



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 31 May, 2020

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US Global Gag Rule Reduces Care in Nepal, New Report Shows

The Global Gag Rule has drastically reduced access to and the quality of sexual and reproductive health services, undermined reproductive rights, and silenced the voices of civil society organizations in Nepal, says new report.

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Kathmandu, Nepal, 31 May, 2020

In recent years, the Nepali government has committed to increasing access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, particularly in remote regions. As a result, the country has liberalized its abortion laws and sought to increase access to contraceptives. While progress has been made, the Global Gag Rule—a US policy that prohibits funding to nongovernmental organizations that provide, refer, counsel, or advocate for abortion care—has undermined government efforts and reduced access to care. These impacts are detailed in a new report, released today, by the Center for Research on Environment, Health, and Populations Activities (CREHPA) and the International Women’s Health Coalition ([IWHC](#)).

“The impacts of the Global Gag Rule continue to reduce access to critical health care services in Nepal. For example, due to early termination of USAID supported program ‘Support to International Family Planning Organization Project-2’, many aspects of family planning services have stopped in 22 program districts and witnessed gaps in service coverage and worsening the quality of services. Apart from this, this policy has created funding gaps, weakened partnerships and coalitions between organizations and silenced voices of civil societies” said lead author Dr. Mahesh Puri, Co-Director of CREHPA. “The Global Gag Rule adds challenges not only to expanding and improving the quality of sexual and reproductive health services, but also to sustaining the progress already made and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals”.

The study, which interviewed 37 stakeholders, found that the implementation of the expanded Global Gag Rule is widening gaps in availability and accessibility of sexual and reproductive health and rights services and utilization, which predominantly affects already marginalized and underserved populations. The policy has affected both the training being provided to health workers on family planning and the

supply of family planning commodities, ultimately causing decreases in quality of care, disruption of partnerships and coalition networks of sexual and reproductive health and rights organizations and limitations on how civil society can work together effectively and efficiently. Because of the policy, four organizations that declined to comply with the policy experienced funding cuts, had limited options to work together, lost resources and scaled down their programs. Similar to last year, silencing of voices on abortion continued across United States government funded organizations, which creates a challenging situation for women to exercise their reproductive rights.

According to expanded Global Gag Rule in 2017, Nepali non-governmental organizations receiving United States global health assistance, including for family planning, reproductive health, maternal and child health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria, infectious diseases, neglected tropical disease and water, sanitation and hygiene programs are prohibited from providing information, referral, or services for legal abortion or advocating for legalization of abortion services as a method of family planning - even with their own funds. In March 2019, the policy was reinterpreted as a mechanism for barring any compliant foreign NGO from providing any financial support (including non-us government) to any foreign NGO that conducts activities prohibited by the policy.

“Particularly in low and middle income countries, the expanded Global Gag Rule is having profound impacts across all areas of global health assistance, including what we’re seeing in Nepal, where it is crippling efforts to reach marginalized populations with sexual and reproductive health services,” says IWHC’s Director of Policy and Advocacy Shannon Kowalski. “This policy is negatively affecting health outcomes in Nepal and undermining the government’s health priorities”.

Though Nepal’s government is committed to providing quality health care services to its people, challenges like limited capacity in funds and technical human resources to provide health care is limiting the government’s efforts. Moreover, budget allocation has not increased substantially enough to accelerate progress in health sector. Hence, support from external developmental partners, NGOs and INGOs is essential. However, because of the Global Gag Rule, national and international organizations working on sexual and reproductive health and rights including abortion in Nepal have been experiencing negative impacts to their organizations and their work.

The responsibility for minimizing effects of the Global Gag Rule in Nepal will have to be shared jointly by government, international donor agencies, NGOs and INGOs by filling funding gaps, minimizing gaps in service availability and accessibility, improving coverage of sexual and reproductive and rights services to the unreached population in Nepal. There is a need of dialogue between government, donor agencies and civil society organizations on evidences surrounding effects of the policy in Nepal and identify its mitigating measures.

For more information, see the [full report: Impacts of Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance Policy in Nepal in Third Year of its Implementation](#), by Mahesh Puri, Kusum Wagle, Vanessa Rios, and Yasaswi Dhungel.