

## A Journey of Justice, Equality & Dignity

Reflecting 50 Years of Collective Action  
for a Just and Equal Society



A Gender Just and Egalitarian Society

# ai action india

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# About Us

Founded in 1976 by the late Gouri Choudhury, Action India is a premier non-profit organisation dedicated to advancing gender justice and the holistic empowerment of women. For 50 years, the organization has operated with a steadfast commitment to ensuring that all women and girls can live with dignity and free from discrimination.

Our approach balances direct community-level interventions with broader advocacy for women's rights. By pioneering grassroots initiatives, we showcase the transformative potential of women to lead social change. Action India does not merely oppose injustice; it actively builds pathways for self-help, resilience, and confidence among marginalized populations.

Action India's legacy includes leading the campaign for the landmark Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) in 2005 and establishing a robust network of Mahila Panchayats—community-led redressal mechanisms that have provided justice to thousands of survivors.

Today, our multi-sectoral interventions span legal aid, sustainable agriculture, education through the Parwaz Adolescent Centre for Education (PACE), and menstrual health management across multiple Indian states. As we have completed our 50th year, Action India remains dedicated to promoting women's agency and building leadership within the communities we serve.

# Health Program

## Transforming Women's Health into Collective Power

In 1974, a small group of concerned citizens began working in Delhi's squatter settlements, responding to growing poverty, inequality, and shrinking democratic space. Their work soon deepened during the mass slum clearances of 1974-76 and the Emergency, when nearly 7 lakh people were displaced to distant resettlement colonies without water, toilets, hospitals, or jobs.



Women and children suffered the most where malnutrition, unsafe living conditions, loss of healthcare, and rising domestic violence became everyday realities. Families were allotted tiny plots only after producing sterilization certificates, placing women's bodies under state control.

**From this injustice emerged Action India's lifelong commitment: Health as dignity, rights, and women's control over their own bodies.**



## Action India's Early Work

Action India began organizing women around reproductive health using a feminist approach, linking personal health to social inequality. By the 1980s, its work aligned with India's growing women's movement against dowry, violence, and discrimination.

Guided by Father Miranda's advice- "**Go and work with the people. Don't construct a building and become an institution**"-Action India operated without an office for 12 years,



And moved alongside displaced communities, in and around areas of Jahangirpuri, Nandnagri-Sundernagri, New Seemapuri, and Dakshinpuri. The idea was to center power to drive development with grassroots forums, including:

- Sabla Sangh – Enabling women to lead a dignified life with rights and equity
- Chhoti and Nanhi Sabla Manch – building leadership of adolescent and young girls
- Gyandeep Bal Yuva Manch – undertaking development initiatives for children and youth

## Aurat Ka Chamatkar

Using Rajasthan's folk storytelling art- *Phad*, Action India created exhibitions to:

- Explain the female reproductive system - menstruation, conception, pregnancy, nutrition, childbirth
- Explore women's social status, household work, and societal attitudes
- Illustrate women's life journeys in simple, vivid imagery

The exhibitions, developed by community health workers, became a key tool for education and empowerment.



## Community Health Program

Most programs continued to view women as reproductive subjects whose bodies needed regulation. To challenge this, Action India launched its **Community Health Programme** in 1984, reframing women's health as a matter of rights, dignity, and autonomy.



Action India's health workers and Sabla Sangh members examined the impact of coercive sterilization policies that treated women's bodies as tools of population control. They uncovered health complications, lack of informed consent, and loss of reproductive autonomy, showing how policies intruded on women's lives and choices. This inquiry turned awareness into advocacy, demanding accountability and a feminist reimagining of public health systems.



## Shodhini Program

From 1990 onwards, this health vision expanded from treatment to nourishment, balance, and self-reliance with our program



Shodhini—a holistic feminist health initiative. Shodhini incorporated deeper nuances such as proper nutrition, fertility awareness, and herbs-and-kitchen programs to foster self-reliance and overall well-being.



