



EDITORIAL

UPLIFTING MATERNAL HEALTH IN NEPAL

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When we look at the trends in maternal mortality rate in Nepal, we can see decline from 850 in 1990 to 239 per 100000 live births in 2016. Following the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Nepal sets its target to reduce maternal mortality rate to 70 per 100000 live births by 2030.¹ By the beginning of 2020, Nepal succeeded to achieve above 60% of deliveries occurring in health facilities. However, under the scenario of global pandemic COVID-19 situation and imposed lockdown, institutional delivery sees a decline.² Here, it can be emphasized that the decline is much obvious in lower wealth quintile. The equity gap is clear in maternal health. It has been documented that place of residence, ethnicity, economic status and educational status are related to place of delivery. Institutional delivery is low among marginalized groups.¹

The challenges of maternal health in Nepal includes lack of awareness, availability of quality health service and access to it, lower utilization of health services, social disparity and more specifically lower status of women, teenage marriage and unsafe abortion, uneven distribution of health human resource and presence of different superstitious beliefs in the society.³ Some factors are associated with government's policies and service delivery and many more are related with social disparity and women's status in the family and society. Hence, this is-

sue shall be looked upon not only as biomedical, infrastructure and service-related phenomena but rather viewed as complex socioeconomic and political phenomena.

There are ample opportunities to achieve better maternal health in Nepal. Utilization of current federal structure for uplifting maternal health is the key. The health infrastructure shall reach the grassroots. The local government shall be emphasized and used at optimum level for better maternal health status. Political commitment is the essential ingredient to achieve any target. Increasing the access and use of quality health service in an affordable price and involvement of male partners is the requirement for attainment of better maternal health status in the country. Above all, the empowerment of women: economic, social and political, is crucial. Because, social and economic empowerment directly affects community women to enhance their status in the family and society, creating the enabling environment for better maternal health. This shall address the gaps in enhancing condition of women in the society. At the same time, political empowerment makes women able to secure the positions at decision making level, so that they can offer better policies with equity lens to enhance maternal health.

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