LISTEN AND ACT ON THE ASPIRATIONS OF INDIA’S WOMEN AND GIRLS!
Globally, approximately 300,000 women and girls die during pregnancy and childbirth every year. In India, where the maternal mortality rate stands at 122 per 100,000 live births (SRS 2019), changing this picture begins with women and girls. When women and girls are involved in identifying the barriers and solutions to healthcare, progress accelerates.

As quality has a huge impact on whether a woman or girl will seek care, the heart of the What Women Want campaign is about understanding quality from women’s and girls’ perspectives.

What Women Want was launched in 2016 by White Ribbon Alliance India as a grassroots campaign to make women’s voices heard. 150,000 women in India were asked one question: what did they want most from the health system?

Beginning on 11 April 2018, India’s National Safe Motherhood Day and International Maternal Health and Rights Day, and continuing for one year, 359 partners grew the campaign by asking nearly 1.2 million women and adolescent girls in 114 countries: what is your top request for your maternal and reproductive healthcare?

Led by White Ribbon Alliance India and its state alliances, over 350,000 of these demands were gathered in India alone through the tireless efforts of committed volunteers, maternal health advocates, and over 100 White Ribbon Alliance member organizations.

The What Women Want campaign asked women and girls in India to set the agenda, as opposed to beginning with a premise of what is important or asking them to decide among a set of options.

If the hope and expectation is for women and girls to visit health centres, adhere to recommended advice, and collectively pursue better health outcomes, it follows their agenda must become everyone’s agenda.

Women and girls have spoken, now it’s time to listen.
To learn more about the methodology and analysis of these results, visit: whitetribbonalliance.org/whatwomenwant to download the complete summary report.

*207,140 demands collected between 2018-2019 as part of the What Women Want campaign; 143,556 collected in 2017 as part of Hamara Swasthya Hamari Awaaz.

** Represent top sub-categories of What Women Want’s top demands.

**The What Women Want findings were shared with the government of India during the formulation of Guidelines for “Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan” (SUMAN) - GoI’s Universal Maternal Newborn Care Assurance Scheme.

This scheme is laying the foundations for assuring 16 fundamental MNH services free of cost and available through India’s public health system (Ref: https://suman.nhp.gov.in/).
Married young and living in a society where women traditionally do not have a voice, Nirmala’s journey to becoming a part of the What Women Want campaign has been remarkable. She counts herself fortunate to have a husband who encouraged her to go back to school after their marriage and later taught tailoring skills to other women in her community who needed to make a living.

That’s when she realized how many women were struggling; women who had been abandoned by husbands, were widowed or caring for other family members. She saw that domestic violence poisoned almost every household. “Either women are being beaten, or they are under the threat of physical or verbal abuse and control,” says Nirmala. “It is domestic violence which stops so many women from seeking the healthcare which is their right. Even if a girl gets education and skills, as soon as she is married, she has to live under the rules of her husband’s family, and you don’t have a voice.”

Now in her forties, Nirmala insisted that her own daughter was educated and has gradually emerged as a leader in her community. She founded and leads Ragho Seva Sansthan (“In the service of God”), a community-based organisation in Sheikhpura District, Bihar and has mobilized volunteers to help gather the voices of more than 4,000 women from the Sheikhpura and Munger districts of Bihar for the What Women Want campaign.

“This campaign has been a game changer in bringing women’s and girls’ health to the attention of our law makers,” she says. “Previously, the local Member of Parliament, Chirag Paswan, did not consider maternal health a priority. But we organized district level events where more than 300 women told him they needed doctors, medicines and ambulance services to save lives. He immediately procured an ambulance from his Local Area Development fund. I continue to engage with him and he is now committed to supporting women’s health issues.”

“Women had never been asked before to think about their own needs. They were used to giving answers about needs of the community—such as water and electricity—but this campaign for the first time made them aware that they had rights and could demand them. Until now women were ignored in the decision making about their own health. Now women have a voice.”

Nirmala’s DEMAND: Good quality health services near to women’s homes
Hamara Swasthya Hamari Awaaz: the campaign heard around the world

The What Women Want campaign is rooted in communities across India. Building on two decades of work of listening to women and making their voices heard in their homes, communities and throughout the corridors of power, WRA India organized Hamara Swasthya Hamari Awaaz. This campaign set out to hear from women about their opinion on their own needs for quality reproductive and maternal healthcare. A largely volunteer effort, more than one hundred and fourteen partners set out to collect women’s aspirations — what women want — for their health services. Between 2016 and 2017, nearly 150,000 women responded. Their voices helped to create an action agenda that continues to drive improvements in respectful and dignified care.

Building on the principles and success of Hamara Swasthya Hamari Awaaz, in 2018, WRA India co-chaired the global What Women Want campaign.

For more information, contact: wra@whiteribbonallianceindia.org
LISTENACT

Listening to women is a radical act.
But acting on what we hear is revolutionary.

Tell us how you are listening and acting on women’s and girls’ demands:
whiteribbonalliance.org/whatwomenwant

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