

**Proceedings**  
**of**  
**Interface Meeting with Parliamentarians**  
**on Strengthening MDG-5A and 5B**  
**in South Asia**  
**Creating Champions and Garnering Support for**  
**Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**

26 February 2015 (Thursday)

7.00 PM-9.00 PM

at

Tango Room, Vivanta by Taj  
New Delhi

Jointly organized by  
FPA India, Mumbai  
&  
IAPPD, New Delhi



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## Introduction

The issues of maternal and reproductive health warrants serious attention as at the terminal year of MDG, India is not only far from the set goals but also struggling to attain these goals. MDG 5A is about reducing by three quarters the Maternal Mortality Ratio and MDG 5B is about universal access to reproductive health by 2015.

An interface meeting was organized with Parliamentarians and representatives of IAPPD and FPA India to discuss and Strengthen MDG 5A and 5B in South Asia. The objective of the meeting was to create champions among the elected representatives and garner support for sexual and reproductive health and rights. The meeting was organized on February 26, 2015 (Thursday) at 19.00 hrs. at Tango Room of Vivanta by Taj, New Delhi. The meeting took place for more than two hours in which Parliamentarians from different political parties shared their views and promised to raise these two vital issues of our society sustainably at both on the floor of the house as well as at their grass root level working.

## Welcome and Setting the Agenda

Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, IAPPD initiated the proceedings of the meeting by welcoming all the honorable Members of the Parliament (henceforth MPs), and also Technical Advisory Committee Experts of IAPPD and Senior Officials FPA India. He emphasized on the purpose and objective of the meeting which was to exchange ideas of parliamentarians and representatives of IAPPD and FPA India on MDG 5A and 5B which relates to reducing maternal mortality rate by three quarters and universalize access to reproductive health by 2015. He outlined the structure of the meeting and said that a short film of four minutes duration prepared by FPA India will be played at the beginning which will summarize the action and efforts of FPA India and then exchange of ideas from parliamentarians and representatives of IAPPD and FPA India will take place. Mr. Sharma then requested Ms. Viplove Thakur, Member of Parliament from Rajya Sabha who is also Vice-Chairperson of IAPPD to chair the session and conduct the proceedings of the meeting.

Ms. Thakur extended a warm welcome to her colleagues from Parliament as well as representatives from IAPPD & FPA India. Ms. Thakur particularly thanked honorable MPs who came directly from the ongoing session of Parliament where the debate on the Presidential address was taking place. She said that the issue of MDG 5A & 5B is the most vital issues confronting our nation. Many states have worked tremendously on these fronts; however, there are many other states which are still lagging far behind. She said that besides awareness, the approach to confront these challenges is key where we have to do a lot of endeavor.

She said that the year 2015 has already arrived and the data tells us that we are still far behind the goals and targets set in MDG. Though we have been working on these issues since many years, nevertheless, there are several reasons behind our unsuccessful attempt to meet the goals and targets. One is the unavailability of the medical facilities particularly in the rural areas. Other important factor is our mental blockage which is preventing us to understand the far reaching outcome of these problems. Our men folk should particularly be more responsible for this as they are the one who bear the responsibility of taking care of the mother and the child. Our women are taking a lot of burden of the family and even today she is the last person to take meal in the house. She said that though we have been working together, I would like to point out our important message. Though, we organize number of camps for women, but now we must also organize camps for men to make them aware of their responsibilities in order to mitigate and tackle these issues of MDG 5A & 5B. Unless we bring them in this effort we are not

going to get successful in our attempt. We will have to make them understand, raise them, make them aware as they are the nearest care taker of the women and the child. She concluded by once again thanking all the MPs for taking time out for the important cause of the nation.

