



# UNFPA NEPAL

Results Achieved in Nepal

2023



## **THREE ZEROS by 2030**

**Ending unmet need for family planning**

**Ending preventable maternal death**

**Ending gender-based violence and harmful practices**

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**UNFPA is the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency.**

**Our mission is to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.**



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## FOREWORD 6

## OUR KEY RESULTS IN 2023 8

### SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS 10

- Increasing choice for family planning
- Safer births
- Obstetric fistula
- Cancer screening services

### GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND HARMFUL PRACTICES 15

- Gender-based violence survivor responses
- Ending harmful practices
- Comprehensive sexuality education

### POPULATION DATA ENVIRONMENT 20

- The population and housing census
- Strengthening the statistical environment
- Innovation and technology for data

### HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE 25

- Emergency responses in western Nepal
- Responding to immediate needs
- Ensuring continuity in key services
- Resilience and recovery

## MANAGEMENT SNAPSHOT 27

- Resource delivery
- Key partners
- Policy engagement

## THE WAY FORWARD 34

- Key priorities ahead in 2024
- Lessons learnt



# FOREWORD

Our new cycle of country programme agreed with the Government of Nepal for the period 2023–2027 commenced this year. This programme of action sets out our priorities over the next four years to further accelerate our achievements in four outcome areas. These are anchored in Nepal’s commitment to the ICPD agenda and our vision of the three zeros: zero preventable maternal deaths, zero unmet need for family planning, and zero harmful practices such as child marriage and gender-based violence.

The Government of Nepal has made significant investments in these four outcomes over the past decade. According to the 2021 census, the maternal mortality ratio is currently 151 deaths per 100,000 live births, a decline from 239 over a five-year period. With targeted and accelerated high-impact interventions, the SDG target of reducing the ratio to 70 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030 could be achieved by Nepal.

Good progress was also made in expanding family planning services, with broad choices of contraceptives available that empower individuals and couples to make informed decisions about family life. The unmet need for family planning has been reduced to 20.8 percent. There is also progress on preventing harm to women and adolescent girls, including gender-based violence. The current prevalence of child marriage is a decline from 51.4 percent in 2006 to 39.5 percent in 2016. The levels of harmful practices such as child marriage are also in decline, albeit far too high.

Despite this progress, there are significant challenges ahead in meeting the SDG goals. Two women every day die due to complications at birth in Nepal. Rates of teenage pregnancy and child marriage are some of the highest in South Asia, with one in three women married before the age of 18. Thirteen percent of teenagers are mothers. Levels of harmful practices remain too high. One in four women has experienced gender-based violence. Numerous obstacles continue to hold back adolescent girls from developing into young adults able to make decisions that impact their lives and challenge harm.

In 2023, our programming has continued to support, consolidate, and accelerate this significant progress by working with those at risk of being left behind in Nepal's social and economic development story. Securing the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and adolescent girls in these communities has been a priority this past year, including those hit by humanitarian disasters. In the coming year, we will continue to expand this support through targeted partnerships that maximize our results and impact both on a political level and in our engagement with communities on the ground.

Addressing these challenges is crucial for the country's sustainable development and resilience in the context of its transition from the least developed country classification.



Won Young Hong  
UNFPA Resident Representative  
Nepal



# OUR KEY RESULTS IN 2023

- **968,322 couple-years of protection from users of all modern family planning methods in 2023.**
- **230, 896 unintended pregnancies and 92,607 unsafe abortions averted.**
- **Average stock out rate of family planning commodities of 8 percent.**
- **The first ever obstetric fistula elimination roadmap in Nepal, which provides strategies to achieve the zero-fistula target by 2030, was finalized.**
- **2,523 gender-based violence survivors were supported to access health and psychosocial support services at eight one-stop crisis management centres and 1,113 survivors and 393 dependent children were provided with secure accommodation in shelter homes.**
- **19,052 couples and community members participated in gender transformative couple discussions and social change dialogues.**
- **143,404 members of local communities participated in local gender-based violence outreach sessions.**
- **8,106 adolescents attended life skills programmes increasing their individual and collective agency to target and respond to gender-based violence and harmful practices.**
- **45,176 pupils learnt from the comprehensive sexuality education material available in adolescent-friendly spaces.**
- **The full population and housing census was published.**
- **The National Statistics Office has finalized three analytical reports based on the census data.**
- **A conceptual framework for an advanced artificial intelligence-driven system to transform data analysis and reporting for evidence-based decision-making is developed.**
- **94,190 women and adolescent girls received emergency support to their sexual and reproductive health through support to continuity of services following the earthquake in western Nepal.**
- **In six high-risk areas local authorities adopted the minimum initial service package for sexual and reproductive health in crisis situations in disaster preparedness and response plans.**





# SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

## INCREASING CHOICE FOR FAMILY PLANNING

The UNFPA continued to support family planning in 2023, ensuring individuals were able to make informed decisions about their reproductive rights and choices, including access to high-quality counselling and services.

In line with global Family Planning 2030 commitments the Government of Nepal's national family planning costed implementation plan for the period 2024–2030 was completed this year. This is a major milestone in setting out government policy and investments in family planning over the next six years. Separately, the government has also committed to increasing its financial contribution to family planning commodities by one percent annually following the signing of a compact agreement with UNFPA.

As a part of the costed implementation plan, a cost-benefit analysis conducted in 2023 estimated that the health and economic returns of investing the required USD174 million in family planning for this period would result in more than USD587 million in maternal and newborn healthcare costs averted. This results in a return of USD 3.36 for every USD 1 dollar invested in family planning. Increased investments in contraceptive services could also lead to significant cost benefits of USD 416 million.

