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India for the World: A Maternal Health Journey from Challenge to Champion



In 1990, India's Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) was estimated at over 550 per 100,000 live births with some global estimates placing it close to 700. Behind each statistic was a family's loss and a community's grief. Over the past three decades, India has transformed this reality, bringing the MMR down to 88 (SRS 2020–22). This remarkable progress reflects sustained political will, the dedication of healthcare workers, and the synergy of public health systems with professional bodies like FOGSI.

Government Milestones in Maternal Health

Several landmark programs have paved the way for this transformation:

- **Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY)** – Conditional cash transfers to promote institutional deliveries.
- **Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK)** – Free drugs, diagnostics, diet, transportation, and blood transfusion for mothers and newborns.
- **Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)** – Fixed-day quality ANC services, specialist consultations, and ultrasound screening.
- **LaQshya** – Quality improvement in labour rooms and maternity OTs.
- **SUMAN** – Respectful maternity care with zero denial of services.
- **Midwifery Initiative** – Skilled nurse practitioners delivering compassionate, women-centred care.

These programs, especially in high-burden states, have ensured wider access, better quality, and safer outcomes for mothers across India.

FOGSI's Role: Partnering in the National Mission

FOGSI has worked alongside the government to complement and strengthen these initiatives:

- **Sampoorna – Swastha Janma Abhiyan:** A presidential flagship focusing on preconception health optimisation to reduce maternal and neonatal mortality. It advocates that every pregnancy should be a planned pregnancy, with women ideally starting preconceptional folic acid to prevent neural tube defects and improve pregnancy outcomes.
- **Manyata:** A quality improvement and certification program for private maternity facilities, aligned with WHO standards and integrated with NABH accreditation.
- **Project ADHUNA:** Supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, improving intrapartum and newborn care across 29 districts in UP, Bihar, MP, and Odisha through master trainers, CPDs, and video-based learning.
- **Maternal Death Surveillance & Response (MDSR):** Strengthening reporting, audits, and preventive measures.
- **Training and Guidelines:** Nationwide dissemination of evidence-based protocols, simulation drills, and high-risk pregnancy workshops.

Achievements and Lessons for the World

Eight states — Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Telangana, Gujarat, and Karnataka — have already met the SDG target of MMR < 70.

India's success story offers valuable lessons to other nations:

- Scale-up of proven interventions.
- Public-private partnerships.
- Financial incentives tied to outcomes.
- Strong community engagement via ASHAs and midwives.
- Integration of respectful maternity care into quality improvement efforts.

The Road Ahead

Challenges remain — teenage pregnancies, late ANC registration, pockets of home deliveries, and incomplete high-risk pregnancy tracking. The way forward includes intensified focus on high-burden states, universal preconception care, expanded midwifery, and digital tracking of pregnancies.

India's maternal health story is now one of excellence with dignity. With government leadership and FOGSI's contributions — from Sampoorna to Manyata and ADHUNA — we are poised to meet the SDG target and serve as a model for the world. Truly, this is India for the World.

Sampoorna – Swastha Janma Abhiyan

Key Actions:

- Screening and optimising weight, haemoglobin, blood sugar, thyroid profile, nutrition and folic acid supplemental before conception.
- Addressing infections and chronic illnesses early.
- Raising awareness about planned pregnancies.
- Partnering with state societies for health camps and community programs.

Impact Goal: Shift focus from antenatal care alone to preconception health optimisation, reducing mortality and ensuring healthier beginnings for every mother and child.

