

VAMP
2015-2016

NOTE FROM THE TEAM

Achieving 100% HIV testing through community led voluntary efforts

- The feature of this year's efforts of the SANGRAM team and its collectives has been their hard work in reaching out with HIV prevention services and health linkages to female, male and trans sex workers in their communities. At the end of the year, the VAMP and MUSKAN collective managed to achieve 100% HIV testing through strong peer led efforts. As part of the partnership with the Government of Maharashtra and the National AIDS Control Program, there has been considerable efforts undertaken by sex workers and MSMs to strengthen peer led efforts and motivate communities to prevent HIV/AIDS. This success comes against the backdrop of limited fund and commodities availability through 2015.

Escalating Abolitionist Movement

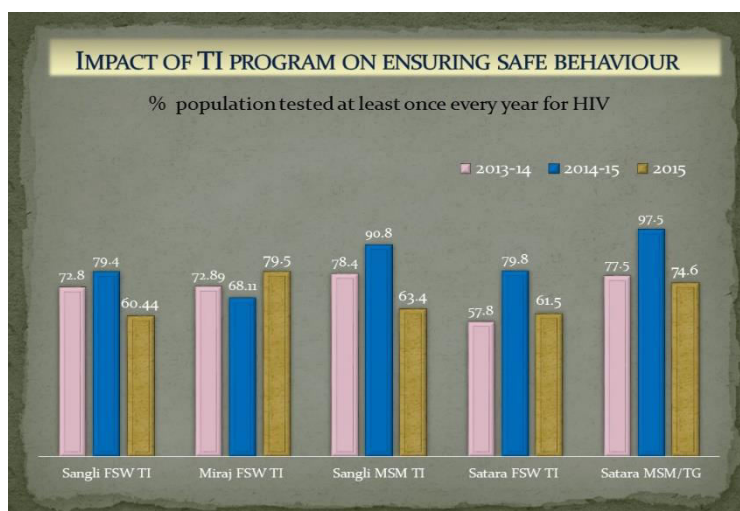
- In early 2015, the groups supported by the Ministry of Women and Child had stated that the trafficking provisions were being relooked at, in an attempt to develop fresh laws. The Supreme Court Panel constituted under a three point reference to recommend the prevention of trafficking, strategies to support people who were victims of trafficking and wished to leave sex work of their own volition and lastly to enable sex workers live a “life of dignity”. The panel submitted its 15th interim report to the Supreme Court. The final report is yet to be completed. This has impacted how sex worker rights advocates and activists can use the recommendations to read down Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (ITPA), the primary legislation that is used to raid and rescue adult women in sex work.
- In August 2015, the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) submitted a report seeking the expansion of the term exploitation to include involuntary acts done under the absence of free will. NALSA provided a working definition stating that the definition of sexual exploitation should include “a situation where a person under coercion and absence of free will is used or abused or explicitly portrayed either physically or through media (print, electronic, internet) in a sexual manner, for the benefit of other person(s).”
- Throughout the first quarter of 2016, there has been discussion that United Nations for Women Fund (UN Women) has decided to write a global policy on sex work. The policy is part of three positions on sex worker, abortion and LGBTI (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans and Intersex). However, the proposed policy note on sex work is being drafted without any global consultations or engagement with sex worker groups and activists from the movement. The proposed policy is being written by Purna Sen, policy advisor and a known abolitionist. There have been concerted efforts by Equality Now, Apne Aap and celebrities such as Ashley Judd to engage with UN Women on the policy in a strategic and consistent manner.

HIV prevention program for female, male and trans -sex workers

BACKGROUND - UNCERTAINTY AROUND FUNDING OF HIV PREVENTION PROGRAMS IN 2015

A major part of 2015 and 2016 has been traumatic for VAMP mainly because of the breakdown of the HIV/AIDS prevention programme called Targeted Interventions for key populations- women, men and trans people in sex work, supported by the National AIDS Control Organisation through the Maharashtra State AIDS Control Society [MSACS].