In total, 2.2 million family planning commodities were supplied through the UNFPA global supply chain to health centres and mobile clinics. These included 8.3 million condoms, 96,600 implants, 1.4 million oral contraceptive pills, 32,623 intrauterine contraceptive devices, 15,300 emergency contraceptives, and 1.1 million Depo-Provera doses that were distributed to clinics nationwide. The national average stock-out rate of family planning commodities was 8 percent in 2023, compared to 9.21 percent in 2022.

National supply chain management was also improved by the introduction of a wider method-mix of contraceptives by strengthening the introduction of newer methods, including Sayana Press, in 21 districts of Nepal. Training to improve the electronic logistics information management system for health commodities was also conducted, which contributed to a 98 percent reporting rate in 2023.

## SAFER BIRTHS

A roadmap to provide a strategic vision for the midwifery sector was supported in 2023. To strengthen regional exchange, a high-level midwifery exchange visit between Bangladesh and Nepal was also supported, which has resulted in a long-term country-to-country learning plan for service providers, faculty members, and government officials.



To improve the quality of maternal health, the first midwife-led antenatal outpatients' department with an attending professional midwife was opened, and this year it supported 2,300 pregnant women. In four hospitals in Lumbini province, where there is a disproportionately high maternal mortality burden, technical and financial support was provided for the Maternal and Perinatal Death Surveillance and Response System.

Six tertiary educational institutions are now offering bachelor-level midwifery programmes with the addition of a new certificate-level midwifery programme in two institutions in 2023. The UNFPA supported the professional development of midwives, including training for 168 faculty staff, service providers, and facilitators in a range of skills, including newborn care, birth complications, and leadership skills.

## OBSTETRIC FISTULA

Sixteen women and adolescent girls received free obstetric fistula treatment from the UNFPA-supported fistula treatment centre in Koshi province. The success rate of obstetric fistula repairs at discharge was 94 percent. Support for patients included all aspects of surgery, post-surgery recovery, and observation.

The first ever obstetric fistula elimination roadmap in Nepal, which provides strategies to achieve the zero-fistula target by 2030, was finalized.

## CANCER SCREENING SERVICES

To strengthen the government's cervical cancer screening and management programme, UNFPA supported the development of standard operating procedures for screening, an orientation package and implementation guidelines, and the development of a national distribution plan for human papillomavirus DNA test kits. Using these guidelines, human papillomavirus /DNA screening services were rolled out in all provincial public health laboratories, national public health laboratories, selected tertiary hospitals, and municipalities across Nepal.



## KEY RESULTS

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# STORY

## COMMUNITY STANDS FOR JUSTICE

When she was 13 years old, Nikita\* was playing in the courtyard outside of her parent's house, as she did often once she had finished her daily chores. As any other young girl in Nepal's rural countryside, she was expected to help her mother around the house and in the fields, and she looked forward to her free time in the afternoon.

On this particular day, however, two of her neighbours in the village enticed her with offers of fruit into one of their small and dimly lit houses. Once inside, the two men closed the front door behind her and, locking her inside, proceeded to rape the young teenager. Defenceless and unable to fight off the men, the rapes and attacks continued for weeks. The men continued to threaten Nikita with violence if she told anyone about the incidents, and she became increasingly withdrawn as the traumatic experience continued.

### FIRST RESPONDERS IN THE COMMUNITY

While sitting with her elder sister at home one day, however, Nikita started to describe these attacks, explaining how these men had tricked her into the house, raped her, and then threatened to harm her even more if she told anyone about the incidents. On hearing what had happened, her sister immediately spoke with their parents, and although initially reluctant, the elder sister insisted the family report the incidents to the authorities.

As a first responder, the local community health volunteer, Tika Ale, was one of the first to be contacted. She recognized what is an all-too-common response of parents in rural Nepal to such incidents: a reluctance to report to the police and seek support services for the survivor.



In these circumstances, all too often, parents feel powerless to confront the attackers and pursue justice and support out of fear of reprisals from the community or a perception of shame.

“People are reluctant because they feel that dealing with the police can be very time consuming and frustrating, and they are also not confident about putting their daughter through more trauma after what she has been through, thinking it would cause her distress,” explains Tika Ale.

Tika Ale is used to dealing with these typical responses from communities, and she reacted immediately, with her training instincts automatically kicking in as a case manager. On arriving at the home, she discussed the case with the parents and Nikita and reassured them that although the incident was traumatic, support was available and they should report the case to the police without delay.

### UNDERSTANDING BREAKS DOWN OBSTACLES

She explains, “Reporting of rape and sexual violence in these small and close-knit communities is complicated by the close community bonds between neighbours.”

*\*Some names are changed to protect the identity of the survivor.*

Tika pauses, “This case, however, shows another side. One that shows communities that are engaged are able to understand much better the impact of violence, including rape. They are much more likely to provide a supportive environment where the survivor isn’t isolated from the community.”

After hearing rumours about the incident, Gita, a neighbour, explains, “I thought it was important that the community was involved. Gita and his wife Apsara had recently experienced how community engagement could help both prevent forms of gender-based violence and, when incidents occurred, provide support rather than isolate the survivors.

“We all heard about the incident because we are a small community. And we wanted to ensure our community supported the girl,” explains Gita. He continues, “We gathered with other members of our village who we had attended a series of group discussions with before. In these meetings, we jointly learned about violence in communities and families. We learned about the impact of violence, especially on women and girls, and we agreed that these incidents were very harmful to our communities.”

The first thing the group decided to do was reach out to the parents of Nikita to support Tika Ale and also to reassure the family of Nikita that the community was firmly behind them. Working with Tika, they encouraged the parents to report the case to the police and also continue seeking support for Nikita.

## **CONFIDENCE IN SUPPORT SERVICES**

Throughout her ordeal, Ale was at the side of Nikita, and she accompanied her as the police recorded her statement at a specialized unit of the women’s and children’s cell at the district police station. She also had a medical check-up, and to aid her recovery, she continues to be supported by specialized services.