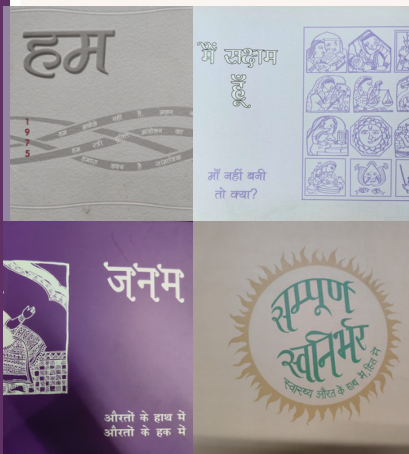
## Fertility Awareness Program

This Program helped women understand their bodies—from menstrual cycles and fertility to conception, infertility, and overall health through diet and home remedies. Herbal medicines were later integrated through learnings from *Shodhini*.

Addressing maternal mortality was a key concern. Action India conducted research to understand the challenges and worked closely with community health workers—ASHA and ANM—to ensure timely access to facilities, safer deliveries, and reduced risks to mothers.



## Safe Inclusive Space - Self Help Centre



Action India's Self-Help Centres became safe, inclusive spaces where women from all backgrounds gathered to learn about health, share experiences, and discuss reproductive concerns. Over time, these centers evolved into recognized hubs of leadership, with grassroots women becoming trusted trainers and advocates—shaping family decisions, engaging with government, and asserting their social rights.

From 1976 to 1999, through Sabla Sangh, Action India placed women at the heart of community health programs—documenting their struggles and triumphs in nine publications (2000).

## Apni Rasoi Program - Nutrition & Leadership

Sons and men were served first, while women, despite managing household kitchens, ate last and least, leading to poor nutrition, anemia, and deficiencies among women and girls.

Apni Rasoi placed nutrition at the center, promoting foods like green vegetables, jaggery. It transformed the kitchen into a space of nutrition, healing, and leadership in health.



## Indigenous Herbal Medicine

Celebrating care and spreading awareness through Health mela



Through the Shodhini program, health workers trained in Saharanpur with **Vikalp and Jan Sangathan Ghaadh Mazdoor Morcha**, learning to identify herbs and prepare Ayurvedic medicines under **Vaidya Prabhat Aangrishi**.



**Neem Campaign** - To build children's immunity during changing seasons, community health workers ran a campaign in all four settlements, giving neem juice to children from April to June each year.

## Midwives strengthening Women's Health Local Ecosystem

Home deliveries have long been part of India's tradition, assisted by women and midwives within communities. Recognizing the value of traditional birth knowledge, Action India launched a Midwife Training Program to validate and strengthen community-based practices. In collaboration with the *Matrika Research Group*, an in-depth study (1997-1999) across Delhi and Rajasthan explored the relevance of these traditional birth practices.



## HIV/AIDS Awareness Program

Action India held detailed HIV/AIDS workshops for women, boys, and girls across four settlements, covering prevention, treatment, myths, and respectful behavior towards HIV positive individuals. To engage the most at-risk group - youth, film screening was used to focus on safe sex and sexuality.



## Women's Initiative for a clean environment and better health



Beginning in 2003 with 1,600 families in resettlement communities, the initiative expanded by 2008 to promote cleaner, healthier neighborhoods where dignity depends on access to basic amenities.

Starting in six North-East Delhi settlements in 2008 and growing to Bhalswa in 2012, the program adopted a “mein se hum” approach- encouraging personal responsibility for cleanliness that inspired collective action. Youth clubs further mobilized residents across all seven settlements. Leveraging of funds Rs 14,32,37,500 and total beneficiaries 1,31,000 were engaged through interactive sessions on personal hygiene, school cleanliness, and hygienic practices at home.

