

**White Ribbon Alliance (WRA)** formed over a decade ago to give a voice to the women at risk of dying in childbirth. WRA rapidly grew, as thousands of individuals and organizations joined the network, speaking as one voice, identifying problems in their own communities and finding solutions collaboratively at a national level across Africa and Asia. Our mission is to inspire and convene advocates who campaign to uphold the right of all women to be safe and healthy before, during and after childbirth. We help citizens recognize their rights and catalyse a global movement for respectful maternity care for every woman, everywhere.

## BACKGROUND

Respectful maternity care (RMC) is a universal human right that is due to every childbearing woman in every health system around the world. Women’s experiences with maternity caregivers can empower and comfort them, or inflict lasting damage and emotional trauma. While many interventions aim to improve access to skilled birth care, the quality of relationships with caregivers during maternity care has received less attention. Evidence suggests that in countries with high maternal mortality, the fear of disrespect and abuse that women often encounter in facility-based maternity care is a more powerful deterrent to use of skilled care than commonly recognized barriers such as cost or distance.

In 2011, WRA launched a global campaign to promote a clear standard for RMC that is rooted in international human rights. Working with other global organizations, WRA produced a ground breaking consensus document, the Respectful Maternity Care Charter: the Universal Rights of Childbearing Women, which demonstrates the legitimate place of maternal health rights in the broader context of human rights. In 2015, White Ribbon Alliance continues to build visibility and coverage of this issue, and envisions a world in which a woman’s right to RMC is embedded at all levels of maternal health systems.

In addition, WRA promotes the empowerment of frontline health workers, with a focus on issues of human resources for health. The Alliance advocates for more providers in understaffed and under-resourced healthcare facilities, as well as improved working conditions for staff. WRA campaigns to amplify the voices of frontline health workers in order to galvanize action among global leaders and national policymakers.



The Respectful Maternity Care Charter: The Universal Rights of Childbearing Women can be found on [www.whiteribbonalliance.org/campaigns/respectful-maternity-care/](http://www.whiteribbonalliance.org/campaigns/respectful-maternity-care/)

## PROMOTING THE RIGHT TO RMC

Since its development, the RMC Charter has been translated into eight languages and is being used globally to talk about the problem of disrespect and abuse during maternity care. It is also being used as a tool to educate health workers about maternity care and human rights, and to raise awareness of the problem in a way that avoids blaming and shaming. To support this effort, WRA produced a range of materials that include guidebooks, infographics, films, and presentations to help increase visibility of this issue. Once the Charter gained momentum, it was endorsed by the World Health Organization, the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, and the International Confederation of Midwives.

WRA is currently advocating to ensure that the language of the Charter and RMC indicators are reflected in the new Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals.

## MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES TO DEMAND RMC

The WRA approach is rooted in mobilizing communities to drive change from local to national level. WRA equips national advocates with key information, tools, and techniques to increase social accountability and secure government commitments on issues related to respectful maternity care.

For example, in Nigeria, WRA facilitated the launch of a hotline for citizens to report incidents of disrespect and abuse at local health facilities. In Nepal, WRA conducted community dialogues to raise awareness about RMC and human rights, and to collect evidence to shape the integration of the RMC Charter into the Safe Motherhood Healthcare Bill. WRA India developed a mobile application that allowed women to rate their health providers and to report on the quality of care that they received. This, as a result, helped healthcare providers evaluate and improve their services, and ensure that their staff is well-acquainted with the RMC Charter.



Mobilizing and connecting community members to their leaders is key to all WRA campaigns

Working with the media has been an important component of WRA's campaigns. In Nepal, WRA organized a major workshop for sixty journalists representing every key media institution across the country. The participants learned how to investigate and report on cases of disrespect and abuse, and to educate their readers about RMC and human rights.

In another example, WRA Malawi organized a group of journalists to report on the experience of new-mothers and health workers. This effort received a lot of attention and as a result, WRA was able to secure a government commitment to include a new budget line to support health workers.

## INTEGRATING RMC INTO TRAININGS FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

WRA recognizes the vital role that health workers play in delivering respectful care, and is working with governments to include this new standard of care in the training curriculum for maternity healthcare providers.



