

Empowering women with a rights-based approach to family planning

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New Delhi: Recognising the need for participation in family planning and reproductive health by the private sector, Federation of Obstetric and Gynaecological Societies of India (FOGSI) and Population Foundation of India (PFI) organised a meeting to discuss the role of the public-private partnership model that would expand access to family planning.

The meeting proposed collective action to work on a rights-based approach to family planning to empower women. The discussion was led by Mr P D Rai, Member of Parliament from Sikkim, Dr Sanjay Jaiswal Member of Parliament from Paschim Champaran (Bihar), Dr. CN Purandare President of FIGO, Dr Rishma Dhillon Pai, President of FOGSI, Dr HD Pai, Secretary General of FOGSI, Dr Teja Ram, Deputy Commissioner Family Planning, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, and Poonam Muttreja, Executive Director, PFI. The experts discussed possible ways to expand the role of organisations like FOGSI and private practitioners in ensuring universal access to quality family planning.

“The future of our country is in family planning, as family planning is not about controlling the population but about empowering women and improving maternal and child health. As committed medical practitioners and members of FOGSI, we have a shared responsibility in making public health accessible to the public – especially when it comes to family planning and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Women’s healthcare is a fundamental right and a collective effort will help women achieve India’s larger FP2020 vision,” said Dr Pai.

Mr PD Rai, Member of Parliament, spoke of the need for increased collaboration between private practitioners, social franchising organisations, civil society organisations, and the government. “We can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the FP 2020 vision by bringing civil societies’ ideas together with FOGSI’s technical expertise and the will and backing of engaged and concerned parliamentarians,” he said, while reinforcing his commitment to a rights-based approach to family planning.

“History has, unfortunately, stigmatised family planning in our country. Today, there are an increasing number of adolescents who need family planning counselling, advice on contraceptives and cannot access it. Family planning is not only about reducing the population but can also make a major dent in maternal mortality, especially in the developing world. Just by using appropriate spacing methods maternal mortality can be reduced drastically,” said Dr CN Purandare, President of the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) who was also present at the meeting.

Releasing a short film on family planning that featured Dr Sneha Mathur from the hit DD show Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon or I, A Woman Can Achieve Anything, Poonam Muttreja highlighted the need to empower women. “One of the most significant ways to empower women is to give them control of their bodies, to create an enabling environment for them to make concrete decisions concerning their sexual and reproductive rights. We can fulfil our global commitments of SDG and FP 2020 if we work together. A three-way partnership between FOGSI, civil society organisations including PFI, and the Government of India will foster innovation of ideas to reach the 48 million users and empower women to take control of their sexual and reproductive health.”

In closing, FOGSI President Dr Rishma Dhillon Pai said, “This has been a wonderful, sensitising meeting and if we keep this pace going we are out to change India.”