

Let Girls Be Born

Stories of Change

UPHOLDING THE RIGHTS OF THE GIRL CHILD



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PLAN INDIA

Plan India is an Indian NGO working to improve the lives of disadvantaged children, their families and communities through an approach that puts children at the centre of community development. Since 1979, we have been working with our partners to help children access their rights to proper healthcare, basic education, healthy environment, protection from abuse and exploitation and participation in decision that affects their lives. We encourage children to express their views and be actively involved in improving their communities. Plan India currently works in over 5000 communities in 11 states across the country impacting the lives of over one million boys and girls.

Plan India is part of Plan International, one of the world's largest community development organisations.

NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR INDIA

The National Foundation for India is a national philanthropic organisation. It aims to make a difference and help create a just and equitable society by enabling marginalised communities to improve the quality of their own lives and by improving public understanding of social issues.

THE AUTHORS

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SWAPNA MAJUMDAR is an independent journalist focusing on research-based articles on development issues and the role of women as agents of social change. The empathy and professionalism with which she has written on women and child rights, healthcare, HIV/AIDS, nutrition, livelihoods, sanitation, education, governance and gender has won her several awards. A recent research study on the status of widows in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka for UN Women is being used to advocate for a reduction of their social ostracism in South Asia.

Disclaimer: These are real life incidents written by the above authors for various media publications. They do not represent Plan India's view and position on Child Protection issues.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

Shramajivi Mahila Samity (SMS), Jharkhand

Shramajivi Mahila Samity, a woman headed organization strongly motivated to work for poor and disadvantaged populations. Was founded with a vision to develop and nurture a balanced and just society to explore equal opportunity for both men and women and ensure their equal participation in development of the society through education, economic independence and social justice.

Sri Bhuvneswari Mahila Ashram (SBMA)

A not for profit organization based in Uttarakhand, works with communities, organizations/institutions, government, technical and academic institutions and other civil society groups to create a society where every child is happy, its well being assured. SBMA has been working in Uttarakhand for more than 30 years.

Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR), Delhi

is a non-profit organisation committed to advocacy on the rights of marginalized populations. These include urban and rural poor, HIV positive people, single women, people living with disability, women in sex work and sexual minorities.

Shikshit Rojgar Kendra Prabandhak Samiti (SRKPS), Rajasthan

is a voluntary organization which is working on the issues of development for past 25 years in the state of Rajasthan. Shikshit Rojgar Kendra Prabandhak Samiti (SRKPS) started its social journey with a comprehensible vision and mission of creating aware and self reliant society.

Urmul Setu, Rajasthan

Took birth as a result of the decentralisation process of Urmul Trust. It was registered as a separate organisation in the year 1994 under the Society Registration Act. Urmul's long term goal is to lead underprivileged sections of the villages especially women and children towards self reliance by providing developmental services which they themselves decide on, design, implement and eventually finance to upgrade their quality of life. awareness and ensure them a life with dignity , self esteem and morality.

Vatsalaya, Uttar Pradesh

Was set-up as a "Resource Center on Health" in the year 1995 with an objective to make consistent efforts towards ensuring quality health services especially to the poor and marginalized community of rural areas. The organization aims to facilitate a lasting change to improve the capacities & quality of life of the individuals, communities and to enhance their awareness on health in a comprehensive framework of development.

PREFACE

Plan India is a child rights organisation that lays special emphasis on working for the rights of girls. It has a presence in 13 states of India. Of these 13 states, in six northern states of India, the flagship project, Let Girls Be Born has been implemented to protect the rights of girls.

In India, it is imperative for Plan India to work on the life cycle approach systematically as girls are discriminated against, even before they are born due to the misuse of medical technology as well as, after birth due to gender inequality at every stage of their lives.

Globally, Plan has initiated a campaign known as 'Because I am a Girl (BIAAG)' & as a part of that campaign, the 'Let Girls Be Born' (LGBB) initiative, is a project working towards the rights to identity, name and citizenship for every girl.

Our book, 'Stories of Change' endeavours to document some of the 'best practices' in the form of stories that highlight a positive shift in the society's acceptance of girls, accomplished as a result of the Let Girls Be Born intervention strategy. We thank the authors who have travelled across the intervention areas to interact with the stakeholders in the communities, document the best practices and translate them into vibrant stories. The main aim was to portray a narrative that is factual, hard hitting and reflects the attitude of the community towards girls.

Gender discrimination or neglect of girls leading to a decline in the female population as a social phenomenon cannot be elaborated completely in terms of numbers, facts and figures. Thus, through this book, we have holistically captured the personal instances and recollections that showcase some of the most dedicated efforts towards promoting gender equality, inclusion and empowerment of girls in the societal system at every level.

We are thankful to the Plan Netherland Office, for their continuous support which encouraged us in developing this document that showcases our work in a much more personalised perspective. We also thank all our implementing partners and the LGBB Plan team for their support in making this project successful through their high impact points meticulously captured as case studies.

We look forward towards seeing this book reach out to more and more people along with, inspiring them to come forward to support the 'Let Girls Be Born' initiative.

Bhagyashri Dengle
Executive Director, Plan India



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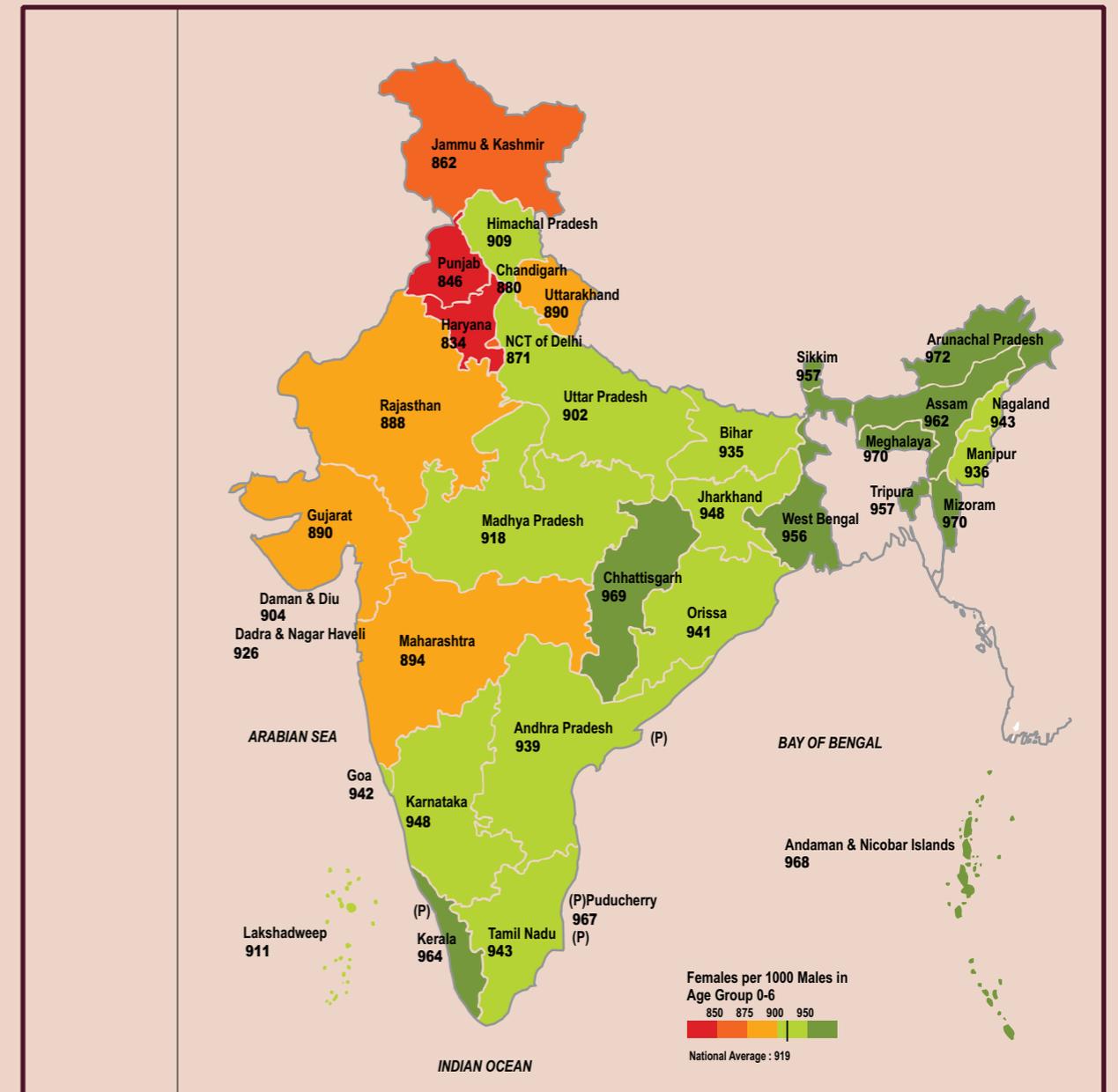
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INTRODUCTION



CHILD SEX RATIO - AGE GROUP 0-6
State/Union Territories

INDIA

919

Females
per 1,000
males

LET GIRLS BE BORN PROJECT



The census report of 2011 rang the alarm bells on the adverse child sex ratio (0 to 6 age group). That there are only 919 female children to every 1,000 males is indeed a cause for concern for all. Looking at the finer details one noticed that in a highly populated country like India, there are startling disparities among different states and regions. The total number of children of 0-6 years is 158.8 million, five million less than in 2001. Twenty states and union territories (UTs) now have over one million children in the age group of 0-6. Five states and UTs have yet to reach the 1,00,000 mark.

Plan India has been focusing on empowering children to improve their lives, their communities and their world. It has been working on all the issues related with the survival of the girl child and declining child sex ratio since 2005. The different initiatives showed positive results and to extend the learning, the campaign "Because I Am A Girl" was launched in May 2007 to promote girls' rights and draw attention to issues that adversely impact their survival, protection, development and participation. Thus for many years now Plan has been investing more on the girl child.

Let Girls Be Born project was initiated in 2010 in the six northern states of Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Uttarakhand having strong patriarchal society. It focussed on the survival of girls by prevention of sex selective elimination as well as their after birth survival through nurturing. The project goal is to 'empower the community and eliminate sex selection and determination by ensuring the rights of the girl child.'

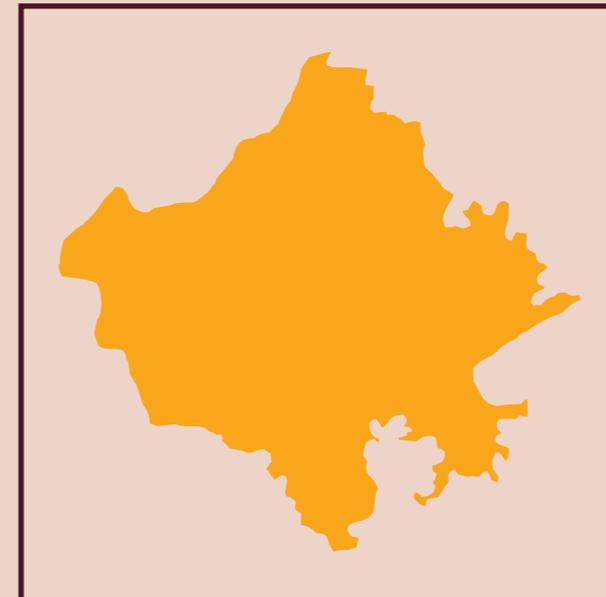
The 12 districts identified for the intervention in the six states had among the lowest CSR in the 2011 Census of India and 10 grassroots implementing partners supported the work. Through 298 panchayats (administrative units) both rural and urban in these districts, the project reached out to a population of approximately 1.2 million. The three-year long project

has demonstrated many community innovations for the improved status of the girl child. In the intervention areas, girls born and each birth celebrated by beating a plate (thali bajakar), a custom traditionally reserved for boys in Rajasthan, and by panchayats publicly honouring the mother and the girl child through balika janmotsavas (public felicitation ceremonies for the birth of a girl).

The project reached out to a large number of youth, the change makers, who will take the initiative forward when the project dust settles down. Singing, play-acting, often dialoguing with panchayat leaders and their own parents, they played an important, catalytic role to change the thinking of the older generation, caught in the time warp of obsolete values like early marriage, dowry and importance of a male heir. In the process, the youth themselves have metamorphosed and internalized what they advocated. They learnt to conduct and participate in birth registration camps, promoting girls education, counselling the parents of the girl children and families aspiring for sons through repeated pregnancies or sex determination. Peer educators oriented to be leaders and enlightened couples called 'jan mangal dals' became models to influence those on the brink of sex selection and sex determination.



