

# OBSTETRIC FISTULA

Obstetric fistula, one of the most serious injuries of childbearing, is a hole between the vagina and the rectum or bladder caused by prolonged obstructed labour in the absence of timely and adequate medical care. The woman is left with chronic incontinence of urine or feces or both and in most cases a stillborn baby. The constant leaking urine, feces or both, is humiliating, often isolating the women with fistula from family, friends and neighbors. If left untreated, fistula can lead to chronic medical problems.

Like maternal mortality, fistula is almost entirely preventable and can in most cases be surgically repaired. More than 2 million women in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are living with fistula and each year between 50,000 to 100,000 women worldwide are affected by this condition. Affecting the most powerless members of society, obstetric fistula touches issues related to reproductive health and rights, gender equality and poverty.

Nepal has made significant progress in improving sexual and reproductive health and advancing reproductive rights of women and girls. But many women, especially the poor and vulnerable, still lack access to quality sexual and reproductive health information and services, including life-saving emergency obstetric care, leading to chronic debilitating morbidities such as obstetric fistula.

To prevent and end obstetric fistula, it is important to discourage child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, educate women about their reproductive rights, increase access to various choices of contraceptives, promote regular antenatal check-up and institutional delivery by skilled birth attendants, and timely referral for management of life threatening complications.



*In Hanuman Nagar of Saptari, Pramila Chaurisiya advocates for an end to obstetric fistula.*

 **4,362**

women in Nepal live with  
obstetric fistula<sup>1</sup>

 **200-400**

new cases of obstetric fistula  
in Nepal each year<sup>1</sup>



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and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

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# Obstetric Fistula in Nepal: UNFPA response

A global campaign to end obstetric fistula was launched in 2003 by UNFPA together with a wide range of partners, with the goal of making obstetric fistula as rare in developing countries as it is in the industrialized world. The campaign is now active in over 50 countries, including in Nepal, where it was launched in 2010. For more information please visit: [www.endfistula.org](http://www.endfistula.org).

## Advocacy and awareness raising

The campaign has helped recognize obstetric fistula as a public health issue in Nepal. As a result of continued advocacy, the National Health Sector Strategy 2016-2021 has incorporated obstetric fistula screening in the free basic health care package at all levels of health facilities. [UNFPA has also been working with the government and relevant partners to raise awareness of obstetric fistula](#). Since 2013, May 23 is celebrated as the International Day to End Obstetric Fistula in Nepal with various awareness-raising activities.

## Providing free treatment

UNFPA has been providing free treatment (surgeries) to women suffering from obstetric fistula in [selected fistula treatment and referral sites in Nepal](#). To enable provision of quality services and to improve quality of care, UNFPA has also provided medical equipment and supplies (including fistula kits) to the obstetric fistula service sites throughout the country.

## Strengthening the capacity of service providers

UNFPA is supporting the capacity building of service providers through various workshops, training and hands on practicum through national and international experts. In partnership with JPHIEGO, UNFPA has supported the development of an on-the-job competency-based surgical training manual on obstetric fistula, adapted from the FIGO/UNFPA Obstetric Fistula Manual. [The BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences, a teaching university in eastern Nepal, has been developed as an obstetric fistula training site by the National Health Training Center with UNFPA support.](#)



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Sources:

1. Report on Need Assessment for Obstetric Fistula in Nepal 2011