The community’s engagement was vital to the work of Tika Ale. In supporting the family, the parents were able to feel confident that their daughter would feel secure in the village community.

Their attendance at the couple discussions has helped the wider community understand sexual and physical gender-based violence and become more empowered to intervene in positive ways to respond to even the most serious incidents with empathy and care.

“We learned about violence and forms of violence, and sat down with other members of our village and told them about these things. Had it not been for these sessions we attended, we would have not been able to see this issue like we are able to now,” says Apasara Dahal.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS A VITAL STRATEGY**

Levels of gender-based violence in Nepal remain some of the highest in Asia and the Pacific region. According to national surveys in 2022, one in four women aged 15–49 have ever experienced physical or sexual violence in Nepal. With the support of people like Tika and the communities she serves, these forms of violence are in decline from a high of 37.5 percent in 2011. More than 72 percent of women who experienced violence, however, did not seek any support. This was not the case for Nikita who with support from Tika and her village community bravely pursued a case against the two men that raped her.

Community engagement is crucial to continuing this reduction in the levels of sexual and physical violence experienced by women and girls in Nepal. Nikita is back at home and recovering from her ordeal. She has also returned to school. The two men who raped her were tried in court and received significant custodial sentences for their crimes.

The small village community involved has also resumed their normal daily lives, and Nikita and her parents are grateful for the support their daughter has received. Ale Tika concludes, “Nothing can undo what has happened, but at least the parents and Nikita took the right step towards making things a little better. The family was also grateful to the wider community for helping and guiding them in the right direction.”

# GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AND HARMFUL PRACTICES

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE SURVIVOR RESPONSES

The UNFPA supported a total of eight one-stop crisis management centres and 111 health facilities to strengthen responses to gender-based violence in 2023. This year a total of 2,523 gender-based violence survivors were referred to an appropriate service in the referrals system at one of these centres.

Of these 1,113 of the most critical cases were provided with secure accommodation in safe houses and shelter homes. This included 393 children accompanying their mothers who were able to receive medical, psychosocial and educational support.

A group of 149 community-based psychosocial workers and coordinators increased access to gender-based violence response services in their public outreach activities. 7,416 gender-based violence survivors were identified by the workers and received information on referral options and available support. Amongst those survivors identified 6,430 received psychosocial first aid support.

Trained in identifying vulnerable cases the workers referred 4,853 gender-based violence survivors to different categories of support services including the justice system and safe houses from the referral pathway. As well as providing this support they also led raising awareness of gender-based violence in communities reaching 143,404 in information-based campaign events.

Local authorities are also increasingly taking over ownership of some of the key aspects of the response services including funding key services and human resources in the priority programming provinces.



For the financial period for 2023, in Koshi province, the proportion of the directly gender-responsive budget increased from 14 percent in the fiscal year 2020 to 31 percent in the fiscal year 2023. In the same period, the directly gender-responsive budget in Sudurpaschim province increased from 47 to 54 percent.

## ENDING HARMFUL PRACTICES

To address the harmful practices such as child marriage and gender biased sex selection, the UNFPA continued to reach out to communities in 2023 to challenge harmful behaviour and increase the agency of women and girls to reject these practices that inhibit their development and full potential.

A total of 3,490 married men and women enrolled in the couples' discussion programme in 19-targeted municipalities during the reporting period. A further 6,490 family members and 8,070 members of the community attended these programmes in 2023. Since the beginning of the project, 6,541 married men and women have completed the 10-session gender transformative couple discussion programme that tackles harmful gender norms and roles, promoting healthy relationships to prevent gender-based violence.

The Rupantaran life skills programme supported 8,106 adolescent girls and boys in 2023 to develop core soft skills such as communications and negotiation, strengthening their individual agency for their personal development. The mentoring and learning sessions on this 16-week programme are grounded in sexual and reproductive health and rights ensuring adolescent teens are equipped with the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions shaping their lives ahead.

## COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION

In 2023, 27,073 adolescents that included 15,427 girls and 11,646 boys participated directly in sessions at adolescent friendly information corners accessing key comprehensive sexuality education as well as information on reproductive health and rights and access to commodities such as sanitary pads.

Our schools far outperform other schools in ensuring that adolescent girls and boys have sufficient learning to understand this crucial period of transformation in their lives and their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

A commissioned study on students' knowledge, attitude, and practice to sexual and reproductive health and rights in 2023 concluded that 89 percent of students in a school with an adolescent friendly corner scored above good levels of awareness of these rights, while the control group of students set up to measure progress only scored 50 percent. In terms of good sexual and reproductive health and rights practice these students, scored 75 percent, whereas the control group achieved only 28 percent in the very good and good categories.





A total of 76 peer educators trained with UNFPA support also led various extra-curricular activities raising awareness on comprehensive sexuality education and reaching 10,724 of their peers. Strategies included speech and essay competitions, street dramas and health camps all on the themes of sexuality, adolescent health issues as well as harmful practices. A total of 7,379 adolescents also received integrated sexual and reproductive health services and information from 10 project supported adolescent friendly health service centres.

A new competency-based teacher-training guide for comprehensive sexuality education was also completed in 2023. To prepare teachers to deliver this new teaching approach 150 teachers received refresher training using the updated manual, equipping them with the knowledge, attitude, and skills necessary for effective delivery in schools.



