



Partnership with MOHP, UNFPA, WHO, and GIZ to Foster Midwifery Education, Nepal

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Project location: Nepal



Newly enrolled 3rd intake of midwifery students with their mentors at NAMS

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Background

Despite many programs related to women's health, including those promoting institutional deliveries, safe motherhood, capacity building of skilled birth attendants, etc., Nepal's maternal mortality rate has not seen significant improvement within the last five years, going from 281 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2011 to 258 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2016 (NDHS, 2016). Although government and NGO programs have helped reduce the maternal mortality rate, the target for 2017, i.e. the Second Long-Term Health Plan (1997-2017) goal of no more than 250 deaths per 100,000 live births, was not achieved. Nepal's infant mortality rate has also improved somewhat, going from 46 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2011 to 32 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2016. The neonatal mortality rate is still high as well: 21 deaths per 1,000 live births (NDHS, 2016).

Nepal's government has realized that increasing the number of specialized health professionals, such as qualified midwives, is essential to reducing the country's high maternal and neonatal mortality rates. To this end, the Bachelor of Midwifery Sciences (BMS) program was developed and continues to be supported by a consortium of partners, including the Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), as well as the World Health Organization (WHO), Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and Real Medicine Foundation (RMF). The implementing organizations are the National Academy of Medical Sciences (NAMS) and Kathmandu University (KU), while a third institution, Karnali Academy of Health Sciences (KAHS), has been accredited and announced its intention to begin implementing the BMS program. The consortium functions to ensure support of every aspect of the BMS program without duplication of efforts, working together to build strong cadres of qualified midwives to reduce mortality and morbidity rates among mothers and newborns.

To further address the problem of maternal and neonatal mortality, Nepal's Ministry of Health is also planning to implement a Proficiency Certificate Level (PCL) midwifery program to replace the preexisting Skilled Birth Attendant (SBA) program. RMF has been involved in the curriculum development for this program in collaboration with other external development partners and organizations, including GIZ, UNFPA, the Midwifery Society of Nepal (MIDSON), and the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), as well as implementing universities, midwifery nurses from various hospitals and nursing colleges, and other experts in the field.

RMF's Presence

As an external development partner with MHOP and UNFPA, Real Medicine Foundation's plan for long-term support to midwifery education in Nepal includes the following activities:

- Develop a database for the Nepal Nursing Council (NNC) to track active nurses and midwives in Nepal.
- Provide faculty training in collaboration with GIZ and UNFPA.
- Strengthen training sites and the skills lab at NAMS and KAHS in coordination with the MOHP, UNFPA, and other partners by providing relevant teaching and training materials.
- Provide one full-time international mentor.
- Fund student scholarships (covering all tuition fees at NAMS) every year for the first 3 years of the program.
- Provide selected essential teaching and learning materials to NAMS, such as books, computers, LEDs, and overhead projectors, to ensure that student midwives are provided with an education that is both up-to-date and evidence-based.

Program Update

It has been more than a year since the Bachelor of Midwifery Sciences (BMS) program was introduced in Nepal. The program is slowly gaining recognition, but there is still much work to be done to effectively increase the number of skilled, competent midwives who will reduce maternal and neonatal mortality rates in the coming days.

The government of Nepal and partners remain invested in the program, with high hopes of effectiveness in the area of maternal and newborn health.

