



Samreen Shahbaz, from Pakistan, has been working in the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) sector for more than 7 years. She has worked at national and regional levels in the capacities of both an advocate and a manager of multi-country legal and policy advocacy and research programmes to advance SRHR.

Samreen is keen to learn from approaches in international development and policymaking that build from below rather than from the top, and engage with the lived realities and constraints of the ‘beneficiaries’. She has consistently applied these approaches to her legal and policy advocacy work.

Between 2016-2020, Samreen managed a country advocacy programme on adolescent and youth SRHR in Nepal and Pakistan together with 25 national civil society organisations with an annual combined budget of more than EUR 300,000 under the initiative Right Here Right Now (RHRN). RHRN was a global advocacy programme that aimed to promote young people’s SRHR through concerted policy advocacy at national, regional and international level. The programme focused on three thematic issues: comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), youth-friendly SRHR services including safe abortion services, and finally, elimination of stigma and discrimination against persons with diverse gender identities, sexual orientations and sex characteristics. She provided technical and strategic support to 25 youth-led and youth-serving civil society partners in Nepal and Pakistan to ensure effective policy advocacy programme design, implementation, and evaluation. In Nepal, RHRN contributed significantly to the approval and formal adoption of the federal Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Right Act 2018. In Pakistan, RHRN contributed to the adoption of Sindh province’s first-ever youth policy and adoption of a Memorandum of Understanding by the Sindh government to integrate life skills-based education/sexuality education in the formal school curricula.

Between June 2021 - September 2021, Samreen has worked with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as a consultant to manage the implementation of ADB’s pioneer knowledge building research on social and economic inclusion of sexual and gender minorities in 23 countries in the region. The research initiative is being implemented in collaboration with the World Bank.

Samreen has also directly contributed to the drafting of several UN Human Rights Council resolutions, including the resolution on child, early and forced marriage presented at the 41st session of the Council. Samreen’s work as an SRHR advocate and as the coordinator of large-scale programmatic partnerships and policy research initiatives has allowed her to directly work with a wide range of stakeholders including government representatives, multilateral agencies, and communities of practitioners in several countries in the Asia Pacific region. She has years of experiential knowledge and expertise on designing and implementing policy research and advocacy programmes.

At Johns Hopkins SAIS, Samreen wishes to strengthen her understanding of contemporary discourses in international development and gender issues, focusing on EU’s foreign policy in relation to promotion of gender equality in developing countries. In the next few years, she wishes to work with public policy think tanks or EU-based donor agencies and continue her work on bodily rights, gender equality, and social inclusion.

She is fluent in English and has a good command of regional languages such as Hindi and Bahasa Malaysia.