



CHAMPIONS OF CHANGE

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A Newsletter of
CENTRE FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Reflections

The formal decision to register CHSJ as a public charitable trust was taken five years ago by a group of development professionals and activists who realized the need for a new organization on health advocacy in India.

CHSJ has come a long way since then. We feel privileged that our work is seen as being both relevant and effective in ensuring health rights to the most marginalised and in envisioning a gender equitable society with active involvement of men. CHSJ has been able to skillfully negotiate a credible space within the policy making arena at the national level while continuing to maintain a critical and pro social justice approach.

During this journey we have been able to challenge some deep-rooted ideological constructs around issues of population and development. Our work on community action has been recognized and adopted by NGOs, governments, activists, international organisations as an effective component of community based interventions. The concept of involving men in gender equality has generated an active interest in organisations across the globe and we have a wide spanning network and alliance in the South Asian region.

At the completion of five years, we took the opportunity to reflect on the learnings from the past through a series of reviews and meetings. In this process we captured the resistances and challenges in our work and identified the potential for change. We took guidance and support from our partners and allies. We consolidate our experiences, identified strategies and derived detailed goals to chart the direction for future work.

From the Editor's Desk

In CHSJ, the past couple of months have been a period of reflection. Here in the second edition of our quarterly newsletter we also reflect upon what inspires us in our work. How many times have we paused and pondered on what touched or affected us. What caught our attention and impacted us so deeply that it made us sit back and think? What makes each experience so profound that in its small way, it changes our outlook towards life forever? What is it that makes us return to those experiences time and again?

We have taken a short journey into all such moments in our work where we have felt happy and contented.

We encourage your comments and feedbacks and will try to include these in upcoming editions.

Signed- Editors

The Unconventional Gains- Ruhul Amin

My work in the thematic area of *Men and Gender Equality* inspires me to think around the issue of men's role in creating a gender just society. This has been one of the best experiences of my life, and the reason is far more than a conscious choice to devote my life for the empowerment of women. I now identify myself with those men who no longer think of themselves as the privileged group.

With this change, I am no more left with the constant pressure to protect my sister and earn for the family as she equally contributes to family gains. My family is confident that my sister will also be able to handle family accounts and family properties well.

I see my share of gains from a mutually encouraging and dependable relationship with my partner as we both share our feelings with no fear of disrespect or misunderstanding. We are confident in seeking each other's suggestions. I recognize and express my personal advantages openly and am careful not to tread on her choice and decisions. Now I am equally involved with my partner in the kitchen. I enjoy the fun of mutual complementarities.

An involvement with the work of gender justice also clarifies to me many other equations of social justice. It tells me how we continue to be trapped in the game of power, overlooking the advantages of interdependence in equitable relationships. This is where I learnt to confront my traditionally assigned masculinity and the tremendous pressure to exert the same. I feel calmer within and I have emerged a better and happier man.



Adarsh Yuva Samooh in action- Pratibha D'mello

CHSJ is implementing a project "*Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women*", in Uttar Pradesh. In this project, it has formed youth groups and trained them on issues of gender and violence. During the implementation of this project, a case was reported where from Fatehpur village of Pratapgarh district, where 4-5 men gang raped a widow. She was afraid of lodging a complaint with the police as two of the rapists were members of a group supported by the government.

Adarsh Yuva Samooh (AYS), the youth group of Fatehpur village, sprung into action and took the initiative to raise its voice against the injustice. It conducted meetings with villagers and encouraged them to support the woman. AYS also helped the woman to lodge a complaint in the police station. Her FIR was lodged and all four accused were arrested by the police and the case is in court.

An Unsung Hero of my World- Beautiful Countryside and Amazing People- Nibedita Phukan



During my visit to Maharashtra for the project "*Enhancing Male Participation for Improving Gender Equality*", I went to a very beautiful village called Morwadi Pachling situated in the foothills of a small mountain 50-60 kilometres from Pune. It is not merely the scenic beauty of the village that lingers in my mind after all this while, but also the beautiful and kind heart of a lady.

We reached the village after having walked for almost five kilometres. The work we had done during the first half of the day and the long walk had made us hungry. We came to know that there were no eateries nearby and we did

not have the luxury of time to walk all the way down from the hilly village to the *dhabas* which were on the highway below. As we were sitting helpless, a lady overheard our travails. Without discussing with any of her family members, she offered us food. Her house was a hut with a sliding roof made of slate plates and sunlight was scarce inside the house. The state of the house was a giveaway of the economic condition of the family

With the limited resources she had in her kitchen and kitchen garden, she cooked a very delicious fare for us within half an hour. For her, time was scarce and after serving us the food, she had to leave for the field to work in order to run the household and fulfill the needs of the family. I had never had such simple yet tasty food in my life. To this day, I remember her as the most gracious host I have ever met and her innocent smile stuck to my heart. She remains an unsung hero of my world and till date inspires me.

Employee in focus:

Ruhul Amin
Barbhuiya-
Research Associate



I have been associated with CHSJ for more than 2 years.

What I enjoy in CHSJ

- Change theories that create allies out of opponents
- Welcoming new ideas and the way of understanding truth from different angles
- Culture of appreciating diversities
- Work rules are not blind to people's personal needs

Main learnings

- Research techniques
- Constructive handling of different opinions

Favourite Quote

"Be yourself; everyone else is already taken." - Oscar Wilde

Ruhul in one word (by colleagues)

- Philosopher
- Thinker
- Vocal
- Meticulous
- Counselor
- Analytical
- Hard working

Learnings during my internship- Jyotiranjana Rout

CHSJ believes that an increased involvement of men is essential to move towards developing a gender just society. After joining CHSJ, in the thematic area of *Men and Gender Equality*, initially it was difficult for me to understand the concepts of masculinity, sexuality, gender and the role and responsibilities of men and women as equal partners. Being a public health professional, I was more focused on health rather than the social determinants impacting health.

