



Transparency Review

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“In a significant step backward for women's rights in the U.S. the Supreme Court overturned its own landmark 1973 judgement, which guaranteed abortion as a constitutionally protected right.

On the other hand, India, the other largest democratic country has further amended the MTP ACT 1971 in early 2021 and provided the legal right to women to terminate the pregnancy in 20 weeks (approximately 5 months) by having the approval of a doctor and performed by a medical professional at a recognised medical institution.”

View-Point

Alok Srivastava

Case-Studies

Annu Anand

First-Person

Dr. N. Bhaskara
Rao

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About CMS Transparency

The CMS Transparency team focuses on issues of good governance, raising awareness about the Right to Information Act (RTI) and empowering citizens to benefit from the legislation. CMS Transparency has been providing significant database and momentum to create responsive governance systems in our country.

The team will continue to establish links with civil society groups and design campaigns for RTI to further social objectives like transparency in elections, exposing corruption and improving civic services.

"I am happy to note that Centre for Media Studies (CMS) has been carrying out the exceptional good work in various areas having substantial public interest. One of their initiatives is the study on corruption in the country in particular in certain geographical areas or on a theme."

K.V.Chowdary, Central Vigilance Commissioner, Central Vigilance Commission (2015)



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Women Health Rights - Where do two largest democracies stand?

Alok Srivastava

One of the recent judgements in the United States of America or (US), on Medical Termination of Pregnancy has raised many eyebrows not only in the US but across the globe. Medical Termination of Pregnancy or abortion is a constitutional right in most countries including India except 24 countries including the USA, as per the Centre for Reproductive Rights.

Considered one of the largest democracies in the world, the USA's recent court judgement annulling abortion as a constitutional right for women, read:

*'We therefore hold that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion... and the authority to regulate abortion must be returned to the people and their elected representatives'...*is a matter of concern from women's health rights perspective.

On the other hand, India, the other largest democratic country but a developing economy, has a Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 that allows for legal abortions under specific conditions within 12 weeks of pregnancy. This Act was further amended in early 2021 and provided the legal right to women to terminate the pregnancy in 20 weeks (approximately 5 months) by having the approval of a doctor, and performed by a medical professional at a recognised medical institution.

Medical termination of pregnancy or MTP is considered an important right of women. MTP is also called as 'Safe Abortion', wherein trained medical practitioners provide the required

services, through medicine or surgically, depending upon the period of pregnancy, condition and growth of the fetus.

As per the Census of India

2011, around 19 percent of India's female population is in the age group of 15-24 years, among the largest reservoir of young population in the world. A sizeable proportion of young women in India get married, pregnant and deliver for the first time at this age. As per NFHS-5 (2019-21), a little less than 25 percent of the women in the age group of 20-24 years get married before the legal age of marriage i.e. 18 years and the adolescent fertility rate for women aged 15-19 years is as high as 43 percent.

No doubt, a plethora of factors including lack of awareness and agency makes them vulnerable to poor reproductive health outcomes, including teenage pregnancy, unintended pregnancy, and unsafe abortion and related morbidity and mortality. Young women in India constitute 30% of total maternal mortality in the country. The highest maternal deaths (38%) in India are also recorded for young women ages 15-24 years, as per Registrar General of India's special bulletin on maternal mortality in India, 2015-17.



*We therefore hold that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion ... and the authority to regulate abortion must be returned to the people and their elected representatives'...*is a matter of concern from women's health rights perspective.

The situation is no better in the USA, even though one of the most developed countries on all indicators including health. As per Guttmacher Institute in 2011, nearly half (45%, or 2.8 million) of 6.1 million pregnancies in the United States were unintended. Specifically, 27% of all pregnancies were “wanted later” and 18% of pregnancies were “unwanted”.

As per Pew Research Center, two organizations – the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Guttmacher Institute – try to measure total abortions figure in US, but they use different methods and have different figures. CDC reported a yearly national total for abortions in 2019, as around 6.29 lakh abortions, slightly up from 2018. While Guttmacher’s latest available figures from 2020, say there were around 9.30 lakh abortions nationwide, up from 9.16 lakh in 2019. One can notice the difference between the estimation of the two organizations, a whopping 45 percent. The gap between the two figures is unbelievable!

Whatever may be the case but one thing is clear that a number of abortions reported or documented are not less. Therefore, women in US (or for that matter any country) demand to get legal and constitutional to avail of services for medical termination of pregnancy as their rights, is genuine and strong.

On the other hand, to meet the expectations of women with the changing time and needs, India has taken positive actions at the policy level. Governments, at both national and state levels, as well as health service providers and civil society groups are promoting institutional delivery and it has shown good results. As

per NFHS-5 findings, around 90 percent of the deliveries are happening at health facilities, public or private. This is a noticeable achievement and will play an important role in reducing maternal mortality.

Similarly, the other two key policy-level decisions i) **Paid Maternity Leave** and ii) **advancing the legal age for marriage for girls** along with the amendment in the MTP Act in the recent past, are equally landmark and further strengthen women’s health rights in India.

In 2017, the government increased the paid maternity leave for women from 12 weeks to 26 weeks, in both public and private sectors. Surprisingly, in the United States, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993 provides a total of 12 work weeks of unpaid leave during any 12-months period for the birth of a child and the care of the newborn, except for a few individual US states and possessions.

As per the data of the US Bureau of Labour Statistics, only 17 percent of U.S. private-sector workers have access to paid family leave through their employers. More so because FMLA applies only to workers in companies with 50 or more workers. On the other hand, in India, in any organization with at least 10 employees, women employees have right to avail of 26-week maternity leave.

No doubt, few studies have suggested that longer maternity leaves have resulted to some extent in reducing promotions, upward mobility in management and getting raises in salary. However, but there is no doubt that the decision of the government stands out in terms of bringing women’s health causes to fore.

Irrespective of the challenges and obstacles one may perceive with regard to implementation and ease in access of these health rights initiatives by women, these amendments are undoubtedly worth appreciating and well-intended action to mainstream women’s health rights in India as a constitutional right.

Another noteworthy decision by the government of the day in India is to advance the legal age of marriage for women from 18 years to 21 years in 2022, which will definitely play a critical role in improving young girls' health by delaying their marriages and pregnancy but will also reduce maternal mortality.