## Menstrual Hygiene Management Program

In 2013, under the broader framework of Menstrual Hygiene Scheme as part of National Health Mission, this work was formalized into a structured program.

The initiative expanded beyond Delhi to rural segments of Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Punjab, building menstrual health knowledge among thousands of women and adolescent girls.



# Women, Law & Social Change

## Women-Led Pathways to Justice and Dignity

### Are men and women truly equal before the law?

Over 30 years in Delhi's resettlement colonies, Action India learned that women's ill health was rooted not only in disease but also in violence, discrimination, and unequal access to justice. Action India launched the Women, Law and Social Change initiative in 1994 as a research and action project.



### Mahila Panchayat: A Collective Step Towards Violence-Free Lives



Mahila Panchayat addresses cases of domestic violence, supports women through legal processes, and provides a safe community space where women can speak freely and seek fair justice. Each case follows a clear and structured process that includes registration, counseling, investigation, and follow-up. This system has remained consistently active since 1994 and has addressed more than 55,000 cases to date.

At present, Action India is operating 6 Mahila Panchayats located in Dharampura, Dakshinpuri, Jahangirpuri, Janta Mazdoor Colony, Sundar Nagri, and New Seemapuri. These Panchayats actively involve 150 Mahila Panchayat members, 6 paralegal workers, 12 volunteers, and 380 Support group members.



**Recognizing the impact, the Delhi Commission for Women designated Action India as a Mother NGO in 2001,**

Action India strengthened its network and empowered communities by forming 54 women's groups in one year and establishing Mahila Panchayats through collaboration with NGOs and CBOs. With accessible gender training and support from the Delhi Commission for Women (DCW), 84 Panchayats were strengthened with paralegal aid—creating a strong grassroots system for women's justice and empowerment.



### KARVAN: Stop Female Foeticide



**KARVAN – Save the Girl Child** campaign emerged as a collective initiative under the DCW, bringing together NGOs and CBOs to address the growing crisis of female foeticide. Through collaboration and community engagement—organising awareness drives, public meetings, street campaigns, and workshops to educate people and advocacy by building pressure on health authorities to implement the 2001 Supreme Court directive on PNDDT Act.

### Nari Shakti Vahini: Saas-Bahu Vartalaap



Mahila Panchayat members and grassroots workers, working as the Nari Shakti Vahini, served as a vigilant community watch groups: tracking pregnancies, identify suspected cases of female foeticide, and intervene early to prevent them.

They supported pregnant women facing pressure to have a male child and being pushed toward illegal sex determination tests under the PC-PNDT Act. To challenge this, Action India introduced “Saas-Bahu Vartalap,” fostering open dialogue between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law to question patriarchal norms and son preference.



## PWDV Act, 2005 & Garima Project

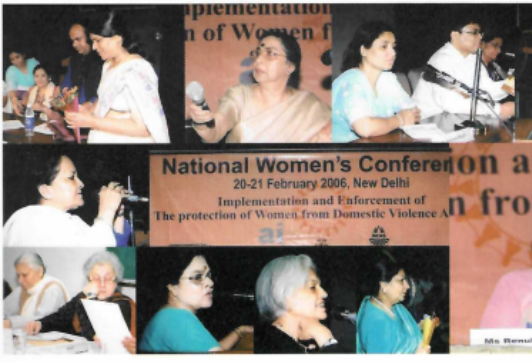
After years of collective struggle, the women's movement achieved a milestone in 2005 with the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA).

As part of this movement, **Action India** worked across eight states, gathering 2.5 lakh signatures to strengthen grassroots demand for the law.



In February 2006, Action India convened the national convention on the PWDVA, bringing together stakeholders from across all states. The discussions reinforced that laws deliver justice only when backed by proper procedures and infrastructure.

The GARIMA Project was a key step in this direction, introducing a new approach to domestic violence as a public health issue.



