

### **Nepali advocate to urge action on uterine prolapse at Washington health summit**

Kathmandu and Washington, DC June 7: A leading advocate for women's rights in Nepal will today warn a major international conference in Washington that uterine prolapse has reached a critical level in Nepal and demand more protection for Nepali women, particularly during pregnancy.

Samita Pradhan, director of the Women's Reproductive Rights Program, (WRRP), will sound the alarm on prolapse at a panel discussion on the opening day of the [2010 Women Deliver Conference](#) on maternal health, which opens today in Washington.

Uterine prolapse occurs when a woman's womb is dislodged. According to a 2007 study by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), over 600,000 Nepali women - 10% of all women of reproductive age - are affected. In a [2008 interview](#) for The Advocacy Project (AP), Ms Pradhan said that prolapse causes such desperation that women stuff pieces of slipper and glass bangles into their vagina, to hold up their fallen womb.

Well over 3,000 health experts will attend Women Deliver, and Ms Pradhan's appearance represents a first attempt by Nepali advocates to put prolapse onto the international agenda. The campaign received a boost recently, when prolapse was listed in a new bill before the US House of Representatives (the [Global MOMS Act](#)) that calls for increased US support for maternal health and describes prolapse as one of several "pregnancy-related injuries" that affect 10 million women worldwide.

The main focus of Women Deliver will be maternal deaths, in line with Millennium Development Goal #5. But with mortality rates falling, many advocates are also urging consideration of conditions like obstetric fistula and prolapse, that may not kill but which severely weaken women.

WRRP has worked on prolapse in nine of Nepal's 75 districts, and is at the forefront of the campaign in Nepal. The government has set a target of 8,000 surgical interventions this year, and developed a strategic plan on prolapse. But these efforts have been undermined by Nepal's prolonged political crisis and by a shortage of trained personnel.

In addition, the government has shown little interest in addressing the root cause of prolapse, particularly the disempowerment of women and girls. According to the WRRP, discrimination against the girl child can begin early in Nepali families. Girls are married as early as ten and often give birth before the uterus is ready. They resume heavy work

within days of giving birth. All of this puts pressure on the muscles of the womb.

Domestic abuse may also contribute to prolapse. A 2008 study by UNFPA found that 74% of the women questioned had been forced to have sex against their will.

"I don't want to blame men, but women are victims of a patriarchal society," said Ms Pradhan. "It's structural violence that women are facing in Nepal."



In an effort to prevent prolapse, WRRP has trained over 100 village "campaigners" to target vulnerable families and helped prolapse survivors to organize and lobby the government. During a recent mission to Nepal, The Advocacy Project interviewed Rekha Yadav (left), the leader of one network of survivors. AP is producing a film on the visit.

Ms Pradhan hopes to use the conference to collect information about prolapse in other countries, and reach out to US lawmakers, NGOs and community groups. She met on Saturday with the Zonta Club of Washington, an association of professional women which has encouraged women's empowerment in Niger and Afghanistan.

Ms Pradhan's visit to Washington is being coordinated by The Advocacy Project, which has partnered with WRRP since 2007. AP was alerted to prolapse by an AP Peace Fellow [Nicole Farkouh](#), who served in Eastern Nepal, and several Fellows have worked with WRRP since. This year's Fellow, [Kate Bollinger](#) from the Monterey Institute of International Studies, will work with Ms Pradhan at the conference, before continuing on to Nepal. Ms Pradhan and Ms Bollinger will both blog and use Twitter from the conference.

*\*\* For more information, and to contact Samita Pradhan in Washington, contact [Kate Bollinger](#); Mobile: (1) 203 788 3286.*

- For more on [uterine prolapse in Nepal](#).
- For a video interview by [Samita Pradhan](#).
- Read a [backgrounder on prolapse](#) in Nepal by AP Director Iain Guest.
- Read the [Global MOMS Bill](#), currently before the US House of Representatives.
- See [photos of WRRP program](#) in Eastern Nepal.