Mr. H.R. Umesh Aradhya, Chairman, FPAI also welcomed all the honorable MPs on behalf of the FPA India. He introduced his team who has come for the meeting. He also emphasized the purpose of the meeting by stating that it is to seek the support of the honorable MPs to strengthen the MDG goal 5A & 5B. It is also to advocate for availability and accessibility of services especially for sexual and reproductive health services and accountability in it. Strengthening these two goals will help in reducing the risk that girl and woman faces during the pregnancy and will avoid maternal deaths. Another important outcome can be safe motherhood in which India has progressed but more progress is still needed. He concluded by thanking everyone once again and emphasized on the need to foster partnerships on these issues.

### **A Short Film on FPA India Activities**

After welcome, a short film of four minutes was played which displayed the different activities that FPA India has undertaken in regard to MDG 5A & 5B. The mute film displayed vividly the role played by FPA India for the last six decades under the objective of voluntary commitment to advocate for SRH and rights & choices for the poor, marginalized and vulnerable people and communities of India. FPA India is working across India and provides a wide range of SRH services & information to woman, man and young people. Family planning, counseling, maternal and child care services, pregnancy tests, prenatal counseling, antenatal care, post natal care and counseling, immunization services, pediatric and general health services, contraceptive services, expansion of contraceptive choices, special service sessions on sterilization are some of the key activities in which FPA India is vigorously involved in. Besides, there are also services for adolescents such as comprehensive sexuality education, child protection policy, ensuring a safe and protective environment, putting an end to child marriages, involving the young advocacy for change, imparting knowledge, changing attitudes, safe abortions etc. The film shows that the FPA India also works in augmenting reproductive choices such as medical termination of pregnancy, access to safe and legal abortions, abortion related counseling, post abortion contraceptive services, male involvement, recognizing the SRH need of men, male OPD service centers, treatment of infertility, counseling and referrals etc. It also has HIV/AIDS programs such as enhancing awareness and reducing incidence of transmission of STI/HIV/AIDS among various migrant groups, mapping and enumeration of sex workers and condom promotion. It has conducted a cross sectional study to survey and generate a Stigma Index under sensitization and community based campaigns. It also works in the areas of knowledge management and capacity building, collating service statistics to track programmatic progression, public-private partnership to strengthen government programs, strengthening quality of services and skills in data collection with the supreme motive of bringing health & happiness to millions.

After the short film, Ms. Sujatha Natarajan, Patron, FPA India spoke briefly on the role of the FPA India. She said that FPA India currently serves through 40 branches spread across country from Kashmir to Kanya kumari and from Rajkot to Nagaland. FPA India provides help and inputs to the state governments in the area of family planning, women empowerment, HIV/AIDS, management of Reproductive Tract Infection (RTI) and management of youth population. She said that FPA India also works in the disaster affected areas. Recently FPA India trained a youth group of Sri Lanka at Chennai who are working with the internally displaced people (IDP) in Sri Lanka. She said that FPA India and IAPPD have been a long standing partner and she thanked Mr. Manmohan Sharma for coordinating this meeting. She also thanked all the

honorable MPs for attending the interface meeting and stressed that FPA India is here to serve as per the wishes of the honorable MPs.

### **Parliamentarians' Perspective**

After Ms. Natarajan's address, the floor was opened for the honorable parliamentarians to share their views. Mr. Ananda Bhaskar Rapolu, honorable MPs from the Rajya Sabha spoke on the issues of widening gap of urban and rural India in service provisioning of maternal and child care. He said that this interaction shall highlight the existent complications of maternal mortality and the death of skilled attendants during the birth time. The grand old India had been pioneering in the safe post-delivery health of mother and the child. In the advanced India, we are facing real complications at par with the other nations across the globe. Why this gap has developed? With the advancement of medical science & technology, India should have been much safer places in ensuring lesser maternal mortality. But, the rural India could not get updated with the necessary medial advancements and ensuring population challenges. Several countries look towards us for the health care. We have wonderful system of health care such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Yunani besides the global allopathy and homeopathy. Naturopathy can lead to safety of child birth. Ayurveda too can lead to natural health of mother and the child. Our National Health Policy is umbrella of all prevalent medicare system. Yoga too becoming important component of modern life. But, as we are moving towards advanced society we are facing the real challenge. Moreover, these modern challenges are also creeping into rural India. Earlier traditional birth attendants are scared to attend to the immediate requisites of child birth. These challenges have to be kept in mind while pursuing our family planning programs. For this, Mr. Rapolu said that he will extend his continued association.

