

Population First

E-newsletter: January - 2018

Hope the New Year brings good tidings for all of us in the form of resources and support to further the causes we are working for!

Some good news for Laadli!



Tweet by Akshay Kumar:-

“Bid for this “Padman” cycle featured in my movie on www.bidkartz.com and the proceedings go for supporting women empowerment to “Laadli - a girl child campaign by Population First”

The actor in his tweet extending his support for *Laadli*, a girl child Campaign of Population First, announced the auction of the most talked about Bicycle from the “Padman” Movie. The Bicycle will be auctioned live at www.bidkartz.com and the proceeds will go straight for the noble cause of *Laadli*. The Superstar also made an appeal on his social media handle. This has been a one of its kind initiative taken by Bidkartz, an online fundraising platform by means of live auction.”

<https://twitter.com/akshaykumar/status/954573313778573314?s=08>

https://m.facebook.com/profile.php?id=20143593282&ref=content_filter#!/story.php?story_fbid=10155697247473283&id=20143593282&_tn_=%2As%2As-R

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Financial Express covered this wonderful initiative by Akshay Kumar:

<http://www.financialexpress.com/entertainment/padman-cycle-to-be-auctioned-akshay-kumar-twinkle-khanna-to-raise-funds-for-menstrual-hygiene/1024369/>

PadMan cycle to be auctioned! Akshay Kumar, Twinkle Khanna to raise funds for menstrual hygiene

The reason why Akshay and Twinkle chose this NGO was that not only do they work for women's rights but they also campaign for health and sanitation facilities for females across India.

By: FE Online | Published: January 21, 2018 10:20 PM

Menstrual Health in India

As all of us know menstrual health and hygiene are some of the taboo subjects in our country and girls are not even prepared for the changes that their bodies go through at puberty. Neither family nor schools are open to discussions about a cycle that is a natural phenomenon and which every girl and woman has to experience every month. They are not provided with any healthcare or hygienic solutions to cope with the bleeding and pain that they have to endure during the cycle. Instead they are burdened with a lot of myths and superstitions which add to their discomfort. Majority of women cannot use sanitary pads and make do with old cloth rags which are also washed and used again and again, without even proper space for drying them properly. In rural areas some women still resort to pads made out of cloth and ash or saw dust. They do not even have access to proper toilets and disposal facilities due to poor sanitation and cultural practices.

A study found that 71% of girls in India report having no knowledge of menstruation before their first period. At menarche, schoolgirls in Jaipur, Rajasthan report their dominant feelings to be shock (25%), fear (30%), anxiety (69%), guilt (22%), and frustration (22%). Further, 70% of women in India say their family cannot afford to buy sanitary pads. 8 And in 2012, 40% of all government schools lacked a functioning common toilet, and another 40% lacked a separate toilet for girls. 9 (FSG - Menstrual Health in India: Country Landscape Analysis - http://menstrualhygieneday.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/FSG-Menstrual-Health-Landscape_India.pdf)

It has also been observed that after the onset of menstruation the mobility of girls gets severely restricted and they even drop out of school.

The movie "PadMan" is based on the real life story of Arunachalam Muruganatham who decided to invent sanitary napkins that would be affordable and comfortable as well as hygienic for women after seeing his wife using unhygienic rags every month during

Population First

her menstrual cycle. The result was the development of a prototype of a pad-making machine, made at the cost of just \$ 950 whereas the original imported one cost \$ 5,00,000. This machine is easy to operate and produces low cost pads. He has created a record of sorts by selling 1,300 machines to 27 states and now he is also exporting them to other developing countries. (<https://yourstory.com/2017/12/padman-bollywood-real-story/>)

While the idea for the movie “PadMan” was Twinkle Khanna’s it has Akshay Kumar, Sonam Kapoor and Radhika Apte as its main stars. It has been directed by R. Balki and produced by Twinkle Khanna.