The campaign page on the WRA website features links to the latest RMC trainings materials, including this video that was made for the training of healthcare workers in Africa

For example, in Nigeria WRA successfully campaigned for the Ministry of Health to incorporate the rights language in the Lifesaving Skills Manual for Midwives. In Nepal, WRA identified gaps in the health workers' training curriculum, and used these insights to produce a strategy paper that was ultimately presented to the Ministry of Health as a roadmap for instituting RMC training nationwide. As a result, the Nepalese Ministry of Health has charged WRA Nepal with leading the implementation of this action plan.

In the United Kingdom, the maternity education team, midwifery supervisors and governance teams at a number of major hospitals joined forces with WRA to incorporate the RMC Charter into their training. All midwives and obstetric staff must attend these sessions annually.

## SUPPORTING HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS TO DELIVER RMC

Frontline health workers are critical to delivering RMC and in realizing this elevated standard of care across the health system. However, provision of RMC is a behavioural change issue, and can only be addressed in tandem with other sector-wide challenges and cultural issues. Therefore, to support healthcare providers to overcome these issues and deliver RMC, WRA developed a set of training tools that specifically target health facility managers, healthcare providers, and community leaders. WRA Nigeria successfully piloted the



trainings in a number of health centres across several states, focusing on the rights of pregnant and childbearing women, and on establishing accountability mechanisms that engage citizens in monitoring the provision of RMC at health facilities. The results of these efforts are clear and impactful, as the health centres involved have already rearranged delivery beds, added separation curtains, and secured personal medical files to provide patients with privacy. Health workers within these centres are actively educating community members about RMC and ensuring that expecting women understand the level of care and respect they are entitled to in the delivery room. Although these changes were primarily directed at improving the experience of expecting mothers, everyone using the services of these health centres will benefit from the improvement.

### INCORPORATING RMC IN NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND HEALTHCARE POLICY

Institutionalizing reform is about promoting long-term policy change at the village, district, facility and country levels through sustained campaigns rooted in data and evidence, community engagement, education and awareness, and genuine dialogue with government. WRA works to persuade policymakers to endorse the RMC rights framework as a means of building national awareness and encouraging leaders to set strong RMC standards.



Led by WRA, community members engage in dialogue with local policymakers

As a result of the WRA campaigns, a number of countries have taken steps to act. In Nigeria, WRA worked with the Federal Ministry of Health to adopt the RMC Charter as a standard of practice. Nigeria's National Council of Health approved the RMC Charter as the standard for delivering RMC at all levels of

care throughout the country. This change realizes a new code of conduct for healthcare personnel directly providing maternal care and as such, raises the expected standard of care across the health system.

In Nepal, WRA collaborated with the Ministry of Health to push for the inclusion of the RMC rights framework and language into the national Safe Motherhood legislation, thereby ensuring that RMC standards are incorporated into law and in-service curricula for all professional disciplines involved in providing maternal care.

A range of similar initiatives are underway around the world, and WRA is at the forefront of this progress.

### MOVING FORWARD

WRA's global campaigns have helped bring RMC to the forefront of the maternal healthcare agenda. Progress has been made, as evidenced by countless examples of change above; however, much work still needs to be done. Over the next 12 months, there are plans to introduce similar reforms in collaboration with WRA National Alliances in Malawi, Zimbabwe, Yemen, Bangladesh and Pakistan. And in the next 5 years, capitalizing on current international momentum, a much more comprehensive strategy will include expanding campaign initiatives into additional countries, continuing to put women's experiences at the heart of our efforts, broadening the dialogue and engagement beyond RMC to include other issues directly tied to maternal healthcare, and embedding RMC within the larger quality-of-care movement—all the while sharing key lessons and insights learned along our journey with organizational peers, partners and allies.

### RESOURCES

WRA Website: [www.whiteribbonalliance.org](http://www.whiteribbonalliance.org)

RMC Campaign Page: [www.whiteribbonalliance.org/campaigns/respectful-maternity-care/](http://www.whiteribbonalliance.org/campaigns/respectful-maternity-care/)

RMC Videos: [www.bit.ly/RMCVideos](http://www.bit.ly/RMCVideos)

Five Approaches to RMC: [www.whiteribbonalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/5-Approaches-to-RMC.pdf](http://www.whiteribbonalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/5-Approaches-to-RMC.pdf)