



# IAPPD Newsletter

A Quarterly Newsletter of Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development

## International Conference of Parliamentarians on Population and Ageing: Towards a New Paradigm for Healthy Ageing and Vibrant Economy

Tokyo, Japan, November 18-20, 2013

The International Conference of Parliamentarians on Population and Ageing: Toward a New Paradigm for a Healthy and Vibrant Economy was organized by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Asian Population Development Association (APDA) from November 18 to 20, 2013. It was attended by representatives of leading international organizations, prominent Japanese authorities and influential resource persons from different countries and parliamentarians representing 31 countries from almost all the continents, including Europe. They exchanged points of view on ageing and robust societies. South America, the sub-continent that does not escape from ageing, also made its presence.



Dr. Bhalchandra Mungekar, MP; and Dr. Alka Balram Kshatriya, MP, during the conference.

The Indian delegation led by Dr. Bhalchandra Mungekar, MP; Dr. Alka Balram Kshatriya, MP; and Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, IAPPD, attended the conference.

The three-day conference was followed by a study-visit to Edogawa City located in the Tokyo metropolitan area. Parliamentarians had the chance to be first-hand witnesses of how the most rapid ageing country tackles this specific population transition. There were many takeaways for the participants including a performance of a traditional Japanese dance together with senior citizens. "How the aged are keen on learning," stated by one of the parliamentarian, which connects to the learning programmes such as dancing, Chinese language among others for the elderly in one of the center visited. "Resiliency and commitment of the elderly," commented by another parliamentarian."

In the "The Next 25 Years" declaration it was stated "the world has the biggest generation of young people it has ever seen". There were two overall wake-up calls for the parliamentarians. One, we might be saying "the world has the biggest generation of elderly it has ever seen", if we do not take appropriate actions to find the balance. Secondly, being a senior citizen is not a sentence for a sedentary life, but a gateway to a new adventurous stage in life if countries commit, and most importantly, implement sound policies to create the supporting environment such as adequate infrastructure and pertinent training programmes for our elderly.

Dr. Alka Balram Kshatriya, MP, Chaired a discussion during the session on 'Global Corporations: Roles and Strategies for Ageing', on November 19, 2013 and Dr. Bhalchandra Mungekar, MP, addressed the parliamentarians during the closing ceremony on November 20, 2013. Participants also witnessed that even simple measures, such as setting one more bench in a park, can be a cost-effective step for making the elderly commute outside their homes and have a more active life.



Group photo of the participants.



## Visit of a Delegation of MPs from Timor-Leste (Island) to IAPPD

September 7, 2013

Ten members of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus of Timor-Leste (GMPTL) and the Gender and Legal Advisor embarked on a study trip to India in September, 2013. The delegation was headed by the Vice President of GMPTL, Hon. Albina Marcal Freitas, MP. They visited three different regions in India to gather information on the implementation of laws and policies on gender based violence. They also met with different interlocutors including the Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (IAPPD), UNFPA, UNDP, UN Women, key lawyers working on gender-based violence especially domestic violence and sexual violence, and top academics on the subject and various NGOs working on gender based violence. The states visited included New Delhi, Pune and Mumbai.

While welcoming the delegation members at the IAPPD on September 7, 2013, Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, expressed happiness on their visit to India and to IAPPD as well. Mr. Sharma briefed the delegation members about the main goals and objectives of 33 years old IAPPD and its advocacy efforts during this period to mobilize, sensitize and involve the elected representatives (ERs) from the Parliament to the villages in the area of health, population stabilization and other development issues.



Members of the delegation during discussion at IAPPD.

A brief presentation about the IAPPD activities was made both by Mr. Sharma and Prof. P.P. Talwar, Member of Technical Advisory Committee of IAPPD. The delegation asked several questions, particularly on total fertility rate, infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate and family planning measures in India. Mr. Sharma and Dr. Talwar apprised the delegation members about TFR position in India stating that in some of the States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab the TFR is less than two per family. However in some of the States like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Meghalaya it is still more than three, which is higher than the target 2.1 by 2015. The delegation members were happy to know the satisfactory result of India but expressed concern about their own country where the TFR is more than six. The study visit was hailed a total success by the delegation.

