



REPORT
4TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE

PLAN FOR EVERY CHILD 2021:
BUILD BACK BETTER WITH GIRLS

DECEMBER 7-8, 2021
AN INNOVATIVE HYBRID CONVENING MODEL



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ACRONYMS

ADI	- Action for Ability Development and Inclusion
AV	- Audio Visual
CASP	- Community Aid and Sponsorship Programme
CBSE	- Central Board of Secondary Education
CEO	- Chief Executive Officer
CSO	- Civil Society Organisation
CSR	- Corporate Social Responsibility
DLSA	- District Legal Services Authority
GBV	- Gender Based Violence
ICDS	- Integrated Child Development Services
IGOT	- Integrated Government Online Training
LGBTQ	- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer
MCA	- Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India
MGNREGA	- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NCPCR	- National Commission for Protection of Child Rights
NCERT	- National Council of Educational Research and Training
NCRB	- National Crime Records Bureau
NCW	- National Commission for Women
NEP	- National Education Policy
NFHS	- National Family Health Survey
NGO	- Non-government Organisation

NHRC	- National Human Rights Commission
NIDM	- National Institute of Disaster Management
NIMHANS	- National Institute of Mental Health and Neuroscience
NIOS	- National Institute of Open Schooling
NIPUN	- National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy
NRLM	- National Rural Livelihood Mission
P4EC	- Plan for Every Child
POCSO Act	- Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012
PTSD	- Post-traumatic stress disorder
RBSK	- Rashtriya Bal Swastha Kaaryakram
RKSK	- Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram
SAMVAD	- Support, Advocacy & Mental Health Interventions for Children in Vulnerable Circumstances and Distress
SBCC	- Social and Behavioural Change Communication
SCERT	- State Council of Educational Research and Training
SDG	- Sustainable Development Goals
SRF	- Dr. Shambhunath Singh Research Foundation
SHGs	- Self-Help Groups
SRHR	- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research
STEM	- Science, Technology, Engineering Mathematics
UNFPA	- United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	- United Nations Children's Fund
VAW	- Violence against Women
VHND	- Village Health and Nutrition Day
WEF	- World Economic Forum

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Plan International (India Chapter)¹ aims to advance children's rights and equality for girls, thus creating a lasting impact in the lives of vulnerable and excluded children, their families, and communities. As a part of their global and national strategies, Plan India has put forth a strong commitment to support the 2030 Global Goals. The vision of Plan India, 'Girls Get Equal', emphasises that promoting gender equality and empowering women is crucial to meeting the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. Building on this, the 4th National Conference Plan for Every Child (P4EC) was organised on the theme, 'Build Back Better with Girls', on December 7- 8, 2021 in New Delhi, India in an innovative hybrid model to ensure safety of participants during the COVID-19 pandemic. The notion of, 'Building Back better with Girls', is quintessential to achievement of gender equality in the true sense of the words, with contributions of both girls and boys specifically in the post COVID-19 period.

More than forty government officials, United Nation officials, academics, policy makers, development practitioners, corporate representatives, civil society representatives and young people (specifically girls) contributed to the discourses and national dialogues. The two-day agenda brought rich and varied perspectives on system strengthening, building resilience, safeguarding girls and their rights to bring about a girl-centred recovery that focuses on well-being of girls, improves inclusiveness and reduces inequality. The plenary sessions of the Conference focussed on- (i) Build Back Better with Girls; (ii) Equal for Better - How CSR can contribute to advancing gender equality,

¹ Referred to as Plan India throughout the document

and (iii) Way Forward – for presenting summary of the key recommendations from the thematic sessions and towards developing a national action plan for build back better with girls were the prominent highlights of the conference. The Conference had four thematic parallel sessions focussing on areas which presented an opportunity to build back better with girls, namely: (a) Towards Inclusive and Quality Education for Girls; (b) Advancing Gender Equality in Food Security and Nutrition for all Girls; (c) Ensuring Mental Health and Well-being for Girls; (d) Towards Eliminating Gender based Violence in all its forms. To empower girls to build back better a special session on importance of legal awareness and legal literacy for girls was also organised.

About 1200 delegates comprising of youth change makers, community volunteers, gender transformative development practitioners, government officials, CSR experts and policy makers registered for the conference from 107 districts across the country. The conference was live-streamed on Youtube and Facebook. A total of 1794 viewers accessed the Conference proceedings on Youtube and Facebook. The Conference was also well received by the media and more than 135 articles covering the conference were published by news agencies.

Plan India also brought the voices of young girls from different parts of the country to the national forum. Each session-plenary, thematic and special session was preceded by the voices of young girls from Uttarakhand, Hyderabad, Delhi and Bihar who presented some of the challenges faced by them as well as areas where they would like more knowledge and skills to help them build back better.

The Conference speakers discussed various issues and challenges in creating a safer environment for girls, especially so after an increase in cases of malnutrition, gender based violence and child marriage during the COVID-19 lockdown. Speakers emphasized the need for gender inclusive education for both girls and boys, better use of technology and social media, creating a safe space for girls to seek help and ensuring uninterrupted education for girls during the pandemic. The need to challenge the gender and social norms and change the patriarchal mind-set was highlighted. The discussions also indicated the need to conduct more systematic and rigorous research to encapsulate the magnitude of the issues and present accurate data to feed into policies and programmes. Panellists in the CSR session suggested that corporates can play an important role in contributing towards gender responsive studies and conduct base level research for policy initiatives. The special session on legal literacy underscored the importance of legal awareness and literacy as even educated girls and young women do not have awareness on the women centric laws that exist to protect them, their provisions and the recourse to these laws.

All speakers outlined pathways for the future, and provided recommendations highlighting the role of different sectors and segments of society in helping girls build back better. The speakers agreed that a holistic approach is needed to address the issue of gender inequality and inclusion. Responding to the pandemic is not just about rectifying long-standing inequalities, but also about building a resilient world with girls

and women at the centre of recovery. Awareness and capacity building initiatives are required at all levels, but are essential for women to equip them with required skill-sets to be independent and self-sufficient. While working with girls and young women is essential, efforts need to be made to engage with and encourage boys, individuals, families, community and society as a whole to come together and support girls and women in building back better

The deliberations from the conference contributed significantly in developing a national action plan framework for influencing policymakers and supporting practitioners at the national and state level as well as communities and girls at the grass-roots level. The proposed national action plan framework encapsulated a series of recommendations to adopt 'gender transformative approaches', which go beyond addressing 'symptoms' to explicitly tackling the root causes of gender inequality, particularly unequal gender power relations, discriminatory social norms and systems, structure, policies, and practices. The National Plan also outlines the need for collaboration between the governments at all levels, corporates, NGOs, communities, girls and their families for building back better.

Plan India would follow up on the recommendations which have emanated from the conference with policy makers, corporates and other stakeholders to enable innovations and new approaches to Build back better with Girls, and focus on areas where further progress needs to be made to bring about the desired impact.

BACKGROUND OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE PLAN FOR EVERY CHILD 2021

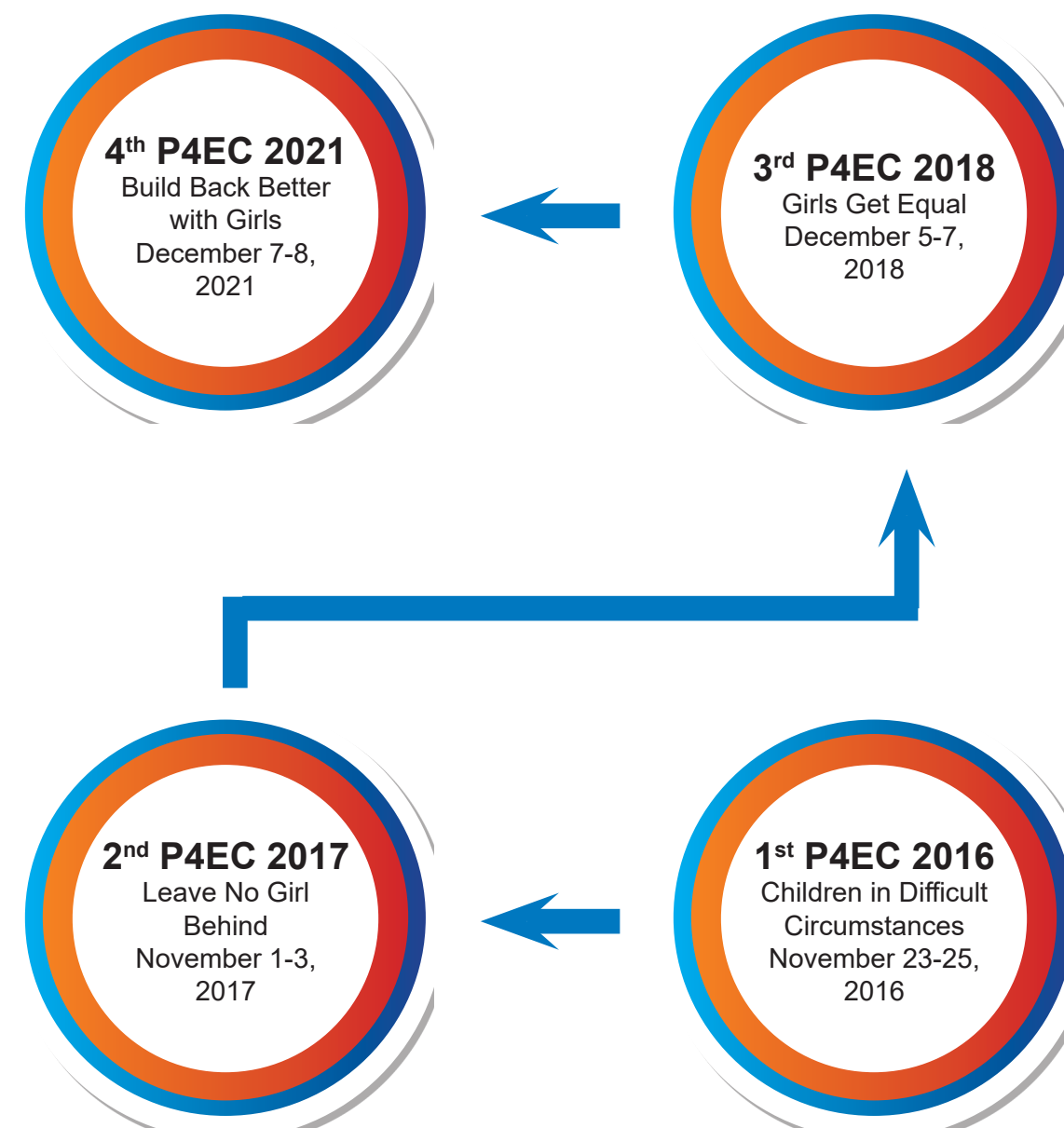
Plan India is continually striving to advance children's rights and equality for girls thus creating a lasting impact in the lives of vulnerable and excluded children and their communities. Plan India recognises that girls and young women from marginalised communities are not just at risk due to their vulnerable circumstances, but also because of the compounding impact of their gender and identity.

As a step in this direction, Plan India has been organising the National Conference Plan for Every Child (P4EC) since 2016 with Ministry of Women and Child Development and Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of India along with other partners, statutory institutions, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), United Nations agencies, grass-roots communities, as well as youth and child networks. The three previous P4EC conferences were held as a forum for exchanging ideas and fostering dialogue on issues related to children, especially girls focusing on specific themes - Children in

Difficult Circumstances (2016), Leave no Girl Behind (2017), and Girls Get Equal (2018). These national conferences brought in rich and varied perspectives on prevention, system strengthening, safeguarding children, equality for girls and provided recommendations on the priorities and opportunities for the advancement of girls' rights.

The 4th National Conference P4EC 2021 focussed on the theme 'Build Back Better with Girls' and marked a significant turning point for mainstreaming the multifaceted agenda of inclusion, safety and equality with girls in building a better India post COVID-19. The Conference deliberated on the important challenges created by COVID-19 with reference to girls, and outlined priority measures for immediate response and longer term recovery efforts that led to a more equal world for girls which is resilient to future crisis.

JOURNEY OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE PLAN FOR EVERY CHILD (P4EC)



INAUGURAL SESSION – 4TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE ‘PLAN FOR EVERY CHILD 2021’

The session marked the formal inauguration of the national conference and set the context for the next two days. Guests of the inaugural session shared the objective of the conference, and the issues faced by girls because of the pandemic followed by key recommendations to build back better with girls.

Ms Rathi Vinay Jha, President of Plan India Governing Board in her welcome address stated that P4EC is committed on reaching out to every child in difficult circumstances and supporting girls and young women in building their capabilities and their leadership to achieve the sustainable development goals. She elaborated on the P4EC 2021 objectives of creating a unique platform to bring together experts from all over the world to deliberate on issues and solutions to complex issues related to protection, health, education, participation violence against girls, early childhood care and sexual & reproductive health.

She underlined the significance of the theme of the conference ‘Build Back Better with Girls for

addressing the issues of inclusion safety and equality for girls in the context of COVID – 19. She reaffirmed Plan India’s resolve to follow up on the recommendations and action points which will emerge from the deliberations of the conference to ensure that there is a meaningful impact on the rights of girls and women. She concluded her address on a positive note that Plan India is looking forward to an enriching discussion, sharing of experiences and learnings over the next two days to help build back better and to rebuild a more inclusive and equal world where concern and care will be centered on the lives of future girls. She congratulated all the panellists of P4EC 2021 for joining hands with Plan India to build back a better society for girls and young women in these difficult times.

Mohammed Asif, Executive Director, Plan India presented the progress report from the 3rd Plan for Every Child National Conference 2018. He informed the delegates that Plan India team ensured that the recommendations reached the policy makers, corporates, UN agencies CSOs and he was happy to share that there has been

progress on the recommendations. A set of 20 recommendations from the eminent panellists, youth and children were directed to the policy makers, civil society organisations, media and the judiciary.

For example, one of the recommendations from the third P4EC on girls get equal was to ensure that more evidence based programming is to be undertaken. Over the last two - three years there have been a number of important studies conducted in the country by different national and international agencies whose recommendations are being used to further refine and sharpen Plan India’s programmes for the welfare of girls and young women. Similarly, one of the proposed actions in P4EC 2018 was to have comprehensive multi-pronged and multi-sectoral approaches which have a greater convergence at grassroots levels. Significant progress on driving greater convergence has been observed at national, state district level and especially in the project areas where Plan is working.

Following the progress on the important recommendations on monitoring framework, very robust monitoring frameworks have been developed by NGOs and government to track and build evidence to actually measure how the needle has moved especially on important development indicators related to girls’ rights and gender transformative development. Overall, the collective and cohesive efforts of the country towards achieving the objectives and the purpose of SDG 5 of advancing gender equality has been momentous.

Shri Sriram Haridass, Representative India and Country Director Bhutan a.i., United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) with reference to girls and women said that there is no gender parity in leadership and there is lack of bodily autonomy. Historical evidence also suggests that immediate impacts of disasters like displacement, destruction of homes, health and schooling facilities etc. have long term impacts on girls like child marriage, gender based violence, trauma, and



sexually transmitted infections. Children who saw domestic violence in their homes during lockdown can experience long term trauma which again is detrimental for their mental health. Onset of the pandemic has been hard for our children and especially girls from the marginalised sections who have probably been hit the hardest. Adolescent girls are especially vulnerable as they continue to face a range of challenges including increased risk of violence, early and forced marriage, unintended pregnancies, anaemia and disproportionate care work.

The health impact on the pandemic has dominated our collective mind space. We must not lose sight of its long-term socio-economic implications that have had a clear gender impact as it affects women and men differently and pandemic made the existing inequalities for women and girls and discrimination of other marginalised groups such as persons with disabilities and those in extreme poverty even worse. When the resources are strained and institutional capacity is limited it is girls

and women who face disproportionate and detrimental impact that is only worsened in the context of fragility, conflict and emergencies like COVID-19.

In his address, he shed light on the recent problems faced by women mentioning that the rural women’s employment accounted for nearly 80 percent of job losses between March and April 2021. The number of people living in poverty in India is estimated to have increased by 75 million due to COVID -19 with actually more women estimated to be pushed into extreme poverty especially in rural areas. India also exhibited the lowest female participation rate among developing countries. There can be various reasons for it ranging from unpaid care work to unsafe travel and harassment. Inequitable vaccine distribution, lack of access to technology, inertia in decision making were some factors concerning women during the pandemic. Shadow pandemic of gender based violence was also witnessed. Crimes against women rose to 23 lakhs during 2020, and that is only the number of crimes that were actually

reported. His words truly defined the gravity of the situation we have to deal with to start building back better with girls.

He also shared some encouraging figures regarding the general decline in harmful trends of child marriage and major involvement of women in the community health sector, as 75 percent of the workers are girls and women and are on the frontlines on the efforts to contain COVID – 19 in India.

Speaking on promoting equality in the context of COVID – 19, he said that to make change happen, we must urgently embrace a vision of a gender-responsive recovery – in engagement with the government and, critically, in tandem with NGOs and civil society organisations. We need to apply a more powerful magnifying gender lens to make course corrections in our programmatic interventions. He suggested that educating girls and giving them the opportunity to develop to their full potential has a multiplier effect on a country’s economic growth and social

development. We should work towards ensuring re-enrolment of girls, coupled with digital literacy and access, to minimise drop-outs on account of COVID-19.

He made several action points and constructive recommendations on making sure that women have a seat at decision-making tables, at the local as well as national level and efforts should be made to engage with men and boys as partners for change. Policy responses must take a gender-sensitive approach that considers the complexities and nuances of the current challenge we are facing, and focus on addressing and shifting negative social norms.

In the end, he concluded by stating that responding to the pandemic is not just about rectifying long-standing inequalities, but also about building a resilient world in the interest of everyone with girls and women at the centre of recovery. Gender equality and the rights of girls and women are essential to getting through this pandemic together, to recovering faster,



and to building a better future for everyone. He gave the new motto of making a fresh start with women and girls at the centre of everything we do. This must be the new motto. The New Mantra.

Dr. Dnyaneshwar Manohar Mulay, Member, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) talked about positivity and how positivity can be used to build back better with girls in his inaugural address.

He felt that crimes against women like child marriage, dowry deaths, harassment and police inaction to even register FIRs against these crimes are major issues that our country is currently facing. In some districts of Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Haryana, families get brides from outside. Therefore, child sex ratio does not indicate true ground realities, putting forth the pressing need of accurate facts and figures to address the most vulnerable groups first and putting the last girl first.

He added that each one of us can do something and attitude change is important for that. Right

from birth, children should be treated equally and they should be brought up in the same manner. Onus of crimes against women should fall on perpetrators and women should not be doubted. Even for family or societal problems, women suffer more and this needs to change. He shared a positive statement that women should not be told to tell themselves that they cannot have it all, highlighting the need for empowerment of girls.

He encouraged everyone to join ‘mission positivity’ which is being followed by more than 150 organisations. In addition to that, he stressed that we should follow the directive principles and respect human rights especially for women to build an equitable future. To bring change, we all should promote constitutional rights and values i.e., Justice, Freedom and Equality. He enlisted three practises that we all can follow individually to promote these rights:

- Be innovative in everything we do.
- Be compassionate and inclusive
- Be constructive

Major General Manoj Kumar Bindal, Executive Director, National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), commenced his chief guest address with the beautiful quote, “Core of everything is compassion and not sympathy”- Dalai Lama.

He referred Plan India’s audio visual on ‘what comes to mind of girls when they hear Build Back Better’, and inferred that most of their answers were centred on safety, privacy and empowerment. The concerns of young girls were not centered on larger leadership but around basic rights. This shows the mindset of girls; they are brought up in a way that they are aiming for small things. He emphasized on changing the mindset of every girl, “Every girl has to be made confident. There should be no limit for imagination”.He further added “Disasters don’t discriminate but people do”. Vulnerable groups such as women, children and the elderly suffer the most during the pandemic. He added that emergencies and disasters like the pandemic reinforce and perpetuate existing gender inequality.

There are many insecurities and issues which women face during disasters but they are not

addressed due to privacy issues and the fear of women to speak them out, for example, menstrual needs and hygiene. Quoting a study, Mr Bindal said that natural disasters kill more women than men, both directly and indirectly due to post disaster events. Difference in mortality lies in lower socio-economic status of women which in turn leads to unequal access to opportunities and unequal exposure to risks, making them vulnerable to disasters. Greater emphasis has to be given for empowering women as this is the key to strengthen the disaster resilience of communities.

Major Bindal added that women in villages have a lot of expertise and experience, but they are not consulted during decision making. Their opinion must be taken while designing policies and programmes for them. Engaging and empowering women in leadership roles should be the norm now. We need to change the mindset of both men and women. Men need to accept that women must become equal and they should start giving women key leadership roles as well. Women must recognise their own potential and start taking leadership roles themselves.



