

Communication

The Bangladesh Midwifery Programme – a giant step towards Safe Motherhood

Tahera Ahmed

Acting Chief,
Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UNFPA, Bangladesh
Email: tahera50@yahoo.com

Safe Motherhood is not only a Reproductive Right but also a basic human right. Provision of Safe Motherhood services like skilled attendants at birth reduces maternal deaths and morbidities. Bangladesh has reduced maternal deaths from 540/ 100,000 live births in the nineties to 194 in 2010¹. In a recent estimate by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, the World Bank and the United Nations Population Division, the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) has declined to 170 per 100,000 live births² in Bangladesh.

The Honorable Prime Minister's commitment at the UN General Assembly to accelerate progress to reach the MDG 4 and 5 was highly appreciated during the 2010 United Nations Summit on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Bangladesh committed to: doubling the percentage of births attended by a skilled health worker by 2015 through the training of an additional 3000 midwives, staffing all 427 sub-district health centers to provide round-the-clock midwifery services, and upgrading all 59 district hospitals and 70 Mother and Child Welfare Centers as centers of excellence for emergency obstetric care services.³

To fulfill the commitment of the Honorable Prime Minister at the 2010 United Nations Summit on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Government has introduced the Midwifery programme and created 3000 post of midwives. This is the first time that a dedicated cadre skilled in the provision of safe motherhood services has been created and posted in the field to be available and accessible to all women when needed. The Midwifery Strategic Directions document developed in 2008 with technical assistance from Development Partners like WHO and UNFPA, as well as the Bangladesh Nursing Council, the Nursing Directorate and other stakeholders including professional associations and NGOs, provided guidelines for the development of the Midwifery cadre including Training of Trainers and Midwifery training.

The training of the midwives is now ongoing in 2 pathways:

- A. 6-months advanced Certificate in Midwifery training for registered nurse-midwives -who have completed 4-year diploma in nursing & midwifery.
- B. 3-years Diploma in Midwifery -direct entry from HSC level.

Until now 1103 Certified midwives have completed the 6 month training course and 700 students are studying for their midwifery diploma in 27 centers.

As the situation has changed since 2008, a review and modification of the Strategic Directions 2008 has been made in consultation with all stakeholders to make it more effective and functional. The updated National Strategic Directions for Midwifery in Bangladesh, 2014 is focusing on 4 Priority areas with strategic actions for each area.

- Policy and Planning:
- Training, Education and Research.
- Deployment and Utilization:
- Regulation

Monitoring and evaluation has been kept as an overall component of the document. The National Strategic Directions for Midwifery in Bangladesh, 2014 has been printed and will be shared by Bangladesh Nursing (and Midwifery) Council and UNFPA.

Bangladesh has taken a huge step forward for ensuring safe motherhood and quality of care through the introduction of the Midwifery cadre. With the timely implementation of the National Strategic Directions for Midwifery in Bangladesh, 2014 it is expected that maternal mortality as well as morbidity will come down to very low levels and Bangladesh will be a shining example for others to follow.

References:

1. Bangladesh maternal Mortality Survey 2010.
2. United Nations Foundation. Every Woman Every Child-Commitments. 2014.
3. World Health Organization. Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990 to 2013, Estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, 2014. <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/monitoring/maternal-mortality-2013/en/> (Access on 27th December 2014)