RAJASTHAN



CHILD SEX RATIO -
AGE GROUP 0-6

RAJASTHAN	888
	Females
	per 1,000 males
<hr/>	
INDIA	919
	Females
	per 1,000 males

GANGANAGAR HERALDS BIRTH OF GIRLS 8 | CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PROMOTES GIRL CHILD 11 |
HELPING FLOWERS BLOOM 14 | FLOAT LIKE A BUTTERFLY, STING LIKE A BEE 20

Source: Census of India, 2011



Ganganagar: Heralds Birth of Girls

With kanya lohris being celebrated to honour parents and new born baby girls in Ganganagar; congratulatory letters (samman patra) given by panchayats on birth of girls; and the Chamber of Commerce aligning with the gurdwara committee and local educational institutes to provide free education for them, a gender sensitive environment has been created in Ganganagar. Even the traditional custom of sounding the thali (brass plate) to usher the birth of baby boys, has been extended to welcome girls. The happy resonance of thali beating is heard in hospitals, on roadsides and homes where girls are born. Parents, grandparents, neighbours even nurses and others take turns to beat the thali and herald their birth.

Though Let Girls Be Born (LGBB) project of Plan India and Urmul Setu started only in March 2011, it is showing results. LGBB panchayat coordinators work closely with anganwadi workers, ASHAs (Accredited Social Health Activists) monitoring pregnancies and

discouraging sex determination. The result is many women who have two and even five daughters are no longer secretly terminating pregnancies. Instead, they are having the child.

WINDS OF CHANGE

'Girls are the blessing of God' was the title of the programme organised by Spangle Public School of Ganganagar to honour 50 families of the district who have only daughters. The school also assured free education for at least one girl in each of these 50 families.

While the parents were honoured with shields for breaking away from traditional thinking and having daughters, the girls, whether it was two or three in a family were decorated with medals.

Changing the Son Fixation

It has been a challenge to change the mind-set of the community and the panchayats from sex determination. In 2011, in Mohanpura gram panchayat, Chinderpal Kaur, an articulate and aggressive anganwadi worker (AWW) and President of the Zilla AWWs, was all set to get the panchayat pass a resolution that sex selective elimination was legal. "It should be the right of the parents to decide how many girls they want. In rural India a family had no future if it did not have at least one son," she thundered at meetings. Nisha, Project Co-ordinator Urmul Setu Sansthan, Ganganagar and her team made many trips to Mohanpura and pointed out that sex selection was illegal under the PCPNDT, the statutory Act and she could be prosecuted. It took eight months to get Chinderpal to change her mind and take an oath in front of the community that she would not motivate families for sex selective elimination. Later, other AWWs, ASHAs and the community took similar oaths to protect the girl child and not demand sex selective elimination.

On November 1, 2011, Chinderpal's daughter Ruby gave birth to twin girls. She already had a four-year-old daughter. Though Chinderpal and eight people of the village went to the hospital to beat the thali and celebrate the birth, Ruby and her mother-in-law were clearly unhappy. Nisha decided to adopt one of the twins. For Nisha this was the ultimate test of

her commitment to protecting girls and though she had no assistance at home to care for a baby, she spontaneously agreed. Vikram Nisha's husband and her in-laws too agreed to the adoption. All the legal formalities were followed for adoption by Nisha and Vikram.

17-Year-Old Encourages Adoption

The story of Gurutej, the 17-year-old LGBB supporter from Rotawali village of Sadhoshehar block, is more remarkable and confirms the commitment of the community to girls. Gurutej, a member of the youth group of the LGGB project was only 17 and in class 11, when he visited his maternal grandparents in Taliwala village of Ferozpur, Punjab in 2012. During the visit, twin girls were born in a neighbour's home and their mother died in childbirth. The distraught family decided to give away the twins to a family so that the father could remarry.

Gurutej groomed in the gender sensitive culture of LGBB called the Rotawali panchayat motivator as well as his mother, Manjit Kaur, and expressed interest in adopting one of the twins as his sister. Manjit after completing all the legal formalities and discussing at home brought home one of the twins when she was just 15 days old. Little Khushi was a bundle wrapped up in layers of clothes too weak to utter a sound. Manjit's mother adopted the second daughter. The family did not have any hesitation in accepting the additional responsibility. Because of the joy the little girl brought to their home, she was named Khushi (happiness) Kalyana. Manjit has stopped working in the fields so that she can look after Khushi and Gurutej, who is studying privately, polishes marble and earns Rs 500 a day so that he can help support his little sister.

The change is evident says Chinderpal Kaur, AWW of Mohanpura. Between November 2012 and April 2013, 29 boys and 38 girls were born in her village.

The LGBB project has won Urmul Setu recognition from Hindustan Times in June 2012 as one of the 25 Agents of Change in the country.



NISHA (RIGHT) WITH TWINS AND THEIR BIOLOGICAL MOTHER RUBY

PANCHAYATS FOR BETIS

The Banwali panchayatgarh of Sadhoshehar Block is colourful with wall paintings, charts and information boards promoting the birth of girls.

Beti se sansar, toh kyon beti ka bhavishkar

Janme lene doh betiyon ko bhi

(The world is created by daughters, so why are we making them outcasts. Let Girls be Born)

Backed by a strong advocacy group, the Banwali panchayat meets thrice a month to celebrate the birth of daughters. Badhai patra (letter of appreciation) and birth registration certificates are given to at a public function to honour the girl child. From its own funds, the panchayat gives gifts like wall hangings, clocks or a small image of Lord Ganesh to the parents and the girls are given token amounts that vary from Rs 10 to Rs 50 per child. This is in addition to the sweets distributed on the day of the girl's birth and the beating of the thali.

SUPPORTING GIRLS EDUCATION AND MARRIAGE

Earlier, Manphool, a tea shop owner and an active member of the advocacy group of LGBB, would go to middle schools and distribute note books and pencils to girls doing well in their class. In the last three years, he has helped in the marriage of eight girls from poor families of the village. He does a door-to-door collection of funds to provide the basic requirements for newlyweds to begin a life together. To encourage girls to study, another ward member gives a sewing machine to girls of the panchayat who top in the eighth class.



Chamber of Commerce Promotes Girl Child

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a word bandied about without much action on the ground. CSR, however, is practised in the true spirit in Ganganagar district of Rajasthan where the Chamber of Commerce is playing a major role in improving the child sex ratio. Its focus is girl child survival as well as their education from primary classes to professional, technical courses, especially in those families that have only girls. This year alone the Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the local Gurudwara Committee has facilitated girls' education through scholarships valued at Rs 3 crore.

Partners in the Let Girls Be Born (LGBB) project of Plan India and Urmul Setu, the Chamber of Commerce has succeeded in getting a quota of free seats for girls from poor families in courses like engineering, computer sciences, dentistry, MBA, B Tech, nursing and others. This is in addition to the mass marriages conducted for girls from poor families providing them basic household goods worth Rs 1 lakh to

Rs 2 lakhs to start their new life. The Lohri festival held at harvest time where traditionally the birth of sons is celebrated was converted into kanya lohri, an occasion to celebrate the birth of girls.

Tejinderpal Singh Timma, general secretary of the Chamber and President of the Gurudwara Committee, says it was a 2006 report on the falling child sex ratio that stirred his conscience to take up cudgels for girl child survival. With the support of the president of the Chamber, Mr B.D. Jindal, the first step was to celebrate the birth of girls and give them importance in society. Mr Timma has two sons and recalls keeping his younger son's hair plaited for a long time to make up for the absence of a girl in his family. The first kanya lohri was held in 2006 for 101 girls. In 2007, the support for girls increased. Subsequently, based on a list of 2,500 families that had only girls, financial support for their education from nursery to class 12 was provided.



CELEBRATING KANYA LOHRI

Slowly the programme widened to a shiksha (education) package for girls in higher education and vocational courses. There was such a clamour for financial support that it was decided to have a lottery system to select the girls. This year there were 28,000 applications for scholarships, and depending on the demand for various courses and the number of free seats offered by colleges and educational institutions.

There is greater acceptance of girls today than 10 or even five years ago, says Mr Timma. The support of panchayats and the Chamber of Commerce has boosted the morale of women who were reluctant to have sex selective elimination. Take the case of Jasbir Kaur, a nurse from Gasipur. She has three daughters. When she was pregnant with the third child and her farmer husband found out it was a girl, he said “you have to choose between me and the child in your womb”. She chose to have the baby girl and walked out of her husband’s home to her natal home.

Obviously, the misuse of the technology is happening but it is women who are taking the decision to have girls. Jasbir’s eldest daughter is 16 and the youngest is 5 years. Her story appeared in the Rajasthan Patrika, and the Chamber of Commerce got in touch with her.

She was honoured at a kanya lohri function in the presence of a large audience. She now has a position in the Chamber of Commerce and is actively involved in promoting the birth of girls. When a girl is born, she dances in the home or hospital and gives Rs 100 from her own earnings.

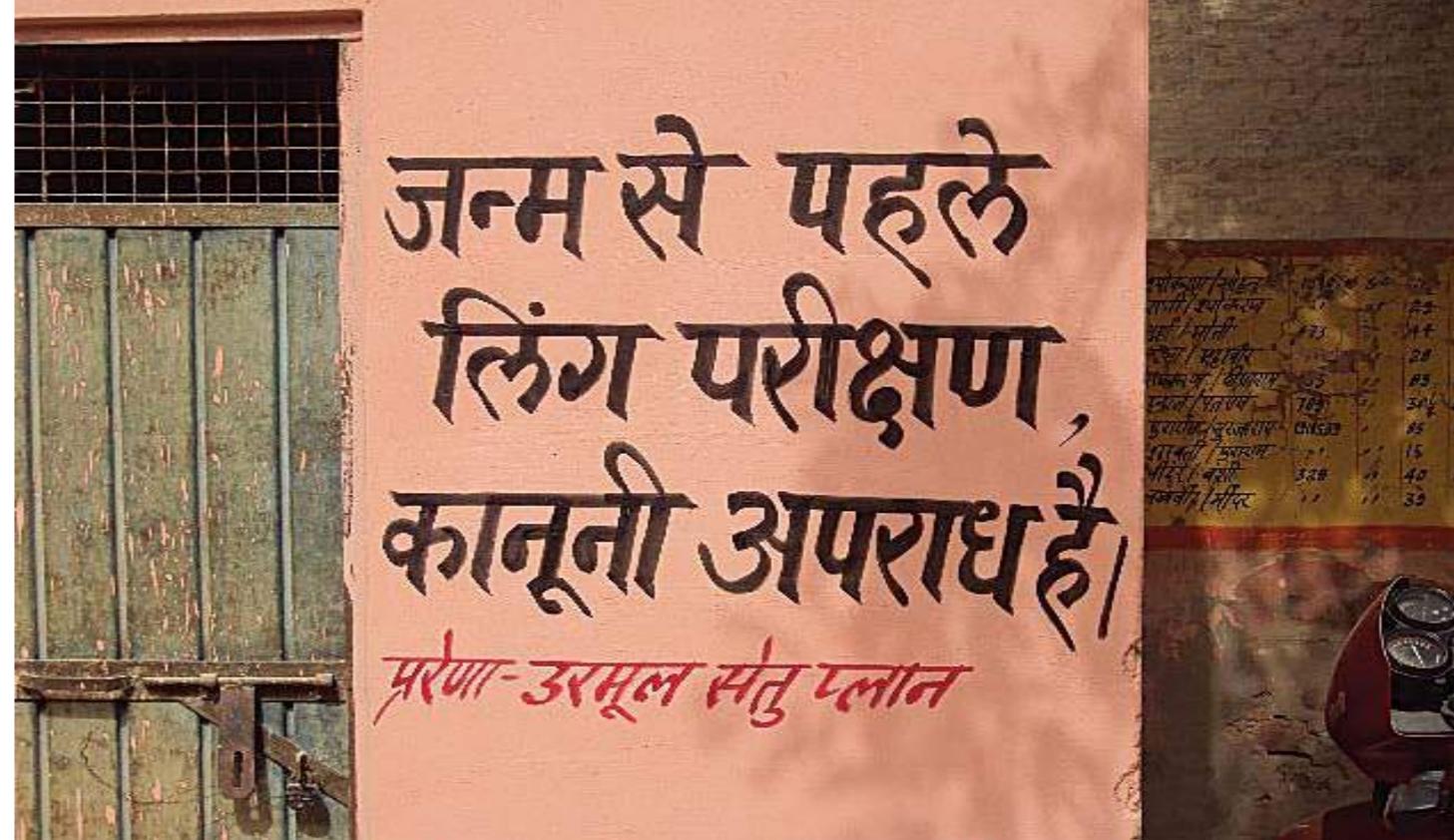
Though the Chambers of Commerce has branches all over the country, it is only in Ganganagar that there is community service to improve the child sex ratio and raise the status of girls, says Mr Timma with obvious pride.

A deeply religious man and President of the Gurudwara Committee in Ganganagar, he is also able to influence the large community of Sikhs and Punjabis by quoting from the Gurbani, so kyon manda akhiya, jise jamme rajaon (why are you rejecting girls when even kings and rulers have accepted them). The advocacy campaigns against sex determination begin with this quote from Guru Nanak, a champion for gender equity, touching many hearts.