## KEY RESULTS

- **2,523 survivors of gender-based violence were supported to access health and psychosocial support services at eight one-stop crisis management centres.**
- **1,113 survivors and 393 dependent children were provided with secure accommodation at shelter homes.**
- **7,416 survivors were identified by community-based psychosocial workers and provided with psychosocial first aid and referrals to response services.**
- **19,052 couples and community members participated in gender transformative couple discussions and social change dialogues.**
- **143,404 members of local communities participated in local gender-based violence outreach sessions.**
- **8,106 adolescents attended the Rupantaran life skills programme increasing their individual and collective agency to target and respond to gender-based violence and harmful practices.**
- **45,176 pupils learnt from the comprehensive sexuality education material available in the adolescent-friendly spaces and peer educators UNFPA supported in 92 schools in 2023.**

# STORY

## TEACHERS AND STUDENTS BREAKING TABOOS

Ayusha Gautam has not experienced menstruation. She feels, however, very confident that she knows what to do when it arrives because of the age-appropriate sexuality lessons she has received from her teacher. “I have learned everything about periods; I know it is necessary to go through them, and women go through their periods every month. I know all about why it happens, what happens inside my body, and how I should prepare for it.”

As a sixth grader, she feels well prepared for puberty as a result of the lessons at Rukmini Secondary School in Lumbini province. The teachers have created an open and inclusive environment where students feel comfortable asking questions and exploring important topics about puberty, contraceptives, and menstrual hygiene management, which are crucial for adolescent girls and boys to successfully navigate the changes they are about to experience.

This has not happened overnight. Seven years ago, the school opened a corner in the school for pupils to explore and learn more about their sexual and reproductive health and rights. This corner became a safe space for the students to hang out, discuss topics around their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and share experiences. The approach was also popular with teachers in the school who witnessed the benefits for the students. It has subsequently widened out into a school-wide approach.



When it was introduced, the subject of comprehensive sexuality education was not without its challenges. Bhupendra Acharya explains, “even just a few years ago, teachers would feel awkward around the students teaching sexuality education. Practices such as separating boys and girls were commonplace. But now we have created an environment where students and teachers can openly talk about issues.” The school has turned that around after considerable efforts by the teachers and students.

The benefits of the support for comprehensive sexuality education extend further, explains Bhupendra Acharya. “We want our students to complete their education. Early marriage and pregnancy in this district are very high. This kind of learning means that girls have the power of information to make the right choices. One particular issue the school is proud of is how they deal with discrimination in relation to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In many parts of Nepal, menstruation is a taboo subject that can lead to dramatic restrictions on the lives of adolescent girls, including exclusion and discrimination leading to stigma and shame. The approach of the school was that this discrimination impacted girls' education and needed to be tackled in the school environment.

Chandra Bahadur Malla, the headmaster, explains how the school has changed the way it thinks through these challenges to become more student-centric, responding to their needs, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights, in a school-wide approach. "Before, we had one bathroom for both girls and boys. Girls would skip out of school during their periods because it was difficult for them to change their sanitary pads during school hours. If a girl's period started in school, they would disappear and go back home in the middle of the day," he explains.

The school management changed the way it has thought through this problem, shaped by its proactive, comprehensive sexuality education programme. Keeping girls in school became the priority. "We constructed a new building that included separate bathrooms for boys and girls. In the girls' bathroom, there is additional space for changing pads, clean water, and anti-bacterial soap, as well as an incinerator to dispose of sanitary pads," beams Bisan Maya proudly.

This makes a huge difference for the girls in the school. Sarada Sunar, who is in grade 10, stresses, "in our village, we don't have a private place for the disposal of pads, so we have to walk to the hilltop away from sight, and we burn our used pads. These new facilities make our lives much easier."

The school teachers and pupils are also using their experiences to reach out to communities. Teachers are trying to get parents involved with what the students are learning. And the students share their new knowledge with friends and family members, contributing to a more informed community. Rupa, a 17-year-old tenth grader, has three sisters. "I talk about body rights, menstruation management, and early child marriage with my mother and sisters. "My younger sisters weren't getting any of this information at her school. Now that I've learned, I can teach them and make sure they know how to stay safe and healthy."



# POPULATION DATA ENVIRONMENT

## THE POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS

In 2023, the full population and housing census data were published following extensive data processing and analysis. The findings provide a complete enumeration of the entire population and details of each household across Nepal. The census is the master sample frame for data collection during inter-census periods, is also a key tool to collect small-area population data covering the entire country, and will be a central data reference point for policymaking over the next decade.

Our technical support for the post-census period included assisting the National Statistics Office to generate disaggregated data on vulnerable groups and on women and girls. It has also developed a census data visualization platform to produce more accessible data, maps, graphs, charts, and small tables. In 2023, a total of 146,000 unique users accessed data via this platform, empowering researchers and policymakers to employ this data and draw on it to make informed policy decisions.

With UNFPA support, the National Statistics Office has finalized three analytical reports based on census data on population composition, housing and household dynamics, and the degree of urbanization. These reports support policymakers in more fully understanding the huge impact of population movements in Nepal, both with respect to the ongoing rapid urbanization processes and the major flows of young people moving overseas for employment, changing the population landscape in profound ways.



## STRENGTHENING THE STATISTICAL ENVIRONMENT

Our technical teams also continued to support and strengthen a future vision of the overall data framework. To assess the potential for increased future data system integration for policymaking within the framework of the Government of Nepal's e-government initiative, UNFPA technical experts participated in a joint UN high-level mission in Nepal in 2023. The assessment identified forward-looking and specific actions for accelerating Nepal's progress towards developing a functioning civil registration and vital statistics system that supports legal identity and the recording of life events.

Nepal was also one of the pilot countries in the Asia-Pacific region to implement a degree of urbanization framework. This innovative approach to defining urban, peri-urban, and rural areas based on standardized evidence supports international comparisons of the degree of urbanization and will assist policymakers in making short- and medium-term planning and forecasting decisions based on evidence and data.

## INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DATA

During this year, UNFPA, together with partners, also developed a conceptual framework for an advanced artificial intelligence-driven system to transform data analysis and reporting, aiming to enhance evidence-based decision-making across various sectors.

