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June 22, 2020

To,

Shri Manoj Kumar,  
Executive Director,  
State Health Society Bihar

**Family planning services during COVID-19 in Bihar**

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We are writing on behalf of Advocating Reproductive Choices (ARC), a coalition of 165 organisations and individuals nationally, including representatives from 22 organisations in Bihar. ARC brings technical and implementation expertise to advance access to quality family planning (FP) services in India.

We sincerely appreciate the efforts taken by the State Health Society Bihar to issue guidelines and resume family planning services in the state amidst the COVID-19 lockdown. We would like to applaud the early and innovative steps by the Government of Bihar to provide condoms for citizens in exiting quarantine facilities, which is a strong demonstration of your commitment to ensure access to family planning.

We acknowledge the concerted efforts made by frontline health workers in supplying contraceptive to clients at their doorsteps. Given our presence in the state and our work in the field, we would like to share the following observations (from 26 districts) with you;

- **Limited access public transport is hindering** ASHAs and ANMs ability to collect supplies from PHCs/CHCs and distribute to communities across all districts;
- **Shortage of injectable contraceptives.** However, condoms, OCPs, Centchroman and ECPs stocks were adequate
- **Fear combined with myths and misconceptions related to COVID-19:** Fears around COVID-19 has led to resistance from communities in interacting with ASHAs and ANMs during their home visit, as well as in accessing health services.

May we take the opportunity to share our suggestions as follows:

- **Alternative mechanism for the promotion of family planning and contraceptive distribution**
  - Ration shops can be designated as a depot for condoms distribution to ensure uninterrupted supplies and a mechanism should be established for regular replenishments. The family planning IEC can be displayed at ration shops and other public places such as beauty parlors to create awareness.
  - Jingles or messaging on local channels (TV and Radio).

- **Counseling and Follow-up**
  - Expedite recruitment of family planning counselors at all the CHCs and PHCs and organize structured induction trainings.
  - Ensure functioning of the family planning corners established at all the PHCs, through ANMs trained on FP counseling. Introduce a monthly reporting mechanism to monitor and provide feedback on client load.
  - Introduce tele counseling services or introduce an Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) to provide accurate and correct information to the beneficiaries on family planning.
  
- **Strengthen Supply Chain Management system**
  - Expedite budgeted recruitment of logistic managers at the state and district level.
  - Organise trainings for ANMs and ASHAs on FP-LMIS (SMS and mobile app).
  - Provide handholding support to ANMs and ASHAs to ensure consistent use of FPLMIS for indenting and updating of stocks.
  - Inclusion of monthly review of contraceptive supply chain as an agenda item at the DHS review meetings and PHC sector meetings.
  - State health society to issue a letter to ensure pre-registration of clients for Fixed Day Services.

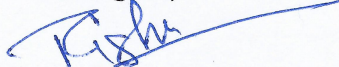
ARC members can provide the following support to the government;

- **Generate awareness** regarding FP services.
- **Provide ground level reports** on availability of FP services, especially door step delivery of contraceptives. SHSB can issue a letter to civil society organisations under ARC, regarding monthly feedback on status of family planning services in Bihar
- **Develop training modules and facilitate ToTs for health care providers** on community mobilization skills; micro planning; addressing issues such as updating list of eligible couple; contraceptive choices, their effectiveness, side effects; addressing myths and misconceptions and; use of FP-LMIS etc.

We sincerely hope the above suggestions and our offer for support will complement and strengthen access and quality of FP services in Bihar, which you are so committed to.

Look forward to an audience for a discussion on this.

Best regards,



Rishu Prakash

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(On behalf of Advocating Reproductive Choices (ARC), Bihar)

**List of ARC members in Bihar**

1. Asian Development Research Institute (ADRI)
2. Agragami
3. Bihar rural empowerment agency for development (BREAD)
4. Bihar Voluntary Health Association (BVHA)
5. Centre for Catalysing Change (C3)
6. Centre for Health and Resource Management (CHARM)
7. Doctor for you
8. Engender Health
9. Equity Foundation
10. Foundation for Reproductive Health Services India (formerly Marie Stopes India), Bihar
11. Genvp
12. Ipas Development Foundation, Bihar
13. Integrated development Foundation (IDF)
14. Janani
15. JHPIEGO
16. Nidan
17. Panah Ashram
18. PATH, Bihar
19. Project Concern International
20. Population Research Centre
21. Save the Children, Bihar
22. SRC-Deepaytan