



PLAN INDIA SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE

**PLAN FOR EVERY CHILD:
LEAVE NO GIRL BEHIND**

NOVEMBER 1-3, 2017, NEW DELHI



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Madan B. Lokur
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Supreme Court of India



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FOREWORD

Plan India conducted an exciting National Conference in November 2017 with the theme - Plan for Every Child: Leave No Girl Behind. The Conference was a resounding success in that it generated tremendous interest among the participants and this in turn resulted in a large number of positive suggestions being floated and discussed. The summary of the proceedings gives a clear indication that all the participants had taken the Conference very seriously and had given considerable thought to the topics under discussion.

As the theme of the Conference suggests, the focus was on the girl child. All of us need to appreciate that there is a lot to be done by each one of us to ensure that the girl child grows up in a healthy environment where she is assured of all her rights and her dignity is respected. We have had more than enough problems of female foeticide and female infanticide (as the poor sex ratio suggests) and sometimes it feels that if the girl child does manage to grow up, she is quite lucky and blessed. But unfortunately, her problems do not end with mere growing up. A large number of young girls are faced with the unpleasant prospect of becoming a child bride, many young girls are denied formal education and issues of sanitation and hygiene are kept in the background. Overcoming all these problems is, by itself, quite a challenge and it is for this reason that each one of us has to contribute our mite to make life liveable for the girl child.

It is to the credit of Plan India that it has dedicated itself through the year to achieve the objective of ensuring that the rights of the girl child are recognised and respected. In this regard, Plan India has been in contact with a few hundred civil society organisations all over the country. It has engaged them in various initiatives and has sought to make them aware that girls belonging to disadvantaged sections of society are vulnerable and need the support of each one of us individually and the support of society as a whole. The National Conference highlighted the fact that the information gathered by Plan India is not anecdotal, but is based on efforts put in at the grass root level. This has been achieved by Plan India by networking with civil society organisations as mentioned above, and also engaging young individuals. It has drawn these young individuals into what has been described as a debatathon through which issues are debated and discussed and solutions found to challenges faced by children, particularly the girl child.

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-2-

The sustained efforts put in by Plan India have been well documented, and scientifically and empirically studied, analysed and presented to the participants in the National Conference. The result of this stimulating effort is that Plan India has generated a unique method of assessing the vulnerability of the girl child. This has been possible through the release of a Gender Vulnerability Index, which gives a meaningful understanding of gender vulnerability on issues such as safety and protection of the girl child, health and survival challenges faced by a girl child, along with illiteracy and poverty related issues. Based on these factors, a ranking is given to each State. If one may say so, the Gender Vulnerability Index brings out the strengths and weaknesses of each State in respect of the girl child. This enables all of us, and more particularly the State Governments to concentrate on areas that need strengthening so that the girl child is benefited. Of course, the Gender Vulnerability Index will be modified and refined as the months go by, but it is and will remain an extremely important tool in policy and planning for the girl child.

There can be no doubt that Plan India will continue on its path of assisting children in difficult circumstances, on its own and through its vast network of loyal friends and caring companions. On our part as individuals, we must continue to support and promote the efforts of Plan India for the betterment of the children in our country, and be the change.

Madan Lokur
(Madan B. Lokur)

CONTENTS

Acronyms	vi
Youth Charter	viii
Executive Summary	ix
Introduction	1
Background of the National Conference	1
Themes of the Discussions	2
DAY 1: NOVEMBER 1, 2017	3
Plenary Session 1	4
Inaugural Session	4
Parallel Session 1: Solution towards Inclusion, Access and Opportunities for Girls	9
Theme 1: Girls in Disturbed Areas	9
Theme 2: Girls in Care and Protection Homes	14
Parallel Session 2: Solution towards Inclusion, Access and Opportunities for Girls	17
Theme 3: Girls in Natural Disasters and Climate Change	17
Theme 4: Girls and Human Trafficking	20
Plenary Session 2: Thematic Recommendation and Launch of Gender Vulnerability Index	24
DAY 2: NOVEMBER 2, 2017	29
Youth Debatathons	31
Parallel Session 3: Solution towards Inclusion, Access and Opportunities for Girls	33
Theme 5: Street-connected Girls	33
Theme 6: Girls in Forced Labour	36
Plenary Session 3: Emerging Challenges and Shared Learning	38
DAY 3: NOVEMBER 3, 2017	43
Plenary Session 4: Driving the Change: Towards Inclusion and Gender Transformation	44
Plenary Session 5: Valedictory Session and the Road Ahead	48
Conclusion	49
Annexure 1: Report of Youth Debatathons	51
Region-wise Prioritised Issues and Recommendations by the Youth	54
Way Forward	57

ACRONYMS

ACHR	Asian Centre for Human Rights
ART	Antiretroviral Therapy
CEOP	Child Exploitation and Online Protection
CHETNA	Childhood Enhancement Through Training and Action
CIDC	Children in Difficult Circumstances
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CWC	Child Welfare Committee
FIR	First Information Report
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GVI	Gender Vulnerability Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IDU	Injecting Drug Users
ICPS	Integrated Child Protection Scheme
IPC	Indian Penal Code
ISE	Impulse Social Enterprises Private Limited
ITPA	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
J&K	Jammu and Kashmir
JJ ACT	Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015
JJB	Juvenile Justice Board
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
LIFE	Living in Family Environment
LWE	Left Wing Extremism
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MGNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MSM	Men having Sex with Men
NACO	National AIDS Control Organisation
NFCH	National Foundation for Communal Harmony
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NCPCR	National Commission for Protection of Child Rights
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau
NCW	National Commission for Women
NEET	National Eligibility cum Entrance Test

NEN	North East Network
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NITI Aayog	The National Institution for Transforming India Aayog
NRLM	National Rural Livelihood Mission
NULM	National Urban Livelihood Mission
POCSO	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) 2012
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RTE	Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009
SACG	South Asia Coordinating Group on Action against Violence against Children
SAIEVAC	South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SMC	School Management Committee
SPYM	Society for Promotion of Youth and Masses
STOP	Stop Trafficking and Oppression of Children and Women)
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes

2017 NATIONAL YOUTH DECLARATION AND CALL FOR ACTION

We, the young people of India comprise 27.5% of the total population as per 2011 census. The National Youth Policy, 2014, acknowledges the importance of youth and envisions active youth participation in civic, social and political development of the country. As responsible citizens and future leaders, we are determined and advantageously poised to contribute to the growth of the nation. We will pursue this through active engagement and involvement in decisions that affect our lives and those of our families and communities.

Underpinning the Plan For Every Child Initiative led by Plan India, a series of regional and national level youth debatathons took place from October to November 2017, bringing forth the collective voices of 181 youth from five regions on solutions towards issues faced by young people and children, and especially girls in vulnerable and marginalised situations.

We, the young people, through our collective experience, appeal to all to ensure the protection of every child, especially girls in difficult circumstances, from any form of discrimination and deprivation, so that all children can realise their rights and entitlements and fulfil their potential.

To ensure that no girl is left behind, we urge you, the Government of India, and other stakeholders, to make every effort and undertake all measures to secure quality education for all girls; their optimal health and development; protection from all forms of violence including harmful traditional practices; and complete inclusion in decision making and other participatory processes. More specifically, we appeal to you to:

- 1 Ensure access to quality education and review educational curricula to eliminate gender bias and promote gender equality, also by strengthening gender ratios among teachers;
- 2 Combat dropout of girls at high school levels by increasing residential education and free transport facilities;
- 3 Improve facilities available in schools and colleges to address the needs of girl children, and emphasise on improving knowledge and practices related to menstrual hygiene and sexual reproductive health;
- 4 Eradicate gender stereotypes and prevent and eliminate gender-based violence and exploitation in all settings, including the home, place of education, community, workplace, etc.;
- 5 Create safe spaces at all levels (families, communities, institutions, public forums and government) for young people to express their views and opinions and constructively engage in decision making, including via digital platforms;
- 6 Invest in skill building and economic empowerment of girls and young women and provide diversified vocational choices which are gender equitable and transformative;
- 7 Improve gender-ratios in the workforce by providing opportunities to young women and also building conducive work environments to protect and uphold their rights, especially with respect to equal wages, opportunities and sexual harassment at the workplace;
- 8 Promote sports and cultural activities as a tool to engage with girls on different issues, also providing them with opportunities to represent themselves at various platforms;
- 9 Make special provisions for effective inclusion of and equal opportunities for most marginalised girls and young women, including those most vulnerable and excluded such as those living with disabilities, in extreme poverty, etc.; and
- 10 Enforce laws and sensitisation of law enforcement agencies towards the rights of children and young women, with strict provisions for non-compliance.



We, the young people of India, are resourceful and wholeheartedly committed to making meaningful contributions to resolve the problems affecting our lives and society at large. With your help, support and investment, we are determined to create an India that is fit for young people, and a society that nurtures respect for every citizen, celebrates diversity and promotes equality.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As stated by the United Nations, “*Without progress for girls, there can be no real progress on our global commitments to justice and prosperity.*” With the vision of leaving no one behind, the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development has gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at its core. By carrying forward this ideal, the Plan India organised the Second National Conference on the theme ‘Plan for Every Child: Leave No Girl Behind’ from November 1-3, 2017 in New Delhi. It is imperative to know the precise challenges and vulnerabilities faced by girls across the country to find solutions and work towards improving their situation.

The ‘Plan for Every Child’ initiative focuses on reaching out to every child still denied his/her rights to basic needs, education, dignity, protection and freedom. The idea of putting the last child first is critical as it brings into focus children who have not been able to access their rights till now. For the social and economic progress of the country, both boys and girls need to be at the forefront of our strategic development agenda. It is the responsibility of the government, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), media and all concerned stakeholders and citizens to ensure the well-being of every child in the country as a rights entitled citizen. The Second National Conference on ‘Plan for Every Child: Leave No Girl Behind’ was a result of this larger dream, achieved through regional and state-level efforts.

Gender-based discrimination is one of the biggest challenges for a girl to learn, lead, decide and thrive in our country. There are various efforts put forward by the government via different legislations and development schemes in addressing these issues and creating a safety net for vulnerable children and, particularly, for girls. The theme ‘Plan for Every Child: Leave No Girl Behind’ provided a platform to recommend initiatives empowering young and adolescent girls through strategies, intervention and partnerships delivering

gender transformation at the ground level. The conference aimed to cover all aspects inherently linked with the lives of girls in India. It hosted thematic sessions where speakers from diverse backgrounds shared their knowledge and understanding on specific topics and put forward suggestions to usher change in society based on their experiences. Specific conference themes discussed issues and viable solutions relating to girls in disturbed areas, care and protection homes, climate change and disasters, trafficking, forced labour as well as those of street-connected girls.

The conference witnessed active youth participation which led to a ‘Youth Charter’ to invoke the responsibility of all stakeholders towards the nation’s children and youth and marked the second day with passionate debates, expressing powerful thoughts. The Youth Charter was a culmination of efforts highlighting the need for addressing gender vulnerability, child development and youth empowerment.

Plan India formulated the first-ever Gender Vulnerability Index (GVI), which was released during the conference by Hon’ble Justice Madan B Lokur of the Supreme Court of India. The GVI is a composite index based on the four dimensions of safety and protection, health and survival challenges, literacy and poverty, ranking states on each of these dimensions and on gender vulnerability.

Conference speakers said it was essential to strengthen research and evaluation systems vis-à-vis gender issues, especially focusing on the concerns of girls via their viewpoint. The importance of education and the use of innovative educational means were highlighted while discussing different topics. The need for a multi-sectoral approach was deliberated in achieving the goals of ensuring the rights of every child. It was deemed essential to engage with boys and men in achieving the objectives of inclusion and gender transformation.



▶ Shabana Azmi, Chief Guest at the National Conference

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the Government of India has made several efforts through its policies, laws and programmes to ensure its commitment towards the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on Children's Rights). These endeavours focused particularly on girls since millions of girls are still prevented from exercising their rights due to various social, cultural and economic drawbacks. The stranglehold of patriarchy in India results in various forms of exclusion and marginalisation, discrimination against girls and their deprivation from availing basic rights such as education, livelihood, freedom and security. Gender-based discrimination and violence, as well as gender inequality, are omnipresent in every sphere of society.

Since challenges remain in ensuring the inclusion of all in the development agenda, Plan India believes in making the needle move for positive change via multi-dimensional, concerted and coordinated efforts.

As part of their latest national and global strategies respectively, Plan India and Plan International put forth a strong commitment to supporting the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals through children's rights, particularly through equality for girls. Gender equality and social inclusion are cross-cutting themes across all our work.

Plan India recognises that girls, especially those from marginalised communities, face multiple disadvantages due to their vulnerable situation as well as gender. The organisation has consistently partnered with the Government of India, CSOs, United Nations agencies, grassroots communities, as well as youth and child networks, in highlighting the issues of children and driving positive change at all levels.

The 'Plan for Every Child: Leave No Girl Behind' initiative aims at ensuring the well-

being of every child, male or female.

The approach aims at ensuring the rights of all children by 'putting the last child first'. It strives to include every child, including girls and those living in difficult situations, in securing the benefits of programmes and policies aimed at improving the lives of their families and communities by placing children at the centre of community development. It focuses on solutions for improving the inclusion, access and opportunities for girls, with specific focus on the key vulnerable group with the understanding that the issues surrounding them are inter-related and cannot be seen in isolation, while also acknowledging that emphasis on solutions specific to each category of vulnerability are imperative.

To reaffirm their conviction, Plan India also implemented the **Because I am a Girl and 10 Million Reasons campaign in India**. The two campaigns are global movements dedicated to girls' education and to transforming power relations so that girls everywhere can fulfil their potential to **learn, lead, decide and thrive**.

BACKGROUND OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Plan India's First National Conference was held from November 23-25, 2016. Carrying forward the lessons of the previous annual conference, Plan India organised the Second National Conference from November 1-3, 2017 in New Delhi. The National Conference became a point of confluence for government officials, CSOs, media and other stakeholders committed to working with children and raising concerns about issues affecting them.

'Youth Debatathons' were a key feature of the Second National Conference and national-level debatathons were held on November 2, 2017.

It is worth noting that preparations for the final rounds of debatathons at the national level were held across the country in the previous months. Around 200 youths participated in the state rounds in the five regions of Maharashtra, Bihar, Northeast States, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir to debate issues that make youths vulnerable across these regions.

THEMES OF THE DISCUSSIONS

- ▶ Girls in Disturbed Areas
- ▶ Girls in Care and Protection Homes
- ▶ Girls in Natural Disasters and Climate Change
- ▶ Girls and Trafficking
- ▶ Street-Connected Girls
- ▶ Girls in Forced Labour



▶ A session on thematic recommendations underway at the conference



KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- The inaugural session set the conference's context where speakers discussed the issues of girls and suggested solutions to improve their conditions across the country.
- Plan India's Country Strategic Plan IV: 10 Million Reasons was released in this session.
- There were discussions on four specific themes: girls in disturbed areas, care and protection homes, climate change and disasters, street-connected girls.
- Speakers deliberated the issues and challenges faced by girls in the above themes and attempted finding viable solutions.
- The Gender Vulnerability Index was launched by Hon'ble Justice Madan B Lokur of the Supreme Court of India.

PLENARY SESSION 1:

INAUGURAL SESSION

This session marked the formal inauguration of the conference and set the context for the next three days. Speakers shared the aim and objectives of the conference and shed light on last year's annual conference.

Smita Bharti, the conference moderator, formally welcomed all guests and participants to Plan India's Second National Conference in partnership with the Ministry of Women and Children Development to strengthen its initiative 'Plan for Every Child'. This year's conference theme was 'Leave No Girl-Child Behind', where the focus was on issues and vulnerabilities of girls in India. The conference was solution-oriented with active youth participation, a debatathon on the second day and a Youth Charter on the final day invoking the responsibility and accountability of all stakeholders towards the country's youth and children.

Bhagyashri Dengle, Executive Director, Plan India, delivered the welcome address. She spoke about the endeavours of Plan India on reaching out to every child living in difficult circumstances and exploring solutions to transform their lives. She also shared the objective of the First National Conference held in November 2016, which was the culmination of extensive efforts of Plan India and its partners to address the issues affecting children, especially in vulnerable situations. The major outcome of the 2016 conference was the 'India Declaration', which focused on girls. Carrying forward the recommendations made during the First National Conference to build evidence specifically on children in vulnerable situations, Plan India developed a 'Gender Vulnerability Index' which analyses the situation of girls and women in different states of the country by considering the four dimensions of protection, poverty, education and health. While speaking about the Second National Conference on 'Plan for Every Child: Leave No Girl Behind', the Executive Director



► Rathi Vinay Jha giving the inaugural address on Day 1

of Plan India reiterated the conference was focused on finding solutions for ensuring inclusion as well as providing access and opportunities for girls.