Key Takeaways	
1.	Gendered access to basic amenities like vaccines, healthcare and education, and lack of decision making were some factors concerning women during the pandemic.
2.	The pandemic reinforced and perpetuated existing gender inequality practices.
3.	Discriminatory social and cultural norms and the gendered division of roles must be challenged.
4.	Recovery from pandemic must incorporate gender equality goals and put women in the centre.
5.	Empower women to strengthen the disaster resilience of communities.
6.	Promote constitutional rights and values i.e. Justice, Freedom and Equality and follow the directive principles and respect human rights especially for women to build equitable future.
7.	Build the agency and voice of girls and facilitate their participation at local and national levels.
8.	Every girl needs to be made confident and provided with the opportunity to dream big

PLENARY SESSION - BUILD BACK BETTER WITH GIRLS

The first plenary session focused on the main theme of the national conference ‘**Building Back Better with Girls**’. Speakers focused on a myriad of issues including healthcare, nutrition and hygiene of women, sustainability in achievement of long-term gender equality goals and most of all, making the paradigm shift of transferring real power and control to women and hence enabling them to empower themselves. The session also deliberated on shaping the post COVID-19 development agenda through quality education of girls which called for immediate intervention and assistance by the government and education boards to develop a secure and equipped online platform for improvised e-learning especially for at-risk adolescents and girls.

Ms Upma Chawdhry, Ex Union Secretary, Government of India & Director, Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration,

Mussoorie chaired the first plenary session. She elaborated on the theme of ‘Build Back Better with Girls’. She stated that ‘Build back’ signifies forward looking and forward moving towards future, ‘Better’ means boosting and enhancing and strengthens the purpose of building. She said that we should not work for girls but we should work with girls. She recommended to, “Read the mind of those whom we want to empower and to whom we want to teach to have a voice”.

Mohammed Asif, Executive Director, Plan India briefly provided insights into impact driven community orientation work where the focus for Plan India team has been on interconnected and interlinked issues of health and hygiene for children, adolescents and for maternal development. They help the community to access government schemes. Plan India is promoting environment sanitation through toilets usage, domestic & public spaces for personal

and community hygiene. He called attention to the lack of awareness amongst women and girls about nutritious food, maternal care and self-hygiene is of great concern. Plan India has been working at the frontline and also indirectly to make the difference.

Dr. Indira Chakravarty, Padma Shri and Public Health Specialist shared her views and recommendations about *Build Back Better for improving health, nutrition, hygiene of women and girls*. She emphasised that pregnancy for a woman is a time in the woman’s life when she needs maximum support, when she is vulnerable for too many issues and all the resources are needed for a new life. During pregnancy critical targets must be on certain issues like *issuing a child protection card to new mothers and assistance in taking the new born to healthcare centres. NFHS data highlights the problem of sustainability of nutrition intake - folic acid is given to women

but not for all 180 days and women do not complete all four antenatal visits. Extending support from primary health centres to women during pregnancy and early childhood care by the family is very important. Indicators like infant mortality rate, neonatal mortality rate and low birth weight are linked to the poor nutritional condition of mothers. India’s infant mortality rate is in double digits and is much more than most underdeveloped countries.

On the health and nutrition indicators, Dr Chakravarty outlined that NFHS data shows improvement but mere five percent improvement is very insignificant. Secondly, indicators improved more from NFHS-3 to NFHS-4 as compared to NFHS-4 to NFHS-5, highlighting the damage caused by the pandemic and our lack of sustainability. Anaemia is one indicator which needs our immediate attention since both men and women are anaemic to an unacceptable range but it drastically affects women. While 25 percent men are anaemic,



as much as 57 percent women in India are anaemic, which is more than double. The situation is worse among adolescents. We need to dig deeper into the reasons for this since programmes for folic acid and anaemia have been in place since 1972. India already has the largest food insecure population and food intake has further reduced due to the pandemic. Secondly, diversity of nutrients has reduced and women were affected more by the shortage.

She also drew attention to accessibility of water resources which is essential for women’s hygiene and health. Lack of access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) is one of the reasons for low health and nutritional status of women including prevalence of anaemia. Women in rural areas with chronic water accessibility have to travel far away to get water for the family by themselves, spending a lot of calories in the process when they are already malnourished. In such a situation, the family should do everything to support their women as water and sanitation is essential not only for

them but also for children, especially young girls. The issue of ‘leaking pots’ i.e., diarrhoea has been a major cause of nutrition deficit in children especially girls. She also added that although overall attendance of girls in schools was increasing, the pandemic has severely affected girls’ education.

She recommended that educating girls on positive attitude and creating awareness about health and nutrition is essential for the success of all the plans and schemes in the country. Women have the strength, capability and resilience to do what they want to do.

Dr. Neelam Singh, Secretary and Chief Functionary, Vatsalya introduced the theme of **empowering girls to get equal**. She stressed upon the power which comes from the constitutions of India to treat girls equally. The need for legal empowerment of girls and how constitution of India has provision on equality viz., Article 15 which prohibits discrimination on



grounds of gender, caste and religion, Article 19(a) on freedom of speech and expression, Article 16(b) about equality of opportunity for all citizens in matter relating to employment and Article 19(g) which talks about practising any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade and business.

She underlined that many women die due to haemorrhage and miscarriage during pregnancy. There is improvement in schooling and literacy but still nearly 60 percent women are unable to study beyond class 10th and 70 percent women do not have access to internet. Role of organisations like Vatsalya and Plan India is critical in advancing the agenda of equality through empowerment of girls. Girls have the power and abilities but we need to help them realize it.

She recommended that expression and speaking are very important for girls and women. Formation of adolescent groups, skilling and creating prospects for making them self-reliant through skill development programmes would go long way for the empowerment of girls and women. By creating a conducive

environment, giving equal access to mobility and household decision-making, we can reach and empower girls till the last mile.

Mr Soumya Guha, Director of Gender Transformative Policy and Practice, Global Hub, Plan International shed light on **achieving sustainable and inclusive development through gender transformative approaches**. He highlighted that we are already not on track to reach the SDG goals and statistics show that the pandemic has only aggravated the bottlenecks. Harmful social norms and insufficient laws are some of the major challenges that we are currently facing as a society.

He recommended that to tackle the situation, we first need to develop a holistic investment plan on reproductive health, education, infrastructure, violence free world for girls and overall life of girls. 10 percent Gross Domestic product (GDP) can be increased by ensuring 100 percent secondary school completion rates, which can be done at only Rs 105 per girl per day. It is important that we not only envision girls as beneficiaries but as consumers and key economic agents too. Secondly, collaborative approaches between the government, NGOs, private sector, girls and their families, communities and states are some of the pressing needs. Thirdly, systemic, sustainable and long-lasting change is the need of the hour for creating an environment in which girls can thrive. He also added in his set of recommendations that if we invest in all key areas, get the policies right for girls and women, make the policies more inclusive to tackle discrimination, regressive public attitudes and social norms, ensure representation of women and female role models and leaders in each sector and in every sphere, we can bring real change to build back better with girls.

Mr Ashok Kumar, Executive Director, Dr AV Baliga Memorial Trust shared his experience on *shaping the post COVID-19 development agenda through girls education*. He stated that this is apt time to have conversation on ‘Build Back Better with Girls’. A dialogue like this will help the people of the society. Build on it, back it through your experience for positive future outcome. The challenges like child labour, child marriage, domestic violence, depression, discrimination, lack of digital access are aggravated due to COVID-19, but these challenges can be easily turned into opportunities.

Mr Kumar talked about his organisation’s initiative of psycho-social counselling, hybrid counselling and hybrid education learning centres among other initiatives to help children cope up during crises. Scholarships were given to reduce economic burden for uninterrupted education and volunteers were constantly

in touch with children. He also applauded government initiatives like swayam, e-basta and e-pathshala which became more active during the pandemic.

He recommended that government should start a special programme to improve online learning for marginalised sections of the society as the education sector has been severely impacted during the pandemic. Safe and secure schooling for girls is important in post pandemic situation. Technological use is to be enhanced for adolescents and girls at risk and filter apps can be created for children which block obscene content. Interaction and engagement with children of sex workers and transgender should be a continuous process. More mother and child healthcare centres should be established and made functional. Girls should be educated and should be made aware about healthcare and other facilities.



Key Takeaways	
1.	Educating girls on positive attitude and creating awareness about health and nutrition is essential for the success of all the plans and schemes in the country.
2.	Girls should not only be seen as beneficiaries but as consumers too.
3.	Female role model and leaders should be there in each and every sector.
4.	Holistic investment plan is to be developed on reproductive health, education, infrastructure, and violence free world for girls.
5.	Girls have power but they are not realising it. Groups of adolescent girls need to be formed to empower them.
6.	For building back better with girls, we must not work ‘for’ girls but work ‘with’ them.
7.	Read the mind of those who we want to empower and whom we want to teach to have a voice.
8.	With humble attitude, men should try to learn about women’s issues and rights and how to stand up for women in the family itself.
9.	It is important to secure schooling for girls in the post pandemic situation. Access of girls, specifically those marginalised to technological devices and digital education needs to be enhanced. Girls should be educated and should be made aware about healthcare and other facilities. More mother and child healthcare centres should be established and made functional.
10.	Collaboration is important between the government, private sector, NGOs, girls and their families, communities and states for building back better with girls.

PARALLEL THEMATIC SESSIONS

**Challenges & New Outlook in Post
COVID-19 India: Analysing the Situation
and Exploring Innovative Solutions &
Approaches in Key Focus Areas**

THEMATIC SESSION: TOWARDS INCLUSIVE AND QUALITY EDUCATION FOR GIRLS

C OVID-19 shutdowns have disrupted learning, formal education and livelihoods and forced many girls out of school thereby deepening existing inequalities. Yet, the pandemic has also provided opportunities to make education policies more evidence based, inclusive and responsive with a greater focus on agility in managing responses and efforts for collaborative actions. This session focused on enhancing access of girls to affordable,

quality education. Panellists called collaborative actions and interventions by the government , education boards and civil society partners for ensuring the continuity of education while exploring and consolidating innovative solutions for equitable and inclusive access to education such as developing a secure and equipped online platform for girls and new free apps for improvised e-learning especially for at-risk adolescents and girls.

Dr. Sanjai Bhatt, Professor, Delhi School of Social Work, University of Delhi was the chair of this thematic session. He introduced the panellists and steered the discussion on inclusive and quality education of girls.

Dr. Sunita Gandhi, Vice-Chair, India Literacy Board, Former Economist, World Bank, Washington D C, Founder-CEO, DEVI Sansthan: Dignity, Education, Vision International said that girls’ education must become a priority, for which political will needs to be translated into proactive policies. Financial investment in activities that target girls’ education should be increased, including provision of cash transfers. Government should ensure that budgets are gender-responsive and should also explore public-private partnerships for financing educational projects. Widespread community action and women volunteers are needed to ensure that girls are not only enrolled in schools but are also attending classes.

She also recommended that attention

should be directed towards mothers’ literacy and education. To make learning real and measurable, she suggested that apps should be used for real-time data collection, immediate corrective action and greater responsibility. She suggested that a ‘safety net’ should be created which consists of a set of learning objectives for each grade, not the total curriculum but just a safety net that teachers should ensure that every student is accounted. There is a need to move away from syllabus completion to short term goals and time-bound targets.

She emphasized that quality education is more than just learning, it is about feeding aspiration, nurturing confidence, social and emotional development and much more. New and disruptive methods of learning and accountability, which enable intrinsic motivation are needed for both students and teachers. Shared spaces and peer support groups should be included in monthly timetables of teachers for their long term motivation, and gender responsive pedagogies should be included in their trainings.

She also suggested that systemic approach should be followed for providing inclusive education. Gendered access to education and social development must become a thing of the bygone era and damage done by such harmful trends should be undone. Blended and hybrid approaches of learning can be adopted after the pandemic as well to provide safe education for girls.

Ms Kanchan Devrari, Joint Director, State Council of Educational Research & Training (SCERT), Government of Uttarakhand talked about SDG Goal 4 - ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all and the targets to be achieved for *Leaving no one behind*. She stressed on gender equality in education which empowers both girls and boys and imparts crucial life-skills such as self-management and critical thinking.

The main barriers to education are poverty, limited accessibility to schools for girls, lack of

awareness, no incentives, absence of sanitation facilities and safety for girls in schools among others. She pointed out the gender gaps in skill development as vocational courses provided by the government are stereotypical for example plumber, photography courses are for boys whereas, beautician courses are for girls. Accordingly, the society’s mindset has been set. Also, child marriage and gender based violence are important themes during the pandemic time which have been having serious implication on the advancement of inclusive and quality education for girls.

Government has launched *Mission Koshish* for learning activities and other initiatives include lectures through Doordarshan E-Pathshala, teacher trainings, campaign for girls’ education, and improvement in school systems for enhancing learning experiences for the children and girls in particular.

She recommended complete education for both girls and boys, and emphasized on their right to



access the basic pre- primary education. She also advocated for equal access to vocational education and gender equality system in the education.

Ms Sonali Khan, Managing Director, Sesame Workshop India shared an upsetting trend in children’s learning habits and literacy skills especially during the pandemic. Children have lost touch with writing manually and reading from a paperback because of alternatives like printouts and e-books available. She informed that 3-6 years of age is the time for fastest development of brain. Unfortunately, many children in this age group did not have access to any learning resources during the pandemic due to the closure of anganwadis. A study shows that 80 percent of children in grade one and two have forgotten certain words, literacy skills and numeracy skills. She fears that girls are at a much greater risk of getting left behind if they continue to miss out on their education.

Not only digital and media platforms, she emphasized that parents also play an even more important role in children’s education since the pandemic. Parents have to consider themselves not just providers, but teachers and play-partners as well while playing an active role in supporting their children as they go back to school. Both father and mother need to be equally involved in the upbringing of their children. Very early, the girls understand their limitations by seeing the role that their mothers play and by giving equal responsibility to both father and mother, this limitation can be addressed.

She recommended that the entire curriculum has to be gender sensitive. The pandemic has pointed towards the absence of skills to handle emotional well-being and mental health, especially for small children who are not even able to express themselves. Technology and empowering the adults in the child’s environment- adults and parents will be important to improve the numeracy and literacy skills through experiential pedagogy. This will

help rebuild the child’s confidence and help them cope up during the periods of disruptions in learning.

Mr Rishikumar Singh, Head - Strategy & Communication, YUVA Unstoppable shared the message of compassion and positivity through his own experience. YUVA Unstoppable started with a few volunteers who decided to teach children for merely 2 hours a week, and has now adopted more than 2,000 government schools. Looking at YUVA’s and his own journey, he recommended for a culture of purposeful learning. Each individual can play an important role in empowering young girls. Even by giving merely 2 hours of our week, we can improve the lives of many girls and children who have no access to education.

He shared examples of children from government schools of Delhi who wanted to work for their community. They tried to make their community green by planting trees around them. Many children were involved in fitness programmes and smartly used their time during pandemic to stay healthy physically as well as mentally. These examples show that we need to inculcate the habit of purposeful learning so that many more children can come together and do impactful work, make their own and someone else’s life purposeful. The main purpose of such an initiative is to educate girls and inspire them to overcome the challenges and move forward with positive mindset.

He recommended empowerment of girls by creating new learning opportunities and continues awareness process will be significant in achieving the objective of quality education for girls.

Ms Geetanjali Yadav, Assistant Professor, Department of Elementary Education, Miranda House, University of Delhi added about importance of teacher development programmes which are also crucial to the overall

enhancement of the learning ambience and quality education of students. She also talked about physical, mental and spiritual health of students, shortage of teachers, school dropouts and other challenges faced by students during the pandemic.

There has been a substantive negative impact on the young mind during the COVID-19 pandemic. High prevalence of depressive and anxiety related symptoms linked with COVID-19 and related shutdowns have been found in children and young people. This impact on mental health has also affected the learning environment. Students also faced multiple financial challenges like lack of accessibility to the internet, mobiles, money for data pack, connectivity problems and lack of devices. Fixed curriculum by teachers, giving online worksheets, a decline in reading and writing capacity further aggravated the issue due to which students are not able to express themselves. Another problem was the absence of mid-day meals which also affected the food security of students.]

Ms Yadav recommended counselling, scholarships, mid-day meals, community radio programme, creative activities for children, providing space and privacy to children, encouraging parents to address the dropout challenge and management of infrastructure so that students who want to attend schools can do so. Sensible curriculum must be created, which does not stress on performance but gives freedom to teachers. There is also a need to create flexible curriculum which provides autonomy to the teachers to pick and choose topics which they think are useful to students. Aesthetic experiences like art, dance and music which have healing powers and help children cope must be given more importance. Counselling and mentoring should be provided to pre-service teachers, teachers and learners. She also suggested that technological support should be provided to both teachers and students.



Dr. Rajni Wadhwa, Director, Programme Implementation, Plan India talked about global health crises during the pandemic and slowed progress towards achieving sustainable development goals. She stated that due to school closures, children have been deprived of the joy of learning, playing together and making friends. Children from poor and marginalized communities have not only been deprived of digital access, but have also suffered due to closure of Anganwadis. Their parents are mostly illiterate and ill-equipped to support their early learning needs. As a result many children are being deprived of a stimulating learning environment in the preschool years which will enhance their school readiness. Many students have forgotten reading and writing due to school closures, leading to poor learning outcomes.

The issues of gender equality, early age marriage and evaluation of the same along with other issues of gender based violence should be monitored so nothing stops girls from receiving the education that is their birth right. She shared Plan India learnings from socio-economic support provided through *Shiksha Mitra*, youth fellows programme, scholarship for marginalised families, App-based online learning support

and distribution of tablets specifically to girls to bridge the digital divide. Additionally, parents can be provided with kits to facilitate home-schooling.

She recommended involvement of Anganwadis in socio-economic activities in the communities to ensure reach of policy driven benefits to the targeted people in need. In addition, school development plans, engaging parents, leadership skill building, career counselling and life skill activities should be a must for personality development apart from theory based education. Marginalised girls in the community can be reached through existing youth clubs in the community, and counselled to motivate them to continue or restart education. Community volunteers engaged in motivating young people to continue education or help them with remedial learning should be allowed to move and exempted from the pandemic restriction protocols. Building public- private partnership to reach the girl child, awareness generation in the community on importance of educating the girl child, building skills of teachers in online pedagogy and providing financial support to teachers who may have lost their jobs during the pandemic were some other remedial measures suggested.

Key Takeaways	
1.	Bridges that have been broken during COVID-19 pandemic should be rebuilt to continue learning process.
2.	Creative activities such as music, dance and art, and spiritual education should be included alongside traditional lessons as they help in the mental well-being of students as these are outlets of expression.
3.	Facilitate access of girls to online learning through community radio programmes, app-based learning, Doordarshan E- <i>paathshala</i> and recording of academic sessions to bridge learning gaps.
4.	Curriculum needs to be sensible and should not stress on the performance of the student. Teachers should be given the autonomy to pick and choose topics which they think are useful to students. Timing should also be flexible to ensure that maximum students can participate in online classes.

5.	A component of counselling, guidance and mentoring should be included in the curriculum for teachers- both during pre-service and in-service.
6.	Empower adults and parents to find ways to be able to understand the socio-emotional well-being of children. Role of parents is important in the development of children and ensuring that children are mainstreamed in formal school.
7.	Invest in building the skills of the Anganwadi worker on early childhood education. Provide her additional support if required.
8.	Do not leave the focus on what has already been implemented. Revise and assess the learnings.
9.	Build capacities of teachers in blended and digital learning.
10.	Mid-day meals, better sanitation facilities, and scholarships to girls would encourage parents to enrol girls in schools.
11.	Public private partnership and funding support should be explored for providing quality education.
12.	Attach volunteers to schools to track students specifically girls.



THEMATIC SESSION: ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION FOR ALL GIRLS

The session deliberated on advancing gender equality in food security and nutrition for all girls and women. Speakers discussed that the hunger crises had the most adverse effect on women and led to multiple deficiencies. The session also pointed out the need for solutions that address both immediate food and nutrition insecurity as well as provide livelihood opportunities so as to break the cycle of hunger and poverty are needed. Pragmatic actions towards the discourse should be prioritised.

The thematic session focussed on discussing the challenges many families already face in terms of access to affordable, healthy diets and identifying priority areas for action for protecting the nutritional status of the most vulnerable families and individuals. Speakers also explored and consolidated innovative solutions and approaches to gender equality in food security and nutrition for all girls.

Dr. Indira Chakravarty, Padma Shri and Public Health Specialist chaired the session. With her insightful guidance, the panellists shared their experiences, views and recommendations on the pertinent issue related to food security and nutrition.

Dr. Unni Krishnan, Global Humanitarian Director, Plan International accentuated that humanitarian emergencies disproportionately affect children and women. Quoting facts he highlighted the gravity of the situation-that globally every night over 800 million people are going to bed hungry , and if we put all the hungry people in the world in a single place that will be the third most populous country after China and India. The forecast shows that the situation is likely to worsen in 2022 and in the near future. World is not on its track at all to achieve any of the sustainable development goals related to nutrition by 2030. While shedding light on the vulnerable groups, he said that humanitarian emergencies disproportionately affect children and

women. During a hunger crisis girls eat less and girls often eat last. Women and children are vulnerable in all four dimensions of food security i.e. availability, access, utilisation and stability. Also, children are often pulled out of school for child labour which takes away their chances of getting benefitted from the schemes. Girls are at heightened risk of child marriage, early pregnancy and sexual exploitation. Families may marry daughters so that they have one less mouth to feed.

