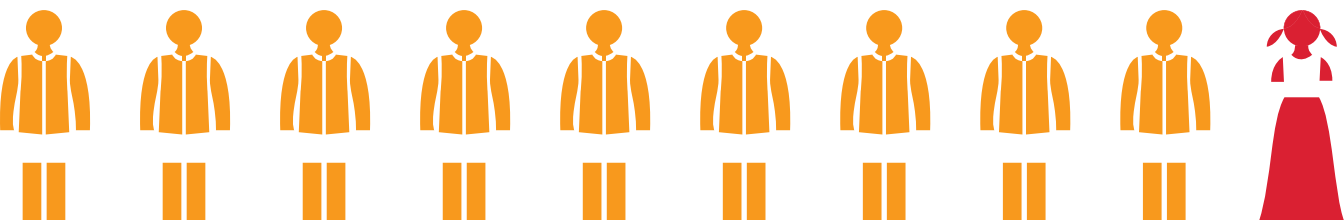




## COMMUNICATION GUIDE

# A Key to Building a People's Response to Gender-Biased Sex Selection





## COMMUNICATION GUIDE

# **A Key to Building a People's Response to Gender-Biased Sex Selection**



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## **A KEY TO BUILDING A PEOPLE’S RESPONSE TO GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION**

– Communications Guide – has benefited from the efforts and voices of many people. This includes many research study participants, workshop participants and stakeholders such as Panchayati Raj Institution members, academics, members of non-governmental and community-based organisations, and activists. Our heartfelt thanks to all of them and also to the people mentioned below who have worked hard to help us bring out this guide:

**Sonali Khan** for conceptualizing the framework and research design of the project and for her technical inputs in framing the messages and stakeholder engagement model

**Madhuri Mohindar** for writing the guide and producing its design and publication

**Sunita Menon** and **Gunjan Sharma** for creating, writing and testing the toolkit for stakeholders

**Praxis Institute of Participatory Practices** for conducting research and developing recommendations

**Leena Sushant** for guiding research and analysis, **Veenu Kakkar** for coordinating all field level research requirements, testing, and bringing learnings from Breakthrough’s field work in Haryana to inform the guide, **Devika Behl** for the initial desk review of the existing communication on gender-biased sex selection and **Aprajita Mukherjee** for research and support in writing the guide

**Rubita Gidwani** for developing messaging routes and strengthening communication strategies

**UNFPA** for their conceptual, technical and editorial guidance and extensive contribution in shaping this publication. In particular, **Ena Singh, Rajat Ray, Dhanashri Brahme** and **Shobhana Boyle** for their critical inputs, **Priyanka Ghosh** and **Vidya Krishnamurthy** for the support provided throughout the project

**Asha Verghese** for copy editing

**Mira Malhotra** for design of the guide

Photography by **Madhuri Mohindar** for a majority of photographs

**Preksha Shukla, The Noun Project** for the boy and girl icon

## FOREWORD

**DESPITE RAPID ECONOMIC GROWTH,** deeply entrenched norms and traditions that discriminate against women and girls have nurtured a culture of son preference that underlies gender biased sex selection. Declining fertility and the misuse of modern technology have further exacerbated this practice.

The continuing imbalance in sex ratios and the consequent masculinisation of the country's demography is expected to have serious social and economic consequences that will unravel over the next few generations. The situation calls for sustained commitment and concerted efforts by governments, international agencies, civil society, families and individuals to urgently address the issue.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) India has been focusing on the issue of sex selection for more than a decade by supporting national interventions and engaging in research and advocacy to bring the issue to the forefront in the national agenda. There is wide consensus that efforts are required on multiple fronts to tackle sex selection. Legal measures

to prevent the misuse of technologies need to be accompanied by measures that address the social norms and structures governing son preference by targeting change within communities and families. Dialogue to transform attitudes and behaviours towards women and girls thus needs to be fundamental to the efforts for addressing gender inequalities manifested through skewed sex ratios. It is here that effective and sensitive communication strategies can make a dent. With this intention, UNFPA collaborated with Breakthrough to develop a communication guide on addressing gender biased sex selection. The ultimate objective of this initiative is to stimulate discourse and critical thinking at the family and individual level to counter son preference by providing pointers for most effective messaging while cautioning on language use and other nuances.

This communication guide systematically reviews and assesses gaps and challenges in existing communication approaches, and recommends alternative strategies based on a rigorous pre-testing of messaging tracks at the community level. Taking a step further, the guide also identifies and engages with key message carriers (such as young



girls and boys, frontline workers, members of women's self help groups, Panchayati Raj Institution members, teachers and media professionals) by sharing core message content for each stakeholder group.

UNFPA would like to acknowledge and appreciate Breakthrough's efforts in developing this communication guide. The inputs and insights from community members and frontline workers that helped shape the recommendations for an alternative communication strategy are especially valued. It is hoped that this guide will serve as a useful resource for strengthening advocacy and communication on tackling sex selection and promoting equal value for daughters.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Frederika Meijer'.

**Frederika Meijer**  
Representative  
UNFPA Office for India and Bhutan

## FOREWORD

### **BREAKTHROUGH BEGAN WORK ON THE ISSUE**

of gender-biased sex selection in Haryana in 2012, which coincided with the release of the Government of India's latest census data. It showed that the female sex ratio across India was highly skewed. The numbers were more alarming in Haryana with the female sex ratio at 879 to 1000 males and an even lower child sex ratio at 834 girls to 1000 boys. As our teams began travelling to villages and interacting with the communities, it became clear that we would have to address both the community's preference for sons as well the mindset that viewed girls as unwanted. The harsher underlying truth was that the situation was a manifestation of persistent discrimination against girls, which was reflected in the status accorded to girls and women in our society.

Our baseline study in Jhajjar and Sonapat, districts with sex ratios lower than the national average, revealed that community members have very low regard for the basic rights of women. Further, women internalised their inferior and subordinate status that undermined, and in many cases,

completely negated their sense of rights. Thus, while women were aware of their right to property they did not claim it, buckling under social pressure that looks down upon women who claim their share in ancestral property. Women were also often denied the right to education, work, mobility and reproductive rights. In fact, the status of a woman in her family was perceived to go down if she had daughters. This compelled us to conclude that it was impossible to address gender-biased sex selection without addressing the issue of women's rights and the discrimination faced by women and girls.

We began the journey of developing a strategy in collaboration with UNFPA to address this very complex problem. The range of responses to the declining number of girls in the community was varied, from not seeing it as an issue at all to recognising that there were fewer brides left for their sons. Others linked the reduced number of girls to the growing insecurity and increasing incidences of violence and atrocities perpetrated against women and girls. For over one and half years, we engaged with key stakeholders including community elders, women, youth, health workers, religious leaders, teachers, panchayat members



**breakthrough**

and government officials, to see how we could address this problem.

This communication guide is an effort to help stakeholders understand their roles and how to be effective partners, what should be the levels of engagement at various stages, and how to maximise the scope and scale of interventions. This document, therefore, is not merely a communication guide, but one that evaluates the role of every key player and stakeholder and suggests who to communicate with and how to communicate.

The support of the JRD Tata Trust fund has been crucial to our work on the ground as the experiences we gathered from the field have enriched this guide. We are also thankful to UNFPA for sharing their vast subject knowledge and being active partners, and their engagement and provision of critical inputs in crafting this document.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Khan'.

**Sonali Khan,**  
**Vice President, Country Director-India,**  
**Breakthrough**



This document is based on **Breakthrough's** campaign against gender-biased sex selection in Haryana, India, supported by **UNFPA** and **Tata Trust**





**COMMUNICATION GUIDE**

**A KEY TO  
BUILDING  
A PEOPLE'S  
RESPONSE TO  
GENDER-BIASED  
SEX SELECTION**

---

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	01
<b>FOREWORD</b>	02
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	10
An introduction to UNFPA and Breakthrough and their work on gender-biased sex selection	

---

1	<b>OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMUNICATION GUIDE</b>	
	1.1 Objectives	20
	1.2 Who can use this guide?	21
2	<b>UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITY OF GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION</b>	
	2.1 What is GBSS?	26
	2.2 The current situation	28
	2.3 Why does GBSS persist?	32
	2.4 What is the impact of GBSS?	34
	2.5 What measures have been made to curb GBSS?	38
3	<b>NEED FOR A PEOPLE'S RESPONSE</b>	
	3.1 Why build a community-based response to GBSS?	44
	3.2 How to build a community-based response using this guide?	46

4	<b>OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS GBSS</b>	
	4.1 Review and analysis of existing communication strategies	54
	4.1.1 A 'risk-list' to keep in mind when developing communication strategy for GBSS	58
	4.2 Providing an alternate framework for effective communication strategies to challenge GBSS	62
	4.2.1 Communication strategies development	63
	4.2.2 Two new effective communication strategies to challenge GBSS	69
	4.2.3 The final communication strategies – A sample	74
5	<b>WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS AND WHY INVOLVE THEM AS INFLUENCERS?</b>	
	5.1 Who are the most effective stakeholders or carriers of the message?	81
	5.2 The opportunities and challenges of working with different stakeholders	83
	5.2.1 Power of the individual: How stakeholders can impact their sphere of influence	88
	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	106
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	107

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS** ANM Auxiliary Nurse Midwives | ASHA Accredited Social Health Activists | CDPO Child Development Protection Officers | GBSS Gender-Biased Sex Selection | HAS The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act | ICDS Integrated Child Development Scheme | MWPSCA Maintenance & Welfare of Parents & Senior Citizens Act | PC-PNDT Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act | PRI Panchayati Raj Institutions | SHG Self Help Groups







# About UNFPA



UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA is the lead United Nations agency for delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, every young person's potential is fulfilled, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.

United Nations Population Fund



**GUIDED BY THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION** adopted at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the Millennium Development Goals, UNFPA partners with governments, civil society and other agencies to ensure that the reproductive health and rights of women and young people remains at the very centre of development.

UNFPA in India has been assisting the Government of India since 1974 to advance reproductive health and rights, strengthen health service delivery to contribute to improved maternal health outcomes, and use population data for policies and programmes that promote gender equality and human rights.

UNFPA partners with the government and other development partners, and carries out its programmes through offices in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan.

UNFPA India has been working on the issue of gender-biased sex selection for over a decade, raising awareness, undertaking policy research, and evidence based advocacy, and orienting diverse stakeholders to work collectively on the issue. Partnerships with the government, medical community, judiciary, media and civil society, have been at the core of UNFPA's strategic response to addressing sex selection.



# About Breakthrough

**BREAKTHROUGH** is a global human rights organization working to make violence against women and girls unacceptable. Our mission is to prevent violence against women and girls by transforming the norms and cultures that enable. We carry out this mission by building a critical mass of change agents worldwide — the Breakthrough Generation — whose bold collective action will deliver irreversible impact on the issue. Working out of centres in India and the U.S., we create innovative, relevant multimedia campaigns, tools, and programmes that reach individuals and institutions where they are, inspiring and equipping them to build a world in which all people live with dignity, equality, and justice.

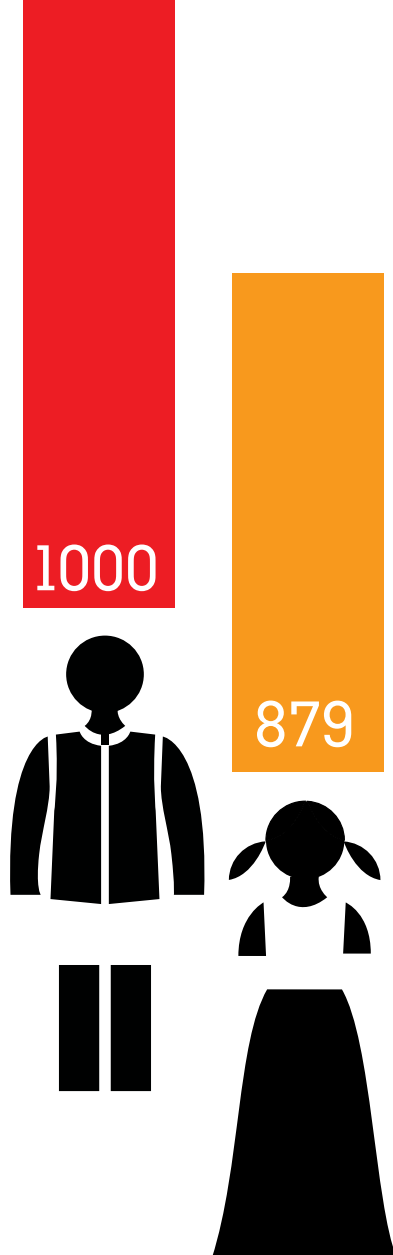
Human rights start with you.





**BREAKTHROUGH'S** internationally lauded programme, Bell Bajao ('Ring the Bell') – recipient of a distinguished Cannes Silver Lion – has inspired millions of men and boys in India and beyond to take a stand against domestic violence. This, together with the initiatives challenging early marriage, gender-biased sex selection, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and more, enables a critical mass of change-makers to stand for human rights in their own spheres and beyond.

[www.breakthrough.tv](http://www.breakthrough.tv)



**HARYANA** is one of the worst affected states for gender-biased sex selection; with the current sex ratio at **879** women to **1000** men<sup>1</sup>

**OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS,**

Breakthrough has been working to end gender-biased sex selection in Haryana, India, through strategic partnerships with the Government of India including the National Mission for Empowerment of Women (Ministry of Women and Child Development), the Ministry of Education and the National Rural Health Mission, and with support from UNFPA, the Tata Trust and the IKEA Foundation. This document is based on the research, findings and experiences of Breakthrough's campaign against gender-biased sex selection in Haryana, India and is an opportunity to pool resources and share a communication guide to challenge the problem.



#### **FOUR DISTRICTS IN HARYANA,**

(Panipat, Sonapat, Rohtak and Jhajjar) were identified as target areas for Breakthrough's campaign against gender-biased sex selection supported by UNFPA and Tata Trust. With its current sex ratio at 879 women to 1000 men<sup>1</sup>, Haryana is one of the worst affected states. Using mass media, leadership trainings and community engagement, Breakthrough is working with leaders and stakeholders, community members and youth, to change the culture that perpetuates gender-biased sex selection, prioritizing the rights of women and girls as equal citizens.

Breakthrough conducted Formative and Baseline Research to create effective communication strategies that would target the roots of gender-biased sex selection, creating shifts in thought, attitude and behaviour.

Formative Research tested different communication strategies developed by Breakthrough and identified stakeholder groups (such as frontline health workers, Panchayati Raj members and youth) who were likely

to deliver these communication strategies most effectively. Baseline Research revealed the community and stakeholders' perceptions, knowledge and attitudes towards gender-biased sex selection and gender equality.

Breakthrough began its programme in Haryana using these communication strategies, which were developed to challenge gender-biased sex selection.