Rathi Vinay Jha, Chairperson, Plan India Governing Board, spoke about the 'Gender Vulnerability Index' and the need for children to realise their rights. She acknowledged that government policies have the biggest role to play in protecting child rights and quoted Amartya Sen, "*Gender inequality is among social disparity that keeps a large number of people on the margin of a new India.*" She also highlighted the issue of violence against girls and women, which they face in almost every area – whether in the community, institution of study or work. In this context, she made some suggestions:

- CSOs need to operate in a collaborative manner in addressing gender inequality.
- Strengthening the youth network at the national level is important for providing opportunities and a platform for addressing most difficult issues such as substance abuse, homelessness, trafficking, etc.
- It is important to ground our interventions in co-related, relevant evidence.
- It's essential to strengthen the research and evaluation system vis-à-vis gender inequality.
- There is a need to sensitise stakeholders to respect girls and women right from childhood.

Ms. Jha praised Plan India for introducing the GVI and believed that success should not be measured by any individual story but by the progress of leaving no child behind.



Message from Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen, CEO, Plan International

In a video message, Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen welcomed conference participants. She shared the outcomes of last year's conference where more than 500 people, including CSOs and government officials, media professionals and other relevant stakeholders, came together to draft the 2016 India Declaration and pledged to uphold child rights. Emphasising the empowerment of girls and women through the realisation of their rights, she stressed it was time to reassert the rights of girls from marginalised and vulnerable sections across India. Together, we could all change the world for girls and women.



GLOBAL PARTICIPATION OF PLAN INTERNATIONAL – 10 MILLION REASONS

Tessie San Martin, President and CEO, Plan International USA, shared the global perspective of Plan International. She spoke about addressing the importance of children in society and how the development of a society depends on the development of its children. No society, community or country can progress if its children are left behind and the path to ensure no child is left behind begins by ensuring no girls are left behind. She highlighted the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) agenda and spoke about 100 Million Reasons, the 5-year campaign by Plan International seeking to reach out to 100 million girls.

She also raised the issue of child poverty in the USA and mentioned there are more than three million poor children in the country. She stressed the opportunity to progress for children was under threat even in some of the richest nations such as the USA, though this can be overcome by giving children a strong voice. Therefore, it is important for everyone to participate in empowering girls and children and 100 Million Reasons is the path to social transformation that begins with each one of us.

Government Perspective and Role: Aastha Saxena Khatwani, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India



► Aastha Saxena giving the keynote address during the inaugural session

Aastha Saxena addressed the audience asserting, “*Childhood symbolises not only innocence and happiness normally associated with it... It contains the forecast of society, the future that we hold.*” She said children are equally important citizens of any nation and it is their right to gain their share of attention from the government along with love and care from society. The level of dignity and well-being enjoyed by children being representative of a country's well-being, it has been seen that girls are often left out of development programmes.

She spoke about various efforts of the government through different legislations and development schemes to address these issues by creating a safety net for vulnerable children. The government has implemented some comprehensive laws such as the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015 and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 to protect children from sexual abuse. Further more, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 and Child Labour Act Amendment, 2016 have all been landmark achievements in child welfare policy and planning.

Besides, there have been focused intervention programmes such as ‘*Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao.*’ Thanks to the consistent efforts and joint interventions of the government

and civil society, the percentage of child marriages have fallen from 47.4% during NHFS-3 to 26.8% in NHFS-4. She stressed the importance of engaging children while discussing child welfare issues and not limiting these discussions to adults.

Ram Gopal Agarwal, NITI Aayog

Ram Gopal Agarwal spoke about the role of women and girls in the nation's economic development. He highlighted Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision, '*Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas*' and how the participation of every youth is necessary to sustain the development process. He stressed the need to focus on the role and positive impact of education and human resource development in the nation's overall sustainable development process. Women and girls cannot be marginalised and excluded, else it will hinder the nation's development process. He highlighted the role of NGOs and individuals in changing people's mindset in empowering girls and advocated a determined programme for the coming decades to accelerate India's development.



► Ram Gopal Agarwal speaking during the first plenary session

Looking forward to the outcome of the conference, he hoped the conclusion would involve NITI Aayog's key development

programmes and that issues of girls would become pivotal to India's economic development programmes.

Elisa Paloschi, President, Eyesfull Inc and Director of 'Driving with Selvie'

Elisa Paloschi spoke about her film 'Driving with Selvie' and the campaign she launched with Selvie to reach out to young girls and women. A short video clip of the film was played for the audience, giving the man idea about the movie that spoke about Selvie's journey from defying a violent marriage to becoming the first female taxi driver in Karnataka. The film has been telecast in five countries, screened at more than 100 International Film Festivals worldwide and dubbed in multiple languages, including Arabic, Swahili, Spanish and Bengali.

She opined that everyone has the opportunity to bring about change in society in their own ways, something she does through films. Documentaries and films on social issues possess the power to generate social change and, thereby, can be used as an important tool in moulding the attitude of people and how they perceive the world outside their own lives.

She shared her experience of the campaign, '*Get on the Bus: Selvie Bus Tour*', which she began with Selvie. In the 20-day screening journey, her team drove through different villages, cities and communities, including the slums of Delhi and remote villages of Uttar Pradesh. They held interactive sessions with audiences, some of whom could relate to the movie and shared dreams about their future. She sought audience support in taking the movie to more young girls and boys so they could be motivated by Selvie and envision themselves in the driver's seat of their lives.



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Shabana Azmi, Celebrated Actress and Social Activist

Shabana Azmi congratulated Plan India and the Ministry of Women and Child Development for conducting the three-day conference with diverse stakeholders. She noted that India has 17.8% of the global population while children comprise almost 40% of the nation's total numbers. She emphasised that India also has the highest proportion of the world's children at 19%. She asserted that as the world moves ahead with the agenda of achieving the SDGs by 2030, it was imperative for India to achieve the goals it has set for its children otherwise, the achievement of global SDGs would be impacted. Accordingly, children, especially those in difficult circumstances and girls, should be at the centre of the nation's development agenda. She shed light on the issues of children living in difficult circumstances who face various forms of marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination, resulting in deprivation of basic needs such as food, shelter, education, medical care, protection and security. Discrimination and disparities faced by girls and women at each stage of their life aggravates their difficulties. If the inequities of childhood and adolescence are left unaddressed, she warned these would fuel intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

Ms. Azmi recognised the efforts made by the Government of India over the years through its policies, laws and programmes to ensure children's rights for their survival, development, protection and participation. She flagged the stranglehold of patriarchy as the key factor marginalising children and discriminating between a boy and girl even before the child is born. Gender-based discrimination and inequality between the sexes are omnipresent in every field and it



► Shabana Azmi addressing the audience on Day 1

is necessary to change people's mindsets in transforming the situation. She mentioned there has not been much change in the situation of girls in the slums of Mumbai or a remote Uttar Pradesh village in the past 20 years. The bitter truth is incidents of foeticide and infanticide are still happening in the country.

To transform this scenario, she recommended a change in the mindsets of people who consider girls inferior to boys. Both boys and girls should receive the same upbringing from childhood without discrimination. The only element hindering girls from soaring high to success is the lack of opportunities. For this, education of girls is vital to grab good opportunities. But the quality of education needs to be scrutinised and gender-biased content in the curriculum must be revised. Ms. Azmi ended by reciting a beautiful poem on women's empowerment written by her father, Kaifi Azmi.

OPEN FORUM

An audience member enquired about the safety and security of girls and children hindering them from pursuing opportunities. Aastha Saxena answered that initiatives were being taken to ensure their security and safety. For instance, information about CHILDLINE and its toll-free number 1098 has been printed at the back of school textbooks. This can ensure children are more confident while offenders stay warned that children are aware of the emergency helpline service.

The next question elicited the panelists' view about one change happening slowly but that could possibly help in ending child marriages. Shabana Azmi responded that the assumption about only 'one change' ending child marriage is wrong as the stranglehold of patriarchy needs an all-out effort to transform the situation. Rathin Vinay Jha added that the concept of patriarchy was not going away in the near future in India. As a result, by accepting ground realities, it is important to talk about the 'Right to Property' for girls as well. She requested the Ministry of Women and Child Development to pursue this matter with all state governments.

Release of Plan India's Country Strategic Plan IV: 10 MILLION REASONS

Gender equality is the passport to a just and fair society and Plan India has supported this by reaching out to 1.5 million girls and via the creation of the first-ever 'Gender Vulnerability Index'. Attending dignitaries were invited to inaugurate the book '10 Million Reasons: India Country Strategy Plan IV, 2016-2020', which is an embodiment of these goals.



► Pradeep Narayanan, Director - Programme Strategy and Policy, Plan India; Bhagyashri Dengle, Executive Director, Plan India; Stuti Narain Kacker, Chairperson, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights; Justice Madan B Lokur, Supreme Court of India and Ranjan Chak, Board Member, Plan India releasing the Gender Vulnerability Index at the Conference

PARALLEL SESSION 1: SOLUTION TOWARDS INCLUSION, ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS

THEME 1: GIRLS IN DISTURBED AREAS

CHAIR

Ramya Subrahmanian,
Executive Director,
Know Violence in Childhood

PANELLISTS

- ▶ Upasana Mahanta, Director, Centre for Women and Law, Jindal Global University
- ▶ Rouf M Mallik, Director, Koshish, Srinagar
- ▶ Roshmi Goswami, Founder, North East Network
- ▶ Seema Kakran, Deputy Director, Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace
- ▶ Emarine Kharibhieh, Programme Officer, Impulse NGO Network

The session deliberated on the situation and issues of girls in disturbed areas. Several studies indicate a correlation between Violence Against Women (VAW) and conflict. Situations of external violence, crisis and instability lead to various distinct forms of gender-based discrimination and violence against women and young girls, including stringent curbs on their already-limited freedom as well as sexual violence by all sides. The legal provisions for children along with the role of CSOs and the media in assisting children and women, especially young girls, in disturbed areas were analysed in this session.



▶ Session on girls in disturbed areas underway on Day 1

Ramya Subramaniam, Chair of the Session, explained the context of ‘disturbed areas’ as those marked by structural violence or conflict. She revealed that there was not much empirical data about conflict consequences on girls in disturbed areas and whatever information is available, comes from the media; but reports based on the situation are sometimes delayed. She stated girls are vulnerable to all forms of violence in their daily lives and conflict enhances this vulnerability wherein their rights are further suspended and the situation exacerbated. Conflict affects patriarchy by perpetuating different structures of gender inequality and biases. Gender inequality is a predictor of structural violence and it is not surprising to find disturbed areas have situations where gender inequality is already rampant. She emphasised probing into vulnerabilities from a justice perspective and focusing on issues around the legal framework which are required in protecting girls and women in such situations. Ms. Subramaniam requested panelists to share their experiences of working in areas of conflict and asked them to focus on solutions for existing issues.

Upasana Mahanta discussed the existing legal framework for children in disturbed areas, their strengths and weaknesses and focused on the way forward through recommendations. Her presentation was based on a larger study on the situation of children in disturbed areas of Jammu and Kashmir, North-eastern states and the Naxalite-affected areas. She highlighted estimates that more than one billion children (accounting for one-sixth of the global population) are living in conflict-prone regions globally.

Ms. Mahanta spoke about the direct and indirect impact of conflict on children, e.g., mortality, long-term physiological and psychiatric impacts and the indirect burden due to barriers/breakdowns in terms of provision of services such as health, nutritional, educational and child protection services. Discussing current frameworks, she mentioned there are 10 National Policies and Guidelines, 19 union laws guaranteeing rights and entitlement to children and 19 schemes for their well-being.

She elaborated on the Normative Policies on Child Protection and Child Development in Disturbed Areas which includes the National Policy for Children (2013), National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), framework for Protection of Children’s Rights in Areas of Civil Unrest (2010) and NCPCR Protocols for Police and Armed Forces with Children in Areas of Civil Unrest. The NCPCR framework categorises children in disturbed areas into six categories:

- Forced Migrants – Children in Camps.
- Forced Migrants – Children in Flight.
- Children associated with Non-state Armed Groups.
- Forced Migrants – Children in Neighbouring Districts or States.
- Children who are not displaced.
- Children as Special Police Officers (SPOs).

She discussed the merits and demerits of existing schemes pertaining to the provision of direct assistance to children in disturbed areas:

- Project Assist (National Foundation for Communal Harmony [NFCH] – Ministry of Home Affairs).
- Project Aashwas (Assam Police and NFCH).
- State Rehabilitation Council Scholarship Scheme for Orphans in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Central Scheme for Assistance to Civilian Victims/Family of Victims of Terrorist, Communal and Naxal Violence, 2010 (Ministry of Home Affairs). [Now known as Central Scheme for Assistance to Victims of Terrorist, Communal and LWE Violence and Cross-Border Firing and Mine/IED Blasts on Indian Territory.]

She highlighted the following challenges and recommendations for these state-led schemes:

- Increasing coverage of schemes.
- Maximising inclusion of beneficiaries and minimising exclusion.
- Enhancing the scope of schemes, going beyond educational support to include

healthcare, nutrition, psychosocial and other forms of social welfare support.

- Must also include development guidelines for children residing in IDP camps.
- No mechanisms to support children injured/disabled due to violence/conflict.

She concluded by emphasising the significant role of civil society partners in promoting these frameworks, overseeing their implementation, beneficiary identification and selection, monitoring and evaluation of schemes and overcoming procedural and bureaucratic lacunae under which these frameworks operate.

Rouf Malik dwelt upon the existing situation of legal provisions and its jurisdiction in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in the face of conflict for the past few decades. The speech was based on experiences through his organisation '*Koshish*', operating in J&K. He highlighted that Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act was implemented in J&K only in 2013 while POCSO was yet to be implemented. He emphasised that presently, there were no child welfare committees, Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) and observation homes for girls in J&K despite the presence of these provisions.

He explained how J&K has its own Constitution but there are many issues regarding jurisdiction of laws, agencies and institutions between the governments at the state and the Centre. In explaining the existence of structural and institutional shortcomings and challenges in J&K, he cited the example of how birth certificates are issued by the Police Department, which should be under the Revenue Department or the Gram Panchayat, he suggested.

There was a sharp decline in J&K's Child Sex Ratio from 941 in 2001 to 862 in 2011, which is of serious concern in a state that never had any bias for boys. More than 80% girls and women in the Valley suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). On the positive side, there are provisions favouring females in the state such as reservation of certain seats for girls in medical colleges

(which ceased after the implementation of NEET 2017) and reservation and relaxation of legal fees and taxes for properties of women in the state under the Land Acquisition Act, encouraging transfer of properties to females. He advocated the implementation of laws and judicial provisions for children in J&K. Finally, he added that scholarships and provisions under the welfare schemes in the state from the centre should not be curbed or decreased.

Roshmi Goswami deliberated on the impact of the geopolitical situation, precisely the protracted nature of conflict and the peace process in North-eastern states on girls and women of the region. From her field experience in the region and as the founder of 'The North East Network' (NEN), she stated that nothing much has changed over the last 25 years. Girls are most vulnerable in a conflict region. The unfortunate element lies in the country not recognising the existence of armed conflict and terming it as an internal law-and-order problem. There has been an inclusion of the definition of conflict on the Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Discussing the politics of conflict, she explained there is not much difference between a protracted conflict and protracted peace situation, although a protracted peace situation allows greater legitimacy for certain actions. Protracted conflict since 1958-60 had led to heightened militarisation of different forms in every domain in the region. There are gains for vested interests from a conflict because of which conflict remains protracted in the region. A shadow economy is functioning in this protracted conflict situation, which needs to be addressed to end its impact on girls. In addition, she revealed that if either of the parents are dubbed a militant or terrorist, girls receive no state support.

There are new types of inter-ethnic and inter-communal conflicts arising in the region. Assam has the highest number of Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps in the country. NEN's study findings on vulnerabilities of girls in such camps showed

lack of sexual and reproductive healthcare, lack of security and the threat of sexual violence, including rape. Also, there are more frequent incidents of early marriage of girls in IDP camps as a form of protection. Another serious issue in the north-eastern states is trafficking of girls.

[Seema Kakran](#) discussed the importance of education of young girls in disturbed areas and shared her field experience of working in J&K. She highlighted links between education and opportunity as well as social mobility of marginalised groups. She said recent statistics show an improvement in literacy rate over the decade from 56% to 69% in J&K. But a big rural-urban gap of 13% still exists in the literacy rate. She emphasised that girls lagged behind boys in all three regions of J&K and across all social groups. She discussed some existing barriers in the education of girls in disturbed areas. In the early years of conflict in Kashmir, schools were targeted by militants since these were used as bases in remote regions by paramilitary forces.

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme has led to infrastructural development and hiring of school staff. However, statistics from the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2016) showed that access to a primary school in one kilometre radius for a young child reduced to 89% from 92% along with a reduction in the accessibility of secondary and higher secondary schools. There is also a rising general perception of girls being a burden in the state, which was not there earlier and can be attributed to the ongoing conflict where women and girls are not safe. There are limited opportunities for a young girl in a society where gender-based discrimination is high. She felt girls are the first target since they are supposedly repositories of family and community honour. Besides the family, young girls are targeted at every level in society to make societies conform to a particular identity. She also highlighted the condition of young girls in the refugee camps of Kashmiri Pandits. She said there would not be much change without changing mindsets so it is equally important

to work with young boys and address their issues of masculinity.