This innovative system will be designed to interpret natural language queries and provide immediate, understandable data insights from complex national surveys to a diverse user base, from policymakers to the general public. By enabling the real-time generation of analytical outputs, including reports, the system will eliminate delays in data utilization, ensuring that insights are timely and impactful.



## KEY RESULTS

- **The full population and housing census is published in 2023.**
- **The National Statistics Office has finalized three analytical reports based on the census data.**
- **A conceptual framework for an advanced artificial intelligence-driven system to transform data analysis and reporting for evidence-based decision-making is developed.**

# STORY

## A RAPID RESPONSE IN TIMES OF EMERGENCIES

Women and children are disproportionately impacted by climate change and humanitarian disasters in Nepal. Earthquakes and seasonal flooding occur annually and with increased frequency. Communities in villages in the remote areas of the hills that rise up to the giant peaks of the mountains of the Himalaya are particularly vulnerable. These tiny hamlets are scattered across the sides of hills, and often going to markets entails long walks and visiting the nearest town days of travel.

Many of the households in these remote hamlets are single-handedly managed by women because the men have travelled from the province to find employment either across the border in India or further afield. This leaves women carrying an ever-larger share of the work burdens at home. When a crisis hits, it is the women who are immediately impacted, and it is the women who lead the recovery.

### A NIGHT THAT SHOOK THE COMMUNITY

On the evening of 3 November 2023, a powerful earthquake struck across three provinces in Nepal. “I was sleeping. I’d never experienced such a powerful earthquake before. I didn’t know what to do, so I just ran outside. If I’d stayed inside, I probably would have been buried in the rubble,” recounts Meena, a young mother of 22 years of age from the village of Musikot. She was eight months pregnant at the time of the quake, and she and her husband had started building a family life and household in the village.



While she safely escaped her home, the damage caused to her house meant she could not safely return. The winter weather was closing in, with temperatures plummeting, exposing women and children to multiple compound risks.

Geeta and her family of two children are from the same village and were also impacted hard by the earthquake. “Before it hit, we had a small tea house serving tea, snacks, and meals that we invested in with the money that my husband sent home from abroad. We grew our own vegetables and reared chickens and goats,” recalls Geeta.

“After the earthquake, it was difficult as we had nothing. We slept under open skies, with only blankets and tarpaulin sheets to protect us. We didn’t have any of the simple things for basic hygiene because they were all lost and the markets were not accessible. Even if they were, we had no way of earning money, and we were unable to even tend to our animals and had to sell them as the business collapsed,” she continues.

## LIFE IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

Meena was fortunate that her husband returned for the delivery of the baby, and when he was home, he was able to support her, and he collected a set of winter items from a UNFPA distribution site for Meena and the newborn baby. “We were living in tents, so it helped us keep warm. The shawl helped me to cover the baby while breastfeeding and to carry the baby on my back. The mattress, blankets, and warm clothes were essential for us during the winter.”

Meena glances down lovingly at her baby daughter, who sleeps quietly wrapped and cocooned safely in a blanket just like any other newly born baby, while she recalls, “Before the earthquake, life was different. I would get up, clean the house, then go to our farm and the market to run errands. Everything was disrupted by the damage and destruction.” Meena explains.

Geeta recalls a similar situation and was able to collect some basic items from the community to cook and keep things running, and the family was temporarily sheltered in a tent in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. She also received a UNFPA dignity kit that included a set of essential hygiene items specifically designed to ensure women are able to maintain proper hygiene, including during menstruation periods during emergencies. She explains, “This blue bag contained items that had been overlooked by everyone else. In times of these massive disasters, it is not possible to go around looking for sanitary and hygiene items.”

She continues “The underwear, sanitary napkins, and detergent soap was really useful for me. We received some relief materials, but this didn’t include underwear and pads. We were using patches of material from curtains because we didn’t have any available supplies. The reusable pads were much better because I was able to wash them.”

## RESILIENCE AND REBUILDING

These women are slowly rebuilding their lives. Meena has moved into rented accommodation while she and her husband save for the repairs to be carried out on their house.

She stresses, “In these hills, life is difficult. There is a lot of walking and no public transport.” Just how hard it is can be testified by the scenes at the roadside across this area where women and young girls can be seen bent over, labouring home with enormous baskets of firewood on their backs.

Even though there is incredible hardship, she also feels hope and strength in her resilience. “My baby is my whole world. The future feels uncertain. It’s hard with my husband gone, and it’s scary to think of raising a child alone sometimes. But if I survived that earthquake night by myself, I can do anything.” She also wants her daughter to be a nurse when she grows up because “it is a respectable profession, and she would be responsible for taking care of so many lives.” The winter items that kept them warm over the months in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake are a small but vital step in the process of recovery.

Geeta’s family too is resilient in the face of the damage caused by the earthquake. “Everything is gone, but our hopes are intact. We built all of this by ourselves, and we can do it again.” For the immediate future, she wants to restart her restaurant, and, in the future, she is determined to have a shop too.

“We just need to wait for a little bit. After everything settles, we will do it again. Our business will start again, and we will once again serve good tea and rice.” Her daughter has returned to school, and a sense of normalcy has returned to village life.

There is much work to do to get life back on track, but Geeta is confident of meeting that challenge. And the small but important packages she received during that crisis moment have helped her maintain her dignity as a woman with strong aspirations to succeed in business. Geeta concludes by saying “receiving these things made me feel respected for being a woman and a mother even amidst such a disaster.”

As they now rebuild their lives, these women reflect not only on the setbacks in their plans for the future but also on the simple items in their lives, including warm blankets, hygiene and sanitary products that have ensured they were able to maintain their dignity to confront the challenges throughout that crucial early period.





# HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

## EMERGENCY RESPONSES IN WESTERN NEPAL

In 2023, two earthquakes and their aftershocks caused extensive damage to villages in the remote mountainous areas of western Nepal. According to the National Emergency Operation Centre of Nepal, 26,550 homes were completely destroyed across three provinces of Nepal in the most severe incident. Some of the hardest-hit rural areas were in the remote areas of Jajarkot and Rukum West.

The UNFPA responded by meeting the immediate basic needs of women in communities to secure their safety and well-being. It also, as part of a longer-term vision for making these communities more resilient and capable of absorbing the shocks of natural disasters and climate change, invests in supporting stronger community adaptation measures.

## RESPONDING TO IMMEDIATE NEEDS

As part of a coordinated response by the UN agencies to this emergency situation, UNFPA provided support for the immediate basic needs of women and adolescent girls, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Temporary shelter and accommodation were provided, and UNFPA complemented this by issuing warm clothes, blankets, and mattresses distributed to 5,250 women and their dependents in the most affected communities, essential for dealing with the dropping temperatures with the onset of winter. Additional supplies included solar lamps, tarpaulins, and mosquito nets.

A total of 10,950 women and adolescent girls also received dignity kits that included menstrual pads, soap, underwear, a basic saree or kurta, a flashlight, and toothpaste. Kishori kits were also distributed to 4,971 adolescent girls. These kits are crucial for women's personal hygiene during menstrual periods, ensuring they are able to maintain dignity when basic facilities are unavailable and communities are cut off from local markets.

## ENSURING CONTINUITY IN KEY SERVICES

To ensure health services continuity for the sexual and healthcare needs of women 21 sets of emergency reproductive health kits were delivered to health facilities to ensure they were equipped for safe birthing, clinical, and family planning needs in the areas impacted. A total of 73,019 women and men are able to receive support for their sexual and reproductive health through these kits, ensuring continuity of access, including for emergency treatments.

Mobile reproductive health camps also reached out to 3,019 women impacted. These two-day camps provided family planning services, antenatal and postnatal check-ups, general reproductive health check-ups, and psychosocial counselling by a team of gynaecologists and health professionals.

Evidence also suggests incidents of gender-based violence increase during emergencies and boost response services. Specialist staff were deployed to support survivors with psychosocial counselling and referral advice to ensure they were able to access essential support services, including shelters and medical treatment.

These professional services were supported by the outreach work of female community health volunteers who reach out to communities to establish safe spaces for women, increase awareness of key response services, and work with communities to address gender-based violence and monitor vulnerable women. A total of 11,416 women and adolescent girls participated in these, receiving key advice and support for their sexual and reproductive health and rights and responses to gender-based violence.

## RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY

In 2023, UNFPA Nepal finalized a resilience-building strategy and action plan in support of building individual, institutional, and community resilience to reduce vulnerabilities to humanitarian stress, with a focus on our key outcomes.

As a result of our advocacy with local authorities, the minimum initial service package for sexual and reproductive health in crisis situations has now been adopted by three local authorities and three municipalities. These have also now incorporated the package into plans that fully integrate sexual and reproductive health and rights into disaster preparedness and response plans.

Local disaster preparedness and response plans outlining the risks, capacities, and preparedness plans in three provinces were also completed, and training was provided for 120 public officials in risk assessment and data collection.

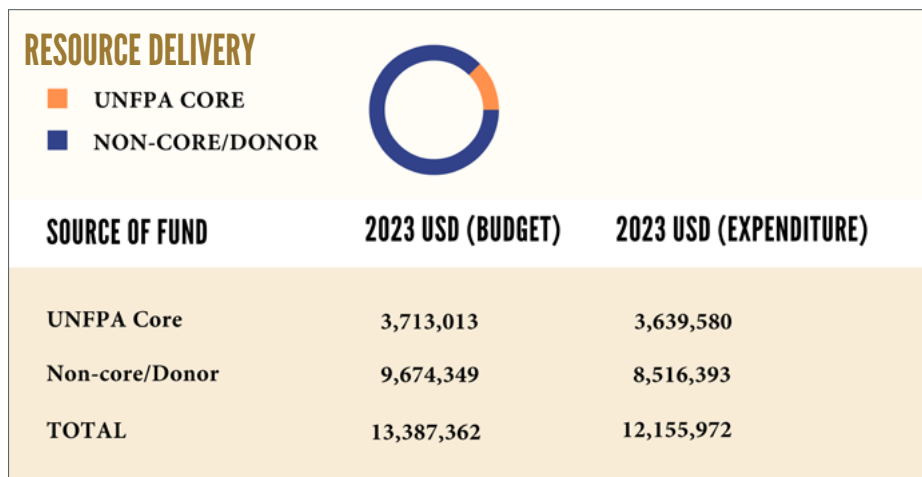
The UNFPA also supports preparedness at stock level, and in 2023, it continued to preposition essential supplies to address the immediate sexual and reproductive health and hygiene needs of women and girls of reproductive age during emergencies. All procured kits are stored in the five maintained prepositioning sites. As a result, it reduced logistics costs and aided timely relief supply delivery for the continuation of uninterrupted service delivery during the 2023 emergencies.



## KEY RESULTS

- **21,171 women and adolescent girls in earthquake affected communities received dignity, kishori and winter kits.**
- **73,019 women and men received support to their sexual and reproductive health through support to continuity of services.**
- **11,416 women and adolescent girls were reached in outreach campaign.**
- **In six high-risk areas local authorities adopted the minimum initial service package for sexual and reproductive health in crisis situations in disaster preparedness and response plans.**

# MANAGEMENT SNAPSHOT



## DONORS AND PARTNERSHIPS

UNFPA PROGRAMMES	DELIVERY 2023, USD	CORE	NON-CORE	FUNDING SOURCES/ DONORS IN 2023
Sexual and reproductive health and rights	4,148,855	1,102,390	3,046,465	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kathmandu, UNFPA Supplies, UNFPA Maternal and Newborn Health Thematic Fund, UNFPA.
Gender-based violence and harmful practices	5,416,918	1,411,787	4,005,131	European Union, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kathmandu, NORAD (Norway), Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, UNFPA, United Nations.
Population data environment	959,602	398,631	560,971	Commonwealth and Development Office, United Kingdom, Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation Foreign, UNFPA.
Humanitarian response	1,311,079	407,253	903,826	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, Republic of Korea, UNCFERF, UNFPA.
Programme coordination and support	319,518	319,518	-	UNFPA.

