**Executive summary**

**of**

**End term evaluation of theproject,‘Ensuring reproductive rights for women’**

The PFI(The Population Foundation of India)- SUTRA project was a three year project from April 2012- March 2015 for a total budget of Rs. 1,72,61,250/-The project was aspirational and innovative in its approach to address the issues of declining child sex ratio and for ensuring the reproductive health of the women.

The project strategies drew upon the community based approaches and building accountability of the formal and informal institutions in the gram panchayat to address the declining child sex ration in their respective wards.

Its coverage:The project was implemented by SUTRA, as a lead organization, in partnership with 5 NGO partnersin 300 gram panchayats in two blocks each of 5 districts of Himachal Pradesh - Kangra, Mandi, Sirmaur, Solan and Una.

**Objectives of the project:**

Ensure reproductive rights that would result in better reproductive health, improved sex ratio at birth, and increased adoption of non-terminal methods of family planning.

**Expected outcomes of the project:**

1. Reduction of sex selective abortion
2. Increased use of spacing methods
3. Increased knowledge of safe abortion among women who want to exercise their right to abort
4. People’s movement built against sex selective abortions and women’s rights to safe abortion safeguarded in select areas of HP

**End line Evaluation objectives:**

- Assess the impact of the project through the realisation of planned outcomes and outputs using the Standard Evaluation Framework – Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability and Impact

- Draw from the best practices emerging from the current phase of the project.

- Suggest Recommendations for future programming, replication and scaling up.

**Evaluation Approach:**

Qualitative approach based ‘Domains of Change analytical framework’ (adapted by Aruna Rao and David Kelleher for Gender@Work) was used for the evaluation. It focused on looking at the resultsandlocated the changes that have occurred in the domains of informal and formal and at individual to systemic level.

For the evaluation field areas of 3 implementing partners including SUTRA was visited by the evaluation team of Vandana Mahajan and ShivaniBharadwaj. 2 Gram Panchayats (GPs) were visited for conducting Focused group discussions (FGDs) and In depth Interviews (IDIs)in the field areas of each of the three partner organizations.

## Framework for evaluation of the SUTRA-PFI Project

**Individual**

**Outcome3:**

Increased knowledge of safe abortion among women

**Outcome2:**

Increased use of spacing methods by women

**Informal Formal**

**Outcome4:**

People’s movement built against sex selective abortions and women’s rights to safe abortion safeguarded in select areas of HP

**Outcome1:** Reduction of sex selective abortion

**Systemic**

**Key Findings**

The project has impacted all the 300*gram panchayats*in different ways and to different degrees on the issues dealt in the project.It goes to the achievement of the project that social issues of declining sex ratio and women’s reproductive healthhave been brought on the agenda of the ward/village/ Gram Panchayats.

Formation of *KanchyaBachaoSamitis (KBS)*{Save the Girl Child committee} with its mandate being taken up by the Gram Panchayats was one of the most effective strategies of the project.

The project has been effective in supporting efficient health data management and community based health monitoring systemsto address the gaps in RH services, especially in improving the rates of early registration of pregnancy, timely ANC & PNC by the PHCs and Anganwadisin the project areas.

The project had made a favourable impact for increasing awareness and promoting change in health seeking behavior among the women and in improving access to reproductive health services. There seems to be a greater recognition of the women’s reproductive health rightsby the rights holders and duty bearers in the project area. Use of non-terminal spacing methods for family planning is reported to have increased as per the project progress reports.

## Although the project has created conducive environment for greater acceptance in welcoming the girl child in the family, the least area of influence of the project was seen in the domain of challenging the deeply held social- cultural attitudes towards son preference.This is a difficult area of change given the short span of the project and the complex interplay of the larger socio- economic and political factors influencing systemic, structural changes of transforming the feudal- patriarchal societal mold.

**Achievements**

The project has successfully met its target of instituting active KBS in all the 300 gram panchayats.*KBS*has been recognized as an effective women’s forum within the *gram panchayat.*As a result of the meetings of the KBS, the rate of scheduled ward level meetings has been more than 90% in all the 300 G.Ps under the project with high rate of participation of both men and women. In the year 2014-15, 99% of the ward level meetings were organized with total participation of 9,754 persons.

The project has helped in placingincreased ownership and responsibility of the gram panchayats to ensure improved sex ratio at birth.220 of the 300 G.Ps under the project have passed the resolution to include issues concerning women’s reproductive healthto be included in the *Gram sabha* agenda.A total of 213 Gram panchayats covered under the project have displayed the child sex ratio at birth statistic (from the panchayat register) prominently in the panchayat office.This has created a positive shift in *Panchayat’s* perception from seeing itself as developmental and administrative hub to opening up its space (physical, discursive, and financial) to respond to female fertility, women’s health, and social and development issues.

