

Press Briefing on the eve of world population day

Organized By:

National Coalition against Two Child Norm and Coercive Population Policies

Constitution Club of India

July 10, 2012

A Brief Report

Background:

The National Coalition together in partnership with Mr AR Nanda (Chairperson of the Coalition), Population Foundation of India and The Hunger Project organized the Press Briefing in which different journalists and other civil society organizations were invited. Presentations highlighting worries and concerns with regard to family planning approach in India and globally were shared before the media. Dr. Abhijit Das from Centre for Health and Social Justice), Ms. Sona Sharma from PFI, Ms. Rita Sarin from The Hunger Project and Coalition's members from Rajasthan and Bihar were the main presenters.

This press briefing was aimed at ringing the alarms on current target based approach in family planning, monitoring achievements in terms of CPR, massive sterilizations conducted driven both by incentives and disincentives in different states and challenging the continuing myths related with population like 'population explosion'. It was opportune to voice these concerns in the media on the eve of World Population Day while India commits and comes back from the London Family Planning Summit 2012.

The idea of this initiative emerged during the National Consultation on family Planning hosted by Family Planning Association of India in which through a small meeting conducted between the members of the Coalition, a need for such a briefing came up.

During the press briefing:

Mr Nanda in his presentation brought out the need for the State governments to explicitly adopt target free approach as some states are over-zealous about achieving the targets which is usually at the cost of the people's health. He further stated that in India the IUD's are inserted in poor and hygienic conditions; beyond the quality norms because the target population is poor and from lower social strata thus they are helpless and can't speak up. He quoted an example as to how he witnessed that at one of the health centers in Bullandsheher, a ward boy

was asked to perform the sterilization without any doctor around and without any safety measures such as using gloves etc.

He also pointed that the Two Child Norm is resulting in worsening sex ratios in India. He stated that the bill in context to the Two-Child Norm should be withdrawn from the Rajya Sabha as it is not helping the population situation and only disempowering the women and the marginalized community.

Dr. Rita Sarin from The Hunger project shared how currently population explosion is not a problem. She said since they are working with women at the panchayat level like to enhance their capabilities and increase their potential as leaders the Two-Child Norm is an issue because of which women are not able to contest for elections in panchayats. She said that they have been launching various campaigns in this context as India being a democracy it's their right to participate for election in political positions. Fifteen years back an amendment was made in the Constitution reserving 33% seats for women and last year the prime minister made it to 50%. She said that this is how, to the world you show how you are empowering the women in the country by promising them their rights while microscopically if we see every women after a third child is disqualified from such entitlements. This norm said has only results in late and unsafe abortions, women and children being deserted and finally disempowerment of women. There are states where the norm has been removed because it was leading to women's disempowerment, female infanticide and skewed sex ratio. Its more like a political issue because for the states to achieve the family planning targets and control population it's the cheapest, quickest and easiest method among the marginalized communities. She emphasized that that the family planning measures must focus on women, their reproductive health and rights.

Ms. Sona Sharma from PFI shared a presentation on Repositioning Family Planning in the context of Adolescent Health. She raised the need to focus family planning in context of adolescent health. Further she restated that planning approach should be repositioned from the target approach to people oriented approach.

Suggestions/Question/Answers:

Mr. Ramakant Rai: He asked if

Whatever has been discussed so far will it be conveyed to the FP Summit in London? If so he wanted to convey this further that all the international coalitions talk about improving the status of the women and girl child but as per the census the literacy rates amongst the women between 2000-2011 have shown just 11% improvement .Though for men it has been just 6.5% but still there's a gender gap of 16% which needs to be filled. Educating the women is

important to empower them. He said that in the 12th Five year plan the government has committed to wards girl education.

He said he wants to convey this to the summit that education should also be the focus and instead of focusing on people as biomedical forms there's a need to empower them instead.

Aditi (tribune): question to Mr. Nanda – Contraception usage break-up of India.

Clarification was sought with the help of Ms Sona Sharma's presentation. Mr. Nanda further mentioned that India has one of the highest rate of sterilization; considering the fact it's an invasive procedure as compared to the numbers in which they are performed there are no doctors available for the procedure.

Aditi (tribune): What is the controversy about injectible contraceptives?

Dr. Abhijit clarified that there are concerns about it being safe, it's not good for women's health as it can lead to cancers and impacts the bone marrow density. There's pending case in the Supreme Court for its usage and only one injectible is permitted for use depo-provera and that too only in private sector. There have been discussions about its safety for prolonged usage and then there's also an issue about the age at which it can be used as it causes bone degeneration. So majorly sterilizations are done

Avinash Chaudhary (coordinator Advocating for reproductive Choices): NRHM funds the states as per their performance, is there a hidden agenda to promote target based approach?

Mr. Nanda: Biggest thing about NRHM Is the infrastructure, so much has been developed in terms of their infrastructure thus they have to perform, but in the context of family planning they should have a different approach. They should not just go by Expected level of Achievement (ELA) or target based approach but should also go for vigilance.

JSY was launched but it still has certain restrictions in terms of their inclusion criteria for provision of incentives and thus it supports TCN. The approach of providing incentive or disincentive is wrong specially to service providers as it will only lead to them focusing on their personal benefit then on the health of the people.

Sandhya (NAMHHR) added: During pregnancy the women are the most vulnerable by so many ways, there's heightened expenditure, the women cant work thus financial crunch, morbidity-children also get unwell when the mother cant look after the children and when there's a limitation due to TCN it only adds to the plight of the women and thus the women are suffering the most. Maternity benefits are to assist the women and should be provided without any restrictive criteria and then she mentioned the study they have been doing in 4 states.

