

Nepal's Journey in Fulfilling the ICPD Commitments:

The Roadmap towards ICPD30



Contents

Message from the Ministry of Health and Population	4
Message from UNFPA	5
Introduction	7
Context of Nepal	8
Timeline	12
Voluntary National Survey	13
ICPD30 Review Process	14
First Kick-off Meeting of Task Force	14
Meeting of ICPD Working Group on ICPD30	14
Consultations	14
Consultations in Dhangadhi, Sudurpaschim Province	15
Consultations in Pokhara, Gandaki Province	16
Consultation in Janakpur, Madhesh Province	16
Consultation with Young People in Kathmandu	17
Consultation with Journalists in Kathmandu	18
Consultation with Parliamentarians in Kathmandu	18
National Conference on Population and Development	21
Key Issues and Policy Responses	22
National Declaration	23
National Validation Workshop	25
Statement at the 7th Asian and Pacific Population Conference	26

Message from the Ministry of Health and Population

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) has been instrumental in shaping the global agenda for advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender equality, and sustainable development. The sphere of population activities spans a broad and interconnected spectrum of both governmental and non-governmental sectors, underscoring the imperative for development endeavors to align closely with a population-centric viewpoint.

Nepal has made notable strides in aligning its national policies and legal framework with the principles of the ICPD Programme of Action. The nation's commitment to sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, and family planning is also evident in various policy measures and initiatives.

Nepal's progress in ICPD implementation can be thus encapsulated by its achievements in areas such as family planning and reproductive health. The nation has worked diligently to increase access to family planning services, contributing to a decrease in fertility rates and an improvement in maternal health. Additionally, development efforts to empower women, engage youth, and raise awareness about sexual and reproductive health have been notable. Some important progress in addressing population and development concerns also include policy enhancements, awareness creation, and strengthened accountability. This progress is substantiated by evident improvements in socioeconomic indicators such as increased life expectancy, a reduced mortality rate, and the creation of extended life opportunities.



However, Nepal faces its share of challenges in achieving the full realization of ICPD goals. Geographical disparities in healthcare access, maintaining population balance, managing migration, ensuring universal healthcare access, providing quality education, developing infrastructure, safeguarding maternal health, and upholding reproductive rights and the persistence of traditional cultural norms are some of the obstacles that require continued attention and action. We hope to critically address these challenges as we chart our roadmap towards ICPD.

The purpose of this publication is to present a collective effort dedicated to the population and development sector in Nepal. It serves as a valuable and informative resource for deeper exploration of Nepal's progress and challenges in ICPD implementation as it moves ahead in fulfilling its ICPD promises.

I take this opportunity to extend my sincere appreciation to all colleagues, staff and individuals for their valuable contribution in the preparation of this report.

Dev Kumari Guragain

Secretary, Ministry of Health and Population
Government of Nepal

Message from UNFPA

Looking forward to the ICPD 30-year review

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in 1994, presented one of the most innovative and transformative agendas of our generation. During this conference that was held in Cairo, 179 governments from across the world agreed to a Programme of Action with a vision to change the way the world thinks about sustainable development, leading to an approach that is people-centred, human rights-based, including reproductive rights, and inclusive of the rights of every single human being.

This ICPD agenda is as relevant today as it was almost 30 years ago. I would go so far as to say it is even more important and urgent than in any period since the original Programme of Action was agreed in Cairo in 1994. Nepal is undergoing rapid demographic, social, and economic transformation as it aims to graduate to lower middle-income status by 2026. These shifts are not only reflected on the macro level but also affect nearly every other aspect of daily life.

Nepal has produced some impressive outcome-level achievements in areas central to the ICPD agenda, including maternal health and family planning. This is a result of sustained government commitment backed by civil society and international development partners to reverse the imbalances that have persisted for generations and held women back and inhibited their right to participate fully in society and realize their full potential, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

There remain however, challenges that I believe we need to target and seize the momentum of the ICPD meeting and 30-year review to work

in partnership to attain what we refer to as the three zeros: zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal deaths, and zero gender-based violence, including harmful practices like child marriage, by 2030.

This ICPD review exercise in Nepal is absolutely crucial to accelerate action to achieve the targets by 2030. It is also a fundamental agenda that directly contributes to the attainment of the national development vision of Nepal. The continued commitment to the ICPD vision of the government and partners is crucial. The challenge moving forward to ICPD30 is maximizing our common vision and efforts in realizing the vision of this agenda, to reach those at risk of being left behind in the development story of Nepal and to ensure women and girls have a full and equal place in public life and their rights are fully secured, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Won Young Hong

Resident Representative, UNFPA Nepal





Introduction

In 1994 the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (commonly referred to as ICPD), held in Cairo, transformed global thinking on population and development issues and defined a bold agenda, placing people's dignity and rights at the heart of sustainable development.

There, 179 governments, including Nepal, adopted the ICPD Programme of Action. It affirmed that inclusive sustainable development is not possible without prioritizing human rights, including reproductive rights; empowering women and girls; and addressing inequalities as well as the needs, aspirations and rights of individual women and men.

ICPD set the standard for people-centred development, guiding national policies and programmes for the implementation of the Programme of Action by governments, in collaboration with parliaments and civil society, including women and youth-led organizations, the private sector, community groups and individuals at the grassroots level.

