



New Delhi, July 16, 2012

On July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012, hours before the groundbreaking London Family Planning Summit, Members of Parliament in India, civil society groups and senior policy makers were undertaking the very “*paradigm shift*” in family planning (FP) being called for by government leaders at the Summit. Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh (JSK), or the National Population Stabilization Fund, in partnership with the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare (NIHFW) and Citizens’ Alliance for Reproductive Health and Rights organized a series of advocacy events on the occasion of World Population Day. The events came with fundamentally new messages: *The promotion of spacing and delaying marriage and first pregnancy to promote women’s health and development*. Equally momentous and a first was the dialogue between parliamentarians, technical experts, and civil society on what it means to promote FP in India today and especially in the states with the worst health and demographic indicators.

The Health Policy Project (HPP)/India played a catalyst role in bringing these key partners and institutions together for the advocacy events. The events were planned to reach multiple audiences to build awareness and commitment for family planning (FP). HPP worked closely with the organizers to promote linkages and provide technical assistance in developing evidence-based advocacy messages amongst all three HPP partners. The day included three key events: A walkathon and National Conference for Population Action led by JSK, with proactive participation from NIHFW and Citizens’ Alliance; and in the evening a focused group discussion with the Members of Parliament to garner their engagement for FP organized by Citizens’ Alliance in collaboration with JSK.

## Walkathon-Raising Awareness

The day began with a walkathon organized by JSK and was presided over by Dr. Syeda Hameed, Member, Planning Commission, and Shri. Naveen Jindal, Member of Parliament (Convener Citizens’ Alliance), Shri Desiraju, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and Shri. Manoj Jhalani, Executive Director, JSK. Two thousand participants including school children and adolescents gathered at India Gate early in the morning to participate in the walkathon. The key messages given by the dignitaries were to ensure education for all, especially young girls, ensuring health services, information, and the right of couples to plan their families.



From top: Dr. Syeda Hameed, Shri. Naveen Jindal, Dr. Sushma Dureja (JSK) and former athlete Suneeta Godra during the walkathon; Enthusiastic participants during the 4-km run before the walkathon



## National Conference for Population Action: A Paradigm Shift

JSK organized a day-long national conference at Vigyan Bhawan to reposition FP for improved maternal and child health outcomes, and population stabilization. Policy makers, researchers, program managers, medical practitioners, people from the entertainment industry, and media came together to highlight the issue of population and to discuss strategies to ensure the availability of information and services, with a focus on reaching the poor and most vulnerable.

The conference was inaugurated by Ms. Syeda Hameed, Member, Planning Commission and Shri Naveen Jindal, Member of Parliament. Also present were Dr. Francois Daniel Decaillet, World Health Organization, Country Office India, Ms. Frederika Meijer, Representative, UNFPA India, Mr. Manoj Jhalani, the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and Executive Director, JSK. The conference was attended by representatives from different ministries, the Government of India, development partners, civil society representatives, and implementers from the field.

A key highlight from the conference was the action-oriented discussion to make population issues part of other ministries' mandates. There was consensus among senior bureaucrats from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Panchayati Raj, Rural Development, Human Resource Development, and Urban Development that population is a cross-cutting issue and should be a part of policies across all sectors.

“Population issues can easily ride on rural development projects. There is a need to use the Self-Help Group network for increased dissemination of population issues.”

Ms. Nita Kejriwal, Director,  
Ministry of Rural Development





From left: Dignitaries part of the opening panel, Manoj Jhalani, ED, JSK, Dr. Francois Daniel Decaillet, WHO, India Country Office and Dr. Syeda Hameed, Member, Planning Commission; Dr. Syeda Hameed and Ms. Frederika Meijer, UNFPA light the lamp at the inaugural ceremony; Prof. (Dr) JK Das, Director, NIHFV and Nita Kejriwal, Director, Department of Rural Development, Gol at the panel on 'Action for Population Stabilization'

Conference participants discussed strategies to bring reproductive choice to the center of service delivery and increase access to services by engaging the private sector meaningfully and reviewed family planning's contribution to the achievement of national and global commitments. A separate session on the media highlighted the lackluster news coverage on family planning, despite a market saturated with media outlets.

The Executive Director, JSK, concluded the conference by summarizing the key highlights from the day: bringing a renewed focus on family planning, expanding coverage by building partnerships with the private sector and finding solutions to address the operational barriers to their engagement, and streamlining the contraceptive supply chain to ensure availability of methods. He announced that a key strategic shift of JSK will also be to promote spacing and behavior change communication (BCC) for informed choices to reposition family planning in India.



From left: Shri Anoop K Srivastava, Additional Secretary, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Gol spoke about the importance of population as a cross cutting issue in various policies.



# Bringing Politicians to the Centre of the FP Discourse

Citizens' Alliance, in collaboration with JSK, led a high-level policy discussion and dialogue with legislators to build their political commitment to reproductive and child health (RCH) and FP. Eight Members of Parliament from high focus states, the Executive Director (JSK), and a group of civil society representatives participated in the dialogue. The discussions were moderated by Prof. N.K. Sethi, NIHFV and former Advisor Health, Planning Commission. The discussions were framed by a technical presentation: 'Family Planning Access for All,' presented by Dr. Arvind Pandey, Director, National Institute of Medical Statistics, which made evidence central to the process of policy dialogue. The presentation appraised the parliamentarians on the status of RCH in their states, the effect of social issues on an increase in population and the need to reposition FP to reduce infant and maternal mortality.

The Members of Parliament pledged their commitment to a number of policy action areas during this dialogue. The parliamentarians committed to using the District Vigilance Monitoring Committees which they chair to monitor FP service availability and quality of services, engaging health providers in discussions during constituency visits to understand challenges and facilitate quicker resolutions. They also committed to motivate fellow colleagues, to promote discourse in parliament on the FP programme delivery, and bring public attention to the benefits of delaying age of marriage, delaying the first child, spacing between children (at least three years) and having smaller families. Ms. Pooja Bedi, a media celebrity, joined in the discussions and highlighted the need to use the power of celebrities to raise awareness among people. She also committed her support for future events.

The dialogue was the first of its kind to bring politicians at the center of the discourse. It was encouraging to hear Members of Parliament talk about the challenges they faced and their willingness to be associated with the Citizens' Alliance. As next steps, Citizens' Alliance will collaborate with JSK to identify priority districts and carry forward the policy actions committed by the Members of Parliament.

“I have been raising this issue for the past four years, now we need to act and reach out to the districts to address challenges.”

Naveen Jindal, Member of Parliament,  
Convener, Citizens' Alliance

Photographs source: Jansankhya Sthirata Kosh, Citizens' Alliance and HPP



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