

Responding to the Covid Emergency: Update July 2020
Centre for Health and Social Justice

CHSJ has been working with marginalised communities across different states in India for the last fifteen years. Right from the beginning of the Covid 19 lockdown, towards the end of March, the different operational units of CHSJ rolled out a multidimensional response, in close collaboration with its partners across the states. The following is a brief description of the work done in May and June 2020.

MITRA (Men's Initiatives for Transforming Relationships through Action) our operational unit working on masculinities and gender justice launched Gender Hubs in 30 of the 80 districts that it works in across the country. Through these Gender Hubs young men have taken new leadership roles responding to the crisis with resilience. These Gender Hubs have become a platform for two-pronged action – one, systematically linking the community with public services and local governance systems to facilitate equitable relief and recovery; and second, fostering gender equitable relations and healthy masculinity. As part of their COVID response plans, a cohort of 750 men in the Gender Hubs are reaching out to other men in their communities for mutual support and collective action through 'friendship collectives.' Using the crisis as an opportunity, they are opening up discussions on men's unaccustomed sense of vulnerability, the disruption of patriarchal role expectations with a loss of livelihoods upsetting the masculine 'provider' role, the extended stay at home a territory unfamiliar to men.

With inputs from our community-based partners we have also developed a Social Resilience Community Protocol on the role of communities in ensuring the respectful return of migrants from cities across India. The aim is to develop a sense of social solidarity and cohesion in village communities and support the emergence of strong coping mechanisms and resilience to deal with the calamity. We have also launched the MITRA Chat Group for reaching out to our Samanta Sathis and discuss topics related to gender equality and masculinities. The Mitra Chat Group discussions aim to enable participants to address safely their feelings of lack of control, stress, financial insecurity, mental health, harmful gender norms take these discussions forward with other peer groups. We continue to disseminate and discuss issues based on the 25 Audio Dramas of the audio series 'Naye Daur Ki Nayi Baatein' or new conversations in a new age, dealing with men's role in positively tackling the COVID crisis. These stories can be accessed here: <https://anchor.fm/mitra06/episodes/---01---Naye-Daur-Ki-Nayi-Baatein---Drama-Series---1-edl3qn>. We have received feedback that they are helping in influencing mindsets and encouraging supportive action.

SEHER – Seher, is our unit working with women and supporting their access to health services and related entitlements. The Seher team has been working closely with partners in the four states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Jharkhand on micro-planning related to their relief efforts on the ground. These are aimed to support women in the community to receive appropriate maternal health services especially to the pregnant women who are expecting childbirth soon. Micro plans were prepared for a total of 135 villages in 19 districts in these four states. These helped to bring the focus to routine reproductive health services as the initial response was limited to relief work.

Seher worked with its partners to build their capacity to liaison with government officials and especially finding appropriate channels for communication with the district and state level. Seher also conducted a documentation exercise to understand the barriers to provision of necessary maternal health services at the community level. It was found that there was much fear regarding infection in hospitals and ambulance that community chose to use private services or deliver at home. Routine problems and barriers to accessing quality maternal health services were also amplified due to the COVID situation. Seher has documented the stories on women's experience in accessing health services for childbirth and other health services.

The Seher team also supported building a better relationship and ally ship between the community and ANM and ASHAs. A webinar was also organised in partnership with APU, COPASAH, NAMHHR, IAPH and the Heal Institute to understand the problems faced by frontline health workers during the Covid 19 pandemic. A blog based on the conversations in webinar can be accessed here:

<https://fmesinstitute.org/blog-13-heal-institute-ijme-covid-19-insights-july-15-2020/#.XxK66ygzblW>

PARICHITI -Parichiti is the Feminist Action Centre of CHSJ based out of Kolkata. Parichiti works directly in 20 poor urban neighbourhood's in Southern Kolkata. Parichiti was able to mobilise support from various local organisations and individuals who very generously donated money and materials for relief including food grain and sanitary napkins. Parichiti also arranged for relief distribution through grants received from APPI and WIPRO FOUNDATION. Funds were also raised from crowdfunding platforms like GlobalGiving and GoFUNDMe for the six Senior Centres run through Kolkata Initiatives and all seniors were provided with emergency rations. In all about more than 5000 persons were provided rations for a period between 15 to 30 days among the different communities that Parichiti works. Parichiti is grateful for the support received from well-wishers, the police, local authorities as well as community leadership.

PEOPLE'S FORUM FOR JUSTICE AND HEALTH (The Forum) – The Forum is CHSJ's South India initiative working with marginalised communities that include manual scavengers, construction workers, beedi workers, devadasis, Dalit women and their collectives towards social justice. The Forum continued its work with Beedi worker and Construction Workers' Union, Dalit Human Rights Forum -Karnataka and Jagrutha Mahila Sanghatane (JMS), Dalit women agricultural labourers collective in Raichur to understand the impact of lockdown on the lives of marginalised communities in 6 districts of north Karnataka. In co-ordination with JMS PFJH developed a proposal to enhance the livelihood possibilities of 1000 farmers and supported Sakhian informal women workers organisations for conceptualising work on livelihoods.

Creative Communication-Communication for Meaningful Social Change (CC) a development communication support unit has been providing strategic communication support to Mitra and Seher. The unit has been providing communication support to SEHER network partners in Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh to adopt ICT-photo and video documentation skills to generate evidence for social accountability in SRHR related initiatives during COVID 19 crisis. Virtual trainings on how to develop photo-stories are provided to each state separately and protocols/guidelines on how to generate evidence through photographs related to different activities associated with SRHR work are developed and shared with partners.

The unit also provided product development support to Mitra and developed promotion materials for 25 Audio Stories are developed to engage Samanta Sathis (Gender Champions) in addressing gender discriminatory social norms during COVID 19 crisis.

We do hope to refine our support strategies and initiatives to enable communities to better cope with the emergency and strengthen their resilience and resolve to overcome it.

In Solidarity,

From all of us at CHSJ