In 2006, the first Khalsa March was organised to change public mindset for girls. The Guru Granth Sahib was placed in an open truck and taken 50 kms through the villages of Ganganagar, Karanpur, Gajsinghpur, Raisingharh by some 3,000 people. As



RELIGIOUS LEADERS TAKE A PLEDGE TO PROTECT RIGHTS OF GIRL CHILD



they passed through villages more people would join the rally in tractors, trolleys, bicycles and motorcycles. At every village, an oath was taken against female foeticide. The verbal promise was backed by a written oath which said “I will not kill the girl child in my womb and if I see anybody doing so I will raise my voice” Some 52,300 forms were filled and were deposited at the Golden Temple in Amritsar. Any Sikh or Punjabi worth his/her salt cannot take an oath that reaches Harmindar Sahib lightly. In 2007 too, a Khalsa march was organised with mass public participation. These two marches set the mood for girl child survival and support in the community.

The Khalsa March was a grand occasion. Mass marriages are conducted by the Chamber of Commerce, the couples took an oath not to indulge in sex determination when they plan their families.

SCHOLARSHIPS FOR GIRLS

Daughters from poor families are doing well under the scholarships programme of the Chamber of Commerce. Manu Nagpal of Chunnawadki village has two sisters. All three girls have received scholarships. Manu who completed her MBA this year was awaiting results. She had topped in the MBA course in her two earlier exams and was hoping for a hat trick and recognition. Since January this year, Manu has been working with Ganganagar Commodities Ltd and earning Rs 10,000 a month.

Ecstatic and humbled by the opportunity she received to develop to her full stature, she said over the telephone “I am the bread winner for my parents—the son they never had!”



Helping Flowers Bloom

Laxmi Dubey doesn't believe in following the conventional path. The 56-year old sari clad principal arrives in school every morning driving her scooty, much to the admiration of her students and teachers. In Jaipur district where the child sex ratio is skewed in favour of boys (861 girls for 1,000 boys according to the 2011 census), Dubey and her school are slowly breaking stereotypes. Not only are the girls studying at the Government Girls Senior Secondary school in Sanganer, district Jaipur, showing their mettle in arenas like wrestling and judo at the national level, but the number of students completing Class 12 has increased.

Small as they may seem, these achievements are paving the way for a new consciousness on the girl child in a state dominated by patriarchal values. Several factors have contributed to this success including a sustained campaign to uphold the rights

of the girl child initiated by Plan India.

Under its Let Girls Be Born project, launched in Jaipur district in 2010, efforts have been made to reach out to the community, youth, health workers, panchayats and adolescent girls with the help of Shikshit Rozgar Kendra Prabandhak Samiti (SRKPS), a local non governmental organization working on the issue of sex selective elimination for over a decade.

In the Sanganer government girl's school, this engagement led to activities on gender issues being held on a regular basis. Besides organizing debates and poster competitions related to child rights, especially of girls, two classes have been set aside for interactive discussions on gender sensitization on every Saturday. During such classes, in addition to dissemination of information on the factors leading to the declining child sex ratio in the state, girls are encouraged to talk

about their status at home and share views on how to promote girls' rights, particularly right to education.

There is always a Way When There is Will

In the intervention villages in Jaipur district, wherever communities have understood the importance of education, girls have bloomed.

In Titariya gram panchayat, sarpanch (village head) Ram Avtar Balai has offered to bear all educational expenses from class 1 to graduation of any girl child unable to study due to financial constraints. Further, any girl making it to the merit list of school examinations, would be felicitated publicly with a cash reward of Rs 1,100.

Just how important this support has been in changing mindsets can be seen in the case of Pooja Jangid. Having been felicitated by sarpanch Balai as the girl who did the village and panchayat proud by securing third position in the district in class 12 exams in 2013, Pooja's conservative family is basking in her success.



RAM AVTAR BALAI, SARPANCH, TITARIYA GRAM PANCHAYAT WITH HIS WIFE: PROMOTING VALUE OF GIRLS BY SUPPORTING THEIR EDUCATION

WHEN EUNUCHS ARE WELCOME

When eunuchs arrived at her doorstep on the birth of her second child, Tara Devi was surprised. They had also come three years ago at the birth of her first child. Then, Tara had expected them since she had given birth to a son. But her second child was a daughter and Tara knew that eunuchs generally stayed away when the newborn was a girl.

But there were more surprises in store for Tara. Not only did the eunuchs congratulate her on the birth of her daughter with the traditional song and dance, but they didn't demand any money either. "They blessed my daughter and gave me a box of sweets. When I offered her Rs 500, the same I had given on the birth of my son, they refused it. On asking why, the kinnar group (eunuchs) told me that they wanted to celebrate the birth of girls to show parents that she was as valuable as their sons," recounted Tara.

This unusual gesture by the eunuch group came about after their interaction with the SRKPS LGBB team in 2012. Since then, the group has continued this practice.

Earlier Pooja wanted to become a teacher as she was unsure whether or not she would be allowed to travel out of her village to study further. But now, Chanda Devi, her traditional uneducated 70-year old grandmother and the family matriarch, wants her to aim higher. "We always believed girls shouldn't be too educated. Now I've realized being educated is a boon. Everybody in the village now knows of Pooja. I want more people to recognize her talent. So, I have told Pooja to appear for the civil services examinations," said Chanda Devi.



Inspired Neighbours Follow Example

Inspired by sarpanch Balai's efforts to promote girl's education, sarpanch Mamashah Shivpratap Gujjar of Badli gram panchayat decided to follow suit and pay for the education of all needy girls coming forward to study.

In adjoining Tutoliya panchayat, daughters-in-law are being encouraged to continue studies after marriage and having children. Meenakshi Meena, who married at 16, was delighted when she was allowed to continue her education by her marital family. In fact, her daughter was four months old when she appeared for her class 12 exam in 2012.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUPS RAISE AWARENESS ON THE DECLINING CHILD SEX RATIO AMONG MEN AND WOMEN

Meenakshi and her husband have no plans to expand their family. "Both of us are happy with one daughter. After my mother-in-law saw that my education helped me get job as a community motivator, she has consented to our decision to have no more children," revealed Meenakshi.

Beating Drums to Celebrate Birth of Girls

Much of these positive developments have been prompted by advocacy efforts by the SRKPS team to underline the importance of the girl child through nukkad natak (street plays), rallies, community meetings, and a week-long road-show that stopped at 12 urban wards, 27 senior secondary schools and 23 gram panchayats, reaching out to over 25,000 people.

Sarpanch Jainarayan Gurjar of gram panchayat Akodia was so motivated that he made an official

announcement that the birth of girls would be heralded by the beating of drums so that the whole village could participate in the celebrations. Besides including slogans valuing the girl child on his official letterhead, he has put up the names of the support group members with their photos on the information board at the panchayat bhawan.

In Titariya panchayat, sarpanch, Balai has told frontline health workers like the anganwadi worker (AWW), auxiliary nurse midwife (ANM) and the accredited social health activist (ASHA) that he wants detailed progress reports on birth, ante and post natal check-ups, and immunizations at weekly panchayat meetings. It was this enabling environment of LGGB project which saw an increase in the number of girls born, from 847 to 875, between October 2011 and December 2012 (source: MIS, LGGB project).

WHEELS BENEATH HER WINGS

Madhu Pawar often helps her mother sell snacks from a makeshift tea stall on the roadside in Jaipur. Although the 18-year old who studies in Class 10 in the local government school does this in her spare time, Madhu knew it was only a matter of time before she joined her widowed mother, the sole breadwinner, on a full time basis to augment family income.

Madhu would have dropped out of school had not two Rajasthan-based non governmental organisations (NGOs), the Shikshit Rozgar Kendra Prabandhak Samiti (SRKPS) and the Azad Foundation, come into her life. Thanks to the collaboration between these two NGOs working to end discrimination against girls, Madhu was given the opportunity to change her life through the Women on Wheels (WOW) programme initiated by the Jaipur chapter of the Azad Foundation.

ACCELERATING EMPOWERMENT

When the SRKPS office in Jaipur began its community mobilisation under the Let Girls Be Born project in partnership with Plan India, it found a lack of economic opportunities for girls pushed them into early marriages. "Parents would pull out girls from school after class 8 because they could not afford to educate them further. These girls would be married and the cycle of early pregnancy and under nutrition would start," pointed out Arvind Kumar, LGGB block coordinator, SRKPS.

Not just Madhu but several others like her have been linked to this initiative. WOW is an innovative initiative to empower women by training them as drivers and running women-only cab services, and has given girls from marginalized communities like Madhu the chance to become change agents.

It realised that establishing livelihood linkages was important for real empowerment of girls and give them a chance to tap their potential. The WOW initiative provided the ideal opportunity to break the early marriage cycle. First started in Delhi, the

programme trains girls and women from under privileged backgrounds with some education to take control of their lives.

Sanjeet Kumar, SRKPS state coordinator, LGGB, pointed out that after identifying girls in the intervention urban wards in Jaipur district, they were linked to Azad Foundation. The girls then undergo a training module involving technical driving skills including daily car maintenance and handling road emergencies.

According to Anita Mathur, Programme Director, Azad Foundation, Jaipur, needy girls above the age of 18 are motivated to learn driving and Sakha Consulting Wings Private Limited, their sister for-profit organisation, provides employment. "Women-only cabs give these girls a dignified livelihood while providing safe transport option to other women," said Mathur.

INCREASING VALUE OF GIRLS

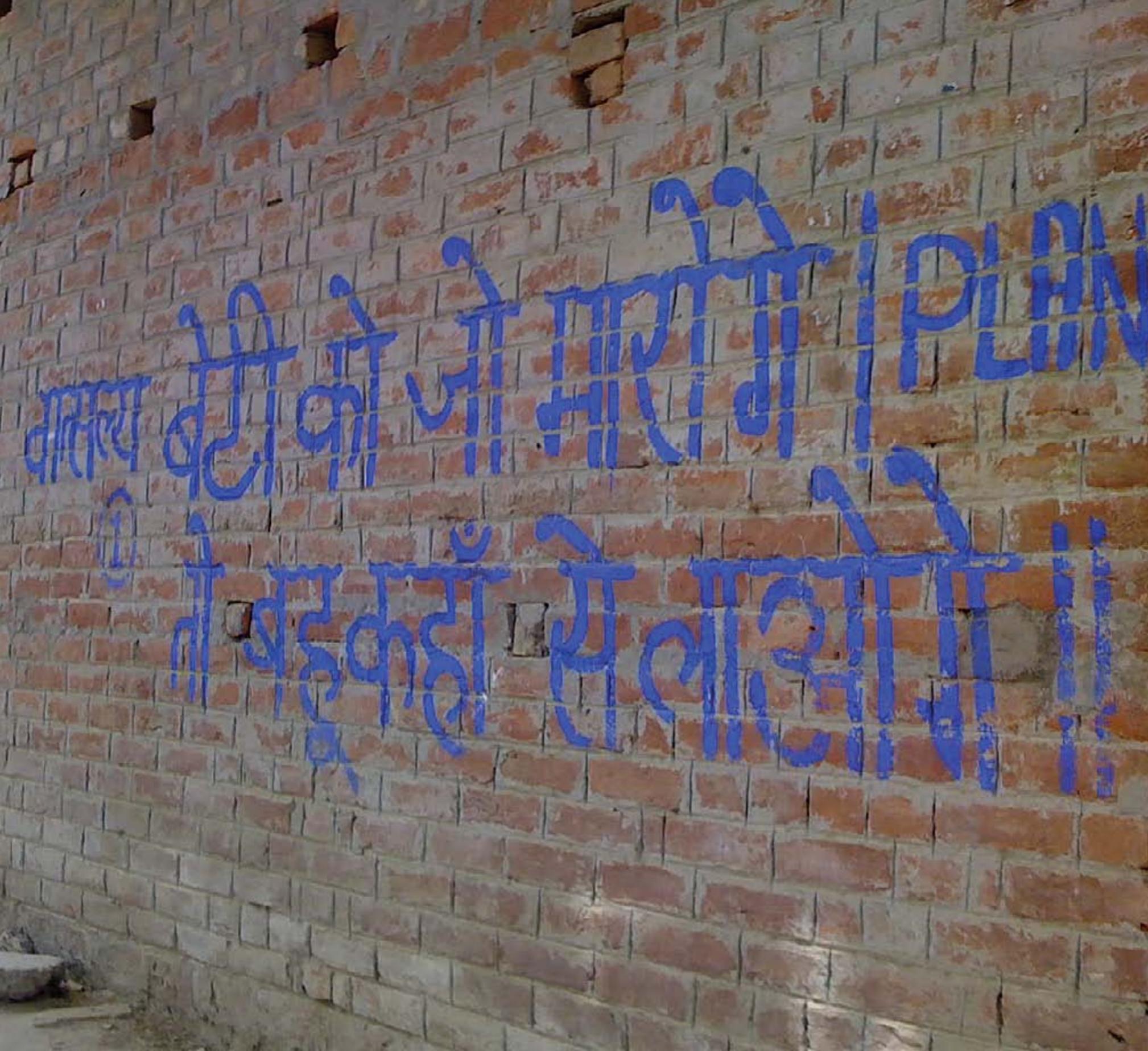
But makes this training different from others is the value additions like training in self defence, lessons

in grooming and personal hygiene and improving communication skills by teaching spoken English and computers.

