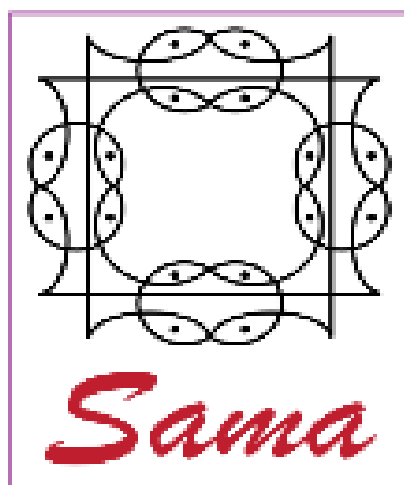


Annual Report

(April 2022 to March 2023)



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Glimpses and Reflections

This annual report highlights Sama's initiatives following the subsiding surge of the pandemic. This period also witnessed several spaces to strengthen alliances towards building a collective understanding, analysis, and advocacy with regard to the impact of the pandemic and deepened inequities, especially gender intersectional inequities. Sama's work through the two years of the pandemic, such as the development of a feminist framework of analysis of the pandemic, the study on the gender gap in vaccination, the analysis of IPR from a gender intersectionalities analytical frame, etc., were consolidated and disseminated during this time. They provided significant insights into informing Sama's as well as larger initiatives in the aftermath of COVID-19.

The Sama team promptly reorganised its focus from responding to the pandemic crisis to strategic engagements to advance its initiatives to address gender-based violence (GBV; sexual and reproductive health including access to safe abortion, safe contraception, infertility; access to health care services and affordable treatments; mental health of young people. Despite the challenges brought on by the pandemic at the organizational as well as community levels, due to the restrictions and lockdowns, the outcomes of the projects were significant and critical. They provided an important analysis of these issues in the context of health and humanitarian crises, drawing attention to the incorporation of emergent lessons in future advocacy and planning of public health responses to these issues.

Overview of Activities

1. Addressing Gender-based Violence (GBV) as a public health issue and Strengthening Health systems response

This period saw extensive community engagement for building and nurturing local support networks for survivors of GBV.

1.1. Capacity building for organizations and networks

Follow-up workshops were conducted with organizations from Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and Chhattisgarh during this period. The objective of these workshops was to consolidate the knowledge and capacities of the organizations on requisite thematic areas, such as laws to address GBV, followed by online sessions and in-person workshops to plan advocacy efforts in each of the states.

1.1.1. Workshops to build capacities of organizations and networks to prevent and respond to GBV

To strengthen support services for survivors, key resources, reference material, and information were shared with the organizations and participants following the needs flagged in the first phase of the workshops. This was done with the help of internet-based apps in the period between the first and second phases of the workshops. Some of the organizations initiated social accountability efforts at the district and block levels to highlight and address the gaps in support services for survivors.

The workshops highlighted a lack of clarity on survivor-centric approaches to addressing GBV, as well as the limited engagement of organizations and networks with the health system. In the process, the need for continued engagement with the health system to facilitate interface and advance the health system's accountability in responding to GBV was also emphasized.

1.1.2. Online sessions with organizations and networks for building knowledge on specific themes

Two online sessions were conducted on laws – one joint session for organizations from Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand and another for organizations from Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. 67 participants from 27 organizations participated in them. External resource persons facilitated the sessions along with the Sama team. Laws related to GBV and legal mandates for the health system in responding to GBV were discussed. Participants also

shared experiences of addressing GBV and flagged questions and clarifications with regard to specific situations.

1.1.3. Short Course on GBV: In the Context of Public Health and Access to Justice

Sama conducted a 5-day Short Course in Patna, Bihar in November 2022 with participants from community-based organizations working on various issues around gender, health, and GBV. The 5-day course covered issues relating to gender, GBV, power, and intersectional inequities that precipitate violence and determine a survivor's access to healthcare. Introducing participants to the existing legal mandates guidelines and protocols for the health system to follow while providing care to survivors of GBV, the course attempted to build an overall understanding of a survivor-centric approach towards GBV.