These provisions may not see an immediate impact but in the long term they will help in at great extent in improving child and mother's health.

Another noteworthy decision by the government of the day in India is to advance the legal age of marriage for women from 18 years to 21 years in 2022, which will definitely play a critical role in improving young girls' health by delaying their marriages and pregnancy but will also reduce maternal mortality. It is further expected that young girls may get an opportunity to continue their education, which gets discontinued due to getting married.

In NFHS-5 findings, this emerged as one of the key reasons for girls dropping out of school along with other reasons like lack of interest, cost of education and to assist with housework.

In the US, child marriage is currently legal in 46 states ([source: www.newsnationnow.com](http://www.newsnationnow.com)). Even among states within US it varies significantly. As reported, the legal age is 17 years in 10 states, while 21 others set the standard at 16 yrs.

Like any other issue, which has social and economic consequences, both positive and negative, there are some

apprehensions about its negative impact as well. Particularly, MTP related recent amendments in India and US, must be a matter of healthy debates across different national and international platforms, to address the concerns of stakeholders and women, in particular.

As it is being critically analysed that law still does not recognize abortion as a woman's choice that can be sought on-demand; or women will have to seek out the opinion of two practitioners and a medical board for certain kinds of abortions is unfair.

Similarly, on advancing legal age at marriage poor families may not be able to borne expenses of continuing girls' education if they remain unmarried till 21 years; concerns with regard to the girls' safety and security, among others.

Irrespective of the challenges and obstacles one may perceive with regard to implementation and ease in access of these health rights initiatives by women, these amendments are undoubtedly worth appreciating and well-intended action to mainstream women's health rights in India as a constitutional right.

Director CMS Social, Centre for Media Studies (CMS)

Information warriors debunk the misinformation

Annu Anand

India has seen a threefold increase in misinformation and fake news-related content in 2020 compared to 2019 as per the report by National Crime Records Bureau. Online misinformation is hard to stop. It's easy to pass along a rumor, even easier to believe one. The problem of identifying misinformation can be even more complex for new internet users, who have never had a chance to understand how to navigate the maze of online information.

Few information literacy activists are trying to reach their communities in rural and urban areas to spread awareness about the dangers of misinformation. Here are a few stories of such information warriors who are committed to developing critical thinking about online information they receive and exercising caution before sharing it with others.

A short voice note popped up on the mobile phones of several residents of Jaskandih, a tribal village in Jharkhand. In a short while, the message went viral in many villages in the area. The message was about a mob lynching that had never happened in any of the villages in the area but it led to violence and harmed many innocent people.

Laxmi Munda, a 20-year-old tribal girl of the village, immediately swung into action and sent a message to various WhatsApp groups not to believe the voice message as it was fake and had been verified through fact-checking. She also called up many people requesting them not to forward it further.

Jaskandih is located in Purbi Singhbhum district of Jharkhand, which is situated 5 km away from sub-district headquarter Golmuri-cum-Jugsalai and 16 km away

from district headquarter Jamshedpur. The region is dominated by a tribal population. Brought up in a large and economically weaker family, Laxmi loves to study and learn new skills so that she can transform the lives of people in her village.



From a neighbouring state of West Bengal, Uzma Alam, a social worker based in Kolkata, used to share every message she received on her WhatsApp from different groups. She believed that since she was working in a social organisation it was her duty to spread the information she received to as many people as possible. She would forward anything which she thought was convincing and sound beneficial in her social circle. It never occurred to her that such information could be incorrect or even fake. But after 2020, Uzma realized that how unverified information does not benefit anyone but can also be harmful to many people if it is forwarded to others. She also learned how to verify such information and check the authenticity of URLs shared in forwarded messages.

Like Laxmi and Uzma, Karishma Choudhary a 23-year-old postgraduate Geology student in Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, too is turned into a local champion and a gatekeeper of identifying fake news and misinformation and limiting its spread in her network - both online and offline.

Similarly, there are many others located in different parts of the country who are

Uzma realized that how unverified information does not benefit anyone but can also be harmful to many people if it is forwarded to others.

involved in spreading awareness about how to identify misinformation among remote communities as well as in their network.

The common thing among all these debunkers of misinformation is that they have been trained under the media literacy program called Factshala launched by Internews with support from Google News Initiative and run in collaboration with DataLEADS. This media literacy program helps people in villages and small cities to better evaluate and assess online information.

After getting the two days of intensive training about debunking the misinformation most of these trainees have started critically assessing the information they receive on social media. Not only this they also developed the ability to identify misinformation and disinformation and were aware of various appropriate methods to verify audio, visual or text messages.

Once trained, they reach out to communities around them to help them understand and navigate their online information ecosystem. At the heart of the effort is a core team of 250 trainers – NGO workers, journalists, fact-checkers, media educators and community radio representatives – who are trained by and on a curriculum built with inputs from media literacy experts.

“I learned in the training program many techniques to identify misinformation and fake news and how to check such information through authenticated websites. We were taught why we should not forward any message before verifying it,” informs Laxmi, a second-year B.A. student of LBSM College at Karandih.

After the training program, she became aware of the menace of fake news on Social Media and how it can harm the

social and cultural milieu of the people. She then decided to create awareness among people in her and nearby villages about dangers of the social media and educate them on how to spot misinformation appearing on their mobile phones.

She explains, “people in my village are not very literate. They tend to believe whatever they read or hear from others or on social media. They don’t know how to differentiate between right and wrong information or understand the meaning of rumors and fake news. This led me to take the learnings further and teach them how they need to consume messages coming from social media.”

Uzma, the 40-year-old social worker works as the convener of Calcutta Muslim Orphanage and also runs a small NGO. The orphanage shelters around 400 boys and girls of 5 to 17 years. Uzma observed the availability of mobile phones among older children in the shelter home was affecting their personal and social lives due to prevalent misinformation, fake news, and WhatsApp chat. She got the opportunity to participate in the training program that was organised for NGOs, representing her organization Purple Foundation.

Uzma says the training made her aware of how unverified information does not benefit anyone but can also be harmful to many people if it is forwarded to others. She also learned how to verify such information and check the authenticity of URLs shared in forwarded messages.

She is also sharing the knowledge she gained with members of her community including friends and family. She now informs others to not forward information without being sure of its authenticity as that counts as irresponsible behaviour and can negatively impact people’s lives.

