

## World Population Day spotlights needs of women and girls in emergencies

NEW YORK, United Nations – Sarita Tamang was nine months pregnant when she was buried alive by the devastating earthquake in Nepal. Her house in Gorkha, near the epicentre of the quake, collapsed on top of her. "I could not even get up from my bed, and I did not have hope that I could be alive," she said. "I felt that my organs were not functioning and my body was trembling."



Ms. Tamang's brother-in-law dug her from the rubble, but the disaster destroyed the local health facility. She ended up giving birth in a tent she shared with four other families.

This year's World Population Day, on 11 July, focuses attention on vulnerable populations in emergencies – particularly women and adolescents, whose specific needs are too often overlooked in humanitarian responses.

"In humanitarian situations, an estimated one in

five women and adolescent girls are likely to be pregnant," said UNFPA's Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin in a statement. "As skilled birth attendance and emergency obstetric care often become unavailable, pregnant women's and girls' vulnerability to death and injury is further exacerbated."

Women and girls also face increased risks of gender-based violence, and they have health and hygiene needs that are seldom prioritized. In emergencies, UNFPA works to secure their safety, dignity and health, and to empower them to better care for themselves.

### Displacement numbers at all-time high

Globally, nearly 60 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes – the highest such number ever recorded. Women and girls are especially vulnerable in these situations, facing increased risks of abuse, sexual exploitation, violence and forced marriage.

Nigo\* endured abduction and rape when Boko Haram militants took over her village in Nigeria. "They told us that we were their slaves, and they would do to us what they want," she said.

UNFPA works with governments and partners to provide support to survivors like Nigo, who received counselling and medical care after she escaped. UNFPA additionally supports legal assistance for violence survivors and works with local leaders to reinforce support systems for women and girls.



## Health care everywhere

One of UNFPA's chief roles in an emergency is to bring reproductive health care to women and girls – wherever they are. With partners, UNFPA supports mobile clinics, health facilities and health-staff training in crisis-affected communities. In Nepal, for example, UNFPA has organized mobile health camps to deliver care in remote earthquake-damaged areas. Restoring reproductive health care means restoring access to family planning, which helps women avoid unplanned pregnancies in dire circumstances. It also means providing the full spectrum of maternal health services, from antenatal check-ups and safe delivery services to post-partum care for mothers and babies.

“I had expected the worst to happen,” said Chantal

Uwamahoro, who walked for days to escape the conflict in Burundi. She was shocked to find a fully operational maternity clinic at Mahama Refugee Camp in Rwanda. There, she safely gave birth to a little girl.

## Part of the solution

But women and young people are more than simply vulnerable populations. When supported, they can help their communities recover and thrive.

“I was 14 years old when my family fled,” said Viviana, whose family was displaced by violence in Colombia. “We arrived in a new town where we thought we would be able to live in peace, but there were armed groups there, too.”

Still, she refused to let her life be derailed by violence. She became a leader, organizing some 5,000 young people to work with UNFPA to advance the rights of marginalized youth.

Viviana's work shows the world what is possible. “I believe in a peace built by listening to young people,” she said.

Dr. Osotimehin agrees. “By prioritizing health, rights and the full participation of women, adolescent girls and young people in public life,” he said, “we increase our prospects for a more just, stable and peaceful world.”