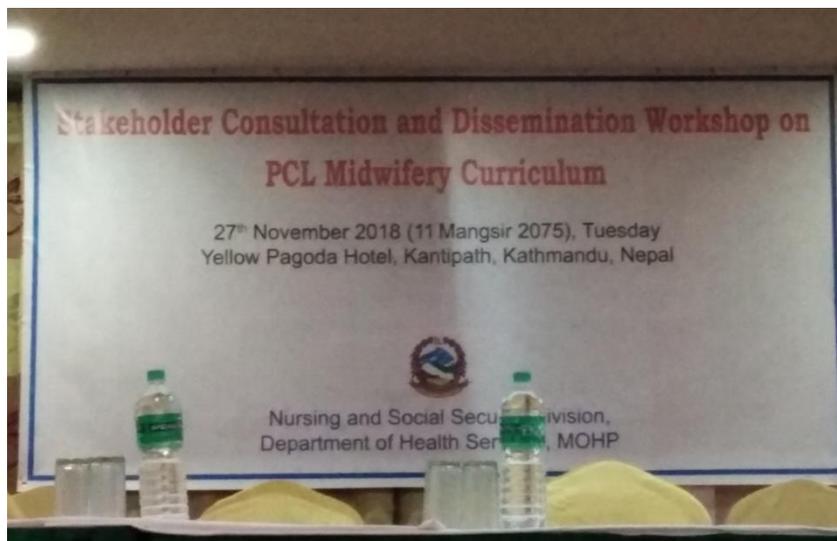
Within this program, RMF Nepal's current priority is to support the Bachelor of Midwifery Sciences (BMS) program at the National Academy of Medical Sciences (NAMS), Bir Hospital Nursing Campus. We have been continually supporting the NAMS midwifery program from its inception, including the provision of student scholarships, as well as learning materials and shelving/storage for the skills lab and library.

Between October and December of 2018, RMF was involved in the following activities to promote midwifery education and awareness in Nepal:

- RMF participated in a Stakeholder Consultation and Dissemination Workshop on PCL midwifery curriculum, organized by the Nursing and Social Security Division of the Department of Health Services.
- RMF participated in a workshop on workforce planning for SRMNAH services with a focus on midwives.
- RMF's scholarship distribution program was organized to award one scholarship to a midwifery student.

Stakeholder Consultation and Dissemination Workshop on PCL Midwifery Curriculum

On November 27, 2018, the Nursing and Social Security Division of the Department of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Population, organized a workshop to disseminate updates and establish acceptance of the PCL midwifery program curriculum. The chief guest of the event was Minister of Health Upendra Yadav. Among the distinguished guests were Nepal Nursing Council President Prof. Goma Devi Niraula, MIDSON President Prof. Kiran Bajracharya, Chief of Curative Service Division of Ministry of Health Dr. Bikash Lamichhane, and Karnali Academy of Health Sciences VC Prof. Dr. Rajendra Wagley. The attendees included representatives from various departments within the Ministry of Health, external development partners (EPDs) including RMF, and representatives from various professional organizations and academic institutions related to nursing.



Banner for the PCL midwifery program workshop

The workshop began with an introduction and updates on the Proficiency Certificate Level (PCL) midwifery program, as well as an overview of the challenges faced in its implementation. Director of the Nursing and Social Security Division of Ministry of Health Roshani Tuitui explained the objectives of the program, the ongoing processes, and the way forward.

In her speech, President of Nepal Nursing Council Goma Devi Niraula, commented that the healthcare system in Nepal is witnessing a change due to comprehensive advancements implemented on a federal level. According to Ms. Niraula, the Nepal Nursing Council is taking concrete steps towards integrating midwifery services into the healthcare system by licensing midwifery graduates and setting up the curriculum standards, implementing institutions, job descriptions, and legislation for midwives.

President of MIDSON Prof. Kiran Bajracharya pointed out the important role of professional midwives in the healthcare system. To meet the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of reducing the maternal mortality rate to 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030, it is fundamental that healthcare service professionals are prepared. The initiation of midwifery education is part of a long-term strategy addressing Nepal's maternal mortality rate. Prof. Bajracharya expressed that the government still has work to do for the midwives who are yet to complete their training in the new programs, such as ensuring their future employment and career advancement opportunities. She pleaded for intersectorial collaboration and strong advocacy for midwives and midwifery education, as a large portion of maternal deaths occur in rural areas where obstetricians and sophisticated health facilities are unavailable, and in such places only community midwives can provide the needed care.

Chief of the Curative Services Division of the Ministry of Health Dr. Bikas Lamichhane also made a speech during the program. He emphasized that the government still lacks reliable data about the actual human resources in nursing facilities. He urged the Nepal Nursing Council to provide the government with a database of existing nurses, because without awareness of the resources available, it is difficult to plan healthcare services efficiently, and the result would be a drain on the human resource pool of Nepal's healthcare system. He added that quality healthcare services are ensured only when providers can receive quality education. Thus, institutions providing education for health professionals should always remain under strict scrutiny by institutions of authority.



