

## Responding to the Covid Emergency

*May 15, 2020.*

**Centre for Health and Social Justice** has been working with marginalised communities across different states in India for the last fifteen years. CHSJ was in the process of reorganising its approach by establishing five operational units working on different themes from April 1, 2020 when the first lockdown was announced on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020. In this period the CHSJ team has worked together as well as through its operational units to roll out a multidimensional response.

CHSJ has always emphasised the need for strong community-based support and ownership of development interventions. During the first phase of Lockdown the CHSJ worked with its community level partners to develop an Appeal to the Prime Minister and State Chief Ministers. The Appeal drew attention to the need for strengthening social solidarity along with physical distancing, respecting individual dignity and rights and for taking the community into confidence while addressing the emergency. At the same time a Community Action Alert was developed on how communities could take leadership to support the vulnerable while maintaining social solidarity and physical distancing. This Action Alert was shared widely among partners across different states and in different languages.

**PARICHITI** - Parichiti is the Feminist Action Centre of CHSJ based out of Kolkata. Parichiti works directly with 20 poor urban neighbourhoods in Southern Kolkata and it has been engaged in carrying out the relief efforts in these community. Parichiti has been able to mobilise support from various local organisations and individuals who have very generously donated money and materials for relief including food grain and sanitary napkins. Parichiti also received a grant from APPI through which it was able to provide food and other relief materials to 500 families for 30 days. All seniors supported through the six Senior Centres run through Kolkata Initiatives were also provided with emergency rations. In all about 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 the police, local authorities as well as community leadership for their support.

Parichiti also kept a vigilance on the possibility of violence against women in the communities. They have not received reports of any incidents in their communities. Parichiti works closely with collectives of women domestic workers and there is a sense of uncertainty among domestic workers about their future. Many of them have not been paid their wages for April. Many fear losing their jobs. Parichiti is working with women domestic worker collectives to work out how to negotiate new challenges and strengthen opportunities for social solidarity.

**MITRA (Men's Initiatives for Transforming Relationships through Action)** is our operational unit working on masculinities and gender justice. We quickly realised that the Lockdown was a new reality for men who spend most of their time outside the home. Through the EkSaath Campaign and other initiatives, MITRA was already in touch with over 100 organisations in more than 80 districts and with over 10,000 community leaders. The MITRA team immediately connected with our partners and shared the Community Action Alert, requesting them to energise their community leaders to ensure safety of vulnerable families and individuals. Community level partners and leaders were also encouraged to keep a vigilance on violence against women and children in the home. Preliminary reports suggest that in communities where we have been working with men and boys on gender issues, the incidence of violence against women and girls has been much less than is being reported elsewhere.

MITRA started developing a series of Audio Stories for promoting supporting actions by men in the community. Seven such audio stories have been dissemination widely through social media and 13 more are under production. The themes of these audio stories deal with issues like Domestic Violence Prevention, Support in

Domestic Work, Childcare and violence prevention, Supporting Vulnerable Families in the Community, Support to Returning Migrants and so on. These Audio stories have been found very useful and are being widely distributed in the community.

MITRA also organized a series of four webinars on Involvement of Men and Boys for preventing Violence against Women for organisations and between 90 and 100 participants from leading women's rights organisations across the country attended these webinars. A group of about 40 organisations have come together to share information and resources to support violence prevention and creative role for men and boys at the family and community level. A similar collaboration is underway to understand the problems of the returning migrants and support their reintegration into the home communities.

**SEHER** – Seher is working with women and supporting their access to health services and related entitlements. The Seher team has been working closely with network partners in 4 states-Uttar Pradesh Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Jharkhand on micro-planning related to their relief efforts on the ground. Seher has also been supporting partners to support women in the community to receive appropriate maternal health services especially to the pregnant women who are expecting childbirth soon. The team developed guidelines and messages on how maternal care may continue during the Covid emergency and distributed these widely among partners. These also draw attention to support needed for frontline workers i.e. ASHA, ANMs and AWWs including their selfcare while handling Covid 19. The Seher team along with its partners is keeping a vigilance around the status of maternal health services and sharing information around service gaps drawing attention to news of Maternal Deaths during the lockdown. Seher has also reached out to various partners across different networks and states to share the reality at ground-zero and to develop common protocols to assess and improve reproductive health service delivery there.

**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, devdasis, Dalit women and their collectives towards social justice. The Forum has been in touch with Beedi worker and Construction Workers' Union, Dalit Human Rights Forum -Karnataka and Jagrutha Mahila Sanghatane (JMS), a 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. Petitions were sent to the Chief Minister and to the District Magistrate in 6 districts for facilitating emergency rations. Considering the continuing shortage of emergency rations a plan has been drawn up to provide emergency rations to about 250 families. Apart from creating and sharing messages on the issue of COVID19 preparedness, a short video was developed in Kannada on how the Covid emergency can be managed at the community level and was circulated in 6 districts and to village leaders through WhatsApp. Community level partners have been encouraged to monitor the delivery of PDS rations, MNREGA, safe drinking water and maternal health services. Community level partners had submitted memoranda to the local health authorities to ensure attendance of the health staff critical for maternal health service in Raichur, and the maternal health services improved thereafter. The Forum also worked with a local journalist helping to develop a story about a maternal health services for marginalised communities.

**CREATIVE COMMUNICATION** – Creative Communications has been providing support to Mitra and Seher to develop their communication strategy for the Covid 19 emergency, as well as material like audio stories and Pamphlets.

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.

We thank you all for your support.