Included in the training module are sessions on gender sensitisation, learning about women's rights and their legal, reproductive and health rights. "Empowerment is not limited to driving skills. They can handle any situation at the end of their training," contended Mathur.

Girls have to pay Rs 2,000 as a commitment fee and are given two sets of uniforms, one mobile phone and are covered by a Rs 2 lakh accident insurance. The first premium is paid by the Foundation and remainder by the girls.

Since the girls identified by SRKPS are from marginalised community, where the annual income of the families are less than Rs 6000, the Foundation allows the fee to be paid in instalments. In special circumstances, it is either waived or an interest free loan given.



Abandoned Baby Girl Finds Loving Mother

Surbala, a big inspiration for the support group formed by SRKPS in ward 47 (where Surbala stays) to promote the value of girls. Not only is she an example to motivate the community but they also have ensured that Surbala is linked to government schemes for the girl child.

This ward support group led by local resident Rehman Ali has been active in alerting the appropriate authorities about misuse of the technology being conducted for sex selective elimination. Ali tipped off the state Pre-Conception Pre-Natal Diagnostic Technique (PCPNDT) cell about women in the area being taken for sex determination tests. “I helped to identify the lady facilitating the tests for the inspection team. Unfortunately she escaped. But she now knows that we are aware of her misdeeds. So she will think twice before doing anything,” said Ali.

The Way Forward

According to Dr Lad Kumari Jain, chairperson, State Commission for Women, there is a need to sensitise members of the legislative assembly to bring policy changes to ensure girls are not discriminated against. She said the two child eligibility norm for contesting elections to panchayats had contributed to disowning of the girl child. “During the public hearings we conducted, there were numerous complaints of women being abandoned or victimized for giving birth to daughters. We are revising the existing state policy for women to address such concerns” Dr Jain stated.

Although efforts to give girls the opportunity to be born under the campaign are bearing fruit, there is still a long way to go. Breaking the feudal and patriarchal mindset needs sustained interventions with the community. Girls have already shown what they can do given a chance. Now it is remains for the political leaders to show their will.



FLOAT LIKE A BUTTERFLY, STING LIKE A BEE

Ever since Rani Singh began working in the state Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in Jaipur, the capital city of Rajasthan, she was closely associated with projects related to the girl child. She would participate in discussions on the declining child sex ratio in Rajasthan and hear how officials were often frustrated when lack of evidence or hostile witnesses would allow medical practitioners misusing technology for sex determinations tests escape punitive action. Many a time, the biggest obstacle was finding pregnant women willing to be a part of inspection operations under the statutory act, PCPNDT.

In 2012, when a friend casually informed her about a well known nursing home in Jaipur where sex determination tests were taking place, Singh was determined to do something. She knew that unless the inspection took place quickly, misuse of

technology to eliminate girls would continue. Singh also knew that planning inspection operations took time as it involved meticulous preparations beginning with finding a trustworthy pregnant woman willing to be a part of the process.

Time being of essence Singh, pregnant with her first child, came forward to help in the operation. “There was some opposition from my family initially. But after being explained how this would impact positively on the lives of unborn girls, they supported me,” said Singh.

Heart Stopping Moments

Singh was nervous when she went in for the ultrasound test and consequently her blood pressure was high by the time she was examined by the medical

practitioner. So Singh was told to wait a while before the procedure for abortion could be started. “The scary moment was when the appropriate authorities got delayed. They got stuck in a traffic jam. So I locked myself in the bathroom until the team arrived,” recounted Singh.

However despite the heart stopping moments, Singh doesn’t regret being a part of the inspection process. “I am really happy that I was able to help to close that diagnostic centre,” she said.

Much of her confidence also stemmed from the fact that Shikshit Rozgar Kendra Prabandhak Samiti (SRKPS), the local NGO organization that facilitated the operation carried out by the state government department, was vastly experienced. It had facilitated with the government cell to organise 15 of the 17 such operations in the state. Seven of these had been carried out in Jaipur alone.

Such operations spearheaded by the state department are an important part of the strategy to protect girls from being eliminated in Rajasthan said Rajan Choudhury, chief functionary, SRKPS. As partners of Plan India, SRKPS has been involved in raising awareness on the value of the girl child and their right

to survival. “When such operations are carried out in Jaipur district, it stings the medical fraternity and acts as a deterrent to the misuse of technology for sex determination for at least one month,” he said.

Improved PCPNDT Act Implementation

Jaipur is fast emerging as a model district as far as implementation of the PCPNDT Act is concerned informed Choudhury. Before 2010, about 54 cases had been filed under the PCPNDT Act. The state had filed the highest number of cases (308) in the country by the end of 2012. Of the 18 doctors’ licenses suspended (source: PCPNDT cell, NRHM, Rajasthan) in the country, eight of them were in Rajasthan, which again was the highest.

Another strategy has been to spread the word about the Mukhbir Yojana or informer scheme. Under this government programme, a person giving information about a medical practitioner or a ultrasound centre involved in sex determination gets Rs 1 lakh if they are found guilty.

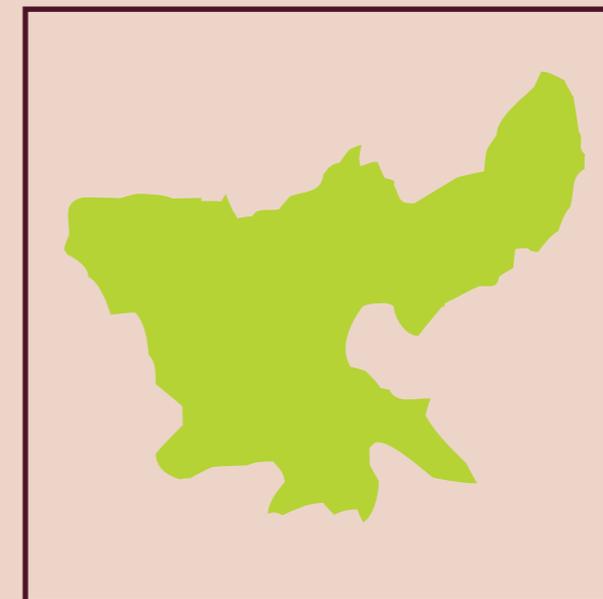
“The scheme will encourage ordinary people to become involved in the campaign to give girls their right to be born. More the people involved, greater is the ownership of a campaign like this. Only then, can our fight to change mindsets be effective,” said Choudhury.



“Operations spearheaded by the state department are an important part of the strategy to protect girls from being eliminated in Rajasthan,” said Rajan Choudhury, chief functionary, SRKPS. As partners of Plan India, SRKPS has been involved in raising awareness on the value of the girl child and their right to survival.



JHARKHAND



CHILD SEX RATIO -
AGE GROUP 0-6

JHARKHAND | 948
Females
per 1,000 males

INDIA | 919
Females
per 1,000 males

DHANBAD'S DURGA RAISES 24 | GIVING BIRTH TO HOPE 28 | SUPPORT FOR GIRLS' BIRTH IN COAL BELT 30

Source: Census of India, 2011



DHANBAD'S DURGA RAISES HOPE

When she asked about her baby daughter, she was handed a doll instead. Its plastic smile twisted her guts into agony. Dangling it in her arms on the hospital bed, she realized the toy was a macabre replacement for her child by her husband.

The child in her womb had been killed. But the fury this gave birth to in Kakoli Devi, an anganwadi worker who would advise families against sex selective elimination, makes her the rare wife in India who is a witness against her husband under the PCPNDT Act. In doing so she also set the law on the entire medical establishment that conspired in the misdeed.

Since her forced abortion in June 2011, in her avatar as Dhanbad's Durga, Kakoli Devi quickly became the rallying point for a newly proactive district administration. When the district's horrifyingly plummeting child sex ratio was revealed by Census

2011, the health authorities' galvanized into action in an unusual bid to reverse the trend. They were backed by committed civil society support in the form of the Let Girls Be Born (LGBB) programme launched at the same time by Plan India through the local NGO Shramjivi Mahila Samity.

Gathering Support Buoyed Kakoli Devi

Taking cognizance of a small article in the Hindi daily Dainik Bhaskar titled 'Woman forced to undergo abortion because of Dowry Demand,' health department officials took up Kakoli Devi's case. They determined to set an example through it for the entire system. The article had described the woman running from pillar to post to file a police complaint against her husband and in-laws for beating her, carrying out sex selective elimination and then having her girl child eliminated.

"We accompanied her to the Deputy Commissioner who ordered the superintendent of police to act urgently on the case," says Dr Sanjeev Kumar, then district nodal officer of the cell established to enforce the PCPNDT Act. Impressed by her unwavering desire for justice, the health authorities knew they had a witness who would not fail them in court. The case was lodged in August 2012 under Section 28 of the PCPNDT Act before the Dhanbad chief judicial magistrate. It was filed by the Civil Surgeon cum Chief Medical Officer (CMO), appointed as the Appropriate Authority under the Act.

The complaint was against four people – Kakoli Devi's husband; the radiologist at the diagnostic centre in Dhanbad where the ultrasonography was carried out; the owner of the diagnostic centre; and the doctor at the nursing home in the city who terminated her pregnancy without consent.

It was also found the doctor who conducted the abortion was unqualified while the nursing home had not been registered under the PCPNDT Act. Show cause letters were issued to the accused and the ultrasonography machine sealed. The District Drug



(RIGHT) A CLINIC IN DHANBAD SEALED UNDER THE PCPNDT ACT

Inspector was also asked to explain the sale of MTP pills over the counter without doctor's prescription to Kakoli Devi's husband. He had administered them to his wife to induce abortion before she was brought to the nursing home. In December 2012 bailable warrants were issued against the accused and in May 2013 an appeal filed for issuing non bailable warrants against them.

"I want to see them all arrested and punished for the heinous crime of killing an unborn child just because it was a girl," says Kakoli Devi, poring over files with lawyer Dhaneshwar Mahto in the Dhanbad Civil Courts. Mahto who is the district legal adviser for enforcing the PCPNDT Act says, "This is an unusual case. It is also very strong. The main witness is so committed on setting an example through this case that she will not turn hostile despite it being a family matter." Most cases under the Act, including the seven others Mahto is handling, are filed by authorities against providers that are unqualified, clinics that are not registered under the PCPNDT Act or in cases where proof can be had, against those found carrying out sex selective elimination. Women have rarely



KAKOLI DEVI WITH HER LAWYER;



come forward on their own to complain against sex selective elimination by a family member.

Influenced by Kakoli Devi's lone fight against the system, the lawyer says, "When I saw her refusing to cave in despite threats to her life then I decided to resist all pressures and am trying to ensure a conviction. Support from higher authorities is crucial. Many hurdles had to be crossed before we could lodge this case. Even now the clinic where the sonography was carried out is still functioning."

At a meeting with a member of the State Women's Commission in April 2013 along with other health officials, Mahto was given the assurance that he should press ahead with the case. Kakoli Devi was also encouraged to petition the National Human Rights Commission and the National Commission for Women. Mahto, who offers his services for other social issues too, now proposes a campaign on raising mass awareness against sex selective elimination through a legal organization of which he is a member.

Resist Injustice Even from Loved Ones

The woman who has publicly raised the banner of revolt against sex selective elimination, Kakoli Devi is calmly handling attempts to harass her teenage son who lives with her. Her husband recently forced school authorities to remove his name as the boy's father in a bid to pressure her into withdrawing the case. Though living in the same village in Jharia block, Kakoli Devi

stays separately from her husband now. She works as a sevika (an anganwadi worker) and does sewing to make additional money. Several times a week she undertakes the hour long journey from her village to the courts in Dhanbad, generally being accompanied by a faithful younger brother.

"We had an inter caste love marriage,' she recounts sadly. "I had a son and things were fine for seven years until my husband and in-laws floated a company for which they needed money. They began ill treating me and badgered my parents for dowry which they could not afford. At my marriage, my parents had given Rs 2 lakh. When I became pregnant, pretending false concern my husband took me for ultrasonography in the fifteenth week, after which he mentioned it was a girl. Thereafter I was beaten and forced to swallow pills causing nausea and bleeding. Semi conscious, I was taken to a nursing home for the abortion." Maintaining her wits, she later gathered evidence, even picking up the torn wrapper of the pills her husband had administered. She has also put her in laws in the dock with cases under the Dowry Act and Domestic Violence Act.