He said that school meal programmes are a lifeline in areas dealing with hunger crisis but the COVID-19 related lockdown has led to a closure of these programmes. In addition to dry rations, community kitchen and therapeutic feeding, direct cash transfers and voucher assistant can play a critical role in stopping a food crisis. Moreover, solutions that address both immediate food and nutrition insecurity as well as provide livelihood opportunities so as to break the cycle of hunger and poverty are needed. Also, the crisis highlights the importance of existing social protection and safety net programmes such as



Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in India.

A comprehensive and holistic approach along with improving targets is critical, since only one third resources are available during hunger crises. A bigger push is on non-dairy products but protein requirements of vulnerable groups also needs to be met. Media has to play an important role in reporting hunger crises and enabling organisations to act early. He recommended that nutritional interventions, targeting children under 5, adolescent girls & pregnant and nursing mothers should be a priority. Interventions focusing on nutrition needs as well as protection measures need to go hand-in-hand, including ensuring that people who are receiving assistance in emergency relief distribution sites are not subject to any form of exploitation. Separated and unaccompanied children need special attention, specially focusing on early child care and development to stop stunting. He also emphasised on supporting and training additional nutrition staff to identify parents who are in distress or at risk of negative coping mechanisms and provide them with financial assistance and psychological first aid. Establishing a help desk to access multi-sectoral reference information and addressing lack of awareness in villages needs to be addressed while designing big programmes.

Dr. Shariqua Yunus, Head of Nutrition Unit, World Food Programme (WFP) India stated that COVID-19 disrupted food supply chains, caused huge increases in prices, disrupted livelihoods, led to migration crises, eventually leading to reducing the dietary diversity on the plate. Due to the fear of disruption of supplied families bought commodities which had a stable shelf life but were nutritionally inadequate.

Dr Yunus added that the government could

come up with a robust response to the COVID-19 because due to the National Food Security act 2013 in place which makes food an entitlement for about two thirds of our population. The National Food Security Act encompasses three schemes : the Public Distribution System; PM Poshan or the Mid-Day meal which covers school children between the ages of 6 to 14 studying in grade 1 to 8, and ICDS which covers children under 6 years of age, pregnant lactating women and adolescent girls. She also mentioned that due to COVID-19 lockdown, the government issued guidelines to states to move away from the hot cooked meals model to a model in which a food security allowance was given where cooking costs and grains were passed onto children. These guidelines were adapted but these dry rations are shared by the whole family and not eaten by the child only. Also, delays in implementation were reported. As a result vulnerable groups like pregnant and lactating mothers and under five children received food low in quantity and quality (nutritional diversity).

She shared the WFP model being implemented in Uttar Pradesh where take home rations were being produced by Self Help Groups (SHGs), bought by ICDS and further distributed to the beneficiaries.

She recommended that the implementation of the social protection schemes has to be need based according to the capacities of women, children and men. Equal participation of both men and women in social protection programmes is also to be ensured.

Mr Sarbjit Singh Sahota, Disaster Risk Reduction Specialist, UNICEF India introduced the theme by saying that diet diversity became a way to look at food insecurity when enough results were not being achieved. He also reinforced that women should not be the ones to eat last. Women have to take leadership. He

shared that UNICEF started the Swabhimaan programme with National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) where they first established the Centre for Excellence on nutrition, diets in Lady Irwin College. Then they started working with 356 villages as evaluation sites.

After achieving the basics in the Swabhimaan project, they moved on from food security to hygiene and sanitation as well. A lot of social and technical capital was created in the project which can be reinvested to solve larger problems. With the same capital, the next version of Swabhimaan project has been started which addresses issues faced by women and adolescent girls.

Similarly he stated that a lot of social capital has been created at societal level through developmental interventions. Reinvestment of what we have already harvested is needed to bring gender into this framework. In addition to this, strategic investment in documentation, knowledge and information management is needed to implement the right kind of scientific evidence based interventions.

Dr. Shivani Dar, Nutrition Officer, UNICEF, Bihar initiated her talk by referring to NFHS-V data. She stated that NFHS is gender neutral and shows that there is not much difference in under nutrition, stunting and other related data. However, on the ground level there is a clear difference. For under five years of age, the difference is not much but it starts showing from five to nine years age group. Further, it was observed that the nutritional status of children under five years of age was linked to the mother's nutritional status which in turn was dependent on other socio economic factors. Mothers whose nutritional status was low were very young, undernourished, had low educational qualifications and had limited money or resources. Hence, food security and nutrition cannot be looked at in isolation.

Ankuran, a school based nutrition strategy being implemented in all district of Bihar is aimed at improving dietary diversity at school and family level. Making nutri-gardens, nutrition awareness through morning assemblies, integrating WASH interventions etc. were undertaken in this programme. Female farmers were linked with livelihood to improve food intake. Macronutrients and iron deficiencies were reduced through supplements and counselling. Due to COVID-19, Swabhimaan plus which is a gender transformative intervention has been introduced. The intervention takes into account the mental health of females, provides them psychosocial support and addresses gender based violence to make it a gender transformative intervention.

Ms. Dar recommended that reaching and engaging men in the process is important. Nutri-sensitive integrated farming should be scaled up as it brings food to the table. Collaborative efforts are required to improve the delivery chains within the system and ensure that services reach all women. It is also important to integrate communication around gender.

Mr Pulkit Garg, Chief Development Officer (CDO), Siddharthnagar, Government of Uttar Pradesh said that District Siddharthnagar is located at the Nepal border and is around 400 km away from Lucknow. It is also heavily affected by floods, so for three months every activity stops. Many people are also displaced during those months. So, to some extent a situation like that created by the COVID-19 pandemic gets repeated in Siddharthnagar every year for three months as all the routine activities stop and people are displaced. Its geographical location and exposure to annual floods makes it an aspirational district. Four lakh children in the district out of a total population of 30 lakhs are enrolled under 2000 Anganwadis operating under the ICDS programme.

Mr Garg shared that low literacy among women is one major challenge as it impedes their

understanding on the importance of nutrients and nutrition diversity. Eating a wholesome, high quality, nutritionally diverse diet has not been the general culture in the district. Lack of general sanitation and hygiene behaviour makes the people more prone to diseases outbreak.

He shared that special focus nutrition programmes for vulnerable children and drop out girls are being implemented in the district. Regular checkups of girls are conducted to check if they are anaemic. For out-of-school girls, Village Health and Nutrition Day (VHND) is organised twice a week. For girls studying in schools, regular health checkups are conducted under the Rashtriya Bal Swastha Kaaryakram (RBSK) programme every month. Under the RBSK programme iron and folic acid tablets and dry rations are given to registered girls. More than 2000 Nutri-gardens have been established in the district ensuring access of families to locally grown vegetables. Also, during COVID-19, a *Nigrani Samiti* was formed whose members comprised of the Panchayat, Asha workers and Anganwadis. This ensured that ration is distributed properly and VHNDs are being held regularly in the communities. Overall Siddharthnagar is ranked 2 is aspirational district programme and in health and nutrition it is ranked 4.

Mr Garg ended his discussions by recommending that resources need to be invested in behaviour change which is a slow but important process. Parents’ capacities and understanding on nutritional requirement for children, especially for girls need to be built. Both intensive interpersonal communication as well as large scale awareness campaigns on importance of a balanced nutritious diet must be undertaken. Alongside a targeted, focussed

approach to ensure community participation should be implemented.

Mr Rajeev Kumar Singh, General Secretary, Dr Shambhunath Singh Research Foundation (SRF) shared his organisational experience. He stated that nutrition is linked with many cultural issues as in some parts of India, girls are groomed since birth to eat after feeding male members of family. This leads to the beginning of gender imbalance in nutrition.

SRF worked with individuals, families, community and government to improve the health of underweight and malnourished children. Programme interventions focus on educating and counselling families regarding gender and nutrition importance through community meetings and through a convergence model which includes all government departments. The Foundation works closely with ICDS. The Foundation’s experience has been that ICDS systems are overburdened and the workers are not well trained, and so the Foundation invests in capacity building and training of workers. Under the ICDS adolescent programmes, very few girls are enrolled and those who are enrolled do so only for a short period of time. These girls are out of both schools and ICDS programmes and hence they lose access to any nutritional schemes, like mid-day meals. These girls need to be linked to other appropriate nutrition coverage programmes.

He also recommended that mid-day meals scheme should be extended to class 10 students as well and the issue of lack of awareness in villages needs to be addressed while designing large scale programmes.

Key Takeaways	
1.	ICDS systems are overburdened and the workers are not well trained. Capacity building and training of functionaries is crucial.
2.	Support and train additional nutrition staff to identify parents who are in distress or at risk of negative coping mechanisms and provide financial assistance and psychological support.
3.	Mid-day meals scheme should be extended to class 10 students as well.
4.	Focus to be more on community participation and engaging men. Alongside both inter personal and mass awareness campaigns need to be implemented to bring about behaviour change of parents.
5.	There needs to be equal participation of both men and women in social protection programmes.
6.	Nutri Sensitive Integrated Framing should be scaled up as it brings low cost, locally available food to the table.
7.	Implementation of social protection programmes gets generalised. We need to adapt these programmes according to different capacities of women, children and men.
8.	Communication campaigns to challenge gender based norms and stereotypes are important.
9.	Media has to play an important role in reporting hunger crises and enabling organisations to act early.



THEMATIC SESSION: ENSURING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING FOR GIRLS

The session deliberated on the importance of mental health and emotional well-being of girls and women apart from physical healthcare. Speakers contributed and built on the theme by sharing data on the issue and discussing the detrimental effects of mental health on girls such as anxiety, workload and the stigma related to it. The panel also put forth several recommendations to tackle and improve this situation which included education of the community as a whole and thereby removing the stigma around the issue of mental health,

creation of safe spaces and normalising to talk about stress and anxiety issues.

The session focussed on discussing the importance of mental health, the stigma around it and the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of people at large. Focus was on ground level perspectives and identifying priority areas for action for improving the mental health of young people, especially girls while exploring and consolidating innovative solutions and approaches.

Ms Preeti Sudan, Former Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India set the agenda in motion as chair of the session by introducing the related facts that 22 percent of the population are adolescents in India in 2011 i.e. in total 253 million adolescents and about 20 percent of them suffer from mental health problems. Indian adolescents are mainly grappled by issues of mental health illness and the associated stigma, anxiety, workload during COVID-19 on people. Mental health problems also fester in young adults from the absence of a nurturing ecosystem in families or surroundings.

She recommended that mental health should be considered as a public health issue and also emotional learning curriculum should be introduced in the education system to address the mental health and well-being issue from ground zero.

Dr. Achal Bhagat, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist, Apollo Hospitals; Chairperson, Saarthak; Chairperson,

AADI emphasised that mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic became a very important issue but the need for it has always existed. The stigma around mental health stems from the constitutional laws which equate mental health problems with an unsound mind and the assumption of incapacity is almost institutionalized. Stigma has emerged from the assumption of 'dangerousness', that people who have mental health problems will either harm themselves or harm others.

He stressed that budgets are focused on institutionalised care and access to community mental health services to look after ourselves on a day-to-day basis does not form a part of the policy framework. Psychologists and psychiatrists in India mostly are concentrated urban cities such as and hence seeking help becomes a task for a majority of the population. To constructively solve this treatment gap of 95 percent, he recommended that not only MPhil students and psychiatrists, but BA and MA psychology and social work students should also be allowed to help people. The huge need for mental health services is currently being met



through technology which is not governed. The western model of one-on-one counselling is becoming the preferred model of seeking help, but we do not have the human resources to take that route. He also emphasised that we cannot have mental health services for women without working with men. To address the issues of violence and abuse, we need to work with men and change the way they view their masculinity.

He recommended to establish mental health fraternity at every level across sectors to create an ecosystem of support for people grappling with mental health issues. Mental health should be looked at as a public health issue, and we need to invest in more Asha and Anganwadi workers and train them to tackle both health and mental health services. Portals of service delivery should be made better and more accessible. He suggested that we need to go into mission mode to address mental health situation in India and for that a significant budget is needed. A community-owned championing of mental health should be created in villages which integrates education, health and social welfare. The gardening in the public parks,

building roads, rejuvenating ponds, plantation and other such activities under MGNREGA have proven to be comforting a person who is suffering from mental health issues especially women.

Dr. Shekhar Seshadri, Psychiatrist and Former, Senior Professor, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Former Dean - Behavioural Sciences Division and Former Director, NIMHANS also pointed out that child abuse, domestic violence, child marriage have severe effects on children’s wellbeing and mental health. Minorities and girls with disabilities have also been highly affected. He said that the evolutionary impacts of the lockdowns should also be studied, especially on pre-schoolers.

The pandemic has led to an intolerance of uncertainty, whether related to anxiety or trauma, among children and it is important to create a system of conversation, especially since in our society relationships of parents and teachers with children are based on instructions,

expectations and obedience and not on a culture of conversation.

He also mentioned how SAMVAD has been making important contributions to the cause by working for child protection, mental Health protection, and adolescent psychiatry. Dwelling on his experience, he stated that a trans disciplinary framework should be built wherein everyone understands the role of mental health- a judge in POCSO court should understand the mental health impacts on child victims and question them accordingly. The mental health professionals should also be able to treat not only PTSD but vulnerabilities of attending those court hearings as well. He also shared the work of SAMVAD at village level with Panchayats, encouraging more such projects.

He recommended that it is important to focus on the development of a cohesive framework of addressing children’s mental health, child marriage and disability issues which may potentially hamper their mental health. Thus, incorporating problems of isolation, depression, infrastructure & mental health issues and innovation to improvise the situation and remove the societal stigmas around it. He suggested to develop a system to address mental health at Panchayat level also.

Ms Nirmala Pandey, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF shared UNICEF’s research and experience to highlight the mental health situation in India, especially for children. UNICEF study accentuated that violence start at an early stage with children and could trigger anxiety and mental health challenges. Almost 90 percent parents thought it was okay to beat children to discipline them. Bullying, abuse, punishment and violence are the common causes of distressed mental health in children apart from the detrimental impact of online exposure especially so during the pandemic and hence such issues must be tackled at the root cause. Behavioural issues, culture norms,

gender discrimination have aggravated the mental health issues.

A survey revealed that one in seven children and adolescents experience some form of mental health condition but only 40 percent even think of seeking help. The pandemic affected girls’ mental health more since the access to outlets which would help them share their feelings was denied and the exposure to domestic violence increased. Moreover, the issues of violence and mental health, and the brunt faced by women and children, got side-lined during the pandemic.

She recommended that we should develop multisectoral policy initiatives while looking at the whole growth continuum and lifecycle of children for improving mental health and well-being. Investment in mental health and infrastructure should be increased as 0.05 percent budget for mental health is insufficient. More funds should be put into infrastructure, collecting data about mental health in India. Positive attitude for mental health cases depends upon the parents’ upbringing. The parenting programmes at a large scale should be organised. Schools should have a flexible curriculum which supports students as they come back to schools. Education system should also incorporate social-emotional learning for children in the curriculum. Every teacher should understand the importance of mental health and a space should be provided for not only girls and boys but for all genders to express themselves.

Dr. Anil Paranjape, Executive Director, Community Aid and Sponsorship Programme (CASP) said that girls’ biggest problem at the time of COVID-19 was to have accessibility to friends for interactions and sharing their anxieties and feelings. In the adolescence stage, overall socialising with peers of their age is desired. Such a situation could be tackled by introducing children toward the group calls through which they can interact with their friends during restricted moments such as COVID-19 pandemic.



For uninterrupted education of girls one way is counselling of parents during the pandemic so, that they should leave the devices like mobile phones, tablets at home so, that girls can attend the online classes. It was also noticed that girls had to compromise their learning time and classes due to unavailability of devices and boys are given biased preference in case of limited devices at home to attend online classes. Another danger that girls faced during the pandemic was child marriage

He recommended counselling of parents and young boys in pandemic situations on marriage issues could also save young girls and women from being married too early and hence have a positive impact on their mental health as they can make their own decisions. Talking to girls about the menstruation cycle, hormone changes that take place every month so that they understand themselves and manage certain situations better and not feel alone or overwhelmed by the changes in their bodies. Life skills programme for the same should be devised. Providing space for girls to speak and express their feelings is important in COVID-19 and in other similar situations.

He added that menstruation hygiene awareness and accessibility to menstrual products should also be made a lot easier and a necessary resource for women. Sensitising men and boys on reproductive and mensuration issues would help in creating support system for girls and women at home. Safe spaces should be created for girls where they can express themselves and

which will also help in finding simpler solutions within the community.

Ms Nandita Bhatla, Director – Programmes, CorStone said that resilience building approach and recognising emotions are crucial ways to deal with our emotions. She defined resilience as ‘bounce back and thrive from adversity’ and said that it is related to building back better with girls. She talked about the ‘inside-out’ approach which starts with looking at our own assets and strengths, believing in oneself and then dealing with challenges. The three tier approach can be summarised as looking at assets, relationships and the societal issues that girls and boys face on a daily basis whether it is about gender discrimination, violence, fighting for fundamental rights and encouraging them for the same.

Along the continuum, services cannot reach all the people. Institutions are important in reaching out to a larger public. For instance, socio-economic learning approaches and group problem solving helps children apply their learning to thrive from challenges.

She recommended preventive measures such as adolescent health programmes, peer support model and counselling of parents would be instrumental in addressing mental health issues. Provision of mental health services to care providers like Asha workers, teachers and parents will go a long way in giving children the right atmosphere which improves their well-being.

Key Takeaways	
1.	Mental health should be considered as a public health issue.
2.	Mental health should be delivered through multiple portals.
3.	Investment in mental health and infrastructure should be increased as the current allocation for mental health is insufficient. A significant amount of budget needs to be invested at least for three to five years to implement and scale up mental health programmes.

4.	Establish mental health fraternity at every level across sectors to create an ecosystem of support for people grappling with mental health issues.
5.	Develop a system to address mental health at Panchayat level also.
6.	Emotional learning curriculum should be introduced in the education system to address the mental health and well-being issue from ground zero.
7.	Develop a cohesive framework of addressing children’s mental health, child marriage and disability issues which may potentially hamper their mental health.
8.	Positive attitude for mental health cases depend upon the parents’ upbringing. The parenting programmes at a large scale should be organised.
9.	Counselling of parents and young boys in pandemic situations on early marriages, domestic violence, menstrual hygiene and other issues concerning girls.
10.	Providing space for girls to speak and express their feelings is important in COVID-19 and in other similar situations. Adolescent health programme and peer support model should be developed.
11.	Provision of mental health services to care providers like Asha workers, teachers and parents will go a long way in giving children the right atmosphere which improves their well-being.



THEMATIC SESSION: TOWARDS ELIMINATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) IN ALL ITS FORMS

The COVID-19 pandemic also led to a rise of the 'shadow pandemic' of gender based violence. The pandemic of COVID-19 showed record spikes in domestic violence reports and thus the scale of the actual cases that were not registered would be more than those that were addressed. Speakers deliberated on the fact that while accounting the harmful generalisation and normalisation of such acts, there is also a lot of acceptability about violence perpetrated by brothers and fathers because these are seen as disciplining acts. Due to the lockdowns women and girls had no choice but to stay in with the perpetrators and hence bringing them back to work spaces and schools respectively is essential to improve their condition as these are safe spaces. Speakers

also shared respective recommendations which can be incorporated to eradicate cases of gender based violence including strict punishments, safety of women and girls, and counselling.

The session mainly focused on discussing the impact of COVID-19 on gender-based violence in the community as well as problems in accessing services and exploring different examples from government and civil society organisations to prevent gender based violence. Identifying priority areas for action for preventing gender based violence while exploring and consolidating innovative solutions and approaches to protect and empower the girls were also brought to light.

Dr. Renu Golwalkar, Director, Gender, Youth and Social Inclusion, Engender Health chaired the session and introduced the theme by giving some facts that Gender Based Violence (GBV) is a global problem. As per UN Women, globally 1 in every 3 women have experienced physical or sexual violence and less than 40 percent women who have experienced GBV seek help.

GBV disproportionately affects low and middle income countries and regions. Since the pandemic, calls to GBV helplines have increased five times globally and 2.5 times in India. 29 percent of GBV is spousal violence in India. She said that while we look at these figures, we must also remember that there is severe underreporting of GBV in India. As per National Commission for Women (NCW), 86 percent women who face violence, do not seek help, which is both alarming and an indication of our failure as a society because of prevalent victim blaming and lack of secure framework which could protect victims from abusers after their crimes were reported. A Plan India study conducted in 2020-21 showed increase in digital forms of violence, cyber-bullying and cyber stalking.

She recommended to have a 'conscience design bases do no harm framework' and suggested to have a concrete strategy for marginalised groups such as people with disability and trans women.

Ms Nayana Chowdhury, Director - Program, Breakthrough India said that Breakthrough uses culture to change culture. Some campaigns by Breakthrough - *Bell Bajao* campaign, share your story with your son, *Dakhal Do* have made significant impact on the GBV issue. She shared how adolescents showed great resilience and took centre stage. They create posters and went around on streets to talk about '*dakhalandazi zaroori hai*'. They wrote essential phone numbers, negotiated with Asha workers to reach out to people and created

groups to develop sanitary pads, prevent child marriage and make sure everybody gets ration on time.

In the context of COVID-19, violence increases when families are locked together for long time. Girls lost the ability to negotiate for further education because of loss in income. Gender based discrimination became more prevalent and girls started reporting pressure of early marriage and talked about losing support of peers during the pandemic. It is indispensable to bring children and girls back to school because they are safe spaces. There is a huge increase in the number of children studying in government schools due to lack of income. Class size has increased from 20-30 to 75-90 students.

