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## *Key Achievements 2016*

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# 1. MENTORING SEX WORKER RIGHTS MOVEMENT – SOUTH ASIA AND INDIA

## A. Mentoring New Groups of Sex Workers

As a strategy to reach out to larger groups of people in sex work at the local level, state-specific training modules were developed and disseminated in Kerala, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu.

In Kerala, a nascent network of five collectives was formed in 2016, known as the Kerala Network of Sex Workers (KNSW). This network has been attempting to bring together sex workers at the district level and also initiate conversations with other movements. Though there was a strong movement till 2006, it ended abruptly due to lack of community leadership and civil society support. The collectives who have come together under the Kerala Network sought support from VAMP to strengthen their perspectives on rights of people in sex work. 18 women and 4 NGO workers attended the training Institute.

In Gujarat, two collectives have been formed and sought an engagement with issues relating to sex workerrights. One collective was formed by the Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanstha (KMVS), a pioneering rural women's organization based in Bhuj, Gujarat. The collective is working with hidden sex workers and attempting to provide them basic HIV/AIDS prevention services. However, since they are struggling to reach out to the women, KMVS had sought VAMP and SANGRAM's assistance. Sex workers from VAMP have made two visits and interacted with the sex workers before the training institute was held in February 2017.

In Baroda, Gujarat; another women's collective working on lesbian and bisexual women's rights has been working with sex workers for a period of time and had sought training on rights of women in sex work. The VAMP Institute curriculum for Gujarat combined a basic understanding of sex and sexuality, HIV/AIDS prevention and a rights-based health prevention; with issues impacting sex workers' rights in India. Fifteen women and 5 NGO workers attended the three-day Institute.

In Tamil Nadu, a federation of over 20 collectives of female sex workers sought training on rights to re-forge an understanding of the contemporary issues challenging the movement. In the late 90s the Vadamalar Federation was a strong federation of sex workers in Tamil Nadu. However, the older members were unable to continue strengthening new leadership and there is a discernible vacuum in the second line leadership.

The training modules focused on the following strategies

- Conversations around sex and sexuality and the need for HIV/AIDS prevention.
- Collectivization to fight exploitative practices and increase HIV/AIDS prevention services.
- Updates on sex workers rights dialogues and issues in India, the South Asia region and globally.

60 sex workers from three states were involved in the training.

## **B. Labor, Migrant Workers, Stigmatized labour**

VAMP participated in a series of consultations to develop a framework to understand the **right to mobility and safe migration** for women. These consultations were organised at the South Asia and India level. Groups working on different forms of stigmatized labour including bar dance, entertainment work, sex work participated in these consultations.

In 2016, VAMP began to participate in **Alliance 8.7** a global partnership to end child labour, forced labor and modern slavery under the Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8). In India the alliance bough together organisations and activists working on labour, including child labour, inter -state and cross border migrant work, bonded labour, bidi workers, construction work, domestic work, brick kiln workers and trade union formations.

A joint statement has been developed by labor groups as a result of the discussion - *No easy answers for ending forced labour in India, September 2017*

[<https://www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/collected-activists-and-academics/no-easy-answers-for-ending-forced-labour-in-india> ]. The statement was also reported on the media

[<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/scholars-activists-urge-india-to-act-against-forced-labour/article19722160.ece>]

Labor lawyers and activists have also decided to come together with sex worker rights activists to critique the Draft Trafficking Bill 2016, from the labor perspective. This alliance will help to critique and establish the fact that a response to trafficking needs to take into account vulnerability of groups to trafficking caused by the corporatisation agenda, poor economic policies, curtailing labor rights, poor implementation of labor laws, better social protection policies, enabling labor collectivisation for wage negotiation, safe mobility strategies. This strategy as opposed to a criminalised response to trafficking.

## **C. HIV/AIDS Prevention Efforts**

VAMP continued to align with the HIV Prevention debates internationally and at the national level. The organisations continuously advocated with the Health Ministry to restore funding support for targeted HIV prevention initiatives.

### **World AIDS Conference, Durban - August 2016**

Kiran Deshmukh from VAMP spoke in a day long parallel satellite session organised by the Ford Foundation on “Challenging Criminalization Globally”. They presented in the session “HIV Transmission Criminalization: More Harm than Public Good - Criminalization of sex work, IDU and women” and spoke on “Issues of Criminalization in India: Supporting Sex Workers to form their own collective” – VAMP. VAMP presented on how communities of people in sex work were part of an integrated HIV response strategy and at the same time criminalised.