Dr. Prasanna Kumar Patasani, esteemed parliamentarian from the Lok Sabha spoke on the issues of female feticide and the need for women empowerment in our society. He said that it is highly regrettable that in Punjab and Haryana, there is a slogan of give a vote to take a bride. The situation of sex-ratio is such dismal that now Draupadi will be there in every house where one girl will have to marry more than a guy. He also commended the role of IAPPD in raising such population issues from time to time not only in India but also at global level. Saving the female feticide according to him is saving the humanity and therefore he urged fellow parliamentarians to march together in this strive.

Ms. Rajni Patil, honorable MP from Rajya Sabha thanked IAPPD and FPA India to raise the important issue of MD 5A & 5B. She said that these issues are very close to her heart. She also thanked FPA India for such a beautiful mute short film which covered all the issues. She felt that the program implementation related to MDG 5A & 5B should be expedited. She said that she is the Chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) where she has highlighted the issues of MMR, IMR and female feticide. She highlighted the issue of low sex-ratio. She said that Mewat of Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat and even South Delhi has very low sex-ratio. More worrying point is that the poor sex-ratio is more in elite families than the poor and tribal societies. In fact, many tribal societies respect women far better than the elite societies and they have fairly balanced sex-ratio. She conveyed her happiness to associate with the IAPPD & FPA India and said that she is ready to contribute on these issues in any manner, IAPPD wishes her to contribute. She also requested to treat women as a human being and not as a commodity and let here live in a free society.

The issues of poor health care infrastructure and poor health manpower in our country were raised by Honorable MP Dr. (Mrs.) Vijay Laxmi Sadho. She said that because of the poor health care facilities our institutional deliveries suffer and the maternal mortality rate & infant

mortality rate too gets affected because of this. She said that she belong to an area where tribal population dominates. There is dearth of doctors in community health centre. Somewhere there is only one doctor which has to look after the entire patients of hospital. Somewhere not even one doctor is available. Even in medical colleges, most of the seats of super specialty lie vacant. So, she requested her fellow parliamentarians to contemplate on these issues as well. Rural areas particularly suffer a lot. ASHA workers, anganwadi workers have their own limitations. Tribal villages have their own problems as they are sparsely inhabited. She finally said that along with the imbalanced sex-ratio, health care infrastructure together with the poor health manpower should also be taken care of.

Population control to be the core issues behind all the problems in India was highlighted by Shri Shadi Lal Batra, honorable MP from Rajya Sabha. He said that all other aspects such as family planning, maternal and child mortality, gender equality are because of the unabated population growth in India. He said that we must introspect on where we started, where we are today and where we want to reach in the future. He said that when India got freedom, the population of India was 30 crores and the cattle population was 130 crores. Today the situation has just reversed. The gender discrimination is not only in the sex-ratio but also in the food, education, treatment etc. We will have to think why family planning program in India failed in checking the population. We will have to make India specific program, village specific program. We will have to focus all our efforts in rural areas than urban centers as still seventy per cent of the total population lives in the rural areas. He said that it is also true that the health situation has improved during the last few decades. But, at the same time population has also increased nearly four times during the last six decades. So, ultimately we will have to control population as it negates all our development efforts. We should formulate such programs and policies which are practical, which attracts people and which can convince people that small family will only lead to a happy family.

Prof. Pradip Bhattacharya, Honorable MP spoke on extending all his support for these causes. He said that he can even mobilize his fellow parliamentarians on these issues if needed. He too emphasized on the rapid growth of population and its impact on every spheres of our life. He concluded by saying that rural areas still have huge unmet needs which we must cater to.