- Creating a **media campaign** to reach millions that will raise the status of women and girls — reiterating their right as equal citizens, challenging the prevailing gender norms and providing an alternate interpretation of masculinity - through large-scale television advertisements, information booklets and internet strategies.
- Conducting **leadership trainings** and capacity building with various stakeholders in the community, which include training frontline field workers such as Anganwadi workers, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives and Accredited Social Health Activists.
- Promoting the **participation** of Panchayati Raj Institutions (village-level local government).
- Working with **schools** and teachers to raise awareness.
- Reaching a large number of population through **community** mobilization events using *nukkad nataks* (street theatre), local performing arts, as well as small and big *melas* (fairs), to create a public debate around the issue and generate action against violations.
- Sharing our learnings and **evaluating** the change in communities.

# MAJOR

# INITIATIVES

## By challenging existing gender-biased norms

and dominant notions of masculinity (and femininity), Breakthrough's vision is to ensure that society recognizes the value of girls and women and upholds their right as equal citizens, and as a collective, works together to end gender-biased sex selection.

In the long run, the community must be empowered to welcome daughters into their homes by changing the long-held patriarchal beliefs and expectations that enable discrimination against daughters and provide the impetus for son preference.



A woman wearing a blue headscarf and a blue sweater is looking down at a document. The image has a blue color overlay. A yellow horizontal bar is positioned above the text.

# OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMUNICATION GUIDE



# 1

**1.1** Objectives

**1.2** Who can use this guide?





## WHO CAN USE THIS GUIDE?

**THE GUIDE** will be useful for multiple government departments, community service organizations, international agencies, and other stakeholders who have been investing in communication to challenge gender-biased sex selection. It will provide an analysis of various approaches to gender-biased sex selection and lay out effective communication strategies, which can

be incorporated into trainings and capacity building with the community and stakeholders, mass media such as television, radio and print advertising, new media such as the internet and mobile strategies, and community media such as video vans, street theatre and information booklets. The guide will also be useful for stakeholders who design or influence the creation and implementation of communication strategies for programmes, media campaigns and trainings, as well as for community mobilization around the issue of gender-biased sex selection.









# UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEXITY OF GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION



# 2

- 2.1** What is GBSS?
- 2.2** The current situation
- 2.3** Why does GBSS persist?
- 2.4** What is the impact of GBSS?
- 2.5** What measures have been made to curb GBSS?

## WHAT IS GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION?

**GENDER-BIASED sex selection is a discriminatory practice against girls that is a result of a complex web of socio-economic and cultural factors.** It is determined by three core factors: deep-seated patriarchal mindsets that lead families to value sons over daughters, an increasing trend towards small families<sup>2</sup> and the misuse of medical technology such as the ultrasound. However, central to this practice, is the low status of women and girls in society and the deep-rooted prejudices that they face throughout their lives. The issue needs to be seen and understood in the context of a male-dominated social and family structure and a value system based on son preference where boys are preferred and valued more than girls. Gender-biased social norms and practices reinforce the perception of daughters as liabilities<sup>3</sup>. Besides being a manifestation of discrimination against women and girls, gender-biased sex selection poses a serious



### THE CORE FACTORS THAT CAUSE GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION

- 1 ——— Deep-seated patriarchal mindsets that lead families to value sons over daughters
- 2 ——— Increasing trend towards small families
- 3 ——— Misuse of medical technology such as the ultrasound



risk factor for violence against women. Violence against women prevents women from fully participating in society and is a grave violation of human rights including the rights to safety, security and a life of dignity, which constitute the inalienable rights of every citizen, including women.

The selection of the term gender-biased sex selection is critical. While sex tends to refer to biological differences, gender refers to culturally or socially

determined differences. Therefore, the term 'Gender-Biased Sex Selection' captures the fact that people are making choices about sex based on broad biases around gender.

Moreover, previous terminologies such as 'female foeticide' (*bhrunhatya*) tend to link the practice of sex selection to access to legal abortion. In India, abortion is legal under certain circumstances as defined by the Medical Termination of Pregnancy

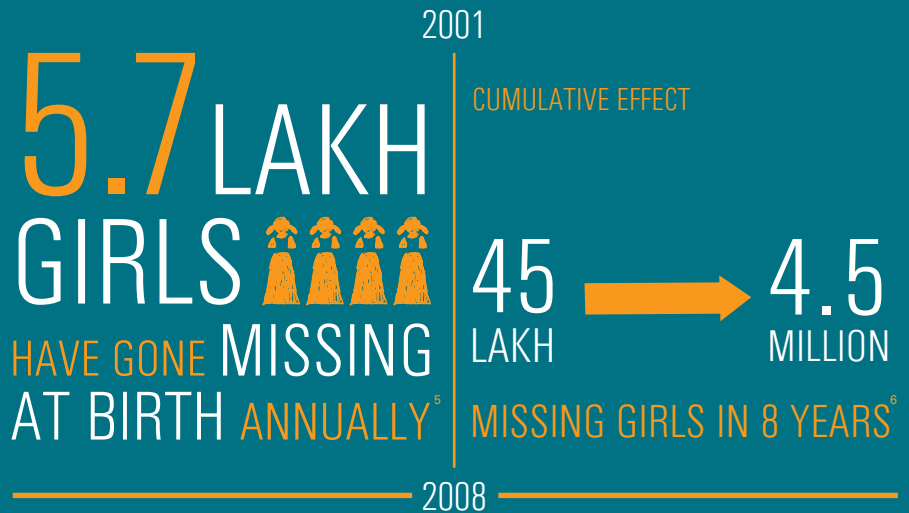
Act, 1971. These circumstances are, for example, danger to the mother's life, foetal abnormality, rape, or contraceptive failure. However, the law does not permit abortion for reasons of sex selection. It is important to recognize this fact.

As permitted by the law, many women seek abortion services for legally valid reasons. Therefore, using a definition that relates to curbing access to legal abortion services is ineffective in preventing the misuse of medical technology, which is the primary concern in the context of gender-biased sex selection. From a gender-equality perspective, gender-biased sex selection is a reflection of discrimination against girls and the subordination of women as a group. Not providing women access to safe abortion services for legally valid reasons deepens this subordination.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

Gender-biased sex selection is a key manifestation of the subordinate status of women in society, with far-reaching socio-demographic consequences.

Gender-biased sex selection directly impacts the sex ratio (the number of females per 1000 males) and the child sex ratio (the number of girls per 1000 boys between 0-6) in a given population.





GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION DIRECTLY IMPACTS

# child sex ratio:



Child Sex Ratio is no. of girls per 1000 boys in the 0-6 year age group

976  
GIRLS  
1961

→

918  
GIRLS  
2011

CHILD SEX RATIO  
0-6 yrs age group  
As per 2011 census

972  
FEMALES  
1901<sup>7</sup>

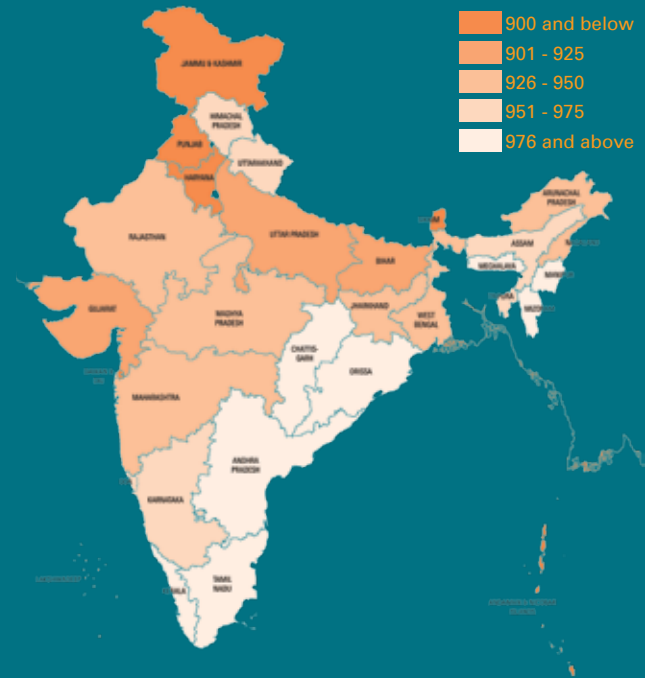
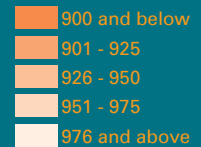
→

943  
FEMALES  
2011<sup>8</sup>

SEX RATIO  
As per 2011 census

## SEX RATIO

CENSUS 2011



## STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES RANKED BY SEX RATIO 2011

	per 1000 males
Kerala	1,080
Puducherry	1,037
Tamil Nadu	996
Andhra Pradesh	993
Chhattisgarh	991

As per 2011 census<sup>9</sup>

	per 1000 males
Daman & Diu	618
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	774
Chandigarh	818
Delhi	868
Haryana	879

As per 2011 census<sup>9</sup>

India's sex ratio has never been favourable to women and has historically been negative.

Over a span of time, the sex ratio and child sex ratio has steadily declined.

According to global trends, the normal child sex ratio should be above 950.

However, in certain parts of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and even Delhi, there are less than 850 girls for every 1000 boys.

The child sex ratio reflects both pre-birth and post-birth discrimination against girls. Therefore, the sex ratio at birth is considered a more accurate and refined indicator of the extent of sex selection not influenced by post-birth factors such as mortality or neglect.



## CHILD SEX RATIO

0 YEARS

6 YEARS

pre-birth

birth

post-birth

GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION

FEMALE INFANTICIDE  
SELECTIVE NEGLECT



# THE SEX RATIO AT BIRTH FOR INDIA 2009-2011

906 GIRLS  
1000 BOYS<sup>10</sup>



The rapid decline in child sex ratio raises a pivotal question about a worrying trend:

Why are fewer girls being born while the life expectancy of adult women is on the rise in the country?

Adult women have benefited from improvements in living conditions and social development, including education, better opportunities for employment and health care. At the same time, parents seek to ensure having sons, as in patriarchal settings, the low value attached to the girl child has made daughters dispensable, triggered by many socio-economic and cultural factors and new technologies.<sup>12</sup>

## STATES AND UNION TERRITORIES RANKED BY CHILD SEX RATIO (0-6 years) 2011

	per 1000 males
Mizoram	970
Meghalaya	970
Puducherry	970
Chhattisgarh	969
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	968

As per 2011 census<sup>11</sup>

	per 1000 males
Haryana	834
Punjab	846
Jammu & Kashmir	862
Delhi	871
Chandigarh	880

As per 2011 census<sup>11</sup>

## WHY DOES GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION PERSIST?

**DESPITE SUSTAINED** economic progress, deeply entrenched traditions of discrimination against women continue to prevail in India, often manifesting in acts of gender-biased sex selection. Sons are preferred over daughters as traditions deign that they alone can inherit property, care for ageing parents, conduct funeral rites and carry on the family name. The practice of dowry, compounded by the belief that the daughter becomes *paraya dhan* (another's wealth) after she gets married further perpetuates son preference. A further concern for families is the notion of 'family honour' or protecting a daughter's safety in an environment where crimes against women are rising, sexual harassment is rife and women's mobility and freedom thus severely restricted.

All these factors – son preference, the unregulated spread of diagnostic technologies and a growing desire for smaller families with at least one son, lower fertility rates<sup>13</sup> and economic considerations – have served to create conditions where gender-biased sex selection has flourished. This can be seen both as a shift as well as an intensification of discrimination against females.

The practice of gender-biased sex selection, earlier seen as a problem of the urban middle class, is now cutting across caste, class and region.

This means families now consciously decide on the 'needed/desired family' based on economic considerations. Planning the family now means planning for families with sons and preferably without daughters, and certainly not more than one daughter, guided with a clear cost-benefit analysis. Daughters are considered a bad investment for various reasons whereas sons constitute a profitable

## MAIN CAUSES IDENTIFIED FOR GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION

### Social

- Preference for sons and aversion for daughters
- Inheritance and carrying forward the family 'lineage'/name
- Customs and rites
- Status and honour
- Devaluation of women and girls and violation of their rights
- Dowry
- Lack of agency, choice, safety, security and sexuality for women and girls

### Political

- Indian population policy prompts parents to have smaller families
- Ineffective implementation of laws like PC-PNDT
- Lack of political will
- Lack of coordination between Central and State governments

### Economic

- Child-rearing costs
- Assets v/s liabilities
- Costs related to marriage, especially in the form of dowry
- Lack of financial independence for women
- Devaluation of women's work
- The market and the proliferation of technologies

investment with short as well as long-term returns<sup>14</sup>. However, it is important to reiterate that the practice of gender-biased sex selection is rooted in patriarchy wherein men control women's production, reproduction and sexuality. Thus, the strong prevalence of son preference assigns greater value on sons who eventually have more power and control over resources.

The practice of gender-biased sex selection, earlier seen as a problem

of the urban middle class, is now cutting across caste, class and region. Earlier prevalent in educated or richer households, presumably because they could afford technologies and ultrasounds more readily, the practice has spread to middle and lower-income families, as technologies have become cheaper and more accessible. Today, it has no barriers and is prevalent across all socio-economic and population groups, in both urban and rural areas. While sex selection can take place at

first pregnancy, it has been observed that more families are prone to resort to gender-biased sex selection for their second born. Further, it is especially high after a second daughter, across all income groups<sup>15</sup>.

## WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION?

**THE DRASTIC DECLINE** in the number of girls compared to boys has serious and severe implications for society at large, creating several societal deficits and crises.

Contrary to what many believe, fewer girls in a society will not enhance their status. Instead, as evidence from states with sex ratio imbalance demonstrates, it could lead to increased violence against women, rape, abduction, trafficking and a resurgence of practices such as polyandry (more than one man marrying one woman). In some parts of the country, women are already being 'bought' as brides, making the commodification of women a real threat<sup>16,17</sup>. In addition, there is increasing evidence to suggest that women in districts with skewed sex ratios experience more physical abuse and a higher degree of control than those in areas with a better sex ratio. Studies have also shown a

possible link between adverse sex ratio and violence, i.e., areas that are more 'masculine' are more prone to violence<sup>18,19</sup>.

### TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN THROUGH COERCED MARRIAGE AND COERCED POLYANDRY

In some parts of the country, the decrease in the number of girls is forcing families to look for brides from other states. What is also emerging is money being paid by the families of sons for brides (where daughters are often sold by poor families), propelled by the existence of the dowry system.

*In Sonapat, it was mentioned that prices for brides range from Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 50,000 to even a lakh.*

These findings are also affirmed by the study conducted by Breakthrough<sup>20</sup> across two districts of Haryana where both community and other stakeholders attest to this increasing practice. The study reveals how brides are being bought in a desperate attempt to continue the lineage, from states like Bihar, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Tripura and Nepal. The brides, called *mol ki bahu* literally meaning 'bought daughters-in-law', mostly come from poor, uneducated and landless families where parents

# SOCIAL & HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION

## Implications of gender-biased sex selection

- Skewed sex ratio
- Trafficking of women: coerced marriage and coerced polyandry
- Increased gender-based violence
- Women's health: inherent risks of repeated and unsafe abortion, exposure to quacks/unsafe medication, mental health implications

## Adverse implications for public health

- Morbidity related to unsafe abortions
- Mental health issues
- Sexual violence

are forced to sell their daughters for money, as they cannot afford to raise their daughters and especially meet their marriage expenses. Respondents in the Breakthrough baseline study claimed that the search for brides was leading families to also visit orphanages.

