

## **UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HOW IT RELATES TO CHSJ's WORK**

### **Parsalli Retreat**

**4<sup>th</sup> October 2013- 6<sup>th</sup> October 2013**

#### **Introduction**

Centre for Health and Social Justice organised a Retreat in Parsali in Sidhi district during 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> October 2013, for which around 22 staff members from 3 states were present.

The objective of the retreat was to understanding social justice and how it relates to CHSJ's work. CHSJ visited the field area in Sidhi to enable the staff members to get a deeper perspective on issues like caste and tribal marginalisation/ hierarchies; development and its impact on social justice; and reconstruction of gender. CHSJ also invited Gram Sudhar Samiti, a community based organisation working in Sidhi from 1990's to present before CHSJ staff members the history of its evolution, its objectives, strategies, activities and results of the work done by GSS. During the course of the retreat, CHSJ also visited a few villages and interacted with the Animators. A team from GSS facilitated the visit.

#### **Agenda**

1. Understanding Social Justice
  - a. Caste and tribal marginalisation/ hierarchies
  - b. Development and its impact on social justice
  - c. Reconstruction of gender
2. Partner presentations
  - a. History, Objectives, strategies, activities and results
  - b. Do's and don'ts of field visit
3. Field visit in groups and interaction with Animators
4. History and evolution of CHSJ
  - a. Issues of concern and what role should CHSJ take to engage with them
  - b. Institutional culture

#### **Discussions**

There is absence of social justice all over the country. Through the discussions, activities, field visit, discussions with animators and key stakeholders in the villages, film screenings, etc., it was evident that money and power tries to control the lives of the people and in this process the marginalised were the most affected one. Tribal communities live in a resource rich area and sometimes the so called development businesses do more harm than good. For us it is important to consider whether the development that is happening is really benefiting all or is constraining those sections of the society who are already living in vulnerable conditions. Social justice for all shall be received when every community, family, individual enjoys their rights without being violated by someone powerful and influential and CHSJ tries to work towards that life for people where each one is enjoying their entitlements. Social justice has to be a collective effort and those believing in social justice have to stand by each other even if we are not directly affected by the issues.

The issue of social justice is complex and various inter-linked relationships in society determine/ affect the formation of hierarchies and access to justice and rights. Rights violations in the rural communities comprise of health rights violations, livelihood, land, river, forest and violations of natural resources. There is a close link between consumer practices and marketing and their impact on the lives of the communities. Social justice is not an issue- it is an umbrella of practice that we

have to practice and follow and that will govern how we treat our fellow human beings, how we use our privileges and how thoughtful we are in our social and personal behaviour.

During the retreat, the staff members met with partners and saw how they implement programmes in remote areas. There were films screened on issues relevant to the local context as well as socially relevant films on issues like construction of Dams, factories and plants producing aerated drinks, coal mining, etc. The staff was able to see the area and the communities where CHSJ's main work lies and for whose rights CHSJ struggles and does advocacy. The impact of the project on the field and how different members of the community are impacted by the work CHSJ does was also discussed. The lives of a rural community were in front of the staff prompting each member to question our dependence on market led initiatives and products. The activities, discussions and field visit were informative and engaging.

There was a discussion on the impact of industrialization and civilization on the livelihoods, belongings and culture of tribals and scheduled caste communities. Women and children belonging to marginalized communities are hidden victims of undeveloped living conditions, lack of resources and unavailability of services. All the national and state level planning for services and distribution are more suitable for developed town and villages, but it is very difficult to reach the services and resources to the villages of marginalized communities, that includes health services and other emergency services too.

CHSJ's strategy of working with men and youth groups to take up and promote gender equality and to change their own behaviour towards women and encourage others to do so as well is important as even now there are large areas where women still do not have lot of information or facilities especially on their health. Gender inequality exists to an extent that lot of younger women have not even spoken to their fathers in long time.

The community visit gave us the opportunity to hold discussions with the ASHA and women about the quality and reach out of the basic services, ensured by the government. The poor quality and delivery of services, especially with regard to maternal health and family planning services were noticed. The aanganwari and mid-day meal schemes were not reaching the women and children of poor families, women had not been provided with three anti natal checkups. This experience, coupled with the theoretical and practical exercises dealing with caste and hierarchies, made it easy to understand why it is essential to locating development initiatives within the local social context.

During the retreat, Gram Sudhar Samiti described their evolution and the journey of around 20 years. The rich history and association of various members in the organisation and the various projects and campaign has enriched the perspective and programmes. This was followed by a discussion of the evolution and growth of CHSJ and revisiting the vision, mission and strategies of the organisation. There was also a discussion on staff roles and responsibilities and the direction for the future work and strategies.

### **Summary**

During the retreat, CHSJ staff saw how difficult access to health facilities is, the lack of transportation and education, also there is no other option for income generation or job. The work CHSJ is engaged in is pertinent to helping the people become aware of their rights and mobilising them to claim these entitlements. CHSJ can contribute on capacity and skills building of the marginalised groups on advocacy and legal rights, and create supportive environment for this purpose.

## Participants

1. Abhijit Das
2. Satish Kumar Singh
3. Anita Gulati
4. Ishu Das
5. Lavanya Mehra
6. Mahfiz Alam
7. Mahendra Kumar
8. Poonam Singh
9. Sarita Barpanda
10. Satish Kumar Singh
11. Tulsi Manimutthu
12. Leena Uppal
13. Shreeti Shakya
14. Sara Ahmad
15. Ravish Ahmad
16. Shakti Jamdade
17. Pramod Shimpi
18. Jagdish Lal
19. Bharti Prabhakar
20. Dastagir Azam
21. Madhulika Masih
22. Edward Pinto
23. Arun Tyagi
24. Kedar Rajak
25. Ragini Mishra