I continued to struggle with these issues but with constant discussions with my colleagues, I started understanding the concept of men's role in gender equality. Subsequently, during my field visit in two districts- Pratapgarh and Jaunpur, in Uttar Pradesh, for the project "*Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women*", I understood that sensitizing men on gender issues can lead to a change in their behaviour and this can further influence all aspects of community life. Change in knowledge, attitude and behaviour is possible through a combined process of mobilisation, capacity building, campaign and community action. I also realised that community based interventions are necessary to empower women and reduce violence against them. Further, instead of viewing the youth as socially irresponsible, I was able to understand how the youth can be constructively engaged as role models for the entire community.

I joined as an intern in CHSJ. I am happy that within a few months my perspective on gender has broadened especially on the ways it may impact health and now I want to continue to work in this area.

Musings of Change- Deepti Morang



When I was doing my Masters in Development Studies (DS), I had developed an interest in the area of health and had made up my mind to work in this sector after graduating from college. Two years after working in the area of livelihood and education, I got an opportunity to work in the health sector in CHSJ and so I just grabbed it.

I joined CHSJ under the theme - *Community Action and Health Rights* in a project on "*Monitoring of Health Expenditure Budget under NRHM*" in Orissa and Assam. Gradually, I learned that here the concept of budget monitoring is not just about tracking numbers but is a lens to empower and orient community to monitor the guaranteed health services under NRHM.

While learning about the project and my work, I was exposed to the community experiences in Assam and Orissa. I was thrilled when I saw women coming out of their domestic spheres bypassing their traditions and customs and discussing their problems and voicing their opinion in public. It gives me immense happiness and satisfaction when I see women as catalysts of change. The community I work with has started realizing that health is their right and a few people in the community are empowered enough to start questioning the lack of facilities in the government health centers. They are feeling the need to regularly assess whether their health needs and rights are being fulfilled. Even the realization of this sort is a great achievement for us, as we see that health is never considered as a community issue like other livelihood issues.

Whatever miniscule I am able to do through this project, gives me immense pleasure and satisfaction as I think that my work is bringing a teeny-winy change in someone's life somewhere.

Forty Five Days in Rural Maharashtra- Shreeti Shakya

One and a half month spent in rural Maharashtra was an enriching experience especially for someone brought up in a city and currently staying in one. 50-100 kilometres and a matter of one and a half hour ride in the bus and jeep and I was away from the cluttered roads of the busy and noisy cities to the silent and serene landscapes.

It was the second time I was visiting the villages of Maharashtra as a researcher for the project “*Enhancing Male Participation for Improving Gender Equality*”.

The purpose was to gather data from men and women from 42 villages in 3 districts of Maharashtra. Data gathering was the task but my experience there was much more than that. We went from one district to another and from one village to another- each village different from the other, having its own unique beauty. Interacting with the men, women and children gave me more insight than I had ever imagined. It was a huge basket of information that I was gathering about their way of life- their livelihood problems, health issues, community concerns, and much more.

While interviewing women across villages, an interesting aspect caught my attention. There was a stark difference in the openness and hospitality of women from lower castes compared to those from upper castes. The latter were friendly and helpful no doubt, but talking to them individually was a big difficulty. In spite of the husbands having gone for work, the mothers-in-law were in control of what the daughters-in-law were permitted to say or do. Whereas the lower caste women had the freedom to decide when and where she would give the interview and also ask her husband to leave the room till the interview was over. Surprisingly, most of the lower caste women offered us tea and lunch and some of them even asked us to come the next day just to have a meal in their house. The warmth and hospitality was so overwhelming and would keep me visiting time and again. It made me question my own urban upbringing.

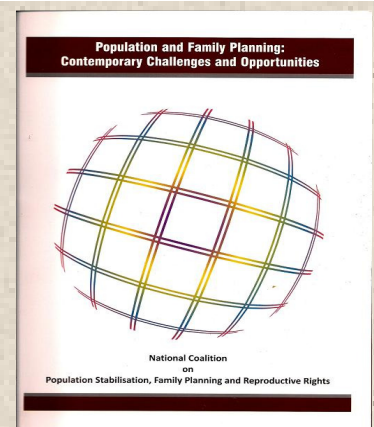


CHSJ Publication in Focus

A set of the following 8 Briefing Sheets were prepared in English & Hindi for a roundtable organized in collaboration with Population Foundation of India around Population and Family Planning: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities.

- A Productive Population is a Nation's Asset
- Contraception is an Essential Tool for Family Planning
- Men should be included too
- Population and Development: Facts and Myths
- Raising Age at Marriage
- Why we do not need to learn from China's One-Child Policy
- Women's Empowerment is the best Contraceptive
- Young People Key Resources

The softcopies are available at <http://www.chsj.org/pages/english/publications/fact-sheets-and-briefing-sheets.php>



List of workshops attended by staff

- 1) *Policy Dialogue on MDGs*, organized by ICW, Asia Pacific on 14th and 15th February 2011.
- 2) *Importance of Addressing Issues of TB in the Context of Women's Health*, organized by Global Health Advocates, India (GHA) on 8th March 2011.

Activities of Interest in CHSJ

- 1) Discussion on Domestic Violence and options for intervention.
- 2) Film Screening- "Aainaa". The film highlights the cause of gender with a strong emphasis on the health outcomes.
- 3) Film Screening- "Seema and Salim ki Diary". The documentary is based on gender roles, masculinity and gender based violence.