### **AIDS Conference, Dhaka and community showcases HIV prevention work**

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. ( <http://www.sangram.org/resources/ICAAP12-Dhaka-Bangladesh-Community-Sessions-Report.pdf>)

### **Sex worker peer based HIV PREVENTION program – NORTH KARNATAKA**

SANGRAM through VAMP the collective of women in sex work has undertaken HIV prevention, care and service delivery activities for women in sex work in North Karnataka, India. The program reaches out to over 1000 women in sex work in the North Karnataka region. These areas are not being reached by HIV prevention programmes since many women are hidden or in traditional forms of sex work such as Devadasi and prohibited by the Devadasi Prohibition Act of Karnataka. Hence the strategies by VAMP is to ensure that the women are collectivised and able to access health services and other benefits. Women are reached to out by peers, safe working environment is promoted through the regular use of condoms, regularly knowing their health including HIV status. Community level meetings are held in the sites at Mudhol, Mahalingpur, Rabkavi, Kesargo, Jamkhandi based in North Karnataka. This enables VAMP to interact with the women, discuss challenges faced by them.

### **IMPACT**

- i. Sex workers within VAMP, amongst NNSW collectives have begun to speak and discuss about the treaty bodies (CEDAW, UPR, Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women) and their impact; in their district and collective meetings on a regular basis. The groups have begun to debate how the laws relating to sex work such as ITPA are being critiqued in human rights sessions and reports such as the Special Rapporteur's Report on Violence Against Women. Further, the groups are also using the submissions made and the concluding comments provided by the Committees to advocate at the national and local level. The international language is slowly beginning to trickle down into local conversations on sex work rights.
- ii. The CEDAW Committee's has been gradually recognizing the need to protect the rights of sex workers in each of the countries. This is visible in the concluding comments that have been made for Bangladesh and Sri Lanka which are reproduced below. Though the Committee continues to emphasize that the State provide exit options to sex workers, there is progress in the articulation "enforcing the State obligations to protect the rights of people in sex work". Examples from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka given below. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>**Bangladesh Concluding Comments by CEDAW Committee**

**Observation by the CEDAW Committee**

*The Committee is also concerned about discrimination and violence against women in prostitution and their children who face stigmatization, forced evictions and frequent police harassment and are often denied access to education and health care. [CEDAW Concluding Comments, Bangladesh, 2016]*

**Recommendation of the Committee**

*Provide effective protection and prevent discrimination and violence against women in prostitution and their children, including police harassment and forced evictions, and ensure that they have adequate access to health care, education, accommodation and alternative livelihood opportunities. [CEDAW Concluding Comments, Bangladesh, 2016].*

Report Submitted by Bangladesh Network of Sex Workers –

[http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/BGD/INT\\_CEDAW\\_NGO\\_BGD\\_25667\\_E.pdf](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/BGD/INT_CEDAW_NGO_BGD_25667_E.pdf)

- iii. The groups in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka also benefitted from the Indian sex workers experiences **of working with the labor movement and the women's rights groups and creating linkages** between State violations and obligations. During the training sessions and exchange between sex workers, women from VAMP had shared how they had worked with LGBT groups, dalit groups, labour activists. These strategies were effectively incorporated into the Sri Lanka group submission in particular which is reflected in the number of groups that inserted the concerns of sex workers in their submissions to the CEDAW Committee. The **Women and Media Collective, Sri Lanka** included the concerns of sex workers in their joint submission<sup>2</sup>. A joint submission from the **Women in Fisheries Movement, Sri Lanka** also called on the right of sex workers to be recognised as labourers.
- iv. **Recognition of sex worker rights by groups working with the Universal Periodic Review of UNHRC in India**

VAMP, members of the National Network of Sex Workers and SANGRAM also made an **independent submission to the Human Rights Council for the Third Universal Periodic Review** process in 2017. Once again this is a new frontier that sex worker groups are hoping to

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#### **Sri Lanka Concluding Comments by CEDAW Committee**

##### **List of Issues submitted to the Government of Sri Lanka prior to the session by the CEDAW Committee**

*"It is reported (para. 59) that police continue to arrest women in prostitution under section 7 of the Vagrants Ordinance, counter to the previous recommendation of the Committee (CEDAW/C/LKA/CO/7, para. 29). Please provide the Committee with information on the measures taken by the State party to ensure that this reprehensible practice ceases."*

##### **Observation by the CEDAW Committee**

*The Committee further reiterates its concern that the Vagrants Ordinance is used by the police to arbitrarily arrest women in prostitution, using their possession of condoms as evidence of engaging in prostitution, and to subject these women to harassment, sexual bribery and extortion. [CEDAW Concluding Comments, Sri Lanka, 2017]*

##### **Recommendation by the CEDAW Committee**

*Repeal the Vagrants Ordinance Act and, in the interim, impose penalties on police officers who misuse the Act to harass women in prostitution as well as sexual minority women, and ensure that victims are provided with gender-sensitive protection and support, including exit programmes for women wishing to leave prostitution. [CEDAW Concluding Comments, Sri Lanka, 2017]*