This initiative strengthened frontline institutions—Anganwadi workers, ASHAs, ANMs, PHCs—while simultaneously deepening the capacities of Mahila Panchayats and women-led health collectives.

A baseline study mapped women's access to ICDS and PHCs, their nutritional and healthcare needs during pregnancy, and their status within families, revealing how neglect, violence, and health deprivation intersect.



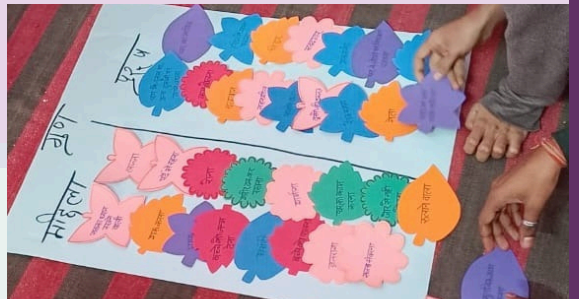
By linking law, health, and community action, Mahila Panchayats supported survivors, improved access to schemes, and fostered safer, more responsive systems—helping break the silence around violence and uphold women's dignity.



## Youth and Men in Action

In 2022, Action India's Mahila Panchayat launched the "Youth and Men's Participation" program to challenge patriarchal mindsets and foster gender equality.

Through structured sessions, discussions on gender equality, life skills, friendship, and the impact of discrimination, alongside sports and interactive activities, participants were encouraged to reflect, unlearn biases, and adopt equitable behaviors.



Workshops also addressed issues such as drug awareness and prevention, helping youth make informed choices and build healthier lifestyles.

## Nayi Soch, Nayi Pehal

In August 2023, Action India's Mahila Panchayat launched "Nayi Soch aur Nayi Pehal—a community-led effort to recognise and strengthen violence-free family relationships.

By promoting equality in decision-making, financial participation, and the sharing of domestic work, Nayi Soch aur Nayi Pehal aims to strengthen the social foundations needed for the law to truly work for advancing rights of women and girls.



# Women & Work

## From Survival to Self-Reliance

### Women's Labour in the Early Context

In the mid-1970s, factory closures in Delhi led to widespread job loss, particularly among working-class communities. As male employment declined, women— with little or no formal education, assumed primary responsibility for household survival through home-based and skill-based work.



Women collectively organised livelihood activities such as crocheting, the work of making patchwork quilts from old clothes and bookbinding was started.

Action India strengthened women's skills, established collective production systems, and opened access to direct markets, reducing dependence on middlemen. This approach enabled women to move beyond fragmented, piece-rate work and gain greater control over their labour and earnings.



Activities like book-binding were traditionally male-dominated; these interventions challenged such norms, boosting women's participation and leadership in unconventional income-generating work.



## Financial Resilience Through SHGs

Action India approached SHGs for their potential towards collective financial agency rather than individualised solutions to poverty.

In 1995, Action India initiated savings programmes with women from poor and marginalised communities across four operational areas.

Women were encouraged to form SHGs, understand the value of collective savings, and critically engage with formal banking systems.

By 2001, 175 SHGs with over 1700 women members were active in Delhi across Nand nagri, Dakshinpuri, Jahangirpuri, Sarojini Nagar and women were able to access loans at low interest rates for healthcare, housing, marriages, and debt repayment, with SHGs strengthening financial security and women's decision-making.



Action India supported a shift from savings to capital formation. Through workshops on entrepreneurship and business skills, women were encouraged to move beyond identities defined solely by wage labour, domestic work, or marriage.

By 2014, Action India's work had expanded to 23 villages in Hapur district. Through 151 SHGs, women formed a federation—Sabla Samiti—bringing together 1,826 women. Fully managed by women, the federation enabled bank linkages, access to credit, and growing self-reliance.



## Agaz – Rural Women's Entrepreneurial Journey

Action India surveyed five villages in Hapur to investigate child labor in bangle-making, which correlates with school absenteeism. This research initiated engagement with women and work in rural Hapur, revealing structural challenges impacting both children and women.