High prices were also being paid to 'procure' brides. In Sonapat, it was mentioned that prices range from Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 50,000 to even a lakh, with the amount being determined by the 'beauty' of the bride. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, rates exceed 1.5

lakh. In addition, the wedding expenses were being borne by the groom's side<sup>21</sup>. Besides treating women and girls as commodities that can be 'bought' and 'sold', research also indicates that 'long-distance brides' have less power in the marriage and lack support structures that they can depend on in times of difficulty. The difficulties that women belonging to lower castes face in such marriages are further compounded due to the stigma attached to untouchability<sup>22</sup>.

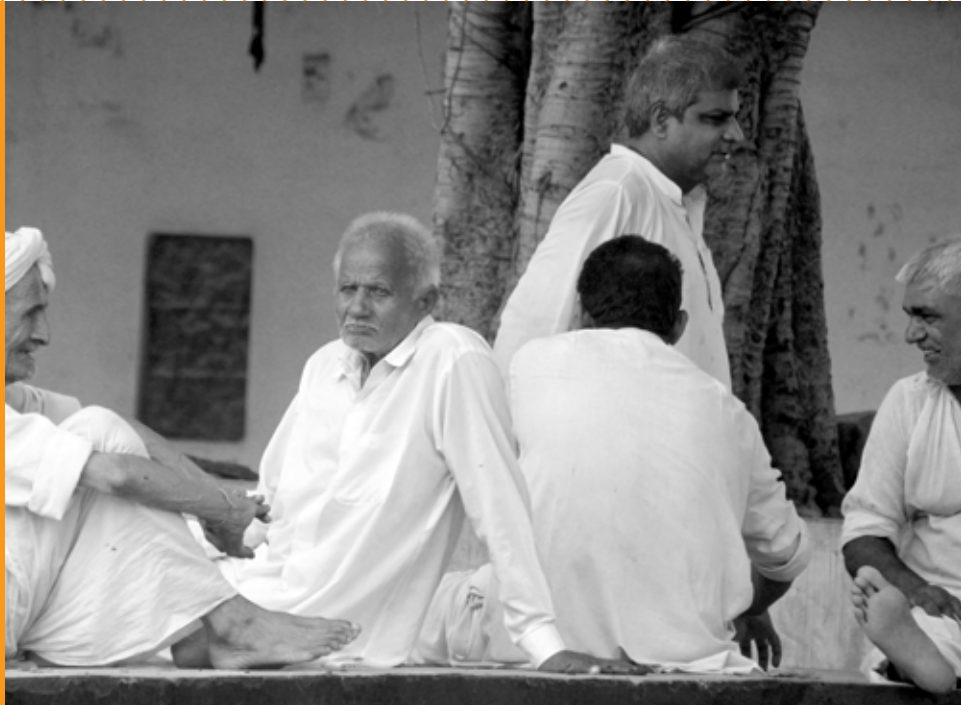
In addition, the baseline research commissioned by Breakthrough in

Haryana also reveals the apprehension amongst the community regarding inter-caste and inter-state marriages vis-à-vis arguments of lineage and 'purity'. As one of the respondents in Sonapat noted, *Hum log jaat hai lekin hamari nasal khatam ho rahi hai* (we are jaats and our caste purity is diminishing). According to a media person in Jhajjar, as a result of brides being bought from other states with no consideration of caste and class, children being born out of such marriages were not 'pure Haryanvis' - *doghli nasal taiyaar ho rahi hai* (future generations will have caste impurities).

Although inter-caste and inter-state marriages violate customary caste and community norms, they are accepted 'out of necessity' and by convenient fictions such as 'a woman has no caste'<sup>23,24</sup> and are seen primarily as 'distress marriages'. In addition, as the findings from the Breakthrough baseline research demonstrate, apprehensions of 'lineage' and 'purity' are equal corollaries indicating that such arrangements do not offset prejudices related to caste and class.

There is also a resurgence in practices such as polyandry (a woman marrying more than one man), and an increase in the number of early marriages between young women and much older men<sup>25</sup>.

Sexual crimes against women seem to be on the rise in the north and north-western areas of India that have skewed sex ratios.



### INCREASED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Significantly, the baseline research commissioned by Breakthrough<sup>26</sup> reveals an amplification of crimes against women with the nature and incidence of violence against women increasing steadily. Overall, sexual crimes against women seem to be on the rise in the north and north-western areas of India that have skewed sex ratios<sup>27</sup>. The research shows how the increase in crimes against women has heightened the feeling of insecurity amongst the community

leading to restrictions on women's mobility, thus adversely affecting their access to education and employment opportunities. As one of the woman respondents from Majhri village in Sonapat noted, *Ladke jeene nahin de rahe hain* (Boys aren't letting girls survive).

#### A. Sexual abuse

The research also indicates that sexual abuse is on the rise. Respondents in both the districts (Sonapat and Jhajjar) noted an increase in the cases of molestation and rapes as well as in

the instances of sexual harassment both outside and inside the home. The research also indicates women were being abused within homes by married and unmarried brothers, elders and young unmarried brothers. Most women do not talk about the abuse for fear of being maligned further and abandoned. Research indicates that practices such as fraternal polyandry (wife sharing by brothers) and leviratic marriage (a widow marrying her husband's brother) seem to be re-emerging in response to bride shortages<sup>28,29</sup>.



### B. 'Honour killings'

'Honour killings' are on the rise in the state of Haryana<sup>30</sup>. The research by Breakthrough reveals pervasive disapproval of marrying outside one's caste.

In processes with community members and other stakeholders in Jhajjar, it was reiterated that girls are the bearers of *izzat* (honour) of their family. If a mishap occurs or the daughter is perceived as having made a wrong decision, it is felt that she has compromised her family's 'honour'. A middle-aged man in Jhajjar explained that 'honour' is the core element of the lives of people in Haryana and indulgence by girls in activities that might bring 'dishonour' to the family had resulted in several cases of 'honour killings' of the girl and/or her family. In Sonapat too, communities echoed similar thinking, stating how bearing daughters was considered risky because of the fear that they might bring 'shame and dishonour' to the family. A 36-year old woman commented that as girls are *sayaani* (smart), they go outside and do 'wrong things' (such as elope), which is why they are not wanted in the first place. Another elderly person similarly commented that when they elope, girls tarnish their family's honour *taar-taar kar deti hain* (shred the family name).

As one of the woman respondents from Majhri village in Sonapat noted, *Ladke jeene nahin de rahe hain* (Boys aren't letting girls survive).

There is a purported link between skewed sex ratios and 'honour killings'. Many of these killings are of young people who have rejected prescribed community norms of marriage and eloped. Such marriages may be inter-caste, with the men being from lower castes. Other honour killings involve marriages that violate clan, tribe or group norms. It is argued that the recent activism and policing of marriages by community bodies such as khap panchayats is due to the crisis engendered by the shortage of local women and heightened competition over them<sup>31</sup>.

### C. Humiliation for not giving birth to a boy

Women who do not give birth to sons have a low status in the family and are often subjected to humiliation and victimization. As one of the woman respondents from the baseline study conducted by Breakthrough noted,

*izzat kum miltey hain* (we are not given due respect). Further, family members often neglect the nutritional needs of the mother and the child. The women respondents in Sonapat also pointed out that daughters-in-law who bore sons as against those who did not beget sons were given preference in matters of decision-making and received more respect within the family.

### INHERENT RISKS TO WOMEN'S HEALTH

Gender-biased sex selection has led to increased health risks for women including repeated or unsafe abortions, exposure to medical quackery and deep emotional trauma. Repeated pregnancies pose a serious risk to maternal and child health.

The impact of gender-biased sex selection is serious: besides impacting the family and the community, it also has consequences for public health at the macro level.

## WHAT MEASURES HAVE BEEN MADE TO CURB GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION?

**CONSIDERING THE GROWING** misuse of technology, the Indian government, responding to a petition made by non-governmental organizations and women's groups, passed The Pre-Natal Diagnostic Tests (Regulation and Prohibition of Misuse) Act (PNDT Act) in 1994 to prohibit doctors and clinics from using pre-natal diagnostic techniques to determine the sex of a foetus. However, despite the legislation, the sex ratio at birth continued to decline in the country.

The context changed with the publication of the 2001 census results, which starkly highlighted the country's deteriorating sex-ratio levels. Subsequently, the PNDT Act was amended in 2003 and renamed the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act (PC-PNDT Act).

### PC-PNDT ACT

#### LAW ON PRE-CONCEPTION AND PRE-NATAL DIAGNOSTIC TECHNIQUES

The PC-PNDT Act makes it illegal to determine the sex of the foetus for non-medical reasons. The Act provides for imprisonment, which may extend to 3 years, and a fine up to Rs.10,000 for the first conviction. It also bans advertisements related to pre-conception and pre-natal determination of sex. The Act has also made it mandatory for all ultrasound clinics and other diagnostic facilities capable of sex determination to prominently display a signboard that clearly indicates that disclosure of the sex of the foetus is illegal, and to provide registration and detailed records of ultrasound scans provided to pregnant women. Further, all such facilities have to be registered with the Appropriate Authority of the district (usually, the Chief Medical Officer or the Collector). Manufacturers are required to provide information to the government about the sale of ultrasound machines and other similar equipment.

The legislation has received wide publicity, both at the national and the regional levels, especially in regions where gender-biased sex selection has been prevalent. At the same time, many difficulties and loopholes have been identified in the provisions of the Act. These include lack of resources to carry out inspection and monitoring, lack of corresponding qualified staff, poor performance of advisory committees at various levels, political pressures brought on the 'Appropriate Authorities', conflict of interest for doctors charged with prosecuting other doctors, insufficient understanding of the law and procedural errors, and, in some cases, the victimization of pregnant women, and harassment of doctors. Very few people have actually been convicted.

In addition, efforts have been made to introduce legislation that addressed the ideology of son preference itself. The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act (HSA) of 2005 legislates daughters as equal inheritors of ancestral or joint family property. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act (MWPSCA), 2007, makes it a legal obligation for sons, daughters and other heirs to provide maintenance to parents and senior citizens from whom they inherit, in proportion to the share of any property inherited. This Act thus challenges the taboo around seeking financial help from married daughters.

Together, they constitute a legal framework to create a flow of resources between parents and daughters such that parents will property to daughters who take care of parents in their old age.

### Many difficulties and loopholes have been identified in the provisions of the PC-PNDT Act.

Other laws that protect the rights of women include the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, which puts forth conditions under which women can abort the foetus; The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, which prohibits the giving or taking of dowry; and The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which protects women from domestic violence.

Besides legislation, the government, both at the central and the state level, has introduced many schemes to enhance the position of women and girls. There are older ongoing programmes of the government such as the Integrated Child Development Scheme or ICDS, which are structured around anganwadi centres for pre-school care of children. Conditional cash transfers to parents as incentives to encourage birth registration,

immunization, school enrolment and delaying the marriageable age of girl children are other notable approaches. Examples include Ladli, Apni Beti Apna Dhan, Dhanalakshmi<sup>32</sup> and Rajlakshmi Yojana<sup>33</sup>.

While relying on punitive laws and schemes to modify entrenched social behaviour may yield positive results, these have not sufficiently reversed trends. Factors such as ultrasound machines being a necessary medical tool in pre-natal care, rapid advancements in technology, and the alliance between clients and practitioners, pose challenges to effective Act implementation. Despite the PC-PNDT Act and more people becoming aware of the issues involved, gender-biased sex selection continues to persist and very particularly so in some states rather than in others.

This points to the need to bring forth innovative and improved communication strategies to reflect an environment where legal provisions are also important alongside acknowledging women and girls as equal rights holders with equal status in society.





मोफत  
क  
90  
4  
4

A photograph of a woman standing in front of a brick wall. She is wearing a patterned headscarf and a long, patterned dress. To her right, another person is partially visible, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and pants. The image has a blue color overlay. A yellow horizontal bar is positioned above the text.

# NEED FOR A PEOPLE'S RESPONSE



# 3

A number of key findings have emerged based on Breakthrough's detailed formative and baseline research as well as the work in Haryana. The findings form the framework for building an integrated response to the issue of gender-biased sex selection.

- 3.1** Why build a community-based response to GBSS?
- 3.2** How to build a community-based response using this guide?

## WHY BUILD A COMMUNITY-BASED RESPONSE TO GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION?

**GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION is rooted in discrimination against women, therefore, to overturn the practice, one has to understand and overturn the deeper discrimination that women face. It is essential to address gender norms and the roles assigned to men and boys and women and girls.**

Gender-biased sex selection is a discriminatory practice against girls that is a result of a complex web of socio-economic and cultural factors. To challenge gender-biased sex selection, it is important to understand that the practice is rooted in a male-dominated social and family structure that undervalues girls. A host of customs and practices bolsters son preference and considers daughters a liability, misuse of technology such as the ultrasound machine, which has penetrated deep into urban, rural and tribal areas, making gender-biased sex selection practices cheap and

accessible, and fulfilling the desire for smaller families with sons. The bottom line is that girls are not valued.

Son preference is perpetuated by beliefs that sons alone can inherit property and carry forward the family name, while daughters are considered *paraya dhan* or another's wealth after marriage. Despite property laws deigning equal distribution of property to daughters and sons, a daughter is often shunned by her family and society if she claims her share.

A further concern for families is the perceived burden of protecting a daughter's 'safety and the 'burden of sexuality'. Households and communities use the notion of 'family honour' to restrict women's mobility and freedom, which in turn controls women's life choices, status and access to opportunities including education and employment. Girls are allowed to



If women and girls do not have the right to go out of the 'house', their right to education and employment is automatically undermined.

go out only if they have to go to school or fetch water, and are forbidden from going out of the house after sunset. Families believe women's movements need to be monitored and controlled, as they can bring shame on their families.

In designing any communication strategy to address gender-biased

sex selection, it is important to keep the rights of women and girls central to it. It needs to be the pivot around which all strategies revolve. The right of women and girls to education, nutrition and health services (including reproductive rights), right to work, to equal wages, to choose their life partner, to mobility, to wear clothes of their choice, to play, to perform funeral rites, to property and to widow remarriage is critical. While, it might not be possible to address all aspects of women's rights through one unified communication strategy/ message, it is important to see the interconnectedness of one right with the other. For instance the right to mobility is intrinsically related to the

right to education and work. If women and girls do not have the right to go out of the 'house', their right to education and employment is automatically undermined. The space for women to make strategic life choices<sup>34</sup> which are critical for people to live the lives they want (such as choice of livelihood, whether and who to marry, whether to have children etc.) is key to addressing gender-biased sex selection.







# HOW TO BUILD A COMMUNITY-BASED RESPONSE USING THIS GUIDE?

**ADDRESSING gender-biased sex selection is the social responsibility of the community; therefore, any communication strategy must include the community.**

Breakthrough's research has revealed that overt and covert pressures from family, community and even medical practitioners strongly underlie gender-biased sex selection. However, many communication strategies prepared so far have either been generic or have targeted only women, which is a problematic assumption, as it places the onus for action on women. However, women often have little choice in the matter because of fears of violence and desertion, and their desire to establish their value in the family. Yet, many women have courageously resisted pressure from family members and refused to undergo sex determination, despite the underlying threat of desertion, rejection or violence by their families.