#### **Report Submitted by Sri Lanka Collectives of Sex Workers**

[http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/LKA/INT\\_CEDAW\\_NGO\\_LKA\\_26289\\_E.pdf](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/LKA/INT_CEDAW_NGO_LKA_26289_E.pdf)

<sup>24</sup>Vagrants Ordinance and Commercial Sex Workers (Relevant to CEDAW Article 6, 11 and General Recommendation 19) We direct the Committee's attention to steps taken by the Ministry of Justice to amend the Vagrants Ordinance in 2014, and call on the Committee to urge the GoSL to implement the Action Plan based on the Recommendations of the Leader of the Opposition's Commission on Violence Against Women and the Girl Child that calls for the immediate repeal of the Vagrants Ordinance and strengthen the implementation of laws on forced prostitution and trafficking in women and girls for prostitution, and penalize those who exploit them in brothels, ensuring that women and girls are not prosecuted. Furthermore, we believe the Government should take necessary measures to decriminalize Commercial Sex Work and ensure their right to safe working conditions, and protection from violence."



intervene in, at the international level. VAMP and members of the National Network of Sex Workers are perhaps the only sex worker groups to intervene in the UPR process to date.<sup>3</sup> VAMP sex workers participated in the process of developing a **joint submission** from women's groups for the UPR process.<sup>4</sup>

**v. Mobilising sex workers across South Asia to intervene in efforts to develop policy on sex work without inputs from sex workers, UN Women**

Another aspect on which SANGRAM and VAMP were able to make an impact was in the pushback to the UN Women Policy on sex work. In 2015 it was announced that UN Women planned to write a policy paper on sex work. Two aspects of the proposed process were worrying for sex worker rights activists world over – the absence of consultation and leadership from sex worker groups; and the fact that the policy was being written by a known abolitionist Purna Sen. Details of this challenge have been submitted in SANGRAM's previous reporting period. In addition to the strategies to respond to this challenge adopted in the earlier part of 2016, the following action was taken in the second half of 2016.

The SWASA representatives (SANGRAM and VAMP) suggested that a South Asia dialogue would be conducted involving sex worker groups from Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India to enable sex workers from the region to give their recommendations. NSWP and APNSW supported the consultation process terming this as a "best practice" on meaningful engagement with sex workers. Over 30 sex workers, rights activists, participated in the two day consultation to understand the Sustainable Development Goals, CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action. The documents were translated into 10 languages including Nepali, Sinhalese and Bangla to ensure participation from sex workers. The recommendations were shared with UN Women along with a short film on "inclusive consultation on a policy on sex work".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Report Submitted by VAMP and the National Network of Sex Workers supported by SANGRAM - <https://www.sangram.org/resources/UPR-Submission-Sex-Work-Final-Submission-22-Sep-2016.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>Report Submitted By Women's Groups to Universal Periodic Review <http://pldindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Status-of-Gender-Equality-in-India-Joint-Stakeholders-Report-UPR3-2012-16.pdf>

Observations made in the report in the context of sex workers

*"Healthcare services, including Anti-Retroviral Therapy medicines and supply of condoms, particularly for sex workers and HIV positive women, are not adequately and consistently available. Under the targeted intervention programme, sex workers, men having sex with men (MSM) and transgender persons are mandated to undertake HIV test every six months, without the provision for 'opting out'.*

*Recently proposed labour reforms do not provide for safe migration or regulation of informal and unorganised sector workers, safe work conditions, social security or address problems of exploitation and trafficking.*

*On the other hand, approaches to trafficking often conflate sex work with trafficking which, together with criminalisation of soliciting (an aspect of sex work), results in systemic harassment of sex workers (in addition to the social stigma)."*

Some demands made by women's rights groups on concerns of sex work rights include

*"- Prohibit mandatory testing on sex workers, MSM, transgender persons for HIV/AIDS.*

*Enact positive legislation for the protection of women in the informal sector, sex work, special zones and arenas like garment and fisheries industries where women employees are at risk.*

*Ensure that the provisions of the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (ITPA), 1956, are not imposed upon adult consensual sex work."*

<sup>5</sup>Towards an Inclusive Policy on Sex work link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzOLvMBFeyM>

In December 2016, Meena Seshu as the member of the UNAIDS Human Rights Reference Group met with UN members in Geneva. On the occasion of the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, the UNAIDS Reference Group on HIV and Human Rights, a body of independent experts established in 2002 to advise the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) on all matters related to HIV and human rights wrote to Ms. Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director, UN Women on **UN Women's approach to sex work**.

