

SAMATA - A Profile

GENESIS:

Samata was formed as a social action group of highly motivated youth cadres committed to uphold the traditional, constitutional and human rights of the tribal people. Initiated in 1987 and formally registered in August 1990 under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 Samata began to work in the tribal villages of East Godavari and Vizag districts in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India. This region forms a part of the Eastern Ghats range of mountains.

SAMATA - 1987-1997

Samata's focus of work for ten years has been community based development action with the following objectives:

- Assist tribal people in obtaining development and infrastructure facilities which are basic to their progress like education, health care, drinking water, housing, etc.
- Encourage sustainable development with regard to forests and natural wealth.
- Raise consciousness among the tribals about their legal rights:
- Organise tribal communities for resisting exploitation and asserting their rights and for gaining control over their natural resources
- Promote locally accountable and micro level people's institutions for self-reliant socio-economic independence.

THE PROBLEMS AND ISSUES:

- a) Land alienation, non-tribal exploitation, industrialisation and displacement, state violation of constitutional and protective legislations
- b) Loss of control over natural resources and rights to decision-making
- c) Economic exploitation and abuse by moneylenders and traders
- d) Deforestation and indiscriminate plunder of natural resources through ill-conceived development policies of the state
- e) Government negligence and lack of infrastructure facilities to the tribals whose basic needs are scarcely addressed;

- f) Ill-health and inaccessibility of health services resulting in high mortality;
- g) Inadequate and substandard educational facilities to the tribal children with a very high drop out rate at the school level particularly, of girl children.

ACTIVITIES OF SAMATA DURING THE PERIOD:

This micro level action for tribal rights and the protection of the environment was taken up with the holistic perspective in a larger development context. Community based action was carried on in tandem with building up linkages to lobby for macro support to the problems in the region.

Micro level community activities of Samata in the last eleven years involved:

- Building up micro credit network among poor tribal women
- Encouraging alternate development systems and local tribal institutions to counter deprivation and economic exploitation through marketing and cooperative societies, grain banks, land struggle groups, people's health centres, water-users associations, etc
- Small community managed primary education centres called "community schools" at the village level to meet the growing demand for education among tribals.
- Resolution of forest conflicts through forest protection committees, getting legitimisation of forest settlements, formation of Vana Samrakshana Samithis (forest protection committees under the world bank aided forestry project), etc;
- Alternate technology intervention for development programmes using traditional knowledge systems of tribals and combining it with modern low-cost technologies for drinking water, irrigation, electricity, housing and land development.
- Promoting Eco-Tourism by training local education tribal youth as a means of economic progress as well as to protect the natural beauty and resources of the Eastern Ghats.
- Settlement of some forest villages by the forest department as per the 1980 guidelines thereby setting up a precedent for conflict resolution between tribals and the state.
- Setting up of a Micro-Hydel project in an interior tribal area as a model to alternate energy generation in the hills through optimal utilisation of local natural resources.

SAMATA – THE METAMORPHOSIS – 1998:

Samata, having played the role of a community based micro level development organisation with its focus on organising tribal communities shifted its focus to advocacy and to providing support to address the macro issues of the region of north coastal Andhra Pradesh and Southern Orissa.

Under the changed perspective, Samata's new focus is:

- To work towards a people and environment friendly development of the Eastern Ghats region.
- To enable community based organisations working with the marginalised like tribals, farmers, fishermen, etc build up their capacities with the support and experience of Samata.
- To endeavour towards development of alternate development designs for optimal utilisation of natural resources.
- To empower poor communities in the Eastern Ghats and help them in their right to decision-making and right to gain control over their natural resources.
- To build up a strong Resource Centre for research and documentation on the issues related to north coastal Andhra Pradesh, particularly the tribal areas.

NATURE OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY SAMATA:

1. Capacity building :

Samata, with its vast experience in community organisation, provides capacity building support to small groups and local organisations working for people's rights as they find it difficult to obtain information and inputs on their own. Samata assists ten community based organizations in north coastal Andhra Pradesh in capacity building, education and health, legal aid, linkages, information and documentation, organisation management, financial support, campaign support, marketing and technical expertise.

