**Communication & Advocacy Guidance to Reduce Gender-Biased Sex Selection (GBSS)**

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**Acknowledgements**

This guidance document has been prepared as part of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)’s Global Programme to Prevent Son Preference and the Undervaluing of Girls, with funding from the European Union (EU), for the period 2016-2019. The programme is being implemented in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bangladesh, Georgia, Nepal, and Viet Nam. The programme’s overall objectives include South-South learning among the six programme countries, as well as building on the experiences and lessons learned by China, India, Republic of Korea and other countries that have launched laws, policies and programmes to address son preference and sex-selection. For this reason, many examples are included throughout this guidance document from past and current initiatives. The International Children’s Center (ICC), a non-governmental organization based in Ankara, Turkey, is working with UNFPA to support the Global Programme for the period 2018-2019.

This document was prepared by a team led by Tomris Tumren of the ICC. Team members include Aysegul Esin (ICC), Monica Das Gupta (University of Maryland, USA) and Maia Barmish (communications consultant). Feedback from UNFPA staff during a workshop in Istanbul in March 2019 was very helpful in finalizing the report.

We are deeply grateful to UNFPA staff in country offices who generously shared their materials for this report: Astrid Bant and Anh Ha Thi Quynh of the UNFPA Vietnam office; Wen Hua of the UNFPA China office; Dhanashree Brahme of the UNFPA India office; Aynur Guliyeva, Narmina Melikova, and Bahija Aliyeva of the UNFPA Azerbaijan office; Tsovinar Harutyunyan, Mher Manukyan, and Narine Beglaryan of the UNFPA Armenia office; Lela Bakradze and Marika Kurdadze of the UNFPA Georgia office; and Ingrid Fitzgerald of UNFPA’s Asia and the Pacific Regional Office in Bangkok. Special thanks to Professor Doo-Sub Kim of Hanyang University, Republic of Korea, and Professor Heeran Chun of Jungwon University, Republic of Korea, for generously sharing information on Republic of Korea’s media advocacy efforts to reduce sex-selection.

**Introduction**

**About this guide**

*Who should use this guide*

This is a practical guidance document to help those involved in preparing national communication and advocacy strategies to prevent or end gender-biased sex selection and address son preference and the undervaluing of girls (GBSS).

This guide draws on various resources developed for communication and advocacy programmes on gender equality and other public health programmes. It also borrows from GBSS communication and advocacy strategies and other literature and content developed by some of the countries in the Global Programme to Prevent Son Preference and the Undervaluing of Girls. See References for a full list of resources that have contributed to this guidance document.

This step-by-step guidance document focuses on communication and advocacy approaches to adjusting societies’ social norms and attitudes—and ultimately behaviours—towards gender equality and an equal value for girl and boy children.

*How to use this guide*

Programme developers should interpret this guide as a set of suggestions for inspiration rather than a formulaic set of instructions to follow. Critically, GBSS communication and advocacy strategies must be *carefully tailored to country contexts* and developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including those who it is meant to serve, to ensure their efficacy and to avoid unintended consequences.

* This guide starts with an overview of what GBSS is and where it manifests, roots of son preference and undervaluing of girls, and measures to normalize sex ratios at birth (SRB), including the critical role of communication and advocacy.
* Next, the guide takes readers through the process of developing comprehensive communication and advocacy strategies from start to finish—including monitoring and evaluation—with real examples from the field illustrating how to implement the guidance.
* The guide concludes with a GBSS communication and advocacy strategy development process recap.

Taken together, the guidance and tools within this document provide a useful starting point for the development of national GBSS communication and advocacy strategies, which must then be tailored to suit countries’ individual cultural contexts.

Section 1: What is GBSS, and why focus on communication & advocacy to reduce it?

1.1 What is gender-biased sex selection?

Most societies show some degree of preference for sons over daughters, though mostly so slight as to be virtually undetectable (Williamson 1976). In some societies, however, son preference is strong enough to motivate parents to manipulate the gender composition of their children in an effort to ensure that they have at least one boy.

GBSS limits the number of girls in the family, enabling parents to have one or more sons without exceeding their desired family size. As fertility falls, the pressure to sex-select can rise unless there is a concomitant decline in the number of boys desired.

Sex-selection can take place before birth (prenatally), at the time of conception or during pregnancy, or after birth (postnatally), through infanticide or by differential care during early childhood.

Postnatal sex-selection was the only method available in the past, and accounts for the high child sex ratios in China since the early twentieth century (Das Gupta & Li 1999: Figure 1). It is now used largely by people who lack physical and/or financial access to prenatal sex-selection technologies, and is still found in China and India (Anderson & Debraj 2010; World Bank 2011). The spread of prenatal sex-selection technology has made it much easier for parents to avoid having unwanted daughters.

In this document, the term “sex-selection” refers to GBSS carried out either before or after birth. It is measured by the sex ratio of children aged <5 years, which reflects the effect of GBSS whether before or after birth.

1.2 Roots of the problem: factors underlying son preference and undervaluing of girls

There is wide agreement on the main factors underlying sex-selection,[[1]](#endnote-1) whether before or after birth. It occurs in societies that place great importance on the male family line, where a son is expected to be responsible for his parents in their old age and inherit the bulk of their property. A daughter is expected to become part of her husband’s family, and care for them.

The UNFPA Armenia office summarizes the situation thus (2015, p. 2):

“The son preference [is] mainly explained by the necessity to continue the family tree, boys being the inheritors of the property, as well as power of men in families, and much more active role and higher social mobility of boys in the society. In addition, given the lack of a well-developed social security system in Armenia, parents were more inclined to have boys so they would support them in their older age.”

In such settings, there is not only a strong incentive to *have* sons, but also to *invest* in sons rather than in daughters. Thus social norms—by making sons central to their parents’ welfare and marginalizing daughters—also motivate lower parental investment in daughters, further reducing women’s ability to contribute to their parents’ welfare. Investing in daughters is seen as a waste of parental resources, with phrases such as “daughters are like ‘birds of passage’” (Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu et al. 2014, writing of Azerbaijan). This can be especially strong in rural areas, where boys inherit the land and girls marry out of the village—unlike urban areas, where there is a more equal chance for girls and boys to live in the same city as their parents and be available to help them.

In most urban settings, women increasingly provide physical care for their aging parents, especially if they live nearby. Yet even in these settings, sons typically continue to be the main source of financial support for their parents. Women are encouraged to stay home or take lower-paid jobs that allow time for their domestic duties, while men maintain their superior position in the home and in society.

These social structures reinforce the more universal tendency to underinvest in women’s capacity to be financially independent and contribute financially to their households:

“Barriers exist in women’s access to resources, services, productive assets, technical and vocational education, and training opportunities…Women remain predominantly employed in informal occupations, where they earn on average 50 per cent less than men and face higher job insecurity” (UNFPA Vietnam 2017, p. 15).

The social pressure to have sons can be considerable. Men who do not have a son may be subject to humiliation. Women who do not bear sons may be subject to ill-treatment or even abandoned for a new wife (WHO et al. 2011).

1.3 What is the current situation?

High levels of GBSS have been documented in large parts of East Asia and South Asia, and some parts of West Asia. It is minimal or non-existent in most Southeast Asian populations, where ethnographic studies note that parents can live with either sons or daughters (Das Gupta 2010). Outside Asia it has been noted in Albania and contiguous areas of the Balkans (Gjonca 2011), and in some parts of Europe in the past (Klasen 1994).

The trends in child sex ratios (boys per girl aged <5 years) from 1950-2015 in different countries in Asia and the South Caucasus are shown in Figures 1 and 2, along with the world average to indicate more normal ratios of boys to girls in the absence of active GBSS. The world average is shown without China and India, as their large populations skew the world average towards higher masculinity. Note that the world average has risen over time, as boys’ natural disadvantage in survival relative to girls is reduced with improvements in maternal nutrition and maternal and child care (Waldron 1998, Johansson and Nygren 1991).

Figure 1 shows the trend in child sex ratios in the six countries covered under the Global Programme to Prevent Son Preference and the Undervaluing of Girls. Child sex ratios rose sharply in the South Caucasus countries of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in the 1990s, following the severe economic and other disruptions after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Das Gupta 2015). They rose more recently in Viet Nam and Nepal. In Bangladesh, levels of GBSS have been minimal. Figure 2 shows the trend in China, Republic of Korea, and India, where high levels of GBSS have been recorded.

It is apparent that child sex ratios have plateaued and begun to fall everywhere, even in settings such as China, Azerbaijan, and Armenia where they had risen to especially high levels. The exception is Viet Nam where the ratios started rising recently and are still rising. The trend in Nepal is less clear, but levels of GBSS are still relatively low there. The Republic of Korea is notable as it showed an early steep rise in GBSS, but child sex ratios have now nearly normalized to levels that are above the world average, but are consistent with the country’s high levels of maternal health and infant survival. These trends are illustrated below in Figures 1 and 2.

Given that a turnaround in GBSS is under way in most settings, policymakers need to focus on how to accelerate the pace of transition towards more normal child sex ratios. Communication and advocacy strategies can play an important role in this effort by helping alter people’s norms, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours with regard to son preference and sex-selection.

Example:

Republic of Korea’s advocacy to reduce sex-selection started in 1991. This fell on fertile soil, as son preference in Republic of Korea had a brief, sharp decline in the 1980s in response to Republic of Korea’s blistering pace of industrialization, urbanization, and socio-economic development since the 1960s. From being a desperately poor war-torn agrarian country in the 1960s, Republic of Korea became an OECD member in 1996 (Das Gupta et al. 2003). Urbanization and other rapid socio-economic change swept away the traditional underpinnings of son preference. The chart below shows the sex ratio at birth from 1981 to 2015 (Kumar & Sinha 2018, pp. 40-41).



Intensive advocacy to reduce son preference was prevalent also since the 1970s and 1980s in Republic of Korea—as also in India and China—where family planning programmes sought to encourage families to stop childbearing even if they did not have a son. Images of happy, prosperous parents delighting in their daughter(s) were everywhere.

1.4 What measures have been taken to reduce gender-biased sex-selection?

A range of policy approaches can be used to reduce son preference and sex-selection. The main ones used are efforts targeted towards *lowering* *access* to sex-selection through bans; *incentivizing* parents with conditional financial transfers if they raise girls; and *changing* *perceptions* of the relative value of sons versus daughters through communication and advocacy.

Other approaches are more indirect, and have typically been put in place for broader reasons. Some seek to change the *realities* of the situation, such as laws and policies to increase gender equity—which also enable daughters and sons to be of more equal value for their parents. Yet other policies, such as those relating to social protection and social insurance like pensions and affordable health care, *reduce the need for parental support* from children of either gender.

Banning foetal sex-detection and/or sex-selection has been tried in many countries, such as China, India, Nepal, South Korea, and Viet Nam (Ganatra 2008 in Rahm 2012). They have proven difficult to implement. There is little hard evidence that they are effective, and the needed data are rarely available to estimate outcomes in the absence of the ban. Most importantly, bans seek to force women to bear children that are not wanted by the household, putting both the woman and the daughter at risk of ill-treatment (WHO 2011:5).