In 2019, in marking ICPD25, the Government of Nepal committed to the following at the Nairobi Summit:

- ▶ Achieving the three zeros: zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal deaths, and zero gender-based violence, including harmful practices.
- ▶ Investing in young people including their health and well-being by ensuring that they are able to exercise their reproductive rights

through upscaling adolescent-friendly services and comprehensive sexuality education.

- ▶ Ensuring basic humanitarian needs of affected populations, including for sexual and reproductive health care and gender-based violence prevention and response, are addressed in humanitarian contexts.
- ▶ Putting in place financing policies, instruments and structures to ensure full implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development, Programme of Action, and Sustainable Development Goals.

Almost 5 years later, Nepal set out to review the progress made on these commitments ahead of 2024, which marks 30 years since ICPD was first held.

In this context, the Ministry of Health and Population of the Government of Nepal, with the technical support of UNFPA, carried out a seven-month rigorous ICPD review process from May to November 2023. Throughout the review, the Ministry of Health and Population has espoused a participatory and inclusive process that includes the formation of a task force, regular meetings held with the task force to ensure the quality of the review process, providing inputs and feedback, conducting a desk review, developing the ICPD progress matrix, and hosting a wide range of consultative meetings at provincial and national levels. The following is a brief overview of the sequential process of the ICDP review process and the progress made ahead of ICPD30 in 2024.

Context of Nepal

POPULATION

(Source: Census 2021)

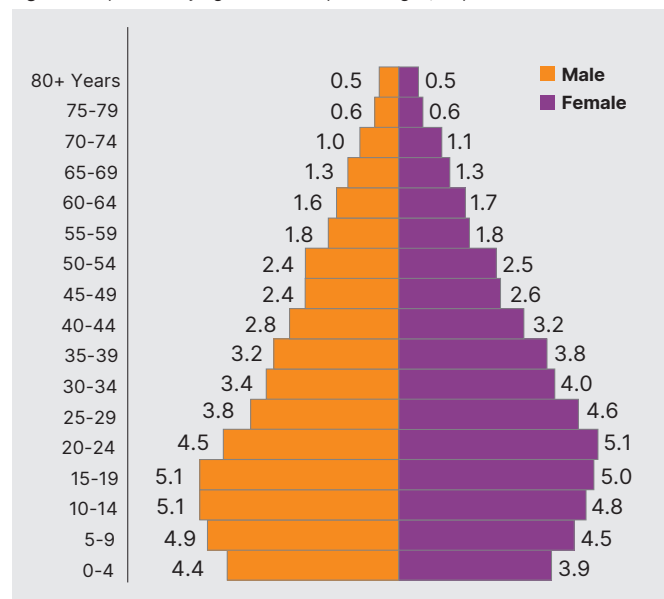


The Population in Nepal is, **29.2 million** up from **26.5 million** in 2011. The growth rate has dropped steadily from **2.3%** in 2001 to **0.9%** in 2021, because of a declining fertility rate and an increase in migration abroad.

Nepal is in the middle of a “youth bulge”, offering a window of opportunity to capitalize on the demographic dividend.

This means, the country has a larger working age population. The data translates to two working age individuals per one dependent person.

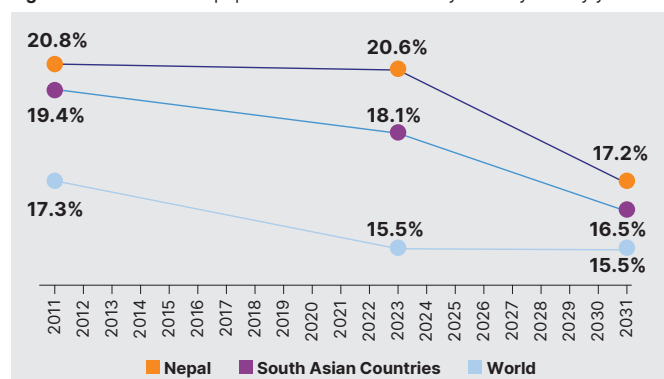
Figure 1: Population by age and sex in percentages, Nepal 2021



However, according to UN estimates, the share of the population aged 15 to 24 is projected to start declining.

Notably, the rate of decrease in Nepal will be slower than the world average and the average of South Asian countries. Nonetheless the window of opportunity to capitalize on the demographic dividend is shrinking.

Figure 2: Distribution of population share of 15 to 24 year old youth by year.



Source: World Population Prospects.

MATERNAL MORTALITY

(Maternal Mortality Study following the Census 2021)

Globally, every two minutes a woman dies due to pregnancy related or childbirth related complications while in Nepal, 2 women die every day. Most of these deaths are preventable. About 56% of deaths occur in health facilities, 26% occur at home while 17% occur on the way to health facilities.



2

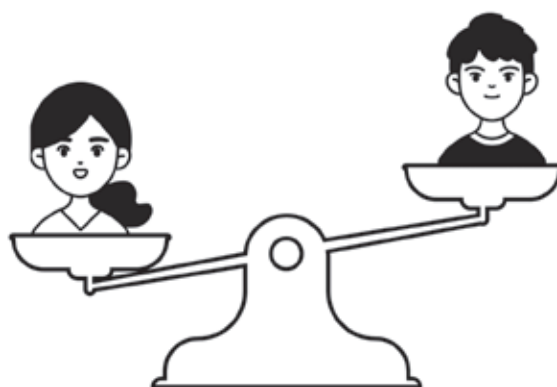
women die every day due to pregnancy related or childbirth related complications

SON PREFERENCE

(Census 2021)

In 2021, there were 112 baby boys born for every 100 baby girls born, up from 107 baby boys born for every 100 baby girls in 2011 - **indicating a growing preference for sons.**

Note: Generally, the natural sex ratio at birth is around 105 boys per 100 girls.