She also mentioned that there is a digital divide in terms of gender. Girls are not allowed to even touch smartphones. Girls also believe that if they use phones without permission, it is legitimate to beat them. She pointed that in GBV cases, we should believe and listen to the victim and also make violence & abuse unacceptable in any circumstance. In our country victims are sent back from police stations with the perpetrators to keep their house internal.

She recommended that focus should be on 'empowerment' and not 'protection'. Listening to adolescents and engaging parents is essential. Bringing the culture of critical questioning is extremely important.

Dr. Karnika Seth, Cyberlaw Expert & Founder, Seth Associates, introduced the theme by saying that the GBV has grown in different dimensions phenomenally over the years especially in the cyber space. About 50 percent rise in cases have been reported. Cyber stalking, extortion, identity theft, fake profiles, cheating by personation, harassment due to non-consensual photos and social media frauds have grown manifolds. Criminals find cyber space as a safe haven to perpetrate crimes and sometime adolescents who might commit

cybercrimes are not even aware that they are committing crimes.

Online games addiction has increased vulnerability among adolescent and education in this regard is inadequate in many schools.

She recommended that capacity building at all level and sectors is required and it should begin from schools. NCERT, CBSE, other educational boards and NGOs can be involved to design the curriculum. The training of the law enforcement agencies to deal with the cybercrimes is to be organised at scale. National helpline systems is to be strengthened in terms of updated knowledge and handling the issue till the last mile.

Ms Shalini Kamath, Domestic Violence Evangelist and Independent Director on Boards of Abbott, Borosil Renewables and Ambit Finvest, said that GBV is a vast issue and women & girls across class can be subjected to this. She quoted that the root cause of GBV is the need of one human being to control and show power over another human being which stems from the belief of superiority, whether gender based or financial. She shared the concept of 'cycle of abuse' i.e. a lot many times the victims also do not realise that they are going through abuse unless it is physical abuse. There is actual abuse, followed by an apology where everything gets fine, and then there is abuse again. Hence, the victims are confused because there are good periods as well.

An analysis of the mindset of everyone involved is required. We live in 'Facebook Culture' to reflect the mindset of society that they want to show that everything is good. She stated that due to shame, guilt, depression, fear, confusion, low self-esteem, the victims find it difficult to report gender-based crimes. The perpetrator feels that there is nothing grossly wrong with what they are doing. The society does not want to talk about GBV and for the government, it becomes an insignificant issue as they have other worries.

The developing nations have limited resources and the funds get channelized as per state or political priorities. In pandemic situation, one out of two women have experienced or have known about GBV which is a huge figure, especially given the population of India. Then also, domestic violence is not at the centre stage of the country.

She recommended that to reduce GBV, long-term behaviour and mindset change at individual and societal level is needed. At individual level, girls should be taught to have self-belief in their own equality. Both boys and girls should be given equal opportunity of education and life skills training of respecting the other gender, home making, family values among others. Self-defence training especially for women is to be initiated. At family level, reduce patriarchy and misogynistic statements inside homes, provide safety at home and support people in own families who face GBV. At the society level, we must stop accepting, normalising and glorifying GBV and start intervening. At the state level, right from legislation to policies there is inequality which needs to change, for example, even the legal minimum age for marriage is different for girls and boys.

She also advocated to support victims legally, mentally, financially and in all capacities and involve them in strategy planning. The perpetrators must be educated by involving them rather than insulating them because that is where the correction is needed. Importantly, gender roles around us to be questioned and revisited.

Ms Krista Zimmerman, Director of Influencing and Programs, Asia-Pacific, Plan International said that the social, health and economic impacts of the pandemic will remain with us for many years. There is a need to eliminate not only all forms of violence against girls but also all forms of discrimination against girls. Hence, it is important to successfully mitigating GBV now or else, it might grow in the

future. Lockdowns have increased the exposure to GBV while also reducing reporting routes, awareness and psychological and physical care opportunities. Economic insecurity caused by the pandemic, pushed some women into low paid jobs, exposing them to violence and exploitation.

UNICEF has estimated that 10 million more girls could be pushed into child marriage due to the pandemic. The most serious setback that countries are facing is preventing child marriage which is a form of GBV, a long-term impediment to economic progress and inclusive development. This also perpetuates other forms of GBV like domestic abuse, partner violence etc.

She recommended that support should be given to girls who are married young to mitigate risks of GBV, early motherhood etc. without stigmatising and isolating them. To combat the shadow pandemic, put young girls and women at the centre of the response and recovery process.

Referring the phrase from Latin America where

indigenous communities would say, "nothing about us without us" i.e., do not make plans for them without involving them, consult women and girls while designing policies, even during crises. Research has shown that if male voices are given priority, they will dominate while if priority is given to female voices, the space will be shared. Children are also to be given a platform to express themselves. It is important to break down the gender digital divide to give women and girls a voice. Partnerships and collaborations are needed to focus on SDG 5. The larger goal is to achieve gender equality and empower girls.

Ms Shanu Somvanshi, Young Health Programme Lead, Plan India shared about the special care that was provided to children and girls during COVID-19 by ensuring counselling and education through online, offline and telephonic mediums. Plan India worked towards engaging men as supportive ally to women and empowering women to understand their rights so that crimes against them can be prevented.



Data from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2021 shows that there is dip of 8.3 percent in reporting GBV. As per National Commission for Women (NCW) data, 23,722 cases of crimes against women were reported in India during 2020 which is the highest in past six years. She also mentioned that World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap report 2021 shows that India slipped 28 places and reached the rank of 140 out of 158 countries to become the third worst country in South Asia. This shows the gravity of the issue.

She shared the experience of a Plan India programme in Ambedkar Nagar, a backward areas. It was observed that there are many laws for women but there is no implementation at the community level for example in situations where husbands migrate, women start working in unsafe environments where they are exploited since they have no education or knowledge about workplace ethics and their rights. To

tackle this situation, Plan India networked with other departments, Panchayats etc. to educate women about their workplace rights. Job cards from MNREGA were given to increase their work opportunities and they coordinated with the banking institutions to open their bank accounts where the employers would transfer money. However, when the bargaining power of women increased by Plan India's initiative, there was backlash from men inside the home. The violent situation which was earlier outside now came from inside homes. With gradual effort and through household bargaining skills, the situation was solved.

She recommended that a formal module can be designed which can be taught to girls of different age groups in schools. Male members can be educated about positive masculinity and how to support girls. Building more partnerships and also facilitate enforcement of laws.

Key Takeaways:	
1.	Need to eliminate not only all forms of violence against girls but also all forms of discrimination against girls. Focus on SDG 5. The larger goal is to achieve gender equality and empower girls. Focus on 'empowerment' and not 'protection' of girls and women.
2.	To reduce GBV, there has to be a very strong long-term commitment to behaviour and mind-set change; societal mind-set change; self-belief in girls' own equality.
3.	At the society level, we must stop accepting, normalising and glorifying GBV and at the state level, right from legislation to policies there is inequality which needs to change.
4.	Preventing child marriage which is a form of GBV, a long-term impediment to economic progress and inclusive development should be our priority.
5.	Girls and women's capacity building on GBV, cyber-crime, legal rights, workplace ethics, financial literacy and self-defence is crucial. Organisations like CBSE, NCERT should work together and with NGOs to devise programmes and curriculum on cybercrime.
6.	It is essential to educate and train workers and law enforcement agencies and to strengthen existing national helplines about GBV and cybercrimes.
7.	Engage with boys and men on gender role and life skills to provide girls and women safety in homes.
8.	It is important to support survivors legally, mentally, financially and in all capacities. Survivors must be included in strategy planning.
9.	Partnership, Collaborations and coordination are needed to eliminate all forms of GBV.

DAY 2: DECEMBER 08, 2021 (WEDNESDAY)

PLENARY SESSION: EQUAL FOR BETTER - HOW CSR CAN CONTRIBUTE TO ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY?

The session focused on directing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds and resources to the cause of building back better with girls. The speakers were renowned corporates representatives who deliberated on contributing to achieving gender equality goals and gender responsive programming. The session called for breaking stereotypes and be more welcoming towards women leaders in the corporate field. It was said that in CSR we should keep in mind to provide more education to girls to be at par with their male counterparts especially in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and Computer Science related fields. Speakers also shared some encouraging trends and concluded that

the role of CSR is yet to reach its fullest potential to contribute to advancing gender equality.

Mr Atul Dhawan, Chairperson, Deloitte India, chaired the plenary session. In his opening remarks he underlined that CSR is mandated by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) for two percent of profit to be spent on social welfare schemes. He mentioned that due to the COVID-19 pandemic like other sectors, the CSR sector is also affected tremendously. The government encouraged that CSR funds be directed towards COVID-19 relief which affected years of work that has been done so far in the development sector.

He recommended ways to derive the optimum of the CSR funds on ‘**Equal for Better**’ thrust. For improving education - making it more inclusive and quality driven is one of the best ways to build back better. Addressing setback in mid-day meals, GBV and discussion on mental health issues would be important to rebuild the post COVID-19 India.

Mr Ravi Bhatnagar, Director, External Affairs and Partnerships SOA, Reckitt introduced the theme by saying that the mind of people was struggling during the time of COVID-19, same for CSR also. The momentum for “educating the girls” was lost, teen pregnancy and dropout cases of children are the key challenges that needs attention now.

He shared that ‘mental helplines’ were set in some areas by Reckitt and Plan India during the pandemic. To ensure that ration and other essential items reached to women, Anganwadis and nutrition workers were involved.

Women, who are leaders of the CSR team themselves, have a lower chance of getting promotions. Men are promoted at 30 percent higher rate than women within the development sector also. 90 percent of women leave the development sector due to other work problems. Situation is almost the same in the corporate and the development sector. There is a leadership deficit as enough women leaders are not seen in CSR domain. Reckitt plans to have 70 percent women leadership in their programmes.

He recommended that efforts should be towards for gender responsive programming. Binaries are also as important as women and they should also get the same benefits.

Mr Maninder Singh Nayyar, CEO and Director, CEF Group pointed that the issues related to mental health and third gender is very important. Breaking stereotypes, taboos, and mindset about culture are essential.

It has been observed that girls are not encouraged for STEM education and limited enrolment of girls are seen in engineering courses. There is no significant work being done in the country for protecting the rights of the third gender. Life skill education is to be integrated into the education system.

He recommended that in CSR, we should empower girls for STEM education so that they can excel in male dominated careers also. Gender equality is to be ensured in all perspectives of life not at a particular stage of life. In the step wise process of making youth especially girls employable, CSR should first focus on digital methodologies of training, empowering, educating, teaching life skill and employment. Following that, the attention should be on early employment as at the age of 14, children should do internship in a particular organisation through online or offline mode so that they get into jobs, get exposure & understand the responsibility. CSR should give space to hybrid internships for more robust experiences to the young minds.

Dr. Sujeet Ranjan, Associate Director, Tata Trusts stated that gender can be seen in different situations, gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance. Economy, food security, health, governance, stability and in all other aspects, gender remains one of the important fundamental source of inequality in the society, country and in the sector.

He shared that Tata Trust by using marketing strategy, advocated for gender equality. TATA initiated slogan “Jaago Re” and urged the government to start gender sensitisation classes in schools.

He recommended that women and gender should be at the centre of our policies. Programmes focussing on girls should be initiated. For any initiatives to be taken on a large scale, CSR can contribute by doing baseline research and mapping the ecosystem.



Ms Deepa Menon, Senior Vice President and Founder Head, PVR Nest introduced the theme by quoting some pertinent facts on gender inequality. Half of the women cannot go to market alone. One in four women cannot participate in decisions related to their own health. In India, only 27 percent women are in the workforce as compared to 50 percent globally. 15 lakh girls in India marry before the age of 18, often without consent. 70 percent of women experience violence from their partners. This year India has slipped 28 ranks in the global gender gap index. Every child deserves to reach its potential but gender inequality limits this.

The CSR programme of PVR Cinema - PVR Nest, have created safe and hygienic sanitation spaces for women. In urban safe spaces concept, they have introduced breast feeding areas, children's diaper changing facilities etc. Through their CSR programmes, they have doubled up creches and also ensured nutritional access to the children.

Two important factors play pivotal role in the

success of any CSR initiatives - first, their work is referred by leading best practices in the field and second, their ability to pool resources optimally.

She recommended that CSR can contribute to gender equality by creating inclusive and equitable urban spaces for women. Urban spaces have the ability to provide sustainable jobs which in turn leads to socio-economic growth of women.

Mr Gambhir Agrawal, Head, CSR, Relaxo emphasised that 47 percent of women and only seven percent men have lost their jobs since pandemic. India has also been a patriarchal society and that has become more evident since COVID-19 including in urban areas. The education of boys has been prioritised and preference is given to them for accessing digital resources. Very few girls can continue their education after 8th class in rural areas due to gender divide and mind-set of the parents. Even, less women have been vaccinated as compared to men in the country.

He shared that Relaxo CSR has given priority to the education sector. They have adopted 45 primary schools in Haridwar with Plan India's support.

He recommended that involving and transforming panchayats and rural bodies through CSR initiatives is essential in gender inclusive growth.

Mr Rahul Agrawal, Director, Intellect introduced the theme by quoting that in 2020-21 CSR's contribution to SDG goals is barely one percent. This highlights the paradox while on one side we have the corporate sector bringing in efficiencies, ensuring availability of services to marginalised people, pooling in resources and putting them to common objectives but on the other hand the statistics show that women empowerment has not translated into ensuring gender equality. The primary reason is that all

our interventions focus on individual outcomes rather than looking at the relationship and factors that affect women's abilities to thrive and succeed. Lack of understanding regarding the scale and level of inequalities while designing policies also have been contributing to the aggravating apathies towards girls and women. Even, many CSR interventions believe in perpetuating the status quo and not addressing the inequalities.

He recommended that 'gender transformative' is the highest continuum that all corporations should reach while designing interventions. Corporations can take the lead in gender analysis and develop their understanding about gender at individual, family, society and community level. For ensuring gender equality, sensitising men and develop their understanding on the larger role that they can play is vital.



Key Takeaways	
1.	'Gender transformative' is the highest continuum that all corporations should reach while designing interventions. For rebuilding inclusive and gendered post COVID-19 India, more inclusive and quality driven education, addressing setback in mid-day meals, GBV and holistic discussion on mental health issues would be needed with strategic CSR support.
2.	Efforts should be focussed towards gender responsive programming. Gender equality is to be ensured in all perspectives of life not at a particular stage of life. Women and girls should be at the centre of our policies and also it is important to sensitise men for developing their understanding on the larger role that they can play is vital.
3.	Empower girls for STEM education so that they can excel in male dominated careers also and can become highly employable. Also CSR should give space to hybrid internships model for more robust experiences to the young minds. CSR should first focus on digital methodologies of training, empowering, educating, teaching life skill and employment. Following that, the attention should be on early employment at the age of 14.
4.	For any initiatives to be implemented on a large scale, CSR can conduct baseline re- search to facilitate mapping the ecosystem. Corporations can take the lead in gender analysis and develop their understanding about gender at individual, family, society and community level.
5.	CSR can contribute to gender equality by creating inclusive and equitable urban spaces for women. Urban spaces have the ability to provide sustainable jobs which in turn leads to socio-economic growth of women.
6.	Binaries are also as important as women and they should also get the same benefits.
7.	Involving and transforming panchayats and rural bodies through CSR initiatives is essential in gender inclusive growth.
8.	The narrative of CSR reporting about the progress on indicators has to be changed and more gender-based results should be emphasised i.e. for girls and women as compared to men and boys. The changing relationships between men & women and the varying gender norms should be highlighted.

SPECIAL SESSION: WHY IS LEGAL AWARENESS AND LEGAL LITERACY FOR GIRLS IMPORTANT FOR BUILDING BACK BETTER?

The session deliberated on the importance of legal literacy amongst young girls and women.

There is an alarming need for increasing the legal literacy rate in women so that they know their rights and can accordingly report and address all symptoms of abuse. The adverse effects of oblivion and ignorance towards legal literacy and how an unaware woman may never be able to break the cycle of abuse was discussed. Girls and women also need to be encouraged and incentivised to be aware of laws that were specifically formulated to

safeguard them.

The special session objective was to provide the conference participants, who are primarily gender and development specialists, university students, social volunteers, humanitarian workers, grassroots/ frontline workers, NGO leaders and government officials, with detailed perspective on the importance of legal awareness and literacy for girls and young women in their socio-economic development, particularly when the country is in the process of coming out of a global pandemic.

Shri J.V.R. Prasada Rao, Former Health Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India steered the discussion and introduced luminary hon'ble Justice Madan B Lokur, Former Judge, Supreme Court of India. In his introductory remarks, Shri J.V.R. Prasada Rao underlined that COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected girls and women in many sectors, whether education, health or gender based violence. COVID-19 pandemic has created major disruptions for all sections of our country, but data indicates that girls and young women have been disproportionately and severely affected. The education for girls, which had seen major improvements in the last decade has been slowed due to the schools being closed as a preventive measure. The maternal and child health services have been slowed due to the public health system stretched due to its focus on COVID-19 health services. All this had an adverse impact on general health but also the mental health and well-being of girls and women. At the family and community level, the existing challenge of gender based violence has been aggravated due to the loss of

livelihoods, lockdown and migration particularly in urban poor families. Among other things, the economic stress on large number of families due to the pandemic has impacted their food security and nutrition. Decreased income and reduced purchasing power in the family has led to them being unable to buy enough food for all members in the family; and consequently it is the girls and women who have had to bear the burden as it is them who often end up receiving less food compared to boys and men, especially when there is not enough food available.

Challenges exist on the ground and thus although we talk about laws on books, we are not able to see the laws on the street. Therefore, he urged that children, girls and women should be at the centre of all post COVID-19 rebuilding efforts.

Hon'ble Justice Madan B Lokur, Former Judge, Supreme Court of India appreciated the outlook of the girls from Bihar who enumerated the challenges and expectations on the need of legal awareness and legal literacy for building back better with

them. He stated that legal literacy is a step towards awareness, implementation and enforcement of the rights and entitlements that women and girls have. School closures and diversion of health facilities towards COVID-19 were two major impacts of the pandemic. School closures have not only affected girls' education but also their mental health and pushed them towards the danger of child marriage. He also pointed out the social issues of gender based violence, increased responsibility of household chores on girls and the economic impacts of the pandemic. Reports suggest that girls were given less food as compared to boys due to economic insecurity.

Girls derive rights directly from the law, like the maternity benefit act or the dowry prohibition act, and entitlements through schemes enacted by central and state governments. Three out of four young girls from Bihar during the discourse talked about child marriage and dowry which is very worrisome since young girls merely of 15-16 years of age are pushed into child marriage due to the pandemic, even though both child marriage and dowry are prohibited by law. There are laws to prevent child marriage, dowry, forced

abortion, harassment in public places, indecent representation of women etc. but these issues are still widespread. Equal pay for equal work is a constitutional right but women still get paid less with the excuse that men are the actual bread earners.

Hundreds of pending child sexual abuse cases need immediate attention of law enforcement bodies. Most of the victims are girls and they are entitled to interim and final compensation but these grants are pending and these girls are left to fend for themselves. In most cases these girls are not even aware that they are entitled to compensation, it is our responsibility to educate them and provide them speedy justice. Organisations like National Commission for Women (NCW), National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) are doing a lot of work but it is our responsibility as well to educate girls about these issues.

The major problem that needs to be addressed is the implementation of these rights. Under the legal services authorities act every district in the country has a District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) and women and children are entitled to



free legal aid but merely five percent women and children are taking advantage of it. Awareness about these benefits is an immediate need. People should not only be informed about their rights but should also be guided that they can avail these rights from legal services authorities or NGOs. Legal literacy should not stop at only knowing what the law is, we have to take the rights to their logical conclusion. It is imperative to know what are your rights and entitlements but it is equally important to know how to enforce those rights.

He recommended that issues of economic importance like property inheritance, especially after accidents, death of husband or father, divorce need more deliberation and attention. Availability of basic amenities like creches, breastfeeding rooms at workplaces is to be ensured and the men are to be sensitised about such needs. Movements for support persons for victims, especially child sexual abuse victims, child friendly and women friendly courts are gaining momentum. Sexual harassment victims who have been abandoned by their families must be entitled to appropriate shelter homes. When the women do not know about their rights, they will not be able to solve their own problems and therefore, we would not be able to achieve

the sustainable goals i.e., SDG 5 Gender Equality and Empowerment of girls by 2030. Judiciary and police need to be educated and sensitised on the rights of women and children and the socio-economic impact of delayed justice. Issues like teenage pregnancies due to rape, ‘love cases’ where boys and girls run away etc. are not only limited to law but also how society looks at them and these are a part of the awareness we need to bring about.

Starting with villages, educating Panchayats is a necessity because whatever the Panchayats say, the villagers believe and follow. Similarly, moving upwards the hierarchy, sensitise all officials about the rights of women starting from the grassroots level.

Organisations need to be more proactive in reaching out to girls, awareness in colleges, schools and take champions and change makers on board. Other NGOs, with Plan India taking the lead, must stir a movement with paralegal volunteers, have a proper course to educate the volunteers who will further educate the girls.