Financial incentives to people who have daughters, especially if they have no sons, have been tried in India and China. There is no hard evidence that they reduce parents’ desire for sons. Besides, compensating people for having daughters risks reinforcing people’s view that daughters are a burden.

Laws and policies to enhance gender equity have been passed in most countries. These are critical to the process of integrating women into the economic & political mainstream, and thereby increasing their potential value to their parents. Such efforts typically include laws to increase women’s schooling, employment, and often also political representation. They also include changes in Family Law, for example, to encourage equal inheritance of property. Policies for financial support for the elderly are in place in some countries, but much of the population remains uncovered in less developed settings.

Examples:

* In 2005, laws were passed in Viet Nam and Republic of Korea to allow couples to choose whether to pass along the husband or the wife’s family name, along with associated ancestor worship (UNFPA Viet Nam 2011, p. 55; Shin 2006, p. 114).
* In China, laws and regulations to promote gender equality include: equal rights to employment (1988); protection of women’s rights and interests (1992, 2005); state protection of mothers and children (1982); equal opportunities to education (1986) and inheritance (1985); free choice of partners and equality within marriages; and the ability to practice family planning (1950, 1981, 2006) (Li 2007 in Rahm 2012, p. 11).
* In India, a 2004 law makes it possible for daughters to inherit family property almost on par with sons, and a 2007 law requires both sons and daughters to be responsible for the care of parents in proportion to the share of property to be inherited (ICRW 2009 in WHO 2011, p. 7).

For an extensive review of direct and indirect measures, including laws and policies, to reduce son preference, see Kumar & Sinha 2018.

1.5 Why focus on communication and advocacy?

Due to the drivers and root causes discussed above, the social norms and beliefs of some countries place a higher value on boys than girls, resulting in a preference for male offspring. This can cause imbalanced national or subnational child sex ratios as a result of sex selection and preferential treatment towards sons.

Therefore, undertaking communication and advocacy campaigns that challenge deeply rooted gender discrimination and empower women and girls is key to changing social norms and balancing sex ratios (WHO 2011). There is much hard evidence that communication and advocacy campaigns, alongside other initiatives, is one of the most cost-effective ways of altering gender-specific attitudes and behaviours (Kumar & Sinha 2018). For example, rigorous evaluations show the power of media exposure in altering values and behaviours in many spheres—including having fewer children, increasing contraceptive use, reducing teen childbearing (UNFPA Viet Nam 2011, p. 55; Shin 2006, p. 114), child marriage (Kearney & Levine 2015; La Ferrara et al. 2012), and female genital mutilation (CARE 2015).

Specifically, there is a growing body of evidence showing the success of communication campaigns in shifting attitudes and/or sex ratios away from son preference towards an improved value of girls, including in China, India, and Republic of Korea. And advocacy efforts in combination with legal reform show more promise in shifting long-term social norms away from sex selection and altering son preference, compared to sex-selective technology bans (Kumar & Sinha 2018).

Example:

A GBSS prevention programme in Haryana, India found that the following tactics clearly improved the district’s sex ratio at birth:

* Interpersonal communication by frontline workers
* Exposure to discourses by religious leaders
* Regular efforts made by public sector programme implementers to connect with communities at the village level
* Schools and colleges to change norms and attitudes and raise awareness about the law

This indicates that concerted efforts towards communication, advocacy, and community mobilisation are essential to transform gender norms and discourage GBSS (Ubaidur 2015).

*A word of caution*

Communication and advocacy campaigns must work alongside other initiatives and social measures, such as policy change, legal action, and gender equality and women’s empowerment programmes, to address underlying structural factors that enable gender discrimination and GBSS (WHO 2011, p. 12; European Union 2015, p. 16). Altering social norms around son preference and undervaluing of girls to yield a balanced sex ratio cannot be achieved through communication efforts alone. Instead, communication is one important tool in a toolbox of interventions that work together to uproot discriminatory practices that result in skewed sex ratios.

The sections that follow provide practical, how-to guidance for building a communication and advocacy strategy to shift social norms and cultural practices towards promoting gender equality and valuing girls and boys equally, and as a result, helping to balance sex ratios.

Section 2: Steps for building a communication and advocacy strategy

This section provides detailed descriptions of how to design a communication and advocacy strategy for GBSS campaigns and provides examples throughout. The step-by-step process is outlined here and expanded upon below. The underlying principle of being consultative, participatory and inclusive at all levels of society should be carried throughout the strategic planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes.

1. Situation analysis: understand local context; identify risks and challenges
2. Define timeframe and available resources for strategy implementation
3. Identify strategy development and implementation stakeholders
4. Define goals and objectives
5. Identify target audiences
6. Develop messaging
7. Determine tactics
8. Create monitoring and evaluation framework

2.1 Situation analysis: understand local context; identify risks and challenges

Since successful communication and advocacy strategies must be contextualised to account for local realities, strategy developers should conduct a situation analysis early in the planning process. This can be done through a desk review of existing country-specific data and insights, depending what is already available within the country, or it may involve commissioning research to generate new data and insights.

Collecting this information from a variety of stakeholders, including representatives of local-level target audiences and individual community members, will help bring forth insights and local realities that must be considered for effective and sustainable campaign results.

Some examples of *country-specific* information that can be used to inform the strategy include:

* GBSS manifestation: trends, patterns, root causes
* Previous communication and advocacy successes for policy, attitude, and behaviour change, either to do with GBSS reduction or related issues
* Risks and challenges associated with conducting a GBSS communication and advocacy programme, including lessons learnt from other harmful practices campaigns in the country, and potential barriers to message uptake
	+ Example: see “risk list” in “[Communication Guide – A Key to Building a People’s Response to GBSS”](https://india.unfpa.org/en/publications/communication-guide-%E2%80%93-key-building-people%E2%80%99s-response-gender-biased-sex-selection-1) (UNFPA India 2014 pages 58-61).
* Media consumption patterns (e.g. how different groups of people get, respond to, and share information, and what types of content they engage with)
* Baseline survey on people’s knowledge, attitudes, and practices around GBSS and gender equality (see Monitoring and Evaluation section for more information)
	+ Example: “[Prevalence of and Reasons for Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia](https://eeca.unfpa.org/publications/prevalence-and-reasons-sex-selective-abortions-armenia)” (UNFPA Armenia 2012)

2.2 Define timeframe and available resources for strategy implementation

The duration of the strategy’s implementation period must be decided in an inclusive, participatory manner at the beginning of the planning process since this determines how much can be accomplished by the strategy. This means all project stakeholders are consulted and have the opportunity to voice their perspectives, including shaping decisions. The project timeframe also dictates how long, often, and when monitoring and evaluation occurs.

It is important to remember that effective and sustainable participatory processes typically take longer and are more resource-intensive than top-down development communication approaches, given the consultative, hands-on methods applied.

Understanding what resources are available, including budget, labour, skills, and partnerships, helps determine a realistic scope for the strategy and identifies gaps that must be filled. For example, message design requires experience in communication and behaviour change, using the wide range of mediums of communication available today, and an understanding of the gender norms the strategy seeks to change. If the implementing team lacks this skill set, funds may be needed to hire someone, or a partnership may need to be formed with an institution that can offer these skills.

Decide which geographic areas will be prioritized during this step of the process. Depending on available budget and local resources, it is possible that some areas with higher GBSS prevalence may need to be prioritized over other areas. Understanding what provincial, city and community-level institutions, activists, and other support mechanisms are available—for example local arts groups that promote gender equality—will help determine the scope of resources available to implement the strategy. These stakeholders should be consulted on all components of the strategy development to help ensure its efficacy.

Leveraging financing

There are many ways to secure financing and in-kind support for communication and advocacy strategy implementation through partnerships.

* Government partnerships can stretch available financing by piggybacking activities onto the government’s vast administrative and outreach structures.
* Private sector partners can offer funding, reduced cost or in-kind support as part of corporate social responsibility commitments, often in exchange for recognition. Another option is to educate media corporations that it is profitable to develop stories about gender and intra-familial relationships, themes that engage rapt audiences. Soap operas that develop such themes have proven lucrative across the world since the 1930s, with high viewership and advertising revenues. They can also be used creatively in other ways, such as expanding the GBSS programme’s informational outreach through the vast marketing networks of companies that sell widely-used products such as soap.
* Partnerships and collaborations at the international, national, provincial, and local levels can all provide advantageous funds, expertise, and insights. It is especially important to foster meaningful collaborations with local communities to establish community buy-in and ideally ownership of initiatives.

Partnerships are explored further in the next section.

2.3 Identify strategy development and implementation stakeholders

Some of the benefits of identifying which entities and individuals will be involved in the development and implementation of a communication and advocacy strategy include:

* Ensuring that the right people are consulted early on, which increases buy-in and support during the implementation phase
* Forging and securing partnerships to help implement the strategy
* Flagging opportunities and resources available to the implementing teams
* Tailoring plans to local contexts
* Fostering participation among affected communities
* Raising considerations, risks, and other concerns that otherwise may have been missed

Thoughtful selection of stakeholder consultations will ensure the right amount of useful, actionable input is received. Stakeholder consultations can occur throughout the strategy development process, and solicited input can range from the initial brainstorming phase, to problem solving, to final sign-off, as applicable.

Stakeholder consultations can be conducted via a range of methods including individual interviews, small group meetings, focus groups, and in some cases, structured qualitative surveys.

Examples of possible strategy development and implementation partners:

* **Initiating institutions’** leadership, advisory boards, and key staff
* Existing or prospective **partner institutions’** leadership and key staff
* **Donor institutions’** leadership and key staff
* **Key representatives from each target audience** who understand the mindsets of these groups and hold gender-equitable attitudes, to foster participation, advocacy, and to enhance efficacy of messages and tactics
	+ E.g. **Policymakers and other public officials** who have demonstrated commitment to, or interest in, finding solutions to end GBSS
	+ **Individuals** (e.g. older people, younger couples, men, women, youth, etc.) who are known to oppose GBSS/have made family planning choices that demonstrate an appreciation of girls/have changed their perspective on GBSS (suggestions can come from community partners, UNFPA staff, healthcare providers, etc.)
	+ **Community leaders** who work with individuals whose current or future decisions impact sex ratios (e.g. teachers/professors, student representatives, religious leaders, village heads, youth club/team leaders, women’s and men’s association representatives, healthcare and other service providers, local NGOs or community based organizations, gender and human rights focal points and/or other key field staff)
	+ **Journalists** and media outlets that have covered gender and women’s rights issues favourably
	+ **Private sector** actors who have taken progressive stances on gender and women’s reproductive health and rights issues

The value of partnerships

UNFPA has systematically built up wide networks of partnerships for its work, which can be used for developing its communication and advocacy programmes. Together with its international and national partners, UNFPA already has considerable experience in effectively channelling the potential offered by different partnerships at national and local levels. This helps to develop programmes jointly with partners, avoiding duplicating efforts, and making the best use of UNFPA’s relative strengths and comparative advantages.

For example, UNFPA has built partnerships with other international organisations around the issue of GBSS, including those issuing the 2011 Interagency Statement on Preventing Gender-biased Sex Selection with UNFPA: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF, UN Women, and the World Health Organization (WHO 2011).