LITERACY STATUS AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

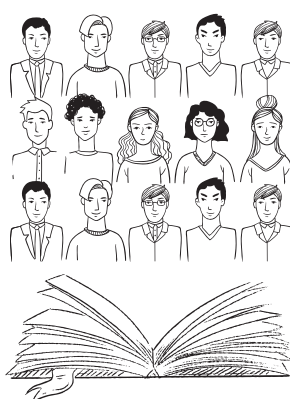
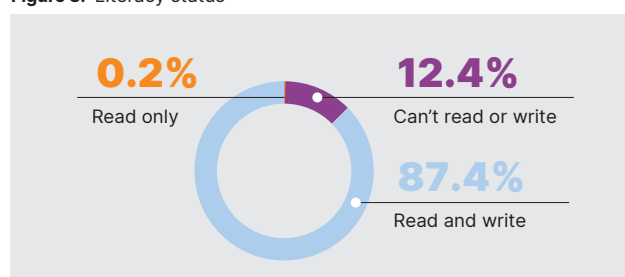
(Source: Census 2021)

87.4% of youths aged 15 to 39 years in Nepal are literate i.e. can read and write, up from 74.3% in 2011. Gender-wise, literacy stands at 83.3% for females and 92.0% for males. In the 15 to 24 year age group, 93.9% are literate, up from 84.8% in 2011. There is narrower gap between gender in this age group (92.5% for females and 95.2% for males in 2021).

Both men and women aged 15 to 39 years show comparable rates of completing undergraduate education (6.7% for men and 6.6% for women). Slightly more men have attained post-graduate degrees (3.0%) compared to women (2.3%).

In terms of the field of education, most youths aged 25 to 39 years took up management (35.0%), followed by education (33.6%) and medicine (5%). Law, agriculture, forestry, veterinary, and computer science were taken by less than one percent of youth.

Figure 3: Literacy status



87.4%

of youths aged 15 to 39 years in Nepal are literate. Literacy rate stands at 83.3% for females and 92.0% for males

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

(Source: Census 2021)

Around 69.4% of the youths aged 15 to 39 years are economically active¹, i.e., they have engaged in income generating activities in past year. Gender-wise, 74.9% of men are economically active compared to 64.4% of women.

In comparison, the 2011 Census recorded that, 61.6% of youths aged 16 to 40 years were economically active, indicating an increase in the proportion of youth engaging in income-generating activities.



Around

69.4%

of the youths aged 15 to 39 years are economically active

DISABILITY STATUS

(Source: Census 2021)

Approximately 1.5% of youths aged 15 to 39 years, as well as youths aged 15 to 24 years, reported some form of disability, with physical disability being the most common type recorded. Among youth aged 15 to 19 years, a higher percentage of males (1.8%) experience disabilities compared to females (1.2%). In 2011, a similar proportion of youths aged 16 to 40 years (1.5%) had a form of disability.



Approximately

1.5%

of you have form of disability

MIGRATION

(Source: Census 2021)

There was a 14% increase in the total population that migrated abroad from 1.9 million in 2011 to 2.2 million in 2021. The gender balance in migration abroad has shifted towards female migrants. The proportion of migrants that are male fell from 87.6% to 82.2% while the proportion of migrants that are female increased from 12.4% to 17.8%.

Overall, 14.8% of youths aged 15 to 39 years and 17.0% of youths aged 15 to 24 years are living abroad. The main reason for migration among youth aged 15 to 24 years was work (70.7%) followed by search for employment (11.7%) and pursuit of education (11.6%).



**1.8
Million**

youth aged 15 to 39 years are abroad

AGE AT MARRIAGE

(Source: NDHS 2022)

Nepal ranks second in South Asia in terms of child marriage prevalence². 53.9% of women and 18.8% of men aged 20-24 years married before the age of 20 in the 2022 NDHS, compared to 59.2% and 22.7%, respectively, in the 2016 NDHS. Additionally, 35.0% of women and 7.0% of men were married before reaching 18 years of age, compared to 39.5% and 10.3%, respectively, in 2016.



1 in 3

women in Nepal marry as children

¹ According to the National Statistics Office, economically active population are those persons aged 10 years or above, who either performed any economic work for any length of time irrespective of whether they searched for work or not, or searched for work (part-time or full time) if they had not performed any economic work in the last 12 months preceding the census. The persons who neither performed any kind of economic work nor searched for any work in the reference period are classified as economically not active.

² The State of the World's Children 2023

ADOLESCENT FERTILITY

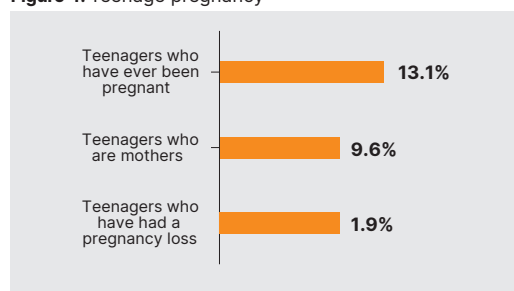
(Source: NDHS 2022)

Nepal ranks third among countries in South Asia when it comes to the adolescent fertility rate³. The current fertility rate among adolescents is 71 births per 1,000 women, a decline from 88 births in 2016.

