



**giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft  
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Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



# A SHARED JOURNEY TOWARDS BETTER HEALTHCARE FOR ALL

Celebrating the achievements of 30 years of  
German-Nepali cooperation in the health sector





## A half century of profound change

Nepal has undergone remarkable political and socio-economic change in the 50 years since technical cooperation between Nepal and the Federal Republic of Germany was formalised in 1974. At that time, Nepal was a monarchy. Ninety-five per cent of its inhabitants lived in rural areas. Road networks were limited, as were telephone connections. Television had yet to arrive. Few children – and girls, in particular – completed more than basic schooling.

Following ten years of civil war (1996-2006), a peace process, the abolition of the monarchy (2008), a transition to multi-party democracy and the adoption of a new constitution (2015), Nepal is now a federal republic. Today, more than one-fifth

of its 30 million citizens are city dwellers. Every second person uses the Internet, and 70 per cent of adults can read and write at a basic level.<sup>1</sup>

These transformations have coincided with other tumultuous events. The massive earthquake of 2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic, which began just five years later, exacted a devastating toll on Nepal. These successive crises diverted precious energy, resources and capacities at a time when the country was engaged in a complex transition from a unitary to a federal state. Now that the immediate impacts of these shocks are receding, Nepal is poised to build upon the remarkable changes of an eventful half century.

<sup>1</sup>All figures from World Bank DataBank unless otherwise indicated. <https://databank.worldbank.org/home.aspx>

## Major improvements in population health

Health and access to healthcare is one of the areas which has changed profoundly. Fifty years ago, most Nepalese had little or no access to formal health services provided by trained doctors, nurses or midwives. When they fell ill, they would seek care from traditional healers or, in exceptional cases, from one of a handful of government or mission hospitals. Deaths from preventable diseases, such as measles and polio, were common. Many women lost their lives from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth.

Today, the picture looks very different, thanks in part to health reforms guided by Nepal's Ministry of Health and Population and supported by external partners, including the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

Essential health services are now available through a network of government health facilities which extend to every ward in the country. Hospitals offer a wide range of curative care, with tertiary hospitals able to provide highly specialised treatments. Privately-run pharmacies, clinics and hospitals complement these public offerings. Every year, medical training institutions in Nepal graduate thousands of healthcare professionals who staff this growing system.

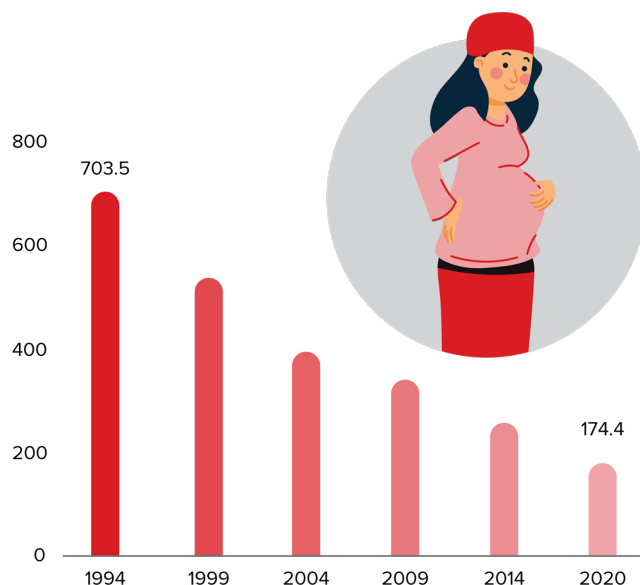
These changes, alongside general socio-economic development, have contributed to considerable improvements in people's health. Life expectancy has increased to 70 years, from just 44 a half century ago. Deaths from communicable diseases have fallen. Four out of five children are now fully vaccinated, and a great majority of women benefit from skilled care during pregnancy (94 per cent) and childbirth (80 per cent).<sup>2</sup>

While there is still much to do to improve the quality of healthcare services and to address imbalances in access between urban and rural areas, and between richer and poorer citizens, the progress which has been made in the past 50 years is noteworthy.