1.2. Capacity building for healthcare providers

1.2.1. Workshop with healthcare providers of Government Medical College, Rajnandgaon

A workshop on strengthening the Health System's Response to GBV was conducted on the invitation of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Government Medical College, Rajnandgaon District, Chhattisgarh in August 2022. 70 participants, including medical students, junior and senior residents, and nurses, attended the session.

The workshop focused on the health system's role in responding to GBV survivors, particularly in the context of sexual violence. The legal mandates for the health system to address GBV—provisions in the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC) and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO)—were discussed. The medico-legal guidelines and protocols, the proforma for documentation in cases of sexual violence adopted by way of a government order (GO) in Chhattisgarh, were also discussed. Despite the GO, awareness and implementation was limited in the district. The workshop concluded with a Q&A session, during which the participants sought clarifications regarding the implementation of the protocols.

1.2.2. Follow-ups with state health departments

Sama conducted follow-up workshops with the health departments in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan towards their initiatives in the capacity building of healthcare providers. Meanwhile, on a request from Jharkhand, a one-day, in-person meeting took place in April 2022 in Ranchi to plan an orientation workshop for medical officers and other healthcare providers in the state the following month.

1.3. Resources: Modules for Health Care Providers on Responding to GBV

1.3.1. Training modules (offline) for Medical Officers, Nurses, and ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activists)

To address the urgent need to highlight the critical—but often overlooked—role of healthcare providers in providing survivors with healthcare and psychosocial support, as well as in coordinating a comprehensive multi-sectoral response to gender-based violence (GBV), Sama has been developing a series of training modules for healthcare providers. The aim of these modules has been to increase capacity with information and awareness about GBV, as well as to encourage healthcare providers to create enabling environments in health systems for survivors to report violence and seek care and support without any hesitation, apprehension, or barriers.

Three modules, titled *Towards Addressing Gender Inequity and Gender-Based Violence*, are being prepared. The first for medical officers has already been released. Work on the remaining modules for nurses and ASHAs is almost completed and the text is with the designer

1.4. Evidence building towards strengthening health system response to GBV

1.4.1. Innovative practices to address gender-based violence in the Asia Pacific region in the pandemic context

Sama published an issue brief *Innovative Practices to Address Gender Based Violence: The Asia Pacific Region in the Pandemic Context*. The brief reviews certain innovative practices in the region during the pandemic to address GBV and seeks to contribute to their wider dissemination, and their adaptation to address GBV in diverse contexts, during and beyond health and humanitarian crises. The innovative practices summarized in the brief, however, do not imply a recommendation of the services, nor an opinion on their functionality, outreach, effectiveness, limitations and challenges. Though the mapping and review were carried out during the period of November 2021 – February 2022, the brief was completed during this reporting period.

1.4.2. Brief report on GBV in the context of the pandemic

Another brief, *We are under lockdown; GBV was not* finalized during the reporting period. This brief, based on a rapid assessment conducted during the period November 2020 – March 2021, was carried out with organizations, one-stop centers (OSCs) and community-based frontline healthcare providers in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. It presents issues and challenges in the context of the pandemic, particularly during the lockdown and in its aftermath. Although the context is specific, the responses of the participants indicate the need for transformative systems to address GBV.

1.5. Policy analysis and public engagement

1.5.1. Advisory group for developing ‘Domestic Violence protocol within Health settings’

Sama was invited as a member of the advisory group for developing ‘Domestic Violence protocol within Health Settings’ by CEHAT. Sama contributed to the discussions, and provided feedback to the draft “Guidelines for Health Facilities to Provide Quality Essential Services to Survivors of Domestic Violence”.

2. Deepening Engagement in Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health, and Rights (SRHR)

Sama continued to contribute to the discourse around safe abortion rights. Sama actively participated in coalitions and networks advocating for access to comprehensive and safe abortion. Linkages between the issues of abortion rights and SRHR with other issues such as GBV, the right to health and healthcare, and the need for an accountable public health system were further bolstered during this period.

