

See our World

Youth Brigade ...for the right to survive!

An essential part of Plan's work is to help create spaces for children and young people to discuss

There are only 7 girls for every 10 boys born in many villages and towns of India. It is estimated that parents knowingly abort thousands of girls every year. This has serious implications on the health of the mother, the family, society at large and the status of women in India. The constitution guarantees equality and the law prohibits the practice of testing the sex of the foetus for the purpose of eliminating the female. The law provides for an imprisonment and fine.

Dear Sponsors,

We are a group of youth in the Hardoi district of the state of Uttar Pradesh. Apart from the common socio-economic problems that most rural areas in India face, our area is facing a new problem - **a huge drop in the female population!** We have heard stories of girls being purchased for marriages in other parts of the world, we thought it would not affect us. To our astonishment, we are now seeing the same thing happening in our area. We are, a little belatedly, realising that the boys in marriageable age in our area are finding it difficult to find girls. Recently, one of our neighbours married a woman who did not even speak our language. Once she picked up our language, she told us that her husband bought her for Rs. 20,000 and she was forced to abort twice when she carried female foetuses.

In our society, like in most patriarchal societies a boy child is preferred for socio-economic, cultural and religious reasons. Boys are considered to be the bread winners who provide financial support to parents in their old age; they continue the family lineage and perform social and religious rites, including the last rites for parents. On the other hand, daughters are considered physically and socially inferior and seen as burdens to the family as they have to be given away in marriage with huge dowries. The rigidity of these beliefs is evident by a statement made by the *Pradhan* – the elected chief of the village:

“Raising a girl child is just like watering a neighbour's field.”



Vatsalya, a non-government organisation, and Plan work for the development of our area. They work with adults as well as the youth to spread awareness on issues affecting our lives and to help us arrive at possible solutions. Through our interactions with them, we realised that the decreasing number of girls in our area is a result of the easy access to **sex determination tests** during pregnancy. Despite the laws against these tests, clinics offering sex determination tests through portable ultrasound machines are flourishing.

Vatsalya-Plan designed a project called '**Kopal**' (a shoot or a bud) to address the problems by creating awareness on **female foeticide**, on the **importance of birth registration** to be able to track the sex ratio, on the **Prohibition of Sex selection by the law** and on **Registration Of Births And Deaths Act**. The Kopal project team, along with several other **NGOs**, **the Government** and **our community** including the **youth** is

developing areas as '**demonstration models**' in terms of **sex ratio** and **birth registrations**. So far, 48 such model villages have been developed. Various discussions are held with our **community members**, especially **women's groups**, to encourage them to introspect on the dangerous implication of sex determination tests and the consequences of the reducing number of women. The religious leaders have been given orientations.

“When ever I am performing the religious rituals related to birth, deaths, weddings or forecasting auspicious



dates for rituals, I use the opportunity to talk about the reducing number of women and birth registration too, especially while I am making a horoscope for a newly born.” - Yogendra Mishra, the village priest, 40 years old

“I want to work in an Ultra Sound centre, even if I am paid less to be able to ensure that no illegal tests are taking place.”

- Kausa Devi, women’s group member

We the members of the **youth groups** are playing an important role in making people as well as the **government and the media** aware of the dire consequences of the growing practice of killing female foetuses. We organise **rallies** and **group meetings**, encourage people to take **oath against this evil practice**, we keep a **vigil on pregnant women** in the village and **counsel the family members**, put up **boards** with information on sex ratio and status of birth registration and conduct **signature campaigns against sex determination tests and Female Foeticide** *“As the representative of my youth group, I attended a training by the Kopal project and began to discuss the decreasing number of girls and the importance of the birth registration in my village. I personally have got 35 births registered in the last three months.”* - Vinita, 19 years old

We have been able to influence **District Advisory Committee** to monitor closely the implementation of laws on sex selection. The community workers are being given **incentives to register births**. Orientations to media people and the stories published on Female foeticide and Birth Registration have helped greatly in reducing the illegal sex determination tests and in increasing awareness among our people. The number of birth registrations has improved from 25% to more than 50% to 100% and the sex ratio is also improving. **Cases of sex selection are being reported and action is being taken to prevent and penalise them.** The district of Gumla is an example of a successful partnership with the government. It has the highest number of birth registrations - close to 90% of the births. The deputy commissioners of the two neighbouring districts have also promised to bring their areas to the same level. The government of the state of Jharkhand has declared the year 2008 as **‘Save The Girl Child Year.’**



The Way Ahead

Although the achievements are encouraging, we realise we still have a long way to go. We aim to bring together more lawyers, media people, government officials and volunteers from different paths of life to get better legal support and to be able to reach out to more people and convince them more strongly. **We have begun the journey and are confident that we will get there...eventually!**

“...as long as the birth of a girl does not receive the

group members during various consultations with the project staff.

This document has been prepared by Richa Silakari and Vijay Rai (India Country Office) based on the views expressed by the youth-