The 8th Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights (APCRSHR) was hosted by Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCCWA) in Nay PyiTaw, Myanmar, during February 23-26, 2016. This Conference is a biennial gathering of civil society, young people, academia, government, media, private sector, and development partners from the region concerned about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Examining the role of the Parliamentarians in increasing political support and strengthen the implementation of the health and gender goals in 2030 agenda was also one of the objectives of the Conference.

The Inaugural remarks were delivered by Mr. Nyan Tun, Hon'ble Vice President, Republic of the Union of Myanmar. The Key Note Addresses were delivered by Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, UNFPA and Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and Dr. Raj Karim, President, Malaysia AIDS Council.

IAPPD nominated its members namely Mr. Ananda Bhaskar Rapolu, MP; Mrs. Viplove Thakur, MP; Mr. Narayan Lal Panchariya, MP; in the Conference. Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, IAPPD, also attended the Conference.

Plenary Sessions on Health rights for all: Towards enabling laws and policies for SRHR; Governance and accountability; Health Justice; Towards Sustainable SRHR Financing; and SRHR integration in Health Systems were held. During the deliberations, issues related to these sessions were discussed at length and presentations were made.

AFPPD Executive Director Dr. Mika Marumoto contributed as a Resource Person to the parliamentary session organized by the IPPF-SARO. The Session focused on the Sustainable Development Goals and the role of parliamentarians in achieving these goals. Country reports were presented by participating MPs from India, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, and Pakistan.

From India, presentations on Ensuring the Reproductive Health and Sexual Rights for child brides in Rural India; Trafficking of minor girls for commercial sexual exploitation; Reproductive morbidity and health care utilization among financially capable rural mothers in India; and entitlements for cash free maternal health services, were made.

After the fruitful discussions and presentations of the Conference, the 2016 Nay Pyi Taw Declaration was adopted. Vietnam was declared the host of next year’s event.
There has been a formal recognition that more equitable relations between men and women and reproductive rights are important ends in themselves as well as the central means of reducing fertility and achieving population stabilization. The HIV and AIDS epidemic sharpened the recognition that existing reproductive health programmes were having a limited impact in helping countries achieve overall reproductive health and development goals. The 1994 ICPD Programme of Action, agreed to by 179 countries, unequivocally links programmes to improve sexual and reproductive health with efforts to address the gendered values and norms that harm both men’s and women’s health and impede development. In this sense, the newer concept of reproductive health has helped to situate sexuality and reproduction within a broader development agenda. Reproductive health goes beyond the health sector, and is more than a women’s health issue. Involving men has been a prominent part of the shift from family planning to the broader reproductive health agenda. Men obviously make up a significant new clientele for programmes. They constitute an important asset in efforts to improve women’s health. And efforts to involve them in ways that transform gender relations and promote gender equity contribute to a broader development and rights agenda.

Despite all efforts, many developing countries have not been able to achieve the woman-centered Millennium Development Goal (MDG)-3 (promoting gender equality and empowering women), 4 and 5 (improved child and maternal health). Indeed, these goals cannot be attained independent of one other. There are many reasons for these MDGs not being achieved. However, now, as we look at some of the achievements of the MDGs and targets set in the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are related to both sexual and reproductive health as well as gender equality, there is an opportunity to examine how gender equality can be addressed within the SDGs, including the involvement of men and boys. The Conference is meant to benchmark on the latest Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 3 (Good health and wellbeing) and 5 (Gender equality). It should be able to bring out specific recommendations for attaining these goals in the next 15 years (2030).

It is in this context that the National Institute of Reproductive Health organized the International Conference on Male Involvement in Women’s Sexual and Reproductive Health: Evidences, Actions and Possibilities during February 28-March 2, 2016, in Mumbai. This Conference offered an international forum for researchers, programme managers, policymakers, women’s groups, health activists, health care providers, human rights groups and students to understand lessons learnt from research and programmes, strengths and weaknesses of the strategies employed, specifically the achievements in positive male involvement in women’s sexual and reproductive health.

Shri Ananda Bhaskar Rapolu, MP; Shri Uttamsingh Pawar, Ex-MP; and Shri Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, represented IAPPD in the Conference. IAPPD surmised the lacunae in the system, the progress of the programmes and the corrective steps and issues taken up by the government to bring about the change.