Laxmi explains, “people in my village are not very literate. They tend to believe whatever they read or hear from others or on social media. They don’t know how to differentiate between right and wrong information or understand the meaning of rumors and fake news.”

Karishma expressed that she has no trust in any information she comes across unless she verifies it. As for her social media presence and friends, she shares, “whenever any of my friends puts up a story or post that turns out to be fake, I immediately inform them and ask them to delete it.”

During her internship, in a community radio station, Karishma organised a media literacy training program on her Radio platform for their local audiences, empowering them with key approaches and skills to consume information critically, especially online. Karishma was responsible for recording the program and this allowed her to get knowledge about the many harmful effects of fake news and techniques of fact-checking from the trainer of the program.

After her internship, Karishma has become very cautious about any information she receives online and even offline. She is wary of any URLs she receives and always makes it a point to check the domain name carefully before clicking on any link.

Karishma expressed that she has no trust in any information she comes across unless she verifies it. As for her social media presence and friends, she shares, “whenever any of my friends puts up a story or post that turns out to be fake, I immediately inform them and ask them to delete it.”

Karishma also shared that people don’t get convinced easily that particular information is fake and ignore the ones who call them out. She finds it challenging that sometimes people are adamant and don’t believe that a certain piece of information could be wrong because of their inherent biases. But with screenshots of fact-checked proof, they tend to believe it and delete or stop spreading fake news further.

Like these three many other trainees from different locations are involved in spreading awareness among their communities about how to access any information they receive on social media.

They are also organizing special small - scale training sessions or have formed the WhatsApp group to provide the knowledge about checking the facts before believing any piece of information.

Laxmi informed that she had organised a small media literacy training in an adjoining village, Tupudang, for 30-35 people. It was attended by teenage girls, women of different age groups, and a few men of the village. She conducted the training in Hindi and local tribal dialect, using her mobile phone. She says, “Most of the villagers who participated in the training weren’t aware of the fact that wrong messages can also appear on their WhatsApp.” Laxmi focused her training by giving them examples of recently circulated posts on their phones. For instance, many people were getting messages with some links on their WhatsApp asking them to share the same with 20 people and claim attractive prizes. Laxmi explained to the women that stop believing these links and don’t open them as these are fake messages. She says, her family members and relatives were also receiving the message supposedly on behalf of KBC that you have won the cash prizes and to accept it you need to send your account details. Laxmi warned them to protect themselves from such scams and advised everyone not to share their account details.

While talking about the challenges they face in training the community people, Karishma says, she feels that due to illiteracy and lack of education and awareness in village areas, people often fall for scams and misinformation. However, at her level, she makes it a point to educate everyone in her network on the issue, and plays a role in curbing the

“They are not much aware of the authenticity of the information and have no means of verification of the information they hear. So information keeps on spreading due to their conversations. Unknowingly they become a key point of dissemination of false information if it reaches them,” shares Karishma.

spread of false news and its negative consequences thereof.

“In the rural areas, and especially the women there, are mostly illiterate and often become a cause in aiding the spread of misinformation via gossip, etc. Their only source of information is word of mouth and informal discussions which take place with other women of the village. They are not much aware of the authenticity of the information and have no means of verification of the information they hear. So information keeps on spreading due to their conversations. Unknowingly they become a key point of dissemination of false information if it reaches them,” shares Karishma.

At an individual level, Karishma now ensures that she informs her mother, relatives, and friends that they don’t believe anything they hear. She especially asks them to not talk about any issue that they are uncertain of and thereby stops them from spreading unverified or false information further.

Karishma has become now the information fact-checking point for all her friends and relatives. She tells others including her mother, “If you get to know that the news is false, you should inform the person that the news he or she is sharing is wrong. And always request them to not share it with others.”

“The FactShala training helps me in my mission to make citizens aware of the news imbalance and misinformation and increase media literacy in grassroots communities that need it the most,” says Soma Basu, an investigative journalist and fact-checker. “The most effective way to fight misinformation is to break the habit of uncritical sharing. The FactShala

training not only help citizens realize that, but also enable them to share this knowledge with their peers” informs Soma.

Tuhin Mandal, a former school teacher and activist in Bilaspur, West Bengal has formed WhatsApp group in more than six districts of North Bengal comprising of students, teachers, workers, housemakers, men, and women to sift and debunk the fake news and misinformation spread in the area to protect the public from its harmful effects.

He started posting messages about the techniques of how to check the news before forwarding it and why any message should or shouldn’t be shared. He felt that the awareness of this issue should also spread at the same speed and frequency as fake news does.

Tuhin is also a social worker and his passion and interest in working for the people got further ignited in the context of identifying misinformation. He realises how important it is to tackle the spread of false information in current times. Whenever Tuhin visits any village or school, he tries to explain about fake news, and misinformation to the people he meets. His contribution to addressing this issue is not only limited to forming WhatsApp groups but he also addresses these problems on social media as well, or face to face if he comes across anyone who would be benefitted.

He feels that today’s young children should get more awareness about this topic so that they can learn and spread awareness to others too.

Director Advocacy, Centre for Media Studies (CMS)

Progressive Portrayal of Women in Advertising

There have been notable shifts in the depiction of women in advertising over the last few years. These seem to be an effort to break overt stereotypes that had been integral to such depiction for many years. We see ads depicting women in spaces and contexts they were historically not very visible in—outside the home at work, in banks, driving vehicles, and making seemingly confident moves in social and romantic situations. In categories like beauty, we see a body language that is more active, not only coy, their husbands take on some load of domestic labour.

There are some more notable strokes of changes in the depiction of women in advertising:

1. Some lowering of levels of anxiety built around her in a different context—especially food and beauty.

2. A more diverse mix of faces and physicality is beginning to appear in a handful of brands.

3. Women are being portrayed as wielding power and strength, having ambitions and drive views and opinions.

4. Digital and app led brands in food delivery and dating are trying to seed new norms that are trickling into portrayals—women showing values of convenience and leisure or making the first move in a dating context.

5. Dating app advertising is attempting new depiction of women as both desiring and being desired.

6. Some telecom service providers seem to show more real notes of friendliness and camaraderie between young women and men normalising realities of educational and work spaces.

7. Many of the tropes that typified motorcycle, men's deo or hair styling product advertising where the woman was overtly sexualised, have either faded or been corrected to be less objectifying in their depiction of women.