UNFPA has also built partnerships with governments and NGOs in the countries in which it works. This facilitates building alliances with key actors and stakeholders—in particular government agencies, media, and NGOs working on gender issues—to develop country programmes to counter GBSS. These strengths are reflected, for example, in the UNFPA’s ability to work with the Viet Nam government’s political/administrative hierarchy from the centre down to village level, and with state and local government officials in India (WHO 2016).

These are just some examples of partners that could be included in the strategy development process. Additional partnership ideas can be found in the “Target audiences” section later in this document.

2.4 Define goals and objectives

Goals

Identifying upfront the intended outcomes of a communication and advocacy strategy helps determine its tactical priorities and metrics of success.

Communication and advocacy strategies often have one—or up to a few—overarching, big-picture goal(s) that describes what the communication and advocacy programme aims to achieve at a high level. This goal serves as a guiding light for the rest of the strategy. In other words, strategies are designed so their components collectively work towards achieving this principal aim.

Importantly, goals and objectives—described below—should be measurable and attributable to the communication and advocacy activities within a strategy. Because success will be measured against these goals and objectives, it is important that evidence can show linkages between the strategy’s communication and advocacy activities and the goals and objectives. See the “Monitoring and evaluation” section for more information about why communication and advocacy efforts cannot expect to change sex ratio at birth directly.

**Example of *attributable* communication and advocacy goals:**

* “To influence attitudes towards an increased value for girl children in [?] districts of [?] country.”
* “To bring about a change in perceptions regarding GBSS by emphasizing its negative impact in terms of long-term development and stability of the people and the state” (UNFPA Armenia 2017).
* To contribute to a shift in social norms that value girl children, as demonstrated by a reduction in self-reported sex-selective behaviours.

(These can be measured and potentially directly linked to communication and advocacy activities, for example through household surveys that indicate trends in women’s reported son preference, or in their reported pressure from other family members to bear a son, and what may have influenced these views—e.g. a sermon or a radio programme, etc.)

**Example of a goal that is *difficult to attribute* to communication and advocacy:**

“To balance the sex ratio at birth in [?] country towards the natural biological levels.”

(There are various factors that can influence this, many of which are unrelated to communication and advocacy, such as economic shifts, policy changes that came before or independent of communication and advocacy efforts, etc.)

Objectives

Many communication and advocacy strategies also include objectives, which are more specific than goals and can be thought of as supporting goals, or sub-goals. Objectives roll up into achieving the strategy’s overarching goal—so to accomplish the goal, objectives must be met first. The number of objectives can range from a few to many, depending on the scope of the strategy.

Each activity/tactic in the strategy should be addressed by at least one objective, ensuring continuity between goals, objectives, and the tactics for achieving them.

**Examples of GBSS communication and advocacy objectives:**

* To use community-based structures to create awareness and advocate for the reduction of existing disparities in the status and treatment of girls.
* To increase prevalence of the belief that girls can also care for their parents if given the conditions.
* To prompt participatory and evidence-based/driven discussions and debates in target communities about the positive role of women in families, communities, and societies, including in public office.
* To facilitate shift of public opinion in support of policies that empower girls and women, such as improved access to education, land rights, and having decision making positions in the public and private spheres.
* To collaborate with communities in producing content that resonates with target audiences, as determined by viewership and/or engagement on television, radio, online, and other mediums.
* To build capacity of media to enhance gender-equitable reporting, promote campaign messaging, and reduce gender biases that inadvertently propel GBSS.

The timeframe and resources allocated to the communication and advocacy strategy’s implementation will determine the appropriate level of ambition for the goals and objectives, since they must be achievable in the amount of time and with the resources available to the implementing teams.

Some goals and objectives will be easier to measure progress towards than others within the duration of the campaign. Given the pervasive and deeply rooted norms within societies of countries with imbalanced sex ratios, it may take more time than the intervention period to see significant changes in reported attitudes, and more so, behaviours. These considerations are discussed further in the “Monitoring and evaluation” section.

2.5 Identify target audiences

Defining target audiences focuses who the strategy seeks to reach. Thoughtfully selecting audiences to communicate with streamlines the strategy’s ability to achieve its goals and objectives by reaching those who most need to hear its messages to produce the desired change. Many of these audiences will become messengers themselves in shifting mind-sets of others. Audience targeting also helps ensure resources are used as efficiently as possible.

Note:

Advocacy campaigns should focus not only on those subgroups of the population that show high levels of sex selection. The specific groups practicing sex-selection can change over time, as shown by the case of Republic of Korea (Chun et al. 2009), where levels of sex-selection were highest at first amongst the more educated urban women who were best placed to access sex-selection technology. However, these women were also the forerunners in the national shift in social norms and decline in son preference. In the later stages of the transition it was the least educated rural women who had the highest prevalence of sex-selection, and finally they also shifted to low son preference. The same pattern is reflected in the process of fertility decline in India, with the more educated being earlier adopters of small families and the least educated catching up with them after a lag (Bhat 2002). More generally, people emulate the norms and life-choices of those whom they perceive to be more successful members of their society (Government of Viet Nam 2018; UNFPA India and Breakthrough 2014).

It iscrucial for target audiences to be localised and reviewed by in-country experts familiar with GBSS and behaviour and social change communication. Not all target audiences are relevant to every country, so this must be customised to the contexts of the countries the strategy is being built for.

Sample target audiences for GBSS communication and advocacy strategies and campaigns

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Audience |  | Justification |
| * Policymakers
* Government bodies/officials (e.g. parliament, ministries, councils, relevant committees, ombudsmen, etc.)
* Political influencers
* Law enforcement

(national, local) |  | Influencing the views of those involved with shaping and enforcing gender equality policies is a vital objective of GBSS advocacy campaigns. All levels of officials are relevant, including local level. They wield considerable influence and authority and can be mobilised to advocate for changing social norms and behaviours on gender preference.Examples:* In parts of India with strong son preference, state and local government officials have been mobilized to this end, along with frontline field workers (La Ferrara et al. 2012; Jensen & Oster 2009).
* A village head in India circulated a selfie with his daughter on WhatsApp, which went viral with selfies pouring in and even more with the Prime Minister encouraging the process (UNFPA India and Breakthrough 2014).
* The Government of Viet Nam trains officials from provincial level down to commune and hamlet level to hone their skills in behaviour change communication (Government of Viet Nam 2018, p. 51).
* Similar activities are planned in China, along with plans to change village rules and regulations to make customary law more gender-equitable (UNFPA China 2017, p. 4).
 |
| Families* Men (older and younger)
* Women (older and younger)
* Married couples
* Youth
 |  | From UNFPA Azerbaijan’s GBSS communication and advocacy strategy (2017): “Covert pressures from families are among the underlying causes of gender-biased sex selection. The families remain the key decision-making units and the social norms that govern son preference will ultimately have to change within families in the first place. Therefore, parents, in-laws and newly married couples should be among the main targets of messages, focusing on promoting the value of girls and women for families and the society. Some families can also be role models in feature stories developed for/by media and social media postings. |
|  | Men’s views in patriarchal societies heavily influence those of their households and communities. If a man is supportive of having daughters/grand-daughters in his family, this reduces the pressure on the women of the household to bear sons. At the level of the community and broader society, the pressures to practice sex-selection are reduced if men come to accept that children of both sexes can be valuable. Young men are also important to reach as their views represent future social norms, and they will soon be of child-bearing age.Example:In India, awareness campaign messages targeting men provided evidence that fetus sex is determined by male sperm; this was deemed an effective strategy for changing men’s attitudes towards fetus sex (Rahm 2012 in Kumar & Sinha 2018). |
|  | Older women in families can apply pressure on younger women to bear sons in societies where son preference is prominent. Younger women are of child-bearing age, or soon will be, so it is important they know their rights and the benefits of girl children. |
|  | Married couples are critical since their actions impact sex ratios. While there are usually pressures on expecting parents that take the decision out of their hands, it is still worthwhile trying to persuade their perspectives. |
|  | Youth are the leaders of tomorrow, so shaping their opinions early on sets the stage for future social norms in favour of both girls and boys. |
| Educators |  | Educators from early childhood through university, and education policymakers, have the power to shape attitudes of countries’ young people—decision makers in the next generation—through curriculum, rhetoric, and example. For instance, teachers can encourage both girls and boys to study, and they can equalize girls’ and boys’ expectations for their futures. |
| Religious leaders |  | Religious leaders can powerfully affect people’s values and behaviours, especially in settings with organised religions such as Islam and Christianity. These religions have formal leaders who make public statements and give their followers frequent sermons on good values and behaviours.Examples:* The UNFPA Azerbaijan office is working with the religious authorities to discuss these issues in their weekly preaching. For example, there are enough messages from Prophet Muhammad and Holy Koran supporting the value of girls and promoting their role in society, which can be used during the Friday public teachings, or Khutbahs, at mosques. This can be a particularly effective way of influencing men and community elders.
* The UNFPA Armenia office notes that “Faith-based organizations can be a powerful ally in combating prenatal sex selection if they are approached wisely and respectfully.” Since 2015, priests of the Armenian Apostolic Church have been talking about the equal value of girls and boys (not pregnancy termination directly)—including during community meetings and counselling meetings in their parishes—and it is planned to include this also in the wedding ceremony sermon.
* The UNFPA Georgia office is working with religious leaders among minority groups who have relatively high levels of sex-selection. These leaders have been enthusiastic about spreading messages about gender equity to their congregations.
 |
| Healthcare sector and other service providers |  | Healthcare workers are an especially important audience in many contexts, as they often understand the pressures facing their clients and have empathy for them (Siwach 2016) and sometimes feel criminalised by sex selection management efforts (Guilmoto 2012 in Kumar & Sinha 2018). They also understand the severe health risks facing their clients if qualified practitioners turn them away. And they typically earn substantial income from providing services related to sex-selective pregnancy termination.Social workers can also use their intensive interaction with people to help change social norms.Example:The project “Caring for Equality” by World Vision Armenia aimed to transform harmful stereotypical attitudes and behaviours towards an equal appreciation of girls and women through community activities. Community social workers were key in identifying and addressing early indications of GBSS in the community (International Center for Human Development 2016). |
| Civil society organisations/leaders* Civic groups
* Local NGOs
 |  | Civic organisations such as youth or sports clubs, women’s networks and student associations—including their leaders who often serve as community organisers—can be effective at shaping the views of their memberships, including next generations. This outreach can carry through to members’ families, friends, and communities. Women’s groups can be especially helpful in ensuring messaging is gender equitable (Kumar & Sinha 2018).Civil society and NGOs are instrumental in tailoring and delivering national campaign activities to local communities; grassroots outreach at the local level must occur alongside high-level national initiatives to produce change. |
| International organisations and embassies |  | Partnering with international organisations is important to ensure coordinated efforts, but beyond that international organisations can help expand reach by sharing content on social media and other distribution mechanisms. They can also be leveraged for financing. |
| Media |  | The media at all levels, from national publications to local, has great power to shift social norms given the wide audiences they reach regularly. Pitching stories, particularly of people who chose to have girls and benefited from it, can present an alternative perspective to the norm. Training journalists from broadcast, radio, online and print outlets can improve gender balanced reporting and enhance coverage to align with GBSS messaging. Targeting journalists who are more likely to cover such issues as well as those who report with biases can be valuable. |
| Private sector |  | Private sector partners can be useful vehicles for dissemination of GBSS messages, including encouraging private sector actors to align advertising with GBSS messaging. They can also be incentivized by the prospect of advertising revenues for edutainment and other compelling content related to GBSS topics, and/or a demonstration of their corporate social responsibility. |
| Popular figures and other opinion leaders |  | Many types of opinion leaders can play an important role in reducing son preference and GBSS. Popular figures, both men and women, from the worlds of sports, films, etc. can add appeal to GBSS messaging. Portraying successful women also underscores the importance of women in societies. |
| Former GBSS supporters who now oppose the practicePositive deviants |  | Former practitioners of GBSS, whether parents, healthcare providers or others, who now oppose the practice can be powerful advocates for change.Similarly, positive deviants—people in areas with high prevalence of GBSS who do not adopt the practice—could become advocates for the campaign, either at a grassroots level within their communities or in a more public-facing capacity, such as in the media.Examples:* [A former female circumciser becomes an advocate against the practice in Ethiopia](https://www.unicef.org/ethiopia/stories/circumciser-past-now-end-fgmc-advocate) (Tadesse 2019)
* See “Negotiating social norm of having son in families of North Vietnam” (Institute for Social Development Studies 2018) for more information about how the positive deviance approach could be leveraged for GBSS advocacy efforts
 |