Many women produced jewelry and bangles for export, but middlemen took most profits. Action India aimed to empower women by transitioning them from laborers to producers.



In collaboration with NIFT, rural women were trained to create new products, diversify designs, and sell directly at exhibitions and outside local markets, bypassing intermediaries.

These products were named “Agaaz” (Beginning)- symbolising women’s entry into independent production and market engagement. Today, women in Hapur continue to earn independently through Agaaz, asserting control over their labour, income, and decisions.



## The Pad Project



In Hapur, Action India’s Chhoti Sabla program partnered with Oakwood School (USA) through an exchange program to explore menstrual health challenges in India- lack of awareness, shortage of sanitary pads, school absenteeism, and cultural taboos.



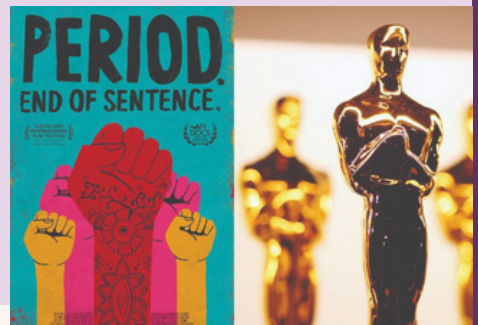
Oakwood students raised funds to install a hand-operated sanitary pad-making machine in Sudna village, Hapur. This initial support, followed by backing from Credit Suisse, paved the way for Action India to establish pad-making units in Sudna and Ubarpur.

The pads, named “Fly”, symbolised breaking menstrual taboos and freedom of choice.



## Period-End of Sentence

Building on this work, filmmaker **Guneet Monga** directed “**Period - End of Sentence**”, capturing the Hapur intervention and raising awareness on period poverty. The film **won the Oscar for Best Short Documentary in 2019**, bringing global attention to menstrual health and the rural women-run pad production intervention supported by Action India.



## Visibility of Women in Agriculture

Action India began its work in Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, and Hapur to bring women farmers' invaluable contributions to the forefront,

Now, it continues this journey in 10 villages of Hapur, Uttar Pradesh, through initiatives building the capacity of women farmers around:



- Organic cultivation & kitchen gardening
- Leadership development for enhanced decision-making at farms
- Technical trainings, including mushroom production
- Access to government schemes, subsidies, trainings, and farm input support
- Learning exposure visits to agricultural exhibitions and consultations for crop diversification, integrated farming, value addition, and women-led agri-entrepreneurship



## Gharelu Kamgaar Naya Ujala Manch

In Delhi, women domestic workers keep households running, but remain unrecognized, unorganized, and often unprotected. Despite the international adoption of ILO Convention 189 (2011), India has yet to provide comprehensive legal protections for this workforce, leaving many in constant insecurity.



Since 2021, Action India has united over 600 domestic workers in Dwarka and Jahangirpuri through “**Naya Ujala Manch**” to learn their rights, labor laws, and strengthen their collective voice and leadership.

Through this initiative, domestic workers are beginning to negotiate fair wages, safer working conditions, and basic facilities, while accessing government schemes for health, pensions, maternity benefits, and children's education.



# Youth & Education

Every Child Has The Same Call, Right to Education for All

## Gyan Deep Baal Yuva Manch

It was a time of displacement. Amid broken roofs, temporary settlements, and an uncertain future, childhood itself seemed to be slipping away. Schools were far from the settlements—so far that little feet often grew tired before they could even reach them.

Displacement had caused one of its deepest impacts on children's learning. Yet, in the midst of this darkness, a small light was lit — **"Gyan Deep Baal Yuva Manch."**



### A Light that Began in the Streets

Action India's workers refused to accept these circumstances as destiny. They believed, "If children cannot reach school, then education must reach the children." And so, the street schools began.