8. Leading brands with the national presence in beauty, skincare and colour cosmetics seem to be aiming for more inclusive, less discriminatory portrayals of beauty.

9. An important note of change is in the depiction of men in advertising, especially how they are portrayed in the context of domestic life. There are some new depictions of men's role's in and their responses to the emerging attitudes and demands of women.

Analysis of cross-category advertising content reveals that a significant proportions and the most wide cache of advertising seem to continue to borrow from an inventory of stereotypes

Women trapped in the loop of portrayals: Content analysis of advertising reveals oddly persistent images that appear repeatedly. Every category seems to have its own 'key images' frames that appear across different brands. Whether it is a woman holding a tray of food, young girls wearing monochrome costumes in beauty and fashion ads, women being instructed by male voice-overs in detergents ads, young women gazing anxiously into the mirror in skin care ads, women being cheerful and care free while washing dishes or cooking multi-course meal for the family—these images keep making a constant appearance.

Much of the stereotyping images lie in the subliminal background of a film or image: Stereotypes reveals themselves when one sees between the frames. It is in the general body language, appearance, attire, task—pairing, spaces in which women are set in, that a gender bias makes its appearance. For example women wearing traditional clothing are often cast as being less aware than western attired ones, food advertising typically distances the women from

moments of life by placing her in the kitchen, skin care ads show groups of young women moving and mouthing jingles in sync.

Women's empowerment –oriented advertising pins new stories on existing cultural stereotypes of women:

Even as advertising scripts show women being more successful, more independent –they stay loyal to existing cultural stereotypes. Women are increasingly shown independent but rarely to be free of the social behaviour typically attributes to them. For example; new attributes like entrepreneurial zeal are still shown alongside the women being caring and continuing to fulfil domestic duties or the emotional care taking of the family.

New stereotypes load women with burdens they may not seek to bear:

Old stereotypes are being replaced by some new ones. The 'working woman' the woman who 'balances work and home', the 'cool' or 'bindaas' teenage girls are part of a new set of representations. Though each one of these is meant to reflect the new lives and choices of women they are also stereotypical new ways of being. We must ask ourselves if women want to be celebrated for bearing more burden at home and work or for their fashion and style to be interpreted as an invitation to flirting.

The male celebrity has coercive power over women in ad narratives: Several categories like food, home cleaning, detergents – seem to use the male celebrity in a particularly authoritarian mould-evaluating, rejecting and then correcting a woman's actions or choices. A surprising factor of this coercion is that it usually plays out in the domain of the woman's home, where the male celebrity/movie star usurps power and space that should be his to claim.

A tendency to infantilise men, not normalise their partaking in domestic and emotional labours: Though brands seem to want to show more equitable division of labour more non-gendered attitudes to domestic duties

or child rearing, there is a common misstep. More often than not, such male characters are written to appear inherently incapable or inexperienced in basic tasks. This tends to reinforce stereotypes of both genders, keeping the burden squarely on women even though brands might intend to connote the opposite. The fact that men in this situation are typically written and depicted as 'cute' and childlike in their bungling of simple tasks, the ad builds in a reason to absolve them of the new duties they are being asked to shoulder.

Typically, male oriented categories are slowly including women in the frame, but very often without agency:

Finance and automobile advertising is seeing more women present in imagery than ever before. However, women are still framed as silent on-lookers or receiving the benefits of good male judgment without seeming to have their own, or having weaker contact with or control over with the product than men have been shown to possess.

Beauty is represented along very narrow definitions: There seems to be an implicit code of beauty that women are measured against. This becomes visible in the casting of female actors in advertising. Not only is this code visible in beauty and fashion categories, where skin colour and tone, weight and height seem to be strictly defined. Out is one seen across advertising. Implicit codes of what women's appearance should be also play out through a moulding of women through styling and apparel - seemingly mandating what a mother should wear, how a young girl's hair should be styled and so on. These beauty moulds are ones that too few women can fit in.

New cliches of representation create hollow depictions of female empowerment, freedoms: There is a tokenism in showing women in spaces beyond the home. Especially the new stereotype of the working woman who is rarely seen at work but is own as 'returning home. For example, the 'doctor-mother or a professional woman's rarely

shown in their work settings and most often at home with their family. We end up seeing what are significant aspects of women's self-definitions, represented merely through wardrobe and styling. There is little change in the tasks she is aligned to, or the expectations others have of her. These don't seem to have undergone the make-over the woman has been given stylistically.

Uncomplaining service: Food categories often show women catering to multiple demands placed on them by different members of their family. Though it creates a very happy picture of a family and its joys, this stereotypical depiction tends to obscure the burden of labour and demands placed on the woman behind a smiling and happy demeanour. Since women are shown to be happy and even energised in this context, this creates a sense that all her service must be joyfully given. This normalises the unthinking placing of multiple expectations, tasks and domestic chores on women and legitimizes the expectations of the husband/children/elders with regards to being served without protest. It also frames these demands as uniformly welcomed by and also fulfilling for women. There is no room for the possibly more realistic scenario where constant labour for the joy and comfort of others, could also be a burden for women.

Costumed in modernity: Women seem to be shown in western attire as a means to depict a surface modernity while keeping her anchored in roles that stay bound to tradition. There also seems to be a hinting to a hierarchy of fashion where those in the ubiquitous and most prevalent traditional attire (sarees, salwar kameez) seem to be losing to or 'instructed' by those in western attire.

Contestant syndrome/ever evaluated: Women are repeatedly placed in situations where they seem to be vying for approval - from either the mother-in-law, the husband or other family members. The woman seems to crave approval from those she is seen serving. Often female characters are pitched against each other in a faux-competitive scenario where one

is trying to outperform the other. The depiction of women being put in a scenario where she is 'trying' to win seems to place women's actions under a constant frame of evaluation.

Food burden bearing: Remarkably, this is not restricted to portrayals of wives or mothers. Even in a fun and friends' setting, young teenage girls seem to be disproportionately saddled with the emotional labour around food - having it ready, ordering it, holding it or sharing it. In the same depictions, boys are allowed to comfortably or even cluelessly, just be hungry.

Submission to the gaze of the camera: There is a sensual engagement between the woman and the camera in colour cosmetic advertising. There seems to be an interplay between the woman and the camera in what makes her seem readily submitting to its gaze. Here the camera's gaze is a symbol of a larger collective gaze that is trained on women. This dynamic with the camera is rarely seen when it comes to depictions of men.