## Infographic(s) showing changes in selected indicators over time

### Maternal Mortality Ratio

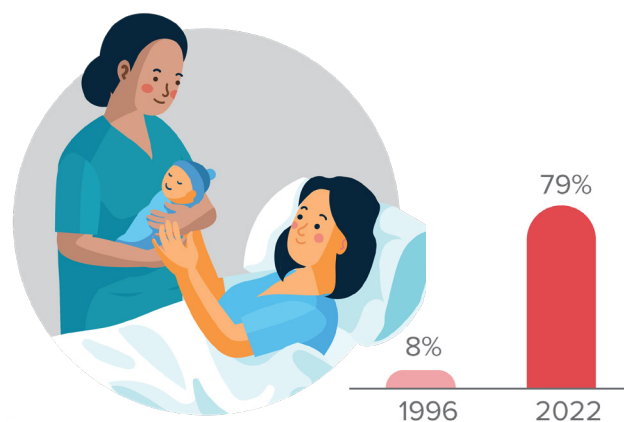
Deaths per 100,000 live births



Source: WHO

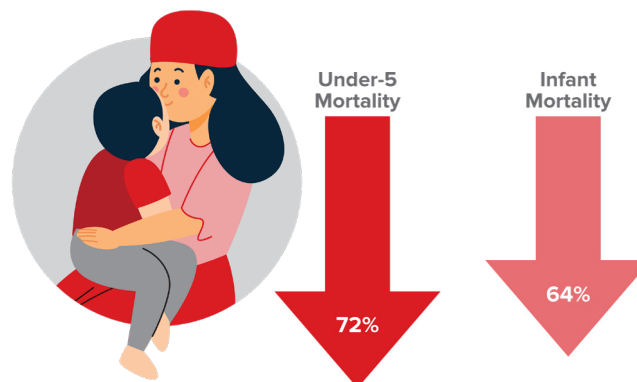
### Institutional Births

Per cent of babies born in health facilities



Source: DHS

### Deaths among children declined by



Source: DHS

<sup>2</sup>Nepal Demographic and Health Survey, 2022. <https://www.dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-FR379-DHS-Final-Reports.cfm>

## A trusted partner through ‘thick and thin’

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) has been a trusted partner to the Ministry of Health and Population in this journey since 1994, when the first technical assistance project in health was initiated. Since then, working on behalf of BMZ, it has provided steadfast support to the government’s health sector strategies through ‘thick and thin’ – in times of peace and stability, as well as times of crisis.

In the early years of the cooperation, the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) – as GIZ was known at the time – worked hand-in-hand with health officials in particular districts to bolster healthcare offerings at the local level. It complemented the government’s efforts by filling gaps in training, supplies, equipment and infrastructure so that primary healthcare and reproductive health services could be provided to people close to where they lived. During the decade-long civil war (1996-2006), this was especially important. GTZ projects helped to ensure that basic healthcare remained available to people at a time when the health system was under great strain.

Once peace was concluded and the Ministry of Health and Population recommitted to health reforms, German technical cooperation shifted its approach away from projects in specific geographical areas toward programs with a health systems orientation. Over the years it has supported the government of Nepal in areas such as safe motherhood, adolescent health, health information systems, health insurance, and decentralised health governance. Some of the highlights of this cooperation are described below.

## What difference does access to healthcare make?

‘I am diabetic. It costs me 8,000-10,000 Rupees every time I go for a check-up and to collect my medicines. My family doesn’t have savings. I used to borrow from others, or would just skip the check-up altogether and buy the medicine at the pharmacy. In 2022 I enrolled my family in health insurance. It has been a godsend.

I no longer worry about the costs of my chronic illness. My husband was in an accident and broke his hand. My son was hospitalised with a throat infection. They are both recovered. The insurance covered the costs. The money we are saving on health costs we can use for our children’s education.’



Khusbu Balmiki, 32, lives in Nepalgunj. She and her husband are waste workers. A local project supported by GIZ has trained her in safe waste handling practices and facilitated access to health services.

