

Soma Wadhwa

e-mail: swadhwa@idfresearch.org, somawadhwa3@gmail.com

Research Interests

Soma is interested in issues of Education and Gender. She uses qualitative methodologies to understand the processes through which development interventions impact outcomes — the theories of change. Her focus has been participatory research methods, in conjunction with case studies, comparative ethnographies and plain storytelling as a narrative tool.

Educational Qualifications

- MA English Literature, St Stephen's College, Delhi University (1991)
- BA (Hons) English, St Stephen's College, Delhi University (1989)
- ICSE, The Frank Anthony Public School (1986)

Work Experience

India Development Foundation (October 2010 — till date)

Fellow

- **Concurrent monitoring and evaluation of Disha, a programme aimed at enhancing employability of Indian women:** IDF is the monitoring and evaluation partner in this IDF-IKEA Foundation-UNDP-Xyntéo programme—Soma is IDF's lead for Tracking Studies and Process Mapping. Her assignment includes qualitatively mapping and studying the processes, practices and experiences involved in Disha's multi-pronged interventions that aim to provide a million women with counsel and training for jobs and starting enterprises. Soma is responsible for generating reports that track the programme's successes and challenges even as it is on between 2015 and 2018, this towards mid-course corrections of programmatic design and implementation. She will also analyse her research findings regarding the programme's processes towards delivering strategies that can be used to inform policy.
- **Evaluations of development interventions funded by the Netherlands government:** Soma was the lead for qualitatively evaluating the civil society impact of 10 organisations in nine Indian states that have been funded by the Netherlands government under the MFS II 2011-2015 grant. For this Soma used the CIVICUS framework to assess civil society strengthening. The assignment required her to evaluate funding impact over a two year period (baseline in 2012 and end-line in 2014) by designing and conducting Theory of Change and Model of Change workshops with the organisations being assessed, identifying significant actors in the concerned civil society arenas, developing questionnaires, interviewing key informants, and analysing the data collected. Soma collaborated with, and attended two workshops at, the University of Wageningen, Netherlands for this project.
- **Odisha Girls Incentive Programme for Secondary Education (OGIP):** Soma was in-charge of qualitative research for OGIP, a joint initiative by the Odisha government and UK government's Department for International Development (DFID), which provided cash transfers to girls from the SC/ST communities in the Rayagada district to ensure their enrolment and attendance in secondary school. Soma designed KAP (Knowledge Attitude Practice) surveys, conducted key-informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with various stakeholders and documented four case studies—all this over an academic year—to study the acceptance and feasibility such schemes

that aim to incentivise education, as also to make policy recommendations. Also, for the OGIP IEC campaign, Soma planned communication strategies to disseminate information from the district to the community, school and household levels; with special focus to ensure that government officials feel ownership for the scheme.

- **The IKEA-UNDP Swaayam Programme for Women's Empowerment:** Soma was a senior member of the qualitative team for this IKEA-UNDP programme in three districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh. The objective was to evaluate the impact of the programme's intent to empower women through constituting SHGs, imparting political, legal and livelihood training and eventually forming federation and producer companies. Towards this Soma conceived of a qualitative evaluation design that assessed the programme outputs and outcomes through participatory methods such as FGDs, interviews and a Theory of Change workshop with the target group as well as other stakeholders, including the UNDP project staff. The data was analysed for the strengths and weaknesses in Swaayam's design, implementation and monitoring, as also the status of women SHG members with regard to chosen empowerment indicators.
- **Madhya Pradesh Unconditional Cash Transfer (MPUCT):** This UNICEF programme was designed to study the impact of unconditional cash transfers to farmer households in eight villages of Indore district. As in-charge of qualitative research for the study, Soma designed the action document, created discussion guides, planned logistics and implemented and documented a series of FGDs. For the MPUCT Awareness Campaign she designed communication for the cash roll out.
- **Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Conditional Cash Transfer (GNCTD-CCT):** As part of qualitative research in UNDP-GNCTD CCT study, Soma investigated the reasons behind people's preference, if any, for PDS (Public Distribution System) over cash transfers. Towards this, she conducted extensive, in-depth interviews of people who refused cash transfers six months after having opted for them. These interviews were the basis of descriptive pieces that were a part of IDF's report.
- **Independent research:** As a part of the OGIP assignment, Soma documented four case studies for the project: three girls who had enrolled into class 9 after receiving the OGIP cash transfers, and one who chose to remain a school dropout despite being eligible for the OGIP stipend. Soma followed these girls for another year — over and above project requirement — to study whether they transitioned into class 10, and the challenges they faced if they did. Soma is working on documenting this two-year-long journey of the four Rayagada girls; as also forwarding policy recommendations drawing from this study of their experiences.
- **R.A.C.E:** Soma edits *R.A.C.E* (Research. Analysis. Commentary. Essays) which comprises researched articles by IDF's Fellows, Research Associates and Research Assistants. *R.A.C.E* showcases the diversity and depth of IDF's responses to the relevant issues and policies of the day, in turn enriching IDF's research environment. The *R.A.C.E* articles are available on the IDF website.