Women forums in the form of *Mahila Gram Sabha*have been institutionalized in the state of Himachal Pradesh with the support and contributions of the advocacy efforts undertaken by the project partners.This could be seen as an indicator in contributing to engendering of the Gram Panchayats.

The project has been successful in improving and streamlining of the supply of the health services.It has increased the uptake and demand for the RCH services by women. Members from 193 KBSs undertook inspection of the sub centers in their respective Panchayats and evaluated the availability of the essential services as per the NRHM performa.The project has reported greater number of younger married women adopting non terminal spacing methods.

The project has successfully supported and strengthened health data recording and management systems at the community level which has led to a significant increase in the early registration of pregnancy in the project areas. The registration rate in the first trimester has gone up to 85% due to the systematic efforts in the project.

*MahilaMandals, EkalNari Shakti Sangthan* and SHGs have been strengthened very effectively in the project to take up the issue of reproductive healthat the community level. The project has been relevant in harnessingthe strength of these women’s collectives in making the local governance and service institutions accountable and inclusive for taking up women’s issues.

**Areas of improvements**

Despite an increased acceptance of the birth of the girl child, the desire and importance given to the birth of a male child in the present family system continues to be very high. There is need to deepen the work of changing mind sets of the communities in H.P.

Increased awareness of the non- terminal spacing methods hasn’t translated in higher use of these methods. There has been an increase in its uptake but not as expected and desired. The female sterilization as the permanent family control method remained the preferred option after the birth of two children in their families.More than 90% of the married women spoken during the FGDs in the older age group (ranging between 29-40 years) had gone in for tubectomy after the birth of two children.

The cases of exercising the right to safe abortion by women was one of the least reported outcomes of the project. Acceptance of safe abortion as a matter of women’s right to health is not very strong in different community forums and in the women’s groups.

There is a need to adapt the RH and SH programmes differently for the younger age group of women taking into consideration the different education, aspirational levels of this generation and the social pressures which the newly married women have to face.

Despite successful attempts made in the project to put the gender and women’s issues in the gram panchayat meetings and have an increased participation of the women on these forums, women’s issues are still not given the due priority. There are no resources under the current budgetary allocations for women and socialdevelopment activities given to the *G.Ps*.

**Key Conclusion**

The PFI- SUTRA project has quite substantively fulfilled its key objectives and met its desired outputs and outcomes. However its achievements and challenges need to be placed for more realistic assessment in the context of i.) The current population and reproductive health policies which have been pushing for low fertility ratio and smaller family norm; ii.) The stranglehold of feudal and patriarchal mind set prevalent in the society and iii). The newer challenges of uneven and unequal economic and social growth in increasing social inequality and pushing more complex forms of gender discrimination in our society.

**Recommendations**

The project interventions in the gram panchayats and with the local health functionaries need to be continued and supported in future as issues of declining child sex ratio and ensuring women’s reproductive health are still not fully recognisedas matters of good governance.

In long run for the GPs to take up social justice issues, the platform of *Mahila Gram sabhas* need to be made stronger with the financial and decision making authority. Local women’s groups like *Mahilamangal dals* and *Ekalnarisangathan*need to be strengthened in their advocacy roles to influence the functioning of the gram panchayat. *Mahilamandals and KBS*  can be helped to develop proposals for raising resources from the untied funds in the *GP* budget for gender, health,social development purposes.

Advocacy for institutionalizing KBS in the Panchayat raj structurewith the state departments of PRI, WCD and rural development in Himachal Pradesh is suggested so that the gains made are sustainable beyond the interest and term of the serving members of the GP.

The capacity of ward members, AWWs and Health workers need to be continually enhanced beyond the project phase in coordination with the training units of the PRI, ICDS and Health departments at the block and district level.

It is suggested to develop appropriate strategies to address the reproductive health needs of the young people from the school age and to help them understand and deal with the harmful impact of the sexual and gender stereotypes.

It is recommended to tap the huge need of working with men and addressing their reproductive health needs. For challenging and changing changed gender roles and relations, men will need to be more involved in these processes.

The vision and objectives of similar project interventions in the future is recommended to be broadened from the MCH/ RH lens to include the issues of sexual health, sexualityof a diverse constituency of women and men, young people, boys and girls. It is also suggested to move beyond the current focus of addressing only the reproductive health needs of the married women.

The NGOsworking in the state of Himachal Pradesh need to be supported with a long term resource as the state doesn’t attract international and national development funds because of its higher ranking in the overall human development indicators. The NGOs and civil society initiatives in the state need to be supported in developing programme design to specifically respond to economically, socially and culturally diverse conditions, customs and practices of the communities living in the hills.

The name Kanya Bachao Samiti (KBS)is suggested to be changed to remove the protectionist connotation and reflect a more empowering and rights based meaning. The project has built a favourable environment to take a more strategic leap of vision and ideas as to move the goal post from bringing awareness level changes to address systemic and institutional changes and making deep cultural shifts in the mind sets towards gender and social equality.