2.6 Develop messaging

Deep-seated social norms and behaviours can be altered by communication using positive messages, as shown by Asia’s very successful family planning programmes. From Republic of Korea to India—and most countries in-between—communication campaigns helped reduce people’s desired and actual family size by showing them the benefits of having fewer children, and giving information on contraceptive methods and services.[[2]](#endnote-2)

This section explores the necessary role that a cohesive messaging framework plays in a communication and advocacy strategy. It then describes how to develop GBSS messages that resonate with target audiences and avoid unintended consequences, such as further discrimination of girls and women.

Why create a messaging framework?

Communication and advocacy strategies are underpinned by a set of messages that are reflected throughout the strategy’s tactics. This consistency is fundamental to achieving the strategy’s goals and objectives. Closely adhering to the strategy’s messaging framework is especially important in GBSS campaigns given the issue’s sensitivity and complexity, helping to avoid unintended confusion and other consequences of poor or otherwise misaligned messaging.

Designing GBSS messages

GBSS advocacy seeks to reduce son preference and the pressures to discriminate against daughters, whether before or after birth, by altering the social norms underlying these phenomena. Effective messaging to reduce GBSS encourages people to rethink their norms and stereotypes—but in ways that are perceived as improving people’s lives.

General principles in GBSS message design

**Messages *should*:**

* **Be simple**, easy to understand, and attention grabbing through prominent and frequent placement and mediums to maximise reinforcement with target audiences.
* **Be positive**—by focusing on the benefits to families and societies of investing more equally in girls and boys—to make it easier for people to absorb the messages and discuss them with others. This focus on gender equity also avoids opening up contentious discussions around pregnancy termination.
* **Be situated in human rights language**, which can be found in the Interagency Statement on GBSS (WHO 2011).
* **Address root causes**/drivers of son preference, undervaluing of girls and sex selection
	+ For example, India’s GBSS communication and advocacy strategy suggests, “The decision to undergo gender-biased sex selection is guided by practical calculations of cost versus benefit in raising daughters…Therefore, the real ‘motivations’ and rational thinking by which people plan their families must be addressed directly” (UNFPA India and Breakthrough 2014, p. 60).
	+ Similar emphasis on addressing these underlying factors is found in other UNFPA country office documents, for example UNFPA Viet Nam (2017, p. 17).
* **Convey the equal value of girls and boys**, and the benefits of investing in both.
* **Ignite discussions and debates** around positive values, such as promoting equal opportunities for girls and boys. The Interagency Statement on GBSS (WHO 2011) suggests this is the most effective way to shift attitudes, behaviours, and thus social norms around GBSS.
* **Be carefully contextualised to local realities** of the country the messages are designed for, with review by in-country GBSS experts, stakeholders, and target audience representatives.
* **Use reliable data.**
* **Be mapped to target audiences and tactics** to ensure every target audience is covered by at least one message. Messages can be used for more than one audience, and audiences can receive more than one message. Not all messages are used in every tactic or for all target audiences, but each tactic should be rooted in at least one of the strategy’s core messages.
* **Be tested** before launching a communication and advocacy campaign, and then piloted to verify their intended meaning is understood by target audiences. Depending on the duration of the campaign, messages should be retested periodically throughout its lifespan for the same reason.

**Messages should *avoid*:**

* **Implicit or explicit moralising*.*** This can make people defensive and less receptive to the message. It does not help to express judgements of social norms and behaviours, such as shaming or blaming them.
* **Eliciting pity for unborn girls, young girls or women**. Portraying them as victims or objects of pity devalues them.[[3]](#endnote-3) An ineptly phrased message that daughters are not really a burden can inadvertently reinforce the perception that they are indeed a burden.
* **Inadvertently implying that girls should be favoured over boys**.
* **Direct injunctions against sex-selective pregnancy termination**. Messaging must not jeopardize women’s abilities to access safe and legal pregnancy terminations, a vital component of their sexual and reproductive rights. This point is especially country-context specific, as the rhetoric and access to safe and legal pregnancy termination services vary. In some countries, GBSS messaging caused confusion or unintentionally reinforced pro-life attitudes.

Examples:

* + A UNFPA Armenia report (2015, p. 8) summarises this in their lessons learnt:

“It proved complicated to ground the advocacy in the concept of human rights, as there seemingly is a number of conflicting rights present (right of a woman to have an abortion, right to be free from gender discrimination, right to life). It is therefore recommended to ground the arguments in gender equality and the equal value of a girl child and a boy child.”

* + In India and Nepal, efforts to implement the ban on sex-selection caused confusion amongst doctors and the wider population about the legality of pregnancy termination (Bracken & Nidadavolu 2005; Ganatra 2008; Lamichhane et al. 2011).[[4]](#endnote-4)
* **Suggesting that GBSS is violence against girls or women**. This can open the door to arguments around pregnancy termination being a form of violence towards unborn children. Instead, GBSS is classified as a harmful practice and form of discrimination against girls, and a human rights violation.
* **Nationalism**, which can result in pro-natalist policies that restrict women’s access to reproductive rights.

GBSS message themes and examples

The following tables and their contents should not be replicated exactly as shown below; instead, these provide ideas for countries to draw from, but it is very important to locally contextualise and test messaging and target audiences.

Most of the examples provided crosscut many of the message themes, even if they are only listed under one theme. Not all the examples are perfect in their message design or delivery—meaning some of the above ‘principles to avoid’ may be present—but these serve as general ideas that can be further refined and tested in each specific country context.

The below sample GBSS messages are elaborated with supporting points and examples in the tables that follow.

1. Deeply rooted gender discrimination against women and girls lies at the heart of sex selection
2. Investing in girls empowers them and protects the human rights of girls and women
3. Respect women’s rights: it’s the law. Women are entitled to [insert applicable laws in the country, e.g. land/property, inheritance, divorce, child custody, education, health care, employment, reproductive decisions, protection from violence, etc.]
4. Childcare is a shared responsibility and joy of fathers and mothers
5. Girls and boys both bring immense pride and joy to parents, including care in their old age
6. When girls are invested in, all boats rise: families, communities, economies, and societies benefit alike
7. Practicing gender discrimination and GBSS leads to negative social and health consequences

General information to empower women, increase gender equity, and promote human rights

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1** | **Deeply rooted gender discrimination against women and girls lies at the heart of sex selection** |
|  |  |
|  | Notes |
|  | Imbalanced sex ratios are an unacceptable manifestation of gender discrimination against girls and women and a violation of their human rights (Interagency Statement on GBSS 2011). |
|  | The rise in sex-ratio imbalances and normalization of the use of sex selection is caused by deeply embedded discrimination against women within institutions such as marriage systems, family formation and property inheritance laws (ibid.). |
|  | Many pervasive social, cultural, political, and economic injustices against girls and women—from fewer educational and employment opportunities to less autonomous decision-making power (e.g. in choosing a partner) and the inability to inherit property—constitute violations of the right of women to non-discrimination (ibid). |
|  | States should develop and promote enabling legislation and policy frameworks to address the root causes of the inequalities that drive sex selection. Policies will be needed in areas such as inheritance laws, dowries, and financial and other social protection in old age, while also ensuring that laws and policies reflect a commitment to human rights and gender equality (ibid.). |
|  | Gender discrimination conflicts with many religious values (Buddha images, Islam, etc.). |
|  |  |
|  | Target audiences |
|  | Policymakers, government officials, political influencers, law enforcement |
|  | Religious leaders |
|  | Educators |
|  | Media |
|  | Health sector and other service providers |
|  | Civil society organisations/leaders |
|  | Private sector |
|  | Popular figures and other opinion leaders |
|  | International organisations and embassies |
|  | Families |
|  | Former GBSS supporters who now oppose the practice |
|  |  |
|  | Examples/proof points |
|  | “Discrimination against girls anywhere in the world is a social ill and a human rights violation, which must be stopped” (UNFPA Azerbaijan 2017). |
|  | “Stand up for equal rights and opportunities for girls and women” (UNFPA Azerbaijan 2017). |
|  | Between 1999 and 2002, India’s Ministry of Health and Family Welfare supported several full-length feature films dealing with various aspects of gender inequality, though not with sex selection directly (Naqvi 2006). These include:* Hari Bhari, directed by Shyam Benegal, which dealt with reproductive rights.
* Kairi, directed by Amol Palekar, which dealt with the girl child.
 |
|  | [*Child marriage messages*](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Working%20together%20to%20end%20child%20marriage%207th%20pp.pdf) *that could be adapted to GBSS* (Save the Children Fund 2018):* “Gender inequality is a root cause of child marriage. Without addressing the inequalities that drive risk of child marriage we will not succeed in eliminating the practice or effectively supporting married girls to realise their potential. Gender roles that restrict girls’ abilities to generate income, along with traditions like bride price and dowry payments, lead to marriage being closely linked to financial security for girls and their families. Barriers to accessing essential health, economic livelihoods, nutrition and education services must be addressed; social norms that limit girls’ opportunities and expose them to violence must change; and girls themselves must be empowered to shape the decisions that affect their lives.”
* “Governments have the opportunity to transform the future for millions of girls—and for their societies. To achieve this, governments must do more to develop and implement multisectoral, holistic national action plans to end child marriage, coordinating across ministries and stakeholders to deliver effective, joined-up approaches that tackle the root causes of gender inequality.”
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| **2** | **Investing in girls empowers them and protects the human rights of girls and women** |
|  |  |
|  | Notes |
|  | States have an obligation under human rights laws to respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights of girls and women (Interagency Statement on GBSS 2011). |
|  | More than 180 states are signatories to the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). As part of this undertaking states agreed to: “eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, which result in harmful and unethical practices regarding female infanticide and prenatal sex selection” (United Nations 1994, paragraph 4.16). |
|  | States should support advocacy and awareness-raising activities that stimulate discussion and debate within social networks, and more broadly within civil society, to strengthen and expand consensus around the concept of the equal value of girls and boys (Interagency Statement on GBSS 2011). |
|  | Supportive measures for girls and women should be put in place, including measures to ensure improved access to information, health care services, nutrition and education; and measures to improve their security (ibid.). |
|  |  |
|  | Target audiences |
|  | Policymakers, government officials, political influencers, law enforcement |
|  | Religious leaders |
|  | Media |
|  | Educators |
|  | Health sector and other service providers |
|  | Civil society organisations/leaders |
|  | Private sector |
|  | Popular figures and other opinion leaders |
|  |  |
|  | Examples/proof points |
|  | Care for Girls campaign, China, promoting the recognition of the value of girls. While results indicate a positive effect on sex ratios, see Interagency Statement on GBSS, p. 7, for complications of the campaign. |
|  | Atmajaa, a short film turned soap opera series in India (Government of India/Plan International 2001, 2004) illustrates the emotional trauma women endure when they are pressured to give up their female babies, aiming to shift attitudes away from son preference and raise awareness of women’s reproductive rights (Hughes 2003). See case study under “Edutainment” section for details. |
|  | “The more empowered the women, the better is the world we live in (Suruklenen besheriyyet qadinla yukselecek, Huseyn Cavid)” (UNFPA Azerbaijan 2017). |
|  | “Girls and boys deserve equal love, opportunity, and rights throughout their lives” (UNFPA Azerbaijan 2017). |
|  | “Let our girls be born, loved, and grow up to achieve their potential and become empowered citizens of our country” (UNFPA Azerbaijan 2017). |
|  | Discrimination against a girl robs her of her childhood and opportunities in life. It does not benefit any community or society. An educated youth paves the way for a better future for the country (UNICEF 2017). |
|  | #EndFGM [social media calls to action](https://iwillendfgm.org/speak-out-online/) (The Girl Generation) |
|  | “I have rights” harmful practices campaign, which can be adapted to GBSS (IKWRO). |