Having forced the law to take action against sex selective elimination, Kakoli Devi says she can now meet the eyes of the young women she meets as a sevika. "I advise them to become self sufficient and tell them however much they are loved by their husband they must never accept injustice."



GIVING BIRTH TO HOPE

Playing detective to nab a medical practitioner reported to be carrying out sex determination...receiving secret sms's from citizen informers about couples going in for the procedure... inspecting clinics and taking legal action against medical providers as well as owners of ultrasonography centres.

Dr Sanjeev Kumar is a government official who struck terror in the hearts of health providers against the practice of sex determination and sex eliminating in Dhanbad district. He shook by the ears the administrative machinery responsible for implementing the PCPNDT Act. He also brought to the courts a record number of eight cases under the Act in Jharkhand's coal belt. This revived enforcement of a law which had become so moribund that judges would ask officials present in court for a copy of the Act to peruse it before presentation of arguments.

Local journalist Amit Ranjan says, "Dr. Sanjeev Kumar

has become something of a hero in the eyes of the public." Known to be incorruptible, he made full use of his position towards a cause that struck an emotive chord. The situation was urgent and he called forth emergent measures.

Child Sex Ratio Nose Dives

In the two years that he functioned as nodal officer in the district PCPNDT Cell from April 2011 till his transfer in March 2013, Dr Kumar's activism – or plain "commitment to the job" as he describes it – made Dhanbad the only district in Jharkhand furiously attempting to tackle the shocking drop in its girl child population revealed by Census 2011.

Dr. Kumar had just been appointed to what was generally considered a nondescript post when Dhanbad's child sex ratio – which reveals the occurrence of sex selective elimination more clearly

than the adult sex ratio – was found to have become drastically unequal in the past 10 years. It had dipped to 917 girls per 1000 boys from 951 in 2001, the second lowest in the state after Bokaro (912). "I was disturbed as this indicated the shameful practise of eliminating girls was flourishing here," says Dr Kumar whose sensitivities had been aroused after he attended a national workshop on the issue.

The new hubs of sex selective elimination in Jharkhand were the urban centres of Dhanbad, Bokaro, Koderma and Hazaribagh where proliferating ultrasound clinics pulled down the child sex ratio in surrounding rural areas too. These urban districts experienced the most drastic fall in the past decade. "Educated, well off people here were going in for sex determination that was easily available. Couples from neighbouring districts also flocked to these facilities in the cities," says Purabi Paul, chief functionary of the NGO Shramjivi Mahila Samity (SMS). "It was an easy money making venture," adds Dr Kumar. "By appointing semi trained para medical staff to man ultrasonography machines, businessmen were earning money hand over fist. A sonography cost Rs 4,000-5,000 while a sex selective elimination cost more. No checks were in place to implement the PCPNDT Act."

Political Backing Buoy Mission

Meticulously unrolling a multi pronged plan, he claims his tenure as the nodal officer coincided fortuitously with that of seniors like district civil surgeon cum chief medical officer Dr Shashibhushan Prasad Singh and district commissioner (DC) Sunil Kumar Burnwal who supported him at every step. The spark for this committed team of officials was oriented by the Plan India-SMS project, Let Girls Be Born (LGGB), launched in the district in June 2011.

All stakeholders were brought on board for solutions on how to tighten the noose on private diagnostic test centres and ultrasound clinics. Informing clinic owners about the provisions of the PCPNDT Act, the DC announced they would be given time to put things in order after which their registrations could be cancelled by the CMO, the Appropriate Authority. "Thereafter, all we had to do was enforce the Act," says Dr Kumar. When he took over as the PC&PNDT nodal officer, the district had just eight registered private clinics with licence for carrying out medical termination of pregnancy (MTP) and ultrasonography (USG). Within a few months of the LGGB project, 81 centres came forward for USG registration and 42 for registration to carry out MTP. "Now each of them submits Form F. It is an important record for regulating sex determination and ensuring its ethical use," says Dr. Kumar.



DR. SANJEEV KUMAR AT WORK



SUPPORT FOR GIRLS' BIRTH IN COAL BELT

Chandana Devi has experienced the full force of society's cruelty to girls, its indifference to mothers punished for bearing daughters, the deliberate blighting of lives to secure a future in which the illusionary female burden has been erased.

For having a daughter, even though she had three sons, Chandana was thrown out of her home by husband Balmukund Pandey and her in-laws.

For four years now she has been living with her brother, a priest in Dhanbad district's Dhoboni village in Govindpur block, along with two sons aged 5 and 7 and her daughter Julie, 11. Julie listens wide-eyed as her mother recounts how her birth had turned their lives upside down, and the injustice of being thrown out of her home.

"Everyone turned a deaf ear," she says. The sarpanch

of her marital village conveyed to her brother that the family was demanding a lump sum in lieu of the dowry that would be incurred whenever Julie got married. This meant a minimum of Rs 5 lakh, the dowry rate in Jharkhand's coal belt—an amount unaffordable for Chandana's brother.

The case evoked outrage after Plan India and Shramjivi Mahila Samity (SMS) launched the LGBB programme, a campaign upholding the rights of the girl child, in Govindpur block. The programme's panchayat advocacy group in the area approached the police superintendent. "The mahila thana has issued a notice to Chandana's husband summoning him to Govindpur," says ward member Kiran Devi who is part of the advocacy group that is also trying to make Chandana financially independent.

The LGBB programme works in rural communities

to prop up traditional support structures that have eroded. "The coal industry brought the rule of money and an influx of migrants who came to prosper without bothering about social responsibilities," says Ranjit, the programme's Dhanbad block motivator.

In an area where there is high dowry and violence against women, the programme seeks to empower women so that they are not seen as liabilities. The child sex ratio fell drastically in the past decade in the 20 panchayats of Govindpur and Dhanbad blocks of Dhanbad district, selected for the intervention. In contrast, Jharkhand's tribal districts have better equity among sexes and a balanced sex ratio despite low literacy levels. Purabi Paul, chief functionary, SMS points out, "Absence of dowry combined with women working outside the home, having their own income and equal control of family and community resources as well as personal and sexual freedom ensures there is no sex determination in tribal communities from whom we have much to learn."

Creating A Groundswell

Since July 2011 the LGBB programme in Dhanbad has been turning the tide against sex determination by strengthening existing community groups –



A PANCHAYAT ADVOCACY GROUP AT WORK

Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committees (VHSNCs) and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). It has also mobilised enlightened wedded couples in the programme area into Jan Mangal Dals.

The programme's community support group (CSG) has been sensitized to become a force on issues of gender discrimination. It is composed of all VHSNC members and also the ANM (Auxilliary Nurse Midwife), sahiya, sevika, ward members, adolescents and representatives of the anganwadi mothers group. Issues going beyond the village are taken up by an eight-member panchayat advocacy group formed of PRI members, the mukhiya, deputy mukhiya, panchayat ward members and a panchayat samiti member. Also represented are women from SHGs and a youth group.

The circle of change is complete with formation of married couples into groups called Jan Mangal Dals. Forty sensitised couples in both programme blocks have pledged not to discriminate against the girl child. They also counsel other couples on the brink of sex determination. A growing chain of such couples is playing a dynamic role.



CHANDANA DEVI WITH HER CHILDREN

“HONOURING GIRL CHILD BRINGS ME HONOUR”

Birth celebrations of the girl child have become the norm in the area. Mukhiya Deepak Singh of Siyalgudri panchayat has added a personal touch by giving from his own pocket 10 kg rice, clothes for the newborn and a box of laddoos at each Balika Mahotsav. The mukhiya also brings the child's birth certificate.

Nagma Parveen, mother of a newborn girl who was felicitated by the entire village says, “My daughter is blessed. The mukhiya himself visited our home with gifts. He made us promise we would put her into school and assured us of his support if we ever needed help for her.” Her husband Mohammad Azad, an autorickshaw driver says, “We have two girls now and though we intend to have a third child we would never go in for sex determination particularly after being informed by panchayat leaders it is a crime.”

Between January-April 2013, Singh distributed 80 kg of rice welcoming eight girls. Four belonged to the panchayat's Muslim community and four to the scheduled tribe. “The expense of Rs 300 per child is well worth it,” says Singh, adding, “Honouring the girl child brings me honour in return. I am singled out among other mukhiyas as being socially aware and felicitated by everyone.” A local TV channel highlighted his proactive role. As word spread, he received over 50 congratulatory calls. Other mukhiyas now seek his advice on implementing similar initiatives in their areas.

Adds deputy mukhiya Sanjay Modak, “Some families are so poor they would consider it a waste to buy sweets for a girl's birth or make the effort of getting her birth certificate. The wailing at a girl's birth changes into happiness when we honour the family. This has a far reaching impact.”



A LGBB WORKER ADVOCATING CHILD RIGHTS

Workers use innovative communication material such as board games, flipbooks and charts developed under the programme to bring information to the community. Support groups are encouraged to celebrate the birth of girls by collecting money to organise Balika Mahotsavs in which mothers are felicitated. They monitor violence against women such as Chandana's case, encourage equal treatment of girls and facilitate birth certificates.

The programme has held 100 nukkad natak (street plays) on women's empowerment, mass awareness rallies and campaigns. Two thousand births were registered at 16 birth registration camps. Programme coordinator Sharmishta Roy Ghosh affirms, “The groundswell against sex determination will be sustained even after the outreach tapers off. Some activities have become embedded in the community and consciousness is very high.”

Vigilantism Yields Dividends

In the close watch instituted by them, the groups vouch their areas are free of service providers promoting sex determination and that no couple dares go in for such practices.

Kamla Devi, for instance, knew exactly who to approach when her husband intended getting a sex determination test during her third pregnancy. The couple already have two daughters. She confided to 16-year-old Khushboo Patel, active in the Dhoboni village youth club and a member of a Community Support Group (CSG). “Several of us reached Kamla's house to counsel her husband before he left for work,” says Khushboo. “We did not reveal we knew his intentions. Faced with all of us, he denied the thought had crossed his mind and promised never to carry out sex determination.”

The vigilante groups are a deterrent as well as a helping arm. Following a few visits by the Jan Mangal Dal, Namita Devi and her husband, a daily wager, not only welcomed their third daughter but got vasectomy (Permanent Family Planning method to avoid births) without trying for a boy. “We could ignore the barbs of family members because of the support of these couples. They also explained our decision to others,” says Namita. She and her husband have joined the Jan Mangal Dal, encouraging pregnant women to register with the anganwadi centre and informing couples about government schemes like the Ladli Laxmi Yojana and Kanya Daan Yojana and the PCPNDT Act.

The Model for Change

The community groups are turning their areas into model panchayats where no abuse will be tolerated. Though eve teasing during Holi is common, the Birajpur panchayat block took a serious view of a harassment case during Holi in March 2013. The outcome of several meetings with support groups was that Mukhiya Pooran Ravidas ruled eve teasers would be fined Rs 10,000 and legal action would be taken against them.

A support group member Mukesh Das of the Literacy Mission concludes, “It's as if the LGBB programme has pulled aside a curtain to show us that discrimination and sex determination are not personal matters. They affect the entire community and there are laws to deal with it.”

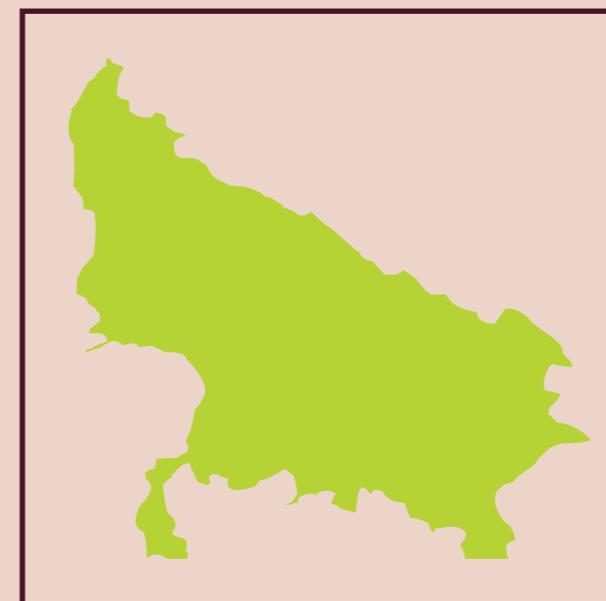
AGE NO BAR TO ACTIVISM

The LGBB programme shows it is best to start young when stopping gender discrimination. Ten-year-old Pinky, a member of an adolescent group attending CSG meetings in Birajpur panchayat, had the confidence to insist that a neighbour put his daughter back into school.

“One day while playing she mentioned her younger brother was studying in a private school but she had been pulled out of the government school by her father,” says Pinky. The girl has now returned to school. So what convinced the father? “We told him his daughter would not get izzat (respect) from anyone unless she was educated,” explains Pinky.