The plethora of information that was available and the different sources of analysis provided to the delegation ensured that the visit was a very good learning process for the MPs. The MPs were able to interact with their interlocutors and it was both interesting and important to visit three different cities, which demonstrated different approaches to the same problem. Furthermore the timing of the visit was very opportune, as the Delhi Rape Case which has had an enormous impact on the way that violence against women is viewed in India was decided during the time of the visit. Given the quality and diversity of the interlocutors, the delegation was able to bring a lot of information back and draw many lessons learned and recommendations for the implementation of the NAP on GBV in Timor-Leste.



Members of the delegation along with IAPPD Team.



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# South East Asia Sub-Regional Parliamentarians Meeting on Trafficking and Meeting of the Standing Committee of Male Parliamentarians on Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls

October 17-19, 2013, Manila, Philippines

Asia-Pacific MPs meeting in Manila agreed to call upon all Parliaments in the region to end human trafficking, as a new report estimates 72 per cent of the estimated 30 million people trafficked in the world are found in Asia and the Pacific.

Gathered in Manila at the 'South-East Asia Sub-Regional Parliamentarians' Meeting on Trafficking and Prevention of Violence Against Women' on October 17-19, 2013, MPs stressed the need for accurate data on trafficking and violence against women in order to bring targeted solutions. Dr. Ram Prakash, MP, and Shri Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, IAPPD, attended the meeting.

The Global Slavery Index 2013 released by the Walk Free Foundation (WFF) calls slavery, which includes slavery itself, forced labour or human trafficking, and practices such as debt bondage, forced marriage and exploitation of women and children, as 'hidden crimes'. "It is very alarming to note that six among the top ten countries with the highest number of enslaved are from our region. We urgently need to work with governments and parliamentarians to address this issue," said Ramon San Pascual, Executive Director of the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD).



(from left): Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Dr. Ram Prakash, MP, Mr. Yasuo Fukuda, Ex-Prime Minister, Japan, and Prof. Keizo Takemi, MP, Japan and Chairman, AFPPD

South-East Asia has been one of the world's best-known hubs for human trafficking. The so-called feminization of migration has also transformed the landscape of human trafficking in the region well beyond the commercial sex industry. With the increasing number of young girls and women in the region who have become the victims of human trafficking, concerted interventions at the policy and political levels are needed in order to tackle trafficking for the purposes of both commercial sex and labor exploitation in the sub-region. The elimination of discrimination against women is not only a human rights priority but also key to putting an end to trafficking. AFPPD, with support from Australian AID strives to end modern day slavery through targeted policies and legislation. A policy brief on human trafficking in South-East Asia was launched by AFPPD to provide parliamentarians with country-specific policy recommendations. "We need these evidence-based actions to bring change when a huge number of people in our region suffer from human trafficking," said Senator Claire Moore, Vice Chair of AFPPD.

"As population dynamics increase cross-border movements, governments must be more vigilant to ensure every individual's human rights and welfare are protected within and outside of their own country." MPs adopted a Statement of Commitment to take policy initiatives to end human trafficking particularly in women and children and foster international cooperation to protect migrant workers. They will also provide assistance and necessary services to victims of trafficking in cooperation with nongovernmental and civil society organizations.

**Standing Committee of Male Parliamentarians Meet to End Violence Against Women and Girls:** Members of the AFPPD Standing Committee of Male Parliamentarians on Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls also met on October 18, 2014. They discussed key concerns on violence against women and girls in their respective country, actions undertaken to end VAWG and priority areas to be addressed. The Standing Committee also invited Cambodia to Chair the next two-year term. Mr. Ramon San Pascual, Executive Director of AFPPD spoke on behalf of the AFPPD Secretary General and proposed to promote collaboration between countries in the Mekong sub-region on the issue of trafficking. As part of public awareness raising campaign, AFPPD secretariat suggested that the MPs who are part of standing committees or stand-alone committees to suggest inquiries, research or reports into violence against women. The Committee adopted the Statement of Commitment on Trafficking and suggested action points to achieve its mandates.