We hope it will contribute immensely towards breaking the silence and taboos surrounding menstruation and help to improve the menstrual hygiene of women throughout the country thus saving them from serious ailments caused by neglect of the same.

~

Running for our Laadlis

First and foremost we wish to thank all those who have supported the cause of Gender Equality, Community Development and the girl child by supporting *Laadli* in the 15th Edition of the Mumbai Marathon held on 21st January, 2018, sponsored by Tata Sons Ltd. and co-sponsored by Tata Consultancy Services.

Laadli wishes to say a big Thank You to all of you!



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Tata Mumbai Marathon

The streets of South Mumbai, which usually wear a deserted look on Sunday mornings, were abuzz with the sound of people calling out and cars honking even before the break of dawn last Sunday. This was because of the crowd of runners hastening to reach Azad Maidan to participate in the Tata Mumbai Marathon, held on Sunday the 21st of January, 2018.

There were different races like the Dream Run, The Half and Full Marathon, the 10 Km. Run, the Senior Citizens race, the Elite run and so on. People were running to support causes like Girls' Education, Menstrual Hygiene for Girls, Men's Rights, Animal Welfare and so on and of course members of *Laadli*, the flagship project of Population First, were running to support the cause of the Girl Child.

It was good to see people from all walks of life, different socio-economic strata, different age groups, different genders and also differently abled people unite and converge on Azad Maidan to participate in this great unifier, the Mumbai Marathon. In the current age of growing intolerance created with political intentions it was a pleasure to see people rubbing shoulders without bothering about which caste, community, religion, class or gender the person running alongside belonged to.

Mumbaikars lined the streets along the route of the Marathon to cheer the runners along. The weather too was pleasant and many first timers also discovered that they could push themselves to complete their run in order to promote a cause.

We ran for the girl child and want every girl child to be cherished and given equal opportunities. They should be protected from abuse and made aware and capable of speaking out against injustice. It is a cause that is close to our hearts and we look forward to your sustained support and encouragement.

A Big Thank You to Our Supporters!

IRB Infrastructure Developers Ltd., Rahul Gandhe, Pradeep Mallick, Nivedita Chalill, Mark S Fernandes, Tina Mehta, K V Sridhar, Sanjay V Mallik, Mitul J Vora, Anthony Louis Gomes, B P Vijayendra, Ameer Yajnik, Anil khandelwal, Abha Sharma, Raghunandan Maluste, Srinivas Kumar Alamuru, Rama Kumari Alamuru, Seth Kearsasp Meherjibhoy Mistry Public Charitable, Ameeta Shah & Sanjay Shah, Jaswant Sarvaiya, Zeba Home Private Ltd, Ashoo Talwar, Shivani Bommakanty, Rohit Yogendra Amin, Ilaben Mahendrabhai Vakharia, Santosh Desai, Sashi Bommakanty, Uma Bommakanty, Manjusha Kalavapudi, Asokan Arumugam, Ravikant Sabnavis, Bhanu Kiran, Aarefa Johari, Dr Aravind Pulikkal, Kaushik Roy, N Dutta, Sushma Narain, Anuja Gulati, Amarendra Mohan, Rajesh Shaiva, Meher Bijlani Hiru Kishinchand Bijlani, Sarah P Philip, J.F.Ribeiro, Vaishnavi Tallury, Naheed Sorabjee, Indira Rajeshwar Rao, Harita Bhavin Talati, Smita Pagnis, Rakhi Ghosh, Rajeshwari Gopalkrishna Hegde, C Thulasamma, Anuradha Rajan, Vaidehi Ranganathan, Nidhi Jamwal, Srikrishna Nedunuri, Nandita Jayaraj, Maheshwar Singh Rajput, Nilesh Patel, Sonal Jain, Milind Borkar, Mehboob Shaikh;

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The *Laadli* & AMCHI teams with our sponsors IRB Infrastructure Development rocking it by spreading the message of Gender Equality loud and clear!