## Highlights from the cooperation



1

### Advancing women's health and rights

GIZ has contributed to Nepal's significant success in reducing maternal deaths. It has trained skilled birth attendants, supported mentoring programs on emergency obstetric care, and equipped simulation centers which allow nursing and midwifery students to develop their practical skills. In the 1990s GIZ spearheaded the passage of legislation which legalised abortion in Nepal – a major advance for women's rights. More recently, it helped to establish the first-ever education programs for professional midwives.



2

### Laying the foundations for national health insurance

More than half of all health expenditure in Nepal is shouldered directly by patients. GIZ has worked with the Ministry of Health and Population to design and introduce national health insurance and to anchor it in policy. In June 2024 the health insurance program covered 4.4 million beneficiaries, more than half of them women. While this represents only a small proportion of those who are eligible, it offers an important foundation upon which to build. Its digital backbone is openIMIS, a Digital Public Good which was developed and scaled up in Nepal and is now used widely in other countries.



3

### Improving health services at the local level

As Nepal's health system has become less centralised, GIZ has helped to strengthen the way health services are planned, delivered and managed at the provincial and local level. It introduced and popularised social audits as a key means to increase citizen participation in decision making about local health facilities. Since the transition to federalism in 2015, GIZ has been working with health authorities, local officials, private companies and other actors to find integrated solutions to complex municipal challenges, such as the disposal of healthcare waste.



4

### Responding to crises – then 'building back better'

GIZ has reacted quickly during times of crisis – and has seized openings to strengthen health systems during the recovery period. Staff travelled immediately to affected areas with emergency supplies and personal hygiene kits following the devastating floods and earthquakes of 2014 and 2015. During the recovery phase, GIZ introduced digital tools which accelerated reconstruction efforts and promoted digitalisation as part of 'building back better.' During the COVID-19 pandemic, GIZ donated personal protective equipment, infection prevention and cleaning supplies, and autoclaves to hospitals. It then supported 13 major hospitals to introduce comprehensive healthcare waste management systems to strengthen preparedness for future pandemics.





5

## Unlocking the power of digital information systems

GIZ has long put priority on information management, starting from the 1990s when it helped the Ministry of Health and Population to develop the Human Resource Management Information System (HRMIS). Following the 2015 earthquake, GIZ was a central player in the nationwide expansion of e-reporting to health facilities. Nearly three-quarters of Nepal's 8000 public health facilities now submit routine health information electronically. Over the past decade GIZ has played a key role in the creation of an interoperable digital ecosystem which links information from programs within and outside the health sector, such as birth registrations



6

## Breaking the taboo around menstruation

The 2018 MenstruAction conference organised by GIZ and other partners put menstrual health and hygiene squarely on the agenda. A year later, the Government of Nepal began making sanitary pads available free of charge to students in public schools across the country. More than 80 organisations and activists have joined the Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Partners Alliance (MHM PA) in working to improve menstrual health. Menstruation-related indicators are included in the 16th national development plan. Through the successful #LetsTalkPERIOD campaign supported by BMZ, social media influencers have helped to break the silence surrounding this once taboo topic.





## A valuable partnership continues

Working on behalf of the German government, GIZ is proud to have played a part in the great strides which Nepal has made in health over the past decades. These achievements are particularly remarkable given the many dramatic events which have occurred in the country over the past 50 years.

The adoption of a new constitution gives every nation an impetus for renewal. In Nepal, the transformations initiated by the 2015 constitution have been interrupted by the earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic. With these dual crises now largely behind it, the country can refocus attention on building systems and implementing policies to improve people's lives.

Heading into the second half-century of Nepali-German technical cooperation, GIZ will continue

to work with its partners at the Ministry of Health and Population to strengthen the implementation of the national health insurance program so that more people gain access to healthcare without financial hardship. It will support municipal governments to ensure that health services at the local level better meet people's needs, particularly women's, and will continue to strengthen digital information systems in the health sector.

Complex changes and 'system building' require time, commitment, an openness to learn from what works and a willingness to adjust course where necessary. They also require trust and mutual respect, which have been the cornerstones of this partnership since the outset. GIZ looks forward to continuing the shared journey towards better healthcare for all.





जर्मन  
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