Ms. Mabel Rebello, former MP and Member, National Minority Commission, Government of India spoke on the issues of family planning for the poor and downtrodden people. These people according to her are unaware and uneducated and tend to produce more children. Rich people have already controlled their population. She said that our religious leaders are also responsible for this. She cited an example from Kerala where the central Kerala is highly dominated by Christian population whereas northern & southern Kerala is inhabited largely by Muslim & Hindu population respectively. Christian religious leaders of Kerala once emphasized the need to increase the population to which educated Christian population retorted back by saying that they can't do it as they are not able to sustain more child properly. So, she said that if people are given little back up they can go against the diktat of the fundamentalists religious leaders. In Jharkhand, she said that there are instances where the naxalites are demanding a child from families which have 3-4 children and the poor families will have to give otherwise the entire family can be annihilated. Such situations are only worsening the population scenario in India. Ms. Rebello also raised the issue of female feticide and said that developed states of India do not have brides. They want to produce children as they want progeny. Now they have also started using tribal girls and women to use them for surrogacy which is very unfortunate. She requested everyone for being aware of all these grand realities.

Mr. A. W. Rabi Bernard, honorable MP emphasized the role of media in family planning program. He said that two thousand years ago Paul wrote to Romans that unless it is proclaimed how will they know, unless they know how they will believe, unless they will believe, how will they follow. Therefore, media will have to play a very vital role as this is a continuous process and lifelong education is needed for it. Our mainstream media however is not playing their role properly as they are largely engaged in either cinema or politics. They have nothing on the social issues. We parliamentarians must demand for a compulsory bulletin on health care, reproductive health, mortality, child care in some interesting capsules which attract people. Government while giving license must provide content stipulations together with financial stipulations. It is there in other countries such as USA, Philippines etc. Media must play its vital role of communications. It should be made mandatory for all media channels to carry the social issues on their channels or newspapers.

Mr. Avinash Rai Khanna, Honorable MP from Rajya Sabha while agreeing on all the issues raised by his fellow parliamentarians emphasized that since the issues are social, it must be tackled socially. He cited several examples from his experiences. He said that in Nawanshahr District (now Shaheed Bhagat Singh district) of Punjab, sex-ratio was very poor. A deputy Commissioner came and took this as a challenge and worked on a mission mode and today Nawanshahr of Punjab has balanced their sex-ratio. Similarly, he cited some more examples to substantiate his arguments. He also emphasized on the need to focus on the remote areas, illiterate people and needy people. He said that our outreach should improve in far and distant areas. He also warned that in the blind copying of the western ideas, we are forgetting to respect women. Our culture has embedded practice to worship and respect women. Lastly, he suggested to have mandatory HIV/AIDS test prior to marriage by all to fight against the dreaded disease.

Ms. Viplove Thakur raised the issue of midwives and their positive role in safe delivery traditionally. She pointed out that our hospital is so much stressed today that institutional deliveries in India too is not able to ensure safe deliveries. Most of the hospitals have very poor infrastructure, high level of infections, 3-4 patients using one bed etc. All this has raised the question of safe institutional deliveries in India. She wanted to know why erstwhile midwives are not promoted. Dr. Vijay Laxmi Sadho replied to the question by saying that today old *dais* and midwives are not promoted as they are told that they are uneducated. Government gives incentives to only those who are eighth passed. These old experienced midwives are much better than educated experienced midwives but there is no government support to use such a valuable resources.