A Big Thanks to IRB Infrastructure Developers Ltd. who have been supporting us for the last several years

Reproductive Rights of Women

On January 12th, 2018 we organized a one day workshop on the Reproductive Rights of Women, as the Maharashtra partner of the Pratigya Campaign for Gender Equality and Safe Abortion.

Pratigya is a campaign for 'Gender Equality and Safe Abortion', launched in January 2013, having its secretariat at Delhi. The Campaign is committed to promoting women's rights and access to safe abortion in India. It advocates striking a balance between enabling women's access to safe abortion and in dealing with gender discrimination in society that is the root cause of sex selection. The campaign points out that the issue of sex selection gets conflated

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with abortion access, often driving women to seek abortions from unregistered providers, thus putting themselves at the risk of morbidity and at times even mortality caused by an unsafe abortion. The campaign wishes to highlight that firstly access to safe abortion is a woman's right and second that sex selection must be curtailed by preventing sex determination which is illegal and by trying to change the patriarchal mindset that is responsible for son preference.

The workshop held at YWCA, Colaba, was attended by 16 representatives from different NGOs. The aim of the workshop was to expand the partner base of the Pratigya Campaign in Maharashtra and involve more organisations to contribute towards increasing awareness about safe abortion and be part of the advocacy for safe abortion rights for women. Population First which has been working on different aspects of Gender Justice and is a champion of women's rights had organized this workshop as the Maharashtra Partner of the Pratigya Campaign for Gender Equality and Safe Abortion and Ujjwala Mhatre spoke as the representative of the state level Pratigya Campaign.

Mr. Sista, Executive Trustee of Population First and our Advocacy & Communication Manager, Ujjwala Mhatre conducted the inaugural session of the workshop by introducing Population First and setting the context of the workshop. It was stated how preventing sex determination and making safe abortion accessible to women were both equally important steps for gender justice. Yet it was observed that often the over-zealous attempts to curb sex determination tended to infringe on the right of women to safe abortion, leading them to avail of unsafe and illegal abortions putting their own health and lives at risk. The Guttmacher study on abortion estimates, published in the Lancet on the 11th of December, 2017, the first comprehensive national study of the incidence of abortion and unintended pregnancy in India which brought forth some startling data was discussed. (Points shared by us in our last newsletter) It was pointed out that we needed to look at the two laws, the MTP Act and the PCPNDT Act as distinct from each other, create awareness about them and make sure that the implementation of the PCPNDT Act did not infringe upon the right of women to safe and legal abortion.



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The following sessions were conducted by Ms. Anuja Gulati, State Program Officer for Maharashtra, United Nations Population Fund, Dr. Suchitra Dalvie, prominent, practicing gynaecologist, Coordinator for the Asia Safe Abortion Partnership and Steering Committee Member for “CommonHealth”, Prerna Puri, External Communication & Advocacy Coordinator at FRHS India and Pratigya Campaign Secretariat Coordinator, Dr. Shilpa Shroff - a doctor by profession and an active member of the Asia Safe Abortion Partnership and Dr. A. L. Sharada – Director of Population First.

Anuja Gulati conducted a comprehensive session on Sex Selection dwelling on the patriarchal mindset that led to gender discrimination in turn leading to son preference in society. She began the session with the unmet need for contraception which in turn led to unwanted pregnancies and highlighted the fact that even today the major responsibility for contraception was assigned to women. The government family planning programs also targeted women in their propaganda. It has also been observed that men do not like to use condoms and the percentage of non-scalpel vasectomies has also come down. She also spoke about the appalling conditions under which female sterilizations were carried out with no privacy and people walking in and out while the sterilization was in process. A government study conducted in 2016 showed that in 30% cases there was no privacy, in 42% cases the door was left open, in 17% cases permission for a permanent procedure was not taken. Within one month of the study Govt. of Maharashtra took it upon themselves to ensure 100 % compliance to WHO standards.

