



# It starts at the top: Advancing access to reproductive and maternal health supplies through for all through landmark legislation in Nepal

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# The advocacy effort and legislative achievement

## Sunil Shrestha

## About Safe Motherhood Network Federation (SMNF) Nepal/White Ribbon Alliance (WRA) Nepal

- SMNF Nepal is a non-profit organization founded in 1996 that advances reproductive, maternal, and newborn health and rights.
- SMNF Nepal has served as the White Ribbon Alliance national affiliate since 1999.
- SMNF Nepal has more than 700 organizational members.
- SMNF Nepal is a recognized partner of the Government of Nepal on advocacy and policymaking.



### Safe Motherhood Network Federation Nepal

*A Network for Advocacy, Awareness and Social Mobilization*

(National Alliance for WRA)



# The context: Why the Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Rights Act was needed

## Health and service delivery gaps

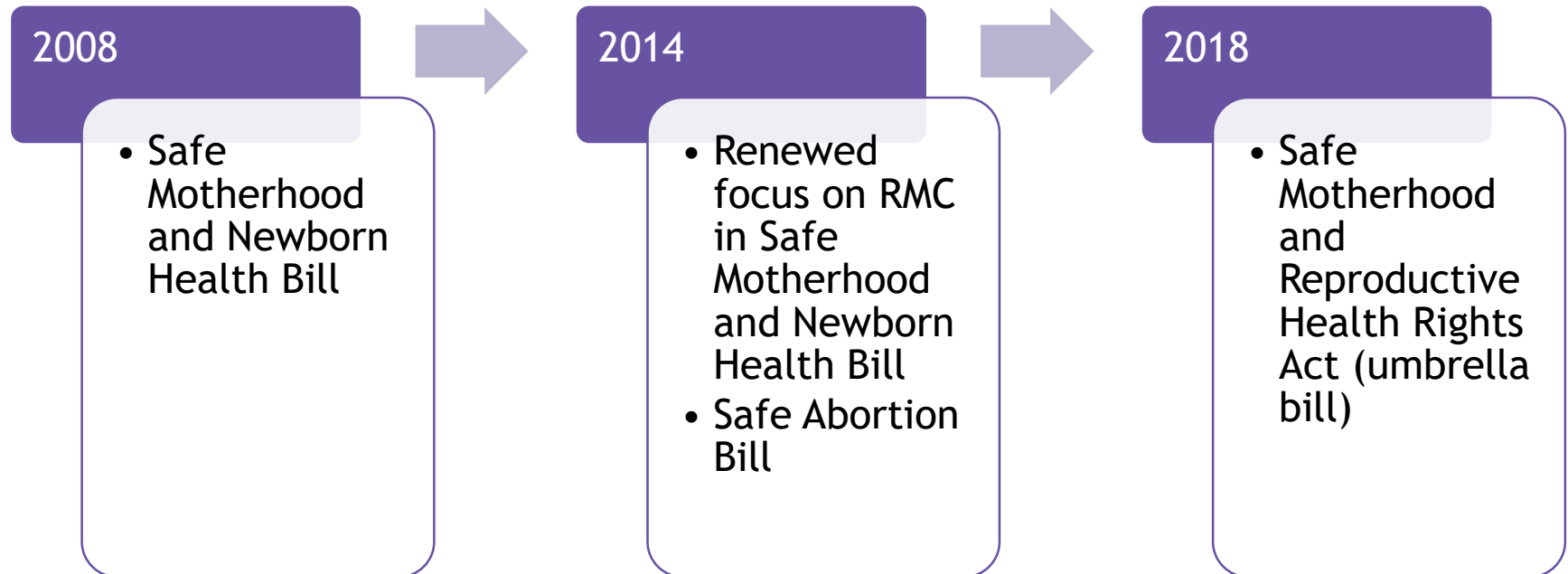
- High unmet need for contraception.
- Continued high rates of maternal mortality, despite progress.
- Ongoing challenges with accessibility of voluntary, safe abortion.
- Quality, equity, and dignity and Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) not mainstreamed.