## Infant mortality down by 30% in past decade

Setting a blistering pace, Tamil Nadu has halved its infant mortality rate (IMR) in the past decade while a bunch of other states — Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka — have shown significant decreases of around 40%. The overall IMR for the country has gone down by a third. This emerges from the latest vital statistics data for 2012 collected under the Sample Registration Scheme by the Census office.

The infant mortality rate is a count of deaths of infants under one year of age per 1000 live births in one year. It is considered a key indicator of health services, nutritional levels, poverty and educational level of the people. Reduction of IMR is one of the millenium development goals set by the UN with a deadline of 2015.

The wide gap between rural and urban areas in infant death rates continues in India but is declining. Rural IMR in 2012 was 46 infant deaths per 1000 live births while the urban rate was 28. In fact, the rural IMR declined by 30% compared to the urban decline of 28% since 2003.

But drilling down to the states, a varied story emerges, one that shows clear links to the way public health is being tackled by state governments. Tamil Nadu, with its extensive and relatively better run primary health services and nutrition programmes has clearly emerged as a frontrunner in the reduction of infant mortality.

Two tiny states, Manipur in the north-east and Goa on the west coast now lead the country with an IMR of just 10, surging past Kerala at 12. These IMRs are comparable to rich-country standards. In Kerala, in the past 10 years, IMR has marginally worsened, increasing by 9%.

Madhya Pradesh with an IMR of 56 in 2012 is at the bottom of the table among major states, with the worst rural IMR of 60 in the country. Its urban IMR is 37. Although Odisha and Rajasthan figure among the bottom five states in terms of IMR, both have shown a high rate of decline — about 35% — in the past decade. Like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, they too carry the legacy of past neglect.

KERALA BEST, RAJASTHAN WORST					
India: 42 IMR (2012), -30% Change since 2003					
TOP 5 MAJOR STATES BY IMR			BOTTOM 5 MAJOR STATES BY IMR		
State	IMR (2012)	Change since 2003	State	IMR (2012)	Change since 2003
Kerala	12	9%	Rajasthan	49	-35%
Tamil Nadu	21	-51%	Odisha	53	-36%
Delhi	25	-11%	UP	53	-30%
Maharashtra	25	-40%	Assam	55	-18%
Punjab	28	-43%	MP	56	-32%

Source: SRS Bulletins 2013 & 2005, ORGI



Karnataka is the only big-population state where urban IMR has worsened, increasing by 4% despite a 40% decline in rural areas. In Andhra Pradesh and Assam, there has been only a small decline in urban IMRs. Other states where urban IMRs are worsening are Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Uttarakhand. The lack of a coherent national policy on urban health for a long time is a direct cause of this, even as urbanization is increasing all-round.

In the north-east, Mizoram has seen a dramatic rise in infant mortality over the past decade. Its IMR has increased from an excellent 16 in 2003 to 35 in 2012. Although one of the few states in the region untroubled by separatist bloodshed, its stagnating employment levels and poverty seem to be reflected in health indicators.