Therefore, since the entire community plays a coercive role in pressuring women to have sons, it is essential to target the communication strategies at the level of both the family and the community. Gender-biased sex selection is the social responsibility of the community, and not of any one individual including the mother.

**The entire community plays a coercive role in pressuring women to have sons.**





**It is critical that  
each stakeholder**

be treated as a unique  
influencer requiring  
a specific version of

these communication  
strategies most suited  
to their sphere of  
influence.

**Since it is the community that influences the decision to undergo gender-biased sex selection, it is also imperative to involve the community members who can influence social norms and behaviour.**

Breakthrough's research has revealed a number of key stakeholders who are gatekeepers to the community and can influence decision-making on gender-biased sex selection. It is therefore important to involve different stakeholders such as frontline workers, panchayat members and youth, to challenge gender-biased sex selection, and thereby influence their unique audiences in the community. It is critical that while there are foundational communication strategies, each stakeholder is treated as a unique influencer requiring a specific version of these communication strategies most suited to their sphere of influence.

The government, especially at the state and the district level, is an important stakeholder invested with resources and the power to make policy changes. Partnerships and collaborations with governments (both at the central as well as at the state level) are critical for achieving scale and reach.

**The stakeholders who are potentially powerful message carriers include:**

1. Youth and School Students
2. Frontline Workers such as Anganwadi workers/Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs)/Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs)/Self Help Groups (SHGs)/NGOs/Child Development Protection Officers and Supervisors
3. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)
4. Teachers and Educators
5. Media Professionals

This Communication Guide will analyze the various existing approaches to address gender-biased sex selection, its limitations, as well as suggest possible communication strategies to overcome those challenges.

Social change, and particularly, a change in gender norms, does not occur in a vacuum. It is a result of a complex interplay of factors at different levels: personal family and community. Therefore, it is difficult to sustain change until and unless all these levels are simultaneously addressed through communication strategies and messaging. Moreover, all the stakeholders identified above do not exist in isolation. They exist within an environment, which is linked and regulated by each other. While strategies to influence each of them may vary depending on their sphere of influence, it is important to adopt a multi-stakeholder approach vis-à-vis dissemination.







---

# OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS GBSS



# 4

Breakthrough's communication strategies to address the issue of gender-biased sex selection is based on the premise that sex selection is a manifestation of a patriarchal society characterized by male domination of social and family structures and a value system based on son preference where boys are preferred and valued more than girls.

- 4.1** Review and analysis of existing communication strategies
  - 4.1.1** A 'risk-list' to keep in mind when developing communication strategy for GBSS
- 4.2** Providing an alternate framework for effective communication strategies to challenge GBSS
  - 4.2.1** Communication strategies development
  - 4.2.2** Two new effective communication strategies to challenge GBSS
  - 4.2.3** The final communication strategies – A sample



## REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF EXISTING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

**IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY** new communication strategies, it is essential to review and analyze some of the types of existing gender-biased sex selection strategies.

Several communication strategies have been launched in the last couple of decades to address the problem of gender-biased sex selection and gender discrimination in the country. While some have been government sponsored, others have been joint initiatives with international and national NGOs while yet others have been more local. The components of these campaigns have involved a mix of tools and media channels, radio and TV spots, print and outdoor media as well as community outreach programmes such as rallies, walks, signature campaigns, *nukkad natak* (street theatre), dramas and folk art<sup>35</sup>.

## ANALYSIS OF EXISTING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION<sup>36</sup>

**6** existing communication strategies have been identified as having been used with audiences to address the issue of gender-biased sex selection.

# 1

## CAMPAIGN



SOURCE: Unknown

## TARGET AUDIENCE

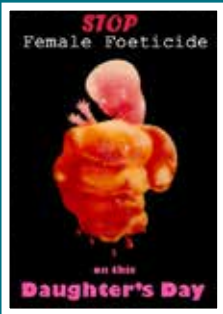
Mothers

## CHALLENGES

This communication strategy blames the expectant mother, placing the moral onus on her. Its impact is therefore limited, as women often have little choice in the matter because pressure arises from their husbands, in-laws and the community. It also reveals a moral stand jeopardizing the reproductive rights of women, including their rightful access to safe and legal abortion services as defined by the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act of India.

# 2

## CAMPAIGN



SOURCE: Dreamz Foundation of India

## TARGET AUDIENCE

Mothers and fathers; Medical practitioners

## CHALLENGES

Once again, this communication strategy can jeopardize women's reproductive rights. The gory image and implication of the communication strategy depicting the concept of *paap* or sin further alienates the audience. The target audience itself is not clearly addressed – 'Daughter's Day' is obviously supposed to be of significance to mothers and fathers, but it also seems to be targeted at medical professionals.

# 3

## CAMPAIGN



SOURCE: Initiative of Madhya Pradesh Government

## TARGET AUDIENCE

Mothers and fathers; Family; Community

## CHALLENGES

This communication strategy focuses on an emotional appeal through the rescue route – save the girl child. However, nobody is directly addressed or held accountable for their part in the problem, and there is no clear call on what must be done to actually 'save' the girl child. Moreover, the inherent worth and rights of a girl child are not conveyed.

# 4

## CAMPAIGN



SOURCE: CSR, India

## TARGET AUDIENCE

Mothers and fathers; Community; Community leaders

## CHALLENGES

This communication strategy 'My Daughter, My Strength' focuses on the girl child articulating a sense of her value – it is a combination of positive emotional messaging while addressing the status of women. However, because it is more of an outreach campaign, it lacks an action point with implications on behaviour change.

# 5

## CAMPAIGN



SOURCE: A Cutting Chai initiative

## TARGET AUDIENCE

Families; Medical practitioners; Young marriageable men

## CHALLENGES

This hard-hitting direct question 'How many babies did you kill today?' has a tagline underlining the causes of the question – dowry and gender-biased sex selection (termed as female foeticide). The reference to dowry acts as a catalyst to a larger discussion on the causes of gender-biased sex selection. The question directly affixes responsibility on the target audience. While grabbing attention, the communication strategy once again pushes the focus on the issue of reproductive rights for women. Moreover, the possibility of resentment for being made to feel guilty could be counter-productive.

# 6

## CAMPAIGN



SOURCE: Government of India, Women and Child Development

## TARGET AUDIENCE

Mothers and fathers; Family; Community

## CHALLENGES

This communication strategy addresses a completely different outcome of gender-biased sex selection – “there will be less women left to marry your sons”. It plays into existing gender biases where it is the male and his requirements that provide the value to the world around him, as a way of sneaking in a message about the importance of women. In doing so, it entrenches the gender roles and biases and continues to keep women within a prescribed social role with a value only as high as her ‘usefulness’ as a ‘wife’. Therefore, it is ultimately a negative approach.

## A 'RISK-LIST' TO REMEMBER WHEN DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO CHALLENGE GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION

**A**

**IMPLEMENTATION OF LAW IS IMPORTANT BUT CANNOT BE THE ONLY FOCUS IN THE LONG TERM**

Even though the reasons for not wanting daughters are rooted in the low status of women, many of the communication strategies on the issue have addressed sex determination without addressing the underlying reasons why daughters are not wanted within families. In addition, concerns about increasing sex ratio imbalances are often expressed in terms of the shortage of brides (marriage squeeze) and sexual partners for men, without addressing the essential crux of inequality, which is not only about unequal numbers but also about unequal power structures and gender relations. Such communication strategies perpetuate the patriarchal mindset, which locates the value of a woman in the institution of marriage and the cycle of reproduction. Several communication strategies, which attempt to promote positive images and portrayals of girls and women, continue to be embedded in the very same traditional, patriarchal family contexts and roles that are at the core of son preference. The focus tends to be more on protecting girls/daughters than on empowering them.

Thus, while the implementation of the law and the illegality of sex determination should be publicized, it cannot be the only focus in the long term.

## **B** EMOTION V/S RATIONALITY

Research studies in India have shown that families use rational thinking and deliberate strategies to plan a small family – and a family with a son.

The decision is bereft of any emotion and is guided by rationality. Daughters are considered a bad investment whereas sons constitute a profitable investment with short as well as long-term returns. Emotion is conspicuous by its absence in such decision-making. In fact, many communication strategies appeal more to the emotion rather than the rational thinking that underlies such decision-making.

The messages tend to be moralistic and target women emotionally. Communication strategies around gender-biased sex selection that address women ignore the fact that gender-biased sex selection decisions are not made by women alone. The complex conditions under which women 'choose' gender-biased sex selection need to be understood and addressed. Women themselves acquire patriarchal biases. They may be under direct pressure from families, may fear violence or may be afraid of their husbands abandoning them for a new wife should they not produce a son. Despite belonging to economically well-off families, their autonomy and decision-making powers, and control over money are often limited. For the individual woman faced with these

dilemmas, her choices may represent a way to mitigate her circumstances and paradoxically raise her status within the family and society in the short term.

The notion of sin (*paap*) is also promoted aggressively. These communication strategies adopt a judgemental tone, which generally serves to make viewers defensive and block communication, rather than pose the issue as a dilemma to the audience in an interactive or open-ended manner, which might serve to draw the audience in. Instead of tackling gender-biased sex selection motivations and engaging with them, communication strategies for the most part, tend to present the issue in terms of absolute right and absolute wrong. This leaves little room for the audience to negotiate its way out of sex-selective behaviour without admitting to having sinned.

**As research has conclusively shown, the decision to undergo gender-biased sex selection is guided by practical calculations of cost versus benefit in raising daughters. Emotions have little room to play in such calculations. Therefore, the real 'motivations' and rational thinking by which people plan their families must be addressed directly.**



## LEGALITY OF ABORTION

Information-based communication strategies about the PC-PNDT Act have led to an increased awareness about the illegality of sex determination. However, communication strategies around the illegality of gender-biased sex selection (in both content and imagery) are largely centred on the act of abortion, not on the misuse of technology for sex determination. Thus, PC-PNDT communication strategies run the risk of making safe and legal abortion seem illegal, and can potentially result in the denial of safe and legal abortion to women. Some messages invest the foetus with human life and viability, making its elimination seem morally abhorrent and akin to murder.

Till recently, son preference and daughter discrimination were looked upon as a 'rural phenomenon' afflicting the poor.

However, steps can be taken to start disentangling the issue of safe and legal abortion from that of illegal gender-biased sex selection, and thereby ensure the critical differentiation between the right to safe and legal abortion and the criminality of sex-selective abortion. A necessary first step in this direction will be to ensure that messaging does not use the language and imagery of 'foeticide' or personify the foetus in other ways. Further, emphasis should be on how discrimination plays out to the detriment of girls.

Overall, while punitive legislation, such as the PC-PNDT Act that regulates discriminatory behaviour, is important, it is also important to bring back the focus on the root elements of discrimination and begin to shift attitudes and cultural norms on son preference.





**D**

### TARGET GROUPS – HOW FAR AND EFFECTIVELY HAVE THEY BEEN REACHED?

Many communication strategies that have been prepared so far have not been community and local specific, and by not being targeted at all produce no effect on anyone significantly. At best, they have targeted women, which is a problematic assumption. Groups that seem most amenable to change and are future decision makers, such as the younger generation, have hardly been targeted. Medical practitioners are another target group, which has also been inadequately targeted.

Moreover, till recently, son preference and daughter discrimination were looked upon as a 'rural phenomenon' afflicting the poor, till research studies coupled with census data challenged those perceptions. These findings revealed that the declining child sex ratio is concentrated in the prosperous states of India and are more prevalent amongst the educated middle class, though the practice is spreading to lower-income groups in urban and rural areas as the technology becomes cheaper and more accessible.

## PROVIDING AN ALTERNATE FRAMEWORK FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO CHALLENGE GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION

### **GENDER-BIASED SOCIAL NORMS**

and practices reinforce the perception of daughters, resulting in their low status in the society. Contrary to communication strategies that give importance to the effective implementation of the PC-PNDT Act, Breakthrough's strategies seek to challenge the norms that underlie son preference and the undervaluation of daughters including the violation of their rights. This is not to suggest that effective implementation of enabling legislations like the PC-PNDT Act is not important. However, it is equally important to understand that medical technology and its misuse has only aided families to practice son preference by eliminating daughters. Until and unless the mind-sets that prefer sons over daughters is

challenged and the value of daughters recognized and their rights upheld, gender-biased sex selection will continue to flourish, with technology (and its misuse) serving as an effective ally.

It is important to create a communication strategy that will take into account gender-biased sex selection and its deep linkage with the low status of women and girls in society. Communication strategies should challenge the deep-rooted norms of patriarchy, masculinity and traditional values that put greater importance on male lineage and get reflected in discriminatory practices like unequal property distribution and dowry. It needs to make people realize the impact of gender-biased sex selection on their community and on

the lives of women and girls and how it undermines them. It needs to address the issue of equality for women and girls and their access to rights like nutrition, mobility, health and reproductive rights, and education.

While the family remains the key decision-making unit and should be the primary target of all messages, the strategy needs to be comprehensive to include key stakeholders in the wider community who can influence decisions.

5 communication strategies have been created considering the relation between gender-biased sex selection and women's rights.

**FOR ANY COMMUNICATION** strategy to be effective, it is important to choose the target group carefully and design communication strategies that engage and 'talk' to them. It is essential to address the specificities of the target group: their motivations, apprehensions, beliefs and value system. Challenging the gender-inequitable value system pertaining to that particular group is the starting point for developing communication strategies.



Based on this idea, Breakthrough tested five different communication strategies with the community and stakeholders in the four districts of Haryana (where it operates), to suggest effective communication strategies to challenge gender-biased sex selection.

These five communication strategies have been created to challenge different community members to redefine their roles, considering four factors – the rationality that drives

gender-biased sex selection; the target audience as the family and community at large; the importance of the relation between gender-biased sex selection and women's rights; and the need for an action. These concepts were then tested amongst the community and key stakeholders.

# 1

## MESSAGE

**BE A MAN. SUPPORT A WOMAN.**



## ADDRESSES

**PATRIARCHY**

**Current context** Belief in the supremacy of the male (associated with strength/ability/power/authority).

**Inroad** Redefines what it really means to be a man.

**How it works** Reminds men such as fathers, grandfathers, village elders and sarpanches that real men use their strength to support women.

## FEEDBACK

**THIS REDEFINES THE ROLE OF MEN AND SEES THEM AS SUPPORTING WOMEN.**

It is successful in making men feel happy about themselves, but in doing so, it perpetuates the prevailing notions of masculinity equated with the role of a man as 'protecting' a woman.

# 2

## MESSAGE

**JO BETI KO DEIN SAMMAAN.  
WOH MATA-PITA MAHAAN.**



**(The parents who respect their daughters truly deserve to be respected.)**

## ADDRESSES

### PRIDE IN PARENTHOOD

**Current context** Parents of girls face social disapproval.

**Inroad** Instil pride in parents with girl children and highlight them as role models.

**How it works** As parents of girls who generally face familial and social ridicule, parents who value and respect their daughters are highlighted as heroes and role models.