The main concern was that the abrupt withdrawal of these funds would lead to a resurgence of HIV among people in sex work. This was reflected in the later part of 2015-16. Community based HIV interventions that were showcased as the most successful HIV prevention programmes by the Government of India have not been paid despite contract, for more than six months now. Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad [female sex worker collective], run Targeted Interventions on HIV/ AIDS prevention service delivery programs for 4500 women, men and trans people in sex work in Satara and Sangli districts. The 1st instalment of Grant for period April to May 2015 was released on October 2015 (6 month delay) the 2nd instalment for June to September was released in December 2015.



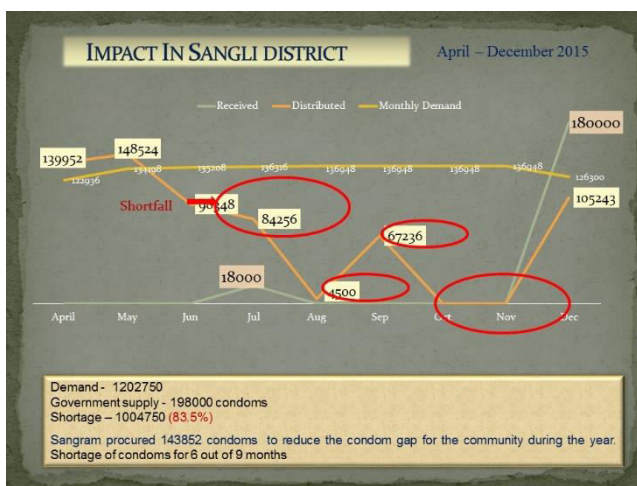
The TI's have shown that the programme reached 100% of the estimated sex work population. Out of the 466 of them who are living with HIV 247 are on Anti-Retroviral Therapy [ART].

The lack of monetary support for the programme now impacts outreach that ensured both follow up and adherence. More than 22 years of work has convinced us that marginalized groups require that we continue to engage with them on a planned regular basis to help adherence to HIV prevention and treatment follow-up.

DIALOGUE WITH THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

SANGRAM and members of VAMP made a representation to the National Human Rights Commission on the challenges in delivering HIV/AIDS prevention, care support and treatment services impacting the lives of vulnerable populations in Maharashtra.

The submission was made to the NHRC in a public hearing supported by the commission on health rights in the region. The issue received media coverage and following this NACO decided to convene a meeting in New Delhi. Crucial contributions were made by sex workers in providing data on the status of commodities and ART medications; from the field level. (<http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/new-year-shocker-ngos-see-red-over-aids-control-bodys-cost-cutting-measures/>)



CIVIL SOCIETY AND NATIONAL AIDS PROGRAM

SANGRAM and VAMP worked consistently with UNAIDS and with Civil Society to highlight the problems with the HIV/AIDS programme in India. A presentation on this was made to the UNAIDS reference group on HIV and Human Rights, which SANGRAM is a member of, and this also helped to highlight the issue under discussion in Geneva. The Executive Director of UNAIDS took up the issue with officials in India and made a visit to New Delhi in an effort to advocate for the continued support of Government of India in the campaign to end AIDS by 2030.

After a lot of behind the scenes work by UNAIDS, WHO, NACO and Civil society a decision to continue support from April 2016 has been taken by Central Government. Accordingly, Mr. Kang the Health Secretary of India called a meeting in New Delhi and announced that new budgetary allocations have been made to streamline the HIV/AIDS programme and we hope for better days in 2016-17. SANGRAM was chosen by civil society to represent and present the issues raised by the CSO's present at this meeting. Early days still, but we await NACO's contracts to restart the TI's in the states.

A second round of discussions was held with the State Chapter of the AIDS Control Societies, in Maharashtra to advocate for sustained access to commodities and HIV medicines. Issues discussed include -

a. Immediate release of funds for HIV programing – As a result of the discussions with NACO and sustained protests, MSACS announced that 3 months funds i.e. from October to December 2015 would be released. 100% funding from April - March 2017 would be released by NACO to the Societies directly, which is likely to help put the HIV program back on track.

b. Drug shortage: Though there were many explanations provided by officials the larger question remains that ZLN is still not available in Sangli and PLHIV are not counselled to buy drugs and NOT take a drug holiday at any cost. This is critical in the response and was raised in the meeting. It was decided that TI counsellors / ICTC counsellors / ART centre doctors should be pulled in for this.

c. Condoms shortage: The Maharashtra State AIDS Control Society has promised that this system will be changed and NHM supply chain will be used for the purpose in future.

d. The communication mechanisms of the National Health Mission program, of the Government of India will be used to disseminate timely information on the HIV/AIDS program in Maharashtra. This will help organisations to address queries on funds/commodities/drugs.

e. NACO reviewed the HIV Targeted Interventions programs and called for all partners to provide suggestions for the next phase of the NACO program. SANGRAM and VAMP made a submission for the same. In addition, a NACO team visited the VAMP interventions to review the work and take on board suggestions from the community.