# KEY PARTNERS IN 2023

## INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, European Union, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, United Kingdom, Republic of Korea, Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kathmandu, NORAD, Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, UNICEF, ILO, UN Women, UN CERF, UNFPA Maternal and Newborn Health Thematic Fund.

## STATE INSTITUTIONS

Ministry of Health and Population, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

## NON-STATE ACTORS

Adventist Development and Relief Agency Nepal, BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences, Central Department of Population Studies, Centre for Research on Environment, Health and Population Activities, Emory University, Forum for Awareness and Youth Activity, Nepal, Family Planning Association of Nepal, IPAS Nepal, LIFE Nepal, Midwifery Society of Nepal, Nepal Red Cross Society, Proteus Fund, Skill Information Society Nepal, Siddhartha Social Development Centre, Voluntary Services Overseas, Women Rehabilitation Centre.





## POLICY ENGAGEMENT

A wide range of policy engagement was undertaken in 2023, especially focusing on the acceleration of the ICPD agenda and commitments. With the Government of Nepal in the process of finalizing a new national development plan and preparing for graduation to middle income status, our policy focus was on ensuring the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and adolescent girls remain central to the policy agenda across all policy domains and integrated into all major planning goals, including across the humanitarian and peace nexus.

To take stock of progress on meeting the targets of the ICPD, the Ministry of Health and Population, with the technical support and data and evidence analysis of UNFPA, conducted a seven-month-long review process to assess progress in the attainment of these goals. This process included a voluntary national survey and a broad-based national consultation. This review has resulted in renewed policy-level commitment to the three zeros that are all fully integrated in key national development plans. It also was presented as part of the ICPD regional review conferences in preparation for the high-level political forum and the summit of the future in 2024.

Through our partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the Ministry of Health and Population the UNFPA convened the first-ever national conference on comprehensive sexuality education in Nepal. The five-point action plan of the event has resulted in commitments to enhance access to sexuality education and adolescent-friendly services, as well as to reinforce coordination for integrating comprehensive sexuality education into policy and financial frameworks.

Our advocacy, including with parliamentarians, the federal government, and local authorities, resulted in a widening political ownership. In 2023, 16 of the 19 local governments in UNFPA priority target areas have now adopted GESI policy frameworks and budgeting practices to increase gender budgeting and transparency. In our target provinces the proportion of the directly gender-responsive budget has increased. In Koshi, it has increased from 14 percent to 31 percent, and in Sudurpaschim, it has increased from 47 percent to 54 percent between 2020 and 2023.

In key services such as family planning, the Government of Nepal has signed a compact agreement with UNFPA that commits it to an incremental increase in the budget for family planning commodities annually. Analysis commissioned on the funding of gender-based violence responses also show a positive trend following policy discussions between local authorities and UNFPA provincial offices with the proportion of local authority funding increasing for core gender-based violence support services.



# STORY

## MALE CHAMPIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Nepal has made some significant progress in combating harmful practices against women and girls over the past decade. There is, however, still one of the highest prevalences of child marriage in South Asia, with one in three women married before they reach the age of 18 years old. Levels of teenage pregnancy remain high, with one in ten teenagers aged 15 to 19 having had children. Women also still experience high levels of gender-based violence.

Adolescent girls continue to experience a range of obstacles in developing into young adults able to make the life choices they need to make, faced with social and cultural traditions that hold them back. While progress has been made, change cannot be achieved without men and boys. Engaging men and boys to work alongside women to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights and target gender-based violence is therefore crucial.

### LEADERS BRINGING CHANGE

One such male champion is the elected mayor of the major city of Biratnagar, Nagesh Koirala, who sees one of the major challenges in his role as promoting gender equality.

He reflects, “there are many factors leading to discrimination against our women, including unpaid domestic work, differences in access to education, and early marriage. All of these factors have contributed to barriers to gender equality, and we are aware of these issues and trying to address challenges through various local government initiatives. There is no development if we allow these practices to continue.”

As a response in the city, there have been an increasing number of initiatives that work to improve the lives of women, including in family planning, healthcare, and education, under his leadership.



During the mayor's tenure, key tools such as gender-responsive budgets have increased from 14 percent in 2021 to 31 percent in 2024, ensuring a stronger gender lens in local government spending. This included allocations for family dialogue, adolescent girl empowerment programmes, and funding for crisis centres.

One scheme the mayor is a strong advocate for is the provision of services for gender-based violence survivors. These services were established in partnership with UNFPA, but the local council is taking increasing ownership, including in wider funding issues. For the professionals that work in this sector, such political leadership is crucial.

Bishnu Panta Sharma Acharya, who is the chairperson of a safe house for survivors of gender-based violence in Biratnagar, stresses. "It's very motivating that the mayor's office recognizes our credibility, and they trust us. This gives me a sense of relief and satisfaction because it gives our safe house a sense of security that the local government is always there for us, and satisfaction because our quest to support the survivors of gender-based violence is acknowledged by the government."

## EDUCATORS FOR CHOICE

In a different capacity, championing the right to information about family planning is one of Nepal's local religious leaders and the rector of a school, Maulana Niaz Ahmad. He says, "a healthy family equals a happy one, and this starts with educating and empowering young people with the right knowledge. Young people need to know about family planning and comprehensive sexuality education. Many schools don't teach these, so I'm glad that the children at my school are privy to this knowledge and information."