Source: Subodh Varma, TNN, October 22, 2013



## UNFPA India-Bhutan Representative meets AFPPD Vice Chair Prof. P.J. Kurien

July 25, 2013

Ms. Frederika Meijer, UNFPA Representative in India called by Hon. Prof. P.J. Kurien, Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha and Acting Chairman of AFPPD at his office and discussed issues concerning population and development in the Indian context. In the meeting arranged through IAPPD, Ms. Meijer stressed the importance of sexuality education of the youth in India and of enhancing the awareness about the need for population stabilization by adopting family planning measures. Both Hon. Prof. P.J. Kurien and Ms. Meijer stressed the importance of using the internet in providing comprehensive sexuality education. Ms. Meijer also highlighted the importance of proper cooperation and coordination between agencies like UNFPA and the Parliamentary Institutions particularly the Parliamentary Committees and Forums, among others on population-related issues. Prof. Kurien observed that for these agencies to be effective, it is imperative to function in coordination with the Ministries of Human Resource Development, Health and Family Welfare and Women and Child Development, the nodal Ministries handling population-related issues. He has offered full support of his office in facilitating such coordinated efforts, both in his capacity as the Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha, Acting Chairman of the AFPPD and Chairman of IAPPD. In this regard, he has desired that the Executive Secretary of IAPPD, Shri Manmohan Sharma, who was also present at the meeting, to explore further avenues of cooperation between UNFPA and IAPPD/AFPPD.



(from left): Prof. P.J. Kurien, Ms. Frederika Meijer and Mr. Manmohan Sharma.

## INDIA: Head of WHO Reproductive Health Research Meets Indian Parliamentary Network

October 28, 2013

Representatives of the IAPPD were delighted to meet with Dr. Marleen Temmermann, Director of Reproductive Health and Research, WHO, and her colleague Dr. Martin Weber, on their recent trip to India.

In their evening meeting they met with IAPPD Technical Advisory Committee Members Prof. P. P. Talwar and Prof. J. S. Yadav, as well as Shri Manmohan Sharma, the Executive Secretary of IAPPD. They discussed a wide range of issues relating to the ICPD Programme of Action. IAPPD representatives were delighted with the outcome of the meeting and have expressed their sincere hope to collaborate in the future and to take the agenda further.



(from left): Dr. Marleen Temmermann, Dr. Martin Weber, Prof. J.S. Yadav, Prof. P.P. Talwar and Mr. Manmohan Sharma.



### The IAPPD Newsletter

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Advocacy is the key job of Elected Representatives (ERs) and to gain learning on the knowledge of the advocacy, communication is one of the most desired aspect for the ERs to be focused in the workshops. Advocacy on the population stabilization related issues is a challenging job, more so in the developing countries,

where a good proportion of population is still illiterate. Different advocacy campaigns/communications are, therefore, needed for different populations. During the past few years, social media has gained a wide popularity throughout the globe. There are several benefits of social media which mainstream media does not provide, as communication through the internet and mobile phones offers direct and immediate access to an array of services, service providers and other resources. Having understood the benefits of the social media, it needs to be noted that the scope of social media for advocacy communication for the masses in developing countries is still a distant goal. More than sixty per cent of the population in developing world is still living in the rural areas where the penetration of means of social media i.e. mobile, internet and computer is very limited. Therefore, the role of social media in developing countries is still largely restricted to urban areas.

The importance of social media can't be ignored today as it has been established beyond doubt that it is a medium to promote one-self professionally, net-work, make like-minded professional groups and also stay updated on the goings on in one's work interest. When social media plays a leading role in business development, student's studies, informal education through informal learning and communication, then why not in issues such as population, etc.

**Strategic Use of Social Media:** There is a need to fully and rigorously understand the audiences, including contextual factors (political, cultural, economic, gender, etc.) that determine the health/quality-of-life choices people make. This is more seen in case of younger populations, wherein the impact of substantive information given/shared on social-media largely impacts their actions.

To be effective, strategic communicators must understand attitudes and cultures, respect the importance of ideas, adopt available advanced information technologies and employ sophisticated (those are also accessible and affordable) communication skills and strategies. To be

persuasive, they must be credible. There are two distinct strategies that are inherent in the social-media use for campaigning/political advocacy, i.e.:

- using elected leaders' messages/statements as a communication-package while using netizens and young people as an audience; and
- targeting elected leaders as a defined audience reached by social media.