Sex workers from VAMP, Muskan have participated in these discussions with the officials to ensure access to commodities and medicines.

Despite these barriers and challenges, VAMP and MUSKAN have managed to systematically reach out and provide services in partnership with the State AIDS Control Program.

VAMP COLLECTIVES PEER LED HIV/AIDS PREVENTION INTERVENTION

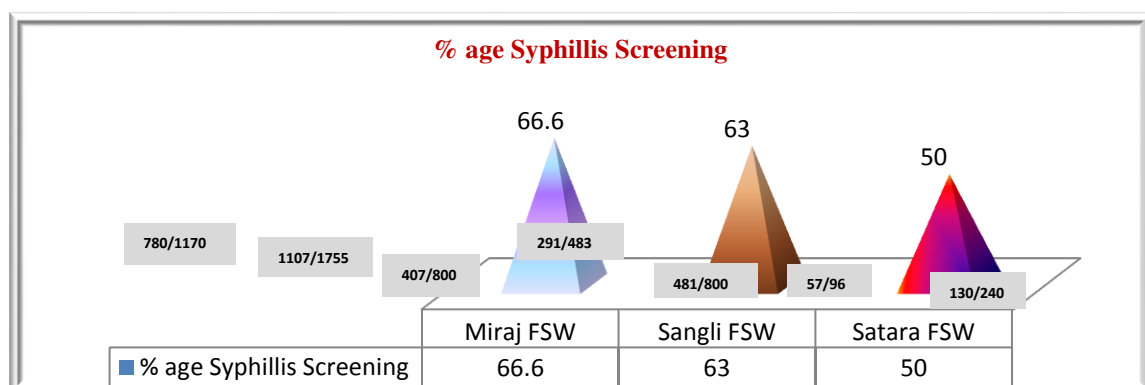
Area of Operation: Sangli, Miraj, Satara, Karad, Koregaon, Lonand, Wai, Nippani, Rabkavi, Mahalingpur- Budhani, Mudhol, Jamkhandi, Kesargop, Belgaum, Gandhinglaj.

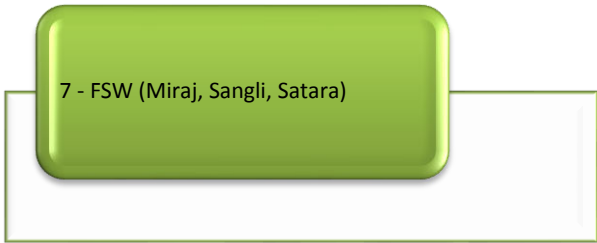
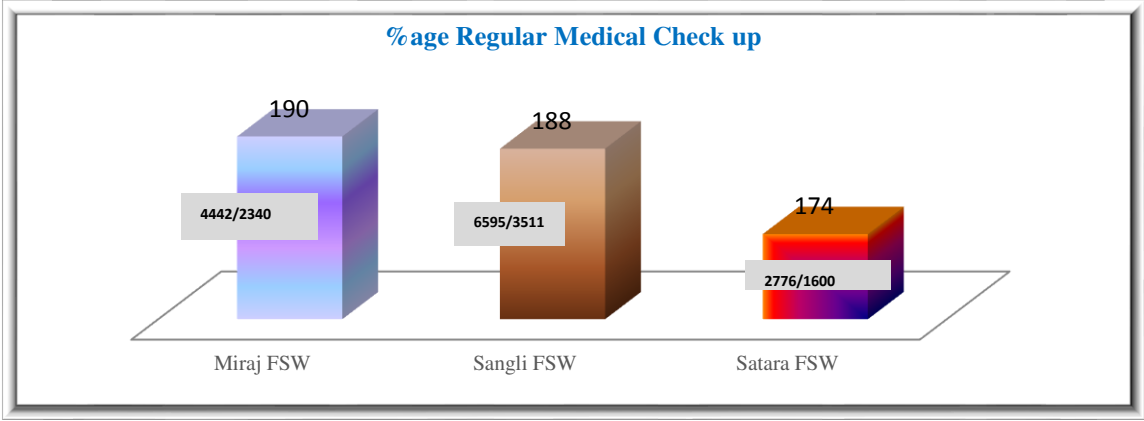
VAMP has been working with over 5000 female sex workers within Sangli and Satara. VAMP which is the collective of women in sex work, has its reach in Sangli, Miraj, Satara and North Karnataka. Through a partnership and with support received from the Maharashtra State AIDS Control Society, Government of Maharashtra, VAMP operates HIV prevention projects for sex workers. In 2015-16, the project reached out to 1906 sex workers with HIV prevention services within Sangli and Satara district through two projects.