Key Takeaways:	
1.	Legal literacy is a step towards awareness, implementation and enforcement of the rights and entitlements. Legal literacy should not stop at only knowing what the law is, we have to take the rights to their logical conclusion.
2.	There are many laws and acts on books but not on the streets. Lax implementation of laws needs to be corrected.
3.	Education and sensitisation on laws and legal rights of women and children are needed at all levels, starting from the grassroots, Panchayats, local governments and to society as a whole.
4.	Educate the law practitioners and enforcement agencies about the rights of “women & children” and the social impact on women & children for the delay of their actions
5.	Justice delayed is justice denied. It is indispensable to address cases against girls and women, cases of child sexual abuse at the earliest and not keep them pending. The compensation that young victims are entitled must be provided at the earliest.
6.	NGOs can start a movement with paralegal volunteers to reach and educate girls and society about their legal rights.

PLENARY FOR WAY FORWARD

The plenary session summed up the main discourses and recommendations from the four thematic sessions on (i) Towards Inclusive and Quality Education for Girls; (ii) Advancing Gender Equality in Food Security and Nutrition for all Girls; (iii) Ensuring Mental Health and Well-being for Girls; (iv) Towards Eliminating Gender based Violence in all its forms. This session focused on consolidating the key recommendations from the four thematic sessions and identifying priority areas for action

while exploring and consolidating innovative solutions and approaches to protect and empower the girls thereby developing a National Action Plan for Build Back Better with Girls.

The plenary session was chaired by **Ms Preeti Sudan**, Former Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. The chairs of respective thematic sessions shared the consolidated key recommendations and enlightening the way forward towards a national action plan.



Summary of the key recommendations of the thematic session by Dr. Sanjai Bhatt, Professor, Delhi School of Social Work, University of Delhi - Towards Inclusive and Quality Education for Girls

1. Girls' education needs to become a priority. We need to ensure every girl gets the education she deserves. To achieve this there is a need to mobilise political will and ensure that political will is demonstrated in proactive policies. It is also important to ensure that funding and support continue for education systems.

2. Government should harness public-private partnerships to supply the needed technology for online education.

3. There is a need to create new bridges after COVID-19 such as with the family which is the most important social institution for education, specifically during the phase of online, distance education. There is a need to focus on family specific programmes and family engaging schemes which will enable girls' participation in education.

4. There is a need to enhance parental engagement to facilitate home-schooling. Parents should be supported with resources to provide them guidance. Community based education for first general learners should also be emphasized. To ensure basic and continued education services as well as remedial education services travel to remote communities should be exempted from travel restrictions imposed during COVID-19.

5. There is a need to emphasize on foundational skills of literacy and numeracy for early learning. For this specific toolkits

to develop skills of learners from pre-school years to grade 3 in foundational literacy and numeracy need to be developed. Further, implementation of the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN) Bharat under the National Education Policy (NEP) that focusses on ensuring that every child in the country necessarily attains foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) by the end of Grade 3, by 2026-27 needs to be accelerated.

6. There is a need to be flexible in the learning curriculum and pedagogy. It is time to focus on creating a safety net, a limited set of learning objectives organised for each grade and subject, not the total curriculum that every teacher should ensure every student knows. Timing should also be flexible to ensure that maximum students can participate in online classes.

7. There is a need to focus on professional development with gender-responsive pedagogies, so that teaching practices are gender responsive, and that the curriculum not only removes gender biases but also shares more female role models and inspires girls.

8. It is important to take care of social well-being and emotional health and safety at schools. Appropriate programmes may be devised to do so. One way of doing so is to give equal importance to dance, music and art along with traditional lessons. There is also need to translate the provisions of
- the school complex under the National Education Policy (NEP) as early as possible.

9. There is a need to broaden the definition of quality education to look beyond learning outcomes. The central objectives of quality education should also include components of feeding aspiration, nurturing confidence, building self-efficacy, spiritual, social and emotional development, and more. Focus needs to shift from accountability on syllabus completion to real and measurable outcomes on the broader goals of education with a data and evidence driven approach. To ensure all objectives are being met realistic and time bound targets and short-term goals need to be framed. Regular monitoring should be conducted to check on the progress of outcomes, and ensure accountability and transparency.

10. Teacher's role and skills are irreplaceable. Leadership, financial and material resources for teachers are necessary to make sure that quality of teaching continues during school closure. Guiding and mentoring teachers in the curriculum as well as building their skills on engaging students during online classes must be given importance. There is also a need to provide training on counselling, mentoring and guidance to teachers during their pre-service and in-service curriculum. Government should also ensure that teachers must be given only responsibility around education.

11. There is a need to understand and recognise the challenges associated with
- digital learning specifically for the excluded and marginalised groups. E-learning solutions are only effective for teachers, students and families with adequate electricity, internet connectivity, computers, tablets and physical spaces. More traditional media such as print, television, phones, radio and recordings of sessions can offer more viable ways, especially for poorest communities.

12. The creation of a school environment in post COVID-19 environment is essential to ensure the social and mental well-being of students.

13. To ensure girls can continue uninterrupted education there is a need to promote, 'a gender transformative approach', which goes beyond addressing 'symptoms' to explicitly tackling the root causes of gender inequality, particularly unequal gender power relations, discriminatory social norms and systems, structure, policies, and practices.

14. There is a need for new initiatives to increase the enrolment and retention rates as well as prevent drop-outs in girls. Schemes on providing cycles to girls help them in continuing their education. There is a need to look at more such schemes and programmes that will encourage girls to continue their education. Slogans after 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' create an impact. There is a need to coin slogans like, 'Beti Aage Badhao', now to encourage girls and society as a whole.

Summary of the key recommendations of the thematic session by Dr. Indira Chakravarty, Padma Shri and Public Health Specialist - Advancing Gender Equality in Food Security and Nutrition for all Girls

1. There is a need to promote the importance of a balanced nutritional diet for all girls and women.

2. There is a need to institutionalise community participation at all levels in the districts, blocks and Gram Panchayats to promote the importance of a balanced nutritional diet for all girls and women.

3. There is a need for a comprehensive approach that integrates all “nutrition – supportive” sectors i.e an approach which looks at. WASH, agriculture, food security, livelihood generation and so on.

4. There is a need to recognise the weaknesses and challenges in implementation of existing policies and programmes on nutrition and food security specifically for those most marginalised and make efforts to reach the unreached.

5. There is a need to develop effective communication strategies to give importance to a balanced, nutritional diet for women. Communication approaches need to be prioritised in large impact driven programmes to generate awareness and bring about social change.
6. There is a need to engage men and include their efforts into mainstreaming food security for girls and women.

7. There is a need to focus on capacity building and training of ICDS functionaries to enhance the implementation of the nutrition policies and programmes at the community level.

8. There is a need to make special provisions for including “drop outs” girls who are neither in the schools nor covered in the ICDS programmes. They should be given rations from the government owned ration distribution outlets and should also be integrated in the appropriate educational programmes and NIOS scheme.

9. There is a need to consider the extension of mid-day meal to class 10 students.

10. There is a need to reinvest the social and technical capital built within any community during the ongoing community development programmes. This will help in addressing foundational deficits such as gender inequity and will also help in building community and family resilience (ability to cope and recover).

Summary of the key recommendations of the thematic session by Ms. Preeti Sudan, Former Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India - Ensuring Mental Health and Well-Being for Girls

1. Mental health should be considered as a public health issue. There is a need to ensure the outreach of mental health services in mission mode beyond the urban areas with dedicated and adequate resources and an earmarked budget.

2. There is a need for a trans-disciplinary framework and multi-sectoral interventions to address mental health.

3. There is a need to focus on developing the entire spectrum of mental health care. This includes building capacities and developing clear referral pathways at the primary level, and developing infrastructure and human resources at secondary and tertiary level.

4. There is a need to sensitise caregivers, frontline workers, and medical professionals on recognising mental health issues.

5. There is a need for specific policies and programmes on counselling for adolescent boys- to: help them understand gender issues; stand up for girls and women in the family; resolve conflicts through open dialogue amongst family members, and later in communities and institutions.

6. There is a need to create spaces for contextual mental health care as well as
- use of technology which also enables personal interface.

7. There is a need to sensitise panchayats by holding Gram Sabhas to: address the stigma associated with mental illness; recognise and understand the extent of mental health issues in the community; help create support groups, and create an eco-system for safe spaces for girls and women to speak.

8. There is a need to mainstream emotional learning in school curriculum. To achieve this Health and Wellness Ambassador Initiative can be implemented in schools to encourage peer conversations on issues that impact the mental wellbeing of students. There is also a need to partner with government to place Health and Wellness Ambassadors also in communities for creating local champions and for expanding the network to provide mental health services.

9. There is a need to create a peer supported eco-system for mental health care delivery. Community based Self-Help Groups (SHGs), youth clubs, ASHA workers and locally trained volunteers can play an important role in this, and their capacities need to be built on addressing

mental health issues. Capacity building initiatives can also be implemented for peer educators (under the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram - RKSK). To build capacities of the community based workers online modules can be created under the existing modules such as: Integrated Government Online Training (IGOT) Diksha, and e-learning module of the Government of India for community volunteers. Special modules on parenting to foster mental well-being of children and a toolkit for providing psycho-socio first aid also need to be developed.

- 10. There is a need to recognise and provide visibility to the mental health and well-being of girls facing multiple vulnerabilities and severe exclusion such as migrant girls, trafficked girls and so on.
- 11. Above all, to improve the mental health and well-being of girls there is a need to develop a conducive atmosphere that builds self-esteem and self-worth of girls within homes, within communities and within institutions where their voices are heard, and they are provided an opportunity to develop their full potential.

Summary of the key recommendations by of the thematic session
Dr. Renu Golwalkar, Director, Gender, Youth and Social Inclusion,
Engender Health - Towards Eliminating Gender Based Violence in
All its Forms

1. The issue of Gender Based Violence (GBV) needs to be brought into focus as an important issue, with or without a pandemic to leverage and garner government support and resources.

2. There is a need to embrace SDG-5 in its entirety and not just the Violence against Women (VAW) components of SDG 5. VAW and GBV cannot be eliminated unless all forms of discrimination are addressed.

3. There is a need to use “empowerment” approaches and not “protection” approaches to prevent and respond to GBV.

4. There is a need to strengthen poorly implemented GBV laws.

5. There is a need to conduct a “rapid risk assessment” prior to implementing any GBV intervention or Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research (SRHR) intervention, to understand the social, cultural, religious, and political drivers of GBV and the enablers or disablers in the ecosystem. The findings of this risk assessment should inform a contextualised “do no harm framework” for the project/ programme.

6. Need to have an intentional lens on addressing GBV faced by marginalised and
- vulnerable groups (women and girls living with disability, living with HIV, LGBTQ, Dalit, and Adivasi groups etc.)

7. There is a need to adopt a multi-sectoral approach to address GBV at the policy level, and not a siloed approach which sits only with one Ministry. GBV should be a part of convergence discussion with other ministries such as those handling law enforcement, judiciary, child welfare, economic empowerment and labour welfare.⁵⁷

8. There is a need to build more partnerships and coalitions for GBV prevention. Coordination is needed among all actors, agencies (INGOs, NGOs, CSOs, CBOs), government, youth networks, feminist networks and all stakeholders to avoid duplicating efforts and ensure a greater and sustainable impact.

9. While keeping all efforts on eliminating GBV, there is a need to keep the focus also on providing comprehensive support to survivors of GBV, as GBV elimination will take a long time. There is a need to provide infrastructure support to survivors (such as one stop centres, shelter homes and so on).

10. There is a need to involve survivors in the strategy design to help develop a curated



response based on the needs of the survivors.

11. There is a need to form a “support group” of GBV survivors to create mutual self-help among the members. This group can to leverage awareness generation and convergence of various GBV services.
12. There is a need to involve adolescents- both girls and boys and engage them in solutions for challenging negative notions of masculinity and gender norms.

Specific recommendations for digital and cyberspace

13. The new National Cyber security Policy needs to have a clear focus on online and cyberspace GBV.

14. All stakeholders and agencies involved in cyberspace and digital space, need to undergo a thorough capacity building, to understand various aspects on cyber security and online violence (example NCERT, CBSE, schools, parents etc.)
15. There is a need to provide comprehensive sensitisation and orientation of law enforcement agencies on GBV and online violence to help them understand that even if a crime which is not visible because it is online, is still a VAW.
16. National Helplines for GBV, need to gear up to register FIRs too. Currently, very few FIRs are registered through the helplines.



TOWARDS A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR BUILDING BACK BETTER WITH GIRLS

Dr. Zoya Ali Rizvi, Deputy Commissioner (Adolescent Health), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India said that COVID-19 has deepened existing inequalities and the worst affected are women and girls, 30 crore children in India missed the school due to COVID-19 lockdown as reported by UNESCO.

She said that even school going girls have lesser access to resources as compared to males. Girls also had more burden of household chores during lockdown. Emotional stress and cybercrime issues have also

affected young girls. More importantly impact on marginalised groups due to the pandemic has been more, whether they are girls with disability, living in remote areas or girls with marginalised caste, or from Dalit Adivasi or OBC community. NFHS 5 data shows that there is an improvement in some areas like sex ratio, decline in early marriage and teenage pregnancy but much more needs to be done to reduce the prevalence of these indicators further.

She recommended that change in teenage and adolescent issues takes decades so any intervention should not be a one of programme but a continued sustained effort. Every organisation, whether government bodies or NGOs, has to look at more long term actions and goals. Intergeneration ownership and involvement for adolescent programmes need to be encouraged, where parents, grandparents and children themselves feel involved. Capacity building of teachers on health of students is to be included in the existing trainings of the teachers. Collective allocation and strong advocacy, sustained investment of funds for girls are important. Strategic public investment which ensures access to quality of services, gender responsiveness, inter-sectoral coordination and ensures community outreach are needed.

Shri Saurabh Rishi, senior specialist, NITI Aayog emphasised that aspirational district programme was undertaken to fast track progress in backward areas of the country. It mainly and most importantly focuses on health, sanitation issues, girl child education in school, malnutrition and supplementary nutrition. According to NFHS 5 data many factors have improved but anaemia is still a huge problem. NITI Aayog has taken up programmes like Anaemia Mukht Barat and established behaviour and insight units in districts.

He recommended that for funding, the gender inclusion fund which is part of the new education policy can be utilised. National schemes which incentivise girls in secondary education need to be revived. National action plan should also include targeted groups, like Assam tea workers and other under privilege communities.

Mr Parul Soni, Founder and Global Managing Partner, Think Through focussed attention on creating an enabling environment for children and women. While, setting the contours of the national plan framework, he said that there should be proper planning for the next five years for holistic development of children. He recommended to involve Panchayats, villages, communities and create a large national plan on the lines of a national budget. The national plan should include an elaborate dedicated process and a dedicated organisation beyond the government who can work for the overall development of children. A number of government bodies exist at district, state and country levels but a multi-stakeholder alliance will be required to galvanise the momentum to operationalize the plan. The multi-stakeholder alliance should include

institutions who can work towards overall well-being of children. The national action plan should focus on implementation of campaigns on specific issues by expert organisations, forums for sharing peer to peer knowledge and tapping available funding.

Age appropriate and need specific separate modules should be created for addressing the specific needs of different age groups. More focus needs to be given to adolescents and their health. Focus should also be on personality development and making children confident. A supporting environment in the families too needs to be created. Also framework for measurement of progress and impact of the schemes is important - what to plan, how the actions should be taken, what has worked so far, how funds are utilised.



NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR BUILDING BACK BETTER WITH GIRLS

*“Not work for girls but we should work with girls and read the mind of those whom we want to empower and to whom we teach to have a voice”. **Ms Upma Chawdhry***

A National Action Plan is an organised structure which provides a blueprint that governments, multilateral institutions, and civil society can use to coordinate actions and track results. Any Action Plan is implemented through existing systems and with the support from all organisations and partners. It defines the role of all implementing stakeholders as well as individual and cumulative roles of all members involved, so that action plan can be achieved in a smooth and organised manner.

Through two days of national conference, Plan India has developed a comprehensive National Action Plan from the recommendations given by expert chairs and speakers. The 4th Plan for Every Child National Conference also gave a voice to young girls who are working with Plan India so that we can effectively ‘Build Back Better with Girls’. The conference has shed

immense light on the ground realities, what has been done so far and what needs to be done in the near and long-term future. The focus of the conference was on disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the sectors of education, nutrition and health, mental health and gender-based violence and how to bring India back on the track of development, keeping girls in the centre of everything.

Responding to the pandemic is not just about rectifying long-standing inequalities, but also about building a resilient world in the interest of everyone with girls and women at the centre of recovery. Gender equality and the rights of girls and women are essential to getting through this pandemic together, to recovering faster, and to building a better future for everyone. Collaboration is equally important between the government, private sector, NGOs, girls and their families, communities and states for building back better with girls. Let’s make a fresh start with women and girls in the centre of everything we do. This must be the new Motto. The New Mantra.

GENEDER TRANSFORMATIVE INCLUSIVE APPROACH

1. For trans-disciplinary framework and multi-sectoral interventions, a gender transformative approach is needed, which goes beyond addressing ‘symptoms’ to explicitly tackling the root causes of gender inequality, particularly unequal gender power relations, discriminatory social norms and systems, structure, policies, and practices. Discriminatory social and cultural norms and the gendered division of roles must be challenged. We must urgently embrace this vision of a gender-responsive recovery – in engagement with the government and, critically, in tandem with NGOs and civil society organisations, while putting girls and women at the centre of our policies and interventions.
2. Every organisation, whether government bodies or NGOs, has to look at more long-term goals and should adopt a gender-sensitive approach which considers the complexities and nuances of the current challenges, and focusses on addressing and shifting negative social norms. A long term five year plan needs to be developed to ensure a holistic development of children

especially girls with a detailed framework for measurement of progress and impact of the schemes- key activities, implementation of activities, what has worked so far and utilisation of funds.

3. There is a need to emphasise the participation of both government as well as individual participation which has been missing in developing a National Action Plan for addressing GBV to bring about radical change. The National Action Plan should also include targeted groups like binaries, sex workers & their children, separated & unaccompanied children and other under privilege communities.
4. There is a need to focus on professional development with gender-responsive pedagogies, so that teaching practices are gender responsive, and that the curriculum not only removes gender biases but also shares more female role models and inspires girls.

A National Action Plan on ‘Build Back Better with Girls’ with an integrated ‘Gendered Transformative Inclusive Approach’ is presented below. elucidating individual and collective roles of policy makers, government, civil society organisations, corporates, judiciary, Panchayats, individuals and society:

Stakeholder	Action Points
Policy Makers (Government level Interventions for scale and impact)	Need to provide visibility and prominence in the political agenda to the vulnerabilities faced by girls specifically those most marginalised such as migrant girls, trafficked girls and so on
	Need to develop strategic approaches to close the gender gap in education and implement interesting and engaging pedagogies. Safe and secure schooling for girls is important in post COVID-19 situation.
	Need to initiate a special programme to improve online learning for marginalised sections of the society. Alongside there is a need to improve access of marginalised groups, including girls to technological devices and imparting them with digital literacy to minimise the number of girl drop-outs on account of COVID-19. Digital medium, community radio and app-based learning, Doordarshan E-Pathshala and new blended alternatives along with traditional media should be promoted for bridging learning gaps.
	Need to develop clear, measurable and time bound targets, short-term goals and outcomes. Focus needs to shift from accountability on syllabus completion to real and measurable outcomes on the broader goals of education with a data and evidence driven approach. Need to emphasize monitoring to increase accountability and transparency.
	Emphasize the importance of pre- primary education specifically the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy. implementation of the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN) Bharat under the National Education Policy (NEP) that focusses on ensuring that every child in the country necessarily attains foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) by the end of Grade 3, by 2026-27 needs to be accelerated. Revive national schemes which incentivise girls for secondary education.

Stakeholder	Action Points
	Need to conceptualise holistic teacher development programmes for enhancing learning pedagogy and quality education of students. There is a need to institutionalise programmes that build leadership skills of teachers, mentor and guide them as well as provide them with financial and material resources to ensure quality teaching continues through digital platforms. Capacity building of teachers on digital education and mental health and well-being of students needs to be incorporated in the existing teacher training programmes. Need to also focus on gender-responsive pedagogies, so that teaching practices are gender responsive, and that the curriculum not only removes gender biases but also shares more female role models and inspires girls.
	Need to ensure that funding and support continue for education systems for inclusive and quality education for all girls.
	Need to focus on school development plans, sanitation facilities, engaging parents, scholarships, leadership skill building, career counselling and life skill activities from a gendered lens to ensure inclusive education for girls.
	Emotional learning curriculum should be introduced in the education system to address the mental health and well-being issue from ground zero.
	Under ICDS adolescent programmes, special provisions have to be made for including “drop outs” girls who are neither in the schools nor covered in the ICDS programmes. They should be given rations from the government owned ration distribution outlets and should also be integrated in the appropriate educational programmes and National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) scheme. The mid-day meals scheme should also be extended to class 10 students.
	Importance of a balanced nutritional diet for girls and women needs to be promoted. Nutritional interventions, targeting children under 5, adolescent girls and pregnant and nursing mothers should be a priority.