## Policy gaps

- Reproductive, maternal, and newborn health issues fragmented in policy.
- No national legislative framework enshrining access to information, services, and supplies as a right.



## The pathway to the final legislation



## Key advocacy tactics

- Assembled multi-stakeholder coalition.
- Gathered women's and community members' voices to inform bill.
- Leveraged moments such as the 4<sup>th</sup> Safe Motherhood Conference in 2016 to build momentum.
- Continuously engaged key decision-makers including Ministers of Health and Finance and Parliamentarians.



Photo credit: SMNF Nepal



# Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Rights Act, 2018

## Main clauses:

Chapter 1. Preliminary (Brief Name and Beginning, Preface)

Chapter 2. Reproductive Health Rights

Chapter 3. Safe Motherhood and Newborn

Chapter 4. Safe Abortion

Chapter 5. Reproductive Health Morbidity

Chapter 6. Budget Allocation And Grant For Maternity and Reproductive Health

Chapter 7. Offense and Punishment

Chapter 8. Miscellaneous (Delivery of Disability-Friendly Services, No Discrimination)



## Select reproductive and maternal health supplies priorities in the Act

- Every person, including adolescent girls and boys, has the right to access sexual and reproductive health related education, information, counseling, and services.
- Every person has the right to be informed about contraception and have access to a full range of methods.
- Every woman has the right to emergency obstetric and newborn care, including access to life-saving medicines such as oxytocin and magnesium sulfate.
- Nobody should be discriminated for any service based on their origin, religion, tribe, caste, sex, community, occupation, profession, sexual orientation, physical or health condition, disability, marital status, pregnancy, belief, affliction by any disease or risk to it, reproductive health morbidity, personal relations, or any other factor.
- The Government of Nepal should allocate grants for each local level for reproductive and maternal health services.





## Bill handover to the Hon. Health Minister



Photo credit: SMNF Nepal



# The way forward

## Pinky Singh Rana



## Implementing the Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Rights Act, 2018

- Government and non-governmental entities (SMNF and partners) engaged in drafting of regulations; safe abortion regulation finalized.
- National Roadmap to Improve Maternal and Newborn Health in Nepal (2019-2030) finalized.
  - Close engagement with civil society organizations (CSOs) underpins collaborative and coordinated approach.
  - Provincial and Municipality/Rural Municipality level discussions critical to create understanding, effective mechanisms, and accountability.
- Budgetary allocations, as per Act, remain to be initiated from forthcoming fiscal year.



## Key priorities for implementation

- Ensuring quality infrastructure and services.
- Guaranteeing availability and accessibility of RH/MH health supplies, including through enhanced CSO and private sector engagement.
- Providing a safe environment for service providers.
- Clarifying the resources, infrastructure, and capacities at the federal, provincial, and rural municipality levels.
- Strengthening institutional mechanisms to review, follow up, and monitor progress.
- Addressing discrimination, harassment, and violence; promoting equity.



## The advocacy road ahead

- Hosting ongoing national level dialogues by CSOs provide platforms for multi-sectoral perspectives on the Act and Roadmap.
- Extensive sharing with right-holders and duty-bearers, at all levels of federal structure, to generate momentum from public and private sectors.
- Working with the private sector to strengthen infrastructure, build capacities, and overcome discrimination and inequalities.
- Advocating with decision makers at the federal, provincial, and local levels for adequate budgetary allocation, effective utilization, and accountability.



## Lessons learnt from the advocacy journey

- Strategic advocacy with policymakers reinforced by dialogues and awareness raising among duty bearers and right holders was crucial.
- Coordinated and collaborative approach between government and non-government bodies establishes enabling environment, which helps overpower challenging political environment, weak infrastructure, and social barriers.
- Addressing discrimination, harassment, and violence within safe motherhood and reproductive health is critical to overcome health deficits.
- Engaging private sectors and CSOs for mainstreaming government programs critical to ensure equality for all.

## Thank you! Questions?



Photo credit: Possible Health