It is believed that when male and female aware of each other’s health needs, they are more likely to receive needed services.

“Special efforts should be made to emphasize men’s shared responsibility and promote their active involvement in responsible parenthood, sexual and reproductive behaviour (ICPD)”

The meeting was inaugurated by Rt. Hon’ble Nanda Bahadur Pun Pasang, the Vice President of Nepal. The inaugural session was followed by three sessions with panelists ranging from social scientists to subject specialists as well as Parliamentarians. The meeting was also attended by H. E. Ambassador Glenn White from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia and Ms. Anjali Sen, Regional Director of South Asia Regional Office of the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

Mrs. Viplove Thakur, MP; Dr. Vijaylaxmi Sadho, MP; and Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, IAPPD, attended the Conference.

While chairing the session on ‘Good Practices and Experiences Sharing on Policies and Programmes to Prevent Child Marriage’, Mrs. Viplove Thakur, MP, said that “prevention of violence against women and girls and value of girls” can be better addressed in national policies and programmes. She also shared current efforts and national-level experiences on ending child marriage in India.

The Conference provided an opportunity for parliamentarians facing similar situations and challenges to exchange their experiences and knowledge on child marriage. Best practices on eliminating child marriage and effective models of monitoring systems, such as through national and sub-national action plans, were shared. The meeting encouraged parliamentarians and key stakeholders to examine existing laws and policies, to reflect how best they can be put into action, and recommend how the prevention of child marriage and other harmful practices can be better addressed in national policies and programmes.

At the conclusion of the meeting, 63 Members of Parliament from 13 countries in the Asia-Pacific Region adopted the Kathmandu Declaration to accelerate collective efforts both nationally and sub-regionally for ending early, child, and forced marriage.

The event also saw the launch of a new report: "Parliamentary Good Practices for Effective Implementation of Laws and Policies for Prevention of Child Marriage.” The report aims to address the root causes of child marriage, identify barriers and obstacles to the effective implementation of relevant laws and policies, and assess a variety of programmatic and policy approaches to address child marriage, with a particular focus on measurable, proven results.
G-7 Global Conference of Parliamentarians on Population and Development: Realizing Healthy Lives and Promoting Well-Being for All
April 26-27, 2016, Tokyo (Japan)

The Japan Parliamentarians Federation for Population (JPFP) and the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) co-organized the Global Conference of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (GCPPD) toward the 2016 G-7 Ise-Shima Summit, in cooperation with other regional parliamentarians’ fora and partners. The aim of the GCPPD was to solicit the commitment of global parliamentarians as well as the G-7 to achieving the fundamental goal enshrined in the 2030 Agenda, “to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment,” which is aligned with the critical principle of safeguarding human security.

130 parliamentarians from 65 countries gathered to discuss five thematic topics: (1) gender equality and women’s empowerment; (2) investing in youth; (3) building active aging societies; (4) infectious diseases and effective risk management systems; and (5) the role of parliamentarians in the SDGs era. Promoting Universal Health Coverage (UHC) throughout the world is a key instrument proposed at the GCPPD to tackle population and development challenges. The GCPPD also successfully adopted the Declaration and Recommendations to the 2016 G-7 Summit, which was handed over to the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Japan on 27 April 2016 prior to the 2016 G7 Summit.

An Indian delegation comprising Mrs. Viplove Thakur, MP; Dr. Vijaylaxmi Sadho, MP; Mr. Jugal Kishore Sharma, MP; and Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, IAPPD, represented IAPPD in the meeting.

The GCPPD was opened by high-level Japanese political leaders and the Executive Director of UNFPA. They all emphasized the importance of addressing population and development issues in achieving the SDGs in general, and the critical importance of women’s access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), in particular. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in his keynote address comprehensively set forth the critical issues that should be discussed at the GCPPD, ranging from UHC, health systems strengthening to eradicate poverty, global pandemics and infectious diseases, the critical role of governments to allocate financial resources to health, and the role of global parliamentarians in alleviating poverty by working with NGOs.

UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, in his address, ‘Human Security and the SDGs: How to Tackle Population Issues,’ argued that in the new era
for population and development with the advent of Agenda 2030, it is imperative to take the right to life as a fundamental human right. Given that Zika, Ebola, and anti-microbial resistance present new challenges, Prof. Keizo Takemi also argued that the most vulnerable populations, especially women and children, often suffer most from these challenges. He further commented that the continued achievements of UHC, national capacity-building and seamless cooperation among local, national, and global levels are critically important to ensure world health quality.

Prof. P.J. Kurien presenting mementos to Ms. Toshiko Abe and members of her group.

Visit of Ms. Toshiko Abe, former Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Japan
April 8, 2016

Ms. Toshiko Abe, former Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Japan called on Prof. P.J. Kurien, Hon'ble Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha (Upper House) on April 8, 2016. Ms. Noriko Shires, Secretary General, RESULTS, Japan and Dr. Sayako Kanamori, Director of Research, Japan Institute for Global Health were also present in the meeting. During the meeting, Prof. Kurien briefed Ms. Abe about the work being done in the field of gender equality and woman empowerment in India. He also informed her about the progress made by India in reducing the maternal mortality rate and infant mortality rate and the initiatives taken by India for supporting the girl child as well as improvements made in the area of reproductive health. Prof. Kurien also referred to the success achieved by India towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the efforts being made to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Ms. Toshiko Abe also visited the IAPPD Office and met with the TAC members of IAPPD. She was apprised about the activities being undertaken by IAPPD in the areas of health, population stabilization and environment. She was impressed about the activities of IAPPD and thanked for support extended by IAPPD during her stay in New Delhi.

Statement by Mr. Jugal Kishore Sharma, MP, India, during the GCPPD 2016:

Every Child Should be Educated to Remain Healthy: Because of unawareness, there is illiteracy, unemployment and ill health. To overcome this problem, we have to make sure that every newly born girl/daughter gets proper education. We have to see that every educated mother must give full attention to the education of their children. No girl who has come to this world should be uneducated. Skill is also another important factor for the development of any nation.

Mr. Tadamori Oshima with Ms. Divya Sharma
India has made enormous strides in the health sector over the past decades. The life expectancy has crossed 67 years, infant and under-five mortality rates are declining as is the rate of disease incidence. Many diseases, such as polio, guinea worm disease, yaws, and tetanus, have been eradicated.

Also of significant concern is the unacceptably high maternal mortality ratio (IMR) and infant mortality rate. The IMR, which was 81 in 1990, declined to 40 per 1,000 live births in 2015 (SRS 2015). This is still higher than the global average of 33. It is clear that while the mortality rates are declining, the rate of decline remains relatively slow, compared to that being achieved by other South Asian neighbours, with exception of Pakistan.

Health Challenges

In spite of this progress, many challenges still remain. For example, communicable diseases are expected to continue to pose a threat to national health security. Besides endemic diseases such as human immunodeficiency virus infection and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), tuberculosis (TB), malaria, and neglected tropical diseases, the communicable disease outbreaks and epidemics will continue to challenge public health, requiring high level of readiness in terms of early detection and rapid response. In this regard, vector-borne diseases, such as dengue and acute encephalitis syndrome, are of particular concern. Antimicrobial resistance is one of the biggest health challenges facing humanity.

To make health system battle ready, a paradigm shift in our approach is needed. The following are some suggestions for consideration:

First, given the centrality of health in economic development, public health should be given a high priority. Nation can develop only if its people are healthy. We must therefore invest more on health and recognize that prevention is always better than cure. Consequently, government health expenditure on health should increase from 1.3% of GDP at present to at least 2.5% before the end of 13th Five-Year Plan (2013-19). All political parties should consider making public health as one the election issues, by including it in their election manifestos and talking about health in election addresses, such as is done in Brazil.

Second, we should ensure that people, especially the poor, do not have to bear health expenditure from their own pockets. The low government investment in health and the high
out-of-pocket expenditure (86%), nearly 60 million people are pushed further into poverty. The lack of focus on quality of health care in the government facilities leads to underutilization of services, driving people to the private sector. To make the health services responsive to the needs of the community, it is necessary to improve the functioning of the existing government health infrastructure, especially at the primary care level. For this, public health workforce is key. India has to address the challenges posed by the low density of health workforce and hospital beds, and gross misdistribution between rural and urban areas. To enhance skill training activities, health can leverage with and benefit from the national skill development mission launched by the Prime Minister in August 2015.