## FEEDBACK

### THIS STRATEGY REDEFINES THE ROLE OF PARENTS.

It instils a sense of pride among parents who have girl children. However, it is unclear whether this strategy will create substantive change in behaviour as it is not backed by an action. It will also require constant recognition of parents by community actors.

# 3

## MESSAGE

**JIS GHAR MEIN BETI KA JANAM MANAA  
KYA BETI KO BYAAHOGE WAHAAN?**



**(Will you marry your daughter into a home that does not allow the birth of a daughter?)**

## ADDRESSES

**RESPECT FOR WOMEN**

**Current context** Families with boys often take the social high ground in relation to marriage, perpetuating practices like dowry.

**Inroad** Get people to rethink what comprises 'family honour' and shift the power equation in favour of a girl's family. In doing so, reduce the social acceptability of gender-biased sex selection and discrimination against women.

**How it works** Equate families with no daughters with people who disrespect women and are seen as unworthy of receiving a bride. This concept reclaims social high ground to the girls' families, who as a result have better decision-making power.

## FEEDBACK

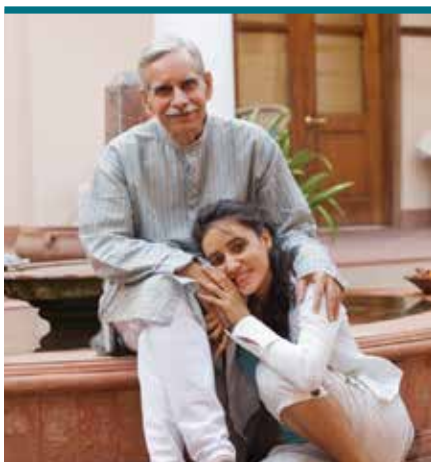
**THIS STRATEGY REDEFINES THE ROLE OF PARENTS.**

It has a clear action; do not marry your daughters into families that don't respect women. It hits where it hurts; yet, there is a sense that it could be unfair for families who do not have daughters in the natural course of things.

# 4

## MESSAGE

BETI SAMBHAALE RISHTE WAFADAARI SE. SHAAYAD SAHAARA WAHI BANE



(Who could be more dutiful and caring than a daughter?)

Perhaps she'll be the one who cares best for you one day.)

## ADDRESSES

VALUE OF THE GIRL CHILD

**Current context** Parents believe that sons provide support to ageing parents.

**Inroad** Address the insecurity and the belief that daughters are *paraya dhan* who are given away in marriage and are thus unable to provide support to ageing parents.

**How it works** It counters the common reason cited for desiring sons: sons provide support to ageing parents while daughters are *paraya dhan* who are given away in marriage. This coupled with messages on women's equal rights to property can be a powerful combination to directly address the motivations for son preference.

## FEEDBACK

THIS STRATEGY REDEFINES THE ROLE OF A DAUGHTER

While positive in its message, this strategy runs the risk of perpetuating the social prescription that expects girls and women to be more dutiful and faithful. It also inadvertently places the role of 'care giving' on daughters.

# 5

## MESSAGE

### THE HUNT FOR INDIA'S MISSING GIRLS



## ADDRESSES

### APATHY

**Current context** Despite people's awareness of legislation (PC-PNDT Act) and the illegality of gender-biased sex selection, it remains rampant. The negative impact of missing girls is not perceived at the community level and how this further undermines the position of women.

**Inroad** It's time to question the apathy and shake the inertia around the issue of missing girls/women by taking on how it impacts women's lives.

**How it works** Make people aware of the 'missing' women in their community – in clinics, homes, educational institutions, weddings, factories, market places, streets, all public places, etc. Bring attention to its impact on women's lives and society.

For example, if there is a fewer number of girls in public places, it will lead to reducing the mobility of girls and women, thereby making these spaces further unsafe.

## FEEDBACK

### THIS STRATEGY REDEFINES THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY IN RELATION TO THE ABSENCE OF WOMEN.

The strategy is quite hard hitting, as it asks people to think over the issue of gender-biased sex selection and how it has led to the discrimination and disappearance of women, and in essence, how it undermines women's rights.



## TWO NEW EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO CHALLENGE GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION

**IN ORDER TO DETERMINE** which communication message works well with the community a rigorous testing process was initiated with a range of stakeholders such as anganwadi workers, doctors and community leaders to come up with a message which would challenge gender inequity and norms in the community. Based on this research, two new communication strategies have emerged that are hard hitting, provocative conversation starters, which force the target audience to move out of their comfort zones and encourage them to take action.

Most importantly, both these communication strategies position the issue of gender-biased sex selection vis-à-vis the right of women to make strategic life choices and its violations. These challenge gender roles and expectations, redefine prevailing notions of femininity and masculinity and question the apathy and inertia of communities around the issue.

**It is important to create strong communication strategies that go beyond merely creating awareness – with clear actions that appeal to different sections of society and challenge the power structure to redefine gender roles and improve the position of girls and women. Both these communication strategies seem to hold that potential.**

# A

## The hunt for India's missing girls

**THE 2011 CENSUS** data highlights the declining child sex ratio and overall sex ratio. This clearly reflects the fact that despite the country's economic improvement, the social status of its women and girls has not improved. The country's most economically progressive states, i.e., Punjab and Haryana, have some of the worst sex ratios<sup>37</sup>. The community neither feels the absence of women nor does it understand how this further undermines the status of the women to make strategic life choices.<sup>38</sup> For example, the right to mobility has been curtailed because women's safety has emerged as one of the main concerns, with community members citing an increase in the number of crimes against girls and women. Girls are only allowed to go out to attend school or fetch water; their mobility is restricted in terms of the places that they can visit, the time and duration of their visit, and whether or not they

are accompanied by someone. Safety and 'family honour' are convenient alibis to restrict their mobility and their freedom, thereby controlling women's life choices, status and access to opportunities including education and employment.

**PERCEPTION** Though community members are aware of the illegality of gender-biased sex selection, they are confident of escaping punishment, as this is an invisible crime. There is lack of perspective on how these missing girls lead to a problem at the community level.

**REALITY** There is an absence of women and girls, which is creating social problems such as restricting the mobility of women.

Make people take notice of the absence of women in their community, homes, agricultural fields, factories and market places.

Make visible the problems caused by the reduced number of women and girls in the community and draw attention on how it is the responsibility of the community to respond.

**OPPORTUNITY** Put the issue of missing girls in the public eye and make it real for their own settings, i.e., workplace, markets, locality, etc. This communication is hard hitting, as it asks people to think over the issue of gender-biased sex selection and how it has led to the discrimination and disappearance of women as well as understanding its impact on the community. We are not merely holding a mirror announcing that women are missing; instead, we are also highlighting the negative impacts in society caused by this, which in turn will impact us all for generations.

# B

## Jis ghar mein beti ka janam manaa / Kya beti ko byaahoge wahaan?

(Will you marry your daughter into a home that does not allow the birth of a daughter?)

### PARENTS RAISE THEIR DAUGHTERS

with love and pride. Their biggest desire is to ensure their daughter's happiness, especially after she is married. But the question is will she find happiness if she is married into a family that has not allowed a girl child to be born?

By redefining what it means to be honourable (attaching social sanction against families that do not respect women); altering norms around marriage and providing girls' families with high social status; the communication strategy challenges a fundamental premise: low status of women and girls and their families within the institution of marriage. By redefining what it means to be honourable, it invests families with daughters with the power to reject

families of boys that do not respect women. It helps build social sanction against such families who are disrespectful towards women. It also enhances the social position and status of families with girls.

**PERCEPTION** Families with boys are more 'honourable'. Currently, families with boys take the social high ground. Families with girls believe they have less leverage. *Hum to ladki waale hain* is a common refrain that indicates a certain inferiority.

**REALITY** The girls' family can define what is honourable – a family that respects women. Families with girls today can afford to reject a proposal if the prospective groom's family does not have any girls. The right to choose an appropriate partner then rests with the girl and her family.

**OPPORTUNITY** Change what it means to be 'honourable'. Get people to equate family lineages that have no daughters with people who disrespect women and are therefore not the most appropriate families to receive a bride, their daughter. This targets both the idea that the sex of one's children is

a personal matter by creating social sanction against families that only choose to have boys, as well as empowers girls' families and a girl's choice to marry.

Redefine social norms around marriage:  
a. Parents will not give their daughters in marriage to households that do not value girls, such as the following :

- Families that ask for dowry
- Families with a visible absence of girls in their families for more than one generation
- Families in which girls have very low education

b. Girls will express themselves and participate in the decision of choosing their life partner.

- The message will encourage girls to exercise choice in marriage and will demonstrate that the girls' families have a choice. This provokes a strong emotional response, allowing a sense of self-agency and an action point.

## OUTLINE FOR A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

### Basic Tips

- Address your constituents so that they understand their individual responsibility. Each of us has a role to play – as parents, siblings, family members and friends, and also as professionals, whether teachers, doctors, lawyers, judges, NGO workers, administrators, government officials, law enforcement personnel, elected representatives, journalists, writers, artists, etc.
- Create awareness about this issue in homes, communities, neighbourhoods and the workplace.
- Let the message incorporate both gender-biased sex selection and gender-based discrimination. Speak up against discrimination. For example, do not tolerate violence and abuse against women and girls, do not give or take dowry, stand up for equal property rights.
- Find small and big ways to promote equality between boys and girls.
- Use the law – report the matter to authorities if you know the law is being infringed, Refer to <http://pnndt.gov.in> or the list of authorities/ medical officers responsible for Act implementation in your areas.
- Link up and help groups actively involved in mobilizing the community against gender-based discrimination and sex selection.

### Language<sup>39</sup>

- Avoid use of language that portrays girls as objects of pity and devalues them. Some of the communication says, “Give girls a chance, they too can look after you” or *mujhe maa ke garbh me kyon marte ho, kewal is liye ki main ladki hoon?* Therefore, avoid language that reinforces such stereotypes.
- Similarly avoid use of cliches such as ‘daughters as *laxmi*’ (Goddess of wealth) or *beti bojh nahin lathi hai* (daughters aren’t a burden).
- Refrain from using words such as foeticide, killing, murder, and genocide as this focuses attention on negative emotions of fear and violence thereby turning the audience away from the issue at hand.
- It is best to avoid using the term ‘sex selective abortion’ as it confuses the issue by linking it to legal and safe abortion per se.
- Avoid language that holds the mother responsible for sex selection. She has very little control over the decision.
- Use language, which is simple, direct and appeals to the heart.

# Imagery

- Avoid imagery that is gruesome or gory for instance foetus in a bottle or a dagger piercing a rosebud for the reason that a violent image will have the audience go into a switch-off mode.
- Avoid imagery that reinforces gender inequality as in the case of some of the popular family based TV serials. Some of them continue to portray women as inferior and men in haloed terms.
- Respect the female form. A grotesque or provocative portrayal of female anatomy while discussing sex selection could take the issue in a different direction. It also distracts from the message being communicated.

## SEX SELECTION...

Never commit, condone  
or remain silent.





## THE FINAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY – A SAMPLE

---

The message to the community should empower change at an individual level. Every person in the community – parents, family members, friends, teachers, doctors, panchayat representatives, anganwadi workers, government officials and journalists are seen as change agents who can work together to end gender-biased sex selection.

The message that goes out to the community is this:

**You can make  
the change.**

---

### **SEE THE VALUE DAUGHTERS BRING TO YOUR FAMILY AND COMMUNITY.**

Look around you. How many women do you see, in your schools, on the streets, in hospitals? An unsafe environment for women is an unsafe environment for all. Fewer women in society is detrimental to society at large.

- Do not tolerate violence, abuse or sexual harassment against women and don't let that be an excuse to restrict women's freedom and mobility.
- Ensure that your daughters and the girls in your community get access to the same nutrition, education and medical care as boys.
- Do not give or take dowry.
- Stand up for equal property rights for your daughters.
- Gender-biased sex selection is a violation of rights of women and girls.

### **MARRY YOUR DAUGHTER ONLY INTO A HOUSEHOLD THAT RESPECTS WOMEN.**

Every mother and father wants to see his or her daughter happy, especially after she gets married. But can a family that won't allow a girl to be born offer happiness to someone else's daughter? A home where women are not respected is not a home for your daughter. Do not marry your daughter into a family that does not allow the birth of a girl child.

### **GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION IS A CRIME.**

Do not use medical techniques to conceive a son or find out the sex of a foetus. If you know of any individual, doctor or clinic using medical techniques to conceive a male or revealing the sex of a foetus, inform the Appropriate Authority immediately. For more details, visit the government site <http://pndt.gov.in>

- Stop gender-biased sex selection in your home, neighbourhood and workplace.
- Celebrate the birth and contributions of girls in your communities.
- Welcome a daughter into your home.
- Marry her only into a household that welcomes daughters.
- Create an environment that is safe for her to pursue her dreams.
- Uphold the rights of women and girls to strategic life choices.









# WHO ARE THE STAKEHOLDERS AND WHY INVOLVE THEM AS INFLUENCERS?

# 5

Gender-biased sex selection is a result of a complex web of socio-economic and cultural factors. In order to address it effectively, it is critical to involve stakeholders at different levels, with their distinct spheres of influence. At the same time, it is important to recognize the opportunities and challenges associated with engaging with the stakeholders. An effective communication strategy should be able to address both.

- 5.1** Who are the most effective stakeholders or carriers of the message?
- 5.2** The opportunities and challenges of working with different stakeholders
  - 5.2.1** Power of the individual: How stakeholders can impact their sphere of influence



Now that effective foundational communication strategies have been laid out to challenge gender-biased sex selection, the question arises as to the best method of reaching the community. As change cannot only happen at an individual level, it is imperative to involve stakeholders or those who hold influence over the community, and modify these communication strategies to their needs; in order to achieve sustained impact at all levels.


This communication guide thus contains both foundational communication strategies as well as the adaptations of these communication strategies specifically catered to different stakeholders. In this way, challenging gender-biased sex selection will hinge on understanding the unique strength of each stakeholder as an advocate and using these strengths effectively.

## WHO ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE STAKEHOLDERS OR CARRIERS OF THE MESSAGE?

To identify the most effective stakeholders and the most effective message carriers in the community, Breakthrough undertook research amongst government functionaries, teachers, religious leaders, doctors, media professionals, NGOs, mothers-in-law groups, and youth, and determined a final list of stakeholders:

1. Youth and School Students
2. Frontline Workers such as Anganwadi workers / Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs)/Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs)/Self Help Groups (SHGs)/NGOs/Child Development Protection Officers and Supervisors
3. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)
4. Teachers and Educators
5. Media Professionals

The government was also identified as a partner to engage in all initiatives, as it could be instrumental in bringing in further partnerships and in disseminating the campaign's media products to achieve scale and reach.



ASHAs and anganwadi workers have a 'social' and 'public position' in the villages and are often seen as role models by community women.