Young children would sit together in a circle. Some held broken pencils, others carried old notebooks, but the eagerness to learn in their eyes was the same.



These spaces welcomed children who had never been to school, as well as those who needed support with their homework. They were called **N.F.E. Centres (Non-Formal Education Centres)**, but for the community, they were much more than a name—they were a second chance.



## Dakhila Abhiyan: A Path to School for Every Child



Community workers went door to door, speaking with mothers and persuading fathers: **"Education is the pathway to a better future."**

Street plays were performed, rallies were organized, and one message echoed across the settlements: **“Every child will go to school!”** Children who lacked documents were supported in getting the necessary paperwork completed.

Each year, **800 to 1000 children** were enrolled in school.



### From Rights to Participation

With the implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act in 2009. The goal was no longer limited to school enrollment, but also to ensuring quality education and accountability.

Women leaders from the community, whose children studied in local schools, became members of the School Management Committees (SMCs). They began attending school meetings, engaging with teachers and administrators, and monitoring children’s attendance and school facilities.

### Chalti-Firti Library

In 1992, a library was established with the aim of nurturing children’s interest in reading. It was realized that many children and young people were unable to reach the library. This led to the beginning of a new initiative: **“The Mobile Library”**.



### Choti-Nanhi Sabla Manch

*“Give our daughters knowledge... educate them, so they can build a better life for themselves.”* It led to the creation of the Chhoti Sabla Manch (for girls aged 13–18) and Nanhi Sabla Manch (for girls aged 9–12) in 1990. Launched in the settlements of Jahangirpuri, Seemapuri, Sundar Nagri, and Dakshinpuri



It was not easy for girls to step outside their homes. Courses in stitching, embroidery, and mehendi offered safe spaces for girls to gather and learn.

## Scholarship Programme

To ensure that the education of talented girls would not be interrupted due to financial constraints, the organization launched a scholarship programme.

Between 1997 and 2022, a total of **788 scholarships** were awarded. Today, many of these young women are working in different institutions.

Over time, boys were also included in these initiatives. **By 2019, around 500 young people had received Data Entry training** and support in connecting with employment opportunities.

## Girls Learning International (GLI)

In 2006, under the Girls Learning International (GLI) programme, girls from Chhoti Sabla Manch were linked with schools in the United States. This journey expanded from Dakshinpuri, Seemapuri, Nand Nagri, and Jahangirpuri to Janata Mazdoor Colony and villages in Hapur, Uttar Pradesh.



To support the young women, the **Parvaaz Adolescent Centre for Education (PACE)** was established. **Designed for girls aged 15–21, this 18-month programme** created an opportunity to reconnect with interrupted education and opened pathways for enrollment through Open Schooling. Through this initiative, **590 girls found a new direction in life.**

**5,000 girls were connected with the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY). Out of them, 1,000 received skill training, and 350 girls secured employment opportunities.**

## “Aao Baat Karein”

Equality can truly be achieved only when boys and men also become active participants in the journey. With this belief, the initiative **“Aao Baat Karein”** was launched, placing the holistic development of young people at its center.

The program addressed important issues such as understanding the changes of adolescence, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), emotional development, and legal awareness.



## Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

Under the reproductive health programme, Chhoti Sabla Manch had already been working on issues related to the menstrual cycle, hygiene, myths, and proper nutrition.

In 2014, this effort became part of the global **Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Campaign**, led internationally by **WASH United**. Today, the initiative has reached **more than 30,000 girls**.



## We Can Campaign



The vision was to create families free from violence and to inspire young people to stand together against violence faced by girls.

In 2004, under the campaign We Can End All Violence Against Women, nearly 80,000 changemakers were mobilized in Delhi in collaboration with 10 organizations. They carried the message of equality and respect into their families and communities.

Even today, this campaign continues with the active participation of 800+ young people, carrying forward the movement for equality, dignity, and non-violence.



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