Seeding beauty self-doubts: A very common trope seen in skin care advertising is women comparing themselves with a 'beauty protagonist' who adheres closely to a conventional yardstick of beauty. The usage of beauty as a yardstick to create insecurity and qualify the non-protagonist women as less beautiful or not beautiful not only deeply reinforces beauty stereotypes but also seems to actively rate women on a scale of an implicitly coded idea of beauty. This also makes a heavily codified view of beauty seem like the essential difference between success and failure in a range of situations.

Gaze acceptance: The woman is often portrayed as a willing and even welcoming receiver of a gaze - often that of a stranger. This depiction seems to give permission to the gaze and also build an expectation that it will be received positively. What might be uncomfortable and even unsafe situations in real life, get normalized as a legitimate social interaction.

Doll housing New freedoms and power seem staged: Though there is a trend for colour cosmetics and fashion brands to depict more un-stereotyped images e.g. young women striding through the city, very often the city seems 'vacated and empty. Women seem to lead empowered lives - at work out of home - but seem to do it in perfectly manicured spaces. They are often shown to exist within spaces that are colour coordinated, cleared of the messiness of real life that real women navigate. The need for beauty advertising to look beautiful often seems to recreate an alternate reality that doesn't exist.

Spender syndrome: The shopping bag is an often-seen accessory of women in finance category ads like credit cards and debit cards. This trope of the woman as a shopper stands out only because it abounds while the image of men shopping/consuming is rare in the category - leaving the woman marked with the label of being consumption greedy, not men as much.

Excluded from the conversation: The typical banking and finance TV commercial has men talking to men while women look on. There are examples where a woman plays a more active role but it still remains marginal.

Under the male provider's care: There is a tendency to showcase women's dependencies in order to highlight men's abilities. Since the man is the central character in most finance category advertising, women often appear almost as children under their care.

Femvertising flips: Women's Day seems to be a moment for many auto brands to include women more actively into their advertising in ways they are otherwise not. This seems to imply and reinforce the notion that women are not seen as an everyday aspect in the world of automobiles.

Deprived damsels: In fashion or deo advertising, there is a tendency for the central male character to be cold to or dismissive of the attention he receives from a woman. The portrayal of the woman's desire for the man is seen in contrast to his apparent lack of interest in her. This is a note visible in some automobile advertising as well.

More stylised and cookie-cutter beauty: Though there has been some widening of the definition of beauty when seen in personal care and colour cosmetic advertising, the women featured in ads that target men seem to still adhere to a more fixed notion of beauty. This is underlined by how they are usually styled in these ads - typically wearing more make-up and figure-hugging clothing.

Passive receiver: Women typically get portrayed as being mute, passive and receptive in representations, usually reacting wordlessly to the demeanor or actions of men who are central characters.

The article is based on the excerpts of the study report 'GenderNext' brought out by Advertising Standard Council of India (ASCI) and Futurebrands

Next big game changers, ten propositions to lift India to newer heights

Dr. N. Bhaskara Rao

As I am about to complete sixty years as research - based analyst in the power corridors of New Delhi and writing books on governance issues, I have concluded that next big game changer in India, in the Republic, is not possible without dramatic shifts in the paradigm of the trajectory of democracy, development and governance.

The common denominators between the three are political parties and electoral system. That is without political parties coming under checks and balances and elections without yielding representation, nothing better could be expected in the country. But it is a compulsion that we need to rejuvenate the Republic as it approaches 75 years so that the country could expect to have Good Governance at least by the time it is hundred in 2050.

The shift in the paradigm in both the cases, the political parties and the elections, is possible if we could take to ten basic practices. They do not need to wait for structural changes to take on. Most of these could be part of the Model Code of the Election Commission of India (ECI) which the Supreme Court had already confirmed legal standing. I refer to them here only in nutshell. My more recent books on corruption involving citizen, *Citizens Activism in India*, *Sustaining Good Governance*, *Rejuvenating the Republic* and the *Third*

Eye of Governance, discussed these propositions at length.

The first is reminding political parties of their very justification and jurisdiction. Despite cautions by Mahatma

Gandhi and the constitution makers, political parties have polarised the balance of power idea inherent in the political system we have adopted. The process of their registration and eligibility criteria need to be revisited now for renewal by the Election Commission of India.

Second, transparency in governance is as important as mass media are for the democracy. The Right to Transparency Act of 2005 need to be revived and kept out from being meddled by successive governments.

The third, poll campaigns should be based more on “crowdfunding”, not corporate funding as at present. The present trend needs to be reversed. This one resolve will make a magical difference.

The fourth, why should candidates campaign solo? Why not candidates reach out voters and appeal together even partly. The campaign should be in a spirit of



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News media sources should offer free time or space as an obligation to serious candidates in assembly and Lok Sabha polls. The ECI should work out the modalities as in the case of AIR and Doordarshan.

coexistence as volunteers for public service.

The fifth, news media sources should offer free time or space as an obligation to serious candidates in assembly and Lok Sabha polls. The ECI should work out the modalities as in the case of AIR and Doordarshan.

Sixth, a candidate should be local and the nomination should be endorsed by local voters (than at present) spread across the constituency. (Even if it requires a legal change).

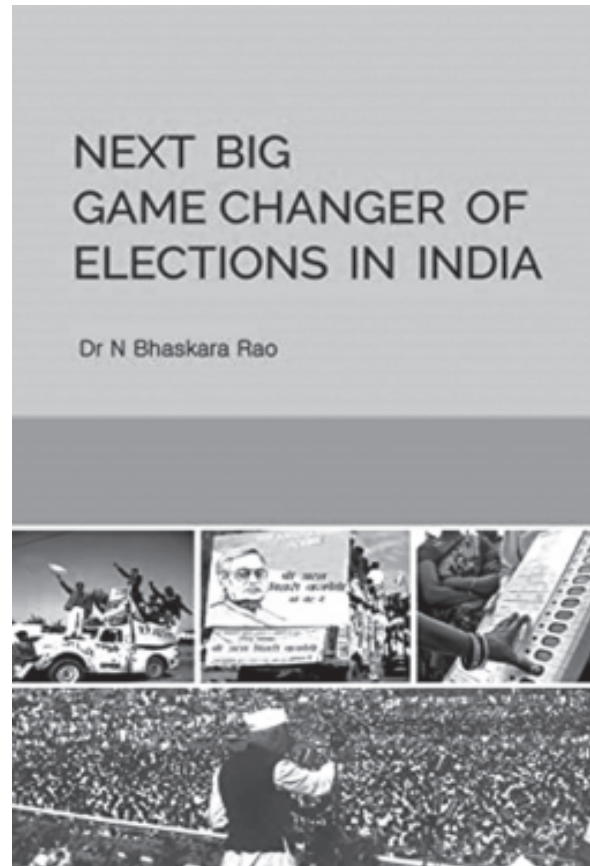
The seventh, political parties could nominate candidates (for a symbol) if only they are adhering to their party constitution as to internal democracy.