2. Mines, Minerals & PEOPLE:

Samata is the National Secretariat for a national network of communities, NGO's, resource organisations and several concerned institutions and individuals called **Mines, Minerals & PEOPLE (mm&P)**. This network addresses the problems of communities and mine-workers affected by mining and also its impacts on the environment. It has about 150 member groups from 16 states in the country. The network support local campaigns through information, linkages, legal, media, technical and policy support on mining issues and highlights them at a national and international level.

3. Industry Watch:

Samata, being an advocacy and support group, monitors the proposed and existing industries and development projects in the state of A.P in order to act as a vigilant civil society. It participates in public hearings, accesses information and disseminates it to the local communities affected. It takes up legal, technical and media advocacy on urban and rural environment issues affected by industries.

4. Support to Development Activities:

Samata implements development programmes in the tribal villages through local community participation to meet their basic requirements of housing, drinking water, education, health services, etc by linking up with either government departments like Tribal Welfare, Panchayat Raj and Rural Development, Forest Department, etc or with institutions/organizations concerned with the development of tribals. Samata also encourages communities to build up local sustainable institutions for over-coming exploitation through women's thrift societies, forest protection committees, health and education committees and farmers' associations.

5. Direct legal services :

Legal aid which is most crucial for marginalised communities fighting for their rights is inaccessible to them. Inability to understand the laws or approach the judiciary on their own makes local communities and small organisations working with them vulnerable to exploitation by the state and other forces. Samata provides direct legal services to communities and groups by helping in legal problems like false criminal cases, illegal custodies, getting bails, harassment and human rights violations, land alienation, either through writ petitions or public interest litigations. It takes up legal action and advocacy on issues related to tribal, forest, environment, industrial violations of the Constitution.

6. Campaign support and legal advocacy :

Samata provides assistance to local struggles of tribals, farmers, fishermen, etc who are fighting in the region for their specific rights of land, water, resources and struggles against displacement by industries. Local groups in Orissa and North Coastal Andhra Pradesh have asked Samata for guidance in organising committees, dissemination of information, planning and implementing campaign strategies, cultural training, help in legal advocacy through public interest litigations and writs, spreading legal awareness and literature among communities, etc.

7. Information support :

Communities affected by private or government projects have a right to information on these projects and their likely impacts. Information should also be accessible to local groups and communities on legal rights, laws and regulations, and other programmes relevant to them. As there is an information-vacuum due to reluctance from government and industries in sharing it,

Samata collects information, compiles into brief informative documents and disseminates it. Demystifying legal and technical information, particularly in the context of development projects and spreading this literature in the vernacular is another important activity of Samata.

8. Media advocacy :

Media being the most powerful instrument of publishing information, gathering information, creating public awareness and acting as a pressure on the government to follow transparency and objectivity in its policies and programmes, Samata has been using media advocacy in all its campaign for the protection of peoples rights. Samata would concentrate on developing media advocacy for the issues of the Eastern Ghats and to give strength to local struggles.

9. Linkages :

Small local groups need to come out of their isolated struggles as issues affecting people are based on micro-level policies of the state. Samata, with its experience and access to other people's networks helps local struggles by providing linkages to larger movements and fora so as to build up a strong lobby support for the issues in the region.

10. Technical expertise and alternatives :

Samata supports small organisations and communities with technical expertise in seeking alternative sustainable development designs which can be managed by the communities. This includes harnessing locally available natural resources for meeting basic needs of drinking water, electricity, irrigation, housing, etc appropriate to the area. With the help of the technical experts Samata also takes up impact assessment studies and gives constructive alternatives which are ecologically and socially enduring and press for balanced development policies of the government.

11. Research and Documentation:

Samata takes up research, studies and prepares reports on issues related to tribals/scheduled areas, mining, forestry, environment, human rights, land alienation, rural development programmes, legal issues, etc. Some of the studies undertaken Samata have been on the impact of the Joint Forest Management program in A.P, the impact of Water Users' Associations, feasibility studies for micro-hydel projects, socio-economic status of mining affected tribals in Anantagiri mandal of A.P, etc.

Sources of financial support:

Samata receives support from a few national and international aid agencies like Oxfam, Christian Aid, Swedish International Development Agency, Governments of India and A.P and through donations and contributions concerned from individuals and institutions.

ORGANISATION DETAILS:

Registered under Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860.

Contact Person: Ravi Rebbapragada, Executive Director