Youth are keen to engage with the issue but lack knowledge and awareness, as well as platforms for discussion.

Local government machinery wield considerable influence and authority and should be mobilized to become advocates for the issue.

The research revealed some unique findings:

**1 ALMOST ALL STAKEHOLDER GROUPS** referred to Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members, government agencies and Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), Anganwadi and Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) as being potentially effective message carriers. Almost all stakeholder groups (the exception being NGOs) also listed media as a great influencer. ASHAs and anganwadi workers have a 'social' and 'public position' in the villages and are often seen as role models by community women. Their position and influence can be effectively leveraged by engaging with them on the issue.

**2 SOME OF THE STAKEHOLDER GROUPS** mentioned youth and students as potential message carriers, but interestingly, the youth stakeholder group itself did not list students for this exercise. It is important to mention here that youth is a key catalyst cohort. Breakthrough's experience from the intervention sites reveal that the group is keen to engage with the issue but lack knowledge and awareness as well as platforms where such issues can be discussed. Creating such platforms, providing information and knowledge and sustaining engagement with youth thus becomes important.

**3 ANOTHER IMPORTANT STAKEHOLDER GROUP** (as evident from Breakthrough's field experience) is the local government machinery, particularly the Child Development and Protection Officers and the Supervisors in the Ministry of Women and Child Development. They wield considerable influence and authority and should be mobilized to become advocates for the issue. Their 'buy in' has a direct bearing on the functioning of the anganwadi worker, health worker or ASHA, and their engagement with the issue.



## THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF WORKING WITH DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS

There is existing evidence to suggest that key stakeholders who hold a 'position' within a community exert considerable influence and can be effectively mobilized to become important advocates for change.

## Stakeholder-wise: Opportunities, Challenges and Strategies

Stakeholder Group	Opportunities & Challenges	
<p><b>YOUTH AND SCHOOL STUDENTS</b></p> <p>College youth with access and ability to use social and digital media such as mobiles; Government school students in secondary and higher levels</p>	<p>Besides worldwide evidence and Breakthrough's own body of work with youth and school students, it has been conclusively seen that youth are an amenable group, ready to engage with issues of gender equality but often lacking the knowledge and awareness to fully engage with the issue.</p>	<p>Further, lack of forums within institutions and the community to discuss issues of gender constrain their engagement. If these constraints can be overcome, youth serve to be one of the most important advocates of change with the potential to influence future generations.</p>
<p><b>FRONTLINE WORKERS SUCH AS ANGANWADI WORKERS/ANMs/ASHAs/SHGs/NGOs</b></p> <p>Field-level workers; Ground-level community-based organizations</p>	<p>There is existing evidence to suggest that key stakeholders who hold a 'position' within a community exert considerable influence and can be effectively mobilized to become important advocates for change. In a village setting, Anganwadi workers, ASHAs and ANMs are one such group. These groups have direct access to women and enjoy the respect of the village. Mobilizing these groups of frontline workers helps create advocates for change at the community level.</p> <p>However, increasing workload, low motivation and lack of knowledge may adversely impact their engagement. Hence it is important to build their capacities and provide the right knowledge, understanding and language</p>	<p>to equip them to sustain conversations on the issue with the community.</p> <p>NGOs are also an important stakeholder with access to the community. Their presence and ongoing interventions/ programmes can be effectively leveraged upon for impact. However, NGOs lack capacity, tools, resources, volunteers and trained staff to disseminate messages, and experience discomfort with communication tools. The government tends to be sceptical of NGOs increasingly perceiving them as commercial bodies. This scepticism and disconnect needs to be addressed, as government and NGO partnerships have proved to be highly successful in social change campaigns.</p>



## Strategies

- Engage with youth by conducting trainings, imparting skills and building capacity; create youth clubs in schools and colleges, use community activities such as street theatre, melas and popular culture products to engage them.
  - Create a youth platform for deeper engagement and community-based action through online and mobile content based on principles of edutainment. For example, create online micro campaigns, social media strategies, interactive games, mobile tools such as applications and games, information booklets with digital and print versions, and talking points for peer-to-peer conversation and with elders.
  - Initiate a dialogue on dominant notions of masculinity and femininity and encourage alternate interpretations of such notions.
  - Support girls and their right to strategic life choices, nutrition, education, employment, mobility, access to all public spaces, etc.
  - Encourage students and teachers to stop sexual harassment.
- 
- Partner with government agencies to undertake training and capacity building programmes with their participation in community mobilization activities such as audio-video modules, mobile tools (applications, games), pamphlets/handouts/ posters/flip charts with minimal text, video vans and talking points.
  - Talk about gender-based discrimination with the community.
  - Know the policies and build capacities and tools to help simplify such policy legislations.
  - Report cases of gender-biased sex determination to the Panchayati Raj Institution and Appropriate Authority.
  - Engage Mahila Gram Sabhas into community mobilization efforts.

## Stakeholder-wise: Opportunities, Challenges and Strategies (contd.)

Stakeholder Group	Opportunities & Challenges	
<b>PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS (PRIs)</b>	<p>The other key stakeholder group in a village/community setting is the Panchyati Raj Institution (PRI). By way of its constitutional authority and elected representatives, it wields considerable influence in a village setting. More importantly, it is also invested with</p>	<p>authority and power to take concrete action against gender-biased sex selection.</p>
<b>TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS</b>	<p>College and school teachers, principals and other academicians</p> <p>Teachers constitute an important influencer group and play an important role in shaping students' perceptions and attitudes. As 'role models' for young inquisitive and impressionable minds (of</p>	<p>students), teachers play an important role. Mobilizing them to be advocates for gender equity also helps institutionalize gender equitable norms and practices within educational institutions.</p>
<b>MEDIA PROFESSIONALS</b>	<p>National and local media</p> <p>The influence and reach of the media cannot be undermined especially in current times. The media (print, TV and social media) has permeated all aspects of life and is now an influencer and opinion maker. There are several examples</p>	<p>worldwide of its reach and influence being leveraged effectively to create awareness as well as spread messages on gender equity.</p>

## Strategies

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Capacitate (through tools and appropriate messages) and promote PRI members as advocates.</li><li>• Provide them with a calendar of events, as they are capable of taking event-based actions. Examples include: Special Gram Sabha meetings to address gender-biased sex selection, convening of Mahila Sabha meetings consisting of all women voters to explain actions which are being taken to stop sex selection, convening of Volunteers/Ward Members who keep</li></ul> | <p>a watch on clinics and report agents who come from outside for facilitating sex-determination tests to the police, and convening of Anganwadi Workers who belong to the same village to take the initiative to register all cases of pregnancy and track pregnant women through their pregnancy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Encourage PRI members to discuss gender-based discrimination with the community.</li><li>• Simplify policies/schemes programmes</li></ul> | <p>related to gender-biased sex selection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PRIs should take action on reported cases.</li><li>• Announce government schemes in the villages.</li><li>• Continuously track and display data related to sex ratio.</li><li>• Create awareness and public dialogue around the issue.</li><li>• Release panchayat funds to be utilized for generating awareness on the issue of gender-biased sex selection.</li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide teachers with simple tools and integrate programmes into their existing extra-curriculum activities such as through plug and play audio-visuals (video aids, video toolkits), talking points and FAQs.</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help facilitate the setting up of youth clubs.</li><li>• Talk on gender-sensitive issues during the morning assembly.</li></ul>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sensitize the media to ensure correct and relevant stories such as through media strategies, press kits, press conferences, providing them with reports and briefs with statistics. The focus with this group would be to push</li></ul>   | <p>them to report positive stories, make the connection between gender-biased sex selection and women's rights.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Form core groups who will report on related issues.</li></ul>   |  |



Youth



Frontline Workers



PRIs



Teachers



Media

## POWER OF THE INDIVIDUAL: HOW STAKEHOLDERS CAN IMPACT THEIR SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

The last section elaborated on the challenges and the opportunities for various stakeholders to work on the issue of gender-biased sex selection, the assumption being that each one could influence their sphere of influence. This section provides examples of how each of the stakeholders outlined above can initiate a conversation with the community on gender-biased sex selection. They are illustrative in nature but provide a critical entry point as well as the right and appropriate language to initiate and continue discussion on the issue. More importantly, they also help dispel some of the myths associated with gender-biased sex selection, which is often cited as the reason for son preference. Each stakeholder section is provided with **Talking Points** that elaborate how to approach the issue with the community:

# Youth

## TALKING POINTS

### 1. GENDER AND FEMINISM IS AS MUCH ABOUT MEN AS IT IS ABOUT WOMEN

"If speaking for the rights of women is being a feminist, then I think I am a feminist." *His Holiness, The Dalai Lama*

Kamala Bhasin, a noted feminist activist in India, shared in her blog that South Asian feminists have defined feminists thus: "Anyone, who recognizes that women are discriminated against within families, at the place of work and in society in general, and who takes action against this discrimination, is a feminist". According to this definition, men can also be feminists.

There is a common perception that women's rights are best discussed by women. Hence in college and corporate trainings only women are sent for gender sensitization workshops. However, this notion is wrong, as gender is as much about men as it is about women. Since it impacts both

men and women, it is important to include both in all discussions on changing gender norms.

We receive constant inputs from our family, friends, neighbours and media on what it is to be a man. Most of these are based on gender stereotypes that affect men in many ways; where boys/men are trained and expected to be strong, to not show their emotions. They are expected to earn a livelihood, take care of primary family expenses, and be the 'head' of the family. Anyone who does not conform to these expectations is ridiculed. There is tremendous pressure on boys/men to conform to these expectations. Boys/men also lack forums where such issues can be discussed.

Since gender impacts both men and women, it is important to include both men and women, boys and girls, in all actions to change gender norms. Let's stand together on gender rights."

**NOTE** The recent incidences of sexual violence and rape in 2012 December in Delhi that resulted in massive protests by people from all walks of life, particularly the youth, motivated all. Young people were seen questioning violence against women, gender norms and stereotypes and were willing to take action against them. However, it is important to remember, that in order to create a society that respects women and girls, it is important to engage with boys and men on the following issues:

- Gender and feminism is as much about men as it is about women.
- Safety and security of women and girls (addressing young men and boys)
- Property rights for women

The talking points on the left can be used to talk to your peers, friends, colleagues and family to start a conversation on gender and rights, which will lead to the prevention of gender-biased sex selection in the long run.

The peer education forum and the online forum are spaces for you to express your feelings, past experiences, fears, confusions and contradictions. These spaces provide support services for men and boys as well as women and girls to discuss these issues.

## 2. SAFETY AND SECURITY OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IS RELEVANT TO MEN AND BOYSTOO

“It is normal to feel concerned about the safety and security of our female relatives and friends. We think that the world is an unsafe space, with violence, increasing cases of rape, molestations and sexual harassment. We often think that in order to prevent such incidents we need to accompany girls; ensure that they do not go to certain spaces, particularly public spaces; return home on time and further dress in an ‘appropriate’ way.

The reality is that most violence against women and girls (dowry harassment, domestic violence, sex selection, incest and even rape) is perpetuated by family members or people who are closest to the woman and whom she trusts. By controlling the women we are closest to and their mobility, we undermine their right and ability to make choices in life.

When girls get married early, it is not a solution because this will continue their cycle of dependence as well as affect their ability to resist and cope with violence. Let girls marry only when they are emotionally and physically ready for marriage and the responsibilities that

come with it. As brothers, you want to see your sister happy, especially after she gets married. But can marrying your sister into a family that won’t allow a girl to be born offer her happiness? A home where women are not respected is not a home for your sister. Do not marry your sister into a family that does not allow the birth of a girl child.

We can make the world a safer place by recognizing the impact of missing girls and women in our community and taking actions to stop this. We must respect girls and women, ensure that our peers do not disrespect women, make sexist comments or harass girls/ women. As brothers, we should ensure that our sisters or cousins have the same opportunities as boys/men in education, mobility, work, leisure, etc. Their access to property is an important right that should be supported within the family. In addition, we must ensure that women are married into families that respect them; do not demand dowry, nor practice gender-biased sex selection. We must support and stand by women and girls who face harassment or violence by talking about the issue and taking action. Talking and taking action does not bring shame and dishonour to the family.”

## 3. PROPERTY RIGHTS FOR WOMEN:

“Legally in India, women are entitled to equal share of property. In reality, women are denied this right in the name of tradition, women’s emotional connect with the family, and other reasons.

Breakthrough’s baseline research in Haryana shows that parents sometimes feel that since they spend money on the girl’s marriage expenses or on dowry there is no need to give her property. Dowry is taken as *stree dhan* (the wealth brought by a bride). However, there is a critical difference here. A woman has no control over the *stree dhan* (wealth brought by the bride) that she brings with her, as it is controlled by the men in the house into which she is married. Women and girls are not encouraged to demand property (with the excuse that it would strain relationships). They are not allowed to return to their natal families while facing violence in a marriage. Dowry and the right to property are not the same. While dowry is prohibited by law, the right to property is guaranteed by law. Therefore, denying women property is not only a violation of rights but helps sustain the cycle of dependence for women on their marital homes.”

**It is important to reflect and take a stand on the following:-**

1. “As young people, let us ensure that we do not take or give dowry or have a grand and expensive wedding. The expenses for a wedding should be borne equally by the boy’s and the girl’s families
2. If you see your friends and peers harassing girls or discriminating against them, then take a stance; clarify that such behaviour is uncalled for and is completely against girls’ basic human rights. Tell them that as a friend you would respect them only if they respected women and girls.
3. Both sons and daughters are capable of caring for their parents in their old age. What is important is to provide the same set of opportunities to both boys and girls.
4. We must ensure that both men and women in our families have equal property rights.
5. Women are denied property in the name of tradition, family relations, etc. However, more than anything, such denial constitutes a violation in law, which can be challenged in courts. Research shows that access to property is a major protective factor for women, which helps them negotiate relationships in the marital family. It is also a protective factor enabling women to resist and cope with violence. Therefore ensure equal property rights.”

**TOOLS FOR FURTHER REFERENCE**

- ‘Voices against violence’ Short films against gender-based violence  
[www.mustbol.in](http://www.mustbol.in).
- ‘Laws and Son Preference in India – A Reality Check’ by UNFPA  
[india.unfpa.org/?publications=8405](http://india.unfpa.org/?publications=8405)
- *Rani ki Kahani* A video on street theatre addressing gender-biased sex selection by Breakthrough in Haryana  
[youtu.be/OUICmaw\\_HRM](https://youtu.be/OUICmaw_HRM)

# Frontline Workers

**ADDRESS KEY MYTHS THAT ARE ASSOCIATED WITH GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION. Given below are samples of myths, which are cited frequently by the community to justify the practice.**

## MYTH NO. 1

*“Women are women’s worst enemies”*

**Fact** “All the major wars in the world have been led by men and most prisons are filled with men who have been violent. Yet, no one says that men are men’s worst enemies or that men are women’s enemies. This in itself reflects the existence of a patriarchal society. Women, when feeling sad or facing problems, also reach out to their mothers, sisters or female friends, who are their sources of support. Hence, pitting women against each other is a method of maintaining the patriarchal order.