Dr. A. Sampath, Honorable MP from Lok Sabha thanked follow parliamentarians for citing Kerala as role model. He attributed the success of Kerala to its educational achievements and social consciousness of the people. He said that real problem is the low health expenditure. He said that we parliamentarians have many benefits and facilities but the poor, downtrodden people have to rely on the community health centers, primary health centers, district health centers etc. which does not have proper infrastructures, medicals staff, medicines etc. He said that the issue is so important that we parliamentarians should work as a pressure group for the government cutting across political parties. He also discussed about the ICDS Scheme and said that forget about India, even in Kerala ICDS anganwadi' s run in a rented building. However, he hesitated in calling the building as most of them run in a very shabby place as the provisions under ICDS is just 400 rupees. It becomes too difficult to rent a respectable building in that sum. He said that in the prescribed provisions, even a cattle shed cannot be rented. He also discussed about the dominant role played by male in the decision-making for abortions and sterilizations. He said that gender imbalance and other such issues are because of the state of

mind, socio-culture perception, rather than economic well-being. All this can change by education and suggested to continue the education right since school.

Last comments from parliamentarians were given by Mr. Bhupinder Singh who emphasized the role of education in tackling the issues related to MDG 5A & 5B. However, there are ironically problems are also related to the educated masses. He said that there are couples with single girl child. They are doing a favor to the nation. They should be promoted by the govt. by giving some kind of incentives such as a special card with some benefits. The issue has become such a sensitive that parliament doesn't even discuss on it. Shri Gulam Nabi Azad discussed the issue in the parliament after 32 years. He said that it's a national issue as we are adding one Australia every year. We are also for increasing benefits to the Anganwadi workers.

### **Vote of Thanks**

At the end, Ms. Geeta Sethi, Secretary General, FPAI proposed vote of thanks. In her vote of thanks she thanked honorable MPs for their commitment on the issue despite the fact that the parliament session is under progress, so many parliamentarians could find out some time to deliberate on the issue. She said that the experiences and thoughts shared by the parliamentarians were emanating from the ground and therefore they are very important and precious. She also thanked for pointing out several social, political, religious issues and the importance of male involvement in the whole process. She said that this is the first step in the partnership between the parliamentarians & her organization. She also requested the parliamentarians to help increasing the budget outlay in the health sector. Population being such a vital issue, it is hardly debated in the parliament. So, she requested to raise these issues in Parliament on a sustained manner. She also mentioned about the Draft National Health Policy which does not have strong mention of reproductive and child health & family planning. So, she requested to ensure that it gets integrated firmly in the policy document. She also mentioned about the end of MDG year and formulation of new sustainable development goals. She requested the parliamentarians to not only play a vital role in the national policies formulation but also in the regional and global policy formulation as India has remained a pioneer in the family planning process in the world. Finally, she thanked everyone and vowed for a continued relationship in the future.

At the end Mr. Manmohan Sharma also thanked everyone for coming and invited everyone for the dinner.

## Appendix 1

### List of Participants

S.No.	Name	Status
1	Mr.A.W.Rabi Bernard	MP
2	Ms.Mabel Rebello	MP
3	Mrs.Viplove Thakur	MP
4	Shadi Lal Batra	MP
5	Dr.Vijay Laxmi Sadho	MP
6	Ms.Rajni Patil	MP
7	Pradip Bhattacharya	MP
8	Dr.P.K.Patasani, MP	MP
9	Mr.Ananda Bhaskar Rapolu, MP	MP
	Mr.Avinash Rai Khanna, MP	MP
11	Dr.A.Sampath, MP	MP
12	Mr.Bhupinder Singh, MP	MP
13	Mr.H.R.Umesh Aradhya	President, FPA India
14	Ms.Bindiya Nimla	Director-Advocacy and Training, FPA India
15	Ms.Priya Kath	CEC Member, FPA India
16	Mr.Arun J.Deshmukh	FPA India Volunteer
17	Dr.J.S.Yadav	TAC Member, IAPPD
18	Mr.Sreedharan Nair	Director External Relations, FPA India
19	Dr.Abhay Kumar	TAC Member, IAPPD
20	Ms.Sujata Natrajan	Patron, FPA India and Immediate Past President
21	Geeta Sethi	Secretary-General, FPA India
22	Mr.Manmohan Sharma	Executive Secretary, IAPPD
23	Mr.U.S.Bhandari	Prog.Officer, IAPPD