Eighth, the canvass of candidates and parties and their offers or propositions to voters should be limited to a manifesto or written claims.

The ninth, elections to local panchayats (Zilla Parishad, Mandal and Village panchayats) should be on a non-party basis (without party symbols), on an individual basis, even if some contestants had party links (as before decades ago).

The tenth, decision of an incumbent Government has to be within the poll codes. All contestants should Endorse RTI the Act guaranteeing services delivery (which many states had heady passed).

These changes will have a lasting and larger impact than going, for example, for the simultaneous poll which may be good for consolidation and control and



command of a regime, not for restoring the civilisational heights that India is known. By taking to these Prime Minister Narendra Modi will remain a reformer beyond decades and a leader who changed the face of India for good.

Dr N Bhaskara Rao is a pioneer in public opinion research in India and studies elections and development.

Indian Digital Media recovering from post - pandemic effect

Anjana Krishnan

Indian media are diverse, with numerous outlets operating in English and multiple regional languages. The sector has been hard hit by the pandemic, with falling advertising revenues and widespread journalistic layoffs. Despite a devastating second COVID wave, which also claimed the lives of several journalists, the sector is showing signs of recovery.

Television brands NDTV 24x7, India Today TV, and BBC News are the most popular offline brands with our mostly English-language internet-using survey respondents, along with national newspapers such as the Times of India, Hindustan Times, and The Hindu. Print and broadcast television channels are self-regulated in India, with several television channels infamous for sensationalising news and conducting polarised debates. Print media recovered from the pandemic slump with an overall reported revenue growth of 20% in 2021,¹⁰⁸ including a strong bump from advertisements. But legacy media platforms are facing stiff competition online from vibrant, digital-born brands that pursue independent journalism. Many rely on non-profit revenue models, such as grants and reader donations to supplement advertisements. Other digital-born brands such as Newslaundry are entirely driven by subscriptions and donations. The Wire takes strong editorial positions that are anti-establishment and investigative,

while Newslaundry eschews editorial positions altogether and believes in portraying diverse viewpoints from the ground. The News Minute caters specifically to news from South India while The Quint aims to build community partnerships through its citizen journalism initiatives and fact-checking services, in addition to regular news. The digital market saw an overall growth of 29% in 2021, with advertising and subscription revenues growing at 29% each.¹⁰⁹

India is a strongly mobile-focused market, with 72% accessing news through smartphones and just 35% via computers. News aggregator platforms and apps such as Google News (53%), Daily Hunt (25%), InShorts (19%), and NewsPoint (17%) have become an important way to access news and are valued for convenience. Social media are popular in India, with a significant number of our surveyed audience using YouTube (53%) and WhatsApp (51%) for accessing news. Short-form video app TikTok was banned in 2020 for security reasons, along with several other Chinese apps, but is being replaced by home-grown apps like Moj, Roposo, and Josh, along with platform-based features like Instagram Reels. The popularity of social media is a concern for policy-makers as these platforms are also rife with misinformation, as well as incessant trolling and abuse. Independent reporting suggests such behaviour is

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Meanwhile new accreditation rules have been introduced for journalists by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting which state, among other conditions, that accreditation could be suspended if work is deemed to harm the larger interests and sovereignty of the nation.

sometimes coordinated by actors close to major political parties. In April this year, the government banned several YouTube news channels for spreading misinformation that harmed the 'national security' and 'foreign relations' of the country. The ban was carried out under the recent IT rules framed in February 2021 that have been challenged by social media platforms and news publishers alike. In further development, Facebook came under intense scrutiny after media investigations revealed the platform had pushed polarising content and misinformation in the form of advertisements, favouring the ruling party BJP, during the election seasons in 2019 and 2020.

Meanwhile, the Competition Commission of India (CCI), has launched an investigation into complaints that Google has allegedly abused its dominant position in the online news market. As in other countries, publishers claim they are not being compensated fairly for the content accessed via third-party digital platforms. India is ranked 150th in the World Press Freedom Index 2022, dropping eight places from the previous year, indicating challenging times for press freedom in the country.

The independent Kashmir Press Club (KPC) was forcibly taken over in January by members allegedly close to the local administration in the presence of armed police – a move the Editors Guild of India described as part of 'the continuing trend to smother press freedom'. Meanwhile new accreditation rules have been introduced for journalists by the Ministry

of Information and Broadcasting which state, among other conditions, that accreditation could be suspended if work is deemed to harm the larger interests and sovereignty of the nation. In a move to address concerns of the right to privacy and freedom of expression of its citizens, the Supreme Court of India set up a committee to probe allegations of the use of Pegasus spyware on journalists, activists, students, and civil society members in the country.

Source: Digital News Report 2022, India; Anjana Krishnan is a Research Associate, Asian College of Journalism, Chennai

108 The numbers are as per FICCI's Tuning into Consumer report published in March 2022. The print media grew from Rs. 189.9bn (\$2.5bn) in 2020 to Rs. 227.2bn (\$2.9bn) in 2021. The figures are for the media and entertainment industry as a whole, in which news media are included. 109 https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en_in/topics/media-and-entertainment/2022/ey-ficci-m-and-e-report-tuning-into-consumer.pdf 110 <https://thewire.in/tekfog/en/1.html> 111 <https://theprint.in/india/india-bans-22-youtube-channels-for-peddling-lies-about-security-foreign-policies/903342/> 112 <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/3/14/how-a-reliance-funded-company-boosts-bjps-campaigns-on-facebook> 113 <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/competition-commission-of-indias-glare-on-googles-online-news-revenue/cid/1858036> 114 <https://twitter.com/IndEditorsGuild/status/1482645879760715776/photo/1> 115 <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/govt-issues-new-media-accreditation-guidelines/article38394463.ece> 116 <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/supreme-court-judgment-on-pegasus/article37184269.ece>

What happened to the little Republics of India of yesteryears?

