

Introduction:

Issues of sexual health and rights have gained momentum throughout the world, especially in developing, primarily due to the outbreak of HIV/AIDS epidemic on a global scale, and evidence-based policy dialogue that highlights the link between sexual and reproductive health rights and overall health and standard of living.

Hence, it has become increasingly important for sexual and reproductive health rights to be institutionalized throughout the world, especially in developing countries –where such rights are often blatantly violated especially with regards to certain marginalized/subjugated groups.

Analysis of the root causes of poor sexual health rights status in developing countries has revealed that they are most certainly rooted in long-standing patterns of socio-economic inequality and discriminatory cultural practices.

Due to poor progress on improving human development indicators –of which reproductive health is an essential part –it has become increasingly important to address the root causes, and build global and national consensus on the best possible way to approach the situation.

In light of all these factors, the argument for the recognition of an international day –to celebrate sexual and reproductive health rights and promote open, informative and constructive discussion of sexual health in a cultural context –has gained significant weight.

Hence the announcement by World Association for Sexual Health (WAS) to celebrate World Sexual Health Day (WSHD) every year on the 4th of September, starting this year, was welcomed and actively supported by the World Population Foundation (WPF).

WSHD –a global celebration:

- Celebrations organized by WAS in 27 different countries, spanning 5 continents around the world.
- Notably, 3 Muslim majority countries –namely Turkey, Lebanon and Pakistan –took part in the global celebrations.
- The over-arching theme of the global celebration was to promote open, informative and constructive discussion around sexual health issues.
- Events organized across the board included engagement of media and local partners to mark the occasion through promotion of key messages and awareness raising activities.

WSHD in Pakistan:

The overarching theme of WSHD was in line with the global theme: promotion of open, informative and constructive discussion around sexual health issues.

Further, the main theme was devolved into three key messages around which discussion was encouraged. Lack of priority given to these three key areas and misconceptions surrounding them are chiefly behind poor sexual health rights status of Pakistani population. They key areas identified were, Sexual Health and Gender Norms, Sexual Health, Fertility Preferences and Family Planning and Sexual Health Education and Services.

Sexual health rights issues were also discussed and highlighted with particular focus on the floods which has left the sexual lives and health of 85% of victims, who are women, children and adolescents, in dire straits. This was useful in highlighting the way in which such issues are often ignored by important community stakeholders and the extent to which SRH rights of certain groups are blatantly violated in general, and in disaster situations.

WPF took the important step of playing a leading role in the introduction of WSHD in Pakistan through:

A media-driven campaign that incorporated all major forms of media

- Press releases were printed in leading English dailies and Sindhi and Urdu newspapers including online blog-zines/e-newspapers such as Taleem News and Pak Observer.
- A 50 minutes television show –The Other Line on Express 24/7, Pakistan’s only English current affairs channel –was dedicated to WSHD and its importance in a Pakistani context, with special emphasis on the sexual and reproductive health needs of 85% of the flood victims who are women, children and adolescents. Qadeer Baig, Country Representative Ahmad Shah Durrani, Research and Communications participated from the WPF, whereas Dr. Imran, HIV Specialist from National AIDS Control Program was also invited on the show.
- A radio show –‘Hum Awaam’ (We, the people) on Radio Pakistan’s national broadcast schedule –was dedicated to WSHD and its importance in a Pakistani context, with special emphasis on the sexual and reproductive health needs of 85% of the flood victims who are women, children and adolescents. The show was hosted by well-known radio host, Fayyaz Baakir. Qadeer Baig, Country Representative Ahmad Shah Durrani, Research and Communications, from WPF, participated in the show. As the show was in Urdu it was able to reach out to a larger audience.
- A public service announcement was circulated amongst various Urdu radio networks. This announcement was developed in house with important input from Intermedia, Pakistan.



- A web-based campaign was launched and a website with a broad range of content promoting WSHD overall theme and important key messages was developed by the WPF. The content includes articles, posters, and a presentation can be viewed here: <http://wshd.wfpak.org/index.html>.
- Web-based content developed by WPF was shared with organizational mailing lists, comprising of over 16,000 partners of WPF in media, CBO's/NGO's and relevant government ministries.
- Monthly newsletter of September also focuses on WSHD.



Engagement of partners in media and non-profit sector

- Media partners were provided information and content to promote in-house and through spots on television/radio broadcasts.
- Partner NGO's and CBO's were provided content and information to promote in-house and through organizational/professional and community-based networks. WSHD was celebrated by many partners who were approached including Plan, Pakistan, which also facilitated a radio show on a nationally-recognized radio network.
- Partners in flood affected areas across all four affected provinces organized awareness raising sessions about WSHD and the importance of discussing sexual health issues openly, for flood victims living in temporary camps.
- Local press printed press releases in flood affected areas, especially Multan, Quetta and Jacobabad.

Promotion through professional and web-based social networks

- All content shared through organizational mailing lists and professional networks.
- "Countdown to WSHD" posters were shared through Facebook and Twitter, organizational mailing lists and professional networks.

Learning and Outcomes:

- The main objective of marking WSHD in Pakistan this year, amidst disastrous circumstances throughout the country, was to introduce it successfully as a platform from where open, informative and constructive discussion is promoted.
- This objective was met fairly well through the WPF's media driven campaign, and as a result all important stakeholders –in media, civil society, development sector and relevant

government ministries –were made aware of WSHD, its purpose and its importance to Pakistan.

- Despite, the current turbulent waters the country finds itself, and an abundance of other news-worthy material the media partners of WPF showed great enthusiasm in their response towards WSHD and were greatly supportive of WPF's efforts.
- Although the main target audience was educated urban audience, the initiative was also able to reach other secondary beneficiaries, especially through radio, who may be uneducated and live in rural areas.
- The WPF strongly believes that next year WSHD will gain further momentum on a national and global level: building upon the successes of this year it is not far-fetched to press for further state involvement in celebrations next year, including official recognition of the day.
- As successful as the campaign was in achieving its objective, the WPF will do well to establish a framework of strong cooperation and linkages with important media organizations for the success of future communications drives of a similar nature. The media cannot be viewed merely as a PR tool; it should be given higher priority on our organizational agenda as an important stakeholder like civil society. In this light, identification and training of SRHR correspondents in leading media outlets is absolutely imperative.
- Message development as recommended by SMART Communications Tool was applied to all communications material developed, especially web-based content. The content, especially posters were greatly appreciated as used by many local partners to mobilize around WSHD and relevant sexual health issues. The WPF should incorporate SMART chart in future communications drives for even better results.