It is true that just like men, women too are part of the patriarchal system and internalize its values and ideology. Since childhood, boys and girls are taught to subscribe to gendered behaviours, thereby helping maintain the status quo. In many cases, because of their low status in society and family, women are unable to intervene in cases where other women’s rights are being violated within the family or the community.

**NOTE** When you conduct field visits for health-related information, or interact with parents of children from your anganwadi, start a conversation on gender-biased sex selection. The initial conversation can start like this:

“Look around you in your homes, anganwadis, schools, health care centre and village – how many girls do you see in comparison to boys? In India, there are only 918 girls to 1000 boys. The situation is worse in certain parts of Punjab, Haryana, UP, MP, Maharashtra and even Delhi, where there are less than 850 girls to 1000 boys.

You may notice in your own village how some women are being pressurized to produce sons. In some villages in Haryana, there are numerous cases where due to the lack of girls of marriageable age, girls are being bought (trafficked) from other states. If you want to change the scenario in your village, it is important to dispel the myths that perpetuate son preference and cause discrimination against the girl child.”



## MYTH NO.2

In a patriarchal society, men own resources and wield power. They own and control resources; take decisions; enjoy full mobility and own property. However, women are dependent on men and have limited access to resources. In many cases, they have to compete with other women within the household or the community to access the limited resources available to them.

Many men and women propagate this myth to maintain the status quo.

When talking to men of the household, emphasize the fact that generally in all households, decisions are taken by the head of the family who is most often a male member. Impress upon male members that as major decision makers in the family, they have the power and the responsibility to deny take/give dowry and prevent gender-biased sex selection.”

*“Abortion and sex selection are the same thing.”*

**Fact** “It is important to draw a distinction between gender-biased sex selection and right to safe abortion services. Access to safe abortion is a woman’s right. Women are often unable to determine when, how and with whom they should have sex, or how to use contraception as per their choice; under such circumstances, access to such a right becomes important.

While abortion is legal in India, determining or finding out the sex of the foetus is illegal under the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act.

The PC-PNDT Act prohibits the determination and disclosure of the sex of foetus. It prohibits any advertisements relating to pre-natal determination of sex and prescribes punishment for its contravention. The person who violates the provisions of this act is punishable with imprisonment and fine.”

### MYTH NO.3

*“Sons carry on the family name, they are old age support and they are needed for the salvation of the soul.”*

**Fact** “If one observes people and their lives carefully, one would not be surprised to see more and more girls taking care of their parents in their old age. Moreover, children often leave their native place in search of employment or to fulfil their professional commitments. Given the rising cost of living, parents should carefully plan for their old age life, and to the extent possible, avoid complete dependence on their children. In addition, the law mandates both men and women to provide old age support.

Women when provided freedom, rights and the ability to take decisions, become self-reliant and capable of taking care of themselves and their parents. Share examples of such cases with the community.

In addition, beyond three generations, one rarely remembers the names of family members! It is worthwhile to be remembered for one’s contribution to society than merely for one’s family name!

Gendered practices that denied women certain rights related to the family are changing. More women are performing *pind daan* and the last rites for their parents. In the city of Benaras, the main funeral area is run by a woman and her family.

It is important to rethink and redefine the notion of the ‘complete/balanced family’. A complete family can comprise two girls, two boys or one boy and one girl, having no children or having as many children as a couple may want, but not conditional to the sex of the children.”

### MYTH NO.4

*“Why invest in girls’ education, as she anyways goes to another family?/If girls are educated too much, they will run away.”*

**Fact** “Girls are neither *paraya* nor *dhan*. They are an integral part of society with the same sets of rights as bestowed on boys/men. Education is a fundamental right for all.

When daughters are educated and given the opportunity to work and be independent, they can also contribute to household income. An educated girl is equipped with the skills needed to negotiate and take major decisions that impact her life. As a result, this not only reduces her dependence on her parents but also relieves her parents of several responsibilities, fears and the pressure of ‘protecting’ their daughter.”

## MYTH NO.5

*“As the safety and security of girls is a big concern, it is best not to have them than take care of them for their entire lives.”*

**Fact** “An important reason cited by parents for not wanting daughters is the fear of the latter’s physical/sexual security. Most cases of violence are perpetuated by men (both within and outside the house). Therefore, it is important to instill boys/men with the value of respecting women. Sexual harassment, passing lewd remarks and using derogatory language disrespect women and violate their rights. As parents, one can play an important role by refusing to marry their daughter into a family that disrespects women.

Marrying girls off at a young age with the belief that marriage will provide them with security is a myth. Moreover, child marriage is prohibited by law and harmful for the health of the girl child. In addition, ensure that you do not marry your daughter into a family that does not allow girls to be born.

It is important to report violence and take action against it.

Age-appropriate sex education provides young people with the right knowledge and information to dispel myths and encourages them to adopt healthy behaviours including sexual behaviour.

Women’s access to property rights is critical and is guaranteed by law. Besides helping to improve women’s status and providing them with economic security, research indicates that is a protective factor for women in resisting and coping with violence.”

### TOOLS FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

- ‘Life on the Edge – No country for young girls’ A film with discussion guide by UNFPA  
[india.unfpa.org/?publications=6331](https://india.unfpa.org/?publications=6331)
- *Rani ki Kahani* A video on street theatre addressing gender-biased sex selection by Breakthrough in Haryana  
[youtu.be/OUICmaw\\_HRM](https://youtu.be/OUICmaw_HRM)

# Panchayati Raj Institutions

## TALKING POINTS

“All new parents or people who have had a child recently must register the birth of their child. This is mandatory in our panchayat. There are several benefits of birth registration, and it acts as a primary proof of your existence. It will enable you to:

- a. Secure admission of your child to school
- b. Give the child right to vote, when she or he becomes an adult
- c. Obtain ration card, driving license, passport, Adhaar card
- d. Seek employment
- e. Obtain visa for foreign visits
- f. Claim the right to marry after attaining marriageable age

Gone are the days when people cried if a daughter was born. We are progressing in life and welcoming daughters is also a part of being progressive. In our panchayat, we will


conduct community celebration on the birth of a girl child. In our panchayat, we will welcome and celebrate the birth of a new-born whether a girl or a boy. Just as most of you celebrate the birth of a boy, ensure to also beat a plate when a girl child is born, distribute sweets, and celebrate lohri for her. Be an example for your relatives, neighbourhood and the community. You will be respected for it.

We know even today there are some families who give milk to their boys and buttermilk to their daughters. Do not discriminate against your girl child. Give her equal opportunities. Ensure that your daughters and the girls in your family get equal access to food, education and medical care as boys.

We feel worried about the prevailing lack of safety and the cases of violence around us. We think we are doing the best for our daughters by protecting them, such as not allowing them to

**NOTE** As panchayat members, you wield a lot of influence and enjoy the confidence of the community. During recent times, you may have noticed/heard about an increase in violence against women, trafficking of brides and ill health of women due to repeated pregnancies. All these trends are closely related with the issue of gender-biased sex selection. There are also other fallouts of this practice such as the ill treatment of women who only have daughters, an increase in the number of unmarried men in the village and increasing cases of polyandry.

go to the market or to the college on their own. We also marry them off at an early age thinking that marriage will protect them and give them security. However, we do not realize the high costs associated with this. While early unintended pregnancies can endanger our daughters' lives, there is increasing risk of them facing violence within their marital homes, as they lack the negotiation power to navigate



---

relationships, etc. Moreover, we know that child marriage is prohibited under law. As a community, let us not tolerate violence, abuse or sexual harassment against women and girls and let us not use that as an excuse to restrict our daughters' freedom and mobility. By restricting their mobility, we limit their access to equal opportunities and subsequently their ability to make life choices. More importantly, we violate their rights.

Let us not think of our daughters as *paraya dhan*. Our daughters are neither *paraya* (belonging to another) nor *dhan* (property). They are an important part of our families; communities and the nation. If given opportunities, they have the full potential to make us proud.

Daughters are not an economic liability for whose marriage you have to pay big dowries to ensure that they get married. Dowry neither ensures our daughters' safety and protection nor

their well being. Instead of dowry, let us give our daughters an equal share in our property. By doing so, we uphold their right to property, which is mandated by law. Property acts as a protective factor for women, helping them resist and cope with violence besides providing them with economic security.

Let us rephrase some of our common sayings: let us not bless our daughters with common sayings like *sada suhagan* (may you always have a husband); instead, let us bless our couples by saying *joda sukhi rahe* or *jodi bana rahe* (may husband and wife be happy always). Why should a boy be blessed with a longer life and a girl be blessed with a shorter life? Such sayings are also disrespectful towards widows.

An important reason for not wanting daughters is the fear associated with her physical/sexual security. Have we

ever thought over the question: Who commits violence against women? As we know, they are our own boys and men from our families and our society. Why should we curb the freedom of girls and violate their rights for crimes committed by men and boys? We need to rethink how we bring up our boys and girls. Boys need to be instilled with the value of respecting women and girls. As parents and community members, we need to convey the message that sexual harassment of women and girls; making lewd comments; using abusive language are disrespectful towards women and will not be tolerated. We also need to support boys/girls to defy gendered behaviours and expectations.

It is a myth that if there are fewer girls, their value will automatically increase. In fact, communities that do not have girls are seeing more cases of violence and an increase in practices such as child marriage and polyandry.

We love our children and want the best for them, especially for our daughters after their marriage. We need to be careful here: families that ask for dowry or families that do not allow the birth of a girl child are not suitable for our daughters. In order to ensure that our daughters are happy in their married lives, we need to ensure that they are married into families that respect women. Do not marry your daughter into a family that does not allow girls to be born.

We must make use of schemes that promote better life options for girls including crèche services provided through the ICDS and the Rajiv Gandhi National Crèche scheme, which enable girl children to go school and reduces the risk of trafficking and marriage. The girl child's vulnerability can also be reduced by enabling access to benefits under existing schemes such as Balika Samriddhi Yojana; Ladli Scheme;

Integrated Child Development Scheme; Kishori Shakti Yojana; the Nutritional Programme for Adolescent Girls; and National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level.

Sex selection is a crime and that is the bottom line. Let us stop the misuse of technology to find out the sex of the foetus. It is a crime under the PC-PNDT Act. Let us as a collective work as a watch dog to report cases. Let us report individuals, doctors or clinics misusing technology and inform the Appropriate Authority immediately (<http://pndt.gov.in>). Within Haryana, you can call 102 to report sex selection and stop this crime."

### TOOLS FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

- 'Life on the Edge – No country for young girls' A film with discussion guide by UNFPA  
[india.unfpa.org/?publications=6331](http://india.unfpa.org/?publications=6331)
- *Rani ki Kahani* A video on street theatre addressing gender-biased sex selection by Breakthrough in Haryana  
[youtu.be/OUICmaw\\_HRM](https://youtu.be/OUICmaw_HRM)

# Teachers

---

**NOTE** There are many ways in which gender bias and discrimination can be manifested in the classroom. It can appear overtly, when different expectations are attached with boys and girls. It can also occur in more subtle ways, such as when examples in textbooks pre-define gender roles. Teachers as role models, have a great influence on students. When teachers promote gender-equitable behaviour, they motivate and influence young minds to adopt such behaviour and the underlying value of equity.

While some schools may conduct separate classes for gender sensitization and rights, in schools where this is not possible, it is best to weave gender, life skills and rights in the current schedule. Simple ways in which this can be done in classrooms is explained alongside.

## GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

Even seemingly innocuous language can promote gender bias. Encourage your students to use 'he or she' when giving examples. Encourage your students to think and discuss examples of gendered language and how they affect our perceptions of men and boys and women and girls. Similarly, ensure that examples in your lessons alternate between genders. If you are using textbooks that only use 'he,' or has pictures that typecast men and women into 'gender boxes', encourage your students to think of ways in which such stereotyping can be corrected by giving examples from the school environment; the family; community, etc. This will help students relate concepts of gender equity with their daily-lived experiences.

## PROMOTE INTEGRATION

No matter what age group you are teaching, ensure that group work is done without gender separation. Never divide students on gender basis. Sometimes, especially in certain age groups, students will tend to divide themselves according to gender. If this is the case, intervene and mix up the groups. Similarly, if you allow students to choose where they sit in the class, don't allow self-selecting gender homogeneity to take place on its own. Allowing boys and girls to mix freely promotes exchange of ideas. It also helps them overcome inhibitions that they might be experiencing during adolescence.



---

## AVOID ASSIGNING GENDERED TASKS

Teachers often assign tasks/responsibilities to students. Ensure that the allocation of tasks/responsibilities does not reinforce gender roles. For instance, do not allocate tasks of cleaning exclusively to girls and tasks like carrying heavy things exclusively to boys. If you need a few students to carry a box of books to another room, ensure that you seek help from both boys and girls. If you are taking a lesson on cooking or gardening, ensure that you also involve boys.

## CREATE EQUAL EXPECTATIONS

Teachers can sometimes unwittingly create different expectations for boys and girls in different disciplines, thereby endorsing gender roles and behaviour. Subjects are not gendered and both boys and girls have the same aptitude for it. It is important to avoid reinforcing stereotypes: for instance, boys' 'natural' aptitude for subjects like maths and science as compared to that of girls. Similarly, it is important to include girls in all sports. Discuss such stereotyping in class and encourage students to defy them.

## TAKE A STAND AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT

As teachers, it is important to adopt a public stand against sexual harassment and send a strong message to students that sexual harassment will not be tolerated. 'Teasing' and name calling (derogatory comments like "Don't cry like a girl") are disrespectful and reinforce gender norms. It is important to discipline such behaviour.



---

## TALKING POINTS

“Anyone who is born human is entitled to basic human rights. These are basic rights that are necessary for each one of us, whether a boy or a girl, which allow us to grow to our full potential. These rights enable us to lead a life with dignity, freedom, equality and justice. These rights are considered fundamental to existence and hence guaranteed in our constitution as ‘Fundamental Rights’.

However, if we look around ourselves, in families, homes and schools, we will observe that girls and boys are not treated equally. Right from their childhood, girls and boys are taught to think, act and function in certain prescribed ways. Our decision-making is influenced by our parents and neighbours. The media may also reiterate many of these messages. These determine our choices in life: what subjects to study, what clothes

to wear, what sports to play, what body image is acceptable, how to behave in relationships, etc. We need to challenge these notions, behaviours and expectations. Therefore, make an effort to be informed and use your intelligence to make a distinction if suggestions are forcing you into gender stereotypes. Take decisions on your life based on your beliefs and your values.

Sometimes, we even discriminate between our parents and undervalue the contribution made by our mothers. Very often, when students are asked about parentage, they automatically mention the name of their father and forget to mention the mother. Don't you think a mother's contribution in raising children is as important as a father's? So, why undervalue the work of mothers? You will notice that the census and school admission forms

now ask for the mother's name too. This is an important way to make visible the contribution of mothers. The family, community and institutional systems need to acknowledge the contribution of mothers.

Many people believe that only boys are the old age support for parents, since girls get married and go off to another family. However, one must realize that this primarily happens because girls are denied the opportunity to pursue higher education or seek employment – factors that capacitate both boys and girls to take care of their parents in their old age. Girls, like boys, can take equal care of their parents if they are given the opportunity to do so.