Chief of Curative Services Division Dr. Bikas Lamichhane delivering his speech

Finally, Minister of Health Upendra Yadav delivered his speech. He said that the problems of maternal and neonatal mortality have afflicted the nation for a long time, and that it is time for these issues to be addressed with impactful strategies. He expressed his appreciation for the nurses' dedication and hard work, which have made it possible to officially instate midwifery education programs. Though past due as a result of the unstable political climate of the country, this development is a major leap in the field of healthcare services in Nepal. Finally, he committed to doing everything within his authority to support the practice of midwifery.



Minister of Health Upendra Yadav during his speech

In the second session of the workshop, the curriculum of the PCL midwifery program, as well as the minimum prerequisites for an institution to initiate the program, were distributed among the participants who discussed the details to reach a consensus. The program was thus completed with the dissemination of the finalized curriculum, implementing organization prerequisites, and feedback from the guests.



Participants involved in the group work session of the workshop

Workforce Planning for SRMNAH Services with a Focus on Midwives

During the reporting period, a workshop was organized by the Nursing and Social Security Division of the Department of Health Services regarding workforce planning for sexual, reproductive, maternal, neonatal, and adolescent health (SRMNAH) services with a focus on midwives. The objective of the workshop was to receive input from various sectors in order to support the federal workforce planning process of the healthcare system, particularly in regard to midwives.

Director of the Nursing and Social Security Division Roshani Tuitui welcomed the invitees and presented background information for the workshop. She shared the current status of the maternal mortality rate in Nepal,

as well as its projected trends in the context of achieving the SDG target of 70 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030. She also introduced the Midwifery Services Framework (MSF), a system created by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) to promote the development of midwifery across sectors. Nursing and Social Security Division Nursing Officer Yashoda Baral updated the attendees about the current status and progress of midwifery education.

A special presentation was made by Martin Boyce, who was the chief investigator in a demographic study analyzing healthcare service patterns throughout Nepal. The study used samples from one cluster in a mountainous region, one in a hilly region, and one in the Terai flatlands. Mr. Boyce presented information about the existing health service centers in those regions, their catchment areas, services provided, and populations served. His study was ongoing, but he presented a small segment of it to pique the participants' interest in the future of federally-supported healthcare services; he added that systematic, highly detailed planning (rather than a blanket approach) would be necessary to improve the availability, accessibility, and affordability of healthcare services in different areas.

Dr. Geeta Rana gave a presentation about the organization of healthcare services, including existing infrastructure and deployment of human resources. She highlighted the existing Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric Care (CEOC) centers and Basic Emergency Obstetric Care (BEOC) centers, where the availability of services is disproportionate to the population in many rural areas. She added that these centers, as well as newly established birthing centers, can be utilized to deploy community midwives who will be certified by Nepal's new midwifery education programs in a few years' time.

Ms. Kabita Pandey, community nursing administrator at the Ministry of Health, gave a presentation on the existing rules and regulations for nurses, the status of interprofessional collaboration, practice of workforce management, and referral mechanisms in the healthcare system.

During the second session of the workshop, participants were divided into groups to work on plans for the implementation of midwifery education, workforce planning according to the given context, improvement and utilization of the available infrastructure, midwife deployment, and motivating factors for healthcare human resources. As the participants were highly experienced policy makers, researchers, and other experts from multiple faculties, they did an excellent job providing abundant input, and the workshop was a success as a result of their diligent work.



A presentation during the workshop



RMF Program Coordinator Pragya Gautam (right) participating in the workshop

RMF Scholarship Distribution Program

The RMF scholarship is provided to a government employee who secures a position on the merit list of the entrance examination held by NAMS and is not provided with remuneration by the government during the study period. The scholarship covers all tuition fees. The National Academy of Medical Sciences (NAMS) Bir Hospital Nursing Campus (BHNC) organized a special program on December 23, 2018 to welcome a new intake of students. The students were enrolled in the Master of Nursing, Bachelor of Nursing Sciences, and Bachelor of Midwifery Sciences programs. The students accepted into these programs had earned their places based on the entrance exam conducted by the NAMS examination board.