Despite the break in supply of condoms, the collectives took condoms from the family planning program of the Government and distributed them as an emergency measure.

During the year, VAMP collective distributed 1178259 condoms through targeted interventions in Miraj, Sangli and Karad. In addition, 10110 regular medical check-ups were conducted during the year as against a target of 7451 cases. Syphilis screening for the communities were also organised during the year. 7 STI cases were detected and treated. 26 cases of HIV were detected across the four interventions and were linked to ARV services.

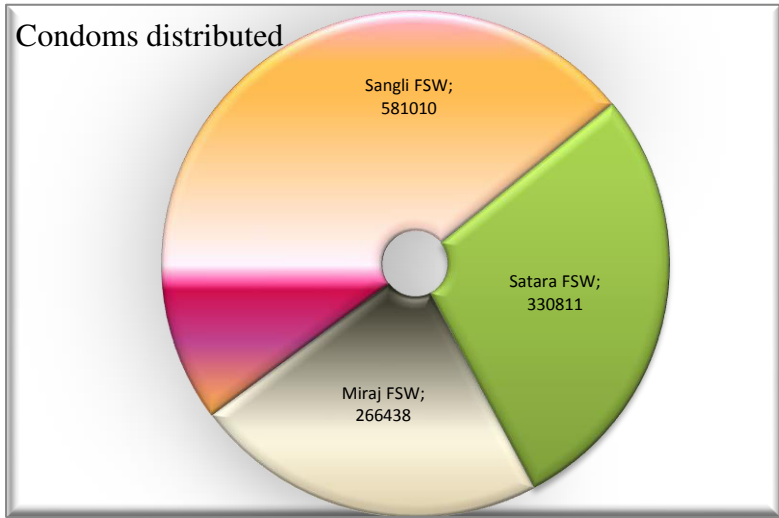
TI REPORT CARD 2015-16





HIV Reactive in TIs, 2015-16

STIs detected and treated in TIs, 2015-16



AIDS CONFERENCE, DHAKA AND COMMUNITY SHOWCASES HIV PREVENTION WORK

SANGRAM, MUSKAN and VAMP used the 12th International Conference of AIDS in the Asia-Pacific [ICAAP12] in Dhaka to advocate for both sex worker rights and for the rights of populations marginalised due to HIV and as persons from sexually diverse communities.

Posters of VAMP and MUSKAN were accepted for the International AIDS Conference.

SANGRAM also facilitated the participation of sex workers from Nepal, Myanmar and other sex worker groups from NNSW at the International Conference. An 18 member delegation of sex workers attended the conference from the South Asia region.

Members of VAMP, MUSKAN, NNSW and SANGRAM made numerous presentations on the impact of a robust community led HIV prevention intervention on reducing vulnerability of stigmatised populations such as sex workers. The presentations included

- a. How sex workers from VAMP help to prevent trafficking of women using a community based approach
- b. Tanta Mukti Samitis or Conflict Redress Mechanisms of VAMP as a model for arbitration without external interference
- c. The SANGRAM/ CASAM experience of working with treaty bodies to mainstream the rights of people in sex work
- d. Building a sustainable community led response to HIV/AIDS amongst rural women using the VMM experience.
- e. Strengthening access of transgender and MSM people to HIV/AIDS services without stigma
- f. Encouraging and empowering adult children of sex workers to collectivise and work for the upliftment of sex workers and their children - the Mitra experience.
- h. The challenges of funding and sustaining Targeted Interventions for HIV/AIDS prevention in India
- i. Sharing the experience of a four country sex worker collective led research on violence faced by sex workers.