Can we claim now the old saying that “India lives in villages”? They were even described before independence as little Republics for their being self-contained. The rest of the country was depending on them. Villages were having local self-government much before *Panchayat Raj* and before locally elected *Panchayat*. But earlier the elections were not on a party basis. Individual credentials were the basis for their getting elected. Villages were not dependent on outside support. But the majority of Indians still live in villages even today. Going by the concern of legislatures, the priority of their discourse and even by the representative character of policymakers, villages are no longer taken seriously as before. For mass media, even of recent social media, villages matter more for political rhetoric or deviant instances like rape, suicides, elections etc. Farmers otherwise would not be in agitation mode for years. Aping urban lifestyles, including the type of residence, continue unabated depriving villages of liveable habitats. The economy of villages has become unsustainable and is in shambles signaling a debt trap for the majority of families. All this despite legislation empowering villages to take responsibility for over 30 services and expecting a finance commission to devolve a certain percent of state revenue. However, in reality, villages don’t have control of even village tanks and revenue generated. If payments for MNRGS and DWACRA women, for example, are delayed or deferred, the news channels will be lining up a village for news! Quality of life and ease of living in villages continue to be on the decline. Pride of the village is no longer evident even among old residents. No wonder out-migration from villages sees no decline, unemployment is on increase. For elected representatives (MLAs, MPs, etc.), it is no

longer population that matters, as the number of voters in a village. Elections have destabilised the peace and harmony of villages mercilessly. Tranquillity is a forgotten notion. Villages have become satellites of cities and pocket barrows of party leaders. Villagers have become or made dependents of governments. Many are on doles and mercies in the name of welfare and development. Institutions, even cooperative ones, which nurtured villages not long ago, are languishing. All this despite a Panchayati Raj Act (1992, the famous 73rd amendment) which came into effect in 1999. In the name of decentralisation, centralisation is blatant. In the name of less government, government agencies are being proliferated in villages. I am making these summative observations as a village boy with years of field research and analysis. This is to point out the urgency for a serious view of the village scenario. Continued Political rhetorics will further plunge village India. None of this will change without excluding village panchayats from party symbol-based elections.

Education is bewildering!

It is only recently that primary education received some attention in policies despite that it is known for a long that foundational and formidable years are three to six or seven. Decades ago school enrolment has been made compulsory and the right to education was made fundamental (2001) and legislated. Successive governments have taken multiple initiatives to bolster school education, even hiking teacher salaries. All that has hardly increased enrolment nor the dropout rate has declined. Even more devastating is what ASER reports have been pointing to as a class-wise outcome last decade. All this despite that the Constitution (1950) has indicated ten

What should also surprise is despite the dilemma, the difference in the quality of schooling between public and private schools and competitive outlook, continues between them without an independent regulation. The politicisation of education at the policy level has become more overt now in many states.

years to make everyone literate. Even in 2022, 25-30 percent remain illiterate. (China did that around the same time and within that time frame). There were three National policies on Education in thirty years with specific claims, promises, and initiatives like *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*. Also, between 2004 and 2007 two percent for primary education and one percent for secondary education is being collected as “education cess” from taxpayers. What has been the difference all that has made in terms of outcomes? In a 2022 field survey in the wake of Covid significant percent of those in schools were not sure of their completing or continuing schooling, whatever the reasons. In AP, for example, the pass-out percent of the 10th class in 2022 was the lowest ever in the decade at around 65% (resulting in over a dozen suicides).

And, yet, 30 to 60 percent of teacher posts remain vacant in some states for years. Even Supreme Court had pointed to the state governments twice to fill the vacancies. Instead, many states went into having temporary ones so that they do not have to pay full salary. Some states took fresh graduates with no training whatsoever and were unconcerned about the implications on the quality of schooling. No wonder why a Delhi High Court, Judge Khanna, has observed in 2021 that he does not want open a Pandora’s Box by ordering regularisation of temporarily appointed ones. On the other, what for the education cess is being used (for the mid-day meal, quality betterment, etc.) and with what outcomes is not known.

What should surprise us now is despite all such disgusting situations of primary and secondary schooling, we continue to

presume that “education is for jobs”. And pursue a rat race in an all-out way for pass percentages, individual ranks, and admission into foreign institutes as an ultimate goal. What should also surprise is despite the dilemma, the difference in the quality of schooling between public and private schools and competitive outlook, continues between them without an independent regulation. The politicisation of education at the policy level has become more overt now in many states. Politics, religion, caste, and community are increasingly engaged in the push and pull with school committees from the party-centric electoral route.

Even the language of teaching has become contentious and political. Politics are even fiddling now with course contents and syllabus priorities. At this rate neither we will ever see education liberated from party politics, able to implement much-needed reforms, and better relevance of schooling. When will we see an end to all that so that the young are not deprived of molding their future? Education should not be the cause and effect of such a trend.

The recent initiative of the Andhra government although some of them have destabilising potential, the timely ones include an emphasis on “conceptual learning” instead of “rote learning”, emphasis on classroom participation, community projects, communication skills, leadership skills, and extra-curricular activities – instead of assessing performance based on same old two or three-hour exam. If these ideas are also seriously implemented, they could change the present chase for ranks and the dilemma on the education front.

Dr. N. Bhaskara Rao



Why rights need proactive protecting

Whichever way one looks at it, the US Supreme Court overturning the 1973 *Roe v Wade* judgment that gave women the constitutional right to an abortion until 22-24 weeks of pregnancy, is a regression that puts the US among countries outlawing abortion like Laos, the Philippines, Egypt and Iraq. Despite being a democracy, the US will now have states with less safe and legal access to abortion than, say, Saudi Arabia. The right to protected abortion access will now be left to individual states. Assessments show that 26 of the 50 states are certain or likely to ban termination of pregnancy.