[Emarine Kharbhih](#), representing 'Impulse', an NGO working against human trafficking in the North-eastern states, discussed regional problems that foster human trafficking. These include poverty in rural communities, lack of employment opportunities and quality education, gender-based violence, armed conflicts and oppressive social structures, which force mass migration from the Northeast to commercial hubs across India and the porous borders of Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Besides, the Northeast being located in Zone V (Very severe intensity zone) in terms of natural calamities – the annual floods of Assam and frequent earthquakes also push people into trafficking.

Ms. Kharbhih discussed the Impulse Model against Human Trafficking where there are '6Rs' and '6Ps': Reporting, Rescue, Repatriation, Reintegration, Re-compensation and Rehabilitation as well as Partnership, Prevention, Protection, Policing, Press and Prosecution. Impulse believes a partnership with all levels of stakeholders is important in achieving its main objectives. One of the components of the model – Prevention – was discussed in detail.

Impulse has set up a company, [Impulse Social Enterprises Private Limited \(ISE\)](#), for providing employment opportunities to trafficked girls and women as well as for other rural girls and women to prevent human trafficking. ISE provides training and capacity building for local artisans to produce quality products. Since the company explores new markets for its products, ISE has become a source of sustainable income and financial independence for women across the eight north-eastern states. ISE has provided livelihood for more than 7,000 women to date. Impulse has a network of another 30,000 artisans to scale impact. It has also launched a partnership with North-East Taxi for the 'Empower Taxis against Trafficking' programme, where taxis help in curbing trafficking.

OPEN FORUM

The first question raised was about the safety of drivers of North-East Taxi in association with Impulse and if they were trained in any way to deal with powerful human traffickers themselves. Ms. Kharbhih mentioned that they had sensitised drivers but a deeper orientation was required since the entire initiative was new.

An audience member commented about the importance of maintaining a positive outlook as many things have changed for the better in recent years. The Chair replied that it would be naive not to consider issues that still need to be addressed knowing the harsh realities still persisting before girls in disturbed areas. Comments from the audience augmented the discussion on the importance of community-level child protection mechanisms.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The legal provisions for dealing with children in disturbed areas are limited with a serious gap in implementation. The conflict has a direct impact on the education of girls in these areas with a sharp decrease in the enrolment ratio and literacy rate. Furthermore, there has been an ever-increasing control on young girls and women by curbing their existing limited freedom.

THEME 2: GIRLS IN CARE AND PROTECTION HOMES

CHAIR

Amodh Kanth, General Secretary – Prayas JAC Society;
Former DGP and Chairperson,
Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights

PANELLISTS

- ▶ Bharti Sharma, Child Protection Expert
- ▶ Neha Dixit, Independent Journalist and Author
- ▶ Leena Prasad, Senior Consultant – Advocacy, Udayan Care
- ▶ Ranveer Phukan, M&E Officer, Society for Promotion of Youth and Masses
- ▶ Anant Asthana, Senior Lawyer
- ▶ Tushar Anchal, National Advisor – Child Protection, Plan India

The session deliberated on the status of children, especially girls staying in shelter homes. Children in need of care and protection and those in conflict with the law are housed in homes run by the Central and state governments and NGOs. The Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act of 1986 was amended in 2015 and came into force in January 2016. A report prepared by Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) found cases of systematic and often-repeated sexual assault on children in juvenile justice homes. The reports state that out of the total 39 cases, 11 were reported from government-run juvenile justice homes. Therefore, the session sought to focus on solutions addressing the issues of girls in these homes.



▶ *Panellists discussing girls in care and protection homes*

Trafficking of young girls is another serious concern in disturbed areas.

The Chair, [Amodh Kanth](#), explained the meaning of juvenile as someone who commits an offence and has not completed 18 years of age with reference to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. The Act takes into consideration all types of children who can be broadly categorised as those in need of care and protection, children committing crimes, missing children, CIDC, working children, children who are exploited or abused, etc. Amodh explained the four types of homes: juvenile homes, observatory homes, shelter homes and children's homes. He shared his experience of working with Prayas and quoted the words: "*Home is the first resort for children while an institution is the last.*"

[Bharti Sharma](#) flagged the issue of standard of care and protection in shelter homes. She raised concerns on violation of rules and standards as well as abuse faced by girls in institutions/homes. Girls face tremendous psychological and mental trauma in these homes, signifying the need to pay attention to mental health. She drew attention to the issues of sexual abuse and harassment faced by girls when taken for medical examination before being admitted in shelter homes.

She also spoke about caregivers in these homes who play a significant role in maintaining stability in the lives of girls inside homes. As a result, it is equally important to address the issue of burnout of caregivers. Capacity building of caregivers at shelter institutions is also neglected in the country.

In her closing remarks, she opined that although lessons and courses on stitching, handicrafts, etc. are provided at these homes, however, they neglect soft skills development programmes for girls, which are also necessary.

[Neha Dixit](#) stated that girls at shelter homes are not treated as individuals. She mentioned Phulari Niketan, Karnal, where girls in the shelter home were beaten and brutally abused, leading to several escape attempts

by girls. Another problem in these homes is that they are forced to accommodate a larger number of girls than the capacity permits. This creates overcrowding, making the environment unconducive to live comfortably.

[Leena Prasad](#) narrated her experience of working with Udayan Care and highlighted alternatives to institutional care for children. Udayan Care has 14 homes across four states while ten of them are for girls. She delved on how young girls end up in care and protection homes and cited a case where a girl facing abusive behaviour from parents, relatives and her workplace was forced to get into a shelter home.

Childcare homes with mentor parents are essential to look after girls at homes. She mentioned the strategy of Living in Family Environment (LIFE) implemented at Udayan Care homes, which basically tries to ensure a family environment for every child living there. Udayan Care homes are located in middle-class communities, imparting a sense of togetherness among children.

She also discussed some challenges faced by girls in care homes. The stigma of being an orphan troubles girls. In addition, patriarchy and poverty aggravate the situation. These become reasons for mental stress and trauma, pushing girls into substance abuse. She suggested some points to tackle these challenges, including ensuring every girl gets a home that is safe and empowering. The child-centric family has to become a revolution in India. She stressed the importance of higher education and social security benefits to support girls. The Government of India needs to formulate policies for children living in alternative care.

[Ranveer Phukan](#) provided insights into substance abuse among girls in shelter homes. Substance abuse in India is completely ignored with little awareness on the issue. In Delhi, substance abuse is high among street-connected girls and those in shelter homes.

He shared survey findings from the Delhi State Legal Services Authority in Seemapuri

that 85% of girls in these households indulged in substance abuse. Here, it is important to consider the background of girls as most have traumatic, stressful pasts. Some have a history of being abused by family members or relatives, including sexual abuse, while some were forced to become sex workers at a young age. Therefore, these girls often have mental health and gynaecological issues with some becoming pregnant at a young age.

He also raised the problem of HIV prevalence among girls living in these homes, who should be on Antiretroviral Therapy (ART). From his experience of working with National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), he regretted no provisions existed for targeted interventions/ services or programmes of any sort for a person below 18 years as NACO does not recognise anyone below 18 as an Injecting Drug User (IDU).

He said in order to provide solutions for these problems, the existence of these issues must be acknowledged in the first place. The concerned stakeholders need to be sensitised while reaching out to girls addicted to substance abuse and are victims of HIV/AIDS.

[Anant Asthana](#) spoke about the importance accorded to girls by the judicial system.

Laws are made for the protection and security of girls; however, they are not always implemented stringently. He shared his views regarding the POCSO Act, stating the numbers of vulnerable girls brought to shelter homes have increased over the years after implementation of the Act. Complications increased among girls living in these institutions and those brought to shelter homes under the provisions of POCSO should be treated in different ways because their needs are different. He also mentioned the issue of legal representation and custody call of these girls.

Closing Remarks by the Chair: Amodh Kanth stated that there are many laws for the safety and protection of girls but there is urgent need for stringent implementation to achieve their goals. The issue of substance abuse needed to be considered seriously and the government has an important role to play in this regard. It is vital to address the root causes of the issues girls face in shelter homes to solve their problems. He mentioned that there is also a need to fill the gaps between the CSOs and Child Welfare Committees (CWCs). According to Mr. Kanth, participation of girls in various programmes and vocational training will help them develop and grow.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Girls in care and protection homes face multiple issues such as violence, sexual abuse, mental stress, etc. Substance abuse, which has manifold ramifications, including addiction, risk of HIV/AIDS, etc., was another matter among girls that needed serious attention. The concept of deinstitutionalised community-based care, family-based care and foster care was also proffered as a solution. Legal rights and custody call of girls in shelter homes as well as their right to education, rehabilitation and reintegration are areas that need attention.

PARALLEL SESSION 2:

SOLUTION TOWARDS INCLUSION, ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS

THEME 3:

GIRLS IN NATURAL DISASTERS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

CHAIR

Roger Yates,
Director, Disaster Risk Management,
Plan International

PANELLISTS

- ▶ Soumya Sarkar, Senior Journalist, The Third Pole.net/India Climate Dialogue.net
- ▶ Aditi Kapoor, Senior Officer – Climate Change, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
- ▶ Sudeshna Chatterjee, CEO, Action for Children's Environments
- ▶ Dipali Sharma, Director, Organisational Effectiveness, ActionAid

Climate change is a global challenge that burdens everyone, though disproportionately. The environmental changes directly impact women and make them vulnerable because of socio-cultural factors such as generally being poorer and less educated as well as having a lower health status and limited direct access to or ownership of natural resources. Climate change-induced migrations have accentuated vulnerability of girls. The session on 'Girls in Natural Disaster and Climatic Change' analysed the issues faced by girls in recent disasters such as the Chennai floods of 2015. The speakers offered suggestions and recommendations in improving the situation for girls and making them more resilient against natural disasters and climate change.



▶ Natural disasters and climate change being discussed during the conference

Soumya Sarkar began the discussion by speaking about the impact of climate change on the lives of children and young girls. As a result of any drastic change in climatic conditions or natural disasters, its adverse effect is faced by all children, especially girls. Additionally, school dropout rates of girls increase as parents prefer keeping them home to help their mothers during difficult times such as during any disaster or crisis. He revealed the number of female deaths is higher compared to males during disasters. This can be attributed to their dressing style, which obstructs them from running to safer places as quickly as men. He also raised the issue of malnutrition among females due to unavailability of food during or after a disaster.

He highlighted the initiatives taken by Plan India to address these problems by creating awareness and imparting education among children and adolescents. Youngsters have to take the initiative in times of disasters and proper escape plans need to be taught to females in areas prone to natural disasters.

Aditi Kapoor explained that agriculture, water and food security, health and energy are the main areas affected by climate change in a country like India. When a disaster strikes, the initial 24 to 72 hours are extremely crucial as there may be no immediate outside help for rescue; therefore, local communities play an important role during a disaster.

It is common knowledge that the best food is always served to males, even during times of disaster. Unfortunately, this practice fosters malnutrition among women due to the consistently low-calorie intake that becomes a serious problem during disasters. A healthy woman begets a healthy child. Therefore, it is essential to educate people that every citizen, especially females, are equally important and equal care and attention must be given to girls and women even in times of disaster.

Discussing the educational opportunities situation during disasters, she revealed that school dropout rates among girls rise during disasters and is higher than that of boys. Moreover, disasters and climate change have

far-reaching social impact as many girls are trafficked after a disaster as their families struggle to regain livelihoods and earn a living. Therefore, proper strategies are imperative while need-based mapping is required on the basis of age and gender. Safety, especially of girls and women, needs to become a serious priority.

Sudeshna Chatterjee shared her experience of risk assessment of climate change for children in Asian cities. Children are most vulnerable to climate change since they are still developing during their early years and remain wholly dependent on adults for care and protection. She explained the 3 'R's of a child-centric approach in tackling climate change in Asian cities:

- ▶ Fulfilling the **Rights** of Children
- ▶ Reducing **Risks** in Children's Lives
- ▶ Building **Resilience**

She shared insights from the child impact assessment of the Chennai floods in slum communities in 2015. Most houses were submerged and as the sewerage system was blocked, toilets were dysfunctional. Consequently, inconveniences prevailed regarding sanitation, which were more problematic for females. The Chennai floods had an immense impact on the economy as well as citizens' health, education and livelihoods. Many people lost their jobs while numerous children were affected by deadly diseases. The number of school dropouts rose during this period, especially among girls. Although emergency relief shelters were provided for everyone, young girls felt insecure about sleeping in common areas.

She made a few recommendations to reduce the vulnerabilities of children and their families. It is necessary to create safe havens in climate hotspots for young children, girls and women where they can receive temporary shelter, food, medical treatment and counselling. Emphasis must be given to creating awareness on linkages between climate change and migration as also the disproportionate risks faced by migrant children, especially girls, in cities. It is important to ensure quick, easy and

equal access to basic services and security as well as the psychosocial well-being of those affected by disaster, especially children and young girls. Specialised attention and support should be given by social workers and counsellors to children who are victims or are at risk of exploitation and abuse, which often occur during disasters. There is a need to create awareness about child rights by local governments in the communities and schools, particularly highlighting the principles of non-discrimination between boys and girls.

Dipali Sharma shared her views on the topic from her experience of the past 25 years in responding to girls and women in disasters. In an emergency during a disaster, women and girls are more vulnerable to violations of fundamental human rights compared to men and boys. According to her, the human rights-based approach during any emergency should aim to:

- Ensure rights are secured, claimed and enjoyed in ways that are empowering. Rights cannot be simply given to people as charity.

- Maintain the dignity of people.
- Strengthen people's ability to negotiate for their rights.
- Increase freedom and choices to visualise and pursue the lives, future and rights they value.
- Build an active agency of the affected and ensure their participation as an integral part of the emergency response work.

She also focused on human rights pertaining to physical security and integrity, basic necessities, economic opportunities, social and cultural opportunities as well as civil and political participation of all people that need to be protected in emergencies. Additionally, creating safe spaces – such as shelters and toilets – are necessary activities to implement during a disaster for physical security and dignity, particularly for young girls and women. Psychological care and counselling also helps in reducing the stress and trauma females face during and after a natural calamity.

OPEN FORUM

Ranjan Mohanty from Odisha, shared insights about crucial precautionary measures based on his experience of cyclones that strike Odisha almost every year. An immediate response needs to be taken by the government, CSOs and other concerned stakeholders. A safe place must be allotted for children who should also be involved while preparing contingency plans. Life-saving skills must be taught to children and young girls in disaster-prone areas. He added that migration is a critical issue in the western and southern parts of Odisha during disasters and natural calamities, leading to high rates of school dropouts and girls being vulnerable to trafficking.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The session reiterated that girls are worst hit by natural disasters and their death rates are high. After disasters, there is an increase in incidences of early marriages of girls and their trafficking. Their education is curtailed as girls are generally expected to take care of the household during times of environmental stress. Females in emergency relief camps face enormous insecurity and other difficulties such as lack of privacy and insufficient supply of basic necessities like sanitary napkins. Rampant violations of fundamental human rights abound, particularly against women. Therefore, it is most important to uphold their rights and ensure the safety and security of females. Emphasis on the participation of communities, including young girls and women, is required in preparing them for a disaster, including their increased involvement in climate change adaptation, decision making and risk-reduction activities.

THEME 4: GIRLS AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

CHAIR

Rasa Sekulovic
Regional Head of Child Protection,
Plan International

PANELLISTS

- ▶ Achal Bhagat, Director, Saarthak
- ▶ Sanjay Awasthi, Chief Functionary, Bhartiya Gramoththan Seva Vikas Sansthan
- ▶ Ravi Kant, President, Shakti Vahini
- ▶ K Mukherjee, Director and Founder, Gram Niyojan Kendra
- ▶ Roma Debabrata, President, STOP (Stop Trafficking and Oppression of Children and Women)
- ▶ Tapoti Bhowmik, Senior Programme Coordinator, Sanlaap

Trafficking in India is widespread and chronic, which includes cross-border and interstate trafficking. India has been defined as a source, destination and transit point for trafficking, indicating the robust demand from national and international syndicates. Given the entrenched systems existing within the nation, it provides safe passage for traffickers. There has been a constant increase in the number of cases from 2,599 in 2004 to 17,330 in 2014 (NCRB, 2014). The victims of trafficking generally hail from economically backward, poverty-stricken families. Accordingly, the session deliberated relevant issues pertaining to trafficking in India and sought to find viable solutions for preventing and protecting young girls from being trafficked while focusing on the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims.



▶ *Panellists at the conclusion of a session on girls and human trafficking*

[The Chair, Rasa Sekulovic](#), highlighted the background of human trafficking, which has three core components. Firstly, the conspiracy involved in terms of recruitment, transport or transfer of girls and women. Secondly, the local elements and modus operandi via which human trafficking occurs such as abduction, threat, cruelty, using manipulative words or other means of coercion. Thirdly, the diverse purposes of human trafficking, including sexual exploitation, organ removal, marriage, adoption (in case of children), etc. Rasa spoke about the '3Ps' approach to human trafficking – Prevention, Protection and Persecution – which basically deals with what needs to be done to prevent, curb and eliminate human trafficking.