Around 13.1% of teenagers aged 15 to 19 years have been pregnant, 9.6% are currently mothers. This is a slight decline from 16.7% and 12.9%, in 2016 respectively. Around two percent of teenagers aged 15 to 19 years have had a pregnancy loss.



Figure 4: Teenage pregnancy



1 in 10

teenagers in Nepal are mothers

ACCESS TO FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES

(Source: NDHS 2022)

20.8% of currently married women aged 15 to 49 years, who desire pregnancy prevention or spacing, lack access to contraception. This prevalence is most pronounced among women aged 15 to 24 years with 29.6% of women having unmet need for family planning, a decline from 33.3% in 2016.

The use of modern contraceptives is lowest among women aged 15 to 19 years (14.2%) followed by women aged 20 to 24 years (24.9%).



1 in 5

currently married women have an unmet need for family planning

EXPERIENCE OF VIOLENCE

(Source: NDHS 2022)

13.8% of women aged 15-24 years have ever experienced physical violence (more than one in ten) while 22.5% of women aged 15-49 years (one in five) have experienced physical violence since age 15.

Approximately 58.8% of 15 to 19 year-olds and 56.0% of 20 to 24 year-olds have never sought help or confided in anyone about their experience of violence, reflecting a decline from 2016 when the percentages were 69.1% and 67.7%, respectively.



More than

1 in 10

young women experience a form of physical or sexual violence

³ World Population Prospect 2022



Timeline



Voluntary National Survey

With technical support from UNFPA, the Ministry of Health and Population convened a consultation meeting to seek inputs and perspectives of the civil society in the Voluntary National Survey. The meeting was attended by 22 Civil Society Organizations to discuss the progress on implementation of the 11 priority thematic areas set out in the Voluntary National Survey for monitoring of the ICPD Programme of Action.

The following points were discussed:

- a) Effective implementation of the national health and population policies, strategies, guidelines and framework at the local level.
- b) Capacity development of local governments in planning and implementation of the ICPD priorities at the local level.
- c) Ensuring adequate human resources and infrastructure for health and sexual reproductive health and rights services.
- d) Political commitment and support for localizing ICPD agenda and priorities at all levels.
- e) Climate change and public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic as critical challenges for population and sustainable development.
- f) Investing resources for social advocacy and public awareness on gender equality and women's empowerment, and human rights.
- g) Multi-sectoral coordination and partnerships for effective implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action at the local level.
- h) Scaling up of inclusive comprehensive sexuality education at the local level.
- i) Meaningful engagement of youth, adolescents and their networks in inclusive development policy making and implementation.
- j) Effective use of health and population data in planning and monitoring.

In addition, the Ministry of Health and Population convened consultations with focal points of relevant ministries to seek their inputs during the survey.

ICPD30 Review Process

An 18-member task force comprising officials from various disciplines, i.e., migration, population, sexual reproductive health and rights was formed. Former National Planning Commission members, and committee members of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women were also included. The task force provided significant guidance in the preparation of the ICPD progress report by holding regular meetings and offering input and feedback on the draft report, ensuring an evidence-based overview of Nepal's progress in the commitment made, and identifying priority areas for further intervention.

First Kick-off Meeting of Task Force

The first task force meeting was held in Kathmandu. The meeting encompassed discussions on Nepal's ICPD progress report roadmap, UNFPA's mandate and priorities in relation to the ICPD30 process, strategies for Nepal's effective positioning during the ICPD30 process, assessing Nepal's commitments from ICPD+25, and reviewing the methodology and reporting template for the ICPD progress report.



Meeting of ICPD Working Group on ICPD30

Members of the working group from various ministries and departments, including the National Planning Commission, the Department of National ID and Civil Registration, the Ministry of Home Affairs, representatives from various departments of the Ministry of Health and Population, the National Statistics Office, and UNFPA, actively participated in the working group meeting. The meeting discussed the ICPD30 process, progress, priorities, and the way forward to foster consensus and a common understanding among working committee members.

Working group members delivered presentations throughout the meeting and discussed various aspects contributing to the ICPD30 progress review process. Key sessions included a presentation on the Volunteer National Survey Report, covering the process, outcomes, and key results; a brief overview of the ICPD30 process, its roadmap, opportunities, and challenges; and the development of the 16th Work Plan, focusing on key priority issues related to population and development. The meeting also included discussions on the checklist and indicators for the National Review on ICPD and the methodology.

Consultations

The Ministry of Health and Population with the support of UNFPA thereafter conducted provincial-level stakeholder consultations and federal consultations with youth, media, civil society organisations and parliamentarians, to gather insights on Nepal's progress towards

the ICPD commitments. These consultations were designed to understand progress made towards ICPD commitments while soliciting input and feedback from key stakeholders. This consultative process engaged a broad and diverse spectrum of stakeholders. It comprehensively reviewed Nepal's national commitments progress made and priorities associated with the ICPD+25 agenda while also highlighting the significant role of youth, media, and parliamentarians for the realization of the ICPD agenda. More importantly, these consultations brought together key insights which were deliberated at the final national validation workshop.

