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## The year 2020: Loss of Women and Midwives' Voices

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## **The year 2020: Loss of Women and Midwives' Voices**

We are saying goodbye to 2020, the year the world changed all of a sudden! The COVID-19 pandemic hit all continents and every aspect of human life. The disease as well as the associated lockdown affected our daily life, from education to business, and from health services to our social, emotional and physical wellbeing. All physical touch suddenly became contagious and online high-tech communication has become the new normal. We have been reminded about the importance of frequent handwashing to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading. We must maintain this habit as it is also highly effective in reducing other highly infectious diseases such as Norovirus.

This is the time we traditionally reflect on the year passed. We need to ask ourselves: “What have we gained and what have we lost?” The biggest loss in midwifery and maternity services was access for women and their families, the loss of vaccinations, the loss of professional antenatal, intrapartum, postnatal and newborn care. For example, in Nepal hospital births reduced by more than half during the COVID-19 lockdown, with increases in institutional stillbirth rate and neonatal mortality, and decreases in quality of care.<sup>1</sup> But the greatest loss is the loss of the voice of women and midwives in their care!

What we have gained? From Yale University in the United States of America (<https://www.coursera.org/learn/global-quality-maternal-and-newborn-care>), we got the Global Quality Maternal and Newborn Care course. Normal Birth Conference 2020 was virtual and attended by more than 7000 women, and not just midwives. This was a great achievement! *The Lancet Global Health* publication on impact of midwives provides yet further proof of the importance of professional midwives.<sup>2</sup> This publication shows that drastically increasing midwife-led interventions could avoid 41% of maternal deaths, 39% of neonatal deaths, and 26% of stillbirths, by 2035. Even a modest increase in coverage of midwife-delivered interventions could decrease 22% of maternal deaths, 23% of neonatal deaths, and 14% of stillbirths by 2035.

How much more proof do we need that professional midwifery services and midwives are effective in improving the health and well-being of women, babies and their families? Let us

promise ourselves for the year 2021: ‘We -midwives-will be the voice for women, neonates and children in our nations and we will be the voice of our own profession!’

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