2.1. Dissemination of knowledge materials

Dissemination of knowledge resources on abortion rights continued in response to queries and requests from community health workers (CHWs) in Chhattisgarh, as well as organizations and groups from other states. Dissemination of insights and learning from previous years' engagements with tribal and other marginalized communities and CHWs in Chhattisgarh on the right to safe abortion continued to amplify marginalized voices on the issue within the larger civil society spaces.

Making linkages with abortion rights through Sama's diverse workshops/trainings is enabling a wider coalition and sustained action and mobilization on the same.

2.2. Discussions on emerging issues and policy landscape

2.2.1. Policy and public engagement

- a) **The Decriminalize Safe Abortion Coalition** convened virtually on several occasions during the period to discuss the developments related to a recent petition admitted in the Supreme Court challenging the Constitutionality of the MTP Act, 1971. The group has been discussing ways to strategically address the topic in and outside court.

- b) **Advocacy meetings and dialogues with the State Health Resource Centre (SHRC), Chhattisgarh:** Sama has been engaged with the SHRC in a process of institutionalizing capacities and rights-based messaging on abortion through community health workers across the state. On the invitation of the SHRC, Sama facilitated a refresher session in May 2022 for the CHWs as part of the 27th round of training that the state was conducting. The session included updates on the amendments to the laws and rules. Materials and handouts relevant to the topic were shared with the participants.
- c) **International Safe Abortion Day – community level action, Chhattisgarh:** As in the previous two years, 28 September 2022 witnessed a wide mobilisation in the state for the right to safe abortion. The coordination and organization of the event were undertaken by women community-based leaders of Chhattisgarh who had been part of Sama's initiatives in the state.

3. Strengthening dialogues and feminist thinking around (In)Fertility, including Surrogacy and Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs)

Sama has been deeply involved and has contributed substantially for over two decades to the discourse on reproductive technologies, particularly Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) as well as on Surrogacy through research, advocacy, public engagement, and creation of knowledge resources at the national, and global levels. Throughout the reporting period, Sama continued to engage at various levels, sharing and exchanging information in the context of regulation and legislation with women's and health organisations, researchers, academics, lawyers and health professionals.

3.1. Repository of Knowledge material resources

3.1.1. Infographic

During this period, Sama developed an infographic tracing the trajectory of the various regulations on ART and surrogacy over the years in India

3.1.2. Website/ blogs

Sama team member developed a blog titled *Examining the Contested Political and Economic Landscape of Assisted Reproductive Technology and Surrogacy Regulations in India*, urging for re-examining the regulations holistically with considerations for the rights of all individuals irrespective of any socio-political indicators. The blog is published on Sama's website.

3.2. Building Capacities on Infertility, ART and Surrogacy Issues

Sama has played a sustained and crucial role in building capacities on the topics of assisted reproduction and surrogacy as emerging reproductive rights issues in Asia and other regions globally.

3.2.1. Asia Pro Bono Conference

Sama was invited to join(online) the 11th Asia Pro Bono Conference in Laos in September 2022. Through a virtual session, Sama's presentation focused on building the capacities and perspectives of young lawyers on understanding the legal and human rights aspects of assisted reproduction and surrogacy in the region.

3.2.3. Session for SARJAI

In an online training programme organized by the South Asia Reproductive Justice and Accountability Initiative (SARJAI), Sama took the lead in facilitating technical sessions for a group of young lawyers and professionals who are currently engaged with the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in South Asia. During the virtual training programme, Sama conducted a session on "Non-discriminatory and equitable access to assisted reproduction in Asia," which provided valuable insights and perspectives on the topic and was well appreciated by the young participants.

4. Advancing Women's Rights, Right to Health and Health Care

4.1. Working with the NHRC

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) invited Sama to present on "Identifying Issues/Challenges in Access to Health Services and Health Care Systems" to the Core Group on Rights of Women held on September 5, 2022, on the agenda *Women's Health, Survival, and Nutritional Status: Challenges and Way Forward with their core members*. Mr. Justice Arun Mishra, Hon'ble Chairperson, NHRC, chaired the meeting.