The available research shows that the strategy "Targeting elected leaders as a defined audience reached by social media.", as given above, has not yielded results due to very poor use of computers/internet and social-media sites by most of the elected leaders in the Asian and African countries. Recent findings in India, as were released by the Ministry of Telecommunication & Information Technology, (Digital Empowerment Foundation) revealed:

- MPs, MLAs and Panchayats (PRIs) have largely kept away from any kind of online engagement with the people of their constituencies;
- Only 80 out of 545 (14%) Lok Sabha (Lower House) members are online;
- Only 15 states have their MPs online and another 15 states have none;
- In the entire north-eastern region, consisting of eight states, only one parliamentarian is online, i.e. Ms. Agatha Sangma from Meghalaya; and
- The current Lok Sabha has the highest number of women MPs ever at 59, 14 more than the last House but only six women MPs are online.

It is, therefore, very strategic to ascertain that the ensuing Campaign on ICPD+20 & Post-2015 Agenda, engages well-known elected leaders with the social-media. However the 'targeted audiences' shall remain only net-active young people and urban netizens. Hence, assuming political leaders as an audience for social-media may not necessarily yield the desired results through the planned campaign.

Manmohan Sharma  
Executive Secretary, IAPPD

*(Excerpts of the speech delivered by Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, IAPPD, during AFPPD Communications Workshop on ICPD Beyond 2014/Post-2015 Agenda, Tagaytay, Philippines, on July, 25-27, 2013)*



# AFPPD Communication Workshop on ICPD Beyond 2014/Post 2015

Tagaytay, Philippines, July 16-17, 2013

In the last 30 years, communication has played a vital role in raising parliamentarians' awareness and knowledge and motivating them to address population and development issues to achieve the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) agenda and the Millennium Development Goals. The 2012 AFPPD Institutional Review Report revealed that the parliamentarians recognize AFPPD for being a source of knowledge and information on various issues.



A session in progress.

Keeping this in view, the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) in partnership with the Philippine Legislators' Committee on Population and Development (PLCPD) and support from UNFPA and Japan Trust Fund organized the AFPPD Communication Workshop on ICPD Beyond 2014/Post-2015 Agenda in Tagaytay, Philippines, on July 16-17, 2013.

The aim of this workshop was to improve the capacities of National Committees of AFPPD in advocacy communications by developing the regional and national parliamentarians' campaign plan on ICPD Beyond 2014 and Post-2015 agenda with specific focus on the upcoming Asia Pacific Conference on Population and Development in September 2013. Shri Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, IAPPD, attended the workshop.



Mr. Manmohan Sharma addressing the participants.

While addressing the participants, Mr. Manmohan Sharma said that advocacy, for all of us, is our key job and to gain learning on the knowledge of the advocacy communication is one of the most desired aspect for us to be focused in this workshop. Advocacy on the population stabilization related issues is a challenging job and it is more challenging in the developing countries where a good proportion of population is still illiterate. Different advocacy campaigns/communications are needed for different populations. He also highlighted the importance of social media, which cannot be ignored in the present scenario.



Group photo of the participants.



# ICOMP Meeting on 'South Asia Regional Consultation of Parliamentarians and Civil Society Leaders Towards ICPD Beyond 2014 Process'

Kathmandu, Nepal, August 26-27, 2013



Dr. Wasim Zaman addressing the participants.

The two-day 'South Asia Regional Consultation of Parliamentarians and Civil Society Leaders Towards ICPD Beyond 2014 Process' was organized during August 26-27, 2013, in Kathmandu, Nepal, by the ICOMP (International Council on Management of Population Programmes). The consultation was supported by David and Lucile Packard Foundation and in close collaboration with the CDPS, Nepal (Central Department of Population Studies).