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| **3** | **Respect women’s rights: it’s the law. Women are entitled to: [***insert applicable laws in the country, e.g. land/property, inheritance, divorce, child custody, education, health care, employment, reproductive decisions, protection from violence, etc.***]** |
|  |  |
|  | Notes |
|  | Family laws have become increasingly gender equal, at least in principle, but information on this is often not widespread. The same is the case with other laws, such as those relating to gender equity in education and the workplace. Information needs to be disseminated on the key laws and policies that can help women improve their position in the household and in society, and also on how to avail of these laws and policies. UNFPA is well positioned to review the main policies and laws relating to gender equity in a given country, and in many cases such reviews have already been conducted (see UNFPA India 2013b). |
|  | The flipside of this message, for policymakers, is that gaps do exist in laws that contribute to GBSS and/or gender inequality. These vary depending on country context. For instance in China and Viet Nam, fertility policies make it more compelling to practice GBSS. In Georgia, implementation of laws is hindered because of social norms and stereotypes propelled by social media. In Azerbaijan, Nepal, and Bangladesh, further improvement of labour law is needed. In Armenia, it is important to develop social safety nets. Generally, social protection of multi-child families could be an indirect solution. There are also gaps between national and regional policies in some countries. |
|  |  |
|  | Target audiences |
|  | Policymakers, government officials, political influencers, law enforcement |
|  | Educators |
|  | Religious leaders |
|  | Media |
|  | Families |
|  | Health sector and other service providers |
|  | Civil society organisations/leaders |
|  | Former GBSS supporters who now oppose the practice |
|  |  |
|  | Examples/proof points |
|  | “Jo beti ko dein sammaan. Woh mata-pita mahaan.” (“The parents who respect their daughters truly deserve to be respected.”) (UNFPA India 2014) |
|  | For service providers in some contexts: Sex selection is illegal: “I abide by the law, I don’t support sex selection.” |
|  | “At present, Vietnamese women’s rights to inheritance is often violated. It is important to enhance people’s knowledge of women’s rights to inheritance and to encourage daughters to claim their rights to family assets. Legal assistance to women can help to ensure women’s rights to inheritance” (UNFPA Viet Nam 2017, p. 17). |
|  | “Though Armenia’s inheritance laws are ‘gender-neutral’ there is a traditional practice of leaving the family home, land and business to sons” (UNFPA Armenia 2017, p. 17). |
|  | A UNFPA China [video](https://china.unfpa.org/en/video/%E5%87%BA%E7%94%9F%E6%80%A7%E5%88%AB%E6%AF%94%E5%AE%A3%E4%BC%A0%E7%89%87%EF%BC%9A%E8%B0%81%E8%AF%B4%E5%A5%B3%E5%84%BF%E4%B8%8D%E6%98%AF%E9%87%91) tells women how to avail of existing legal and institutional protections against gender-based violence (which is different than GBSS, but provides an example of how to activate this message) (UNFPA China 2017b). |

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| **4** | **Childcare is a shared responsibility and joy of fathers and mothers** |
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|  | Notes |
|  | Simple messaging showing the love that fathers have for daughters can be very powerful, indicating that fathers can be great caregivers too. |
|  | Men’s positive involvement in the lives of their partners and children creates a global opportunity for equality, and it benefits women, children, and men themselves. Engaging men as involved fathers can lead to improved maternal and child health, stronger and more equitable partner relations, a reduction in violence against women and children, and lifelong benefits for daughters and sons. Research has shown that men’s involvement as caregivers also has benefits for them: it makes them better fathers, improves their intimate relationships, and enhances their quality of life (MenCare 2019). |
|  |  |
|  | Target audiences |
|  | Families |
|  | Educators |
|  | Religious leaders |
|  | Health sector and other service providers |
|  | Civil society organisations/leaders |
|  | Media |
|  | Private sector |
|  | Popular figures and other opinion leaders |
|  |  |
|  | Examples/proof points |
|  | MenCare campaign [posters](https://men-care.org/resources/?type=posters) with strong messages and imagery showing men taking responsibility in childcare duties and the love a father has for his children—boys and girls (MenCare 2019). |
|  | UNFPA Georgia [campaign for father engagement](https://www.unfpa.org/es/node/14832), including a popular primetime reality series, *Fathers*, and other activities (Datuashvili 2016). |
|  | In Armenia, a Facebook page called “[What about you – do you have a daughter](https://armenia.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-and-moh-joint-event-devoted-what-about-you-do-you-have-daughter-facebook-campaign)?” exceeded the social media activity during presidential elections in the country (UNFPA Armenia 2015, p. 7). |

Positive messages on how families and society benefit from investing in girls and boys equally

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| --- | --- |
| **5** | **Girls and boys both bring immense pride and joy to parents, including care in their old age** |
|  |  |
|  | Notes |
|  | Simple messaging showing the love that parents have for daughters can be very powerful. |
|  | Messages of this theme can correspond to images/stories of successful women. |
|  | Messages of this theme can correspond to images/stories of daughters carrying out ceremonial ancestral rites and/or husbands taking on their wives’ family names. |
|  | Messaging that daughters can help their parents and be as valuable as sons directly addresses parents’ motivations in childbearing and childrearing. Changing perceptions about the relative roles of sons and daughters is key.* If parents see that their daughters can help them in later life, they are encouraged to invest more in their daughters. Otherwise sons get most of the parental investment and inheritance, while their wives remain dependent spouses, taking care of children, her husband, and his parents.
* Messaging can show the benefits of giving girls the opportunity to be independent, to make decisions, and to be self-reliant. This enhances their ability to help their parents, not only financially but also because they are better able to negotiate the outside world.
 |
|  |  |
|  | Target audiences |
|  | Policymakers, government officials, political influencers, law enforcement |
|  | Families |
|  | Educators |
|  | Religious leaders |
|  | Health sector and other service providers |
|  | Civil society organisations/leaders |
|  | Media |
|  | Private sector |
|  | Popular figures and other opinion leaders |
|  |  |
|  | Examples/proof points |
|  | “When given the conditions, girls can also be successful, bring happiness to the family and parents can be assured when old” (Government of Viet Nam 2018, p. 24). |
|  | * Republic of Korea campaign “[Love Your Daughters](https://www.economist.com/international/2017/01/19/how-south-korea-learned-to-love-baby-girls),” with slogans such as “There is no envy for ten sons when you have one well-raised daughter” (Economist 2017).
* Intensive advocacy to reduce son preference in the 1970s and 1980s in Republic of Korea—as in India and China—where family planning programmes sought to encourage families to stop childbearing even if they did not have a son. Images of happy, prosperous parents delighting in their daughter(s) were everywhere.
 |
|  | * In India, a spontaneous social media post went viral after a villager posted a selfie of himself with his daughter, leading to millions of similar posts, including by the Prime Minister (Siwach 2016).
* Government of India public service advertisement shows a successful female television celebrity with happy parents to convey that girls can be successful and are the pride and joy of their parents (Naqvi 2006).
* “Beti sambhaale rishte wafadaari se. Shaayad sahaara wahi bane.” (“Who could be more dutiful and caring than a daughter? Perhaps she’ll be the one who cares best for you one day.”) (UNFPA India 2014)
* “Jis ghar mein beti ka janam Manaa Kya beti KO byaahoge wahaan? (“Will you marry your daughter into a home that does not allow the birth of a daughter?”) (ibid.)
 |
|  | “Who says Daughter is not Gold,” a short video prepared by the UNFPA Beijing office in collaboration with the China Women’s Federation in 2009. The video starts with a man bitterly disappointed when his wife bears a girl. Over the years, he takes increasing pride in his daughter’s achievements. Finally he is shown in old age, radiantly happy with his grown-up daughter pushing his wheelchair. |
|  | UNFPA Azerbaijan prepared an appealing [short video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zEM5z7UykQ&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR2ovKvqfNNw8ifrOG2flr3yPQ6kmNywc0d_yBe2fdCqdFZhJp1v747ZM2M) about this (2017). |
|  | Every child brings happiness. |
|  | Isn’t your life better because of a special girl or woman you love? |
|  | Children don’t choose their parents. Parents should not ‘select’ their children. |
|  | “A happy and successful family does not depend on the presence of a son” (Institute for Social Development Studies 2018). |

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| **6** | **When girls are invested in, all boats rise: families, communities, economies, and societies benefit alike** |
|  |  |
|  | Target audiences |
|  | Policymakers, government officials, political influencers, law enforcement |
|  | Families |
|  | Educators |
|  | Media |
|  | Religious leaders |
|  | Health sector and other service providers |
|  | Civil society organisations/leaders |
|  | International organisations and embassies |
|  | Private sector |
|  |  |
|  | Examples/proof points |
|  | “Meena” edutainment cartoon television series (UNICEF 1992). See case study in “Edutainment” section for details. The messages are upbeat and positive, and only indirectly imply that ill-treating daughters and wives is counterproductive for everyone. |
|  | “Ne the Girl Child’s Journey,” a puppet show with stories emphasising the value of women and girls, aiming to address the roots of prenatal sex selection (UNFPA Armenia 2015). |
|  | The Government of Viet Nam (2018) emphasizes the need to enhance gender equality, and to show how this benefits Vietnamese families and communities. |
|  |  “Girls are an important part of our families, communities and the nation. If given opportunities, they have the full potential to make us proud” (UNFPA Azerbaijan 2017). |
|  | When the conditions are such that girls are given the same opportunities and care as boys, including nutrition, health, shelter, and education, they can become highly productive members of society, contributing to their families, communities, and the greater economy. |
|  | If half the population has access to education and employment, the economy will grow exponentially. |
|  | [*Child marriage messaging*](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Working%20together%20to%20end%20child%20marriage%207th%20pp.pdf) *that could be adapted to GBSS* (Save the Children Fund 2018):* “Ending child marriage could save the worst‑affected countries billions of dollars. Modelling suggests that failing to end child marriage by 2030 will cost the world economy trillions of dollars. By contrast, ending the practice will have a multiplier effect: for countries with the highest rates of child marriage it could result in billions of dollars in savings from welfare and education budgets through increased earnings, along with the human and economic benefits of reductions in child mortality, stunting and early child birth.”
* “Ending child marriage requires different sectors to work together for the benefit of all. As child marriage rates decline, government savings and growth will increase national resources for human and economic development and bring countries closer to achieving a range of national, regional and global development goals. Multisectoral collaboration is urgently needed, to end child marriage and set married girls on a safe pathway to fulfilling their potential.”
 |