4.2. International People's Health University (IPHU): Short course on Struggle for Health

In October 2022, Sama was invited to build the capacities of young health workers, researchers and health activists of eight countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This was through a short course developed for the International People's

Health University (IPHU). The course covered issues of gender, SRHR, and GBV using different pedagogies.

4.3. Other capacity-building initiatives

4.3.1. A session for young media fellows

Sama mentored young activists with the IUIF fellowship (media fellowship program), and facilitated an online session on Health, gender, and intersectionalities on December 28, 2022. The session built the discussion on the politics of health, looking at social and gender hierarchies as health determinants.

4.3.2. Talk on “Working Hope: How ASHAs Mediate Between Their Communities and the Health System”

Sama organized a talk on “Working Hope: How ASHAs Mediate Between Their Communities and the Health System” on March 24, 2023 with an external resource person. This talk discusses the position ASHAs occupy as mediators between the state and community and how ASHAs facilitate the delivery of health services. The positioning of ASHAs in the health care structure from ground-level experiences of ASHA in the presentation raised important questions such as what makes them uniquely vulnerable? And why do ASHAs' experiences matter for health outcomes?

The online talk attracted a larger number of participants from different countries and networks working on public health and health systems issues.

4.4. Panel discussion on World Cancer Day

Sama facilitated a panel discussion on the occasion of World Cancer Day (February 4). The webinar titled ‘Comprehensive Free Cancer Care: Challenges and Solutions, Making Medicines Affordable’ was co-organised by the Working Group on Access to Treatments, Sama, and the Third World Network-India. The speakers of the webinar spoke about the cancer burden and the urgent need for affordable cancer care.

4.5. Third International Human Genome Summit

Sama was invited to participate in the Third International Human Genome Summit, held in London on March 6–8, 2023. Summit focused on various advancements in technologies such as Heritable Genome Editing along with larger ethical and access issues.

5. Pandemic and Beyond: Feminist Analysis Engagement, Equity Lens and Access to Healthcare Technologies

5.1.1. Webinar on Intersectionality and Equity in Intellectual Property Rights in Healthcare

The webinar facilitated discussions on intellectual property rights by experts and feminists working in this domain. It sought to chart an intersectional and inclusive understanding of intellectual property rights. The webinar shed light on the various barriers to intellectual property rights from an intersectional lens and the plausible measures to overcome them.

The webinar also highlighted how the lack of a gender analysis of intellectual property rights has denied women's contributions as inventors, knowledge producers, and subjects of clinical trials suffering exploitation. The manner in which intricacies of intellectual property issues during the pandemic exacerbated the existing inequities between countries, and worsened the living conditions of marginalized communities, women, persons with disabilities, the elderly, LGBTQI+ communities, and others was often cited as an example.

The speaker focused on transforming medical innovation to prioritize health needs and equitable access to knowledge and technologies.

5.1.2. Webinar on Relooking local production and R&D: Why the TRIPS waiver is still relevant

COVID-19 not only showed the need to develop and provide preventive measures such as vaccines but also highlighted the need to support local development and manufacture of diagnostics and treatments. Continuing the work on pandemics and public health—access to vaccines, diagnostics, and medicines— Sama organised a webinar on *Relooking local production and R&D: Why the TRIPS waiver is still relevant* and how it is necessary for developing countries to continue pushing on this to foster local production.

5.2. Dissemination meeting for Intersectional Feminist Framework

Sama organised a dissemination convening of its knowledge materials through a hybrid meeting on December 17, 2022, held at the India International Centre, Delhi. The Intersectional Feminist Framework '*The Unravelling Pandemic: Envisioning Our Intersectional Feminist Futures*', the summary video of the framework, along with handouts of briefs in multiple languages, were widely disseminated amongst the participants joining in both offline and online modes.