A Satellite session was organised by SANGRAM, VAMP and NNSW titled “Reclaiming Rights: Sex Workers Speak”. The satellite session was attended by sex workers from Bangladesh, Australia, Nepal, Myanmar and India.

SANGRAM also helped to develop the Community Forum Statement that was read out at the closing ceremony of ICAAP. A more detailed report of the conference is available on the following link <http://www.sangram.org/resources/ICAAP12-Dhaka-Bangladesh-Community-Sessions-Report.pdf>

ANNIVERSARIES, CELEBRATIONS AND COMMEMORATIONS, CONFERENCE AND PRESENTATIONS

- ✚ A number of celebrations were held, starting with the celebration of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar in April which brought the whole VAMP community together, and included garland giving, a programme of events and a rally in Miraj.
- ✚ The Masob Jatra festival was observed in July/August, and the celebration of the goddess Yelema in September with a big rally from the sex worker community (from MUSKAN and VAMP) to the riverside. On the 6th December VAMP remembered and celebrated those who were lost due to violence and HIV and celebrated a 3rd March an International sex workers day.

Core Area 4 – Research and Advocacy on the Rights of Marginalised Communities

Through 2015 and 2016, SANGRAM, VAMP has individually, collectively and in partnership with women's groups, media practitioners and internet experts been challenging these developments in India and at the South Asia regional level. SANGRAM and VAMP participated in various initiatives to strengthen alliances on expanding the Labor Framework

i. SURROGACY, ART AND SEX WORK

In India there has been considerable discussion around **regulating commercial surrogacy**. Commercial surrogacy has also challenged perceptions of agency within the feminist movement and therefore parallels with the sex work rights movement have been inevitable. Both movements have sought to argue for bodily integrity and the need to accord the status of work to those who labor within it. On the one hand this parallel has led to stigmatization of surrogacy and led to inevitable comparisons for surrogate mothers who see surrogacy as a “morally right” or “doing some good” option when compared to “bad women” (prostitutes)¹. However, for activists these very discussions and debates have enabled us to look for common platforms of dialogues on rights and bodily integrity. It has enabled activists and to some extent the sex workers to challenge feminist constructions of sex work being done “out of lack of choice” and therefore being “inherently exploitative”.

¹In a study undertaken by SAMA titled “Birthing A Market: A study on commercial surrogacy”, 2012, one of the ways in which women rationalized their choice of surrogacy was to explain that at least they were not doing something that was “immoral”.

SANGRAM and VAMP participated in these discussions on commercial surrogacy and assisted reproductive technologies through 2015 and 2016. SANGRAM is giving inputs on a paper authored by SAMA (Women's health group) titled "**Surrogacy and Social Movements in India: Towards a Collective Conversation**". The paper will make an effort to look at the various conversations on women's sexual rights and labor.

In 2015, SANGRAM members participated in a meeting "**Bio (medical) economies today: Understanding issues of ethics, markets and labour**". A presentation was given on how sex work has been perceived in the larger context of bio – economies and contestations in the session on "Locating Labour Today: New Trends and Concerns". The critical dialogue in the session was on the feminist engagement with invisible forms of labor and the ways in which new forms of labor such as sex work and surrogacy was being performed. SANGRAM presented on the construction of sex work as work and its contribution to the global dialogues on labour. The case study of VAMP was also presented with an understanding of exploitative practices including trafficking were sought to be rooted out through collectivization of labour. The discussions were held with a broad range of experts and cross movement activists including medical practitioners, health activists, doctors, researchers, feminists, women's rights groups.

The conversation and emerging solidarity of movements has come at a critical time of intersection for both movements. The Assisted Reproductive Technology Bill 2015 for instance seeks to limit women's ability to commercial surrogacy and those who can access ART. Arguing for altruistic surrogacy, the Bill sought to limit women's rights to define their work. The sex worker rights movement reeling from a backlash of the abolitionists will stand to gain from the labor arguments forwarded by the commercial surrogacy movement activists.