[Achal Bhagat](#) shared his opinions and experiences as a mental health practitioner dealing with trafficked girls and women. To counter trafficking, he emphasised the need for handling survivors of human trafficking via a person-centric rather than a victim-centric approach. As a psychiatrist, he asserted that the identity of a female is demolished when she is trafficked. She loses her dignity, sense of togetherness, belongingness and purposefulness, which are replaced by a feeling of helplessness. He stressed that it is imperative to include their voices in the recovery process and to look at survivors as people with feelings, hopes and a voice of their own. Besides poverty, other factors – such as sexual abuse, domestic violence, alcoholism, debt, pressure from loan sharks and the presence of a person with chronic illness in the family – often drives young girls into the clutches of traffickers.

Dwelling on solutions, he emphasised the need for an integrative approach in combatting trafficking. The role of a counsellor or psychiatrist is not enough in the recovery process of victims. Survivors need an environment of care and protection with a redressal mechanism from the police and judiciary as well as rehabilitation along with livelihood options. Furthermore, he said there is a dearth of mental health professionals in the country. Therefore, serious consideration should be given to hiring trained human

resources for providing relevant services. Consequently, a cross-sectoral approach is required to promote mental health along with care and protection in countering the impact of trafficking. He also emphasised the need for funds, focus and human resources in mental health.

[Sanjay Awasthi](#) shared his experience of working on human trafficking in the porous Indo-Nepal border region for the past 27 years. He recounted that as a member of the Child Welfare Committee in Bahraich, he encountered many children trafficked across the border. Since there are no shelters or short-stay homes for children in that region, female employees of border security forces shoulder the responsibility of keeping trafficked children for the night. Alternatively, they contact organisations such as Maiti Nepal, which work in countering human trafficking in Nepal and have transit homes in the Indo-Nepal border area.

According to him, poverty and lack of job opportunities are major contributory factors for human trafficking. In most cases, the victims are manipulated by traffickers, who are generally known to the victims and trusted – being relatives or people from the same village or town. He said there is a strong anti-trafficking network in the region comprising people from government and non-government organisations of both countries. His organisation coordinates and maintains ties with institutions such as Maiti Nepal, Save the Children and Plan International, among others, in Nepal to fight against human trafficking.

[Ravi Kant](#) addressed the issues and loopholes within the system in dealing with human trafficking. He mentioned that anti-trafficking units were formed and trained across the country between 2007 and 2014 but not much had changed. He opined that traffickers do not fear the law. He cited two examples where people from law enforcement agencies were directly involved with traffickers and highlighted the corruption within the system that hampers protection and justice delivery for victims. He added that human trafficking

has become the third largest money-spinning business globally. To solve these issues, more investment is required to hire and sensitise law enforcement personnel. Also, more resources and funds need to be allocated for shelter and protection of survivors as rehabilitation is the right of every survivor. Although the law has become stringent since its amendment in 2013 regarding penalising of traffickers, more stringent laws and fast-track courts are required to improve redressal and justice delivery mechanisms. Kant also added that the Anti-Trafficking Bill is yet to be passed by Parliament.

[K.K. Mukherjee](#) took the discussion forward on the current scenario and prevention of human trafficking. He cited empirical evidence from a study conducted in 2004 on approximately 16,000 girls and women in prostitution, where 75% reportedly stated they were lured into the situation without their consent by known people such as relatives and other acquaintances. Only 17% of the sample were trafficked by strangers. He estimated there were around 71-72 lakh sex workers in India in 2017, out of which 50-52 lakh were trafficked. He added that trafficking does not take place in isolation and there were three agents in the chain: buyer, procurer and victim, where the former two work for economic gains. According to him, prevention of trafficking is possible if three groups – family, gram panchayat or village committees and NGOs – identify and act upon their respective roles and responsibilities. Effectiveness in preventing human trafficking lies in the emphasis placed on education, livelihood, vocational training, legal support and the relationship between different stakeholders based on advocacy and lobbies. He mentioned the experience of working with the government on whether to legalise prostitution in India or not, but it was decided this was not yet suitable for India.

[Roma Debabrata](#) spoke about the nature of rehabilitation needed for trafficking survivors. She emphasised that children trafficked

into prostitution should not be termed 'sex workers'. She shared her experience of rescuing young girls and women in India and abroad and said they followed the '3Ps' approach: Protection, Prevention and Persecution. Rehabilitation of trafficked survivors is the most important requirement but shelter homes are not the answer for survivors. Four categories of trafficked survivors need rehabilitation: small children; young girls and adolescents; young girls and women wishing to leave the profession of sex work; and aged sex workers. Rehabilitation of these four should be need-based, depending on the category, with different staying arrangements. This can work as a model for protection, prevention and even persecution to some extent. Her organisation helps in rehabilitating and helping victims to work as activists. In the long run, they become change agents or role models for society. She believes survivors should be given a safe environment and a rights-based approach should be used to decide that. Moreover, mental health assistance and suitable opportunities for self-reliance should be provided so trafficked girls can live a free life with safety and dignity.

[Tapoti Bhowmik](#) shared insights from working with trafficked survivors in her organisation. She spoke about physical hazards a young girl may go through once trafficked, such as multiple abortions leading to serious conditions, including HIV/AIDS and death. She explained how a young girl is totally controlled by her 'madam' (pimp) in the '*chokri system*' of prostitution with no decision-making power, no say in what she has to do with her clients and no right on the payment for her activities. There is no protection of children in some societies as families sell their own daughters to traffickers for money in most cases. Besides poverty, other contributing factors include political instability, natural calamities, social issues such as pressure for dowry, negative effects of globalisation like abuse of mobile technology leading to online sexual abuse, etc. Her study from the previous year also showed an increase in trafficking due to travel and tourism.

Trafficking is a basket of crimes comprising abduction, displacement, outrage of modesty, denial of rights, etc. Nonetheless, human trafficking can be prevented. But this needs an attitudinal change towards women and children, which should begin with the family. She felt the vigilance system on the Indo-Bangladesh border is faulty as human trafficking cases are reported daily. She urged more coordination among all stakeholders to tackle human trafficking.

From the Chair: At the end of the discussion, Rasa Sekulovic inquired that if every panellist obtained the requisite resources, what would they prioritize as solutions to human trafficking? Anchal Bhagat responded that prevention, education, nutrition, gender equality, voices of

survivors in rehabilitation and redressal, professionalising care and protection as well as the building of mental health institutions were all important. Sanjay Awasthi added that priority should be given to addressing migration and prevention of HIV/AIDS in the border regions to prevent trafficking. K.K. Mukherjee opined that education should be the first priority to counter trafficking. Ravi Kant added that prevention and protection mechanisms need to be strengthened while care and protection of every survivor should be ensured. Tapoti Bhowmik highlighted that convergence and consolidated coordination is necessary to prevent trafficking whereas Roma Debabrata asserted there were many good laws but the solution lies in effective implementation.

KEY TAKEAWAY

First and foremost, there must be a change from a victim-centric to a person-centred approach while combatting trafficking. It is necessary to focus on community participation and the role of local governance in creating awareness, law implementation, community vigilance and empowering children in their own protection. Convergence is needed while assisting trafficked children in the areas of health, education, vocational training, protection, recreation and counselling with a view to reintegrating and rehabilitating. Education and economic empowerment are the two-pronged approaches towards preventing trafficking. Finally, India needs more mental health professionals to support those who have suffered trafficking.

PLENARY SESSION 2:

THEMATIC RECOMMENDATION AND LAUNCH OF GENDER VULNERABILITY INDEX

SESSION CHAIR

Ranjan Chak

Member of Plan India Governing Board

THEMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Ramya Subrahmanian, Executive Director, Know Violence in Childhood
- ▶ Roger Yates, Director, Disaster Risk Management, Plan International
- ▶ Amodh Kanth, Prayas JAC Society – Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights
- ▶ Rasa Sekulovic, Regional Head of Child Protection, Plan International

Welcoming everyone back to the Plenary Session 2 at the end of Day 1, Smita Bharti introduced Ranjan Chak as the Chair of the Session on Thematic Recommendation. In this Plenary Session, the Chairs of the four thematic sessions held earlier on the first day presented their consolidated key findings, recommendations and suggestions to the larger audience.

The Chair, [Ranjan Chak](#), shared his experience of visiting some flooded areas of Bihar where the issue was managing children and preventing them from walking into the raging waters simply because the kids wanted to play. He said there were people who voluntarily got involved with the community by providing relief materials such as food, water, blankets, etc. and also engaging the children by playing with them. He praised NGOs for doing phenomenal work by focusing on the need-specific details of their beneficiaries from 'holding the hands of every child in the field to making policies at the national level' so that there is a plan for every child and no girl is left behind. He wondered about the situation for marginalised girls in India two decades ago

in comparison to the present scenario. In this context, Mr. Chak spoke about the creation of the Gender Vulnerability Index as very necessary because he believed what can be measured can also be improved.

The first panellist, [Ramya Subrahmanian](#), shared her inputs from the thematic session on 'Girls in Disturbed Areas'. Speakers in the thematic session discussed the vulnerabilities of girls and the legal and policy provisions available for them. They noted that conflict multiplies vulnerabilities of girls. Legal and policy provisions were scrutinised under the wider framework of the political scenario. Ramya Subrahmanian, said that the implementation of policies and laws in the wider political landscape must be connected with the right of every child. In the thematic session, the discussion included the ground realities of girls' lives in disturbed areas and the impact of protracted conflict on their lives, most specifically on their education in disturbed areas. She highlighted that the decrease in various education parameters is due to increased conservatism along ethnic lines in the northeast and J&K. Moreover, there is a sharp decline in the Child Sex Ratio during the past decade in J&K that can be directly linked to the conflict there and its impact on girls. Trafficking in the disturbed areas of northeast India is also another issue where 'girls' bodies are the new currency of divided and contested politics in protracted conflict areas'.

There is a lack of data about the issues of girls in disturbed areas. Questions were also raised about selective coverage from the media. Research and data generation is required for planning and finding viable solutions for these issues and on resource allocation for girls. There is also an urgent requirement for a justice and legal framework in these areas. Though schemes for children in disturbed areas exist, the real gaps lie in the fact that these are developed by people in areas far away from disturbed zones, leading to incongruity in implementation. Attention is required in the policy formation, implementation and budget for dealing with issues of girls in disturbed areas. She mentioned the positive experience of the NGO Impulse, which is working in the eight

states of northeast India on human trafficking and rehabilitation of survivors.

Roger Yates shared some general points to remember while finding solutions for 'Girls in Natural Disasters and Climate Change' – the thematic session he chaired. Firstly, there is no magic bullet or single solution to change the situation or solve all issues. This implies that it is necessary to identify the root causes and analyse underlying issues. Since girls do not receive space in the public domain to raise their issues, therefore, their involvement and participation is crucial. He raised the point about 'disaster of opportunity' where processes during the time of any disaster need to be identified to promote gender equality. He felt there is a huge impact on the education of girls due to natural disasters. Two common trends are higher school dropout rates during crisis, with girls restricted to household chores, and underage marriage.

One of the solutions Mr. Yates discussed was the importance of education that covers the environment and disaster. Education needs to be based on an inclusive approach that recognises girls have a tougher time and, therefore, need more attention in learning life-skill lessons. There is a need to work with the affected communities in developing their local resilience. Protected space for girls ensuring dignity and safety, with basic sanitary and washing facilities, are required when they take emergency shelter during disasters. As trafficking is a serious concern in areas struck by calamity, awareness and adequate measures must be taken to prevent trafficking. The mental health implications are another critical matter as these issues are either not given due importance or stigmatised in most cultures.

Amodh Kanth, while discussing the topic 'Girls in care and shelter homes', stated that a holistic view of the entire situation should be taken. Speaking about the juvenile justice system, he said it covers all aspects and all types of children, including those in conflict with the law and ones needing protection. Shelter homes and children's homes are not the last but the first resort for youngsters below 18 years of age.

The main understanding from this session was that 'the homes should be like a home'. This implies shelter or care homes need to have the environment, living conditions and ambience of a home. It needs to go beyond the minimum conditions of food, shelter and clothing because children need guidance, recreation and developmental opportunities too. Therefore, protection, development, rehabilitation, social integration and mental care are equally important in shelter homes. Children in shelter homes need emotional support, counselling and guidance to make them eager to go out and face the external world.

Trafficking laws need to be applied stringently. An integrated approach should also be taken by the police, social welfare and labour departments in dealing with repatriation and rehabilitation of trafficked children. The role of various stakeholders such as the government, NGOs and Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) are extremely significant while dealing with the issues of children in shelter homes.

Rasa Sekulovic summed up the issues and solutions pertaining to trafficking in India. Trafficking is a multifaceted issue deep-rooted in poverty that has many other factors exacerbating it. Thereby, a multi-sectoral response is required in dealing with trafficking.

The thematic session had a general agreement that a human-centric rather than a victim-centric approach is required in countering trafficking. The tag 'victim' further stigmatises those who have experienced trafficking. Prevention is possible and, here, the role of the family and community is vital. Education of girls and opportunities to empower them are important to prevent trafficking. The focus should be on changing the mind-set of people who consider girls a liability. Human trafficking protection measures should be holistic where age-specific and need-specific norms are kept in mind while arranging accommodation and rehabilitation of survivors. Most importantly, in transforming the lives of survivors, there should be no long-term dependency on institutions and shelter homes as every survivor deserves a safe and free life with ample opportunities. The focus should be on empowering girls by spreading awareness

and strengthening their resilience. Rasa ended by saying the time to act was now and urged everyone to become a passionate activist fighting against human trafficking.

Ravi Verma, Regional Director, International Centre for Research on Women

Ravi Verma mentioned how it is problematic that the challenges faced by women in disturbed areas are 'normalised'. It must be ensured there is zero-tolerance against violence and discrimination, which should never be 'normalised'. Besides, we should not wait for big disasters to strike but take action beforehand in preventing them. He spoke about contradictions that on the one hand the size of the family is shrinking while, on the other, there is a concomitant rise in the preference for sons. He stressed that risk and incidences of sex selection and determination becomes more pronounced for the second-born child if the first-born was a girls. Thereby, there should be sensitization and awareness about these issues as well as more concerted efforts are needed to bring a change.

Plan India presents Gender Vulnerability Index (GVI)

Pradeep Narayanan, Director, Programme Strategy and Policy, Plan India



► Pradeep Narayanan presenting the Gender Vulnerability Index

As part of Plan India's 'Plan for Every Child' initiative under the research aspect, the organisation created the Gender Vulnerability Index— the first of its kind in the country. Pradeep Narayanan said there is a need to define the vulnerability index within the SDG framework in which CSOs are working for the rights of children. The GVI is based on the life-cycle approach that captures all issues a girl faces after being born till the age of 18 years. The four dimensions of Safety and Protection, Health and Survival Challenges, Literacy and Poverty form the base of the composite index. Though there are various indices across the world, none measured states based on gender vulnerability. This Index will be useful in understanding the situation of states as it ranks them in every individual dimension, and more comprehensively, as the Gender Vulnerability Index.

While creating the Index, the dearth of existing secondary data for various dimensions became clear, especially data for the 6-14 age group. The methodology included first forming a conceptual framework for gender vulnerability, based on which the Index was formulated by identifying 170 indicators across four dimensions and consolidating the data for them. For instance, Mr. Narayanan explained that the poverty dimension did not have just income as a single indicator but 18 other indicators.

The overall rankings of the 30 Indian states (29 states and Delhi) are presented in the GVI. Goa, Kerala, Mizoram, Sikkim and Manipur are the states occupying the top five GVI ranks across all dimensions. He pointed out that Goa, Kerala, Mizoram and Sikkim are all smaller states while three out of the top five are from northeast India. Conversely, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are the three states ranked lowest in the GVI. Himachal Pradesh is one of the north Indian states that fared better in the GVI while other states such as Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and Haryana are ranked very low.



SPECIAL KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Hon'ble Justice Madan B Lokur, Supreme Court of India

Hon'ble Justice Madan B Lokur of the Supreme Court of India was present to release the Gender Vulnerability Index (GVI). Justice Lokur mentioned there were a host of issues and sub-issues pertaining to children that become a big challenge while addressing child rights. He cited the issue of trafficking of girls and sub-issues such as rehabilitation of survivors and reassessment of their family situations that needed consideration. In this, he said lack of verified information or relevant evidence is a big problem as studies take a long time and data becomes outdated and irrelevant over time.

For instance, the JJ Act framed in 2000 was first amended in 2007 and, again, there was a need to review and further amend it in 2015 to meet current requirements. Furthermore, he added there were only 'episodic responses' to issues of children from the state and CSOs from time to time. But consistent plan of actions are necessary, for which verifiable and substantive evidence is required. In this context, he praised Plan India for formulating the GVI, which has a variety of indicators and subjects enabling a holistic view of children and girls' issues. He was certain GVI could contribute greatly in generating current information and helping the concerned stakeholders plan their course of action. The value of GVI data will help define and improve performances while working on social parameters. He also expressed concern about Delhi being one of the lowest-performing states in almost all GVI components such as Poverty, Health and Survival Challenge, Safety and Protection, and Literacy.