An approach paper on access to medicines and intellectual property, “Exploring Intellectual Property and Access to Medicines from a Gender Approach,” was released. This paper essentially argues for valuing the health of marginalized women over patent rights and corporate profits.

5.3. Dissemination of knowledge resources

Dissemination of other relevant knowledge resources was also undertaken during this period.

- **Handouts:** Handouts summarizing the Intersectional Feminist Framework in six different languages, i.e., English, Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, French and Spanish.
- **Short AV film:** A short audio-visual summarizing the feminist framework of the pandemic drawing on Sama’s work of over two years.
- **Podcast on the gender gap in COVID-19 vaccination:** The podcast titled Gender Gap in Covid-19 Vaccination in India, draws on the study by Sama that explores the underlying reasons for the gender gap in vaccination in India, including vaccine hesitancy and asymmetric information.
- **Blog Post:** A young intern from Sama developed a blog post “Dignity or discrimination in death?” which explores the stigma surrounding COVID-19 during infection and after death, the COVID-19 protocols surrounding burial and cremation and the difficulties of grieving the loss of kin while protecting oneself from infection.

5.4. Participation in Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) on ‘various aspects of COVID vaccine development, management and mitigation of the pandemic’

Recognising Sama’s intense work during the COVID-19, the Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) on Health and Family Welfare, the Government of India (GOI) invited Sama to submit and physically present concerns and recommendations on various aspects of COVID-19 vaccine development, management, and mitigation of the pandemic on April 4, 2022. The submissions and the presentation before the PSC provided strategies and directions for preparedness and addressing the continuing devastation and consequence wrought by the pandemic as well as other critical areas of vaccine development, equitable access, and COVID 19 management and policy.

5.5. Taking forward COVID-19-related initiatives at the community level

Sama organised community-level workshops on pandemics and their impact, access to diagnostics, therapeutics, and vaccines with an intersectionality lens in Odisha and Chhattisgarh. The consultations sought to understand the current challenges faced by healthcare workers and community members, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, in accessing COVID-19 healthcare technologies, including vaccines.

Sama's research findings on the gender gap in vaccination and information about various global-level advocacy actions on these issues and their relevance to local contexts were presented in the consultation. The consultation helped in amplifying voices from the ground who were always invisible in policymaking.

6. Advancing conversations on young women and mental health

6.1 Knowledge material development

Sama developed a [creative brief](#) drawn from the self-memoir and storytelling conversations held previously with a group of young girls in Jharkhand around mental health and well-being. The idea behind the creative brief is to build knowledge around mental health concerns to break the stigma around discussing depression, anxiety and other forms of distressing emotions, and facilitating safe spaces and interactive methods for sharing those feelings without fear and shame.

7. Contributions of Sama members to Other Publications

- How COVID-19 retraced India's steps to gender equality (*In COVID-19 -A view from the margins* (In Jain, Yogesh & Nabia, Sarah (Eds.), 1st ed., pp. 503-519, Manohar Publisher)
- Access to abortion under lockdown in India ([Access to abortion under lockdown in India - Safe Abortion Action Fund \(saafund.org\)](#))
- Gendered inequities during Covid-19 times: A view from the global south (Global Health Watch 6, In the shadow of the pandemic. (pp. 47- 64, Bloomsbury Publishers)
- Pregnancy and Covid vaccine trials: Gender justice compromised (Indian Journal for Medical Ethics DOI: [10.20529/IJME.2021.051](#))
- बात आदिवासी महिलाओं के प्रजनन स्वास्थ्य और ननजता के अधिकार की (About reproductive health and right to privacy) [https://hindi.feminisminindia .com/2022/09/22/abortion- rights-privacy-and- marginal- ised-women-hindi/](https://hindi.feminisminindia.com/2022/09/22/abortion-rights-privacy-and-marginalised-women-hindi/))
- The many hues of connections (<https://www.tarshi.net/inplainspeak/the-many-hues-of-connections/>)