SANGRAM participated in a Consultation called by the National Commission for Women to debate on the Assisted Reproductive Technologies Bill 2015, in Delhi. The team gave inputs on various clauses of the bill including – limiting ART facilities to resident citizens in India and married couples only, changing commercial surrogacy to altruistic surrogacy thereby opening a black market economy where women would be exploited much more than in a labor context where they would be able to bargain better.

ii. RIGHT TO MOBILITY AND STIGMATIZED LABOR

Through 2015 and 2016 SANGRAM and VAMP has participated in consultations organized by the South Asia Women's Fund to discuss and develop a framework to understand the right to mobility and migration for women and the construct of stigmatized labour within that.

In October 2015 SANGRAM partnered with South Asia Women's Fund to develop the concept for a donor dialogue on viewing sex work as labor and the need for greater resource commitment from the donor community. The Consultation was organized between donors, women's funds, academics, activists and groups working in anti -trafficking programmes in South Asia. The dialogue sought to assess the impact of current anti trafficking strategies and programs on vulnerable communities and to share best practices of donors and groups working on anti -trafficking initiatives. Groups working on anti -trafficking strategies from Nepal, and various parts of India participated. Members of VAMP and SANGRAM presented in a civil society panel on the methods adopted by the VAMP collective to respond to exploitative practices in sex work, including loan sharks, minor entry and entry against consent of the woman.

iii. SEXUAL EXPRESSION AND EXPLOITATION

Another crucial series of initiatives was joining hands with gender, sexuality and digital rights activists around sexual expression. In August 2015 the Indian government took a decision to ban 857 porn sites in August 2015. Apart from this the move to expand the legal definition of sexual exploitation under ITPA and a parliamentary committees suggestion to enlarge the scope of the Indecent representation to include all forms of new communication such as internet, mobile telephony etc. Point and View and Internet Democracy project organised initiatives to bring together a large number of activists working on gender, child rights, internet and digital rights, sexuality, lawyers working on indecent representation; to discuss and debate the closing spaces for sexual expression and rights. SANGRAM participated in the two day meeting (Porn, Panic, Ban) and presented its concerns over the interpretation of sexual exploitation proposed by NALSA and the scope for its misuse, the absence of public participation in the proposed amendment processes.

iv. ENGAGING WITH NATIONAL LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY (NALSA) ON THE DEFINITION OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

CASAM director Ms Aarthi Pai and Ms Meena Seshu met with Supreme Court advocate Ms. Vrinda Grover who organized a meeting with Hon. Justice Asha Menon member secretary of NALSA. The meeting lasted two hours and Justice Menon argued that the definition of sexual exploitation as offered by NALSA was appropriate. Ms Pai argued that any definition that affects the community cannot be decided by non-community panel members. At that point Justice Menon agreed that the community should engage with the definition and give NALSA their opinion on the same. NALSA would then reconsider submitting a fresh definition to the Supreme Court. Accordingly, we wrote up

a submission and got it endorsed by the National Network of Sex workers, India. In the coming year 2016, SANGRAM will reach out and work with the legal services on a more sustained basis.

V. SUPPORT TO THE AMNESTY POSITION ON SEX WORK AS A HUMAN RIGHT

SANGRAM was an active partner in the pre-launch strategy of the Amnesty position on sex work. For instance, when Jessica Neuwirth wrote an article in The Guardian (<http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2015/jul/28/amnesty-international-prostitution-sex-work-human-trafficking>) on how supporting sex work was not human rights, Meena Seshu wrote an open letter to the Guardian.

“As someone who has dedicated her career to fighting for the rights of sex workers, I can say without a doubt that Jessica Neuwirth’s article got it wrong. In her piece, Neuwirth advocates against Amnesty International’s proposed policy that calls for decriminalization as a way to empower sex workers to combat the violence and discrimination they commonly face. Yet in doing so, she fails to acknowledge how laws criminalizing sex work contribute to these outcomes, and puts forth harmful generalizations about sex workers themselves.