The meeting was attended by political leaders from the SAARC member countries, represented by senior ministers, MPs and Members of Legislative Assemblies,

together with key civil society bodies who had gathered in Kathmandu for the two days regional consultation in reflecting on and taking stock of reproductive health and family planning issues in the region, especially as these issues evolved in the last twenty years after the Programme of Action of ICPD was adopted in 1994 in Cairo. The Indian delegation led by Dr. Jagannath Manda, MP, Vice-Chairman of IAPPD; Mrs. Viplove Thakur, former MP and Vice-Chairperson of IAPPD; Mr. Rajesh Dharmanli, Legislator, Chief Parliamentary Secretary, Himachal Pradesh Government; and Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, IAPPD, represented the country in the meeting.

At the outset of the meeting, Dr. Wasim Zaman, Executive Director, ICOMP, questioned the political and civil society leaders, "why do still have so many women die while giving births; infants and children in large numbers still die despite advances in health and medical systems; why women are discriminated and bear the indignities of violence and abuse; why girl child, in some cases, is simply denied birth; and why most young people denied access to basic information and services?"

During the inaugural session, Ministers from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Nepal were present. The concluding programme was chaired by Ms. Zakia Shahnawaz, Minister of Population, Government of Punjab, Pakistan.



Group photo of the participants.





Mrs. Viplove Thakur, MP, addressing the participants.

After two days of intense discussions and debates, the regional consultation meeting unanimously endorsed taking forward the ICPD agenda beyond 2014 and called to action. It raises policy issues, resources, services, human resources, young people's sex and reproductive health rights, safe abortion, gender based violence, gender equality, male involvement, emerging challenges, partnership with civil society, governance and SAARC.

"South Asian countries have a common voice on population issues. We want continued support from development partners to sustain the achievements made in infant and maternal mortality and to fulfill the unique needs of youth and adolescent," said Viplove Thakur, MP, and Vice

Chair of IAPPD and former Chair of Women's Commission India. "All South Asian countries need to have a common stand for ICPD+2014 and beyond."

In his presentation on 'Status of Post Cairo Initiatives on Health and Population Stability in India', Dr. Jagannath Manda, MP, presented the population and reproductive health scenario in the country, issues and challenges in reproductive health, family planning interventions and key achievements. He further said that almost every day, dozens of mothers die in South Asia due to complications in child delivery. Similarly, large numbers of children still die before completing the age of five. There are issues related to stunting, diarrhea and child health in South Asia. Of course, some countries in the region made certain progress in meeting some International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) targets. However, they still need to go a long way to sustain the achievements made and progress further.



Dr. Jagannath Manda, MP, addressing the participants.



A session in progress.



The Polio Eradication Programme in India - a strong partnership between the MOHFW, WHO, UNICEF, Rotary International, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, started off in 1995 as the Intensive Pulse Polio Immunization wherein children up to the age of 5 were given additional doses of Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) irrespective of their then immunization status and aimed to eradicate polio from India with the use of doses of OPV. Use of communication, then, was limited as the entire effort was addressed by the public-sector immunization teams in administering polio drops to children.

### Health Communication: Promoting "Products" or "Healthy Behaviors/Concepts"?

Effective Communication is certainly the only most powerful 'vaccine' that prevents communities from various dreaded diseases, including Polio. Needless to emphasize, the use of communication has been identified as a major factor in possible eradication of polio in India. This is more so as it was realized that the planned communication strategy is instrumental in following and implementing sustainable steps to eradicate polio in India. The country has been particularly hailed as a success as it saw innovative use of epidemiological data and application of multiple communication channels for the Polio eradication programme. However, the communication for polio eradication has not been strategic, as it mostly promoted polio-vaccine drops, whereas the causal factors that are responsible for spread of Polio virus (*i.e. low rates of routine immunization, poor sanitation, lack of clean drinking water, poor nutrition, etc.*) were not promoted as behavior-change content/tools. Hence, even now the knowledge & perceptions of a large number of communities are very low with regard to recalling any causal factors which lead to polio transmission. Therefore, the current content of the Polio Communication is "promotional" in nature that markets the use of polio vaccination, without imparting ample knowledge to communities on various causes of polio.

