Gender-biased sex selection an extreme form and manifestation of gender discrimination and inequality against women, say UN Women and UNFPA

Study on History, Debates and Future Directions of Gender Biased Sex Selection launched

New Delhi, July 22, 2014 – The sharply declining child sex ratio in India has reached emergency proportions and urgent action must be taken to alleviate this crisis. The study ‘Sex Ratios and Gender Biased Sex Selection: History, Debates and Future Directions,’ undertaken by Dr. Mary John on behalf of UN Women and with support from UNFPA, helps to understand gender-biased sex selection more holistically, and aids in the identification of the important way forward for organisations and people working on the problem.

“Gender-biased sex selection is first and foremost a reflection of how little our society values girls and women. The sharply declining child sex ratio in India has reached emergency proportions and urgent action must be taken to alleviate this crisis. The deteriorating ratio from 976 girls to 1000 boys in 1961, to 927 girls in 2001, and to 918 girls in 2011, demonstrates that the economic and social progress in the country has had minimum bearing on the status of women and daughters in our society,” says Ms. Lakshmi Puri, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, Assistant Secretary General of the UN.

The study maps existing evidence on gender biased sex selection in the Indian context, weaving in significant social debates and policy developments, and the way forward on action. It offers practical suggestions to advance research and understanding on the subject by focusing on different areas such as family and household, education, labour and employment, and on institutions that directly or indirectly aid or fight the practice of sex selection.

“This report provides a road map for what has a widely researched topic and includes study on several pertinent topics such as the emergence of female infanticide from the mid-nineteenth century, the discovery of declining sex ratios in the 1960s and 1970s through the use of census data, history of relevant legislation and policy and a critique of its implementation, an interesting viewpoint on the extent to which dowry is a cause for the practice of sex selection and, finally, a look at different perspectives for research, namely culture, violence and political economy,” says Dr. Rebecca Tavares, Representative, UN Women Multi Country Office for India, Bhutan, Maldives & Sri Lanka.
The study forms part of a component of the UN’s joint work on Sex Selection. This joint group is made up of UN Women, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, WHO and the UNRCO and endeavours to support the UN’s work on preventing and reducing Sex Selection.

"India has witnessed many critical initiatives made by the government, academia and civil society to understand and resolve the issue of gender biased sex selection. UNFPA has played a key role in drawing attention to the issue in the last one decade, through engagement with multiple stakeholders. UNFPA leads and coordinates the efforts of the UN core group on sex selection in India, and is pleased to support UN Women in this joint initiative to map existing evidence on the issue. This report bears testimony to the research work thus far, and points to the wisdom that we can build on for evolving a definitive response to skewed sex ratios in India," added Ms. Frederika Meijer, Representative, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) India.

The report also provides a brief overview of the sociological and ethnographical areas of study, including the role of civil society and the state, and changing familial patterns. Unequal inheritance rights, dowry, unequal socio-religious status, unpaid work, unequal pay, lack of economic opportunities for women, focus on male lineage, a culture of honour that places a greater burden of safety and protection on the parents of girls - all contribute to building a society that favours sons and men, and neglects daughters and women.

“The government and the civil society must go beyond policy-making and must quickly identify specific behaviours, cultural attributes, practices, media representations, mind-sets, and notions that propagate discrimination against daughters and, consequently, help sex-determination testing flourish despite its illegality. While we are witnessing a rapidly changing Indian society with modern and egalitarian values finding their way into the traditional and conservative family systems, the numbers, however, prove otherwise. A wider mindset change is crucial if we are to indeed save and empower our daughters,” adds Ms. Puri.

“The Government’s commitment to gender empowerment is evident - from Prime Minister Modi’s speeches confirming zero tolerance for violence against women to the very substantial funds that are being allocated for schemes. When it comes to gender biased sex selection, however, entire social structures including those linked to work, marriage and community need to change and the root causes of son preference, acknowledged and fought,” concludes Ms. Lise Grande, UN Resident Coordinator, UNDP Resident Representative in India.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. For more information, visit www.unwomenindia.org

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. For more information, visit india.unfpa.org

To read the detailed report, please visit the UN Women website: http://bit.ly/1nfcPmk

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