



Spring 2013 Newsletter

Our Bodies, Ourselves Goes to Washington

By Judy Norsigian, Executive Director

Every member of Congress has pages of accurate information on women's health at their fingertips – more than 900 pages to be exact – now that they have *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.

Thanks to supporters of OBOS's **Educate Congress** campaign – inspired by a road trip to deliver *Our Bodies, Ourselves* to then-Rep. Todd Akin – we hand-delivered or mailed the newest edition and a letter signed by prominent health policy experts to all members of the U.S. House and Senate.



A Busy Day Delivering *Our Bodies, Ourselves* on Capitol Hill. Clockwise: Erin Thornton and Christy Turlington Burns of Every Mother Counts, Rep. Gary Peters, OBOS's Judy Norsigian, and NWNH interns Alysson Reddy and Grace Adofoli; Judy and Christy with Sen. Jeanne Shaheen; Judy, Sen. Elizabeth Warren and NRCWF's Diana Zuckerman; Rep. Chellie Pingree; Judy and Christy with Rep. Jim McGovern (center).

Educate Congress launched with a simple premise: **Everyone deserves access to accurate information concerning women's reproductive and sexual health – especially those who write the laws.**

Deliveries began Feb. 28, when I spent the day meeting with members on Capitol Hill. It was the day that the House finally passed the Violence Against Women Act, which made the trip particularly poignant.

Joining me were Christy Turlington Burns, founder of Every Mother Counts (EMC), and Erin Thornton, EMC executive director. We collaborated on scheduling and delivered EMC materials along with *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, including a special petition for women members of Congress congratulating them on their leadership role and asking them to affirm support of policies that protect the health and well-being of girls and women around the world, especially those that will reduce infant and maternal mortality rates.

Two National Women's Health Network (NWNH) interns, Alysson Reddy and Grace Adofoli, provided invaluable logistics support and shoulder-bag transport of the rather hefty copies of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. We received warm receptions not only from those who know the book and OBOS's work, but also from members who want to be better prepared to address key reproductive health concerns.

Our first meeting was with Rep. Jim McGovern
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First Person

Supporting Women - At Home and Around the World

By Ayesha Chatterjee, Program Manager, OBOS Global Initiative



Ayesha Chatterjee with her daughter, Tara.

I was welcomed into the Our Bodies Ourselves family in January 2006, soon after I moved to Boston from India. As a die-hard reproductive justice advocate (and unabashed *Our Bodies, Ourselves* fan), I was euphoric to join the team.

The OBOS Global Initiative, which supports women's organizations developing and using culturally specific materials based on *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, offered the perfect opportunity to weave together my commitment to women's rights and cross-cultural movement building.

Eight years later, I have helped shepherd the development of resources based on *Our Bodies, Ourselves* in 12 additional languages (with more in development), and coalesced a global network of social change activists. I have been privileged to meet, learn from, and grow to love this group of women, each on the frontline of human rights work in her country. I know that OBOS's partnerships with these visionary and tenacious leaders represent a community of shared interests that is pivotal to protecting the lives of women and girls *on the ground*.

Beyond OBOS, I nurture my decade-long love affair with reproductive justice by supporting families with newborns. As a postpartum doula trained by DONA International, the oldest and largest doula association

in the world, and young mum (and as a child who benefitted enormously from the loving arms of extended family), I am personally affected by and committed to changing the state of postpartum care in the United States – one mummy at a time!

My doula-ing started rather unexpectedly and informally in 2009, with the birth of my niece. Though I have always been acutely aware of the growing global crisis in maternal and postpartum care through my work overseas and at OBOS, being with my sister and her family during and after the birth was transformative – the proverbial eye-opener. I quickly became aware of the awesomeness of their task; a task that really does take a village.

At the time, my goal was simple: to love and provide everything my sister and her partner needed to stay nourished and focused on their baby and each other. From hot meals and daily grocery runs, to endless loads of laundry and late-night, sleepy-eyed banter to keep my sister awake (and laughing) through yet another round of pumping, I did my best and loved (nearly) every moment of it.

OBOS, with its four-decade journey and networks of women's health activists, has connected me with women who, like me, are drawn to the sides of expectant and new mothers. With these relationships, I am now gaining stride in my doula-clogs.

I thank the families that have let me into their homes and lives – I am honored and humbled by their trust. As OBOS expands its global reach, I thank the women who have become our steadfast co-conspirators in a collective struggle. I am inspired by the fire in their bellies.

And to all of you – I thank you for cheering us on and hope you will remain our committed partners as we plough ahead, forging a global community where women live without fear, with dignity, wrought as a fundamental human right. 🌸

Adapting *Our Bodies, Ourselves* for Iranian and Vietnamese Women and Girls

By Ayesha Chatterjee, Program Manager, OBOS Global Initiative

The Our Bodies Ourselves Global Network is a dynamic coalition of social change organizations, all of whom talk the talk and walk the walk when it comes to the health and human rights of women and girls. **This year, OBOS welcomes two new partners into its growing network.**

The **Roshan Institute for Persian Studies**, in collaboration with the **Department of Women's Studies at the University of Maryland**, is adapting sections of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* into Farsi. This is a critical effort to reach Iranian women and girls, especially those living in Iran and routinely subjected to oppression and censorship, both by government and other forces.