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She also traced the history of the PCPNDT Act describing how it was an outcome of protests by women's organizations against the falling sex ratio highlighted in the 2001 census. Diagnostic techniques were being misused to find out the sex of the foetus and the pregnancy continued only if the foetus was found to be a male one. Enacted as the PNDT act in 1994 initially, later it was amended in 2003 to include the prevention of pre-conception sex selection and called the PCPNDT Act.

While it was important to curb the practice of sex determination with the help of this legislation the implementation of this act was done in such a manner that doctors providing abortion services were persecuted on the suspicion that the abortions were sex selective abortions and thus the right of women to abortion started to get compromised. They were either denied abortion or asked to have a tubectomy after a MTP. Pills for medical abortion were also tracked going against the right to privacy of a woman seeking an abortion.

She also spoke at length on the fact that media had an important role to play in the messages being sent out regarding sex selection and abortion. She explained that communication related to prevention of sex determination should be carefully worded and appropriate imagery used so that it does not end up going against the right of women to safe and legal abortion. Terms like female foeticide should not be used and images showing a full grown foetus in the womb stabbed with a dagger etc. should not be shown as these suggested that abortion was equivalent to murder, which it isn't. Unless a foetus is able to survive on its own outside the uterus it cannot be called a child as it does not have life and unless a woman delivers a child she cannot be called a mother. Some of these facts were a learning experience for the participants.

Prerna Puri from the Pratigya Secretariat spoke about the need for the Pratigya Campaign, its objectives and goals, the need for clarifying how abortion and sex selection are distinct, the operation and intent of the campaign and the purpose of the NGO meeting. She appealed to all the participants that all the NGOs needed to actively participate in the campaign to really fetch good results and make an impact on society.



Dr. Shilpa Shroff did an interactive and thought stimulating session on Value clarification related to abortion and sex selection. She did an interesting exercise in which a statement was put up and everybody was asked to take a stand for or against it. They would be asked to stand in two different groups accordingly.

The logo for 'Population First' features the words 'Population First' in a large, bold, red font. The background is filled with a dense, overlapping pattern of the same words in various sizes and orientations, creating a textured effect.

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For example: Statement – “Young unmarried women should be required to get their parents’ consent in order to have an abortion” or “Liberal abortion laws lead to more irresponsible sexual behaviour, especially among young women”. Participants were at times quite confused when they were asked to take sides for or against a certain decision and had to really re-examine their values. For example, “A husband should have the right to divorce his wife if she has had an abortion without his knowledge or consent.” It was fun to see the participants changing sides as they examined their values. The conflation of the issues of abortion and sex selection in our own minds was also explained by asking us to take a stand on the statement – “Reproductive rights include the choice to select the sex of the baby”. The political economy of abortion and sex determination was also pointed out, the latter being a lucrative business due to son preference and abortion not being such a profitable service.

The concluding session included a presentation by Dr. Sharada on – The Way Forward: Pratigya Campaign activities planned in Maharashtra by Population First. Each of the representatives of different organizations was asked to state what they could do to take this initiative forward. Most of them said they would be interested in sharing the information they had got from this workshop with the community they were working with.

Prerna which works with the children of victims of sexual exploitation in the red light areas voiced their concern that the girls and women they worked with had no idea about rights or laws for women. They suggested that we could conduct sessions for those women to make them aware of their reproductive rights and Dr. Sharada suggested that at least measures like distribution of contraceptive pills could be undertaken.

Vishal from *Dilaasa*, an initiative to give relief to victims of violence, run by CEHAT, suggested that we could reach out to the doctors who are a part of the 13 crisis centres run by them to take our discussion forward.

Bindiya from FPAI said that we should meet regularly and plan how we can have sensitization and awareness campaigns with doctors, pharmacists, community and at the government level.

The workshop ended on the positive note that all the organisations needed to keep in touch and work together as partners in the Pratigya Campaign to create an environment in which a correct message to prevent sex determination was disseminated and safe abortion would be made accessible to women as a right.

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