Messages that warn against the adverse consequences of gender-biased sex-selection

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **7** | **Practicing gender discrimination and GBSS leads to negative social and health consequences** |
|  |  |
|  | Notes |
|  | Negative social and health consequences of GBSS include:* Countries form a reputation of allowing gender discrimination and not upholding human rights.
* Shortage of future brides, which has implications such as increased potential for human trafficking of brides, rape and other forms of violence against women, and other disruptive behaviours/crimes by men.
* Shortage of future mothers. No girls = no mothers; no mothers = no children.
* When women are expected to continue having children until a boy is born, the health and life of both mother and child may be at risk, including the mother’s mental health.
* Economies are not able to realize their full potential when women are not engaged in the workforce as a result of gender discrimination.
 |
|  | The growing number of missing women in marriageable age has increased transnational marriage migration, women, and child trafficking. Some reports suggest that the lack of brides will lead to political unrest due to increased male bachelorhood and youth bulges (Hudson and Den Boer 2004; Urdal 2006). |
|  | There are considerable economic losses for global growth (mounting up to US $12 Trillion) that countries lose by lacking or not making ‘full use’ of their female populations (Woetzelet al. 2015). |
|  |  |
|  | Target audiences |
|  | Policymakers, government officials, political influencers, law enforcement |
|  | Educators |
|  | Religious leaders |
|  | Health sector and other service providers |
|  | Civil society organisations/leaders |
|  | Media |
|  |  |
|  | Examples/proof points |
|  | Caring for girls is caring for your future. And your country’s. |
|  | Act before it is too late: don’t wait until there aren’t enough women in your country. |
|  | Media advocacy in Republic of Korea to address sex-selection focused on the negative societal consequences of sex-selection: problems in the socialisation process at schools with few girls; shortages of future brides; increased potential for crimes and anti-social behaviour; difficulties in the gender-related division of labour in the labour market; and the negative effects of illegal pregnancy terminations on women’s health. Other messages included boys feeling the lack of girls in their class, and “the less gender preference, the better quality of life”. |
|  | “More and more people are moving away from child marriage. It is not necessary, and it is damaging to a society” (UNICEF 2017). *This message could be adapted to GBSS.* |

Targeting and adapting messages

GBSS is like family planning programmes in that messaging seeks to alter social norms that prevail across the population as a whole. Many countries practicing GBSS share underlying norms regarding gender roles and hierarchies. This is not to say that people share the same *level* of son preference across a population, but some messages will apply across the population and generations. For example, showing how daughters can be valuable to their parents and their households demonstrates the benefits of greater gender equity to everyone. Parents and the older generation see how they can benefit from investing in girls; boys and young men see the benefits of more equitable treatment of their wives and sisters; and girls and young women are encouraged to raise their expectations and aspirations.

Conversely, some messages should be tailored to specific target audiences, since not all messages are appropriate for all audiences. For example, messaging about ‘the common good’ and how GBSS harms countries’ economies is more likely to influence policymakers and media than individuals such as young parents who may respond better to messages with high emotional/personal appeal and direct relevancy to their day-to-day lives.

Variations in local languages, dialects, and idioms must be considered when designing and delivering messaging, for example ethnic minority regions. Populations also vary in characteristics such as dress and living conditions, which is relevant to visual representations. But much of this variation can be addressed through neutral messaging and imagery that cuts across such differences—as was typically the case with family planning advocacy.

Testing messages

Messages need to be tested and piloted on target audience representatives—as well as within specific regions—to verify they are interpreted as intended before large-scale dissemination. Subsequent audience feedback is also crucial to finetune the messaging as needed. Message testing should facilitate target audience participation, a core value of communication for development methodologies.

Message testing process

1. Design messages
2. Test messages through focus groups with target group representatives or other means of collecting detailed qualitative feedback
3. Modify messages
4. Pilot messages with a slightly larger group of target audience representatives (e.g. qualitative survey, phone interviews, etc.)
5. Modify messages
6. Launch campaign messages to target audiences
7. Monitor regularly for needed improvements, modify, retest, relaunch

Example:

The contents of Armenia’s GBSS public campaign messages in most cases underwent a thorough peer review. This prevented, to the extent possible, any unwanted shift of the discussion on sex-selective pregnancy terminations to the general topic of pregnancy terminations and ‘pro-life vs. pro-choice’ confrontation (International Center for Human Development 2016).

2.7 Determine tactics

Once the key messages and target audiences are identified, the next step is determining how to deliver the messages to the audiences. These delivery methods are known as the ‘tactics’ of the strategy. This section offers ideas of methods and mediums for spreading communication and advocacy messages, along with some examples from the field.

Tactics should be mapped to target audiences at the country level to ensure each target audience is reached by at least one of the strategy’s tactics. Likewise, each tactic should aim to fulfil at least one of the strategy’s objectives.

Given the broad scope of GBSS campaigns that seek to shift social norms, leveraging mass media and other wide-sweeping tactics will be key to efficiently reaching large volumes of people across target groups within a country. Mass media is one of the most effective ways of altering people’s awareness of, values, and behaviours related to social issues. Normative change is most cost-effective when using mediums such as television, radio, and internet, which can span wide geographic ranges (Kumar & Sinha 2018).

The following tactical ideas must be customised to local contexts to ensure they effectively reach target audiences. These examples offer inspiration for a communication and advocacy programme, but they are just a starting point and not all ideas will be relevant to all countries or possible given available resources.

For an overview of six campaigns, their target audiences, and challenges, see “[Communication Guide – A Key to Building a People’s Response to GBSS”](https://india.unfpa.org/en/publications/communication-guide-%E2%80%93-key-building-people%E2%80%99s-response-gender-biased-sex-selection-1) (UNFPA India 2014, pp. 55-57).

The information collected during the first step of the strategy development—the situation analysis—will be especially useful in providing insights about types of media and other ways target audiences obtain information (e.g. what are the most common forms of media consumption—television, radio, newspaper, online? What types of content is most effective?)

Branding

Having a consistent look across the campaign will help increase message recognition among those who engage with its content.

Developing a branding package ensures all campaign content is easily recognized as belonging to the campaign. A branding package, including a campaign logo, should be created by a professional graphic designer familiar with campaign work. As with messaging, branding should be tested before launching.

 Example:

A bright, eye-catching campaign logo was enormously effective, as illustrated by the simple red inverted triangle used in the Indian family planning programme. Seeing that triangle was enough to convey the whole message on reducing fertility to people quickly passing a billboard, bus or building.

UNFPA might consider designing and testing a simple logo that is used across countries to advocate for gender-equal family planning. It could even be used in countries not practicing sex-selection to help promote greater gender equity.

The logo of the Indian family planning programme:

 

GBSS logos:
Ne puppet (UNFPA Armenia) (Government of Vietnam):

 

Meena (UNICEF Bangladesh):

  

Note that all European Union funded programmes must adhere to the “[Communication and Visibility Requirements for EU External Actions](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/node/17974)” guide, which involves co-branding content (European Union 2018).

Television, films, and radio

Television, films, and radio reaches large groups of people in many developing countries. These mediums can feature GBSS messaging via a variety of content formats, including:

* Advertisements
* Talk shows and interviews with GBSS advocates (e.g. [talk show on Viet Nam television for International Day of the Girl Child](https://vietnam.unfpa.org/en/video/tv-talk-show-international-day-girl-child), UNFPA Viet Nam 2015)
* Documentaries
* ‘Edutainment’ series and movies

Television and radio programmes can be especially useful in unpacking complex issues like GBSS because they can develop their messaging gradually over the course of a series. A variety of GBSS messages can be presented over time, such as through the lives of different characters in edutainment series played out over months. See below for more on edutainment.

Example:

An evaluation of the impact of access to cable television in India found that it was associated with lower son preference, as well as lower acceptance of domestic violence (Jensen and Oster 2009). The authors argue that this has to do with the values of the characters typically portrayed on television, accelerating the spread of new ideas among people that challenge gender stereotypes. However, it is important to remember that not all media produce content representing gender equality.

Edutainment

Edutainment is the “process of purposely designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate, in order to increase audience members’ knowledge about an issue, create favourable attitudes, shift social norms, and change the behaviour of individuals and communities” (Singhal et al. 2004). Edutainment has been used in many contexts to alter attitudes, behaviours, and social norms, including changes in fertility and health behaviours.

Edutainment can take various forms, including ongoing television and radio series, soap operas, cartoons, short films, feature-length films, theatre, puppet shows, and more. Research is being done on the impact of edutainment content via emerging interactive technology formats such as mobile messaging, social media, and videogames (World Bank Group 2019).

Soap operas are good opportunities to subtly challenge traditional gender norms. They can alter the values that underlie son preference, for instance by portraying women caring for their parents, as well as enriching their communities and society. Effective edutainment soap operas have been developed by the BBC, MTV, and other media agencies in both developed and developing countries (Cody et al. 2004). Soap opera edutainment programmes are often broadcast by state-run and commercial media channels aware of revenue potential for family dramas.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Examples:

* An Indian radio soap opera paused the story when a woman accused her daughter-in-law of infertility to play a short jingle noting that male infertility is common but people tend to assume that the woman is at fault.
* Films are also a powerful medium, as illustrated by the Indian film “Secret Superstar,” which showed how women can protect themselves using the legal system, and how parents can benefit from refusing to abort a girl but instead educate her and help her thrive.
* For additional examples of edutainment campaigns and their impact, see World Bank Group 2019, p. 32.

Successful edutainment messaging typically enables audiences to identify with the characters of the story who deliver memorable messaging in an easy-to-follow format (World Bank Group 2019). This is particularly effective when messages are embodied by the characters viewed positively by the audience (Singhal et al. 2004).

Differential role modelling—positive, negative, and transitional characters—is used to convey a programme’s messages of change. Through role modelling, viewers’ sense of self-efficacy is expanded by showing them how to deal with problems and where to obtain needed information.

To learn more about designing and evaluating GBSS edutainment content, see “Images and Icons: Harnessing the Power of Mass Media to Promote Gender Equality and Reduce Practices of Sex Selection” (Naqvi 2006).