Third, focusing on evidence, excellence, and equity, an efficient and effective health system requires credible evidence to guide public health policy and plan, quality in service delivery and programme performance, and ensuring that the health services reach the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the society. Besides policy, the programmes also should have inbuilt mechanism to ensure transparency and fixing accountability. Public health system should be managed by well trained workforce, without unnecessary interference.

Fourth, leveraging technology to transform public health. Modern technology has great potential in connecting remote areas with national centers of excellence or patients in villages with doctors in hospitals in urban areas by establishing a network of telemedicine services, mother and child tracking, and web-based disease registration schemes. In line with the Digital India Scheme, mobile technology holds enormous promise for enhancing communication and education, rapid data collection and transmission, follow up on chronic disease treatments, and for emergency response.

Finally, empowering health leadership and forging inter-sectoral collaboration. Health is not the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare alone, but it requires an inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary approach. Uniquely, the role of the government is to formulate policies, plan services, and coordinate activities. It also has mobilizing and facilitating roles. It should reach out to the sectors other than health sector to develop a consensus on national policies and to build partnership between different sectors for better service delivery.

European Parliamentarians' Study Tour to India
February 7-13, 2016, New Delhi

A delegation of Parliamentarians’ from France, Italy, Denmark and Finland along with senior officials from IPPF – South Asian Region, Delhi; and Family Planning Association of India (FPA, India) Mumbai called on Prof. P.J. Kurien, Hon’ble Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha and Chairman, IAPPD/Vice-Chairman, AFPPD on 9th February, 2016. The purpose of the study tour was to showcase interim and long term solutions to improve Reproductive, Maternal, New Born, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH) of the most vulnerable population particularly women and girls.

Prof. Kurien briefed the delegates about the work being done in the field of gender equality and woman empowerment in India. He also informed them about the progress made by India in reducing the maternal mortality rate, fertility rate and infant mortality rate. Prof. Kurien also shared the initiatives taken by India for supporting the girl child as well as the improvement made in the area of reproductive health. He appreciated the contribution made by the European nations, United Nations and NGOs in this regard. Prof. Kurien also referred to the success achieved by India towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals as well as the efforts being made to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The delegates also provided inputs regarding the work being carried out in their respective countries in this field.

Parliamentarians’ Meet on
‘Population, Development and Reproductive Rights’
May 11, 2016, Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi

To discuss the issues of population stabilization and reproductive rights and development frame work, Parliamentarians’ Meet on ‘Population Development, and Reproductive Rights’ was jointly organized by the Family Planning Association of India (FPAI) and IPPF, South Asia Regional Office on May 11, 2016 at Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, IAPPD mobilized the Parliamentarians to participate and share their vast experience on population stabilization and reproductive health and rights in the developmental framework.

Active Members of Parliament associated with IAPPD, Mrs. Viplove Thakur; Dr. Vijaylaxmi Sadho; Mr. Ananda Bhaskar Rapolu; Mr. Jugal Kishore Sharma; Mr. Thupstan Chhewang; Mr. Narayan Lal Panchariya; Mr. Sharad Kumar Bansode and Dr. Kirit Premjibhai Solanki attended the meeting and shared their views on population, development and reproductive rights.
Discussion on Post ICPD/MDGs now SDGs
February 12, 2016, New Delhi

A meeting to discuss ‘Post ICPD/MDGs now SDGs’ and to welcome Hon’ble Mr. Virendra Sharma, a Senior Member of Parliament of United Kingdom, and a very active member of the European Parliamentary Forum, Belgium (EPF), was organised jointly by the Population Foundation of India and IAPPD in New Delhi on February 12, 2016. The objective of the meeting was to discuss and to educate the MPs on issues related to population stabilization and health in India. 9 Members of Parliament and 4 senior officials of PFI and IAPPD attended the meeting. The meeting was chaired by Smt. Viplove Thakur, MP; Vice-Chairperson, IAPPD.

A presentation on overview on Family Planning and Women’s Health was made by Population Foundation of India, highlighting the issues like Family Planning Saving Women’s lives, maternal mortality in India, Family Planning unmet need and unsafe abortions, linkage; early marriage and family planning, women’s health and family planning, current India’s spending on family planning, and India’s Family Planning 2020 commitment.