Consultation in Dhangadhi, Sudurpaschim Province

The Ministry of Health and Population and the Ministry of Social Development in Sudurpaschim province jointly organized a participatory multi-stakeholder consultation in Dhangadhi. A total of 60 individuals participated in the consultation, representing provincial and local governments, development partners, civil society, adolescents/youth, persons with disabilities, sexual and gender minorities, healthcare providers, and others.

Below are the key issues and discussions that took place during the consultations held in Sudurpaschim:

- ▶ Prevalence of harmful social norms and discriminatory practices, such as chhaupadi, child marriage, polygamy, and gender discrimination.
- ▶ Limited access to safe abortion services due to multiple barriers, including stigma, lack of availability of appropriate information, and various social and economic factors.
- ▶ Inadequate resources to ensure the effectiveness of the One-Stop Crisis

Management Centres, rehabilitation centres, legal aid services, health facilities and, psychosocial counseling, especially in remote and rural districts.

- ▶ Internal migration to the cities, plains and to India have increased issues of unplanned urbanization, human trafficking, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, and other health vulnerabilities for migrants.
- ▶ Limited human and financial resources to ensure the effective implementation of nationally and locally prioritized policies related to health, population, gender, marginalised groups and other development issues at the local level.
- ▶ Limited/inefficient multi-sector coordination with provincial and federal governments, partners, civil society, and marginalized groups.
- ▶ Limited technical and financial capacities for addressing challenges related to population dynamics, maternal mortality, unmet family planning needs, sexual and reproductive health and rights, adolescent/youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services, sexual/ domestic violence, safe abortions, migration, child marriage, social inclusion, and human rights.
- ▶ Poor engagement of adolescents, youth, civil society, and marginalized groups, such as LGBTQIA+ individuals in local-level policy making, planning, and strategic interventions.
- ▶ Lack of appropriate mechanisms to ensure the voices of women and marginalized communities are included in laws and policies.
- ▶ Lack of public awareness on reproductive health and issues such as family planning, choices, and health rights.
- ▶ Limited access to sexual and

reproductive health service centres and youth-friendly services in the provincial and local health systems.

- ▶ Limited access to basic healthcare, sexual reproductive health care services, family planning services, and socio-legal services, especially in rural villages.
- ▶ Limited opportunities for young people to serve in decision-making.

Consultation in Pokhara, Gandaki Province

The Ministry of Social Development and Health of Gandaki province, in coordination with the federal Ministry of Health and Population with technical support from UNFPA, convened a participatory and inclusive consultation meeting with provincial and local level stakeholders in Pokhara. The consultation gathered around 80 participants, including representatives from the provincial and local governments, development partners, academia, civil society, adolescents/youth, persons with disabilities, sexual and gender minorities, healthcare providers, etc. Following the plenary, the participants were divided into different groups for more in-depth discussions. Below are a few pertinent issues that were raised:

- ▶ Prevalence of child marriage, sex-selective abortion, sexual violence and other harmful practices.
- ▶ Lack of universal access to specialized services, including health facilities.
- ▶ Rise in health issues namely, non-communicable diseases, infertility and mental health issues particularly amongst young people.
- ▶ Limited capacity to collect, analyse and utilise data for evidence-based programming and results-based management.

- ▶ Limited investment in research and development and trained human resources.
- ▶ Lack of efficient coordination and collaboration among the three tiers of government resulting in poor management of local resources and accountability.
- ▶ There is no strong referral mechanism to address the needs of GBV survivors/victims as there are no service mechanisms in place as envisioned by federal laws at local and provincial levels.
- ▶ Limited implementation of comprehensive sexual education at schools.
- ▶ Limited understanding about gender inequality issues resulting in gender-based violence and discrimination.
- ▶ Very few women hold ownership to their land and/or homes.
- ▶ Lack of awareness among key stakeholders on their roles and responsibilities.

Consultation in Janakpur, Madhesh Province

UNFPA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Population in the Madhesh Province, organized an ICPD Consultation in Janakpur, bringing together 80 participants. The consultation facilitated insightful discussions on the ICPD30 process, covering progress, priorities, and the path forward among provincial stakeholders, thereby enhancing their understanding of Nepal's commitments. The workshop also emphasized the importance of the provincial governments' role in integrating ICPD issues into their plans and programmes. This led to increased awareness and a collective commitment to implementing the ICPD initiatives at the provincial level. Here are the key issues



highlighted during the consultation:

- ▶ Prevalence of harmful social norms that include witchcraft, child marriage, domestic violence, dowry, sex-selective abortion and son preference.
- ▶ Limited opportunity for girls to complete their education due to existing discriminatory gender norms.
- ▶ Lack of comprehensive sexual education modules in the school curricula.
- ▶ Women are not empowered and often not given the opportunity to serve in key decision-making and leadership positions.
- ▶ Rupantar, although a successful model, is not extensive enough to cover the entire country.
- ▶ Lack of universal accessibility of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.
- ▶ Prevalence of stigma around young people accessing safe abortion services.
- ▶ Lack of knowledge about Nepal's ICPD commitments.

Consultation with Young People in Kathmandu

A youth-led consultation was held in Kathmandu, commemorating International

Youth Day on 12 August 2023. The event gathered 75 young participants to discuss the challenges and issues that hinder their ability to reach their full potential in the context of the ICPD agenda.