Case study: Meena, edutainment cartoon by UNICEF

“Meena” is an edutainment television series developed by UNICEF’s South Asia offices and disseminated from 1992, most intensively in Bangladesh (Chesterton 2004, p. 17). The children’s cartoon series features a little girl and her pet green parrot.

“Meena” was adapted for the following formats:

* State television broadcast
* Mobile film screenings in urban and rural areas
* A radio series
* Story and comic books distributed in schools
* Promotion on billboards, rickshaws, public service announcements, and other mediums
* Meena events. e.g. at fairs and puppet shows, incorporating local customs
* Flipcharts for training and discussion

Encouraged and supported by her parents, Meena is portrayed as an intelligent girl well-liked by her schoolteachers and others. Having had the opportunity to learn to negotiate the modern world, she is an asset to her parents, wider family, and community.

The messages are upbeat and positive, and only indirectly imply that ill-treating daughters and wives is counterproductive for everyone. Through Meena’s adventures, the series educates people on treating sons and daughters equitably, along with messages on preventive health behaviours. It shows women as role models in all walks of life, and also as supporting their parents. Son preference is directly addressed in an [episode](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpGQ7BOHY2c) available in English (UNICEF 2010).

The core materials were disseminated in English, Bangla, Hindi, Nepali, and Urdu. These have been translated/dubbed in 17 South Asian languages as well as Arabic, some South East Asian languages, and some European languages. Meena’s neutrally-designed cartoons appeal to people across the highly heterogeneous population of South Asia. It shows that messages for broad social change do not necessarily need to be targeted to each subsection of a population, beyond using a language people can understand.

The programme’s success in Bangladesh was helped by being part of wider national efforts by governments and NGOs that intensively promoted gender equality. Specifically, Meena spinoff content and materials were tailored to local contexts and organisations were engaged to disseminate it to local communities, even in remote areas. The programme was also continuously improved by feedback collected from regular community participation research.

For more information about designing, testing, launching, monitoring, and evaluating edutainment programmes, see the resource, “Evaluation of the Meena Communication Initiative” (Chesterton 2004).

Case study: Atmajaa edutainment serial\*

Atmajaa, or “Born from the Soul” (2004), was a 13-part tele-serial produced in 2004.

Inspired by the short feature of the same name and funded by Plan International, it was telecast on various Doordarshan channels at different times.

The serial contextualised the problem of GBSS in an urban, upper middle class north Indian family. The main protagonist was Mamta, a young married woman, who fights against her conjugal family to save her unborn female child. In order to resist conjugal family pressures to have a sex-selective pregnancy termination, she leaves home and tries to make a new, independent life for herself.

The serial was targeted primarily at women in the reproductive age group to make them aware of their reproductive rights and of the right of the girl child to survive. The secondary target groups were families, communities, the medical establishment and judiciary, to make them critically aware of sex selection and of the provisions of India’s Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act.

In 2004, a five-city audience impact study on Atmajaa found that young women were the most decisive supporters of the serial, and that young women, married or unmarried, were unanimous in their approval of greater gender empowerment. In addition, there was a small but critical mass of unmarried young women who were aware, candid, and open to new attitudes. Married women, however, felt that women’s rights need to be located within the family. Therefore, conflict resolution must take place within the domain of the family. Among this audience segment, Mamta’s decision to leave the conjugal home provoked anxiety and discomfort. The study found that, for the most part, married women tended to defer to the opinions of the older generation. Older women, old enough to be mothers-in-law, had a compelling but uneasy relationship with the serial. Many of them felt stereotyped in the serial, and felt uneasy about being portrayed as regressive and authoritarian. Male viewers generally felt marginalised and that their challenges had not been adequately represented in the storyline.

The impact study concluded with the following key recommendations:

* As an experiment in communicating a social message through a drama serial format, Atmajaa was worthwhile and should be supported.
* Older women and men would have to be made an active part of the discourse and given a greater personal stake in the issue for the message to reach them.
* The format of a long-running soap rather than a 13-episode serial would be more effective to communicate this complex issue.
* There was enormous scope for serials like this to be interactive and producers of such drama serials should seek viewer feedback on the treatment of issues and resolution of conflicts.

Atmajaa was revived in 2006, funded by the international NGO IFES, with new episodes airing on Doordarshan.

\* Excerpt adapted from Naqvi 2006

Digital media

GBSS campaigns should have a strong presence on social media and other digital platforms—including a campaign website, blogs, mobile apps, messaging apps, etc.—to engage large segments of the population and make campaign information readily available in a variety of channels. Determining which channels and what types of digital content are most appropriate for the country context will ensure messages reach and resonate with target audiences. This research can be conducted as part of the strategy’s situation analysis.

The GBSS programme should both produce and share others’ social media content, leveraging related hashtags, trends, movements, influencers, and opportunities for reach expansion.

Depending on project budgets, paid social media advertising can help expand the reach so messages and content further penetrate specific audiences and locations.

Examples:

* Social media can also provide a forum for communities of practice to coordinate and share learnings, as was the case in Armenia. Under the EU-funded project against GBSS, the partners set up a [group on Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/groups/409020602617094/)[[6]](#endnote-6) in 2015 for stakeholders to exchange knowledge and hold discussions in a secure environment. The group has over 1,000 members.
* In Armenia in 2014, a Facebook campaign called ["What about you - do you have a daughter?"](https://armenia.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-and-moh-joint-event-devoted-what-about-you-do-you-have-daughter-facebook-campaign) reached more than 100,000 people in its first week. Users uploaded photos of their daughters along with warm comments to demonstrate that girl children are as dear to and welcome in the family as boy children. UNFPA Armenia and the Ministry of Health held a joint event in conjunction with the campaign to generate discussion around the issue of GBSS (UNFPA Armenia 2014).
* “I Will End FGM. Will You? Social Media Campaign Toolkit” ([The Girl Generation](https://www.thegirlgeneration.org/sites/default/files/files/IwillendFGM%20Social%20Media%20Toolkit.pdf)).

Traditional media

Traditional media such as newspapers and magazines can contain advertisements, feature stories, news articles, op-eds and interviews/columns on issues related to gender equity and son preference. They can also disseminate findings from technical reports on the consequences of sex selection, for example census reports, sex ratio comparisons, local impact of excess males and bride scarcity, trafficking of women, etc. (Kumar & Sinha 2018, p. 38). Traditional media can be useful for conveying more detailed information and reach different audiences than digital media, particularly older generations. However, written content is less accessible to audiences with limited literacy.

Content

* **Posters and billboards** with simple messages. Examples include the “We can do it” poster with Rosie the Riveter to recruit female workers for the US defence industries during the Second World War, the “Iron Girls” posters to empower women in Mao’s China, [father engagement campaigns](https://men-care.org/resources/?type=posters) (MenCare 2019), and family planning programme posters across Asia
* **Factsheets** with data and insights for dissemination at events and meetings with policymakers, media, and other public opinion leaders
	+ E.g. [Factsheet on GBSS programme](https://vietnam.unfpa.org/en/publications/global-programme-prevent-son-preference-and-undervaluing-girls-0) (UNFPA Viet Nam 2019)
* **Brochures and booklets**: general for a broader audience and targeted for specific groups, such as community groups, healthcare providers, religious leaders, etc.
	+ E.g. [Booklet on skewed sex ratio at birth](https://armenia.unfpa.org/en/publications/%E2%80%9C-lost-balance-son-preference-armenia%E2%80%9D-project-book) (UNFPA Armenia 2012)
* **Detailed reports and policy briefs** on various elements of country-specific GBSS phenomenon
	+ E.g. “[New Insights and Policy Recommendations](https://vietnam.unfpa.org/en/publications/imbalanced-sex-ratio-birth-viet-nam-new-insights-and-policy-recommendations)” report (UNFPA Viet Nam 2018)
* **Teaching materials and sample curriculum**
* **Infographics** for digital and print uses
	+ E.g. [“Communication Guide – A Key to Building a People’s Response to GBSS”](https://india.unfpa.org/en/publications/communication-guide-%E2%80%93-key-building-people%E2%80%99s-response-gender-biased-sex-selection-1) (UNFPA India 2014, pp. 28-31)
* **Press releases** for newsworthy initiatives
* **Questions and answers** on country-specific GBSS phenomenon for easy reference
* **Video animations and other video clips**
	+ “[Gender-Biased Sex Selection in Georgia](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxE4GEqqBNg)” (UNFPA Georgia et al. 2016)
	+ [“UNFPA Study on Sex Imbalances at Birth in Armenia, 2013”](https://armenia.unfpa.org/en/video/unfpa-study-sex-imbalances-birth-armenia-2013) (UNFPA Armenia 2013)
	+ [“10: How our future depends on a girl at this decisive age”](https://vietnam.unfpa.org/en/video/10-how-our-future-depends-girl-decisive-age-0) (UNFPA Viet Nam 2016)
	+ “[Voices from the community on Sex Ratio at Birth imbalance](https://vietnam.unfpa.org/en/video/voices-community-sex-ratio-birth-imbalance)” (UNFPA Viet Nam 2015)
* **Music videos and songs** by popular artists
	+ E.g. “[Story of a Girl Child](https://vietnam.unfpa.org/en/video/story-girl-child),” by The Voice Viet Nam winner 2013 (UNFPA Viet Nam 2015)

Events

Hosting or participating in events is a great way of conducting face-to-face engagement with a variety of target audiences, from urban areas to villages:

* Leverage international days on social media to place op-eds and to co-host events with partners in communities: International Day of the Girl Child (11 October), International Women’s Day (8 March), World Population Day (11 July), International Human Rights Day (10 December)
* Film screenings
* Photo exhibitions
* Booths at festivals and other public events
* Flashmobs and other demonstrations
* Press briefings
* Speaking engagements at rotaries, universities, community associations, government institutions, conferences, and other venues
* Conferences with gender equality elements
* Town-hall style community discussions
* Plays, puppet shows, street theatre, street art, and other creative cultural events can be effective at community mobilization, particularly in rural areas where other mediums may not reach as easily

Example:

Rani ki Kahani, a video on [street theatre](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cfitzgerald%5CDownloads%5Cyoutu.be%5COUICmaw_HRM) addressing gender-biased sex selection by Breakthrough in Haryana, India (UNFPA India 2013).

Trainings

Trainings for media, healthcare workers, religious leaders, village heads, and other community leaders can desensitise these opinion influencers to GBSS key messaging, helping to ensure use of gender-equitable language. Involving these leaders in programme design and implementation can encourage them to offer their communities alternative perspectives in favour of gender equality. These can be offered in-person, such as the programme “[Integrating the Contents of Gender Equality, Domestic Violence Prevention, and Men’s Responsibilities in Caregiving and Housework in Premarital Courses in Churches in Hanoi, Vietnam](https://men-care.org/2015/04/23/religious-leaders-champion-gender-equality-and-domestic-violence-prevention-in-hanoi-vietnam/),” or remotely via webinar, such as [this advocacy webinar](https://men-care.org/2019/06/13/state-of-the-worlds-fathers-a-mencare-advocacy-webinar/) for raising awareness about the “State of the World’s Fathers” report 2019.

1:1 briefings, roundtables

Individual and small-group meetings with policymakers, religious leaders, community heads, media producers, and other opinion leaders is an important part of any advocacy programme. This provides a detailed exchange of information and an opportunity for these influencers to discuss any concerns directly with experts working on GBSS-related issues.