UTTAR PRADESH



CHILD SEX RATIO -
AGE GROUP 0-6

UTTAR PRADESH	902 Females per 1,000 males
INDIA	919 Females per 1,000 males

Source: Census of India, 2011



ISS DES MEIN AANA LADO

Making Advocacy a Game Changer

In Uttar Pradesh, the latest 2011 Census reveals a steep decline of 17 points in the child sex ratio (CSR). The number of girls between the age of 0 and 6 years for every 1,000 boys has dropped from 916 in 2001 to 902 in 2011. Alarmingly, the decline has been steeper in rural areas – dipping by 15 points from 921 to 906 as compared to the urban pockets where the CSR reduced by five points from 890 to 885 in the same period.

However, hope glimmers in the form of the ‘Let Girls Be Born’ (LGBB), project initiated by Plan India, which has been trying to correct the imbalance by enlisting the help of local panchayat leaders, activists and the people. Aiding them in their endeavour is Vatsalya, a local NGO that has done considerable work on preventing sex selective elimination.

It was in 2010 that work on this grave issue began

in Bakshi ka Talab block, which emerged as one of the worst offenders, registering a drop in CSR from 937 in 2001 to 910 in 2011 (Census figures). In order to formulate its strategy, Vatsalya conducted a study in April 2011 to examine the prevailing knowledge, attitude and behavioural practices in the community towards a girl child. The findings were much on the expected lines. “Traditionally, the status of the girl child has always been low. The thought that they are a burden was still prevalent and the son preference was strong that even in villages where sex determination was not possible female infanticide was known to happen,” said Dr Neelam Singh, Chief Functionary, Vatsalya.

Realising that only rigorous advocacy could be the game changer Vatsalya roped in the panchayat to set the process in motion. Across 20 panchayats chosen for the intervention in the block, panch’s were encouraged to join hands with health workers like the Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) and

anganwadi workers to uphold girls’ rights. In addition, religious leaders and other community members were also brought on board to generate awareness on the PCPNDT Act and the importance of birth registration.

Besides community meetings held to spread the word, rallies were taken out and engaging street skits were put up to help the community to understand the importance of daughters. Some key community groups were also identified to reinforce and take the messages forward.

It was a proud moment for Sheila when her efforts led to the closure of the diagnostic centre. “When I heard about the number of missing girls, I felt it was my duty to help stop this practice. Besides my husband, even my mother-in-law and father-in-law supported me,” said this mother of a six month old son.

Changing Milieu

Sheila’s household has emerged as a fine example for the entire village and neighbouring ones as well. For example, in village Katwada in nearby panchayat Katwada, the birth of a granddaughter celebrated in a ‘grand’ way – drums were beaten and sweets distributed – inspired others to follow suit. Rejoicing in the birth of the girl child, with just as much fanfare as that of a boy, has received the wholehearted support of the panchayat leaders and helped to promote gender equality.

In order to keep the community motivated, other tools were developed. A comprehensive pictorial flip-book, conceptualised and designed by Vatsalya and Plan India, has proven very useful. Further, interactive games using beads, cards and boards have been used to throw light on traditional cultural practices perpetuating gender discrimination. Magic and radio shows, too, have been used to dispel myths and disseminate information.

Then, panchayat leaders have helped to mobilise families to participate in celebration of days earmarked for girls. In Dasauli village of Adharkheda panchayat, pradhan Kedar has been an active member in promoting awareness on valuing the girl child.

Organising community celebrations on Women’s Day (March 8) and International Day of the Girl Child (October 11) has been supplemented with evening rallies (mashaal juloos) so that men, who are generally unavailable during the day because of work, can also be sensitised. “I have told the community that anyone ill-treating their daughters or considering sex selective elimination will face punitive action. I am keeping an eye on everyone,” he stated.

Displaying the number of births through an information board in the panchayat office, a move supported by panchayats, has motivated the community to improve the CSR of their village. In Bhauli panchayat, pradhan Rambahadur Singh stated that the number of girls born in Bhauli village increased from 700 girls per 1,000 boys in November-December 2011 to 1,021 girls at the end of December 2012. The positive trend continues in 2013 with the number increasing to 1,214 girls by May-end (source: MIS, LGGB project).

Religious Leaders Bless Birth of Girls

Bringing religious leaders on board has also worked as a good strategy to reach out to the community. After being briefed on the declining child sex ratio in the block, Pandit Nand Kishore Sharma popularly known as Maharaj, the head priest of the famed Chandrika temple in Bakshi ka Talab block took the initiative to ensure all devotees participating in the monthly religious ceremony (yagya) pledge to value the girl child, treat daughters on par with sons and end sex



NISHU KUMARI REFUSED TO MARRY AFTER A DOWRY DEMAND WAS MADE A DAY BEFORE THE CEREMONY

selective elimination. “I tell all those who come to seek the blessings of Chandrika Devi, the goddess of the temple, that only when they treated their daughter like a Devi (goddess), would the temple Devi listen to them”, said Maharaj.

The head priest of Chandrika temple has also led by example and that has been crucial in sending the right message about nurturing the girl child. He spurned the marriage offer for his daughter after the suitor demanded a car as dowry.

But he hasn't stopped there. Having understood that one of the reasons for early marriage in the community was the lack of a high school, he joined hands with the panchayat leaders to address the problem. As head of the Ma Chandrika Devi Mela Vikas Samiti (temple trust), Maharaj used its funds to acquire panchayat land and build a high school to give girls the opportunity to continue their education from classes 6 to 12. “This will stop parents from marrying off their daughters as now they will be able to study further and build a bright future for themselves,” stated a confident Maharaj

A Village Leads the Way

In village Bhauli, girls are showing the way. In April 2013, Nishu Kumari took the brave step of refusing to marry after a dowry demand was made a day before the ceremony. The 20-year old, who headed the girls' advocacy group formed during the LGGB project,



PLEDGING TO VALUE GIRLS AT A RELIGIOUS CEREMONY

called off the alliance since she knew her father a daily wage labourer would not be able to meet the dowry demand.

“Instead of worrying about what people would say or whether such an act would impact on my younger sister, my father supported me. A complaint was filed with the local police and the dowry seeker was jailed for a couple of days. I don't think he will ever dare to ask for dowry again,” Nishu said with a big smile.

Advocacy efforts by Nishu and the community support group also managed to prevent Sunita Devi, a mother of six daughters, from opting for a sex determination test of her unborn seventh child. “There was some pressure on me to go for the test. After they spoke to my family members including my husband, I didn't have to go in for the test,” revealed Sunita.

Bhaulti pradhan Rambahadur Singh has been pushing for birth registration since these ensure girls will be able to access their rights. He said, “The number of girls registered born between November 2011 and March 2013 increased even though it was just one less than the number of boys, (51 girls, 52 boys). Soon, it will be the other way around.”

Advancing Girls' Rights

“The multi-pronged approach adopted in the LGGB project has contributed towards this encouraging development. In fact, so motivated were some panchayat and community members that they eventually persuaded those responsible for facilitating the sex determination to stop doing so.

LGGB strategy to bring 100 civil society organisations on a common platform (Sanjha Manch) to work with the panchayats is helping to change attitudes towards the girl child at the grassroots. Meanwhile, the Allahabad High Court judgement of May 2013, which dismissed the petition of a medical practitioner and directed state to take criminal action of conducting sex selective elimination, is a historic milestone in the campaign. Hopefully, this will be a big stepping stone towards advancing girls' right to be born.



WHEN IN TROUBLE, CALL VINEETA

Short and petite, Vineeta Kumari doesn't look like as if she could hurt a fly. But appearances can be deceptive as residents of village Kapasia in district Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, soon found out. Whenever there was any news of injustice against any girl, Vineeta would be the first person to protest. So when she heard about a move to marry off a 12-year old girl studying in class 5, she immediately swung into action.

“My mother cooks the midday meal in the school where this girl, Neelam, was studying. When she heard about her impending marriage, she told me that if there was anyone who could save Neelam, it was me,” recounted Vineeta.

An urgent meeting of the girl's support group, formed by Vatsalya under Plan India's Let Girls Be Born project, was convened to work out a strategy. The local anganwadi worker, auxiliary nurse midwife

and accredited social health activist were also invited in addition to parents of the group members. It was decided that all of them would meet the parents of the girl the next morning to persuade them to call off the marriage.

Spunky and Persuasive

Vineeta's persuasive skills have been tapped even by her group members. Rachna Kumari, 17, a member of the group, recalled that when her father wanted to stop her education after class 8, it was Vineeta who convinced him to change his mind. “She can explain really well because she knows why it is important for girls to continue their education. She has helped us understand how we can change our own lives and motivated and inspired us. This is why we all turn to her when we are in need,” said Rachna.



COMMUNITY MOTIVATOR VINEETA KUMARI

Vineeta's spunk prompted Vatsalya to appoint her as their community motivator to help them carry forward the LGBB project. "Earning a monthly salary of Rs 4,500 as a community motivator was a big achievement. My daughter never used it for herself. Instead, she spent in on running the household and funding her own education," said mother Vidyawati proudly.

Vineeta did her mother proud by being the first in the family to pass the intermediate exam in 2012. She is the only one of four siblings who received a one-time sum of Rs 30,000 as financial help under the state government's Kanya Vidya Dhan scheme for girls from weak economic background to pursue higher education after Class XII.

Role Model for the Community

Vineeta and her mother Vidyawati, have emerged as role models for the community. Vineeta, now in the second year of college, travels several miles to attend college since there is no institution for higher education in her village. Seeing Vidyawati allowing

her daughter to go out of the village to study, more parents have been inspired to send their daughters as well.

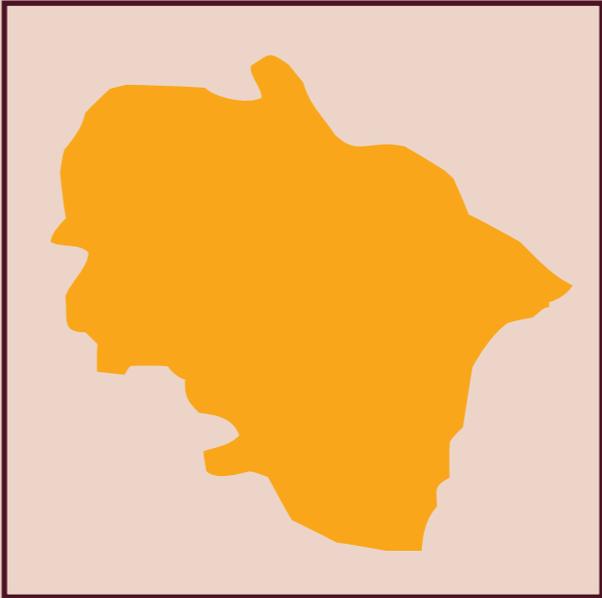
Vidyawati's decision to support her daughter spread her wings instead of pressurizing her to get married created a buzz in the community at first. But now, seeing Vineeta's achievements, they are realizing that girls play a fundamental role in the well being of their families.

Vineeta's dream is to become a social worker. "I know that I may not earn very much as a social worker. But the satisfaction and joy I get by helping someone in need is a big reward. I know that in many villages, girls are eliminated before they are born. So far, there has been no such incident in my village and I intend to keep it that way with the help of the community," Vineeta said determinedly.





UTTARAKHAND



CHILD SEX RATIO -
AGE GROUP 0-6

UTTARAKHAND	902
	Females per 1,000 males
<hr/>	
INDIA	919
	Females per 1,000 males

CHANGE MAKERS OF UTTARAKHAND 44 | CURBING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN RURAL HARIDWAR 46 |
CHANGING FACE OF UTTARAKHAND 48

Source: Census of India, 2011



CHANGE MAKERS OF UTTARAKHAND

Short and petite, Vineeta Kumari doesn't look like as if she. Despite two decades of mounting concern about the falling sex ratio and various initiatives taken by governments as well as civil society, in Uttarakhand the 2011 census revealed that the child sex ratio (0 to 6 years) had actually plummeted by 18 points to 890 and was even lower than that of neighbouring Uttar Pradesh. This was despite the state's high female literacy rate of 70.7 percent. Now under the initiative Let Girls be Born (LGBB), Plan India and Shri Bhuvneshwari Mahila Ashram (SBMA), a respected NGO with over 35 years grassroots experience, are working closely with the community since 2010 to rectify the child sex ratio and there is a glimmer of hope!

Jeevangarh in Vikas Nagar block of Uttarakhand, barely 50 km from the state capital Dehradun, is a sleepy, run of the mill panchayat. Now, it is being

shaken awake with ANMs, anganwadi workers (AWW) and ASHAs working together closely to ensure every pregnancy/birth is registered and followed up to check dubious abortions and neglect of the girl child.

The other important level of intervention is through youth groups who will determine the way Uttarakhand goes in gender sensitivity by reaching out to other young people as well as their own families. Called 'change makers' they are trained to speak and script skits or nukkad natak on issues like dowry, domestic violence, sex selection, impact of falling sex ratio, dimensions of the PCPNDT Act and the importance of education, particularly for girls. Well informed and confident, with new acting skills, they have been performing nukkad natak in schools, colleges, village squares and village melas. In Vikas Nagar alone, SBMA is working closely with 20 panchayats and as many youth groups.