By junking *Roe v Wade*, the guardian of the US Constitution has made women in many states no longer have a say over their own reproductive rights and body. This is a major backslide. No amount of moral or cultural relativism in the form of 'popular will' or 'federal empowerment' can provide cover to this regression. Like the US's permissive gun laws, allowing abortion to become illegal in individual

states underlines how civil liberties and protecting rights are mutually exclusive of economic development and progress. They need to be proactively protected as non-negotiable liberal values. The quest towards a more perfect progressive liberal democratic society is never over, nor is its progression linear. Changing mind-sets and social structures takes time, constant effort. As Martin Luther King Jr had aptly put it in the context of a struggle for another right, 'The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.'

For people across the world, particularly in younger and less mature democracies, this moment must not be one of hopelessness. Rather it should teach us that the real threat to open societies and liberal democracies is the absence of constant dialogue and exchange, and that hardened positions that deny any segment of its citizenry their rights do not make for a democracy.

Source: *The Economic Times*, 26 June, 2022

Introduce digital media literacy in schools

A recent study focused on the United States and India pointed out the lack of attention to digital media literacy in education policies as a critical factor in spreading online misinformation.

The power of social media to optimise and speed up the spread of misinformation and its detrimental consequences for democracy are matters of concern among policymakers across the world. Misinformation spread through social media applications (49% of the global population are active users) have been linked to entrenched social polarisation,

the rise of authoritarianism, vaccine hesitancy, and real-life violence. Hence, upholding democratic values requires measures to limit and control the dissemination of misinformation on social media platforms.

There are two main policy-driven approaches to tackle misinformation - regulation of social media platforms and social media literacy.

Regulation and its limits

The more popular approach among governments is regulating social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

However, such interventions are fraught with adverse political fallout as citizens in most liberal democratic societies are suspicious of State interventions on free speech. Another strategy is self-regulation by the platforms themselves, which can make changes quickly and at scale. However, engagement is a key source of their revenues, and thus these platforms have an incentive to rig their algorithms to spread emotionally charged misinformation. Further, research shows that strategies to tag misinformation have a marginal effect on the propensity to consume and share false news.

A second strategy that has not received sufficient attention (particularly in India) is digital media literacy to the citizens, especially school children, to equip them with skills to steer through the information they receive via these platforms. Hence, technological interventions to tackle misinformation should be complemented with human-centred solutions focused on digital media literacy. A recent study focused on the United States and India pointed out the

lack of attention to digital media literacy in education policies as a critical factor in spreading online misinformation. A report by the United Kingdom's communication regulator Ofcom also underlined the significance of media literacy skills to limit the spread of misinformation.

The Government of India's National Education Policy 2022 is a missed opportunity to insert media literacy in the curriculum. The policy gives considerable importance to 'higher-order' cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and problem-solving - but also social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions" (p.3). However, 'digital literacy' is mentioned once in the entire document, and social media literacy is entirely neglected. This is a serious gap as social media is the primary source of students' literacy. Education policy should equip students with social media literacy that would involve the application of critical thinking to the information they are flooded with daily through social media.

Source: Hindustan Times, 24 February, 2022

Why we must act now to keep humans and the planet healthy

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the inequitable and unsustainable systems in which people in the South-East Asia Region and across the world live and work, consume and exist. Globally, over 90% of people breathe unhealthy air, resulting in around 7 million deaths every year, including around 2.4 million in the Region. Food systems that are unsafe, unhealthy and unsustainable cause millions of premature deaths annually, primarily from non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and are a leading contributor to climate change and antimicrobial resistance – two of the greatest health risks facing humanity.

In 2020 around 1 in 4 people globally lacked safely managed drinking water in

their homes, and just 50% of health care facilities in least-developed countries provided basic water services. Poor quality drinking water can lead to acute waterborne disease and risks exposure to toxic chemicals such as arsenic. Inadequate access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in health care facilities makes health care less effective and has a disproportionate impact on women and girls. In total, WHO estimates that more than 13 million deaths around the world each year are due to avoidable environmental causes – a figure that we cannot and must not accept.

To achieve a Region and world in which clean air, water and food are available to all, where economies promote physical and mental health and well-being, where

cities are liveable, and where people have control over their health and the health of the planet, together we must address five priorities.

First, protect and preserve the source of human health: nature. Policies that reduce deforestation, promote afforestation, and end intensive and polluting agricultural practices improve air quality, strengthen food systems, and promote sustainable farming and forest management. They reduce the risk of emerging infectious diseases, over 60% of which originate from animals, mainly from wildlife.

Second, invest in essential services, from water and sanitation to clean energy in health care facilities. Countries of the Region must continue to protect drinking-water supplies by implementing multisectoral water safety plans, and also include WASH in relevant health policies, strategies and programmes, with a focus on increasing access at the primary health care level. In line with the Region's 2017 Malé Declaration, countries must continue to build climate-resilient health facilities that not only respond to and withstand environmental health threats, but which promote environmentally sustainable practices.

Third, ensure a quick and healthy energy transition. Globally, two-thirds of exposure to outdoor air pollution results from the burning of the same fossil fuels that are driving climate change, which between 2030 and 2050 is expected to cause an additional 250,000 deaths annually. While countries of the Region have made commendable efforts to expand renewable energy sources, increased action is needed, and must be accompanied by rigorous enforcement of

air quality standards, as well increased investments in public transportation infrastructure.

Fourth, promote healthy and sustainable food systems. Diseases caused by lack of access to food, or consumption of unhealthy, high calorie diets, is a major contributor to NCDs, which in our Region kill around 9.2 million people annually. In all countries of the Region, WHO will continue to support countries to identify and implement high-impact and cost-effective "best buys" that transform the food environment, from food reformulation and labelling, to increased taxation of unhealthy foods and beverages, and strengthened restrictions on marketing, especially to children.

Fifth, build healthy, liveable cities. In 2021, five cities in the Region were selected to participate in the WHO Urban Governance for Health and Well-being initiative, which aims to strengthen country capacities to promote health and address health inequities through multi-sectoral action. To take just two examples, policy makers can expand cycle ways and increase the provision of green and healthy spaces to reduce greenhouse emissions and road traffic injuries, increase physical activity, and promote mental health.

We are at a pivotal moment. The decisions we make now can either "lock in" development patterns that do permanent and escalating damage to the ecological systems that sustain human health and livelihoods, or they can promote a healthier, fairer, and greener world. Together, we must raise our voice and act now to protect our planet, our health, and our future.

Source: World Health Organization, 7 April, 2022

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