Lok Geeton Mei Beti
Fighting the issue of daughter deficit

A folk media campaign of SIFPSA touching hearts
“The hand that rocks the cradle, the procreator, the mother of tomorrow; a woman shapes the destiny of civilization. Such is the tragic irony of fate, that a beautiful creation such as the girl child is today one of the gravest concerns facing humanity”.

The above quote is a tragic reflection of today’s society with ever-growing preference for a male child and the appalling sex ratio which is the consequence of age-old discriminatory socio-cultural traditions and economic practices resulting in rampant female infanticide and foeticide, affecting women’s reproductive life, with serious implications for their health and survival. The decreasing sex ratio in India in general and in UP is likely to create severe gender imbalance that has the potential to destroy the very social fabric. As per the Sample Registration Survey 2013, the sex ratio of Uttar Pradesh was estimated to be as low as 878 girls per 1000 boys at birth, which further plummets to 868 by the age of 4 years, showing a large number of girls either being killed through sex-selective abortions or dying prematurely due to violence and negligence.

SIFPSA in its effort to combat the grave issue of gender imbalance resulting from the odious acts of female infanticide and foeticide, led a folk media campaign entailing an inspiring musical drama titled ‘Lok Geeton Mein Beti’ in the year 2015-16, touching chords of the masses across the state. The campaign focused on 20 high priority districts with recorded low sex ratio. The districts were Agra, Baghpat, Bulandsahar, G.B.Nagar, Ghaziabad, Meerut, Muzaffar Nagar, Jhansi, Hathras, Hardoi, Bijnor, Etawah, Kanpur Nagar, Shrawasti, Mathura, Varanasi, Badaun, Auraiya, Faizabad and Firozabad.

Folk media represents the people in their natural habitat, with all their contradictions and diverse activities, giving glimpses of their style of speech, music, dance, dress and wisdom. Rural Uttar Pradesh is a treasure trove of folk art, theatre, music, dance and craft, satisfying the innate need for self expression. The most popular forms of folk music, dance and theatre in Uttar Pradesh include Rasiya, Sohar, Naqal (mimicry), Nautanki, Qawwali, Ramlila, Raslila, Swang etc. Historically, the folk media has often played a key role in the communication and promotion of new ideas and adjustment to a new social order, apart from its traditional role of preserving and teaching established values.

Understandably so, the folk media campaign of SIFPSA focused on sensitizing the community towards the critical issue of female foeticide, related beliefs and practices, attempting to establish the importance of a girl child in the society and moving towards gender equity.

The campaign strategy cleverly focused on weaving the girl child issues such as gender inequality, female foeticide, early age at marriage, unmatched marriage etc. in popular folk songs of Uttar Pradesh, successfully presented in a drama form in more than 1000 villages across twenty districts by 20 folk troupes, motivating the community, generating awareness and sensitizing them on the importance of a girl child. Block and district level NHM officials, as well as division and state level SIFPSA officials closely monitored the folk media campaign in all the districts.
The troupes had been trained by SIFPSA in collaboration with the Bhartendu Natya Academy (BNA), a premier institution of Lucknow for performing arts. Prior to the performance by the folk troupes in various districts, a 4-day preparatory workshop was organized that was inaugurated by Ms. Surbhi Ranjan, President of Akanksha Samiti, Uttar Pradesh on April 27, 2015 at Bhartendu Natya Academy Lucknow. A short presentation of the musical drama was also made during the occasion. Present on the occasion were the wife of Principal Secretary Medical Health and Family Welfare Mrs. , the then Executive Director SIFPSA Mr. Amit Kumar Ghosh and Additional Executive Director SIFPSA Mr. Rigzin Samphel and all major health partners, SIFPSA and NHM officials.

Folk songs dwell deeply in the hearts of the people of Uttar Pradesh and are sung on all occasions, birth to marriage. To celebrate the occasion of the birth of a male child, it had always been a social practice to sing 'Sohar'(celebratory song). To break this practice, for the first time, introduced through this folk drama was 'Sohar' composed for celebrating the birth of a girl child that garnered a lot of attention and positive reactions from the village community!

Such was the impact of the program that at one place an overwhelmed audience, insisted on giving money to the folk troupe for singing 'Sohar' on the birth of a girl child.
Apart from 'Sohar', a song highlighting the issue of an unmatched marriage, marriage of a 10 year old girl with a man, 60 years of age, fit to be her grandfather, also touched hearts.

The folk media campaign 'Lok Geeton Mei Beti' had 12 folk songs addressing various issues like right age of marriage for boys and girls, female foeticide, female infanticide, unmatched marriage, rights of girls etc. with powerful messages attracting positive responses, clearly reflecting the impact and success of the campaign.