Stakeholder	Action Points
	<p>Need to develop a comprehensive approach that integrates all “nutrition – supportive” sectors i.e an approach which looks at. WASH, agriculture, food security, livelihood generation and so on.</p> <p>Need to recognise the weaknesses and challenges in implementation of existing policies and programmes on nutrition and food security specifically for those most marginalised and make efforts to reach the unreached. Interventions focusing on nutrition needs as well as protection measures need to go hand-in-hand, including ensuring that people who are receiving assistance in emergency relief distribution sites are not subject to any form of exploitation.</p>
	<p>Nutri Sensitive Integrated Framing should be scaled up as it brings food to the table.</p>
	<p>Need to develop a cohesive framework for addressing mental health and well-being of children and young people. The framework should include issues around child marriage and disability which can have an impact on mental health and well-being of children. Need to ensure the outreach of mental health services in mission mode beyond the urban areas with dedicated and adequate resources and an earmarked budget. Need for a trans-disciplinary framework and multi-sectoral interventions to address mental health. Need to focus on developing the entire spectrum of mental health care. This includes building capacities and developing clear referral pathways at the primary level, and developing infrastructure and human resources at secondary and tertiary level. Need to establish mental health fraternity at every level across sectors to create an ecosystem of support for people who require support with mental health issues.</p>
	<p>Need to mainstream emotional learning in school curriculum. To achieve this Health and Wellness Ambassador Initiative can be implemented in schools to encourage peer conversations on issues that impact the mental wellbeing of students. There is also a need to partner with government to place Health and Wellness Ambassadors also in communities for creating local champions and for expanding the network to provide mental health services.</p>

Stakeholder	Action Points
	<p>Any GBV intervention or Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research (SRHR) intervention, should involve a “rapid risk assessment” to understand the social, cultural, religious, and political drivers of GBV and the enablers or disablers in the ecosystem. The findings of this risk assessment should inform a contextualised “do no harm framework” for the project/ programme.</p>
	<p>Need to use the “empowerment” approaches and not “protection” approaches for GBV. Need to adopt a multi-sectoral approach to address GBV at the policy level, and not a siloed approach which sits only with one Ministry. GBV should be a part of convergence discussion with other ministries such as those handling law enforcement, judiciary, child welfare, economic empowerment and labour welfare.</p>
	<p>While keeping all efforts on eliminating GBV, keep the focus also on providing comprehensive support to survivors of GBV, as GBV elimination will take a long time. Infrastructure support to victim and survivors (in one stop centres, shelter homes and so on) is to be strengthened. It is important to support victims legally, mentally, financially and also to include them in strategy planning.</p>
	<p>Special focus is needed to prevent child-marriage which is a form of GBV. Support should be given to girls who are married young to mitigate risks of GBV, early motherhood and so on without stigmatising and isolating them. To combat the shadow pandemic, need to put young girls and women at the centre of the response and recovery process.</p>
	<p>Need to have an intentional lens on addressing GBV faced by marginalised and vulnerable groups (women and girls living with disability, living with HIV, LGBTQ, Dalit, and Adivasi groups).</p>
	<p>More mother and child healthcare centres should be established and made functional.</p>

Stakeholder	Action Points
	There is a need for specific policies and programmes on counselling for adolescent boys- to help them understand gender issues, stand up for girls and women in the family, resolve conflicts through open dialogue amongst family members and later in communities and institutions.
	On the lines of “National budget”, a “National plan for children” needs to be developed. For funding the National Plan the gender inclusion fund which is part of the New Education Policy (NEP) can be utilised.
	Mobilise investments in care infrastructure that allow women to re-enter and thrive in the labour market. Also, at the same time, develop policy actions with sufficient funding support for ensuring uninterrupted access to essential services such as healthcare (including mental healthcare) and education to support the millions of families who have been (and remain) adversely affected.
Government Functionaries	Need to implement sensitisation and awareness generation programmes on: GBV and importance of food security and nutrition for girls and women as well as to address the stigma and taboo around mental health at all levels, starting from the government, civil societies, grassroots, panchayats, local governments, law enforcing agencies, and to society as a whole.
	Need to harness public-private partnerships for providing technology driven quality education for advancing gender equality in post COVID-19.
	There should be collaboration and coordination among all INGOs, NGOs, CBOs, government organisations, youth networks, feminist networks and other concerned stakeholders for building back better with girls.
	Investment of funds and proper implementation of laws pertaining to girls’ should be ensured. Develop a holistic investment plan on reproductive health, education, infrastructure, and violence free world for girls.
	Public private partnerships and funding support should be explored for providing quality education to girls.

Stakeholder	Action Points
	Programmes and schemes need to be initiated to enhance role of parents in the development of children and ensuring their partnership in mainstreaming school education. Parents should be supported with resources to provide them guidance. Mid-day meals, scholarships would encourage parents for sending children to schools and increase school attendance. Need to ensure equal participation of both men and women in social protection programmes.
	Positive attitude for mental health cases depends upon the parents’ upbringing. The parenting education and counselling programmes at a large scale should be organised.
	Caregivers (families), frontline workers (ASHA, Anganwadis, and ANM), and medical professionals need to be sensitised on well-being of girls, nutrition, health care facilities, GBV, and also for recognising mental health issues.
	Support and train additional nutrition staff to identify parents who are in distress or at risk of negative coping mechanisms and provide financial assistance and psychological aid to them.
	Empower girls by creating new learning opportunities, personality development, teaching them job-oriented skills and making them self-reliant and confident. Encourage girls for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education so that they can excel in male dominated careers also and can become highly employable.
	Need to sensitise men and boys on pubertal changes in girls including menstruation and importance of a high quality, nutritious diverse diet for girls to help them create a support system for girls and women at home. Conduct counselling programmes for parents and young boys in pandemic situations on early marriages, domestic violence, menstrual hygiene and other issues concerning girls.
	Strong advocacy and allocated funds to ensure sustained investment of funds for girls are important.
	Involve Panchayats, villages, communities and create a large national action plan.

Stakeholder	Action Points
Panchayats	Community participation at all levels in the districts, blocks and gram Panchayats should be institutionalised.
	Panchayats must engage women in the villages while developing programmes for them.
	Panchayats should also engage boys and men on gender roles, challenging negative notions of masculinity and gender norms and life skills to provide girls and women safety in homes.
Civil Societies and Child Centric Organisations	Initiate a multi-sectoral approach with the help of other institutions, non-government organisations, private sector and academic institutions. The alliance should come together and create a broader structure, and start discussing how they can develop a national plan in the next five years for children.
	Develop a conducive atmosphere that builds self-esteem, self-worth of girls within homes, within communities and within institutions with their voices heard so that they can have the opportunity to meet their full potential and be part of decision making on their own destinies.
	Adolescent health programme and peer support model should be developed keeping in view the fact that the change in teenagers and adolescent issues takes decades so any intervention should not be a one of programme but a continued sustained effort.
	Need to listen to the adolescents and involve and engage them in solutions. Provide space for girls to speak and express their feelings is important in COVID-19 and in other similar situations. Need to form adolescent groups to empower them.
	Peer supported eco-system for mental health care delivery should be established such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Youth clubs, a dedicated ASHA worker and a local trained volunteer.
	Facilitate the formation of “support groups” of GBV survivors, to create mutual self-help among the groups and use this group to leverage awareness generation and convergence of various GBV services. Focus should be on reducing patriarchy and misogynistic statements inside homes, providing safety at home and supporting people in own families who face GBV.
	Mobilise women volunteers for a safe community

Stakeholder	Action Points
	Sensitise Panchayats and hold Gram Sabhas on creating support groups and creating an eco-system for safe spaces for girls and women to speak.
	Empowering women in leadership roles should be the norm now. And visibility of female role models and leaders in each and every sector should be ensured.
	Women are out on the frontlines of this crisis at many levels, in hospitals, basic health units and schools but still they lack voice in making critical decisions. Efforts need to be made to immediately rectify this by making sure that women, including the most vulnerable and marginalized, have a seat at decision-making tables, at the local as well as national levels.
	Intergenerational ownership and involvement for the adolescent programmes, where parents, grandparents and children themselves feel involved and heard should be implemented. Supportive environment should be created in the families.
	Develop new apps for uninterrupted education of girls in schools.
	Age appropriate and need-specific separate modules should be created for addressing the specific needs of children in different age groups. More focus should be given to adolescents and their health and well-being. Create online modules for community volunteers, special modules on parenting to foster mental well-being of children, creating a toolkit for psycho-socio first aid & strengthening government interventions with feedback.
	Need to organise capacity building programmes on healthcare, self-defence training, GBV, cyber-crime, legal rights, workplace ethics, financial literacy is crucial for girls.
	Parent’s capacities and understanding is to be built on nutritional requirement for children, especially for girls.
	Efforts should be made to engage with men and boys as partners for change, in particular, to reduce gender-based violence, understand and address toxic masculinities, fight misogyny for ensuring gender equality. Sensitise men and develop their understanding on the larger role that they can play is vital.

Stakeholder	Action Points
	Need to reinvest the social and technical capital built during ongoing development programmes to address foundational deficits such as gender inequity and GBV. This will not only add to the sustainability of wider results but will also build community and family resilience (ability to cope and recover).
	Invest in documentation, knowledge and information management to take the right kind of scientific evidence based interventions.
	Strengthen ongoing partnerships, collaborations and coordination among different stakeholders to eliminate all forms of GBV and create a greater and more sustainable impact.
	Partner with government on Health & Wellness Ambassadors not only in schools but also in communities for creating local champions to address mental health and well-being of children and young people, and for expanding the community based network on the lines of developing Peer Educators under Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK).
Corporates (Strategic CSR for ‘Equal for Better’)	Provide strategic support for rebuilding inclusive and gendered post COVID-19 India, more inclusive and quality driven education, addressing setback in mid-day meals, GBV and addressing mental health issues in a holistic manner.
	Incorporate a ‘Gender transformative’ transformative approach in all interventions.
	Give space to hybrid internships (offline and online) for more robust experiences to the young minds. Focus on digital methodologies of training, empowering, educating, teaching life skills and employment. Provide children including young people with more gainful employment opportunities by placing them in internships through online or offline mode from an early age.
	Help in implementing evidence based interventions on a large scale by supporting baseline research, assessments and mapping exercises. Corporates can take the lead in gender analysis and develop their understanding about gender at individual, family, society and community level.

Stakeholder	Action Points
	CSR can contribute to gender equality by creating inclusive and equitable urban spaces for women. Urban spaces have the ability to provide sustainable jobs which in turn leads to socio-economic growth of women.
	Involve and transform Panchayats and rural bodies in gender inclusive growth through CSR initiatives.
	The narrative of CSR reporting about the progress on indicators has to be changed and needs to include gender-based results i.e. for girls and women. The changing relationships between men and women and the varying gender norms should be emphasised.
Judiciary (Legal Literacy and Reforms)	Generate awareness on implementation and enforcement of the rights and entitlements. Legal literacy should not stop at only knowing what the law is, rather there is a need to provide information on how those entitlements can be met.
	There is a need to strengthen implementation of laws such as poorly implemented GBV laws. It is necessary to address cases against girls and women, cases of child sexual abuse at the earliest and not keep them pending. The compensation that young victims are entitled to must be provided.
	The new National Cyber Security Policy needs to have a clear focus on online and cyberspace GBV.
	National Helplines for GBV need to gear up to register FIRs too. Right now, very few FIRs are registered through the helplines. It is essential to educate and train workers and law enforcement agencies and to strengthen existing national helpline about cybercrimes.
	Educate the law practitioners and enforcers for the rights of “women and children” and to understand the potential social impact on women and children of delay of their actions.

Stakeholder	Action Points
	<p>Comprehensive sensitisation and orientation of law enforcement agencies including paralegals is required on GBV and online violence because many a times they do not even understand how a crime which is not visible (since it is online), is still a VAW.</p> <p>All stakeholders and agencies especially involved in cyberspace and digital space, need to undergo a thorough capacity building, to understand various aspects on cyber security and online violence (example NCERT, CSBE, schools, parents and so on).</p>
Communication and Media Agencies (Social and Behavioural Change Communication - SBCC)	Develop effective communication strategies to give importance to gender. There has to be a very strong long-term commitment to behaviour and mind set change; societal mind set change and developing self-belief in girls' own equality.
	Educate girls on positive attitudes and creating awareness about health and nutrition to ensure the success of all the plans and schemes in the country. Undertake mass awareness generation campaigns regarding balanced food intake must be undertaken.
	Establish a help desk to access multi-sectoral reference information.
	Implement campaigns to generate awareness on menstrual hygiene and accessibility to menstrual products.
	Focus on different types of advocacy campaigns and forums for sharing peer to peer knowledge.
	Develop innovative programmes and strategies to reach girls. Generate awareness in colleges and schools. Empower selected young people (girls and boys) as change makers.
	Media should play an important role in reporting hunger crises and enabling organizations to act early.

ANNEXURES

IMPRESSIONS OF GIRLS FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF INDIA

Discussions with Girls from Plan India Project Areas in Uttarakhand on 'Build Back Better with Girls'

Moderated by Gopaldutt Thapliyal, PIU Manager, Plan India, [Uttarakhand](#)

Deeksha Rawat talked about *challenges faced by girls due to the pandemic*

- School closures adversely affected girls. They did not have access to smartphones and even if they had access, there was no internet connectivity. Priority was given to boys' education and girls were pushed towards household chores. These factors led to loss of interest of girls' in education.
- Girls' health was also severely affected. They could not avail medical help or purchase medicines since transportation facilities and medical shops were shut down. This also affected access to menstrual hygiene products.
- Lack of mid-day meals and ration facilities from Anganwadis has negatively impacted nutritional status of girls.
- Routine vaccination of children was affected since Asha workers could not visit homes.
- Loss of jobs have impacted the self-esteem of girls who were earlier employed and increased household work due to lockdown led to further stress.

Deepika Rana shed light on the *work done by young girls to tackle the challenges they faced due to COVID-19*

- Children who were missing out on schooling were given online classes and access to smartphones.
- People were educated about COVID-19 and vaccinations by door-to-door visits. Girls were also given menstrual pads and iron tablets which they could not buy from nearby shops.
- Girls helped in packaging of COVID-19 kits and in distributing ration to 6,000 families with Plan India team and the state government.

Mansi talked about ***what girls can do to improve health and hygiene***

- Through ‘Poshan Charts’ young girls and pregnant women can be educated about what nutrients they should include in their diet.
- Women and girls can be made aware about the increased need of proper hygiene since the pandemic. COVID-19 kits and menstrual pads should be made available for them in advance.
- Families of undernourished children and pregnant women should be educated about the perils of COVID-19 if proper nutrition is not provided to children and women.
- Families can also be made aware about the importance of kitchen gardens.
- Girls can help the government in uninterrupted distribution of mid-day meals to children.

Priyanka Rawat shared the ***ways in which girls can help to resume school education for children and girls***

- In small groups, girls can be made aware about the importance of education.
- Young girls should be sensitized that education is their first priority and they must not succumb to child marriage under family pressure. Similarly, their education must not be sacrificed due to economic adversity.
- Awareness can be raised about ‘Beti Bachao Beti Padhao’ scheme at the ground level.
- Along with school education, girls should be equipped with job based skills to become financially independent.

Discussions with Girls from Plan India Project Areas in Hyderabad on ‘Quality Education for Girls’ and ‘Food Security & Nutrition for all Girls’

Moderated by Shanthi Thumaty, State Manager, AP and Telangana Plan India

Ramavat Akshaya talked about ***challenges faced by girls during the pandemic and how they continued their studies despite those challenges***

- In families of 3-4 siblings, only one smartphone was available. Network issues, economic hardships and lack of proper understanding in the online mode were some problems faced by them.
- She found it difficult to understand concepts in online classes so missed many classes. As a result, she faced difficulty in preparing the syllabus and similar can be true for many girls. She felt that concentration levels have decreased in the online mode of learning.
- She also shared the example of her friend whose parents were forcing her to get married, thus, listed the dangers of child marriage which have been aggravated due to the pandemic.

She suggested that campaigns should be organised with parents and girls to prevent child marriage and highlight the importance of education for girls.

Sheikh Asra Jabeel shared her views on ***how girls’ education can be supported***

- It is important to question dropout girls why they were not able to continue their education. Whether it was their own lack of interest or were they stopped by their parents. In both cases, parents and girls need to be made aware about the importance of education.
- She shared her own experience when she motivated a friend to attend classes. A similar initiative can be taken by each one of us. Girls who are educated should conduct campaigns to make parents and uneducated girls aware about the importance of education.

R Mounika shared her experience on ***how children and girls have been affected due to COVID-19 in the context of nutrition***

- Proper nutrition is very important for physical growth of adolescents and mid-day meals play a key role in this aspect.
- Children in Hyderabad suffered due to lack of mid-day meals, closure of Anganwadi centers and job losses of parents.
- She also expressed her gratitude towards Plan India and other community members who helped children by giving them ration and COVID-19 kits in these trying times.

R Rajeswari also shared her experience on the ***effect of COVID-19 on health and nutrition of girls and children***

- Mid-day meal is a very good initiative for children’s nutrition and health. However, school closures and consequent lack of mid-day meals has greatly affected children.
- The practice of giving meals to girls after feeding men and boys needs to stop.
- Parents need to be taught to view boys and girls as equal and to not discriminate between them.

Discussions with Girls from Plan India Project Areas in Delhi on ‘Mental Health and Well-being for Girls’ and ‘Gender-based Violence’

Moderated by Kiran Samagar, Bal Vikas Mitra (SBVM) Delhi, Plan India

Muskan shared ***effect of lockdown on girls’ mental health and well-being***

- Increased burden of household chores, no access to smartphones to either study or talk to their friends, being trapped inside homes were factors that caused irritation and anger issues among girls.

- Girls had to ask their brothers for smartphones which they were denied. Not being able to talk to their friends as a consequence majorly caused girls to bottle up their thoughts.
- Parents took out their tensions caused by economic insecurity on girls.
- Additionally, there was no privacy for girls. They also felt uncomfortable to change their menstrual pads as everyone was at home at all times.

Bhumika highlighted the ***steps taken by girls to tackle the challenges they faced***

- Girls planted trees and plants around their homes, started doing yoga and learned to cook new dishes through YouTube.
- They asked their parents to set a time-table so that everyone in the house gets to use smartphone for a stipulated time.
- Girls started talking to their mothers about the problems that their mothers and they themselves were facing. In this way they both were able to help each other relieve stress. With the support of their mothers, girls were able to go out and meet their friends.
- Girls also created awareness in their communities that playing and going out are as important for girls as they are for boys.

Mantasha talked about ***gender-based violence experienced by girls and women during the lockdown***

- She shared her own experience of a neighbour who lost his job and used to beat up his wife and use abusive language after drinking. No action was taken against him.
- In their homes, preference was given to boys to watch television and use smartphone while girls were expected to do all the household work. If they complained and the siblings started fighting over this issue, boys were not scolded while girls were blamed and were expected to compromise.
- Preference was given to boys in every aspect and this needs to change.

Khushboo shared the ***ways in which women and girls fought against gender-based violence***

- Girls asked their parents to equally distribute all kinds of work among boys and girls and not put all the pressure on girls only.
- As girls and women were beaten up under the excuse of economic tensions, some girls started the initiative of educating other girls and women that domestic violence is a punishable offence and they can lodge a complaint against it.
- Girls asked their parents to give importance to their education and not just to their brothers' education. They also shared such experiences in groups and with NGO volunteers.
- Lastly, she encouraged everyone to break their silence against injustice.

Discussions with Girls from Plan India Project Areas in Bihar on ‘Legal Awareness and Legal Literacy’

Moderated by Sanjiv Kumar, PU Manager-Bihar Plan India

Kanchan Kumari shared her views on ***issues faced by girls & women and the awareness about the laws that protect them***

- She said that women and men are equal in our constitution but not in our society.
- Even though child marriage act, PCPNDT act, domestic violence act and POCSO act have been in place, awareness about these acts has not reached the village and at the ground level.
- Societal pressure and fear stop many women to take action and even forces them to commit suicide in worst cases. This mentality is a huge issue that needs to be tackled.
- She urged the government to not only make the laws but also help girls and women to understand and implement these laws.

Rupa Kumari shared her views on the ***importance of legal literacy for girls and women***

- Massive awareness campaigns are needed to educate the society about acts and issues.
- The problem of child marriage will not get solved by just creating acts, making parents and families aware about the perils of child marriage is needed.
- Only spreading awareness will actually help the women to get justice.

Neha Kumari shed light on ***how legal literacy can help women and girls live a happy life***

- She shared her experience of participating in a campaign with Plan India in which girls and parents were made aware about the importance of education.
- She also urged the government to educate people about laws and acts for the betterment of girls and children. Educated girls can further educate more women and girls in their villages and communities about these laws. In this way we will be able to reach the unreached.
- Girls also have right to property. Awareness about this is required so that girls and young women do not have to depend on anybody else.

Ritika narrated ***through an anecdote how awareness about laws helps girls to live a better life***

- She shared the example of a friend who was married off early to a presumably good man who asked for less dowry. However, the girl did not feel good mentally after marriage so she came back to her own home. As a response, her husband left her.
- Ritika and other volunteers asked the Mukhiya to help both families to negotiate but this did not work out. Then she reached out to Plan India for help.
- This incident shows the lack of knowledge about laws in villages which severely affects the lives of girls.
- Legal literacy is important and she, again asked for all families, girls and children to be educated about these laws.