As boys, you need to respect girls and women. Girls have the same rights that you do. Making sexist jokes that undermine girls do not turn boys into

heroes nor does it make them 'cool'. A real hero or a 'cool' guy is one who respects women and girls.

If any of you have any questions on gender, gender roles and behaviour, questions, conflicts, confusion regarding these issues, please feel free to discuss these with me during recess. Your privacy will be respected."

### TOOLS FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

- *Kishor-kishori kaun, kya hota hai youn?* Books for adolescents and teachers by UNFPA  
[india.unfpa.org/?publications=8670](http://india.unfpa.org/?publications=8670)
- 'The Time of our Lives: Growing up Volume 1, 2 and 3' by Ideosync Media Combine  
[www.ideosyncmedia.org/tools\\_i.htm](http://www.ideosyncmedia.org/tools_i.htm)
- 'The Orange Book: A teacher's work-book on sexuality education' by TARSHI  
[tarshi.net/publications/publications\\_sexuality\\_education.asp](http://tarshi.net/publications/publications_sexuality_education.asp)

# Media

---

**NOTE** The declining sex ratio in states like Haryana and Punjab and in states with skewed sex ratio can serve to be a good entry point to engage with the media. However, it is important to go beyond such stories and highlight the underlying factors that lead to such practices. Inviting the media to be part of community mobilization events organized by civil society organizations or youth and women’s groups to address gender-biased sex selection can help publicize the cause and help channel the message effectively. Other forms of media – online, digital and social – can become feeders or supply channels for information for the traditional mass media to disseminate/broadcast and beam key messaging.

- Media professionals, and, through them, the channels that they are associated with, should be made key stakeholders in all efforts to engage the media on addressing gender-biased sex selection.
- Community media tools like hoardings and video vans can help multiply the reach and impact of the message among the larger community.
- The prevalence and popularity of social and digital media among the youth – especially school and college students – can be effectively used to relay messages related to gender-biased sex selection and its percolation to various levels in the community.
- The discourse around gender-biased sex selection and its complex and intersectional causes needs to be popularized. The effect of the falling sex ratio is not understood in terms of other reportage of violence against women. The existing links and the way sex selection forms a key cause for several forms of violence against women need to be highlighted.
- As media, you need to be careful with the politics of language used in addressing the issue. Please ensure that you do not use terms like female foeticide, sex-selective abortion *kanya bhrunhatya*. Instead, use the correct term – gender-biased sex selection (*ling bhedbhav va ling chayan*).
- The depiction of skewed sex ratio and its graphic impact needs to move from bloody knives plunging through a baby girl or a young girl, as such depiction unconsciously goes against the safe abortion stance.
- Gender-biased sex selection affects a vast cross-section of the society – it is not a socio-economic problem that

## SPECIFIC MASS MEDIA STRATEGY

affects only a certain strata of the society. This must be emphasized among media personnel so that they can effectively communicate the changes necessary in this discourse through mass media.

- The increasing trend of gender-biased sex selection in other parts of the country provides a good entry point of engagement with the media on the issue because of its existing media interest. Highlighting 'stories' such as the increasing practice of 'bride import' from different parts of India to states with skewed sex ratio is of great interest to the media.

- Mass media as partners can help multiply the impact of innovative use of non-conventional media to reach out to niche audiences – through apps and games, information booklets and public service advertisements.
- Print, broadcast and radio journalists need to be sensitized on the key issues related to gender-biased sex selection with an understanding of the core underlying factors that perpetuate such practice. A well-articulated press brief can be prepared for this purpose.
- While there appears to be enthusiastic event coverage, there are fewer stories that go beyond the surface and report on the factors that perpetuate gender-biased sex selection. In order to increase the capacity of the media to understand the implications of the issue and its prevalence, it is important to increase their access to research and data

at the national and the state level. Targeting select media professionals who have an interest in the issue and sharing relevant information and data with them on gender-biased sex selection can be an effective strategy to keep their interest alive, thereby increasing chances of coverage that helps publicize the issue.

- Media needs to be given access to change and impact stories collated by civil society organizations, youth groups, etc., for greater coverage and publicity. It also helps relay the message of positive change and counter the apathy to the issue.
- Access to current research, new facts and statistics as well as access to key stakeholders like government functionaries and organizations working on the ground can encourage the media to become an active partner in the campaign against gender-biased sex selection.

- Shorter campaigns – like celebrating the birth of a girl child or a signature campaign amongst the youth – are also significant story pegs that can be covered by the media.

### TOOLS FOR FURTHER REFERENCE

- ‘A life free of violence and discrimination is a right of every woman’ by the UN system  
[in.one.un.org/img/uploads/UN\\_brochure\\_10.pdf](http://in.one.un.org/img/uploads/UN_brochure_10.pdf)
- ‘Understanding India’s declining sex ratio’ by Dr. Mary John, Centre for Women’s Development Studies (Video in English)  
[in.one.un.org/updates/international-day-to-end-violence-against-women-2013#UIDSR](http://in.one.un.org/updates/international-day-to-end-violence-against-women-2013#UIDSR)

## CONCLUSION

### **MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACHES**

that engage government agencies, communities, youth and the media are vital for sustainable change and for providing lasting solutions to address gender-biased sex selection. More importantly, it is critical to see women's rights and their realization in a continuum. Prioritizing one right over the other will not be sustainable. Thus, while it is important for the government to strengthen the implementation and monitoring of the PC-PNDT Act in the context of gender-biased sex selection (specifically), it is equally important that the government equally and effectively implements other enabling legislations such as the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006; the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005; and the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act 2005, which help address structural gender inequities.

The communication messaging that accompanies policy/programme announcements needs to be carefully reviewed. Such messaging should not reiterate the liability of daughters and limit their value to upholding the institution of marriage and procreation. While schemes/programmes based on financial incentives as a measure to check gender-biased sex selection may hold promise in the short term, it cannot be the basis for a long-term strategy. Such incentive-based schemes do not challenge existing unequal gender norms and structural inequities and can in fact seem to perpetuate the stereotype of daughters as liabilities while providing monetary compensation/relief to families. The emphasis of policies and programmes needs to be on the rights of women and girls as equal citizens – rights that empower them to make decisions around strategic life choices.

Similarly, in the face of emerging data and studies, which clearly state that new 'demand' groups in the form of the burgeoning middle class and new 'supply' mechanisms characterized by accessible and cheap technology are being created, future communication strategies and products need to shift focus and gear in order to simultaneously address both the middle class and the rapidly accessible technology. While the effective implementation of the PC-PNDT Act is important, the key to this changed approach involves developing a multi-pronged communication strategy that addresses the underlying motivations for son preference and increases the value of the girl child and gives primacy to her rights to make life choices. Herein lie the challenge and the opportunity.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> CensusInfo India 2011 available at <http://www.devinfo.live.info/censusinfodashboard/>
- <sup>2</sup> India's Total Fertility Rate dropped from 2.9 in 2000 to 2.7 in 2006. For more details, see NFHS 2 and NFHS 3 data at <http://www.rchiiips.org/nfhs/>
- <sup>3</sup> Why do daughters go missing? Frequently asked questions on gender-biased sex selection, UNFPA, June 2013
- <sup>4</sup> Why do daughters go missing? Frequently asked questions on gender-biased sex selection, UNFPA, June 2013
- <sup>5</sup> Trends in sex ratio at birth and estimates of girls missing at birth in India (2001-2008), UNFPA, September 2011
- <sup>6</sup> This estimate has been obtained following the methodology described in a paper by Kulkarni, P.M. (2007). 'Estimation of missing girls at birth and juvenile ages in India' Paper presented at the XXIX Annual conference of the Indian Association for the Study of population, Banaras Hindu University, Banaras, October 2007
- <sup>7</sup> [http://censusindia.gov.in/Data\\_Products/Library/Provisional\\_Population\\_Total\\_Link/PDF\\_Links/chapter6.pdf](http://censusindia.gov.in/Data_Products/Library/Provisional_Population_Total_Link/PDF_Links/chapter6.pdf)
- <sup>8</sup> CensusInfo India 2011 available at <http://www.devinfo.live.info/censusinfodashboard/>
- <sup>9</sup> CensusInfo India 2011 available at <http://www.devinfo.live.info/censusinfodashboard/>
- <sup>10</sup> Sample Registration System; 2009-2011
- <sup>11</sup> Understanding gender-biased sex selection: A policy brief, UNFPA, July 2013
- <sup>12</sup> Mary E John, Ravinder Kaur, Rajni Palriwala, Saraswati Raju & Alpana Sagar, Planning families, planning gender: The adverse child sex ratio in selected districts of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab, ActionAid and IDRC, 2008
- <sup>13</sup> The total fertility rate (popularly referred to as fertility rate) represents the number of children that would be born to a woman if she were to live to the end of her child-bearing years and bear children in accordance with current age-specific fertility rates. Country-wise specifics are available at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT.IN>
- <sup>14</sup> Mary E John, Ravinder Kaur, Rajni Palriwala, Saraswati Raju & Alpana Sagar, Planning families, planning gender: The adverse child sex ratio in selected districts of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab, ActionAid and IDRC, 2008
- <sup>15</sup> Rohini Pande, Selective Gender Differentials in Childhood Nutrition and Immunization in Rural India: The Role of Siblings, Demography 40(3), August 2003
- <sup>16</sup> Understanding gender-biased sex selection: A policy brief, UNFPA, July 2013
- <sup>17</sup> Ravinder Kaur, Mapping the adverse consequences of sex selection and gender imbalance in India and China, Economic and Political Weekly, August 31, 2013, Vol XLVIII, No 35
- <sup>18</sup> Jean Dreze & Reetika Khera, Crime, Gender, and Society in India: Insights from Homicide Data, Population and Development Review, Vol 26 (2), 2000
- <sup>19</sup> Philip Oldenberg, Sex Ratio, Son Preference and Violence in India: A Research note, Economic and Political Weekly, 27 (49-50), 1992
- <sup>20</sup> Breakthrough undertook a Baseline Study to assess knowledge, attitude and practices of community members and other stakeholders related to gender-biased sex selection in Jhajjar and Sonapat districts of Haryana. Field processes were carried out separately for each of the two blocks namely Sonapat and Gannaur in Sonapat district; and Jhajjar and Bahadurgarh in Jhajjar district of Haryana, respectively, districts based on poor child sex ratio. Within the district, samples were then distributed in order to get fairly equal representation from rural and urban areas in order to understand variations in responses with regard to the socio-cultural and geographical settings. The sample was further disaggregated by gender and age. Two age groups of 18-35 years and 36 years and above were finalized. The baseline study used a mix

of participatory qualitative and quantitative techniques including Focus Group Discussion, Card Sorting, Structured Individual Interviews, and Close-ended questionnaires.

<sup>21</sup> Baseline Study to Assess Knowledge, Attitude and Practices of Community Members and other Stakeholders related to Gender-Biased Sex Selection in Jhajjar and Sonapat districts of Haryana, submitted by Praxis to Breakthrough. December 2013

<sup>22</sup> Ravinder Kaur, Mapping the adverse consequences of sex selection and gender imbalance in India and China, *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 31, 2013, Vol XLVIII, No 35

<sup>23</sup> Ravinder Kaur, *Dispensable Daughters and Bachelor Sons: Sex Discrimination in North India*, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 153 (30), 2004

<sup>24</sup> Ravinder Kaur, *Marriage and Migration Citizenship and Marital Experience in Cross-border Marriages between Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bangladesh* *Economic & Political Weekly*, 47 (43), 2012

<sup>25</sup> Baseline Study to Assess Knowledge, Attitude and Practices of Community Members and other Stakeholders related to Gender-Biased Sex Selection in Jhajjar and Sonapat districts of Haryana, submitted by Praxis to Breakthrough. December 2013

<sup>26</sup> Baseline Study to Assess Knowledge, Attitude and Practices of Community Members and other Stakeholders related to Gender-Biased

Sex Selection in Jhajjar and Sonapat districts of Haryana, submitted by Praxis to Breakthrough. December 2013

<sup>27</sup> Ravinder Kaur, Mapping the adverse consequences of sex selection and gender imbalance in India and China, *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 31, 2013, Vol XLVIII, No 35

<sup>28</sup> Leela Dube, *Misadventures in Amniocentesis*, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 18 (8), 1983

<sup>29</sup> Ravinder Kaur, *Across Region Marriages: Poverty, Female Migration and the Sex Ratio*, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 39 (25), 2004

<sup>30</sup> In June 2010, scrutinizing the increasing number of honour killings, the Supreme Court of India issued notices to the Central Government and six states including Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh to take preventive measures against honour killings. Available at: <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Honour-killing-SC-notice-to-Centre-Haryana-and-6-other-states/articleshow/6073756.cms>

<sup>31</sup> Ravinder Kaur, *Dispensable Daughters and Bachelor Sons: Sex Discrimination in North India*, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 153 (30), 2008

<sup>32</sup> The Dhanalakshmi scheme has been revoked.

<sup>33</sup> A select review of special financial incentive schemes for the girl child in India available at : [http://www.unfpa.org/gender/docs/sexselection/UNFPA\\_Publication-39772.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/gender/docs/sexselection/UNFPA_Publication-39772.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Naila Kabeer defines strategic choices as ones “which are critical for people to live the lives they want (such as choice of livelihood, whether and who to marry, whether to have children, etc.)” as opposed to less consequential choices, which may be important for the quality of one’s life but do not constitute its defining parameters. For more details, see: Naila Kabeer, *Resources, agency, achievements: reflections on the measurement of women’s empowerment*, *Development and Change* 30, 1999.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.csrindia.org/>

<sup>36</sup> Disclaimer: The reference through use of images/logos is only for the purpose of education, and not for replication.

<sup>37</sup> Sen, Amartya. *More Than 100 Million Women Are Missing*, *The New York Review of Books*, 1990

<sup>38</sup> Naila Kabeer defines strategic choices as ones “which are critical for people to live the lives they want (such as choice of livelihood, whether and who to marry, whether to have children, etc.)”, as opposed to less consequential choices, which may be important for the quality of one’s life but do not constitute its defining parameters. For more details, see: Naila Kabeer, *Resources, agency, achievements: reflections on the measurement of women’s empowerment*, *Development and Change* 30, 1999.

<sup>39</sup> *The missing daughters of India. Sex Selection: The issue and what you can do*, UNFPA











**breakthrough**  
human rights start with you

**[www.breakthrough.tv](http://www.breakthrough.tv)**

E-1 A, First Floor, Kailash Colony, New Delhi 110048, India

☎ 91-11-41666101 📠 91-11-41666107

✉ [contact@breakthrough.tv](mailto:contact@breakthrough.tv)

📱 @breakthrough 📘 /LetsBreakthrough



United Nations Population Fund - India

**[india.unfpa.org](http://india.unfpa.org)**

**[www.unfpa.org](http://www.unfpa.org)**

55, Lodi Estate, New Delhi 110003, India

📱 @UNFPA 📘 /UNFPA