The ANMs, AWWs and ASHAs acting as the panchayat's eyes and ears meet every month to exchange notes on pregnancies, births, abortions and deaths and put up a monthly update of these statistics on the village information board so that everyone in the panchayat is informed. Of the six committees in the panchayat monitoring the development of the village, the ANMs, AWWs and ASHAs are members of the Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (VHSNC) along with gram panchayat members. The committee, headed by the pradhan, also tries to meet once a month to add political muscle to the work of the health functionaries. Local representatives of the SBMA help the committee to strategize development with micro plans. The focus extends beyond health and nutrition and looks at sanitation, waste disposal, water availability and functioning of schools and teachers.

While each member of the VHSNC has an important role to play, a lot of the energy comes from the youth groups. Singing, play-acting, often dialoguing with panchayat leaders and their own parents, they play a small but important catalytic role to change the thinking of the older generation still caught in the time warp of obsolete values like early marriage, dowry and importance of a male heir. In the process, the youth themselves are metamorphosing and internalizing what they advocate.

In all, 60 youth from 40 panchayats of Vikas Nagar and Haridwar have trained as change makers. October 11 was celebrated as the International Day of the Girl Child in all the LGBB blocks. With the same fervour, International Women's Day was observed on March 8. The youth are creating a positive environment for the girl child and supporting the system to track and strengthen the health management information systems.

Information Boards Dot Landscape

An indication of the community's seriousness to change the sex ratio and give girls their rights are the charts found in every panchayat of Vikas Nagar and Haridwar listing the demographic parameters of the village - the size of the population, the number of pregnancies, girls and boys born, abortions, stillbirths

etc. Prominently displayed in panchayat bhavans, sub centres or other such facilities, these charts are updated every month after ANMs, anganwadi workers and ASHAs crosscheck and integrate data.

At Jeevangarh, the maternity tracking system showed that of the 405 pregnant women, 234 had delivered—110 in a government hospital, 66 in a private facility, 57 at home and one in the mobile transport unit. While 117 were boys, 111 were girls. There were four male stillbirths and two of females. The 10 abortions registered in the whole year seemed on the low side leading to discussion and investigation that others may have visited private doctors to escape detection (source: MCTS, UK, NRHM, 2012). Though health functionaries seek early registration of pregnancy, very often it is only after three and a half months when the woman goes for her tetanus shot that the pregnancy is registered.

The PCPNDT state supervisory board for CSR (child sex ratio) found the information boards so useful that it wants them in all panchayats in the state's 13 districts. Even the project implementation plan of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) for 2013-14 has endorsed them.

A POSITIVE OUTLOOK FOR GIRLS

The impact of the interventions is already visible in the child sex ratio of Uttarakhand. In February 2013 the Mother & Child Tracking system of the state government reflected a CSR of 920 at birth with 4,386 boys and 4,052 girls in Dehradun district. In Vikas Nagar block the data collected by the District Asha Resource Centre shows CSR 904 with birth of 1,190 boys and 1,003 girls.

Since November 2011, the LGBB programme of SBMA and Plan India has also been collecting the data of births in 20 intervention panchayats. The data analyzed by the International Institute of Health Management Research shows that the sex ratio at birth, which in November 2011 was 833 increased to 931 in December 2012.



CURBING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN RURAL HARIDWAR

Sex selective elimination is violence on little girls even while they are in the mother's womb. Plan India's Let Girls Be Born campaign seeks to stem this violence through community initiatives to recognize the rights of girls. The violence extends right through their life. In fact, over 26 percent of women in the 15 to 49 age group in Uttarakhand have faced physical and sexual abuse within the four walls of their homes as per NFHS 3 data. This is higher than in Himachal Pradesh (5.6 percent) and Delhi (16.5 percent).

At the discussions of the Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (VHSNC) of Adarsh Nagar panchayat in Haridwar district, the number of complaints on domestic violence is on the increase, clearly showing violence that begins in the womb continues through the woman's life. The guilty men don't come for these meetings. In the new upsurge against violence, more women are trekking to the Women's Helpline in Haridwar to lodge complaints. Even as women are moving out of agriculture to work

in the many new companies and factories coming up in and around Haridwar they feel thwarted in their own homes. Illiteracy compounded by alcoholism fans domestic violence. With sugarcane fields all around, ironically the women who face the brunt of the violence of drunken spouses brew liquor at home.

At Adarsh Nagar, social vigilance by the community and the groundswell against violence is actually leading to pregnancies being carried to term and an increase in the child sex ratio. The Let Girls Be Born movement has shown that as against 749 girls to 1000 boys in the 2011 census, there are now 764 girls.

Hoshier Singh, 60, a retired schoolteacher, is an important member of the VHSNC of Shivgarh panchayat, Haridwar block. He runs a small teashop and is constantly regaling visitors with poems and ballads on the valour of women like Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, astronaut Kalpana Chawla and mountaineer Bachendri Pal. He has written umpteen poems on

sex selective elimination and domestic violence and every evening there is discussion on the numerous roles and responsibilities of women and the need to respect them.

Women drop in at his shop to have chai and confide about the violence inflicted on them by drunken husbands. There is a strong movement against domestic violence in Shivgarh. After the women complain, a watch is kept on homes where domestic violence is reported. Sometimes, a neighbour brings cases of domestic violence to the notice of the VHSNC. At times members of the committee visit the homes and talk to the elders and the husband. With a law now against domestic violence, threats of police action are also given but largely the community tries to sort out the issue without going to the police.



CHANGING FACE OF UTTARAKHAND

In July 2012, 32 year Harminder Kaur (name changed) of Dak Pathar panchayat, Vikas Nagar block of Dehradun, was pregnant for the second time after a gap of 16 years. Her first child was a daughter born when she was just 16 years old. Since her daughter was quite old, Harminder was a little embarrassed to have another child after such a long gap. However, she did not mind having a son.

While much of the credit for the birth of a second daughter after a gap of 16 years at Dak Pathar goes to Asha, a committed activist of the Let Girls Be Born project, the support of Harminder's family for her having the second child even though it was a daughter cannot be underestimated. It was also refreshing to hear a young, unmarried brother-in-law offering to legally adopt the little girl.

A Second Girl After 16 Years



CHAMPIONING THE CAUSE OF GIRLS IS THE ASHA OF DAK PATHAR PANCHAYAT, VIKAS NAGAR

Aamir Khan's investigative TV report Satyame Jayate that zeroed in on sex selection and its impact on society was also effective in changing mindsets on the value of the girl child. "Everyone was hooked to the programme and one of the first episodes was on sex selection," recalls Asha. Within the community in Dak Pathar too there was a lot of discussion about the programme and some amount of soul searching.



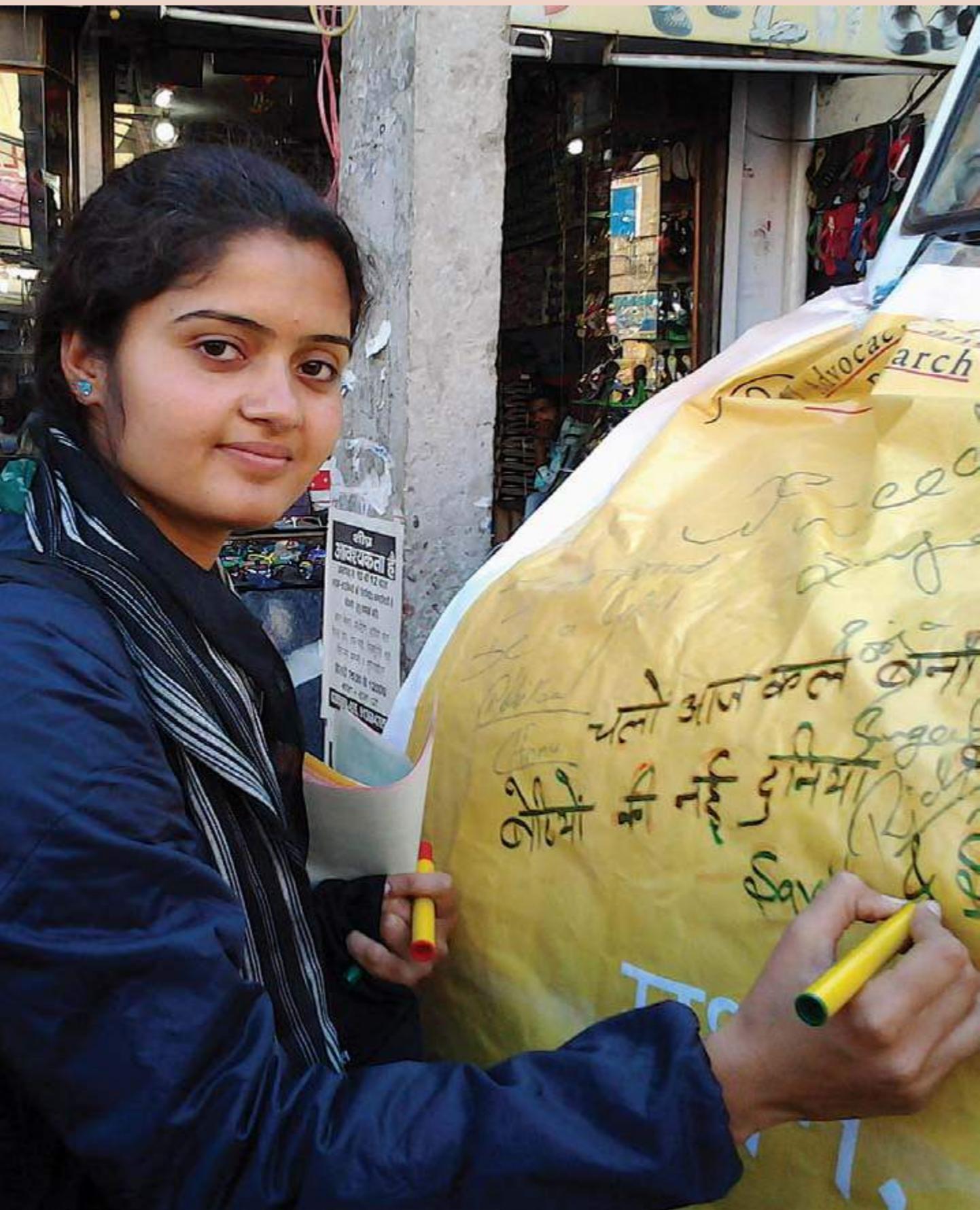


A MODEL PANCHAYAT

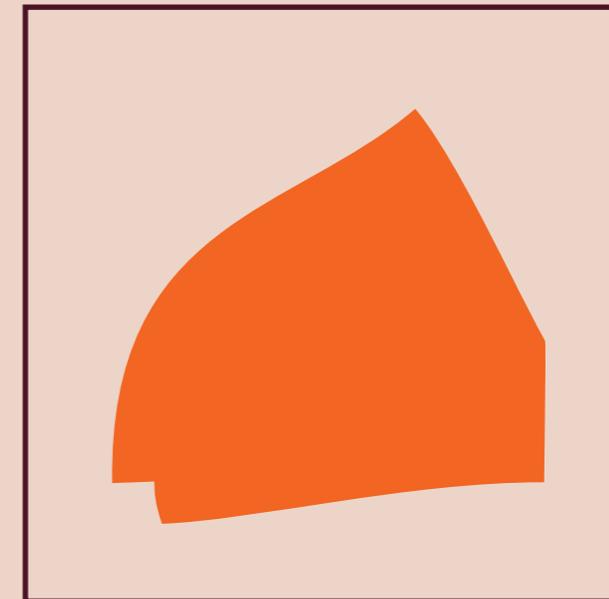
The public health functionaries in the Dhalipur panchayat of Vikas Nagar maintain there is no sex selection or elimination in the panchayat under their care. In fact, in this panchayat women in their second month of pregnancy come and register for all the care and medical assistance they are entitled to, says ANM Nirmala Semwal. Dolly and Karan Singh, Nirmala says have reconciled to not having a son. After the birth of four daughters through C-section, the youngest six years old, they have decided not to try again because the life of Dolly was precious and they were not willing to risk it to have a boy.

It is a long and difficult battle to change mindsets, says Asha. Though largely successful in her advocacy work, she was unable to avert an abortion in the sixth month in another case in Dak Pathar. A mother of three grown up children of 19, 16 and 14 years found she had conceived when she was in her sixth month of pregnancy. She had two sons and a daughter and was too embarrassed to have yet another child. Despite an advanced pregnancy, she wanted an abortion. All Asha's counselling on the risk to her life was of no avail. She went ahead and got an abortion from a nurse who is neither registered nor qualified to do it and miraculously survived!