Visit of Shri Virendra Sharma, MP, United Kingdom to IAPPD
February 13, 2016, New Delhi

Mr. Virendra Sharma, Member of Parliament, United Kingdom, visited IAPPD office on February 13, 2016 and met with the Technical Advisory Committee members and other invitees. During the visit, Mr. Sharma was apprised about the activities being carried out by the IAPPD in the area of health and population stabilization. The TAC members shared their views with the visiting dignitary on Post-ICPD/MDGs and now SDGs. Mr. Virendra Sharma was also apprised about the collaborative efforts of IAPPD and The Union working together on eradication of Tuberculosis in India.

Mr. Yoganand Shastri, Ex-Speaker, Delhi Assembly and Mr. Madan Lal Sharma, Member of Legislative Assembly, Delhi Government and Technical Experts, senior officials of The Union and Civil Society members attended the meeting.

Mr. Manmohan Sharma apprised the chief guest Mr. Virendra Sharma, MP (UK); Mr. Madan Lal Sharma, MLA, Assembly of Delhi and other guests that the main theme of organizing advocacy workshop/seminar at National level for MPs, at State level for MLAs and district level for elected representatives (PRIs) is to sensitize them in the context of Population Stabilization in India and health issues so that they utilise the information to increase awareness among the masses at their own constituency levels campaigns.

The Chief Guest, special guests and other present in the meeting were very appreciative of the work done by the IAPPD and its proposed activities in the area of TB-Free India and population and development related issues including family planning and maternal health issues. Mr. Virendra Sharma while appreciating the activities of IAPPD, promised to contribute in whatever possible ways in efforts for making India TB-Free.
International Conference on Male Involvement in Women’s Sexual and Reproductive Health: Evidences, Actions and Possibilities
February 28-March 2, 2016, Mumbai

The International Conference on Male Involvement in Improving Women’s Sexual and Reproductive Health: Evidences, Actions and Possibilities held during February 28-March 2, 2016 in Mumbai, was organized by National Institute of Reproductive Health (NIRRH), Mumbai. The Conference was inaugurated by Dr. R.S. Sharma, Head, Division of Reproductive Biology and Maternal Health, ICMR, as the Chief Guest. Dr. Samita Mahale, Director, NIRRH and Convenor of the Conference welcomed the delegates. Summarising the research programmes of the Institute, particularly the decade long research work on male involvement in improving the reproductive health of women, she called upon programme managers, policy makers, women’s health activists, health care providers, human rights groups, and research scholars for active deliberation in the Conference.

Dr. Ravi Verma, Regional Director, ICRW and the Chairperson of the Scientific Programme Committee presented the objectives and overview of the scientific programme. Dr. R. S. Sharma, Head, Division of Reproductive Biology and Maternal Health, in his Inaugural Address put forth the issues related to women’s health where men could make the difference.

The Conference saw national and international researchers, government, academic, NGO representatives, medical and socio-behavioural scientists portraying their research findings in areas like safe motherhood, child health, gender based violence, adolescent reproductive health, family planning and abortions. Issues deliberated at length with multidisciplinary team included anaemia, how men could make a difference in improving women’s health, media and new age technology for promoting male involvement. Programme evaluation and advocacy issues were also deliberated.

Shri Ananda Bhaskar Rapolu, MP; Shri Uttamsingh Pawar, Ex-MP; and Shri Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, represented IAPPD in the Conference. IAPPD surmised the lacunae in the system, the progress of the programmes and the corrective steps and issues taken up by the government to bring about the change.

In his valedictory address, Mr. Uttamsingh Pawar, Ex-MP, urged the audience that every man should take it up as one’s own responsibility to bring about a change at the individual, family, societal, and community level. Also, women should influence their sons, brothers and other male members in the household for the persistence of change. Mr. Ananda Bhaskar Rapolu, MP, in his address briefed on the issues that needed urgent attention like society nuances of gender-based violence, rape, self protection among women and girls, understanding of basic safe and unsafe touch by children, mass media and technology for dissemination of realistic information, health care facilities for men, role of men in family planning programmes and improving the health of women using a life cycle approach.