Polio related communication was reviewed, on a sustained basis at all levels which resulted in building a process about communication interventions and inclusion of communication expertise. In India, evidence-based communication strategies, including interpersonal communication and social channels that includes engaging people's participation through self-reliant efforts, made a marked difference in delivering effective health communication for polio eradication programme. These efforts included participation of community organizations, national, local and state governments, professional organizations and media. It is evident that the mass-media campaigns and sustained political willpower combined, contributed to reducing polio incidences, which led to a stage where no fresh cases of wild Polio virus infections are spotted since Jan 13, 2011. However, while the medical experts/immunization specialists have adjudged the health communication for polio eradication as very effective and job well done, many communication scientists contest the limitations which the polio-communication has carried along with it. This is primarily so as the risk-factors leading to polio-virus transmission and that are directly related to health-practices have not been incorporated into the communication-content for polio communication.



Polio cases in India were identified among children aged less than two years (75%) who lived in mostly poor Muslim and scheduled Hindu communities who lacked access to basic sanitary facilities, lived in highly dense population areas with inadequate public health systems and were missed in OPV rounds resulting in fewer doses, including poor status of routine immunization. Polio programme faced another major challenge; even though most parents were aware of the need for polio drops to protect their children, they did not understand the logic for those repeated rounds of the same 'medicine' (OPV). Misconceptions about OPV and suspicions about the motive behind this repeated campaign came to the forefront which included OPV caused illness in children, it was termed ineffective due to substandard vaccine, caused infertility in children when they grow up as adults and most importantly it was seen as a part of a plan to curb population growth. Therefore reaching this critical group ("underserved population") in India became a significant strategy and a turning point in formulation and implementation of communication as it was understood that information alone was not sufficient to encourage behavior and social change which could lead to acceptance of OPV.





# in Polio Eradication: Evolved and Succeeded?

*Polio-Free, India needs to be more Strategic now!*

Pak Gupta\* and Anusha Agarwal\*\*

## Reaching the Under-Served

This challenge of reaching the underserved and hard-to-reach population, largely the Muslim community, and the areas that had families at high-risk of polio-virus infection due to poor access to health, sanitation, and other basic services, was huge. These groups also included nomads, migratory population groups and those migrants from the high-endemic States who stay in Sub-Urban clusters of other State Capitals. Therefore, 'Social Mobilization' was included in the overall Communication approach for Polio Eradication and became the crucial support to the programme in India.

The evolving strategy included focus on reaching out to and connecting with the women community as a whole. The primary channels of communication were kept as inter-personal communication (IPC) methods where it laid the importance of OPV and its safety and efficacy and the benefits it can give to their young children. Public health programme's female health workers (FHWs) were trained and were made to anchor and lead these efforts by directly communicating with mothers/caregivers and sometimes even indirectly through support from their male counterparts and religious leaders.



## Multiple Levels and Stratified Health Communication

In the entire process of evolving a more effective system of communication for polio eradication, the mass-media campaigns continued to ensure national visibility and general public awareness. It included "brand" and "basic message promotion", especially using sound bytes from well-known celebrities such as Amitabh Bachchan (re: "Do baand zindagi ki"). Nevertheless, interpersonal communication and social mobilization became the major riders in piggy-backing the mass-media and thus, became crucial to reach this unreached population in India.

In the apparent absence of any trained and dedicated 'communication cadre' with the Government to carry such a momentous task of effective inter-personal communication and social mobilization tasks at the field level all across India, especially with a greater focus on endemic and high-risk States, a huge social network was created with the local health staff of districts. Local health authorities coordinated working at different levels such as district/sub-district/block and lastly the villages. Activities included intensive and repeated interpersonal communication using house-to-house visits and bringing the community and religious leaders and influencers on a single platform. In support of its 'Underserved Community/Hard-to-reach' activities, the Polio Programme pro-actively engaged with the influential Muslim institutions. These activities engaged with select institutions in building confidence and credibility of the Polio Eradication Programme among minority populations, thus resulting in an improved coverage of the underserved communities.

