



ENGAGING WITH THE HEALTH SYSTEM



SOCHARA works along with many others towards the realisation of the goal of “Health for All”. The state has a crucial role in the provision of health and health care services that are equitable, accessible and affordable to the entire population. This requires a strong public health system to respond to the health needs and rights of the people. SOCHARA commits itself to work with communities and public health system by providing support not only as and when it is requested by the system, but also involving itself in issues that need greater cooperation from civil society to build a strong health system in the state and the country. Based on the experience of working together with the government through the Community Action for Health (CAH) initiative, the team is continuously engaging the system in developing and creating effective community processes in the state. Some activities done in collaboration with the public health system and in the interest of the public health system are briefly described here.



Dialogue with state health planners, policy makers and implementers

During 2005, SOCHARA organised and invited Senior Bureaucrats of the state Health Department for a Southern regional public hearing on right to health care along with National Health Rights Commission in Chennai. From 2007 onwards, the team envisaged a wide range of opportunities to engage with the public health system in multi-dimensional ways. The Advisory Group on Community Action (AGCA) of National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) initiated a pilot in 9 states of India including Tamil Nadu focusing on community processes for health. SOCHARA-CEU facilitated the process in Tamil Nadu along with the health system and Makkal Nalavazhvu Iyakkam (MNI) partners initially in 225 villages and then expanded to more than 4000 villages in 446 panchayats spread across 6 districts in Tamil Nadu. This initiative helped in deriving a state specific model for community processes in health. The Unit also gathered MNI members across the state to form a State Level Mentoring Committee to make CAH process more sustainable. The Unit facilitated the formation of Governing Body for CAH process consisting of Civil Society members and Senior Bureaucrats of health system to build a platform for policy dialogue. The team also continued to dialogue with health system from 2012 to expand the CAH process to all villages of the six districts.

From 2010 onwards, a team member who is also a member of the State and National Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) Mentoring group was involved in evolving the role of ASHAs in Tamil Nadu along with ASHA support structure. The centre participates in

State Health Society NGO Committee as a member to review NGO proposals. In 2011, the team shared civil society concerns on Public Private Partnership in health in a round table organised by IIT Chennai with support from the Public Health Department. Attempts were made to expand the CAH process to other sectors such as the Chennai Corporation Health Department by developing a model of community processes in urban settings and for the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) sector to improve the quality of services.



Support to the National Health System

Between 2010 and 2012 the team supported the High Level Expert Group on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and derived background papers for final recommendations. The team was also a part of delegates to meet the member secretary of Planning Commission to promote the concept of community monitoring in social sector. SOCHARA team played an important role in an initiative of AGCA to develop a national tool on community monitoring of different health services and a guideline for using the tool. SOCHARA team shared their learnings and experiences in a workshop organised by AGCA to expand the activities of CAH to other states. National Urban Health Mission also invited the Unit to share their experiences on community participation in health. A team member being a member of Tuberculosis Research Centre's (TRC) – Community Advisory Body helped TRC to assess the research proposals from a community perspective.



Training and support to Government, local self-government and health system

During 2012–2013, the Secretary of SOCHARA who is also a member of AGCA emphasised the role of elected representatives in health to President and Vice President of Kandhili Block, Tirupattur. In Dharmapuri the team facilitated a sensitisation meeting for Village Health Water Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (VHWSNC) members, Auxiliary Nurse and Midwives (ANMs) and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) on community process. The Municipal Corporation of Chennai organised a meeting in which the team outlined community health approaches to vector borne disease control. The state government invited SOCHARA team to evolve and conduct 3 days training for 75 ASHA trainers on health rights, communitisation and role of ASHAs. The team also conducted a session on accountability and governance for selected Block Medical Officers. During 2013–2014, SOCHARA team dialogued continuously to develop a state specific model of UHC.