Punitive laws that criminalize and punish sex work act as instruments through which sex workers are harassed and regularly have their human rights violated by law enforcement agencies, health authorities and clients. In many countries, sex workers are the primary means through which the police meet arrest quotas, extort money, and extract information. Police wield power over sex workers in the form of threats of arrest and public humiliation, and use condoms as evidence of illegal activity, undoing years of effective campaigning around HIV and sexually transmitted infections. Forced testing for HIV is commonplace, along with breaches of due process and privacy. In many countries sex workers are routinely incarcerated in “rehabilitation centers” or “correctional homes” for long periods of time despite being adult consenting sex workers. Where sex work is illegal, sex workers often feel there is little they can do to address the violations perpetrated against them.

VAMP spoke with Emily Bazelon, who wrote a detailed report in the New York Times “Should Prostitution be a Crime (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/08/magazine/should-prostitution-be-a-crime.html>)?” The article which came on the eve of the publishing of Amnesty’s position and received a lot of attention globally. The reporter analysed the growing global movement to make decriminalisation of sex work a feminist issue.

During the run up to the Amnesty policy release, Meena Seshu also participated in BBC World Service Trust radio interviews to explain the position of sex worker rights activists and their demand for full decriminalisation.

VI. MEETING ON STIGMATIZED LABOUR: VAMP, SANGRAM AND NNSW

A workshop of Vulnerable Communities in Stigmatized Labour was organised by the South Asia Women's Fund (SAWF) with groups from India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka held on 8-10th February, 2016, Colombo, Sri Lanka. The workshop was aimed at building skills and understanding in the areas of fundamental rights, labour rights and collectivization for sex workers in order to learn from and strategize with each other and to push forward an agenda of decriminalisation and destigmatisation. The participating groups were working at various levels of organising and activism. SANGRAM, VAMP and NNSW participated in the workshop. SANGRAM facilitated the participation of extra members from NNSW to strengthen a broad based partnership and alliance at the South Asia level. The workshop discussed about understanding sex work and sex worker, labour and stigmatised labour from the regional perspective, notions of sex work, contemporary issues- Amnesty International, UNAIDS, Laws in respective regions etc. The workshop also dealt with planning the future course of action by the groups of each country and discussed about taking it forward.

VII. RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF ANTI – TRAFFICKING STRATEGIES ON WOMEN IN SEX WORK



SANGRAM and VAMP, identified the need to collect and collate evidence of the acts of forced rescue, denial of rights that was happening due to the anti -trafficking initiatives. In partnership with Rights For Change which has developed a tool called the Rights Guide: Understanding the impact of anti trafficking policies, SANGRAM and VAMP embarked on a research process to undertake a Human Rights Impact Assessment

and document the rights violations in the lives of sex workers.

A three day training programme on "Assessing the Impact of Anti-Trafficking Laws on the Human Rights of Sex Workers" was held in Panhala, Maharashtra from 4th to 6th June 2015 to understand human rights and pertinent research methods. The training consisted of around 20 participants (whose ages range between 22 and 50 years and some) from various non-profit, non-governmental organizations across India which work with sex workers of different socio-cultural identities. The participants included women sex workers, men whose mothers have been sex workers and a few social workers whose primary responsibility was to interpret the discussions in the language spoken by the sex workers and vice versa. The participants hailed from 2 states, Maharashtra (Karad,

Miraj, Nippani and Sangli), Jharkhand (Ranchi and Dhanbad). Based on the training the collectives will undertake a community led research to understand the impact of anti trafficking laws and policies on the lives of sex workers. Following the training (*training report titled Impact of Anti - Trafficking Laws on rights of sex workers.*) VAMP and SANGRAM have undertaken the research.

VIII. SCALING UP THE DISPUTE REDRESS MODEL OF VAMP

The Tanta Mukti Samiti or dispute redress mechanism was piloted in one area of Sangli during 2015 and the results of this pilot initiative have been encouraging in terms of community based solutions and partnerships to fight trafficking and exploitation in brothel areas. At the organisation level, SANGRAM and VAMP have been experimenting with dispute redress mechanisms at the ground level to fight exploitative practices and violence. Though sex work is not illegal in India, laws such as Immoral Traffic Prevention Act criminalize numerous aspects. This approach has led to invisibilizing the violence and abuse faced by sex workers. They are unable to complain to the police when faced with violence, abuse by goondas, police; conflict within the community. Access to justice is impacted due to their criminalized profile.