Justice Lokur emphasised that unless accurate evidence and right information is applied at the right places, performance in



► Justice Lokur addressing the audience during his special keynote address

social parameters cannot improve. It is also important to look at information carefully and analyse correctly. In this context, he spoke about data for juveniles indicating the number of children requiring protection was much higher than those committing crime. However, to ascertain the proportion of girls needing protection and those committing crime, data needed to be in a segregated form. Also, issues pertaining to different categories of children need different responses. He emphasised the need to have 'clear-cut and specific policies for children and girls, which can be implemented and are actionable in the real field'. According to him, time is not an important factor as long as the right approach is adopted in achieving the goal. He acknowledged the efforts of NCPCR in improving the state of children in different parts of India. He believed change is possible for any child as CIDC (Children in Difficult Circumstances) are not there out of choice but because of circumstances that forced them there.

OPEN FORUM

Ranjan Chak thanked Justice Lokur for his extremely encouraging words. He requested Justice Lokur to share his views on how the judiciary could help in addressing the issue of patriarchy, which is an individualistic as well as a family or community oriented problem in India. Justice Lokur concurred the judiciary has a role to play in this respect. He explained that from the four pillars of democracy – Executive, Legislative, Judiciary and Press– if one of the pillars, i.e., judiciary, does not contribute, democracy could still sustain itself on three pillars but this would not be good enough. Therefore, issues pertaining to children's rights should be everyone's concern, including the press, CSOs and judiciary.

Justice Lokur stressed that laws enacted by Parliament and state governments are formed keeping adults in mind. He cited the examples of vulnerable witness courts and free legal aid, which were initially for adults but the judiciary extended these provisions to children as well. Justice Lokur said the involvement of CSO is crucial to improve the situation of girls in India. Today, the voices of CSOs are heard, which was not really the case some years ago, since these organisations now specialise on a variety of subjects such as drugs, trafficking, childcare institutions, etc. and are working to bring about change in society.



DAY 2

NOVEMBER 2, 2017

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Day 2 began with special keynote addresses from Feroz Abbas Khan, Anju Malhotra and Sergey Kapinos.
- ▶ Debathon among state-level finalists took place in three rounds with participants contesting on the following topics:
 - ◆ Technology enhances gender vulnerability
 - ◆ I, as an individual, can smash gender stereotypes
 - ◆ Men are better leaders
- ▶ Thematic discussions on street-connected girls and girls in forced labour were held, where it was found that education, care and rehabilitation were most important in empowering girls.
- ▶ The emerging challenges of trafficking, cyber bullying, child sexual abuse and safer spaces for girls were discussed in the 3rd Plenary Session.

▶ *Hameeda, a youth debater from Delhi speaking on Day 2*

[Smita Bharti](#), the conference presenter, welcomed all guests and participants to the Second Day of the National Conference. She shared the forthcoming events for Day 2 which included the much-anticipated Youth Debatathon, among other events.

Feroz Abbas Khan, Eminent Film and Theatre Director

[Feroz Abbas Khan](#) spoke about 'entertainment education' as a powerful tool for communication in his keynote address. To explain his idea of entertainment education, he played an episode on the topic 'menstruation' from his series '*Sex Ki Adaalat*'. He asserted that in a world where it is difficult to grab attention and engage people with what one is saying, entertainment education can be a powerful tool in communicating with the masses. He stated that 'entertainment education' communicates the message via a story, where the story is the message. Going back to the history of Indian television entertainment programmes, he highlighted how India's first soap opera '*Hum Log*' contained valuable messages. However, he lamented that private channels had begun telecasting some of the most regressive TV programmes, causing 'huge damage to the women of India'. He explained how entertainment and education remain suspicious of each other. Flagging off gender discrimination, he mentioned how popular TV programmes never show parents or family members praying for the birth of a girl but always do so for a male one.

He spoke about his programme '*Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon*' (I, a woman, can achieve anything), aired on Doordarshan and viewed by 300-350 million people in India. An inspirational series, it has been effective in bringing about attitudinal change in the country. He also mentioned other programmes such as his collaboration with Farhan Akhtar's '*MARD*' on the topic 'violence against women'. He discussed the power of entertainment education where the emphasis is on providing correct information to bring about behavioural change. He also shared his views on the power of social media and the internet as well as an individual's power to use these mediums to drive change.

In the Open Forum, he cited the example of the film '*Dangal*' as a movie with a message but one that was also the highest box-office grosser of 2016. While mainstream Bollywood ventures infrequently into making movies on social issues with relevant messages, the movies NGOs make are usually repetitive and need to be more engaging.

Sergey Kapinos, Representative for South Asia, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC)

In his special address, Sergey Kapinos spoke about the power of youth and their involvement with the UNODC. He indicated that youth are the future of the nation and India and Bangladesh are countries with a high proportion of youth. There are a multitude of challenges such as terrorism, global warming, drug addiction, delinquency, cyber crime, human trafficking, etc. faced by almost all nations. He felt that youth are the most impacted among the entire population and are most vulnerable to these challenges and circumstances. Nevertheless, they are also the most powerful segment to address them. The UN has appointed a Youth Ambassador. In this term, a woman has been appointed to work on all aspects, including peace and security. He emphasised the need to change mindsets. He outlined the UNODC's key initiatives towards youth empowerment, which included global and regional youth forums, global youth council, global awareness campaigns and global youth conglomerations with the private sector using technology for reporting crimes. He discussed in detail the power of sports as a tool for prevention of crime among the youth.

Anju Malhotra, Principal Advisor, Gender and Development, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF HQ)

[Anju Malhotra](#) mentioned she was pleased to witness positive changes in the country each time she visited India. She asserted we needed to be positive and motivated by these achievements, but cautioned there was still a long way to go. She told the audience she would be unorthodox and question certain sacrosanct assumptions to see where they lead us if we consider those strategies.

Firstly, she questioned if it is important for every organisation to work on all aspects of girls due to the need to have a ‘holistic approach’. She said, “Holistic does not mean doing everything but giving the best in every aspect.” It would be more fruitful if experts in education offer quality education. Similarly, experts in health, communication and other necessary fields should work on their respective domains. The second assumption that needs to be reviewed lies in the statement “*value of a girl is not a strategy to change but an outcome*”. Her third assumption questioned spending time in changing general norms rather than providing services. Girls should be seen as customers of services that they were provided rather than beneficiaries. Fourthly, she questioned if the focus should be on reaching 200 to 400 people in a community or in reaching out to the large-scale population of girls with respect to time. She praised the programme ‘*Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon*’ of Feroz Abbas Khan for reaching out to 300 million viewers. Finally, Ms. Malhotra stated that we need to be more innovative and think out-of-the-box in reaching out to large sections of girls in bringing about attitudinal and behavioural change.

YOUTH DEBATATHONS

Ishani Sen, Director of PRAVAH, along with Rochana Mitra and Pinky Pradhan from Plan India narrated their individual experiences of moderating debatathons at the state level. Ms. Sen explained that state debatathons were held in five regions: North (Delhi), Northeast (Guwahati), East (Bihar), South (Hyderabad) and West (Mumbai). Around 100 youths from 15 states were selected to participate in state-level debatathon events. Plan India partnered with PRAVAH to conduct the Youth Debatathons successfully in the regional as well as state level. The youths were briefed on the issues of gender vulnerability and trained on public-speaking skills. Debatathons at state and national level resulted in the formulation of a Youth Charter.

Rochana Mitra and Pinky Pradhan shared their experience of the regional debatathons in Hyderabad and Guwahati. The main topics

raised at the five regional-level debatathons included: education and empowerment of girls, child abuse, school dropouts, violence against girls, teenage pregnancy and child marriage focusing on girls. (*Refer to Annexure for a detailed report on Debatathons*).

Smita Bharti introduced Ranjan Chak, Member, Plan India Governing Board, as the Chair of the esteemed jury. Other members of the jury were:

- ▶ Mariann Eriksson, Secretary General, Plan International Sweden
- ▶ Yuichi Tanada, Executive Managing and National Director, Plan International Japan
- ▶ Nalini Gangadharan, Executive Director, CAP Foundation
- ▶ Bernard Francis, Senior Advocacy Officer, High Commission of Canada in India
- ▶ Kaushik Deka, Senior Associate Editor, India Today
- ▶ Ramesh Negi, Chairperson, Delhi State Commission for Protection of Child Rights
- ▶ Feroz Abbas Khan, Eminent Film and Theatre Director

There were three rounds of debates at the national-level debatathons. In the first and second rounds, four speakers debated in favour of the motion of the house and four against. Each of the speakers were allowed three minutes to present his/her arguments and an additional two minutes to answer the question of opponents and defend their motion.

The topic for the first round was ‘[Access to technology enhances gender vulnerability](#)’. Participants included Srinivasa, Roshni, Hameeda and Vivek supporting the motion while Dalumoni, Richa, Rohit and Aishwarya spoke against the motion.

Key arguments in favour of the motion included the rising number of cyber-stalking cases where the majority of victims were women. This was despite the fact that more than 70% of the total population using the internet in India are males. It was argued that the extra domination of men in these platforms creates gender vulnerability. Stereotyping and personification of women in advertisements were pinpointed as key contributors to gender vulnerability.

Arguments against the motion included ideas such as co-opting technology as part of education to promote female participation. It was argued that technology provides women a much-needed platform to raise their voice and concerns; the *#MeToo* campaign was cited as an example. It was also argued that women in rural areas are pushed to the forefront of economic activities and development by using e-commerce sites; therefore, technology plays a vital role in boosting their independence and income generation. The role of the government in projects such as National Digital Literacy Mission for girls was projected as a bold endeavour. The debaters also put forward the thought that ideas of progress, gender equality and empowerment are also propagated through technology.

The topic for the second round was “*I, as an individual, am powerless to smash gender stereotypes*”. Palak, Atif, Jhilmil and Patrina supported the motion while Daphira, Vijayta, Anok and Henry argued against the motion.

Key arguments presented for the motion were along the lines that girls and women are bound by the shackles of norms, values, customs and tradition that are laden with gender stereotypes. Thereby, a girl or woman finds herself incapable of breaking these gender stereotypes on her own. In a patriarchal society, girls feel powerless before their authoritarian families in standing up for change or questioning gender stereotypes. Due to these circumstances, an individual is sometimes powerless and requires the support of family, friends and community to smash gender stereotypes. It was also argued that there is considerable social pressure on people to follow rules and traditions, making it harder for individuals to shatter gender stereotypes.

The arguments against the motion proffered the idea that as an individual, one is powerful to bring about change and smash gender stereotypes, first at an individual level and then in society at large.

Gender stereotypes are not a result of ‘nature’ but outcomes of ‘nurture’ that begin within the family. Therefore, small initiatives by a single person at an individual level can result

in inspiring others to join and possess the potential to usher in big changes and break gender stereotypes. The examples of Queen Elizabeth of England, Malala Yousafzai, Selvie from the documentary ‘Driving with Selvie’ were cited to support these arguments.

The four winners, one from ‘for’ the motion and the other from ‘against’ the motion from both the rounds were announced. Rohit and Hameeda were first-round winners while Atif and Daphira were second-round winners of the debatathon. The impromptu topic for the third and final round was “*Men are better leaders than women*” where Atif and Rohit debated against Hameeda and Daphira.

Key points the two speakers, Atif and Rohit, presented supporting the motion included the idea that “actions speak louder than words”. They cited examples of female leaders such as Indira Gandhi being great leaders, yet citizens continued voting and choosing male leaders.

According to the two debaters, in a patriarchal society like India, the question lies in how men have proved themselves to be effective leaders time and again. Boys get a fair opportunity in the family’s decision-making process. Thereby, men grow up to be efficient in taking decisions and leading society. In such a society, men become better leaders by the virtue of having more and better access to resources and opportunities than women.

The main arguments presented by the two speakers, Hameeda and Daphira, opposing the motion were along the lines that women play an important role in the success of men. Therefore, if women receive the same opportunities as men, they have the potential of becoming better leaders. They cited the quote: “*If you educate a man, you educate one person. If you educate a woman, you educate a nation.*” Consequently, women should be given education and equal opportunities to lead society. They said that in our democracy, men still receive more opportunities, enabling them to become better leaders. However, women who received opportunities, such as Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu, have proved to be superior leaders.

PARALLEL SESSION 3: SOLUTION TOWARDS INCLUSION, ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS

THEME 5: STREET-CONNECTED GIRLS

CHAIR

Surina Narula,
Founder, and Patron,
Consortium for Street Children

PANELLISTS

- ▶ Bina Seth Lashkari, Executive Director, Door Step School
- ▶ Rita Panicker Pinto, Founder and Executive Director, Butterflies
- ▶ Antony Nellissery, General Manager – Programmes, Bharti Foundation
- ▶ Poonam Mehta, Senior Programme Manager – North and West, Plan India

India's rapid development, economic growth and associated urbanisation has resulted in the continuous movement of people from rural to semi-urban areas and larger cities. There are no comprehensive or credible estimates of street children in India, with numbers ranging from 11 million to as high as 18 million. There are innumerable challenges faced by street-connected children, particularly girls connected with the street. The vulnerabilities of girls living on the street, street-working girls and girls from street families as well as solutions towards solving these issues were discussed in this session.



▶ Youth debaters from across the country at the Debatathon Final

Bina Seth explained the scenario of street-connected children, especially girls, and discussed inclusion, access and opportunities for such girls. The three categories of street-connected children include: those living with their families on the street comprising almost 65% of street-connected children; street-working children, the second-largest group, comprising 24.44%; and, thirdly, street-living children at 8.02%. Studies show a lower proportion of girls among street-connected children, which can be because girls are married off at a young age.

The speaker shared her experience of working with street-connected children in Door Step School. Here, they aimed at providing solutions towards inclusion by forming active groups, such as the Door Step School Bal Samuha Group, to raise their confidence and provide for active participation and opportunities in enhancing decision-making skills and providing mentorship, e.g., teachers from the same communities. In terms of solutions towards access, she explained about access to education through School on Wheels, access to information about issues related to physical and sexual relations via gender sensitisation workshops and sessions on sex education, access to knowledge on child rights and child protection, access to health and mental health facilities and access to tailor-made common facilities like lane-wise classes and portable classes. The different methods for a solution towards opportunities include mentoring and peer learning, providing role models among children by naming a street in their slum area/*basti* after a student, helping them with financial literacy by opening bank accounts and training them to become social entrepreneurs.

Rita Panicker Pinto initiated her discussion with the emerging trends of economic distress and agrarian crisis in rural areas, coupled with a sharp decline in traditional livelihood options like artisans. Such a rural scenario has triggered an increase in the number of 'footloose' workers—a term used for migrants from rural areas who move from one city to another in search of livelihood options. Footloose workers find themselves in a worse situation in the urban areas than their rural setting from which they ran

away in the first place. They survive in miserably inadequate living conditions without proper shelter, sanitation or drinking water facility and with the constant threat of eviction from 'illegal squats' in the cities.

She advocated studies with an ethnographic and feminist methodology, which can contribute to more understanding of the issues of street-connected girls. There is a need to expand the narrative of 'victimhood', where children should be perceived as social actors and the focus should be on exploring their everyday lives. These street-connected children being resilient, the focus should be on their coping strategies and not just the victimhood of girls.

She emphasised the importance of formal education and spoke about how quality education can lead to empowering street-connected girls. NGOs should support these first-generation learners. She raised the point that qualified teachers with Masters in Education (M.Ed.) need to be hired to teach these street-connected children. The focus should also be on the emotional well-being of street-connected girls. She highlighted the importance of social deconstruct of gender and the need to deal with the whole notion of masculinity in a patriarchal society while focusing equally on issues of young boys. It is important to involve and engage the communities and families of street-connected girls while addressing their issues. Lastly, she raised the point of making mental health interventions in the country available and the need for ensuring the quality of these counsellors and field practitioners to work with street-connected children.

Antony Nellisery then took the discussion forward, speaking about street-connected children in the rural setting. Representing Bharti Foundation, the development arm of Bharti Enterprises, he spoke about their impact on a billion children every year by providing education, sanitation and legal aid. The main strategies behind the interventions are to strengthen co-scholastic processes and community processes while improving community interventions too. Their programme focusing on girls is operating in states having low sex ratios such as Punjab, Haryana,

Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, where most interventions are in educationally-backward blocks. Their 'Girl Child Campaign' focuses on equipping girls with continuous updating of knowledge and skills beyond academics, and providing special platforms for the recognition of girl achievers. Their schools are sensitive towards the special needs of girls and work to make each student a role model for fellow juniors and villagers.

Mr. Nellissery made several recommendations on policies and acts such as policy change should be evidence-based, incorporating the provision that no child shall be subjected to torture, cruelty or degrading treatment, while there is a need for transparency and adopting a community-centric approach. The focus should be on early childhood education and pre-service and in-service training programmes for teachers. There should be accountability of institutions, which can be achieved by publishing reports/KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and having a monitoring mechanism in place.