Open, Newsweekly Magazine (December 2008 — September 2010)

Deputy Editor

As a core member of the launch team, Soma participated in the conceptualisation of the magazine's editorial and visual philosophy. She was in-charge of its weekly publishing cycle; including deciding the magazine's menu for the week, ideating with reporters on stories and then guiding and monitoring their efforts, visualising stories with the photographers and designers, planning and working on stories that were not time-bound, and setting deadlines.

The Hindustan Times (2006 — 2008)

Editor, HT on Saturday

As Saturday Editor, Soma was in-charge of HT's Saturday newspaper—from front page to the last sports page. The edition also included weekend feature pages, and was mandated to have special front page news stories. These features and stories had to be planned, assigned and monitored through the week. The edition's menu and production was overseen by her. Towards this, Soma had the newspaper's editorial staff and a separate Saturday team reporting to her.

The Indian Express (2005 — 2006)

Deputy Editor

In-charge of the Op-Ed page, Soma had to keep pace with news and generate opinion on it every day. This included selecting articles to be published from among unsolicited articles, identifying writers and experts who could best react to the day's news and commissioning them to write. These pieces were then edited by Soma. She also wrote opinion pieces and special news pieces for the newspaper.

Outlook (1995 —2005)

Features Editor

Soma joined *Outlook* as Principal Correspondent and was Features Editor at the time of her leaving. Apart from leading the magazine's team of feature writers in Delhi, as well as in all its state bureaux, she reported and wrote extensively on issues of development. The main emphasis in her writings was on issues of Education, Gender and Health. She also wrote on Minorities and social trends. For this she travelled extensively through the country. Among other issues, she wrote on: women who were branded witches in Singhbhum, Bihar; midwives confessing to committing serial infanticide for a Rs 100 or less in Katihar, Bihar; Kerala's failed development model; the struggle that led to the 93rd Amendment making Education a Fundamental Right and its aftermath; the impact of women's reservation on Panchayati Raj and the movement for 33 per cent reservation for women in Parliament. She covered HIV-AIDS conferences as media delegate in Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Melbourne.

The Times of India (1995, seven months)

Senior Features Editor

In the Features Bureau, Soma reported and wrote on issues of Education, Health and Gender. She was also responsible for doing front-page stories on these issues.

The Pioneer (1992 — 1995) Senior Reporter

Soma was a daily reporter with Education and Gender as her beats.

The Sunday Observer (1991 — 1992) Reporter

Other Achievements

- Recipient of The Sanskriti Award for Journalism
- Winner of the Press Council of India Award for reporting on Education
- British High Commission Chevening Scholar
- Worked at the Education Desk with *The Guardian* in London
- The Shri Ram Award for Excellence in Academics. Tuition waiver and stipend through graduating years at St. Stephen's College

Publications

- Reports on *MFS II Country Evaluations (India) — Baseline (2012) and End line (2014)* for WOTRO in collaboration with the Centre for Development Innovations (CDI), University of Wageningen

- <http://www.outlookindia.com/peoplehome3.aspx?pid=5891>
Author Page, *Outlook* archives
- **Some articles on Gender:**
 - <http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/nation/the-other-headlines-and-battles>
Other headlines and battles, March 2010, *Open* magazine
 - <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/Rajasthan/Women-burn-bright-in-Rajasthan-s-sati-village/Article1-246134.aspx>
Women burn bright in Rajasthan's Sati village, September 2007, *Hindustan Times*
 - <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/rape-is-about-women-and-men/10173/>
Rape is about women—and men, August, 2006, *The Indian Express*
 - <http://www.outlookindia.com/article/Bangles-No-Bar/211558>
Bangles no Bar—Panchayat elections in Bihar, May 2001
 - <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?200020>
Lambs to Slaughter, October 1995, *Outlook*
- **Some articles on Education:**
 - <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?223093>
Pencil Erasure, March 2004, *Outlook*
 - <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?213967>
Flawed Cause, *Outlook*, December 2001
 - <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?209186>
Class Struggle, April 2000, *Outlook*
 - <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?207627>
Where numbers lie, June 1999, *Outlook*
 - <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?206757>
In dead letters, December 1998, *Outlook*
 - <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?206453>
Colour of the alphabet, November 1998, *Outlook*
 - <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?206362>
Master Kesra has no blackboard or imagination, October 1998, *Outlook*
- **Some articles on other development issues:**
 - **On the Kerala Development Model:**
<http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?224458>
Kerala... God's own country, and He can keep it, July, *Outlook*
 - **Right to Information:**

<http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?225099>

I know, so I am, September 2004, *Outlook*

○ **Population:**

<http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?211284>

Stasis Behind Statistics, April 2001, Outlook

<http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?207974>

India One Billion, August 1993, Outlook