The consultation played a crucial role in enabling a youth-led discussion on the ICPD30 process, encompassing its progress, priorities, and the way forward, particularly from the perspective of young individuals. It underscored the significant role of increased investment and greater youth participation at decision-making levels. Moreover, this consultation served to enhance the understanding of young people regarding the ICPD process and Nepal's ICPD commitments, emphasizing the pivotal role that youth can play in achieving the ICPD vision. The event also provided a platform for these young minds to voice their concerns related to ICPD30 commitments. Here are a few of the concerns highlighted by the young participants:

- ▶ Lack of privacy and confidentiality in accessing sexual reproductive health and rights related services.
- ▶ Lack of adolescent-friendly health services.
- ▶ Violence against gender minorities is not considered a pertinent issue.
- ▶ Unavailability of newer forms of family planning methods.



- ▶ Prevalence of harmful practices and discriminatory gender norms.
- ▶ Lack of informed decision-making in practice especially when accessing family planning services.
- ▶ Lack of local contextualization of international commitments, policies, and other services.
- ▶ Lack of availability of age-appropriate information and education.
- ▶ Lack of inclusive policies and laws for persons with disabilities and non-binary people. Lack of effective monitoring systems in place.
- ▶ Prevalence of corruption and lack of transparency.
- ▶ Lack of clearly demarcated roles within the three tiers of government: federal, provincial, and local level.

Consultation with Journalists in Kathmandu

UNFPA convened a gathering of 40 journalists and media professionals representing prominent media organizations in Kathmandu. The focus of the event was to delve into the vital role that media professionals and journalists play in the advocacy and implementation of Nepal's ICPD commitments, with a specific emphasis on advancing the three transformative goals, commonly referred to as the 'three zeros'.

This consultation therefore provided the attending journalists with an in-depth understanding of the ICPD framework, which, in turn, empowered them to deliver more accurate and informed reporting on ICPD-related matters through their respective media outlets. Additionally, the event offered a valuable platform for journalists to share their collective insights and feedback from a journalistic perspective, contributing to a richer and more nuanced discourse on ICPD-related issues.

Consultation with Parliamentarians in Kathmandu

The Ministry of Health and Population, in partnership with the National Forum of Parliamentarians for Population and Development, organized a two-day workshop with technical support from UNFPA. The consultation convened over 50 parliamentarians and parliamentary officials



from both the House of Representatives and the National Assembly to deliberate on the roles and interventions of parliamentarians in advancing the ICPD agenda and Nepal's commitments. The workshop fostered a robust discussion regarding the interplay between population and development. It emphasized the necessity for a people-centered development agenda that aligns with the ICPD vision, particularly within the current context of shifting population dynamics in Nepal. In-depth deliberations were conducted on the ongoing challenges faced by Nepal, including extensive urbanization, persisting maternal mortality rates, structural imbalances, gender-based violence driven by harmful gender and social norms, and climate-induced disasters, among other issues. During these discussions, parliamentarians expressed their unwavering commitment to play effective roles in oversight, budgetary allocation, and legal and policy reforms to ensure the realization of ICPD commitments.

Honorable Speaker Devraj Ghimire delivered a compelling keynote speech, emphasizing the pivotal role of parliamentarians in

realizing Nepal's commitments to the ICPD agenda. The discussions centred around three key themes: 1) the ICPD process and the role of Parliamentarians in legislating for implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda; 2) Developing and updating existing legislature on Gender Equality and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights on addressing gender disparities and promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights within the context of ICPD30; and 3) Using evidence from analysis of data from the census and other sources such as CRVS to examine Nepal's emerging population trends and develop integrated and policy.

The workshop concluded with a six-point commitment:

- ▶ Reduce maternal mortality in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goal 3.1 and the ICPD target. The objective is to decrease maternal mortality from 151 to 70 by 2030. This entails ensuring access to sexual and maternal and child health services including antenatal care, skilled birth attendance and postnatal care health rights for all social strata and communities.



Therefore, concerted efforts will be made to secure essential investments and implement policy and structural measures.

- ▶ Achieve the three zeros including zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal death, and zero gender-based violence, including harmful practices. This necessitates the implementation of additional legal measures and gender-sensitive awareness programmes, along with improvements in healthcare and family planning services.
- ▶ Prioritize the expansion of comprehensive sexuality education with a focus on human rights to promote the full access to reproductive rights for all individuals.
- ▶ Advocate with the Government of Nepal to make the necessary preparations to facilitate Nepal's transition to the list of middle-income countries in 2026, including the establishment of the required policy and structural foundations.
- ▶ Implement essential legal and policy measures to address environmental challenges, humanitarian disasters, and proper planning to address the impact of rapid urbanization currently faced by Nepal.
- ▶ Assign special parliamentary committees to prioritize the implementation of the aforementioned subjects and issues, with a focus on conducting research and developing new legislation through real-world practices.

