

Responding to the Covid 19 pandemic

April 3, 2020

The Covid 19 pandemic has upset the rhythm of all our lives and we are all trying to figure out the best ways to negotiate it. There are millions who are suddenly faced with uncertainties and risks of an unprecedented nature. When the Covid 19 pandemic struck we at CHSJ were in the last stages of Institutional Restructuring by evolving into a set of Operational Units. CHSJ has developed a community response protocol to support the Covid 19 associated lockdown and other measures. This protocol has been distributed widely among our partners. We are also utilising our new institutional framework to develop a decentralised yet relevant response to the pandemic as described below.

MITRA (Men's Initiatives for Transforming Relationships through Action) is our new Operational Unit working on issues related to men and gender. This unit is being led by Rimjhim Jain with support from Satish Singh. Through its extensive network MITRA is working closely with 80 partners across several states and reaching out to over 10,000 Samanta Sathis in over a hundred districts generating awareness and reducing fear around the Corona epidemic and providing other informational support to strengthen their relief efforts. We have started developing innovative audio messages for community youth around a) Issues related to the epidemic and health b) Available public health services; government schemes and citizens' rights during emergency c) community participation in implementation and monitoring of lockdown and various schemes that have been announced e) Gender equality including need for men's participation in domestic work and gender role reversal and on preventing domestic violence.

Seher- a women's collective for better health and rights is our new women's health focussed Operational Unit. Seher is being led by Sandhya Gautam and is in touch with its network members across the states of Jharkhand, MP, UP, Karnataka, HP, Uttarakhand and Delhi to monitor situation vulnerable people like single women, Dalits, tribals, and other others. In addition to monitoring provision of food and other essential commodities we are also monitoring essential health services like ANC care to pregnant women delivery care services for women in labour. Our findings indicate that not only have regular ICDS and health services stopped but even CHCs and district hospital are not providing routine but critical services. Our network partners are raising these issues with the local administration. We are preparing and sharing information in regional languages on prevention, care, safety measures for the front line workers, advisories/ services issued by the govt. etc.

Parichiti is the feminist action centre of CHSJ based out of Kolkata. Parichiti is led by Anchita Ghatak and works with underprivileged communities in 20 urban and periurban slums in Kolkata and south 24 Paraganas. Parichiti's is active through its network of community leaders and volunteers both women and men. These include tracking the availability of daily essentials like food, medicines, soap and other, the status of government relief supplies and their distribution. It is also arranging for their distribution to those families who are unable to access these materials due to lack of appropriate documentation. Parichiti has been accessing government information about pandemic management as well as relief measures

and helplines and these are being distributed widely through local social media groups. Parichiti is monitoring the status of domestic violence and is in the process of setting up local community level monitoring communities so that the response mechanism can be streamlined at the community level.

People's Forum for Justice and Health (**People's Forum**) is a network of community based organisations that is being facilitated by CHSJ in Karnataka and led by Edward Premdas Pinto. People's Forum includes Dalits, Muslim Minorities and informal sector workers and is reaching out to these communities by translating COVID19 messages into layperson's language, creating voice messages to the communities, monitoring the access to public services such as access to general stores, public distribution system, health care services and the additional burden faced by them due to the lock down in seven districts of Karnataka.

The unit **Creative Communications** being led by Sambit Mohanty is providing support to the others to develop the necessary communication material to support the community campaigns.

The lockdown is preventing us from directly intervening in more meaningful ways. However, we are trying to optimise our skills and our expertise to work with partners across the country to build community strength and readiness to face the current emergency and work towards more long-term sustainable solutions.

I have also changed my role in CHSJ and instead of functioning as the Director I will be mentoring the Unit Leads while I remain the Managing Trustee of the organisation.

We look forward to your continuing support and encouragement.

Wishing you good health and please stay safe,

In Solidarity,

Abhijit

Managing Trustee

CHSJ