Though Asha is now part of the LGBB campaign, some 20 years ago after three daughters she too was desperate for a son, she recalls. Through ultrasound in 1992 and again in 1993 she found she was carrying a female foetus and got it eliminated. It was only after the third ultra sound confirmed a boy that the conception was carried through. An ultra sound 20 years ago would cost Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,200 and an abortion would cost the same. Now the costs have gone up 10 times. Pregnancies are hidden from health functionaries, often till the fourth month, when the women are sure of the sex of child, before they are registered. So it is important for ANMs and ASHAs to network closely with the community for early signs of pregnancies. If an abortion is required, the women may move from the village or city to a neighbouring bigger city and get it done surreptitiously. Considering the poor child sex ratio of Bahadrabad block, the Let Girls Be Born campaign is obviously making slow but steady inroads in an area where there is strong preference for boys.



DELHI



CHILD SEX RATIO -
AGE GROUP 0-6

DELHI | 871
Females
per 1,000 males

INDIA | 919
Females
per 1,000 males



TORCHING THE SON PREFERENCE

Amid chants of 'Ram naam satya hai' the bier of the former Haryana Police constable was lifted from the ground. One of the persons giving shoulder to the policeman's body on its final journey drew gasps of disbelief from those gathered around. Ignoring the shocked reactions, the policeman's daughter, his only child, did not falter under her burden. She led the funeral cortege to the cremation ground in Prapura village and here too she did not take the traditional role of the grieving woman. Santosh stepped ahead and lit her father's pyre, shattering the Hindu custom of a male family member performing the last rites.

About a year after her father died on May 5, 2012, Santosh went back to the village to complete the death formalities. She performed all the necessary rituals for the peace of his soul before returning to her family in Delhi. An Anganwadi Worker in Nangal Raya settlement in Delhi's south west district, 35 year old Santosh is deceptively soft spoken and simple looking

but she is clear about her intentions. "My purpose was to torch regressive patriarchal diktats. From marriage to cremation, men conduct every important ritual and thereby create a son culture. I wanted to break the traditional belief that everyone needs a son for the last rites, considered important for the salvation of the soul. I have shown daughters can do the same."

Recalling her father's response when people would ask him why he did not have more children and ensure the birth of a son, she says, "He would reply – Santosh is no less than a son". Since most people want a son to perform the last rites and light the funeral pyre, he had told Santosh several times that she could take this responsibility. With the support of her mother, Santosh was able to challenge the strict norms governing the community to which they belong. "The eldest son of my tauji (father's elder brother) was expecting to light the pyre. They now feel I have offended the family's dignity in the eyes of society," she says wryly.

Santosh was the butt of criticism not only in her parental village in Haryana's Ranauli block in Rewari district but also among her community members who have settled in large numbers in Nangal Raya. "Many of them here are educated and have good jobs. Yet, in every gathering I was told that if not my cousin then my son should have lit the pyre; that I dictated my terms without taking advice from anyone as women should; and that I sullied the honour of our community," says Santosh. However, her husband supported her and advised her to ignore the gossip and insinuations.

Determined to prove a daughter is as responsible as a son is, Santosh and her husband bore the funeral expenses and conducted the subsequent pujas. They also ensure her mother is never lonely or left uncared for. "Change can come only when we ourselves bring about change," expounds Santosh, sharing her life changing moment with a group of college students invited to Nangal Raya by the LGBB programme of Plan India and the Centre For Advocacy and Research (CFAR), Delhi.

Changing Mindsets

A member of the Lakshmbai community support group set up in Nangal Raya under the LGBB programme, Santosh says the monthly meetings in which they discussed the issue of gender equality played an important role in shaping her decision. As an anganwadi worker she started noticing the discrimination of girls faced from an early age. During sibling fights sisters would be scolded by parents who drilled into them what girls should or should not do even as boys were free to do as they pleased.

"The way I was brought up and the ideas we were exposed to by this programme helped to bring about a change in me. I in turn have contributed to changing the mindset of others by seeding the idea that women should not be denied social and religious responsibilities," she says.

The LGBB programme, operating in Delhi since April 2011, chose to work in south and south west districts, where the child sex ratio (CSR) is very low. In contrast to the primarily urban and more upmarket

south district, the two programme wards of Nangal Raya and Sagarpur in the south west are largely rural. Abutting Haryana, the district shares many of the neighbouring state's cultural and social norms of gender discrimination. Activists feel this, combined with easy access to sex determination technology, may be responsible for south west Delhi continuing to have the lowest CSR of all seven districts in the national capital region (846 in 2001 and 845 in 2011). Census figures show the CSR in Delhi's rural areas is the country's lowest at 814, while urban areas in neighbouring Haryana have the country's lowest urban CSR at 832.

LGBB activities in the area have been bringing about a slow and steady change in the mindset of persons of all ages, Santosh said. Having participated in several Balika Janamotsavas' to celebrate the birth of girls, 65-year-old Prem Devi, a grandmother living in south west district's Sagarpur ward, was inspired to go a step further. She decided to break with custom and perform kuan puja (oblations around a well) on the birth of her granddaughter. The ceremony is traditionally held to honour the advent of a male child. She said, "I wanted to send out the message that though we already have a granddaughter, we are happy to welcome our second granddaughter."

In a significant success, Balika Janamotsavas, in which the ward councillor, MLA, medical officer in-charge (NRHM) and child development officer (ICDS) felicitate the mother and her girl child, have been adopted by the state government's three gender resource centres situated in the LGBB programme area to create awareness on gender discrimination. CFAR's LGBB programme coordinator Babita Chopra says, "Rigid notions of male dominance inculcated from birth, are now being questioned."



INNOVATIVE CAMPAIGN IN DELHI CAPTURES EYEBALLS

The flash dance mob collected in a trice in the heart of Delhi's Connaught Place, equally quickly collecting a large audience. Those watching got more than what they were expecting – the foot tapping music and dance carried a message against eliminating the girl child.

Expanding the repertoire from nukkad natak on gender equality to glamorous flash mobs and sophisticated road shows, the Let Girls Be Born (LGBB) programme is trying to catch the interest of Delhi's posh areas. Ironically, its residents' wealth and education qualifications have spurred sex selective elimination to a new high.

At 885, south Delhi's child sex ratio (CSR) dropped three points from 2001 and is much below the national

average of 919. "Families here desire just one or two children and a boy is a must so sex determination is rampant," says Pramod Chauhan, project manager, Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR). The Delhi government has registered approximately 1,700 ultrasonography clinics which provide easy access to technology. Unscrupulous providers, many unregistered, pander to the demand.

CFAR is implementing the LGBB programme in south and south west districts of Delhi with Plan India since April 2011. It trained 50 youngsters from the programme area for the flash mob. To gain the attention of Generation Y, the flash mob performed on Valentine's Day in 2013 in the hip Dilli Haat. This was also the venue for flagging off the programme's fortnight long road show rally on March 6, 2013. The

slick promotional van mounted with a high tech audio visual unit accompanied by a professional theatre group had an electrifying impact wherever it travelled.

Wheels of Change Break Class Barriers

Moving from swanky malls to metro stations in upmarket Hauz Khas and Green Park, shopping centres and parks in prosperous residential colonies like Vasant Kunj, Vasant Vihar and Dwarka, the road show covered a wide swathe of population in not just the two programme districts but also, on the request of the state government, the upper class district of New Delhi where too the CSR is low.

Local NGO partners supported the road show on every location. The campaign was planned to reach urban working families late in the evening and on weekends. Students and teachers in Delhi University were moved to tears by the road show, insisting on bringing it to Model Town where some of them lived. In Dwarka, some people said despite being well read they were not aware of the provisions of the PCPNDT Act. Finding it informative and interactive, the community radio station Radio Dwarka broadcast the show's activities to a wider audience. In Najafgarh, animated debates on sex selection occurred with young men in the audience. At another location at a temple in south Delhi, a devotee took the stage to share her personal experience. She cried while describing how she was pressurised for sex determination. Information on laws and legal redress were part of the discussions sparked by the road show.

Going beyond issues of bijli, pani and neighbourhood security, resident welfare associations (RWAs) took an active interest in the road show that focussed on a topic normally taboo for the middle class. The influential RWAs played a role in spreading the word and helping with logistics. The road show also helped to develop a network with the government. The Deputy Commissioner, district health officials and the MCD Commissioner in particular were actively involved.

Supporting Women

The LGBB programme workers here did not have community structures like panchayats and VHSNCs through which the programme operates in rural areas. Neither did they have the advantage of working with cohesive village groups. The Delhi wards are large, with fragmented communities from neighbouring states, each with their own social norms. A major programme success was to build from scratch 21 community support groups on a common platform.

Composed primarily of home makers, the groups reach out to those pressurised for sex determination and rally against gender discrimination. ASHA worker Rajrani of the 15 member Ekta group in south west district's Padam Basti says, "Recently, we stood by a woman who delivered a second daughter after turning down the doctor's offer to tell her the sex of the unborn child. We are counselling her family too."

"Driven to desperation by social pressure women themselves want a boy," says Kiran Sharma, member of south west district's Sankalp group. Living beside the train tracks, she saved a woman trying to commit suicide because of the abuse she was facing at home



A COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUP IN NANGAL RAYA



STAGING A REAL LIFE TRANSFORMATION

Playing her nukkad natak role of a woman beaten by a drunken husband in the play Sab Chalta Hai, Pooja felt she was stepping into her mother's shoes. The 17 year old student from south Delhi's Tigri settlement is in the Parivartan Youth Group involved with the LGBB programme. Eventually, she shared the dialogue she would speak with her father. Says Pooja, "The way I presented my argument, saying - Isn't mother a human being too...there is so much tension at home...your health is also ruined - had an effect. Father no longer returns drunk. Our home situation has improved greatly."

Several other youth volunteers also spoke about the change in their personal lives. Tigri Camp residents' Ajay and Danish are regulars in the flash mob, nukkad natak and awareness campaigns. The teenagers now help their mothers with cooking and sweeping and do not expect their sisters to wait on them.

for delivering a daughter. Even group member Saroj (name changed) admits she had once been keen to have an ultrasound and had threatened to commit suicide because of the horrific barbs she would have to face if she had a fourth daughter. Many such group members now prevent others from becoming victims.

Sunita, an ASHA worker in south Delhi's Dakshinpuri, says her community support group in the well-off locality deals with a different set of prejudices against having girls. "Rather than economic compulsions, violence against women and concerns for girls' safety and security are cited for not preferring girls. To overcome parents' fears we try to make girls strong enough to face any problem."

The monthly discussions with motivational songs and dances have helped members from different states and communities develop close bonds. The group is their 'alternate family'.

The programme is revitalizing existing support systems like gender resource centres. Responding to news reports of harassment of the family of a sexually abused child in south district's Sangam Vihar in April 2013, LGBB workers ensured the support of the area's gender resource centre in the girl's rehabilitation.

EVENING PROGRAMMES ROPE IN MEN

With the busy metro life leaving men little time for involvement in community issues, the LGBB programme has tailored evening programmes for them. In addition, as part of the gender sensitisation campaigns, week-long celebrations are now held of anniversaries like Women's Day and the Girl Child Day enabling men to join in. This has resulted in a band of dedicated male volunteers, making up for the absence of men from community support groups.

Sunil Kumar was returning from his plastic factory when he saw an evening rally against dowry organised with the help of the ward councillor in East Sagarpur colony and stopped to put his contact

number on the LGBB banner. A concerned citizen who had greened a public park in the area, 39-year old Sunil and his friends became active members of the programme.

They helped organise a night mashaal rally opposing violence against women and the December 16 rape case. It started from the park which has now become a hub for evening programmes. Even as programme coordinator Babita Chopra speaks of the multiplier effect of the LGBB programme, an enthused Sunil says, "We will request release of the MLA Fund to paint social messages. This neighbourhood park is visited by thousands of residents, and from toddlers to 90-year olds all will be influenced."

GLOSSARY

ANM	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife
ASHA	Accredited Social Health Activist
AWW	Anganwadi Worker
BCCL	Bharat Coking Coal Limited
CFAR	Centre for Advocacy and Research
CMO	Chief Medical Officer
CSG	Community Support Group
CSR	Child Sex Ratio
DC	District Commissioner
FOGSI	Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Society of India
LGBB	Let Girls Be Born
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTP	Medical Termination of Pregnancy
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NFI	National Foundation for India
NGO	Non government organization
NRHM	National Rural Health Mission
PCPNDT Act	Pre Conception and Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act
PHC	Primary Health Centre
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institution
RWA	Residents Welfare Association
SBMA	Shri Bhuvneshwari Mahila Ashram
SHG	Self Help Group
SMS	Shramjivi Mahila Samity
SRKPS	Shikshit Rozgar Kendra Prabandhak Samiti
USG	Ultrasonography
UT	Union Territory
UK	Uttarakhand
VHSNC	Village Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee
WOW programme	Women on Wheels programme



Plan

There's a plan
for every child.

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