National Conference on Population and Development

The Ministry of Health and Population in collaboration with UNFPA organized a national conference on 15 September 2023 on "Population and Development to Advance ICPD Commitments". The conference aimed to analyze emerging population dynamics, discuss their implications, evaluate Nepal's efforts in meeting ICPD+25 commitments, and identify areas for further action. With over 200 delegates from diverse sectors, including government officials, civil society, youth, development partners, UN agencies, and academia, the conference underscored the government's pivotal role in advancing ICPD commitments centred around three major themes:

- ▶ **Navigating Nepal's Policy Priorities Amid Emerging Demographic Shifts:** Focusing on the 16th Periodic Plan, Sustainable Development Goals, and graduation from the least developed country status.
- ▶ **Analysis of the 2021 National Population and Housing Census and 2022 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey Data:** Exploring population trends with a special emphasis on Nepal's policy priorities.
- ▶ **Advancing Gender Equality and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights:** Examining the realities and the path forward for realizing Nepal's ICPD commitments.



Key Issues and Policy Responses

Reproductive Health and Rights – During the session the participants discussed the numerous health policies and plans implemented in Nepal over the last decade. Nepal is among the very few countries in the Asia-Pacific to have a standalone law on Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Rights Act since 2018. In spite of the gradual progress perceived in terms of awareness, education and services the conference concluded that gains made in advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights in Nepal have been uneven and disparities exist. Moving towards ICPD30 critical action points were recommended to address the three zeros – zero unmet need for family planning, zero preventable maternal deaths, and zero gender-based violence, including harmful practices. The key policy approaches suggested were - support the realization of gender equality and women's rights by strengthening implementation of national policies and programmes, improving information and services for women and girls and promoting positive social norms. The need for comprehensive sexuality education and monitoring and evaluation of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights initiatives were also highlighted.

Ageing Population and the Demographic Dividend – Nepal is experiencing a rapidly evolving population structure, including declining fertility rates, the potential for a demographic dividend and population ageing as an emerging issue. The key policy approaches suggested to address these demographic shifts were investment in maternal and child health, education and skills matching for a diversified economy and promoting a life-cycle approach towards ageing.

Migration and Urbanization – The conference recognized the challenges and opportunities

associated with high rates of internal and international migration. Strategies proposed better use of data to address the impact of migration on depopulation of mountain and hill rural areas and rapid urbanization, implying better planning for the security and provision of services for internal migrants, especially women and girls and evaluation of service needs to meet the needs of communities with declining populations. Similarly, there is a need to ensure safe and orderly international migration, to provide opportunities for return migrants and to maximize productive use of remittances for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

Data and Policy Integration – In the federal context, the importance of timely and disaggregated data and statistics for informed policy development was underscored. There is a need for better data management, including enhanced integration and interoperability of a range of data systems from federal through provincial to local levels, including through capacity building and use of technology and innovation. Similarly, there is a need to strengthen capacity to build a culture of best-practice use of data and analysis to support evidence-based policies and planning in line with leaving no-one behind principles.

The conference concluded with a declaration that reaffirms Nepal's commitment to the Action Plan of the ICPD30 process and Global Conference commitments, which include achieving the three zeros: It also emphasizes investing in young people's health and well-being, ensuring their ability to exercise their reproductive rights through the expansion of adolescent-friendly services and comprehensive sexuality education. Additionally, the declaration stresses addressing the basic humanitarian needs of affected populations, including sexual and reproductive healthcare and gender-based violence prevention and response in humanitarian contexts.

Furthermore, the declaration calls for implementing financing policies, instruments, and structures to realize the ICPD Programme of Action and the Sustainable Development Goals. The conference also urges Nepal's global, regional, and national partners to uphold reproductive rights and ensure the fulfillment of the ICPD commitments, leaving no one behind in our pursuit of achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

National Declaration

Taking into consideration the demographic changes obtained from other studies, including the National Housing and Population Census 2021 based on the policy provisions related to population management specified by the Constitution of Nepal, existing laws and policies related to population management, Sustainable Development Goals, international documents and commitments on population and development, in Kathmandu on 15 September 2023. We, the delegates of this National Conference on Population and Development, express our commitment to emphasize further the following issues through policy and programme formulation in our field of work.

1. Recognizing the intrinsic relationship between development and population, grounded in the principles of sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, and social inclusion, the laws, policies, and programmes pertaining to population and development will undergo revision, formulation, and will be implemented equitably and effectively.
2. To safeguard the rights of various important population segments, including women and children, youth and adolescents, the ageing population, people with disabilities, gender and sexual minorities, and other vulnerable and marginalized communities, a policy emphasizing human rights, gender

equality, and sexual and reproductive health will be adopted.

3. Considering the population trends demonstrated by National Housing and Population Census 2021, the emphasis will be on the national plan, national policy, and programmes on population, aiming to maximize the opportunities inherent in the current population structure, including leveraging the demographic dividend and reducing the existing challenges.
4. Programmes will be designed to promote the following priority areas of population and development management in a coordinated and effective manner:
 - Poverty alleviation and employment
 - Accessible, affordable universal health care
 - Sexual and reproductive Health rights
 - Quality education
 - Gender equality and women's Empowerment
 - Children
 - Adolescence and youth
 - Ageing
 - Urbanization and migration
 - Population and sustainable development
 - Information and statistics
5. Ensuring the welfare and prosperity of the present and future generations, with a focus on equal rights and development opportunities for all people, regardless of age, gender, disability, geographic location, caste, religion, sect, or socioeconomic status, as well as in the areas of education, health, and economic opportunities, is central to the overall development of Nepal and the goal of empowering individuals and communities through their active participation in access and decision-making processes will be upheld as a guiding principle.