Needless to emphasize, the polio programme greatly benefitted with the contribution of folk media in increasing the awareness and enhancing attendance. Mass-media campaigns involving movie and cricket stars and important regional and national level political figures focused on removing the rumors about OPV and encouraging the people to bring children for vaccination. It has been documented that Puppet/theatre shows, video vans and other folk media activities held in more than 3500 villages in Uttar Pradesh, contributed to a 20% increase in booth attendance.

## Must-Follow Lessons for Health Sector: Strategic Communication for Polio Eradication

Synergistic communication activities integrating social mobilization, interpersonal communication, gender and culturally sensitive interventions, mass/folk media and political advocacy have greatly contributed to the overall success of the polio programme, which helped in accessing the unreached and vulnerable population groups in India. The strategic and innovative polio communication can contribute to other public health programmes and initiatives. Some select elements, which should be strongly considered in cementing the strategic health communication include the development of area-specific and tailor-made communication interventions and selection of appropriate communication channels; extensive use of





interpersonal communication and social mobilization at all levels; pro-active inclusion of community leaders, PRIs, religious spokespersons, local communication, folk based media and community involvement; effectively using trained and skilled plus effective communication-workers to reach every house hold; well-designed entertainment-educate approach; primary content must include "benefit-message"; intense grassroots level social mobilization to reach out to the marginalized communities; and addressing social/gender inequities in improving interpersonal communication and increasing access to hard-to-reach groups.

Therefore, it is evident that the polio campaign is also a good example of the integration of data driven communication programmes with the operational work. Policy community ought to base development/health communication around empirical findings and, as is evident; the polio programme has shown how to use data in delivering the most effective operational results. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that so far the Polio Communication in India has exclusively promoted "demand generation" for polio-vaccines in more than many ways, while missing out completely the inclusion of primary 'risk-factors' in to the communication-content.. Therefore, while such a demand-generation strategy holds well, in short-term, in chasing away the polio virus; it certainly cannot yield the desired results in polio eradication on a long-term basis. Needless to emphasize, the current Polio Communication content is mostly based on 'product-promotion' (OPV); the content clearly lacks promoting behaviors (*sanitation, safe drinking water, routine immunization & nutrition*) that would create a stronger prevention-circle in communities. Ensuing years will determine how strategic India is in developing content for and in managing its public health communication, specifically in keeping the polio virus off its grounds.

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## **29th Asian Parliamentarians Meeting on Population and Development and Parliamentarians' Study Visit on Population and Development**

Manila, Philippines, on August 28-30, 2013

Parliamentarians from 14 countries in Asia and the Pacific, including India, participated in the High Level Dialogue on Population and Development in a Cultural Pluralistic Society, held during August 28-30, 2013 in Manila, Philippines.



Mr. Manmohan Sharma  
Speaking on the occasion.

The participants were interested in the experience of the efforts of Philippines Congress, which successfully passed the Reproductive Health Bill. Participants commended the Philippine Legislators' Committee on Population and Development (PLCPD) for playing a leading role in reconciling religious tenets and the need for managing reproductive health and family planning.

According to the participants, the question of how to further balance population and development in a pluralistic society has become a major issue and a common concern among the international community.

In the closing session, Hon. Toshiko Abe – Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs and member of the JPFP, requested the UNFPA to further strengthen the parliamentarian's activities in the field of the population and development. Such support would make them understand its nature as well as difficulties.

After the meeting, the delegation visited Baguio city to discuss with leaders of the indigenous people and local officials the best practices and challenges experienced in enacting the bill.

At the end of the study visit, participants adopted the Call to Action and committed to continue and enhance efforts to address population issues, contribute to the acceleration of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and promote sustainable and equitable development toward and beyond 2015.

The meeting was organized by the Asian Population and Development Association (APDA) and hosted by PLCPD.



Dignitaries during the meeting.