Public personages

Engaging public personages to disseminate key messages can help change social norms and behaviours among target audiences who admire these role models. This can be done via most of the tactics above.

2.8 Create monitoring and evaluation framework

The formation of the communication and advocacy strategy’s monitoring and evaluation plan should coincide with the development of the strategy itself. All goals, objectives, and tactics in the strategy must be measurable to determine impact. Therefore creating a framework for assessing this impact must be done alongside communication and advocacy programme planning. The monitoring and evaluation process should be inclusive and participatory, as with all other elements of the strategy development and implementation.

Monitoring and evaluation of programme activities is essential to ongoing and future programme success.

Regular assessment via *monitoring,* which collects data about the programme performance, enables needed adjustments for improvement during programme implementation.

After programme completion, this data is used to *evaluate* the programme’s impact by assessing the degree to which the strategy’s *indicators* have been met. Indicators are precise metrics that break down the strategy’s objectives into measurable segments.

Examples:

* Monitoring and evaluation framework for a communication and advocacy programme: “[National Strategy to End Child Marriage in Nigeria 2016-2021](https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Strategy-to-end-child-marriage_for-printing_08-03-2017.pdf)” pp. 43-46.
* See below for sample high-level GBSS communication and advocacy indicators. For more detailed indicators, see the “Global Guidelines: Monitoring & Evaluation Global Action on Son Preference and Gender-Biased Sex Selection” pp. 31-33.



1 Source: Global Guidelines: Monitoring & Evaluation Global Action on Son Preference and Gender-Biased Sex Selection

 \*IEC = information education communication

GBSS communication and advocacy programmes should not expect to measure changes in the sex ratio at birth. Such changes not only take more time than the average few-year lifespan of a communication and advocacy programme, but also result from a complex interplay of factors outside the scope of communication programmes. These factors may include policy changes like the availability of meaningful pensions and social insurance programmes, shift in national socio-economic status, etc.

Instead communication and advocacy monitoring and evaluation can expect to find shifts in more attributable phenomenon such as the proportion of people reporting strong son preference, a shift in the desired sex composition of children, or increased public support for more equal investment in girls and boys.

For a detailed understanding of best practices for monitoring and evaluation, methodologies, methods, indicators, and examples, see:

* Global Guidelines: Monitoring & Evaluation Global Action on Son Preference and Gender-Biased Sex Selection 2019 (GBSS programme M&E framework, global indicators and Viet Nam national case study)
* [Interagency Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Resource Pack 2011 for Communication for Development Initiatives](https://www.unicef.org/cbsc/files/C4D-RME-Resource_Pack.zip) (Lennie & Tacchi 2011)
* How to design impact evaluations and use data for policy change (particularly pp. 70 – onwards): “Science for Impact: Better Evidence for Better Decisions” (World Bank Group 2019).

*Some monitoring and evaluation methods*

The following high-level descriptions of monitoring methods are meant to provide ideas for some of the ways in which data can be collected, including both qualitative and quantitative. There are additional methods to consider beyond these, so evaluators are encouraged to review the above resources for a more comprehensive overview of monitoring and evaluation approaches.

Note that it can be appropriate to use a combination of instruments to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, which enables evaluators to understand broader trends as well as detailed information about particular phenomenon.

* **Randomized Control Trials (RCT)**

RCTs are the gold standard in impact evaluation. These require a control population to provide a clear counterfactual of what changes might have taken place in the absence of the programme, which helps researchers understand the programme’s impact. RCT data are typically generalisable and representative of a wider population.

Such a counterfactual is difficult to devise in communication programmes, as communication tactics are typically designed to reach across a population and have ideas ‘contaminate’ people in other groups. However, it is sometimes possible to create data from a ‘natural experiment,’ in which for example only some people had access to a particular television channel.

RCT evaluations can usually only be carried out when a programme has been in place for some years.

For these reasons, the following methods are likely better suited for GBSS communication and advocacy monitoring and evaluation.

Example: [BALIKA](https://www.popcouncil.org/research/balika-bangladeshi-association-for-life-skills-income-and-knowledge-for-ado) (Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents)\*

The BALIKA project was a four-arm RCT that evaluated whether three skill-building approaches to empower girls can effectively delay the age of marriage among girls aged 12–18 in parts of Bangladesh where child marriage rates are at their highest.

More than 9,000 girls in 72 communities participated in the BALIKA project, divided into three different intervention groups—communities that received education support, life skills training, or livelihoods training. Another 24 communities served as the control arm of this study: no services were provided in those communities.

The program was implemented over an 18-month-period from February 2014 to August 2015. In an intent-to-treat analysis, each intervention showed that it was possible to significantly delay child marriage in comparison to control communities.

*\*Excerpt adapted from Population Council 2016*

* **Survey data**

Surveys can be used to monitor programmes, both for routine feedback and to collect data for impact evaluation. While this form of impact evaluation lacks the rigour of RCTs, it can be conducted more easily, and potentially more effectively in the case of communication campaigns.

Surveys commonly measure changes in specific indicators between a baseline survey conducted before the intervention begins, and subsequently during the intervention and after it has concluded.

Surveys also help in program design. Analysis of the baseline survey by the respondents’ characteristics—such as age, gender, position in the household, residential location and other socio-economic characteristics—can also indicate the range of reported opinions and behaviours held by the population, and how to focus the communication plan. Analysis of data collected once the programme is underway helps indicate whether it needs to be refocused. Surveys can also capture shifts in reported *awareness, attitudes, and* *behaviours* following exposure to advocacy, thus indicating the potential impact of the programme. It must be noted that surveys cannot necessarily assess the *actual* views and actions of respondents.

Survey data can be qualitative or quantitative, and thus representative of wider populations depending on the survey design, but they are not always generalisable.

Specifically, Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) surveys are a recommended approach for GBSS communication and advocacy programmes. KAPs can capture shifts in audiences’ reported *views and behaviours* on issues of gender equality—such as parental care for sons and daughters, equal inheritance for boys and girls, the acceptability of daughters supporting their own parents, and more broadly the respective roles of men and women in the home and in public life. KAPs have been used to monitor and inform evaluation of a variety of development projects, including family planning programmes.

For a detailed guide to developing, implementing and evaluating KAP surveys, see “[A Guide to Developing Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Surveys](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/43790/9789241596176_eng.pdf?sequence=1)” (World Health Organization 2008).

For an example of a survey report on women’s attitudes towards GBSS after exposure to communications and advocacy campaigns that aimed to change acceptability of GBSS in India, see “[Addressing gender-biased sex selection in Haryana, India: Promising approaches](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a0896e40f0b649740000a2/61192_India_Report_Sex_Selection.pdf)” (Jejeebhoy et al. 2015).

* **Focus group discussions**

Focus groups are a popular method of collecting more comprehensive insights into people’s views, cultural contexts, and related phenomenon than other methods may afford. However, they have some drawbacks. What people say in a group can be affected by the dynamics of the group. Especially if the group is drawn from people who live or work in the same place, participants may hesitate to express controversial opinions or contradict someone in a position of authority over them.

Focus groups yield qualitative data and are not based on formal sampling, so it is not possible to generalise findings from a focus group to represent the views or behaviours of a larger community.
* **Process evaluations**

In addition to using an above method to collect information about shifts in reported attitudes and behaviours, and thus programme impact, process evaluations should be carried out on a regular basis to collect routine feedback on whether interventions are reaching their intended audience effectively.

This involves assessments such as the size of audience being reached by each type of messaging and audience approval ratings to indicate how the messages are being received (Government of Vietnam 2018, pp. 52-55). It also involves assessing other programme activities, such as how many local officials or teachers have received training in advocacy, and their response. A combination of qualitative and quantitative information can be useful here.

Example:

UNFPA Azerbaijan GBSS communication and advocacy strategy (2017, p. 15):

“The questionnaires filled by participants of training courses and information sessions upon their completion are also important sources of information to see the effectiveness and influence of the capacity building activities.”

Distilling and disseminating lessons for the future

Distilling and disseminating the lessons learnt is an important part of programme activity, which is too often neglected. After evaluating programmes, lessons learnt should be disseminated to programme stakeholders and target groups for transparency in a timely fashion to ensure relevancy and usefulness. These lessons can enhance the *reach*, *impact,* and *cost-effectiveness* of current and future programmes.

* **Reach**
* Which communication channels and vehicles reached the highest percentage of the intended audience? How did this vary by characteristics such as age, gender, rural/urban residence and socio-economic status?

Example:

An evaluation of a GBSS communication, advocacy, and community mobilisation campaign in India found that while frontline workers were a particularly important source of behaviour change communication in rural areas, women in urban settings, notably those in Kurukshetra, benefitted from greater media exposure and talks by religious leaders (Jejeebhoy et al. 2015).

* **Impact**
	+ Which types of communication seem to have been most effective at changing norms on gender equity/son preference? If enough time has elapsed to measure changes in reported behaviours, this is crucial. How did this vary by characteristics such as age, gender, rural/urban residence and socio-economic status?
	+ Which types of messages seem to have been most effective in bringing about normative and/or reported behavioural change? What might have been the problem in the design of messages that were less effective?
* **Cost-effectiveness**
	+ Which communication channels and forms of messaging were found to be the most cost-effective in reaching intended audiences and in changing norms/reported behaviours?
	+ Cost-effectiveness can be very difficult to estimate rigorously with the data available from most surveys. However, some estimates of the relative costs of each type of messaging can be made, along with their reach and rough estimates of impact.

To be able to learn from evaluations, it is important to avoid the tendency for evaluations to merely conclude that a programme had limited (or significant) impact, without discussing why this might have been the case. The details of programme design and implementation should be explained so others can learn from the programme’s experience, including reflections on what did not work.

2.9 Communication and advocacy strategy development process recap

|  |
| --- |
| Big picture |
| * Situation analysis
* Define timeframe and resources
* Identify strategy development and implementation stakeholders
 |
|  |
| Core components |
| * Define goals and objectives
* Identify target audiences
* Develop messaging
* Determine tactics (and necessary skills for implementation)
 |
|  |
| Review of success and learnings |
| * Create monitoring and evaluation framework
* Monitor regularly, evaluate periodically
* Disseminate learnings to stakeholders and make available to target audiences for transparency
 |

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1. UNFPA (Armenia) 2015; Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu et al. (2014) on Azerbaijan; Guilmoto (2015) and UNFPA Georgia (2017); Talukder (2014:6) on Bangladesh; Puri and Tamang (2015:1) on Nepal; UNFPA (2011) on Vietnam; and Das Gupta et al. (2003) on China, India, and South Korea. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. There is a large literature on this, some of which is summarized in Middleton and Lapham (1987). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. UNFPA India and Breakthrough (2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. The UNFPA India office responded by issuing a FAQ sheet explaining what is and is not illegal (UNFPA India and IPAS 2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. The term “soap opera” originated with serial programs sponsored by the producers of soap and hygiene products, starting with radio in the 1930s and television thereafter. These engaged their audience with the emotional crises of their beloved characters. Sales of their sponsors’ products shot up (Swasy 1994, p. 110-112). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/409020602617094/> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)