Group photo of the participants.
Discussion on Family Planning and Maternal Health Issues in India
May 4, 2016, New Delhi

A short one-to-one meeting for discussing Family Planning and Maternal Health Issues in India was jointly organized by the IAPPD and Population Foundation of India, on May 4, 2016, in Hotel Shangrila, New Delhi.

Hon'ble Members of Parliament Mrs. Viplove Thakur; Dr. Vijaylaxmi Sadho; Mr. Jugal Kishore Sharma and five senior officials of IAPPD and PFI attended the meeting.

Mrs. Viplove Thakur, MP praised the efforts of PFI and advised to hold similar kind of consultations with the district medical staff who are the real implementers of the family planning programme in India. She also said that the parliamentarians are conscious of the issues raised by the PFI and they are striving for more fund allocations and better programme implementation.

Lunch Meeting with Parliamentarians Towards a TB-Free India
May 11, 2016, New Delhi

A meeting with Members of Parliament towards a TB-free India was jointly organized by IAPPD in collaboration with The Union on May 11, 2016 in New Delhi. Mrs. Viplove Thakur, MP; Mr. Ananda Bhaskar Rapolu, MP, and 5 senior officials of IAPPD and The Union were present in the meeting.

The main agenda of the meeting was to seek Parliamentarians’ support in Call of Action as champions of TB and signing the Barcelona Declaration of Global TB causes. The Barcelona Declaration is the founding document of the Global TB causes. In the meeting, a Call of Action for a TB-Free India was made. It called for increased efforts to control TB through innovative policies and new strategies and pleaded to raise awareness and domestic resources to end TB in India.

Project on Engagement of Parliamentarians ‘Realizing Commitments to Family Planning in India’
May 12, 2016, New Delhi

A meeting of project on ‘Engagement of Parliamentarians on Realizing Commitments to Family Planning in India’ was organized jointly by IAPPD and Population Foundation of India on May 12, 2016 in New Delhi. The agenda of the meeting was to discuss issues related to family planning and maternal health in India. Mr. Anand Bhaskar Rapolu, MP; Mr. Laxmi Narain Yadav, MP; and Mr. Baishnav Parida, MP, attended the meeting.

Dr. Nitin Bajpai and Ms. Simeen Kaleem from Population Foundation of India presented the current scenario of family planning in the country. Mr. Manmohan Sharma, Executive Secretary, IAPPD, also participated in the meeting. During the meeting, issues related to unmet need of family planning, unsafe abortions, linkages between early marriage and family planning, women’s health and family planning were discussed at length.
Statement of Mrs. Viplove Thakur, MP, in Rajya Sabha (Upper House of Parliament) on the occasion of Women’s Day
March 8, 2016

Right now, our senior member Najma ji, who had been our guiding force also, spoke well, but I want to say that this day should not be celebrated only like a ritual. Every year 8th March comes and we gather here to celebrate Women’s Day and express our views, but in practice nothing happens. I request you all not to celebrate this day as a formality but every one of us should work in our respective constituency for sensitizing the local masses about the importance of this day. They should be sensitized to take care of the health of their mother, wife, sister and the daughter. They should ask them if they need a doctor. If a man become ill or having a minor headache, he starts shouting whereas if a woman become ill, she quietly engages herself in her household work. I request you all that we talk about ‘women empowerment’ but if the health of our women is not good then, how can they be empowered?

Now I am going to raise a very serious issue i.e. Child Marriage. As per the UNICEF report, in our country, particularly in Jharkhand, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, which are tribal areas, child marriage is prevailing till today. When we visited the states with high prevalence of child marriage and presented the report, we were pained that we are still connected with child marriage. The child who got married do not know that what is happening with them, why are they decorated with ornaments and why their parents bring them to the marriage venue (pandal/Bedi). They are not aware about all these but they are forced for this.

Sir, I want to tell our brothers in Uttar Pradesh sitting here that in U.P. there is a district called Srawasti where still child marriage exists. According to a report, about 85 per cent of child marriages still take place in this district. I agree with the statement of Mr. Nareshji that this statement is wrong, but if this is correct then find out its solution and solve it. This is not a small issue. Today on the one hand, we talk about women’s empowerment but on the other hand, little girls are getting married at a very early age. We must think to eliminate this problem.