Fatemeh Keshavarz, director of the Institute, told OBOS that the Farsi resource, which will be available online, will lead the Institute's effort to integrate gender into a broader social change framework.

"We have so far been an academic institution with a fairly small reach," said Keshavarz. "I am trying to expand our reach to Persian speakers across the globe, particularly inside Iran, mostly through the internet. I am also adding gender to the range of lenses we have used for understanding and instigating social change. The current project is one of the very first steps in that direction."

Further away, in Vietnam, OBOS is working with the **Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS) in Hanoi** to provide nearly 3 million women and girls evidence-based, culturally appropriate information based on *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.

Toolkits with discussion guides, stories and proposed actions will cover such topics as relationships and sexuality, sexual health and reproductive choices, bodies and identities, and post-reproductive years. ISDS will use the resources in trainings across the country, and tap a large, close-knit collaborative network that spans the provinces to maximize print and digital access. One of ISDS's allies, the Vietnam



Committed friends of the Vietnamese OBOS project Susan Bailey (left), Roslyn Feldberg and Nancy Hammett (right), with OBOS's Judy Norsigian and Sally Whelan, and project director Khuat Thu Hong (center).

Women's Union, has 13 million members.

The timing and impact of our Vietnamese partnership are critical. The UNFPA reports that about half the country's population is under 25, with high rates of unplanned pregnancies, abortions and HIV infection. Yet condom use is low, and young people are continually exposed to inaccurate and misleading information.

In a country where nearly 38 percent of the population subsists on less than \$2 a day, millions of poor and rural Vietnamese women and girls are unable to pay for reliable information and services. Access is further limited by the lack of capacity and neglect exhibited by state agencies overseeing sexual health education. A strong response is needed – and the ISDS is well positioned and equipped to lead the way.

Established in 2002, the ISDS is renowned in Vietnam for the quality of its research and ability "to inform as well as influence," as it applies academic knowledge to meet national challenges. At the community level, the ISDS is strongly rooted in the philosophy of "knowledge as power," and has successfully adopted an approach that keeps women and girls front and center as it builds public awareness around gender, sexuality and sexual health.

With support in place from Oxfam Novib, the Dutch affiliate of Oxfam, ISDS and OBOS are responding to a growing health crisis in Vietnam. In November 2012, Khuat Thu Hong, ISDS co-director and director

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(MA), a consistent advocate of evidence-based policies. Christy and Erin presented a copy of EMC's excellent documentary about maternal mortality, *No Woman, No Cry*.

Alysson and Grace helped me walk the corridors of three House office buildings in record time, with stops in the offices of Representatives Adam Kinzinger (IL), Steven Horsford (NV), Gary Peters (MI), Kay Granger (TX), Betty McCollum (MN), Chellie Pingree (ME), Michael Capuano (MA), Marsha Blackburn (TN), James Clyburn (SC), Jackie Speier (CA), Nita Lowey (NY), Anne Kirkpatrick (AZ), Joseph Kennedy (MA), and Cheri Bustos (IL).

The day ended on the Senate side, with visits to Senators Jeanne Shaheen (NH) and Elizabeth Warren (MA). Diana Zuckerman, president of the National Research Center for Women and Families (NRCWF), joined me in discussing women's health with Sen. Warren and her chief of staff, Mindy Myers.

Time was running short, so Allyson and Grace

Adapting Our Bodies, Ourselves (continued from page 3)

of the adaptation project, met with OBOS staff and a circle of committed friends in Boston to formalize our partnership and launch the project.

OBOS is honored to collaborate with ISDS and the Roshan Insitute to bring *Our Bodies, Ourselves* to Vietnamese and Iranian women and girls. These projects speak to the urgent need for evidence-based, culturally appropriate health resources – and underscore our commitment to ensuring the health and human rights of *all* women and girls. 🌸

returned later that week to deliver books and letters to Senators Mitch McConnell (KY), Rob Portman (OH), Carl Levin (MI), Mark Begich (AK) Charles Grassley (IA), Pat Toomey (PA), Jeff Flake (AZ), and Christopher Coons (DE).

OBOS has already received personal thank-you notes from several members of Congress who indicated that the book will be a useful resource. We're confident it will be of value to staff members working on policy issues.

If you visit the D.C. office of your representative or senator in the coming months, let us know if you get a chance to ask about how *Our Bodies, Ourselves* might have been referenced. Establishing sound, science-based policy about reproductive health is no easy feat, but it will be all the more likely if each of us finds ways to promote this goal.

OBOS will continue to monitor where information interventions are needed. You can help! Learn more at bit.ly/obos-to-the-rescue 🌸

Thanks to a grant from **Ipas**, a global nongovernmental organization, OBOS is embarking on a major project to overhaul its digital communications. Your support this spring and summer will help to create an OBOS website that features more health news, engages visitors in OBOS's advocacy efforts, and is social media and mobile-friendly. With your help, OBOS will expand its digital footprint to educate and inspire a new generation.

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