A former student at the school agrees, "Having families also means being able to take care of them. Rushing into starting a family has severe repercussions on the health of the mother and the child, and it also comes with a financial burden. Planning families is easy if you think of your partner and your future together." Maulana Niyaz Ahmad has taught us about reproductive health and the need to safely plan families, and I am grateful for that knowledge," he continues.

In two very different capacities, one as a politician and the other as an educator, these two men impact their communities to help shape the future of women and adolescent girls for positive outcomes. Through their efforts and as role models and public personalities, they are also influencing the behaviour of the next generation of boys and girls as they mature, as well as working with communities to secure their sexual and reproductive health and rights and ensuring they are better protected against harm today.







# THE WAY FORWARD

## KEY PRIORITIES AHEAD IN 2024

The ICPD and three zeros will remain our priorities in 2024. The UNFPA country office in Nepal will continue to advocate for increased investments in meeting the three zero targets at the federal, provincial, and local levels. Using our convening powers, we will continue to identify opportunities to leverage the ICPD to accelerate the attainment of targets and goals across all tiers of government.

A key strategy for 2024 in support of gender-based violence responses will be to strengthen the systems around gender-responsive budgeting at all levels of the government. Although gender equality and women's empowerment budgetary practices were introduced at the federal level a decade ago, they have only recently been adopted at the local government level. In order to strengthen the adoption of these systems, UNFPA will invest in the capacity building of the local government on gender-based budgetary planning and support improved consistency in coding in the government system in 19 targeted municipalities.

To further strengthen gender-based violence responses, a national review and conference will be organized in 2024 in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Population to assess the impact of one-stop-management crisis centres in supporting gender-based violence survivors. The review process will leverage UNFPA expertise to deepen national consensus around essential services for gender-based violence survivors and build further integration of these services with health services across Nepal.

Support for the sexual and reproductive health and rights policy framework will continue to strengthen services. This will include support for the implementation of a new roadmap for obstetric fistula focusing on prevention, case management, and evidence generation. A first national assessment of comprehensive emergency obstetric and newborn care sites across Nepal will also be conducted enabling close-to-real-time monitoring of 110 hospitals.

Technical support for the rollout of the new family planning costing implementation plan will also advocate for increases in domestic financing for family planning at the local government level. UNFPA will also, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Population, initiate a national dialogue to position men's sexual and reproductive health needs, as national health sector priorities.

In the context of future development goals, the population data environment and systems require increased investigation to interpret how these can be fully leveraged to meet the needs of the 16th development plan, the Government of Nepal's e-governance strategy, and strengthened federalization. In 2024, UNFPA will increase the evidence base and engagement of policymakers and data custodians related to the future needs of this data and statistical environment.

This will include an analysis of the legal and policy environments for the registration of vital events and national identification systems in the context of population redistribution. Analysis aims to increase government ownership of future requirements and investment needs in integrated and interoperable data systems, resulting in a sustainable data management system with reach to all levels of the federal system.

Investments in working with data and artificial intelligence have also started to move forward. In 2024 we will develop a pilot that will harness the power of artificial intelligence to enhance data analysis efficiency and improve accessibility for a broader audience. By creating an intuitive system, it allows diverse users to interact with extensive datasets through natural language queries. The pilot will utilize the Nepal demographic and health survey dataset and will integrate publicly released, aggregated census data to demonstrate its application for census data.

Humanitarian responses that started in 2023 will also move to a recovery phase in the forthcoming year. As part of a coordinated UN response, the UNFPA will continue to focus on building resilience in those most affected to ensure sexual and reproductive health and rights are secured. To strengthen overall resilience in the healthcare sector, the concept of resilience assessments will also be explored in 2024. This will include developing a health system resilience assessment framework to assess the capacity of healthcare facilities in two provinces to absorb the shocks associated with climate change and natural disasters.



# LESSONS LEARNT

A number of lessons learned in 2023 were captured by evidence-based reviews of UNFPA Nepal's programming and progress on attaining ICPD targets. These include:

- Closer integration between sexual and reproductive health, including family planning and other key services, is crucial to increasing efficiencies in the health sector and improving responses to sexual and reproductive health and harmful practices and gender-based violence responses that have strong interlinkages.
- There is a need for the federal and provincial coordination of gender-based violence prevention and response support mechanisms to be strengthened. National and provincial coordination mechanisms to map out interventions and ensure synergies and policy and implementation direction on outcomes for all gender-based violence prevention or response initiatives are essential.
- To achieve optimal sexual health and wellbeing, men and women need to have access to complete and high-quality sex and sexuality information. It is essential to fully engage men as clients, equal users, and advocates of sexual and reproductive health services, increasing their universal access to and utilization of quality services in their own right.
- The population data environment and registration system are currently fragmented. To maximize the return on investment, a focus on developing integrated and interoperable data systems is crucial for good development outcomes. In order to support the implementation of the 16th development plan and blueprints for the data and statistical systems outlined in the Government of Nepal's e-governance strategy, it is essential to ensure that administrative data sources are accurate and reflect the actual distribution of the population in real-time. It is critical that these data and target populations are available to planners, trained in data access and use, at all levels of government, especially local levels, to facilitate effective service delivery and good governance everywhere, across the country.
- A policy of prepositioning humanitarian supplies, including storing kits in strategic locations across Nepal, enables a timely response during emergencies. While it is widely recognized that all three tiers of government are central to successful responses, there is a significant capacity gap in identifying the needs of women and girls at all these levels. Consistent support and engagement with disaster management stakeholders at all levels is essential to continuing to mainstream sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender-based violence.



# UNFPA NEPAL

## Results Achieved in Nepal 2023




Ensuring rights and choices for all since 1969


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