PROFILE OF SPEAKERS



Ms Rathin Vinay Jha, President, Plan India Governing Board and Former Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

Rathin Vinay Jha served in the Indian Administrative Service where as Secretary, Union Ministry of Tourism, she led the team on the ‘Incredible India’ campaign. In her assignment as Director to set up the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), the concept of Fashion Education was introduced for the first time in India. Ms Jha has also served after retirement as Secretary General of the World Travel and Tourism Council, India. She is the Founder Chairperson of the Indian Heritage Cities Network, a UNESCO NGO. She is on the board of a number of other trusts and societies addressing the development sector. She is currently the Chairperson of the India Foundation of Arts as well as a Trustee of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA).



Mohammed Asif, Executive Director, Plan India

Mohammed Asif is the Executive Director of Plan India since December 2019 and Chair of the Sphere India Executive Committee since 2018. He has more

than 21 years of development and humanitarian experience. He has been with Plan India since 2006. Prior to Plan India he has worked with Action Aid International India. He is the Alumni of the Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, and has written several research articles and papers on poverty and development, urbanisation, good governance and gender equality.



Shri Sriram Haridass, Representative India and Country Director Bhutan a.i., United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

Sriram Haridass, a national of Sri Lanka, brings with him over 18 years’ experience in strategic planning and programming, in both development and humanitarian contexts. Prior to joining UNFPA India, he served in UNFPA

Sierra Leone, where in addition to overseeing the implementation of large-scale donor funded projects, he also coordinated UNFPA’s response to the Ebola crisis. Before that, Mr Haridass spent nearly nine years with UNHCR in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and South Sudan. Mr Haridass holds a Master’s degree in Law and Human Rights (LLM) from the University of London, and a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration (BBA) from Curtin University of Technology, Perth. He is passionate about the rights and choices of women and girls and a strong believer in amplifying the voice of youth and adolescents.



Dr. Dnyaneshwar Manohar Mulay, Member, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

Dr Dnyaneshwar Manohar Mulay is from the 1983 batch of Indian Foreign Service and has served in several

capacities, including the Consul General of India, New York, High Commissioner of India, Male, and Secretary (CPV & OIA), Ministry of External Affairs. Dr Mulay is also a successful writer and has written over 15 books which have been translated in Arabic, Dhivehi, Urdu, Kannada and Hindi. His magnum-opus – Maati Pankh ani Akash, written in Marathi, has received immense popularity and has also been prescribed in the Arts curriculum at the North Maharashtra University, Jalgaon (Maharashtra). He has inspired several socio-educational projects including Balodyan, an orphanage in his native village and the Dnyaneshwar Mulay Education Society, which seeks to introduce innovative concepts like Global Education. The D.Y. Patil University of Mumbai honoured him with Doctor of Literature (D.Litt.) (honoris

causa) for ‘exemplary contribution to society’ in January 2017. A documentary titled ‘Gypsy’ and a book titled ‘Dr Dnyaneshwar Mulay – Passport Man of India’ celebrate his life and work. Dr Dnyaneshwar Mulay is also serving as Chairperson of Pravasi Bhatiya Academic And Scientific Sampark (PRABHAAS) as well international operation of the CSIR.



Major General Manoj Kumar Bindal, Executive Director, National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM)

Major General M K Bindal is presently the Executive Director,

National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM). He was commissioned into the Corps of Army Air Defence in December 1985. An alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Major General Bindal is a graduate of the Defence Services Staff College and has attended the prestigious Higher Command Course at the Army War College besides excelling in all other career courses in the army. He holds a master’s degree in Defence and Strategic Studies as well as Masters of Philosophy in Defence and Management Studies. During his more than three decades of service, he has held important command and staff assignments. Major General M K Bindal served as the Provost Marshall in the United Nations Mission in Mozambique where he was deeply involved in the liquidation of the mission. He has been the Director, Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (CUNPK) in New Delhi. For three years he was also the Secretary of the International Association of Peacekeeping Training Centres.



Ms Upma Chawdhry, Ex Union Secretary, Government of India & Director, Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie

Upma Chawdhry has an experience of more than 35 years in the Indian Administrative Service with work encompassing a variety of responsibilities in public dealing, service delivery, programme implementation, policy formulation and co-ordination across sectors including HR, finance, education, tourism, animal husbandry, sports, youth affairs, energy, agriculture, art & culture, industry, women & child development. Upma has represented India at various bilateral, multilateral and international fora including Codex Alimentarius, WTO, OIE and dealt with several UN organisations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, UNV, WHO etc. At the UN, she is a member of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA), New York. She was also the Rapporteur of the Committee in 2018 and the Chairperson of the Working Group for the United Nations Public Service Awards in 2019 and she was also a member of that Working Group for three years. She was the first woman Director, and the only one to-date of the prestigious Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration in Mussoorie that trains officers of the Civil Services of the Government of India and Bhutan. Upma retired from the senior most administrative post of Secretary to Government of India in December 2020.



Dr. Indira Chakravarty, Padma Shri and Public Health Specialist

Dr Indira Chakravarty is a renowned academician and her entire efforts have been targeted towards using scientific evidence

for improving basics of public health related to environmental science, nutrition and food security, food safety, water, sanitation and hygiene. Prof Indira Chakravarty has the highest degrees in academics which are Ph.D and D.Sc in Science. She is a Fellow of several renowned National and International scientific bodies including International Medical Science Academy, International Water Academy, Institution of Chemists, International College of Applied Nutrition (USA), National Environmental Sciences Academy, Indian Public Health Association. Prof Indira Chakravarty received the prestigious Padmashri award from the President of India in 2014 for her lifelong achievements. She is recipient of the prestigious highest Eduardo Sauma Award from FAO of the United Nations on her work with Street Foods, Presidents Global Leadership award in Public Health, United States of America from USF in 2009, Indira Gandhi National Priyadarshini Award, Uday award for life time achievement, Uday from Rotary International and many more. She studied at the Presidency College and then the Science College in Kolkata and was subsequently trained as a WHO fellow in several renowned organisations and universities in the U.S. She has been affiliated to prominent government organisations in the country.

She also serves as a Director or Chairperson of advisory bodies of national and state level government departments, UN agencies, NGO

and CSR programmes (for examples refer below from bio sent by Mra Chakravarty). Additionally, she is a Member, Advisory Board on Water Week, Singapore Water Convention, PUB, Govt. of Singapore and Member, International Board of Advisers, International Inst. of Global Health, United Nations University (UNU). Formerly she was the Addl. Director General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family welfare, GOI; Director & Dean, All India Inst. of Hygiene and Public Health, MOHFW, GOI.



Dr. Neelam Singh, Secretary and Chief Functionary, Vatsalya

Dr Neelam Singh is a gynecologist by profession but a social entrepreneur by choice. A doctor from KGMC, Lucknow she is an expert

in the field of gender and adolescent health issues in India. She is a founder member and chief functionary of Vatsalya (a not-for-profit organisation) set up with the mission for saving the unborn girls in Uttar Pradesh. With a wide experience and technical expertise of 25 years, she has been awarded with 15th Rotary India Award (2006) and Acharya Vinoba Bhave Award (2001) for pioneering efforts in northern India to curb sex selective elimination of the girl child. She was appointed jury member to support #100women campaign by Ministry of Women and Child Development. Under her leadership, Vatsalya has received Rani Laxmibai Award, a state government award to work for the cause of girl child in 2017 and 2018.



Mr Soumya Guha, Director of Gender Transformative Policy and Practice, Global Hub, Plan International

Soumya Guha has extensive development and humanitarian

leadership experience in West Africa, South Asia and South East Asia with UNICEF, ORBIS and Plan International. He is currently the global Director of Gender Transformative Policy and Practice (GTPP) at Plan International. The GTPP team brings together policy, advocacy and programming excellence, building coherence and focus towards gender transformation. Soumya represents Plan International in the Joining Forces Global Steering Committee - a global alliance of 6 International child focused organisations - ChildFund International, Plan International, Save the Children, SOS Children's Village, Terres Des Homes and World Vision - working towards promoting child rights and preventing violence against children. He is passionate about intersectional feminism and co-chairs Plan's Global Anti-Racism Council.



Mr Ashok Kumar, Executive Director, Dr A V Baliga Memorial Trust

Ashok Kumar has been working for the betterment of under privileged women and children for over 25 years. He

started his professional career as a lecturer and later joined as Research Associate with MKSK Foundation for seven years. He served Bal Sahyog, Delhi as its Executive Director from 2013 to 2015. Currently, he is working as the Executive Director of Dr AV Baliga Trust. He is also National Convener, CACL Advocacy Unit, member of the Inspection Committee for Shelter Homes, DCPU, GNCTD, North West, Delhi and Member & Board of Directors of Hope Project Charitable Trust. He was nominated as Member, Delhi Legal Service Committee by Chief Justice of Delhi High Court. Mr Kumar has been Awarded and appreciated for Social and Relief works by various organisations including Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR).



Dr. Sanjai Bhatt, Professor, Delhi School of Social Work, University of Delhi

Dr Sanjai Bhatt is a highly proactive academician and is presently working as Professor of Social Work at Delhi School of Social Work,

University of Delhi since 2001. Dr Bhatt has been into teaching, conducted research and implementing action based projects from last 44 years. He has also taught in the Department of Social Work at various other universities. He is associated with a number of social movements and civil society organisations such as Center for Community Economics and Development Consultant Society (CECOEDECON) in Jaipur, South Asian Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Development (SANSAD) in New Delhi, South Asia Partnership (SAP India) and Association of Schools of Social Work in India (ASSWI). He is one of the founder members of Delhi based advocacy group PAIRVI, NGO

SOHAM and Treasurer of National Association of Professional Workers in India (NAPSWI). He has been an elected Executive member of International Committee of NGO Forum of Asian Development Bank based in Philippines. Presently, he is involved as a national convener of a country-wide campaign to enact a legislation for Council for Social Work Education.



Dr. Sunita Gandhi, Vice-Chair, India Literacy Board, Former Economist, World Bank, Washington D C, Founder-CEO, DEVI Sansthan-Dignity, Education, Vision International

Dr Sunita Gandhi is the Vice-Chair, India Literacy Board and former Economist, World Bank. She is the Founder-CEO of DEVI Sansthan, Dignity Education Vision International, and the Founder- Convenor of the Global Dream Disruptive Literacy: A Global Partnership. She is also the founder of Council for Global Education USA and has travelled to and studied education systems in 49 countries. She has established schools in Iceland, the Czech Republic and India. She is also the Honorary Chief Academic Advisor of her family run City Montessori School, Lucknow that is the winner of UNESCO Prize for Peace Education.



Ms Kanchan Devrari, Joint Director, State Council of Educational Research & Training (SCERT), Government of Uttarakhand

Kanchan Devrari has worked as an academic and administrative head of department in different offices of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. She possesses vast experiences in pedagogy, andragogy and educators' training. She has been working as Joint Director, SCERT Uttarakhand since 2014. She has also worked as Principal of Government Girls Inter College, lecturer in DIET and Government Girls Inter College.



Ms Sonali Khan, Managing Director, Sesame Workshop India

Ms Sonali Khan leads Sesame Workshop's educational mission in India to create innovative and engaging content that maximises the educational power of all media to help kids grow smarter, stronger and kinder. As the Managing Director of Sesame Workshop India, Sonali spearheads a multiplatform initiative that combines the power of mass media with educational outreach to prepare children for school and life. Under her leadership, the organisation develops and implements ground breaking programs to reach children everywhere – especially those who need it most. She is a proud recipient

of the prestigious Nari Shakti Puruskar (Women's Empowerment Award) from the President of India and Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship for her work in ending child marriage.



Mr Rishikumar Singh, Head - Strategy & Communication, YUVA Unstoppable

Rishikumar Singh, popularly known as Positive Rishikumar comes from a strong background in Leadership,

Administration and Management. His core strength is to empower youth, maximise their potential & skills for nation-building, and drive them to live a sustainable lifestyle. He has over 15 years of experience in a leadership position with organisations and companies based in India and the USA. He left his corporate career and devoted his life to the empowerment of young people in India. He has mobilised over 50 thousand volunteers from institutions and corporate in Swachhta Mission initiatives to create awareness amongst more than three lakh people across Gujarat, Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. His deep interest in social work has led him to work in the mentorship of Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Late President Dr Kalam for the cause of education and digital India Initiatives to improve the quality of education in Govt schools. He received "Target 3 Billion" book as an award signed by Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. He has also received an appreciation letter from PM Narendra Modi for the CSR initiative in 2014. Shri Manohar Lal Khattar (CM Haryana) honoured him with a letter of appreciation for support amid lockdown.



Ms Geetanjali Yadav, Assistant Professor, Department of Elementary Education, Miranda House, University of Delhi

Ms Geetanjali is associated with

Department of Adult, Continuing Education and Extension as a Research Scholar. She likes to work with children. She had worked as a Natural Science teacher in Delhi government schools under Directorate of Education. Her area of interest is Curriculum Studies, Critical Identity Development, Gender Studies, Guidance & Counseling, Science Education and Teacher Education.



Dr. Rajni Wadhwa, Director, Programme Implementation, Plan India

Dr Rajni Wadhwa is a Public Health specialist. She brings expertise in Health, Nutrition, Education and Gender. Rajni

works as Director – Program Implementation at Plan India and leads different projects on Inclusive and Quality Education amongst many others across 100 districts in the country.



Dr. Unni Krishnan, Global Humanitarian Director, Plan International

Dr Unni Krishnan is the global humanitarian director of Plan International. He has worked on health, humanitarian issues and situations

on the frontlines for more than 20 years. He is trained as a physician from Madras University, humanitarian worker from Geneva University and in conflict management from Selly Oak Colleges. He has held leadership positions in some of the leading development and humanitarian agencies such as Oxfam, ActionAid, Plan International, Save the Children and War Child. He has provided strategic direction and has led multi-disciplinary and multi-national teams, managed large scale humanitarian and health responses in complex settings in more than 40 countries.



Dr. Shariqua Yunus, Head of Nutrition Unit, WFP India

Dr Shariqua Yunus graduated in medicine from the Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College, Aligarh in 2001. She is a gold medalist in Community Medicine

and subsequently did her post-graduation in Community Medicine from the same college in 2005. She holds a diploma in Public Health Nutrition from the Public Health Foundation of India and has also been trained on the management of nutrition in emergencies by the

University College of London and Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre. She has worked on the ASHA project under the National Rural Health Mission with the training division, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. She has also worked as the focal point for Nutrition at the World Health Organization, Country Office for India. Currently, she is working as the Head of the Nutrition and School feeding unit at the World Food Programme office in India. She has to her credit several research papers in various national and international journals. Her main areas of interest are maternal and child health, infant and young child feeding and links between disease and nutrition.



Mr Sarbjit Singh Sahota, Disaster Risk Reduction Specialist, UNICEF India

Sarbjit Singh Sahota works at UNICEF as a Disaster Risk Reduction Specialist. He is an Architect and Urban Planner

with over 25 years of professional experience in steering development and humanitarian strategies and programmes within UNICEF and other frontline humanitarian agencies. He has worked in the domain of child centred disaster risk reduction, risk informed development planning, humanitarian response, capacity development, conservation of historic urban precincts and urban planning and design. In recognition of his contribution to policy planning and implementation of DRR and humanitarian programming, in 2005 he was included in the 'International Visitor Leadership Programme' by Department of State, Government of USA.



Dr. Shivani Dhar, Nutrition Officer, UNICEF, Bihar

Dr Shivani Dhar is a medical doctor with over 20 years of experience in health and nutrition programmes, having worked in UNICEF Bihar for past nine years. She has

extensive experience of working with state government and communities in improving Infant and Young Child feeding, SAM management, adolescent and maternal health & nutrition initiatives.



Shri Pulkit Garg, Chief Development Officer, Siddharthnagar, Govt of Uttar Pradesh

Shri Pulkit Garg is an IAS Officer of 2016 batch and an IIT graduate. He currently serves as

Chief Development Officer of Siddharthnagar since January 2020. He has also served as Joint Magistrate Bulandshahar and Baghpat district and as Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. He was shortlisted for PM Governance Award for 2020 - 2021 for Aspirational District Programme and is currently handling over 150 development related departments in the districts including rural development, health, education, women and child development, skill development, PWD and others.



Mr Rajeev Kumar Singh, General Secretary, Dr Shambhunath Singh Research Foundation (SRF)

Rajeev Kumar Singh is active in development sector since last 31 years. Being the founder

General Secretary of Dr Shambhunath Singh Research foundation, he has been guiding the programme implementation team of the organisation for the last three decades. A Post Graduate in Social Works from Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi and Post Graduate diploma in Industrial Relations and Personnel Management from Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, Mr Rajeev Kumar Singh is a known Child Rights and labour rights Activist and continuously advocates for the protection and safeguarding of Child Rights. He is also the founder of multiple social activist organisations, including Bal Paharua, Human against Child Labour. During the last three decades, under his leadership, the Foundation has implemented many child centered, nutrition and protection focused community development programmes with UNICEF, WFP, CRY, Plan India, Save the Children, Care, USAid among many others. The SRF Foundation has been instrumental in setting up a multi-sectorial convergence model at state level and nutritional rehabilitation center in districts of Uttar Pradesh through advocacy and lobbying work.



Ms Preeti Sudan, Former Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India

Preeti Sudan, retired as Union Health Secretary in July, 2020, after

nearly thirty seven fruitful years, especially the last six months, during which she handled the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to this, she was Secretary, Department of Food & Public Distribution.

She also served in Women and Child Development & Defence Ministries. In the State, she handled Finance and Planning, Disaster Management, Tourism and Agriculture. She is M.Phil in Economics and MSc in Social Policy and Planning from LSE. Amongst her notable contributions have been initiating two major flagship programmes of the country i.e. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and Ayushman Bharat, Legislation on National Medical Commission, Amendments to the MTP Act, Allied Health Professionals Commission and Ban of E-cigarettes.

Ms. Sudan was also Consultant with World Bank. She served as Chair of COP-8 of Framework Convention on Tobacco Control; Vice Chair of Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health; Chair of Global Digital Health Partnership, and member of WHO's Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response.



Dr. Achal Bhagat, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist, Apollo Hospitals; Chairperson, Saarthak; Chairperson, AADI

Dr Achal Bhagat is a Senior Consultant Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist with over thirty years of experience. He has been practising in Delhi at Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals since 1995, and heads a multi-disciplinary mental health team. He is the Chairperson of Saarthak, a group of mental health organisations working on the issues of Mental health in South Asia. He is also the current Chairperson of Action for Ability, Development and Inclusion (AADI), an organisation working for the persons with disability. He did his training in Psychiatry and Psychotherapy from PGIMER Chandigarh and Oxford, UK. He has pioneered innovative public health initiatives for mental health in India since 1995. Dr Achal Bhagat has worked as a consultant on Mental Health with organisations like UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNODC, JPAL etc and has assisted Judicial Processes across South Asia on mental health. He has trained nearly 5000 barefoot counsellors across South Asia and has also trained mental health professionals on skills for cognitive behaviour therapy, family therapy and on mental health and inclusive development. He has authored fifteen manuals on mental health and has been actively contributed to the print and electronic media. Dr Bhagat sees himself as a mental health activist and is actively involved in rights movement for gender rights, rights of persons with disability and rights of persons with mental illness.



Dr. Shekhar Seshadri, Psychiatrist and Former, Senior Professor, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Former Dean - Behavioural Sciences Division and Former Director, NIMHANS

Dr Shekhar is a child psychiatrist with 40 years of experience in the field of child mental health but his work extends beyond the clinical population, amongst others, to children in institutions, educational spaces and in the context of law, across the country as well as the South Asia region. An artist and musician, he uses a number of creative methodologies in child mental health interventions, including theatre in development approaches. He was part of national deliberations on the POCSO Act 2012 during its drafting, and has been an active part of the debates around the December 2015 Juvenile Justice Act on children in conflict with the law. He has also engaged extensively as a member of working groups of the National Commission for Protection of Rights of the Child on issues such as substance abuse and elimination of corporal punishment in school. He also engages in training and capacity building programmes for students of mental health disciplines and mental health care professionals, community health workers, teachers, government and non-government staff and counsellors and Judicial personnel.



Ms Nirmala Pandey, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF

Nirmala Pandey is a Child Protection Specialist with UNICEF India Country Office, New Delhi. Her core responsibilities

include implementing UNICEF’s child protection programming and policy addressing violence against children, mental health and psychosocial support and prevention of child labour, trafficking and unsafe migration. She has more than 15 years of experience of working on child rights and gender-transformative programming with Government and UNICEF.



Dr. Anil Paranjape, Executive Director, Community Aid and Sponsorship Programme (CASP)

Dr Paranjape completed his MBBS and MD from the

Armed Forces Medical College, Pune and subsequently served in the Indian Army Medical Corps for more than 21 years. Subsequently, he has been working with the development sector with various NGOs. He has been a visiting faculty at the Symbiosis Institute of Health Sciences and School of Health Sciences in University of Pune. He also serves as a guide for MPH students of University of Pune. He has been employed with CASP since 2010 and is responsible for the functioning of the organisation.