Poonam Mehta spoke about Plan India's Dreams on Streets project. This pilot project was launched in 2015 at six locations in New Delhi – Munirka, Nizamuddin, IIT Flyover, Moolchand Flyover, BRT Flyover and Defence Colony Flyover. It aimed to stop children begging at traffic signals in New Delhi and bringing them into the mainstream line of education and other opportunities. The project reached 1,000 children out of which almost 60% are girls in the 6-12 age group. It includes both kinds of street children, runaway children and those with parents facing different types of challenges, such as migrants, children in rag-picking, begging, vending at traffic signals, etc. Major activities include structured education classes, library support, life skills, health check-

ups, immunisation, referral for treatment of drug abuse, etc. They have partnerships with organisations such as SPYM, CHETNA, local district administration, and tie-ups with PWD, City Hospitals, DCPU, the Police Department and other NGO networks for supporting children.

Highlighting the project achievements, she said it reached out to more than 1,000 children through six contact points in South Delhi, with 60% of these children being girls. The project enrolled more than 600 children to bridge educational gaps while 84 among them are mainstreamed with MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) schools and 40 in ECCD. They provided healthcare support to 450 children and also linked their families with government entitlements and livelihood support. In all, 35 children were reunified with their families.

From the Chair: Surina Narula summed up the session and highlighted that there is a need for research and authentic data on street children. Also, there is a major requirement for mental health professionals to assess the health and background of children to ascertain who can or cannot go back to his or her family. She cited the example of a young boy in Ecuador, imprisoned for killing his own father. In reality, he was just saving his mother from domestic abuse when he accidentally killed his father. The family, including his mother, disowned him. An organisation with mental health professionals working for street-connected children then took up his case and counselled his family. There is a need for breaking-schools before street-connected children are introduced to the regular schooling system so that they can be prepared to some extent. It is important to note that these children are 'little men' and not really children. Therefore, there is a need to bridge the gap so that they receive the chance to be children again.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Solutions to include street-connected children in mainstream society lie through educational opportunities, reformation, care and rehabilitation. While education is very important, innovative measures need to be adopted in reaching out to millions of these children and providing them with equality education. Also, more attention and rigorous research is required in understanding their issues and finding viable solutions for them.

THEME 6: GIRLS IN FORCED LABOUR

CHAIR

Nalini Gangadharan,
Executive Director,
CAP Foundation

PANELLISTS

- ▶ Shivani Bhardwaj, Director, Sathi For All Partnership
- ▶ P Joseph Victor Raj, National Convener, Campaign against Child Labour
- ▶ Deepali Nath, Director, Solution Global Consulting Studies
- ▶ Kulbir Krishnan, Advisor, National Commission for Protection of Child Rights
- ▶ Ashok Kumar, Field Manager, Academy of Gandhian Studies
- ▶ Anita Kumar, Senior Programme Manager South India, Plan India

Child labour is an infringement on the rights of all children, boys and girls alike. Gender is a crucial determinant of child labour. Girls are most often found to suffer the triple burden of housework, schoolwork and work outside

the home, which can be both, paid or unpaid. According to the 2011 Census, about 4.5 million girls between the ages of 5 and 14 years are engaged in labour. The situation is particularly grim for girls in rural India as 80% of working children live in India's villages, where most work is in the agriculture sector. Around 63% of adolescents are engaged in hazardous work. Child labour is increasingly invisible, making it all the more necessary that issues affecting girls within the category of child labour, including forced and bonded labour, be identified with the aim of addressing the risks and vulnerabilities affecting them specifically. Accordingly, the session aimed at looking into the issues of girls in forced labour and finding solutions for them.

[Shivani Bhardwaj](#) shared her experience at Sathi for All Partnership, where they work on rights of women and girls and develop programmes for the vulnerable with the help of their partners. The agenda of sensitive planning to bridge the gender resource gap has been the fulcrum of their work. A girl in forced labour can be anyone: those doing unpaid housework, bonded labour, sex slavery, begging, etc. In India, there are many girls employed as forced labour. These girls are made to drop out of school and forced to work on meagre or no wages. Abused and exploited, they experience violence daily.



▶ A discussion on girls in forced labour underway at the conference

The government has amended the Child Labour Law in 2016, which now allows children below 14 years to work in family businesses and the entertainment industry, after completion of their schooling, while stating that no adolescent shall be employed or permitted to work in any hazardous occupations or processes. However, the fact remains that 8.8 million girls between 15 and 17 years are into hazardous labour. Therefore, it is necessary to look into policies and agenda, financial budgets and strategic structural programmes to address the issue of girls in child labour. It is also important to improve existing government schemes and emphasise skill development programmes. There needs to be lobbying and political will in including 'right to property for women and girls', which will go a long way in empowering women.

P Joseph Victor specifically spoke about girls in forced labour with respect to the 'Sumangali Scheme' in Tamil Nadu. In this scheme, girls are forced to work for 3-5 years on a very low salary while, at the end of the term, they are promised around INR 30,000 for their marriage expenses and dowry. This scheme perpetuates both child labour and the dowry system in the state.

The girls are taken to work in factories located far away from their native places. Made to stay in hostels without being paid for their work, they are forced to work two shifts daily – a clear violation of child and human rights. The long hours of work adversely affect their health. In some cases, these girls become too unfit to lead a normal healthy life. The speaker stressed there should be participation from NGOs and the Labour Welfare Department to monitor the issue of forced child labour of girls in these mills.

Deepali Nath spoke about how girls are forced into labour and its dire consequences. The International Labour Organisation defines forced labour as a situation in which a person is coerced to work through the use of violence or intimidation or by more subtle means such as accumulated debt, retention of identity papers or threats of

denunciation to immigration authorities. Any labour for which a child worker receives less than the government-stipulated minimum wage falls into the category of forced child labour. She said that situations of forced labour are generally found in agriculture, domestic work, construction, mining, quarrying and brick kilns. There is an ever-growing need for domestic workers, especially in urban India, where girls and women are forced into these activities. Generally, girls belonging to weaker socio-economic and socio-cultural family backgrounds end up in forced labour. These girls are often illegally trafficked by placement agencies operating in destination areas.

Kulbir Krishnan said the issue of forced labour, particularly of girls, is one of the sustainable goals India has committed to achieving by 2030. Forced labour is directly linked to poverty, health, hunger and gender equality.

He emphasised the need for political will to prevent the issue of forced labour by taking a bottom-up approach. There are many initiatives taken by the government to provide free and elementary education to both girls and boys such as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojna, etc. that contribute towards empowering girls and women. He noted that government initiatives focusing on empowering girls and women also contributed to a decline in child marriages.

Ashok Kumar spoke about the plight of girls in a country where they do not have decision-making powers in most cases. He shared his experience of working to prevent and eliminate forced labour in India. Most girls in forced labour are found in agriculture and as domestic workers. There is an absolute necessity to look into the status of girl workers in these sectors while equal opportunities need to be given to both boys and girls to curb the menace of forced child labour.

Anita Kumar dwelt on solutions to eliminate forced labour in India. She shared her experience of working on a pilot project of

Plan India that focused on girl labourers across 150 villages and slums of Andhra Pradesh. The project was successful in withdrawing more than 3,500 children from forced labour and enrolling them in schools. Out of these 3,500 children, 2,400 were girls employed in agriculture as well as small shops and establishments.

According to her, it is important to have functional community-based child protection mechanisms in place to tackle the problem of forced labour. The active role of Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) and School Management Committees (SMCs) can help in preventing forced labour. According to her, convergence is required among key stakeholders concerned with child and labour rights. Solutions will also come from discussions with Gram Panchayat, Mandal and District authorities on topics related to education, women and child protection and labour rights. It is imperative to provide job-oriented vocational training to all girls rescued from forced labour conditions so they can lead dignified lives. For this, there need to be linkages between families of the rescued child labourer and job employment schemes and agencies to prevent them from going back into the forced-labour trap. It is of utmost importance to sensitise the entire system, including Child Forums, CWCs, SMCs and district officials on gender, child rights as well as the needs and rights of girls to prevent and eliminate forced labour.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Child labour and girls in forced labour are harsh realities that need concerted preventive efforts from the government, CSOs, media and every concerned stakeholder and citizen. Forced labour in different sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, home-based industries, etc. and the vulnerable situation of girls was brought to attention. To tackle the problem of child labour and forced labour, community-based child protection mechanisms were suggested.

PLENARY SESSION 3: EMERGING CHALLENGES AND SHARED LEARNING

CHAIR

Mariann Eriksson,
Secretary-General,
Plan International Sweden

PANELLISTS

- ▶ Rinchen Chophel, Director General, South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC)
- ▶ Dorothy Rozga, Executive Director, ECPAT International
- ▶ Cecelia Wallin, Criminal Intelligence Officer, Crimes Against Children Section, INTERPOL, Asia-Pacific
- ▶ Sunita Dhanuwar, Executive Director, Shakti Samuha, Nepal
- ▶ Anoop Sharma, Founder & Creative Director, Company of Design



▶ *Panellists after their discussion on emerging challenges and shared learning*

Rinchen Chophel, representing the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children (SAIEVAC), mentioned the organisation was a commitment of South Asian Governments. It manifests as a regional network engaging a wide variety and range of stakeholders, including children, international NGOs, UN agencies

and civil society in an action-oriented, collaborative manner. Chopel revealed the Governing Body of SAIEVAC comprises eight government representatives, two child representatives (currently these two hail from India), two Civil Society Organisations (NACG) Representatives, one SACG chairperson and one director-general.

SAIEVAC and its network of partners have a mandate to address human rights violations against children with a special focus on elimination of violence against children. SAIEVAC works in five themes of child protection issues that include corporal punishment; child marriage; child labour; sexual abuse; and exploitation and trafficking. Chopel highlighted the need for partnerships and SAIEVAC's collaborations and agendas at global, national, regional and local levels.

[Dorothy Rozga](#) spoke about the emerging challenges of child sexual exploitation. She introduced her organisation – End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT), which is a network of CSOs committed to ending child sexual exploitation. She spoke about the challenges of child protection for child abuse victims. Child sexual exploitation manifests via trafficking for sexual purposes, sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism, online child sexual exploitation, early or forced child marriage and sexual violence. Online child sexual exploitation has presently become rampant through online grooming for sexual purposes, sexual extortion (sextortion), sexting, live online child sexual abuse, including live streaming of child sexual abuse. She drew attention to the alarming situation where the age of victims of such crimes in 2014 constituted 21% pubescent, 72% pre-pubescent and, shockingly, 7% infants. For three years (January 2010-December 2012), Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) has reported a 125% increase in the category of images depicting severe sexual activity (level 4) and especially of children below 10 years. Moreover, no country in the world is immune.

She highlighted the areas of child sexual exploitation that require more study and

attention, including vulnerabilities of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual and intersexed (LGBTI) children, vulnerabilities of a child with disabilities, sexual exploitation of boys, commercial surrogacy and voluntary 'child prostitution' and 'compensated dating', which also include adolescents working in the entertainment sector. Multi-sectoral alliances are required to tackle the menace of child sexual abuse with holistic and systematic approaches.

[Cecelia Wallin](#) carried the discussion forward with her experience as an Interpol officer in the Crimes against Children section and focused on online child sexual abuse. She gave an insight into how Interpol operates in 192 member countries and connects police across the globe for international police cooperation. She asserted that it is crucial to have cooperation among member countries in sharing information to catch hold of online sex offenders and for victim identification.

She acknowledged that there is an urgent need for capacity building of law enforcement officials so they can work more productively. There are no borders when it comes to international crimes like online child sexual abuse. She revealed how offenders across the world share child sexual abuse material online and trade them offline. Such abuse materials of a child remain with perpetrators and are spread worldwide while the victim has to live with the fact that anyone anywhere anytime can recognise her. In this context, she reiterated, "*Sharing is caring when it comes to sharing database of child sexual abuse.*"

At present, 51 countries are connected to the database, including India, while there are reports of only two victims from India, which is hard to believe. With the huge number of mobile users in the country with an internet connection, great responsibility vests on all stakeholders. She cited the example of live-streaming cases of child sexual abuse and violence against children, even leading to their death, in establishing her point that there cannot be any worse material online. She urged that it was time to stop talking and start acting. All adults need to respect all children as well as help and assist them. It is important

to raise awareness on this matter and since everyone is responsible, all need to act and work together.

Sunita Dhanuwar brought the personal element of human trafficking into the discussion. She shared her story of being trafficked from Nepal, at the age of 14 years, to Kamatipura in Mumbai, from where she was rescued after a period of six months. Shakti Samuha is the first organisation in the world that was established and run by survivors of human trafficking in 1996. Capacity building, protection and prevention are the main focus areas of Shakti Samuha, along with lobbying and advocacy. The organisation works towards providing sustainable livelihood, rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficked girls, besides assisting them with legal, employment and counselling services. They raise awareness about human trafficking and work towards protecting vulnerable girls and women from trafficking. While working on rescuing and repatriation, they coordinate with related Indian organisations. They conduct a risk assessment before reintegrating trafficked girls back into their families and also undertake regular follow-ups even after they are rehabilitated.

She spoke about emerging trends of human trafficking in Nepal, which can be found in the name of foreign employment, marriage, student visa, surrogacy/breastfeeding, work in the entertainment industry and organ transplants (including skin transplant and cosmetic surgery). Nepal is turning into a transit, destination and source country for trafficking. Lack of awareness and information about the prosecution process among the trafficked women and their families is another challenge. She mentioned the example of Nepali girls trafficked to Iraq whom she is still struggling to rescue.

Anoop Sharma shared his involvement with Plan India's Safer Cities programme, their global initiative with UN-Habitat and Women in Cities International. The objective is to increase safety and access to public spaces for women and girls. He revealed that they wanted to go beyond creating

awareness by making a real difference on the ground. Along with various initiatives by the government, there have been public protests and campaigns by the media regarding their concern for the safety of women in the Capital city. However, nobody has been able to find a practical, long-lasting solution. Therefore, they began a campaign in Delhi asking girls and women to pinpoint locations where they feel unsafe.

Delhi being the least safe city for girls and women in India, they came up with the concept of 'Safe Houses', which can be accessed by any girl or woman who feels unsafe and seeks immediate help. The logo for the programme is a safety pin inside a bracket and this logo is painted in front of every 'safe house' so women can identify them easily. Here, communities and police work together in close coordination. There are more than 200 'safe houses' located every few metres in two localities of the city. He described the positive factors of the programme as innovative, permanent and scalable. Involving citizens can lead to permanent, effective and scalable solutions. He said there is scope for extending the programme to other parts of the city.

From the Chair: Mariann Eriksson asked Sunita Dhanuwar if her organisation is undertaking or planning to undertake any campaign for girls who are trafficked by being lured into marriage. She responded that her organisation is working on awareness campaigns and added that many survivors get married and share their stories with their would-be spouse before marriage.

The chair asked Anoop about the next steps for the Safer City programme. He replied that the second phase would be implemented across the city and will hopefully begin soon.

The Chair asked panellists what was the one thing most successful in achieving their goals of different projects. Dorothy replied there was no single magic bullet and a multi-sectoral approach was required to achieve their goals. Cecelia added that INTERPOL needs cooperation from all stakeholders while working on the issue of online child sexual abuse.

The chair sought the views of panellists on whether SDGs could be achieved by 2030. Rinchen Chopel mentioned that they cannot achieve such things overnight and efforts should be focused on working with child rights at the centre of the agenda. Dorothy Rozga pointed out that India is not a member of the Global Alliance to combat child sexual exploitation, which means one-fifth of the world's population is missing although there are more than 80 member countries.

PRIZE DISTRIBUTION SESSION OF NATIONAL DEBATATHON

Ranjan Chak, who chaired the Jury of the national debatathon, shared his experience of judging three rounds of the debatathon and enlightened the audience with his views on the three topics. He believed that

advancement in technology has improved communication and networking across the globe. Technology has also been amazingly helpful in improving situations for girls. He said an individual alone cannot smash gender stereotypes and it always becomes easier and faster to drive change with the support of family and community. He praised everyone for their performance and presentation of arguments. Moreover, he stated that all participants from across the country shared their experiences and views that were very similar. This implies concerted efforts are needed to bring change.