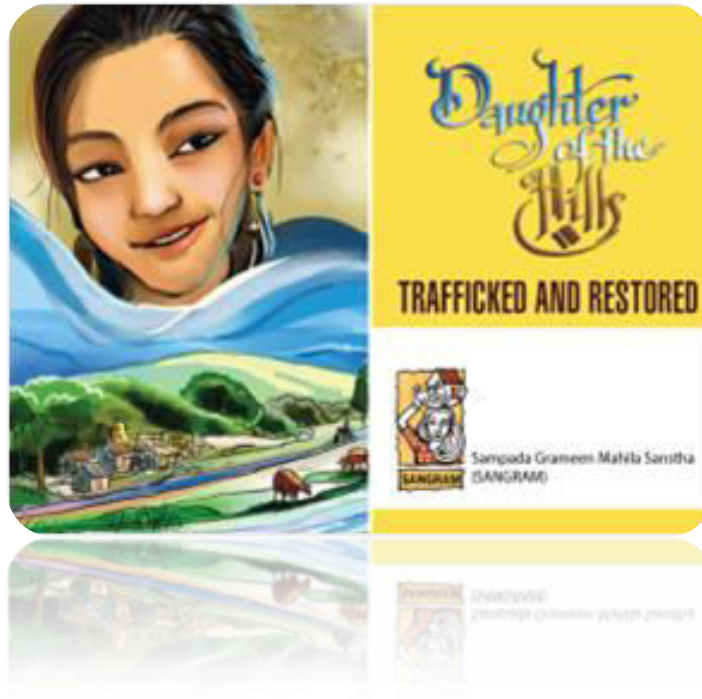
VAMP decided to develop community solutions. From 2012 , conflict redress committees (*Tanta Mukti Samitis TMS*) were formed with members including brothel owners and sex workers. In 2015 TMS has been scaled up in one site of VAMP - Sangli brothel area. It has organised regular meetings, resolved local disputes, filed police complaints for serious issues, hand over violent clients or goondas to police. New girls entering sex work come before TMS who ascertains whether she is trafficked or in sex work of her own volition. Her antecedents verified and birth certificate collected. They have also successfully resolved and returned one trafficked girl in this period. Exploitative brothel owners are also brought before TMS before to find solutions. The success of this experiment has led to scaling up of the model to three other VAMP areas. The experiment will be documented.

IX. DISABILITY AND SEX WORK

Ms Bishakha Dutta from Point Of View Mumbai visited SANGRAM to make a documentary called *Work with Physically Challenged Sex Workers*. In the interviews, sex workers who were physically challenged said how proud they were of what they do, that they were living happily, and challenged the mainstream idea that if an individual was physically or mentally challenged she had no sexuality.

X. GRAPHIC NOVEL ON VAMP AND ANTI TRAFFICKING INITIATIVES

SANGRAM and VAMP published a short graphic novel called 'Daughter of the Hills, Trafficked and Restored' about a Nepali girl who had been trafficked to Sangli, and who, with VAMP and Sangram's help, was returned back to her home and family (see our website for further information). It was presented in March at the International Congress on AIDS in Asia Pacific in



Bangladesh.

The story of Kopisha (Name changed), a Nepali girl who was trafficked into the brothels in Sangli and the response of the Tanta Mukti Samitis or internal dispute redress mechanism within VAMP was a real learning experience. The entire narrative has now been made into a graphic story. (Available on link <http://www.sangram.org/resources/Daughter-Of-The-Hills-Sangram.pdf>)

The biggest learning is that the collective VAMP has really been able to help a woman caught up in a web of lies and unfortunate decisions. The brothel owner herself has responded and helped restore the girl to her parents challenging every understanding of a brothel owner as inherently exploitative.

Restoration of a person trafficked into the brothels is possible when the sex workers are organised and collectivised to fight against all forms of injustice. The rights of individual members in the collective can never be compromised and will not be allowed in the VAMP areas, is another valuable learning from this narrative. This narrative, with rights at the centre has achieved more than what the governments and anti-trafficking organizations have been able to – restoration with consent, dignity and respect.