6. In alignment with the commitment expressed at the conference in Nairobi for the twenty-five-year review of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, healthcare systems will be strengthened to provide quality, accessible, affordable, and effective health services for all.
7. Emphasis will be placed on creating and implementing national-level plans, policies, and programmes that prioritize ageing populations, promoting their well-being and fostering an accessible and healthy environment for them.
8. To achieve sustainable development goals, a focus will be placed on ensuring the active participation and decisive role of youth in the development of policies and programmes will be established to promote competitive skills and employable entrepreneurship among young people, with the active involvement of children and marginalized groups to ensure universal access to education.
9. Policies aimed at achieving the three zeros will be formulated. Additionally, a dedicated policy will be developed to enhance maternal and child health and empower women through the promotion of family planning services.
10. Utilizing high-quality, technology-friendly demographic data, policy initiatives will be prioritized to address challenges related to population and development including climate change, urbanization, and migration through research and innovation.
11. To address population and development issues, policies and strategies will be reviewed and formulated in cooperation with stakeholders and coordinated among multi-stakeholder bodies, including federal, provincial, and local governments, civil society, the private sector, academia and national and international organizations.

We, the participants of the National Population and Development Conference in Kathmandu, in accordance with the commitment letter mentioned above, including the government, private sector, civil society, academics, and development partners, are fully committed to driving Nepal's development agenda in alignment with the laws, policies, strategies, programmes, and action plans and call you to participate in shaping and implementing this agenda.

National Validation Workshop

A national validation workshop was organized jointly by the Ministry of Health and Population and UNFPA to discuss and share major findings and the way forward gathered from Nepal's consultative ICPD National Review Process and to validate the National Declaration of the National Population Conference on ICPD commitment.

This was the final step ahead of Nepal's preparation for the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference is organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) in collaboration with UNFPA in Asia and the Pacific held in Bangkok from 15 to 17 November 2023.



Statement at the 7th Asian and Pacific Population Conference

15 November 2023

The Chair, Excellences, and Distinguished Delegates,

I am honoured to be a part of this 7th Asia-Pacific Population Conference in Bangkok. This conference provides a crucial platform for us to explore the crucial link between population and development, which is a matter of paramount significance for our region.

After the adoption of the new constitution in 2015, Nepal has transitioned into a federal democratic system with a strong commitment to fulfilling the aspirations of all its citizens, including the goal of achieving universal healthcare. We have established both national and international objectives for prosperity and development, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), among others. Nepal is a steadfast advocate for the ICPD, having embraced its agenda at the Cairo Conference in 1994. We wholeheartedly recognize the significant importance of the ICPD in advancing population-related initiatives, promoting women's rights, and facilitating sustainable development, with a specific emphasis on reproductive rights as a central component in realizing this vision.

Since the adoption of the ICPD Programme of Action in 1994, our investments have created significant improvements to key indicators. According to the 2021 census data, maternal mortality rates have substantially



reduced, from 281 to 151 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births between 2006 and 2021. Additionally, the use of modern contraceptives increased from 26 percent in 1996 to 43 percent, while adolescent fertility rates decreased from 127 to 71, and the total fertility rate declined from 4.6 to 2.1 between 1996 and 2022. We have also advanced our understanding of the interconnectedness of population and development, leading to improved institutional and policy frameworks to guide our actions. Moreover, we have made significant steps in the implementation of progressive legislation and policies that support the human rights of women, girls, and young people, particularly in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Challenges, however, remain, and although we have witnessed some remarkable progress, there is still a great deal of work required to meet our targets. Nepal is

navigating significant demographic shifts, and the Government of Nepal is unwavering in its commitment to adjusting national policies in response to these evolving population dynamics, with a focus on harnessing the demographic dividend and addressing the urgent challenges posed by rapid urbanization, internal and foreign migration, and climate-induced disasters. Within the context of these enormous social and economic changes, we need to ensure our efforts remain focused on crucial aspects of population dynamics and securing universally available reproductive and maternal health and rights.

The Government of Nepal acknowledges the vital role of quality human resource development in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. As we strive to reach middle-income status by 2026, we are dedicated to reducing preventable maternal mortality, eliminating violence and harmful practices against women, promoting comprehensive sexuality education, increasing youth participation in decision-making, strengthening the National Population data system and further reducing unmet family planning needs, all in accordance

with the ICPD agenda. Our commitment to enacting strategic policies that safeguard the rights and choices of all citizens remains unwavering as we approach the 30-year review of the ICPD Programme of Action.

This conference offers a valuable opportunity for us to exchange experiences and acquire knowledge. Through collaboration and knowledge-sharing, we can enhance our national agendas to more effectively address these challenges. Together, we can strive to create a healthier and more prosperous future for our populations. As we navigate this crucial phase in our journey, we reiterate our full commitment to the ICPD agenda and its core principles, aiming to build a more equitable world by fully realizing the potential of women, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and leveraging our demographic potential.

I look forward to productive discussions and collaborations during this conference.

***Honorable Mr. Mohan Bahadur Basnet**
Minister for Health and Population
Government of Nepal

* Statement delivered at the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference in Bangkok on 15 November 2023 by Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Health and Population of the Government of Nepal, Mr. Ramesh Kumar KC, on behalf of the Honorable Minister Mohan Bahadur Basnet.