Aditi (Tribune): How did you determine the scale of Maternal Mortality?

Dr. Abhijit: initially we had no such records in hands but only information gathered during our visits to various health centers, so we started doing death audits and did the count. As per the government norms it is mandatory to keep records of mortality and provide compensations to the respective families. Unfortunately none of it has been done efficiently, thus the RTIs were filed to MoHFW. There are numerous claims for compensations which haven't been resolved or denied. The government has pre-paid the premiums but these haven't reached to people it should.

So what is India proposing at the London Summit?

Dr. Abhijit: we don't know that, but from our side have globally put up some concerns. The focus of family planning should also be to provide the supplies and encourage public-private partnership, but also it should not be supply-driven else it will only lead to coercive and target-oriented approach. The women should be the centre of concern.

Also there's the issue of the funders. The danger is if they give grants only linking to certain conditions and making family planning a stand alone issue with contraception and not maternal health then it will be committing the same crime again. Family planning has to be an integral part of reproductive health. These contraceptive methods sometimes over-play the health of the women and their rights. Hopefully these people will stand in support of the women and WHO will take a balanced view.

The issue regarding the need for safe abortions should also be regarded as a key issue of family planning and maternal health.

What is the stand of the National coalition towards the monetary benefits given in JSY?

Dr. Das: The Coalition has not yet started working on JSY so there is no current stand of the Coalition. Though for CHSJ, it is clear that poor women going through pregnancy need financial support. The financial support provided is necessary but only in institutional deliveries is coercive. These women don't go the health centres or for institutional deliveries because of the lack of quality of services and infrastructure and also there's no such evidence of institutional deliveries leading to reduction of maternal mortality. There are certain examples such as in Tamil Nadu institutional delivery coerces sterilization post delivery while in Rajasthan the women not participating unless monetary benefits given.

The idea is to make the work interest based and not incentive based. The people should be motivated towards these things and not forced into through coercive policies or lured in by provision of incentives. Mega sterilization camps such as one in Sitapur have been conducted sterilizing 1900 men in 4 days, why is government only thinking in terms of sterilization. The women should be empowered and choices should be given to them.

The briefing closed with a vote of thanks to all the members of press and civil society.

List of Stories Picked up in the media after the Press Briefing:

1. A Mandate that Spells coercion

Usha Rai, July 10, 2012

Read more:

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/article3620930.ece?service=mobile>

2. Poor Women face Risk of Uninformed Tubectomies

Aditi Tondon, The Tribune, July 11, 2012

Read more:

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2012/20120711/nation.htm#2>

3. More role for women in population policy: Experts

Wednesday - Jul 11, 2012, 11:38am (GMT+5.5)

Read more:

<http://www.indiavision.com/news/article/national/323153/more-role-for-women-in-population-policy-experts/#ixzz20InYqEwd>

4. World Population day: Experts focus on Family Planning

Press Trust of India | Updated: July 11, 2012 10:47 IST

Read more:

<http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/world-population-day-experts-focus-on-family-planning-241998>

5. Approach to family planning needs to be reviewed: experts

Press Trust of India / New Delhi July 10, 2012, 18:35

Read more:

<http://www.business-standard.com/generalnews/news/approach-to-family-planning-needs-to-be-reviewed-experts/30531/>

6. Approach to family planning needs to be reviewed: experts

PTI | 07:07 PM, Jul 10, 2012

Read more:

<http://ibnlive.in.com/generalnewsfeed/news/approach-to-family-planning-needs-to-be-reviewed-experts/1021146.html>

Read more:

<http://www.newsreporter.in/approach-to-family-planning-needs-to-be-reviewed-experts>

7. नारी के ही जिम्मे परिवार नियोजन, Mukesh Kejriwal, Dainik Jagran, July 11, 2012

Updated on: Wed, 11 Jul 2012 10:42 AM (IST)

Read more:

<http://www.jagran.com/news/national-womens-are-responsible-for-family-planning-9457242.html>

8. More Role for Women in Population Policy

Last Updated: Tuesday, July 10, 2012, 21:47

Read more:

http://zeenews.india.com/news/health/exclusive/more-role-for-women-in-population-policy_17827.html

http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/health1/more-role-for-women-in-population-policy-experts_100629866.html

<http://pluzmedia.in/news/business-economy/49455/more-role-for-women-in-population-policy-experts>

9. World Population Day: call to end India's target-based approach to family planning

Date: Jul 11, 2012

Two-child norm is endangering women's lives and skewing sex-ratio, say activists

<http://www.downtoearth.org.in/content/world-population-day-call-end-indias-target-based-approach-family-planning>

10. Activists pitch for change in family planning

Deccan Herald, July 11, 2012

DECCAN HERALD
PG 4
JULY 11,
2012

Activists pitch for change in family planning programme

NEW DELHI: Civil society organisations gathered on Tuesday to express discontent with family planning policies on the eve of union health minister's presentation at a family planning summit in London.

Dr Abhijit Das, convener of the National Coalition against the Two-child Norm and Coercive Population Policies said, "I hope India will realise that while global leadership is necessary for providing information to countries where women still do not get contraceptive knowledge and services, there is an urgent need to restructure the family planning programme to fulfill the reproductive needs and rights of women in her own country."

States like Rajasthan, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat have laws preventing persons with more than two children, born after a certain cut-off date, from becoming panchayat representatives.

Rita Sarin, director, The Hunger Project, said this law prevented younger women from coming into leadership roles. Activists also pointed at the poor quality of female sterilisation services in these states.

Devika Biswas of Healthwatch Forum, Bihar said the Sc has taken cognisance of poor quality and started sterilisation camps in Bihar.

DH News Service