Rathi Vinay Jha and Ranjan Chak presented all state and national-level winners with certificates and trophies. Rohit Jha won the final round of the national debatathons. (See *Annexure for details of state-level winners of Debatathons.*)



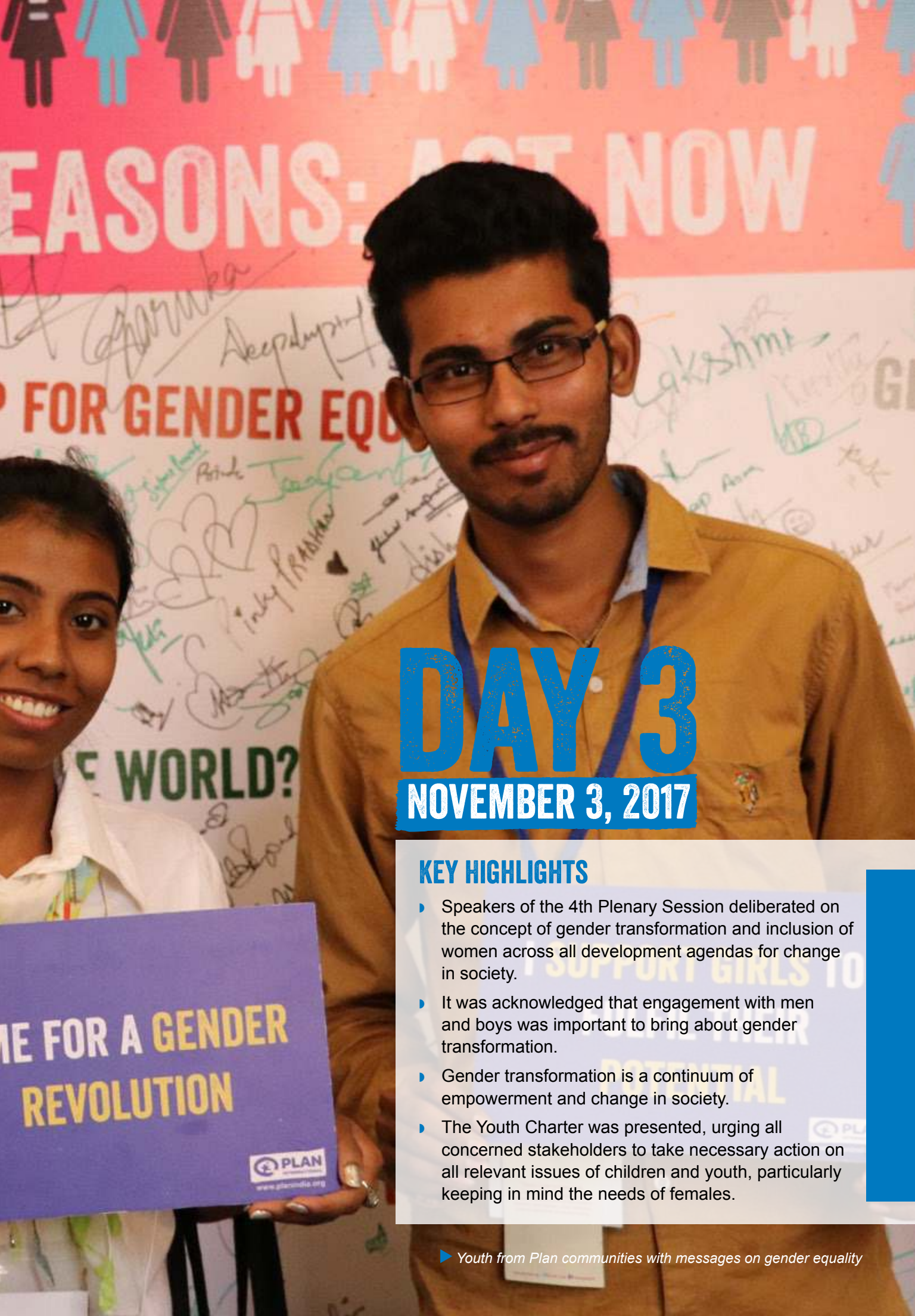
► Rohit, winner of the Youth Debatathon receiving the award from Rathi Vinay Jha, Chairperson, Plan India Governing Board



THE WORLD

STEP IT UP





DAY 3

NOVEMBER 3, 2017

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ Speakers of the 4th Plenary Session deliberated on the concept of gender transformation and inclusion of women across all development agendas for change in society.
- ▶ It was acknowledged that engagement with men and boys was important to bring about gender transformation.
- ▶ Gender transformation is a continuum of empowerment and change in society.
- ▶ The Youth Charter was presented, urging all concerned stakeholders to take necessary action on all relevant issues of children and youth, particularly keeping in mind the needs of females.

Smita Bharti welcomed everyone to the final day of the conference. She praised the youth for their active participation and congratulated the children presenting mime performances since the first day for their sincere efforts and brilliant performances. The mimes drew the attention of the audience towards a variety of socio-cultural issues that society has succumbed to ranging from gender inequality to cultural alienation. She informed the audience about the partnership of Plan India with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, which has culminated in various successful initiatives, including two national conferences on ‘Plan for Every Child.’

The conference was solution-oriented and invoked responsibility and accountability from everyone towards the country’s youth and children. She disclosed that the collective vision emerging through the past few days had been translated into a charter crafted by the youth from across the country. The Youth Charter was a cumulative product of ideas and thoughts that came across in various debatathons organised at the regional and national levels. The Youth Charter mainly dealt with topics such as child protection, education, gender inequality, third gender segregation, revamping the education system and infrastructural issues.

PLENARY SESSION 4: DRIVING THE CHANGE: TOWARDS INCLUSION AND GENDER TRANSFORMATION

CHAIR

S Parasuraman,
Director,
Tata Institute of Social Science, Plan India
Governing Board

PANELLISTS

- ▶ Renu Singh, Country Director, Young Lives
- ▶ Aparajita Gogoi, Executive Director, Centre for Catalyzing Change
- ▶ George Abraham, CEO, Score Foundation
- ▶ Syeda Sakira Sahin, Associate Professor, Department of Women’s Studies, Guwahati University, Assam
- ▶ Sunita Prasad, Senior Manager – Sustainability and CR, Ericsson India Ltd.
- ▶ Sanjay Roy, Managing Director, Teamwork, and Trustee, Salaam Baalak Trust
- ▶ Mohammed Asif, Director, Programme Implementation, Plan India

S Parasuraman introduced the topic, ‘Driving the Change: Towards Inclusion and Gender Transformation’. ‘Transformative change’ is a vital input towards sustainable development entailing behavioural, structural and systemic changes to make a lasting impact. He stressed the requirement of an inclusive, gender-transformative agenda for long-term economic and human development in India. Gender transformation is a multidimensional phenomenon, which involves reconstructing



▶ *S Parasuraman leading the discussion on Day 3*

public attitudes and perceptions through transformative actions such as regulatory changes that enable and promote gender equity. When gender equality is a component of other human and economic development interventions and policy, we move closer to gender-inclusive development, which is a prerequisite for gender transformation. Some of the focus areas of the session included long-term ramifications of demographic transition, current notion of masculinity and the role of men as change agents. Panellists were asked to highlight potential hurdles in a diverse country like India and suggest solutions to overcome them.

Renu Singh spoke about issues of childhood and adolescence based on findings from a longitudinal study done by Young Lives. She discussed her idea of inclusion and gender identity, stating that inclusion means to remove barriers and enhance opportunities for participation in all walks of life. The structures at macro and micro level, as well as cultural beliefs and practices, have a ripple effect on forming gender identity. She focused on the issues related to childhood and adolescence as this transition period is the most crucial time in shaping gender behaviour. She shared her experience of working in the longitudinal study done by Young Lives in four countries: Peru, Ethiopia, India and Vietnam. The research study followed two groups of children since 2001 with a sample size of 3,000 in each country. The study considered all aspects of children's development.

The study revealed that gaps in enrolment widen during adolescence along lines of gender, poverty and social disadvantage in India. Disparities are the result of inequitable investment in girls' education, early marriages, poor or unsafe school environments and competing demands on girls' time because of work.

She noted that the percentage of girls in school is higher than boys in Peru, Vietnam and Ethiopia, unlike India. Gender gap across different dimensions and parameters widens with age. In the 'pro-poor' sample,

11% were consistently poor over the years across the five rounds and there was no gender inequality. While domestic chores and child marriage are the major reasons for girls to drop out of school, the opportunity for paid work is the reason for boys. Although boys and girls begin working from similarly young ages, work becomes increasingly gendered as they grow up.

Further more, safety is still a big issue while violence is very pervasive in the lives of many children and adolescents. Poverty, risk and responsibility in early adolescence shape later trajectories. Shocks intensify pressure but in an uneven manner. Adult illness, death of a caregiver and dowry debt have long-term consequences for adolescents in the household. She said it is important to work on the aspiration, education, livelihoods and attitudinal change of parents.

Aparajita Gogoi spoke about the gender transformative agenda and challenges faced in achieving gender equality. She pointed out that although the government has created opportunities for education of girls, their safety remains a serious concern. There has been an increase in feminisation of poverty, in terms of income as well as denying women and girls in reaching their full potential due to the dearth of choices and opportunities. Although education levels of girls are rising, their economic and work participation has decreased over the years. The female population in India faces deprivation in all aspects at all stages of life. As per economists, if 10% more girls finished higher education, the nation's GDP will increase by at least 3%.

Ms. Gogoi stressed the need to focus on gender norms that affect men and boys equally. Moreover, girls and women should start valuing themselves. For positive change, every girl and woman needs to express and defend their rights, have self-esteem and gain control over their lives.

George Abraham shed light on the situation of disabled people and the issues they face in India. According to the last Census,

there are more than 21 million people with disability, where it is presumed that approximately half of them would be women. People are neither sensitised nor aware of the needs and issues of disabled people. They are quick to form judgments about any disabled person while their expectations are very low and, often, their focus is limited only to the disability.

He added that people with disability are also human resources. Therefore, he said there should be an investment made on disabled people rather than providing for them. It is necessary to expect disabled people to contribute as inclusion happens only when people begin contributing. He added there was lack of accountability for programmes meant for the disabled. He cited how the website of Digital India did not have any provision for access by blind people. Consequently, it is important to make the ecosystem accessible and disabled friendly while simultaneously working on empowering the disabled.

Syeda Sakira Sahin briefly gave a conceptual framework of gender transformation in society. She stated that, initially, gender imbalance was addressed with an instrumental view to empower women by focusing on the efficiency of individual woman to emerge as a force for catalysing development outcomes. However, this approach failed to generate sustainable change and rather had a temporary transient change. Therefore, the focus needs to change from engaging with only women's agencies to more collective responsibility where all stakeholders play their part in empowering women.

She acknowledged the role of grassroots-level mobilisation of women in generating awareness and building their capacities to challenge the patriarchal system, structures and relations. Gender transformative agenda in the development process should be about transforming unequal power and eliminating discrimination between men and women. She referred to the issue of dwindling child sex ratio, which is rooted in social and cultural norms and perpetuated by the advancement

in modern technology. While the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994, addresses this issue only at the surface level, the root causes are not really addressed, which have several ramifications in our society. She spoke about the rigid constructions of masculinity that deny men humanitarian values such as love, care, compassion, etc. and prevent them from equipping themselves with basic life skills. As for solutions, there should be a change in the ecological model that includes all structures having an effect on empowerment of women, with the gender transformative agenda being an ongoing process.

Sunita Prasad spoke about the partnership of Ericsson India and Plan India to support 15 Distance Learning Centres (DLC) for the education of around 15,000 girls over three years in Delhi and its neighbouring areas. These centres work in helping girls complete their schooling, improving their learning outcomes and ensuring their participation in the workforce.

She added that though the education level of women is improving, their participation in the workforce is not proportionate and more women are falling out of the workforce. In the corporate world, there exists a small pool of technologically-advanced girls. For a fair representation of women at all levels, it is important to work on quality education of girls, which would enable them to face the competitive job market. For gender transformation, she suggested it is imperative to include men in the discussion as well. Men need to talk about gender imbalance and how it impacts them in their work and life. In her closing remarks, she stated it is important to work for everyone and leave no one behind.

Sanjay Roy emphasised the importance of education, mental health, good governance and accountability in the context of the session's topic. He ticked off both the Central and state governments for not doing enough in the education domain. Mr. Roy stressed that without education,

the economy of the country will suffer. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all individuals and stakeholders to collectively look for solutions and work towards providing education to every child in India. Education is a fundamental right and the stepping stone for any social change. The need of the hour is to discover innovative solutions such as digital learning, schools on mobile vans, etc. to reach out to 110 million children who are out of school. Also, emphasis should be given to the quality of education as it has ramifications on the socialisation process.

He expressed concern about intolerance and violence in society, which has lost its sense of empathy. Good governance is necessary at all levels. He noted that reservation of women at the Panchayat level has resulted in a gradual process of rural development and empowerment of women. He said mental health is a serious concern that needs to be addressed effectively.

Mohammed Asif spoke about the gender-transformative approach adopted by Plan India in all programmes and policies. By outlining the concept of gender, he said analysis of gender differences generally show a disadvantaged and weaker access for girls and women to social, political, economic, legal and educational rights. Therefore, the focus is on correcting these imbalances through social development initiatives, specifically targeting girls and women. Unequal and unjust relations are found in:

- Awareness and access to knowledge and education
- Ownership of productive assets
- Access to natural resources and services
- Control over family income, entitlements and savings
- Leadership and decision making in the family and community

Since the struggle is real, the programmes of organisations should be gender transformative, improving both practical and strategic gender

issues. Gender-transformative programmes intentionally address underlying, structural causes of gender-based rights violations. This involves addressing social norms, cultural beliefs, attitudes and values.

He stressed that gender transformation is a continuum of empowerment and change in society. From confinement of girls and women at homes and exclusion from all decision-making processes, they go a long way to become economically and socially empowered with the help and support of Plan India and their NGO partners. It is essential to engage with boys and men to achieve the objectives of inclusion and gender transformation. They need to be engaged in the prevention of gender-based violence, supporting women's economic empowerment where they commit to an equal share in household and care work. Gender-equitable socialisation needs to be promoted at all levels of education, from early childhood education to the tertiary level. Men need to be engaged as supportive partners, clients and positive agents of change in sexual and reproductive health and rights, and maternal, newborn and child health.

From the Chair: The Chair said the approach of 'growth as development' adopted in the country is problematic. The disparity gap in income and wealth is widening. Despite 'growth', there has been less welfare, inclusion and equality in society. Although the education status has improved, jobless growth and a high rise in informal labour prevails.

According to him, the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and National Urban Mission (NULM) have been successful in bringing a fundamental change with the collectivisation of women in Self Help Groups (SHGs). He emphasised the involvement of institutions and universities along with civil society to share research ideas and put pressure on states to achieve common goals. He also urged CSR to work on empowerment of women.

OPEN FORUM

The audience raised the issues of politicisation of education and corruption. Renu Singh responded that politicisation of education is not limited to recruitment and transfers of teachers but covers all segments of education, including curriculum, textbooks, pedagogy and training. But the more critical questions that need analysis are whether there is enough investment in education and if education itself is empowering. Aparajita Gogoi asserted that to change the alarming situation of education in India, mobilisation of citizens with active participation of civil society is required. She added that gender disparity, education and inclusion need to become political issues so the government focuses on them more strictly. S Parasuraman mentioned the example of Kerala where CSOs make government employees accountable at all levels.

A query arose about street children in Delhi. Sanjay Roy responded by speaking about the background of these children. He mentioned that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) has been successful in some states in reducing migration. According to Mr. Roy, the interpretation of Juvenile Justice Act by CWC is problematic when attempts are made to send rescued children back to their families. Since all families are not capable of looking after their children, they should not be sent back to families they ran away from in the first place. He said the focus of development is on rural issues but urban clusters need equal attention.

A lady shared a story about ensuring the safety and protection of women in Vijayawada, Telangana, by working collectively with all stakeholders such as the police, colleges, civil society and media and forming 'mahila-mitras' of female police constables.

PLENARY SESSION 5: VALEDICTORY SESSION AND THE ROAD AHEAD

CHAIR

JVR Prasada Rao,
Special Advisor for UNAIDS,
Former Special Envoy of UN Secretary-
General for the Asia Pacific, Plan India
Governing Board

SPEAKERS

- N Hobo, Vice Chair, Governing Board, Plan International Japan
- Bilali Camara, Representative – India UNAIDS

N Hobo began the session by talking about the relationship between Plan India and Plan Japan. Plan Japan has 1,677 sponsored

children, comprising 12% of their contribution for sponsored children. He highlighted the issues of income disparity in India and Japan. One of the dangers of a fast-growing country like India lies in the widening income-disparity gap. Consequently, attention needs to be paid towards redistribution of income.

He spoke about the collaborations of the Indian and Japanese Governments on infrastructural developments such as the metro, port and power generation. He noted the Japanese Government has asked its Indian counterpart to hold policy dialogue on mitigating the widening income gap and redistribution of wealth. Despite government efforts, some gaps exist in society that need to be filled up by NGOs such as Plan International. Both government and CSOs need to work together in achieving the SDG objectives by 2030.

Bilali Camara shared his past experiences, discussing the importance of education in every individual's life. The exclusion of women and girls from education will

not be conducive to the social, economic and political development of any country. Educating girls offers far-reaching advantages, including their chance of participating in formal sector jobs with better wages. Education of girls has been found to have a positive impact on reducing Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) while lowering teenage pregnancies. The relationship between education and knowledge about transmission of diseases such as HIV and malaria has also been established. Education of girls allows them to participate in the nation's decision-making process and have family planning. Education is a vaccine against child marriage. Political leadership across all levels as well as in the executive branch increases with the education of girls. He mentioned the example of Uganda, where 50% of those in power and holding executive and legislative powers are women. This has led to ensuring social justice, human rights and gender equality, while promoting prosperity and curbing corruption in the country.