Despite their busy schedules, acting Vice Chancellor of NAMS Prof. Dr. Subodh Adhikari and NAMS Bir Hospital Director Prof. Dr. Bhupendra Basnet attended the scholarship distribution program. Bir Hospital Campus Chief Prof. Pramila Dewan greeted all the guests and welcomed the new students to the program. She explained how the academic programs at NAMS have been able to produce high quality health professionals that provide valuable services throughout Nepal. She also described the challenges faced by the institution in maintaining the campus: they do not have an adequate building for academic purposes and must accommodate students in a hostel, and they have insufficient faculty to run the various programs. Thus, she asked the NAMS administration to help the Bir Hospital Nursing Campus to address these issues. She stressed that although there were numerous challenges in running the institution, the quality education of the students has been and always will be the first priority. In closing, Prof. Dewan expressed her gratitude to RMF for its support. After Prof. Dewan's speech, the students were welcomed by their respective faculties with tika, a Nepali celebratory tradition in which a bright pigment is applied to the forehead.

In his speech, RMF Program Manager Ganesh Shrestha introduced RMF and its CEO Dr. Martina Fuchs to the attendees. He elaborated on the role of RMF in the consortium supporting midwifery education and the purpose of the scholarship itself. He also expressed his gratitude towards Prof. Pramila Dewan and the NAMS family for maintaining a respectful relationship with RMF and commitment to continuing scholarship support in the future.



RMF Program Manager Ganesh Shrestha (second from right) among the other distinguished guests at the program

In the meantime, NAMS Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Subodh Adhikari distributed scholarship checks to the RMF scholarship recipients. These students were Pratiksha Gurung and Muna Tembe Limbu of the Bachelor of Midwifery Sciences program.

In his speech, Prof. Dr. Adhikari said that it was a privilege to attend the program. He had not previously had the chance to visit Bir Hospital Nursing Campus and thus did not know the challenges it faces. He committed to supporting the campus by any means and asked BHNC administration to first find a suitable building for its programs. He also addressed the new students and asked them to put their best work into their studies so they can provide high quality services after completing their training; as a result, NAMS will take pride in producing such a high level of health professionals. In conclusion, he thanked RMF for providing invaluable support to BHNC.



Prof. Dr. Subodh Adhikari, acting Vice Chancellor of NAMS delivering a speech at the RMF Scholarship Distribution Program

RMF Scholarship Recipient Muna Tembe Limbu

Muna Tembe Limbu, a student in the Bachelor of Midwifery Sciences (BMS) program at NAMS, was chosen to receive an RMF scholarship. She is an employee of the Nepal government in the health sector, as a staff nurse. Muna had worked at the Ghorlikharka Health Post and Tamku Primary Health Care Center (PHCC) in Taplejung for 3 years. She is from the mountainous Taplejung district, where she grew up in a lower middle-class family and longed to complete her studies in order to support her father financially. Muna also had a strong grasp of her own capabilities and a passion to build her confidence, which allowed her to pursue an education in nursing.

When Muna worked at Tamku PHCC, she witnessed the experiences of pregnant women during childbirth. Though she could handle many of the clients efficiently, some of them had to be referred to more advanced health centers. However, the location of Tamku PHCC was so remote that the life of the both mother and child were often at stake during referral periods. Muna understood that if they could identify risky pregnancies earlier, they could refer them sooner and save lives. Her passion for preventing maternal and neonatal deaths led her to apply for the NAMS Bachelor of Midwifery Sciences program as soon as she learned about it, and she was placed on the merit list on her first application. Based on her financial background and her lack of a government stipend for the

academic period, she applied for the RMF scholarship and was selected as an awardee from a group of other government employees studying at NAMS.



Muna Tembe Limbu, BMS student at NAMS and recipient of 2018 RMF scholarship



RMF Program Coordinator (second from right) with midwifery mentors at NAMS

Conclusion

As the number of participating universities grows and their capacity is increased through educational materials, technology, faculty training, and more, the government of Nepal and consortium of partners, including RMF, believes that a large-scale change can be affected in women's and neonatal health through the increasing numbers of well-qualified midwives in the country.