Ms Nandita Bhatla, Director – Programmes, CorStone

Nandita Bhatla currently serves as Director, Programmes and oversees all CorStone programmes in India, leading the design, planning, training and

monitoring. She is a key member of CorStone’s scalability team, working to ensure strategic approaches to scale-up of CorStone’s resilience-based Youth First and Girls First programmes aimed at improving overall wellbeing and promoting mental health of marginalised adolescent youth in India.

Prior to this, Nandita was a Senior Technical Specialist and thematic lead for the gender, violence and rights portfolio at the Asia Regional Office of the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). She has expertise in gender mainstreaming, gender analysis, primary prevention of gender-based violence. She is an active contributor to strategic advocacy networks, constantly striving to link policy dialogue with field realities. Nandita was part of pioneering efforts to set up residential schools for adolescent girls for continuing education in Uttar Pradesh and training a team of rural, neo-literate women in journalism, to produce an award-winning local newspaper.



Dr. Renu Golwalkar, Director, Gender, youth and social inclusion, Engender Health

Dr Renu Golwalkar is Director for Gender, Youth and Social Inclusion with EngenderHealth and she provides

technical leadership and support to countries in Africa and Asia. She has over 18 years of experience in gender transformative and youth friendly programming in the context of Sexual and Reproductive Health, Gender based Violence, male engagement, women’s economic empowerment and life skills. Dr Golwalkar has a Doctorate (PhD) in Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) for young people and Masters in Social Work. She has extensive experience of multi-sectoral GBV response work, with special focus on engaging women, men, communities and the health systems. In her professional experience, she has focused on demystifying and simplifying the models and frameworks for gender transformative change and building capacity of teams.



Ms Nayana Chowdhury, Director - Program, Breakthrough India

Nayana Chowdhury leads the Programs at Breakthrough. She comes with over two decades of experience in the

development sector. She has a Master’s in

Social Work from University of Delhi and has worked on rights of Dalits and Tribes in the grassroots in India. Nayana is a passionate gender rights worker who has had the opportunity of working with reputed philanthropies such as IKEA Foundation and Tata Trusts as Grant Manager overseeing multi-state and multi-country grants. She has developed, implemented, managed, monitored, and evaluated programmes with focus on marginalised groups in Asia and Africa. She has also been a trainer-facilitator focussing on human rights in an international human rights’ organisation. She has always pushed the boundaries of her formal job-description and walked the extra mile to get most out of each development intervention that she has led.



Dr. Karnika Seth, Cyberlaw Expert & Founder, Seth Associates

Karnika Seth is an internationally renowned Cyberlaw expert and the founder of Seth Associates. Dr Seth is also the Chairperson of Lex Cyberia at

Seth Associates, the World’s first integrated cyberlaws research, forensics and legal consulting centre. Dr Seth has been consistently ranked by global business community as topnotch cyber lawyer, an IT Expert & a prolific author, policymaker & educator. Dr Seth practices law at the Supreme Court of India, Delhi High court & other legal forums and is principal legal advisor to many multinational groups and government entities. She has been empanelled as a member of the Working Group of International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) formed to design the Policy framework impacting global domain registration services and is also a part of expert

panel of UNICEF working on children safety in the online world and actively associates with International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC) in its cyber awareness activities in India. She is also associated with the International Telecommunication Union's initiatives and is a member of the global cybersecurity forum. On the UN International Women's day, she received the Great Indian Women Award in 2021 from the Indian Observer Post and the Eminent CIO of India Award in 2021. She was also conferred the title of Super Cyberwoman by Cyberpeace Foundation in 2021.



Ms Shalini Kamath, Domestic Violence Evangelist and Independent Director on Boards of Abbott, Borosil Renewables and Ambit Finvest

Shalini Kamath is an Independent Director on the Boards of Abbott India, Ambit Finvest and Borosil Renewables. As an entrepreneur, she assists with organisational and individual change and transformation. She is an Advisory Board member with an NGO TRRAIN focused on creating livelihood for people with disability. She has been the Chairperson of FICCI's Women on Corporate Boards mentorship programme. For over two decades, she led the Human Resources function at ChevronTexaco, Star, KPMG and Ambit for their India operations. Prior to that, she was the Deputy Marketing Director at Raytheon India. She began her career in Zambia and Botswana where she worked for 12+ years in tripartite partnership community development projects. She is an MBA graduate from Edinburgh Business School, UK, trained

at Harvard Business School in Change and Transformation, a certified Leadership Coach and a Zenger Folkman and Hogan facilitator. She is an evangelist and a voice against Domestic Violence.



Ms Krista Zimmerman, Director of Influencing and Programs, Asia-Pacific, Plan International

Krista Zimmerman is the Director for Influencing and Program for

Plan International Asia-Pacific Hub. She leads the organization's regional influencing and programme team, which is focused on gender-transformative advocacy, civil society strengthening, research, and programme strategy in Asia-Pacific. Working through 15 country programmes and five national offices in Asia-Pacific, Plan International helps to advance girls' rights and gender equality. Before joining Plan, Ms Zimmerman worked for several other non-governmental organizations and practiced labour and human rights law in the private sector. She holds a Juris Doctor from the University of Notre Dame.



Ms Shanu Somvanshi, Young Health Programme Lead, Plan India

Shanu Somvanshi is an experienced development professional with technical expertise in health, gender,

livelihoods, and innovation. Her career focused on reducing income poverty, promotion of gender wage parity, and youth advocacy on receiving health services. She has expertise in the design and implementation of projects from district level to multi-nation level (United Kingdom, Uganda, Malawi, India, Gautemala, Cameroon, and Kenya). She is adept at evidence strategic planning, stakeholder management, partner management, team management, capacity building, documentation and advocacy. She has been associated with international organizations (Plan International Global Hub, Plan India, and International Development Enterprises, India) and has managed diversified projects. She is in the final semester of PhD in feminist studies. She is a member of Innovation Accelerator Group (IAG) that reviews and support Innovation project application.



Mr Atul Dhawan, Chairperson, Deloitte India

Atul Dhawan is the Chairman at Deloitte India and brings considerable experience in governance, strategy and other areas. Atul also represents India on

Deloitte's Global Board as well as the Asia Pacific Board. Until recently, he was the Chief Strategy & Innovation Officer responsible for formulating, communicating, and monitoring the organisation's strategy as well as the innovation & start-up ecosystem programmes. Over the years, he has held other leadership roles that include Regional Managing Partner for the North region and National Leader for Client programmes as well as Brand & Communications. A Deloitte partner for almost 30 years, Atul has 40 years of experience starting in audit, with a distinguished record

of service to key clients. With his multi-disciplinary experience, he has advised clients on their different strategic matters. He is a strong believer of diversity & inclusion and has mentored many professionals to drive their goals. He has also mentored select start-ups and upcoming entrepreneurs. Atul is on the Board of The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE) in Delhi and a member of the Board of the American Chamber of Commerce in India (AMCHAM). He is also on the Advisory Board of the Confederation of the British Industry in India and advises U.S. India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) for various India-focused campaigns. He is a Chartered Accountant and an Economics graduate from the University of Delhi.



Mr Ravi Bhatnagar, Director External Affairs and Partnerships SOA, Reckitt

Ravi Bhatnagar leads External Affairs and Partnerships at Reckitt (SOA). Before this role, he was leading the same function for

the AMESA region at Reckitt. He is a qualified Independent Director (Institute of Directors) and sits on various commissions and committees at ASSOCHAM, UKIBC, CBI, FICCI-ISC, among others. At Reckitt, he is a member of the Global Corporate Affairs and Sustainability Leadership Team. In recognition of Reckitt's exemplary work in social impact, he is in the WTO Hall of Fame and a recipient of the President of India Medal. Before joining Reckitt, Mr Bhatnagar worked in challenging leadership positions in several organizations, including Clinton Health Access Initiative, DFID, World Bank. He is an Alumni of TISS Mumbai and Life Founding member of Leaders' Excellence Harvard Square.



Mr Maninder Singh Nayyar, CEO & Director, CEF Group

Maninder Singh Nayyar is a young enthusiastic scholar, visionary leader, dynamic entrepreneur and a social reformist with desire to develop the nation

through various initiatives and endeavours in Renewable Energy, Power, Ayurveda, Technology, Education, Skill Development and Social Work. Recently, his passion and well-orchestrated efforts has given him the esteemed position of Chairman, National Council on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in ASSOCHAM as a result of his immense and selfless hard work for society. With the mission to build a society for mankind where each and every human being can write his own success story, he is set forth to meet all the challenges & indefatigable pave the way for new developments for the youth of the nation. He is truly a discerning professional in the field of management and a widely respected transformational leader.



Dr. Sujeet Ranjan, Associate Director, Tata Trusts

Dr Sujeet Ranjan has been associated with public health sector for more than two decades. His experience includes large-scale programme

management, policy advocacy and partnership management. Dr Sujeet Ranjan is associated

with Tata Trusts as Associated Director. Prior to this, Dr Sujeet has worked as Executive Director, Coalition for Food and Nutrition Security (CFNS), Director – CARE India and Chief Operating Officer – Swasthya Management and Research Institute, Hyderabad. He has also undergone International Fellowship Program on Visionary Leadership. Has undertaken the international fellowship on leadership at the Centre for African Family Studies (CAFS), Nairobi, Kenya, and with the NFPCB, Government of Indonesia, Jakarta.



Ms Deepa Menon, Senior Vice President and Founder Head, PVR Nest

Deepa Menon is a seasoned professional with 18 years of developmental experience in social sector

stakeholder relations and management, corporate social responsibility, programme, financial and budgeting management, social and development communication, public and corporate and the , governmental affairs. She joined PVR Cinemas Ltd in 2006 and is the founder head of PVR NEST, a CSR initiative of PVR Ltd which partners with local communities and builds its capacities to mitigate the issues and challenges the communities face. She is also currently managing the Corporate Communications for PVR. She started her development career with Katha a non-profit organisation working with the government on education and social development and Indian literature and later moved into well-known International non-profit sector (INGO) - Heinrich Boell Foundation, Action Aid International and USAID – South Asian Regional Equity Program. She has international diplomas on

Corporate Sustainability from the Harvard Business School (HBS) Massachusetts, Boston, United States AID agency (International Volunteer Programme) and Swedish Institute of Management program, Sweden Embassy.



Mr Gambhir Agrawal, Head, CSR, Relaxo

Gambhir Agrawal started his journey 15 years ago as a young volunteer and choose Social Work as a career over his family business. As CSR Head at Relaxo Footwear Limited, he is aligning the

companies intent to benefit the marginalised section of society and plays a key role in project expansion and enhancement of quality standards and system. Gambhir is a member of various committees and bodies and believes that working for social causes is the greatest contribution in any capacity.



Mr Rahul Agrawal, Director, Intellecip

Rahul Agrawal has over 20 years of experience in strategy development and investment planning with expertise in the social development sector. Prior to joining

Intellecip, he was the Director at NRMIC, an evidence based impact advisory and research firm. His entrepreneurial zeal is guided by the belief that creative disruption through constant innovation is the key to creating

large scale impact. In the development sector, Rahul is committed to applying innovative management approaches in solving complex human development issues with an aim to design programmes and processes that enable inclusive growth. Over the last two decades, Rahul has led on projects worth over a billion dollars, paving the way for innovative and adaptable solutions for various development challenges. Rahul is passionate about redefining development narratives to design and curate solutions to drive development beyond addressing marginalisation. In his past experience, Rahul has designed and executed greenfield projects in the areas of health, nutrition and education. He has led on evaluation of programmes supported by Corporates, National and Local governments in India and South Asia, Multilateral and Bilateral agencies and civil society organisations on enhancing rural livelihoods, improving last mile delivery of services for poor and vulnerable communities, and enabling access to social protection.



Dr. Zoya Ali Rizvi, Deputy Commissioner (Adolescent Health), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India

Dr Zoya Ali Rizvi is a meritorious and

hardworking doctor having vast experience of working in the government health sector at various levels in the District, State and National for more than two decades. Dr Rizvi is an alumnus and gold medalist from King George's Medical College, Lucknow and the London School of Hygiene which deals with the promotive and preventive health

care of adolescents in facilities, schools and communities. She also looks after the newly launched School Health and Wellness Programme under Ayushman Bharat (Long-live India) to improve the health seeking behaviour and knowledge. The School Health and Wellness Programme includes age-appropriate incremental learning for gender equitable attitudes, prevention of violence and injuries, improved reproductive health, mental health, safe usage of internet amongst others. These comprehensive health programmes will go a long way in improving the understanding, attitudes and practices of the young boys and girls, thereby paving the way for improving their knowledge and awareness regarding safer health practices in times to come.



Shri Saurabh Rishi, Senior Specialist, NITI Aayog

Saurabh Rishi is a Senior Specialist (Joint Adviser) in the Data and Strategy division of the Aspirational Districts Programme at NITI Aayog, New

Delhi. He is responsible for monitoring and ranking of districts based on KPIs related to Health and Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure. As a lateral entrant in the government, Mr Rishi comes with nearly 1.5 decades of rich industry experience in data analytics, consulting and research; specific to Health, Finance & Retail sectors. He has a MBA (Market Research & Analysis and has also done the Executive Programme in Business Analytics & Intelligence from IIM Bangalore.



Mr Parul Soni, Founder and Global Managing Partner, Thinkthrough Consulting

Parul Soni has been instrumental in providing strategic leadership to large development programmes at country and regional levels with international and national organisations. With over 24 years of experience, he has driven major programmes in areas of cross-sectoral partnerships and institutional networks, inclusive community participation, social accountability, and social justice, using his rich and extensive experience in Social Development and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). He was previously a Partner and the Global Co-leader for The not-for-profit organisation at Ernst & Young India LLP (EY). During his career he lent his expertise and leadership to various organisations and associations in India and across the Globe.

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

DAY 1: December 07, 2021 (Tuesday)

10:00 – 11:15 A.M.

INAUGURAL SESSION

4th National Conference “Plan for Every Child 2021”

- **Welcome Address - Ms Rathi Vinay Jha**, President, Plan India Governing Board and Former Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India
- Progress Report from 3rd Plan for Every Child Conference 2018 - **Mohammed Asif**, Executive Director, Plan India
- Audio-visual journey of the Plan for Every Child Conferences held in 2016, 2017 & 2018
- Gender lens for promoting equality in the context of COVID-19 - **Shri Sriram Haridass**, Representative India and Country Director Bhutan a.i., United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- **Inaugural Address:** Mission positivity and building future of girls - **Dr Dnyaneshwar Manohar Mulay**, Member, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)
- **Chief Guest Address:** *Disaster risk management to ensure well-being and inclusive development for girls* - **Major General Manoj Kumar Bindal**, Executive Director, National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM)

11:15 – 11:30 A.M.

Tea Break/Videos from the previous Plan for Every Child National Conferences and Discussions with Girls from different parts of India

DAY 1: December 07, 2021 (Tuesday)	
11:30 A.M.–01:00 P.M.	PLENARY SESSION Build Back Better with Girls Chair: Ms Upma Chawdhry , Ex Union Secretary, Government of India & Director, Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Build Back Better, for improving Health, Nutrition and Hygiene of women and girls</i> - Dr Indira Chakravarty, Padma Shri and Public Health Specialist <i>Empowering girls to get equal</i> - Dr Neelam Singh, Secretary and Chief Functionary, Vatsalya <i>Achieving sustainable and inclusive development through gender transformative approaches</i> - Mr Soumya Guha, Director of Gender Transformative Policy and Practice, Global Hub, Plan International <i>Shaping the post COVID-19 development agenda through girls education</i> – Mr Ashok Kumar, Executive Director, Dr A V Baliga Memorial Trust
01:00 – 02:00 P.M.	Lunch Break/ Interactive Online Quizzing/Q&A and Discussions with Participants

DAY 1: December 07, 2021 (Tuesday)	
PARALLEL THEMATIC SESSIONS	
Challenges & New Outlook in Post COVID-19 India: Analyzing the Situation and Exploring Innovative Solutions & Approaches in Key Focus Areas	
02:00 – 03:30 P.M.	
Towards Inclusive and Quality Education for Girls Chair: Dr Sanjai Bhatt , Professor, Delhi School of Social Work, University of Delhi Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr Sunita Gandhi, Vice-Chair, India Literacy Board, Former Economist, World Bank, Washington D C, Founder-CEO, DEVI Sansthan: Dignity, Education, Vision International Ms Kanchan Devrari, Joint Director, State Council of Educational Research & Training (SCERT), Government of Uttarakhand Ms Sonali Khan, Managing Director, Sesame Workshop India Mr Rishikumar Singh, Head - Strategy & Communication, YUVA Unstoppable Ms Geetanjali Yadav, Assistant Professor, Department of Elementary Education, Miranda House, University of Delhi Dr Rajni Wadhwa, Director, Programme Implementation, Plan India 	Advancing Gender Equality in Food Security and Nutrition for all Girls Chair: Dr Indira Chakravarty , Padma Shri and Public Health Specialist Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr Unni Krishnan, Global Humanitarian Director, Plan International Dr Shariqua Yunus, Head of Nutrition Unit, WFP India Mr Sarbjit Singh Sahota, Disaster Risk Reduction Specialist, UNICEF India Dr Shivani Dar, Nutrition Officer, UNICEF, Bihar Mr Pulkit Garg, CDO, Siddharthnagar, Government of Uttar Pradesh Mr Rajeev Kumar Singh, General Secretary, Dr Shambhunath Singh Research Foundation (SRF)
03:30 – 03:45 P.M.	Tea Break/Videos from the previous Plan for Every Child National Conferences and Discussions with Girls from different parts of India

DAY 1: December 07, 2021 (Tuesday)

03:45 – 05:15 P.M.	
Ensuring Mental Health and Well-being for Girls Chair: Ms Preeti Sudan , Former Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr Achal Bhagat, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist, Apollo Hospitals; Chairperson, Saarthak; Chairperson, AADI• Dr Shekhar Seshadri, Psychiatrist and Former, Senior Professor, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Former Dean - Behavioural Sciences Division and Former Director, NIMHANS• Ms Nirmala Pandey, Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF• Dr Anil Paranjape, Executive Director, Community Aid and Sponsorship Programme (CASP)• Ms Nandita Bhatla, Director – Programmes, CorStone	Towards Eliminating Gender-based Violence in all its Forms Chair: Dr Renu Golwalkar , Director, Gender, Youth and Social Inclusion, Engender Health Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms Nayana Chowdhury, Director - Program, Breakthrough India• Dr Karnika Seth, Cyberlaw Expert & Founder, Seth Associates• Ms Shalini Kamath, Domestic Violence Evangelist and Independent Director on Boards of Abbott, Borosil Renewables and Ambit Finvest• Ms Krista Zimmerman, Director of Influencing and Programs, Asia-Pacific, Plan International• Ms Shanu Somvanshi, Young Health Programme Lead, Plan India

Day 2: December 08, 2021 (Wednesday)

10:00 – 11:15 A.M.	PLENARY SESSION Equal for Better - How CSR can contribute to advancing gender equality? Chair: Mr Atul Dhawan , Chairperson, Deloitte India Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mr Ravi Bhatnagar, Director External Affairs and Partnerships SOA, Reckitt• Mr Maninder Singh Nayyar, CEO & Director, CEF Group• Dr Sujeet Ranjan, Associate Director, Tata Trusts• Ms Deepa Menon, Senior Vice President and Founder Head, PVR Nest• Mr Gambhir Agrawal, Head, CSR, Relaxo• Mr Rahul Agrawal, Director, Intellectap
11:15 – 11:30 A.M.	a Break/Videos from the previous Plan for Every Child National Conferences and Discussions with Girls from different parts of India
11:30 A.M. – 01:00 P.M.	SPECIAL SESSION Why legal awareness and legal literacy for girls is important for building back better? Hon’ble Justice Madan B Lokur , Former Judge, Supreme Court of India In Conversation with Shri J.V.R. Prasada Rao , Former Health Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India and Member Secretary, Plan India Governing Board.
01:00 – 02:00 P.M.	Lunch Break/Interactive Online Quizzing/Q&A and Discussions with Participants

Day 2: December 08, 2021 (Wednesday)	
02:00 – 03:30 P.M.	<p>PLENARY FOR WAY FORWARD</p> <p>Summary of the key recommendations from the Thematic Sessions</p> <p>Chair: Ms Preeti Sudan, Former Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India</p> <p><i>Respective Session Chairs present the key recommendations from the four thematic sessions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Indira Chakravarty, Padma Shri and Public Health Specialist • Dr Sanjai Bhatt, Professor, Delhi School of Social Work, University of Delhi • Dr Renu Golwalkar, Director, Gender, Youth and Social Inclusion, Engender Health <p><i>Towards a National Action Plan for Build Back Better with Girls</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Zoya Ali Rizvi, Deputy Commissioner (Adolescent Health), Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India • Shri Saurabh Rishi, Senior Specialist, NITI Aayog • Mr Parul Soni, Founder and Global Managing Partner, Thinkthrough Consulting
	<p>03:30 – 03:40 P.M.</p> <p>Vote of Thanks: Ms Anushree Mishra, Director, Programme Development, Quality and Innovation, Plan India</p>

About Plan India

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

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

Plan India is a member of the Plan International Federation, an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. Plan International works in more than 75 countries worldwide.



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