From the Chair: JVR Prasada Rao shared his views on the role of leaders in addressing the issues and development of the country. Leaders sometimes fail to meet their responsibility, whereby it is the duty of all concerned citizens, including civil society, to make them accountable. He cited the example of films to express concern about the regressive trend of objectifying women. He also voiced concern about growing intolerance in the country. He emphasised the need to focus on the development of the social sector.

He shared his experience of working on preventing HIV/AIDS. It was possible to control an HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country by engaging directly with high-risk groups such as female sex workers, MSM (Men having Sex with Men) and IDU (Injecting Drug Users). Therefore, empowerment of communities and strong leadership is required to bring about change in society. He stated that conferences are important but the discussions and ideas need to be

forwarded to policy makers and politicians and should be implemented at the ground level.

CLOSING REMARKS AND VOTE OF THANKS –

Bhagyashri Dengle,
Executive Director,
Plan India



► Bhagyashri Dengle giving the closing remarks on Day 3

Bhagyashri Dengle delivered a Vote of Thanks to all speakers, guests, partners, youths and the Plan India team for the conference's successful completion. The conference offered an opportunity for dialogue and deliberations with a host of professionals, experts and speakers from the government, civil society and media as well as with youths from across the country. This conference was designed taking into account recommendations from the First National Conference. She expressed gratitude to the Ministry of Women and Child Development for their support and partnership in this endeavour.

CONCLUSION

The plight of women and children in modern society continues to be a matter of grave concern. Understanding the United Nations' statement– *"Without progress for girls, there can be no real progress on our global commitments to justice and prosperity"* –

has become potentially more challenging in the developing world, where disparities and segregation have become more prevalent. Across various sessions, the conference strove to engage participants on numerous issues regarding gender inequality and, to some extent, succeeded in highlighting the main issues pertaining to children and especially relating to girls' welfare in India.

The conference spotlighted the idea that gender-based discrimination is one of the biggest challenges for girls to grow, achieve and survive in our country. It also highlighted thought-provoking subjects such as child marriage, forced labour, abnormal gender ratio, gender-based violence and education. It observed that the underlying cause of gender-based issues in India lies in the prevailing attitude of a male-dominated society that curtails the development and growth of females to a large extent. There is an impending need to develop a strong research and evaluation system with respect to gender issues, especially focusing on the concerns of girls. The importance of education and the use of innovative means of education were acknowledged while discussing different topics. There is a need for a multi-sectoral approach in achieving the goals of ensuring all rights for every child. It is essential to engage with boys and men

to achieve the objectives of inclusion and gender transformation. It is also important to develop community-wise development and monitoring systems to facilitate all-round development of girls.

Children, including all girls, are the future of our country. Therefore, to ensure inclusion of each citizen in the development agenda, concepts of gender segregation and women empowerment have to be addressed at a broader level giving equal preference to education, employment, security and economic development. The larger aim is to witness gender transformation at the ground level, which is a continuum of empowerment and change in society.

The Youth Charter paves the way forward for Plan India, along with all other stakeholders such as the government and CSOs, to address concerns of the youth, enabling them to visualise a better future. The GVI is another tool that will be instrumental in helping all to address issues of vulnerabilities in different states of the country, keeping in mind prevailing ground realities. The suggestions of speakers from diverse background on specific topics related to girls need to be taken seriously to improve the outcomes for each and every girl in the country.

“We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back. We call upon our sisters around the world to be brave – to embrace the strength within themselves and realise their full potential.”

– Malala Yousafzai, Nobel Peace Prize Winner

ANNEXURE-I:

REPORT OF YOUTH DEBATATHONS

BACKGROUND

In the recent past, India has taken strong steps to prevent violence against young girls and reduce their vulnerability. Plan India supports the policies that have been implemented in India to ensure children's protection, participation and development and believes a multi-dimensional, concerted effort involving all stakeholders is required to alter course towards a positive change.

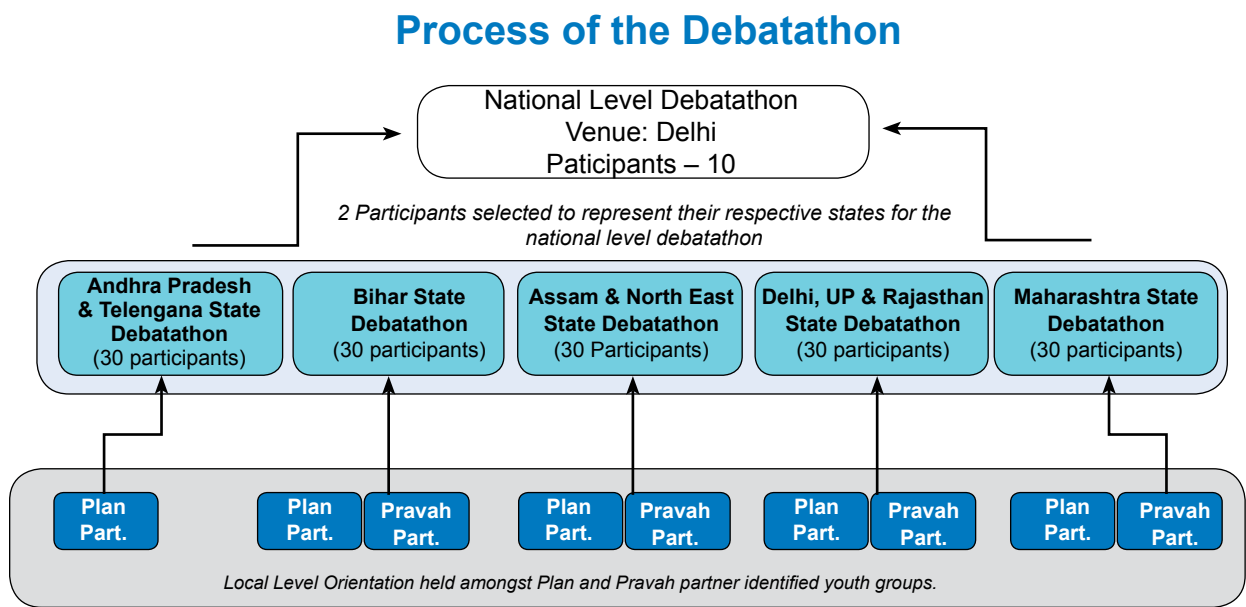
Plan India National Youth Advisory Panel members engaged a media group in the previous conference to highlight its outcome and raise their voice on the inclusion of youth. It was stressed in the 2016 National Conference on 'Plan for Every Child' that the inclusion of young people in consultation and decision making towards children in difficult circumstances was imperative to promote sustainable development. Accordingly, Plan India Youth Engagement Strategy is centred on meaningful youth participation in the

programmes, influencing the agenda and the internal decision-making process by collating [Voices of Youth through Debatathons](#).

As a formative part of the 2017 National Conference, Plan India reached out to and partnered with youth to involve them in shaping the discussions through debatathons at regional and national level. It was also decided to engage the youth beyond our programme area; therefore, youth from colleges and universities were invited to participate in the debatathons. The aim was to create a sense of ownership among youth from different states and institutions via their involvement right from the beginning. It also sensitised them in understanding children's experiences of vulnerabilities and in contributing to their well-being in the future.

PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

Plan India, along with technical agency PRAVAH Learning Voyages, organised and



facilitated debatathons on issues of girls across five regions in India that culminated in a grand finale in Delhi. Plan India had selected the concerned partners to host the debatathons in each region. The session module for youth mobilisation and step-by-step guidelines for conducting Youth Debatathons were disseminated to all hosting partners.

The three-day regional-level debatathons were designed as a development process for participants, encouraging them to be able to advocate for girls.

The jury committee was formed in each region in collaboration with hosting partners and technical agency to select the winners participating in the National Debatathon.

PARTICIPATORY FACILITATION

1. YOUTH MOBILISATION AND SELECTION

PRAVAH, along with Plan India, formulated the guidelines for youth mobilisation with eligibility criteria, session module for orientation with games and participatory activities such as Bingo game, self-reflection of the past, reflection on the present scenario and solution-finding activities. Based on the criteria, hosting as well as PRAVAH partners mobilised youth in the programme areas, colleges and universities and conducted orientation to select the youth participating in the state-level debatathon. It was decided to select those in the 18-24 years age group and 50% of participants needed to be young women willing to commit time to debatathons and the National Conference. The language employed was English since the National Conference had international participants.

2. REGIONAL DEBATATHONS

The debatathons were organised in five regions North (Delhi), Northeast (Guwahati), East (Bihar), South (Hyderabad) and West (Mumbai). Through countrywide scouting and outreach sessions, more than 500 youth were sensitised on the issues of

gender vulnerability. Around 100 youth from 15 states were selected to participate at state-level debatathon events. In each region, participants debated various topics addressing a wide range of issues relating to protection and participation of girls and their development. The participatory process of arriving at the topic ensured participants could suggest solutions to the issues from their personal experience. In each region, the youth presented a Youth Charter to the primary duty bearers.

PRAVAH had designed the framework for regional-level debatathon in collaboration with the Plan India team with many participatory activities and games to stimulate the youth for effective debate. On the first day of the debatathon, the session began with the activity 'Wish Tree' as an ice-breaker while the regional debatathons comprised brainstorming sessions on relevant issues pertaining to the youth, listening and speaking exercises and preparing for the debate and the final debatathon on the third day. The hosting partners chose eminent, professional jury members to select the winner based on the evaluation criteria.

3. GENDER VULNERABILITY INDEX: (GVI)

The 2017 National Conference was focused on girls with the theme 'Leave No Girl Behind' in alignment with Plan International's Global Strategy and Plan India's Country Strategy Plan. Plan India initiated the Gender Vulnerability Index for the evidence-based debatathon. The GVI was based on the life-cycle approach about how children at each stage of their lives till 18 years, especially girls, experience vulnerabilities in four key dimensions: poverty, education, protection and health.

The GVI became an important tool for the youth in the debatathon to analyse their experienced and/or perceived notion of girls' vulnerability in their respective regions and states. Plan India facilitated the findings with the youth at the beginning of the debatathon, which led the further process of preparation by the youth for participating in the debatathon.

PRIORITISATION OF ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS

Almost all the five regions prioritised specific issues that contributed to girls' vulnerability; the problem of school dropouts and sexual offences were identified across all regions as major reasons of vulnerability.

sensitisation of police and other duty bearers. Thirdly, initiating continuous advocacy campaigns on the issue of protection, development of girls and space for their participation in the decision-making process.

NATIONAL DEBATATHONS

Based on the predetermined themes, PRAVAH had designed a two day preparatory agenda to support youth for their conceptual understanding on the statements and even conducted sessions on public-speaking skills.

The youth were prepared well for National Debatathon on the above-mentioned two themes while the winners of these two rounds had a final impromptu third round where the topic was decided by the jury. The best debaters were selected by eminent jury members. *(See the main body of the Conference Report to know the views of the youths and outcomes of the National Debatathon.)*



► Participants at the National Conference with messages on gender equality

REGION-WISE PRIORITISED ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE YOUTH

Region	Participants from	No. of Young People	Prioritised Issues	Recommendation
West	Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh	22 girls and 21 boys	Protection of girls against violence Does education empower women to stand up for themselves?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in projects to empower young girls Engage in educating the male population of society as well Educate and empower families Make education relevant for girls in difficult circumstances Decrease dropout rates Ensure infrastructure development in communities to ascertain girls are supported for their development and growth
South	Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu	22 girls and 22 boys	School Dropouts Child Labour Child Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special drives in the community to identify needy families for employment opportunities and provide livelihood options by organising skill development programmes with follow-up at family level Strengthen functional linkages and coordination between Anganwadi and schools Strengthen the existing community health system by establishing palliative care centres and mobile health units to cater to health issues contributing to child labour Ensure larger engagement of women and girls in the Child Protection Committees (CPC) Child Protection Committees to be linked and accountable to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) The CPC should have clear awareness and an action plan created and reviewed by the CWC and prioritised based on the severity of issues in the locality, particularly addressing cases of girls in vulnerability Increase RTE scope from 14 to 18 years Girl-led drive to identify dropout peers and re-enrolling them in schools Development of a mobile app, web-based system and toll-free number for effective grievance redressal mechanism by the Education Department

Region	Participants from	No. of Young People	Prioritised Issues	Recommendation
East	Bihar, Jharkhand	16 boys and 15 girls		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive awareness programmes on sexual abuse and knowledge on possible ways to avert sexual abuse to be imparted to multiple stakeholders, including children and youth Parents need to be encouraged to draw safety net for their children Children to be introduced to a mobile-based app to raise alert in case of unsafe, threatening situations Raising awareness programmes on the importance of girls' education by using stories of contextual role models Girl-led drives to identify school dropout peers and re-enrolling them in schools Teachers and parents engaging in dialogue to identify potential factors responsible for girls' dropout and rectifying it to ensure education for all girls
Northeast	Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Assam, West Bengal	17 girls and 12 boys	School Dropouts Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure schools comply on the infrastructural requirements as per standards laid down under RTE Act, with special focus on schools being within one kilometre of the village and with appropriate first-aid facilities Inclusion of sex education and child rights in the curriculum via value-oriented learning by clearly highlighting its impacts and consequences To promote retention of girls, separate toilets for boys and girls in schools are required, which should encompass the safe menstrual hygiene practices Youth networks to be formed in North-eastern states to campaign and be a change agent in tackling child marriage and teenage pregnancies State, district and block functionaries to work with youth networks to prevent child marriage and teenage pregnancy
North	Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana	14 girls and 12 boys	Quality Education – Benefits in the school are increasing enrolment of girls but does not ensure quality education Child Labour – Is child labour better than living in poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that schools have clean toilets for girls and safe drinking water for everyone. Also ensure provision for free access of sanitary napkins for all girls, specifically from middle school onwards Include comprehensive sex education in the school curriculums (middle school onwards) to break social taboos and stigma Ensure mandatory parent-teacher meetings once in two months to enhance parents and teachers' accountability Build awareness through social media and mass media about the various forms of child labour and laws against it. Also involving eminent scholars, individuals and domain experts to hold workshops about the issue in schools and universities Recognise people who report cases of child labour to assist in governmental monitoring

Region	Participants from	No. of Young People	Prioritised Issues	Recommendation
National	Kashmir, Delhi, Bihar, Telangana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh	8 boys and 8 girls	"I, as an individual, am powerless to smash gender stereotypes" and "Access to technology enhances gender vulnerability"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure access to quality education and review the educational curriculum to eliminate gender biasness and promote gender equality, also by strengthening the gender ratio of teachers Combat dropout of girls at high-school levels by increasing residential education and free transportation facilities Improve the facilities available in schools and colleges, envisioning the need of girls and emphasise on improving knowledge and practices related to menstrual hygiene and sexual reproductive health Eradicate gender stereotypes and prevent and eliminate gender-based violence and exploitation in all settings, including home, educational, community, places of work, etc. Create safe spaces at all levels (families, communities, institutions, public forums and government) for young people to express their views and opinions and constructively engage in decision making, including via digital platforms Invest in economic empowerment of girls and young women and provide diversified vocational choices that are gender equitable and transformative Improve the gender-ratio in the workforce by providing opportunities to young women and also building conducive work environment to protect their rights, especially related to equal wages and sexual harassment at work Promote sports and cultural activities as a tool to engage with girls on different issues, as well as providing them an opportunity to represent themselves on different platforms Make special provisions for effective inclusion of and equal opportunities for the most marginalised girls and young women, including ones who are most excluded, such as those living with disabilities, in extreme poverty, etc. Enforce laws and sensitisation of law enforcement agencies towards the rights of children and young women, with strict provisions for non-compliance

WAY FORWARD

- Representation in National Youth Alliance.
- Formation of state, regional and national-level youth networks to cover as many youth as possible from different strata of society, which includes youth from marginalised and excluded communities, young people facing vulnerabilities as well as youth from colleges, universities, government initiatives such as Nehru Yuva Kendra and networks in the country.
- Partnering with youth-focused CSOs for the formation of networks.
- Choosing relevant organisations from each region to host network meetings in collaboration with Plan India and the Government.
- The youth network will discuss prioritised issues and recommend solutions at all levels and influence relevant stakeholders in reducing and addressing these issues, particularly girls' vulnerabilities, through policy changes, enforcement of law and by ensuring quality services.





ABOUT PLAN INDIA

Plan India is a nationally registered not for profit organisation striving to advance children's rights and equality for girls, thus creating a lasting impact in the lives of vulnerable and excluded children and their communities.

Since 1979, Plan India and its partners have improved the lives of millions of children and young people by enabling them access to protection, quality education and healthcare services, a healthy environment, livelihood opportunities and participation in decisions which affect their lives.

Plan India is a member of the Plan International Federation, an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. Plan International is active in more than 70 countries



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