#### **vi. Advocating on the Draft Trafficking Bill 2016**

In India, VAMP and SANGRAM have played a pivotal role in expressing concerns of non-inclusion of sex workers in the discourse on the **Trafficking Bill 2016**. Details of the work done in the early part of 2016 have been given in the previous report. There is lack of clarity and transparency on the provisions of the trafficking bill that are being considered by the Cabinet. In response to collective pressure from various groups, the Union Government Cabinet referred the Bill to a legal group Vidhi. In September 2017, VAMP and SANGRAM were also called by Vidhi, a legal group to provide inputs to the fourth draft of the trafficking bill. Detailed recommendations were provided by the National Network of Sex Workers.

#### **vii. Strengthening Network of Sex Workers in India by induction of new members**

Following the training, members of the Kerala Network of Sex Workers have decided to work towards increasing the membership of the network, strengthen the network, collaborate to fight against violence faced by sex workers, and also ensure greater participation in HIV/AIDS programming of the State AIDS Control Program. VAMP is following up to review the progress with KNSW.

In Gujarat, Vikalp Collective decided to become a member of the National Network of Sex Workers and participate in a more proactive manner in reaching out to other sex workers and to advocate with local agencies and government departments for legal and social entitlements. The KMVS collective have asked for more support to enable hidden sex workers to come together.

#### **viii. Dialogues**

Dialogues held with Dalit women leaders and women's rights activists around growing caste and communal stresses and the need for a unified women's response. Women in sex work participated and gave their inputs on the need to include sex workers in such dialogues. Over 30 women from VAMP participated in the discussions. While women's groups were inclusive of sex workers, there was tremendous backlash from caste (Dalit) groups to including sex work within a rights framework. They persistently stated that they would be willing to include sex workers only if they were willing to consider themselves as oppressed by upper caste men. Women from the VAMP collective rejected this victimhood framing.

Over 4000 women in sex work prepared and signed onto a statement against the formulation of sex work as exploitation suggested by the **Coalition Against Prostitution (CAP)** who organized an



international conference in New Delhi in January 2017. The sex workers who were part of the National Network of Sex Workers (India) collective rejected the CAP position and issued a statement of their own to CAP and the media.<sup>6</sup>

In October 2017, SANGRAM, VAMP and members of the National Network of Sex Workers participated in a week long festival "Rubaru" an inter movement dialogue. The event culminated in the launch of a national office of the NNSW in Delhi.<sup>7</sup>

#### **ix. Sex Workers Intervention in Karnataka**

In 2016-17 VAMP was able to reach 750 women and distribute 1450000 condoms. VAMP also intervened in crisis situation by collectivising other members in the areas. VAMP has handled 90 crisis including issues of quarrel among brothel owner, goons, clients, family members and of police.

One of the Vamp member from Kesargop won election and selected as Sarpanch (head of the village) She is handling issues of sanitation, road constructions and housing schemes and education schemes. After her selection she is actively involved in Gram panchayat activities. She helped 10 women in getting housing under government scheme and helped in constructing two roads in her village. Vamp members are doing advocacy regarding accessing all welfare schemes for Sex workers.

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<sup>6</sup> National Network of Sex Workers put out a statement opposing the conference  
<http://www.nnswindia.org/upload/resources/2017/NNSW-Statement-with-endorsements.pdf>  
<sup>7</sup><http://www.nnswindia.org/rubaru-nnsw.aspx>

# VAMP TEAM

VAMP- Tanta Mukti Samiti (Crisis Redressal Committee) , and Peer Education Program in North Karnataka			
Name	Designation	Name	Designation
Bhavrawa Mahtre	TMS Member	Anusuya Dodmani	Peer Educator
Kashibai	TMS Member	Kalyani Harijan	Peer educator
Kasturi Yalawa Haligeri	TMS Member	Mahadevi Madar	Peer Educator
Laxmi Appanna Dodhmani	TMS Member	Archana Latkar	Outreach Worker
Mahananda Mamdapure	TMS Member	Bharati Pujari	Outreach Worker
Mala Mahadev Kamble	TMS Member	Durgavva Pani	Outreach Worker
Malan Pujari	TMS Member	Gouravva Madar	Outreach Worker
Padma Hanmanth Koli	TMS Member	Mala Harijan	Outreach Worker
Prema Hunchikatti	TMS Member	Shalan Salamtappi	District Coordinator
Rekha Mahadev Kamble	TMS Member	Suvarna Ingalgave	District Coordinator
Shantabai Patil	TMS Member		
Sujatha Manoji	TMS Member	VAMP Institute	
Suman Holikade	TMS Member	Name	Designation
Sumitra Bandargar	TMS Member	Rajendra Naik	Community Coordinator
Sushila Yamnappa Mudenavar	TMS Member	Kiran Deshmukh	Community Coordinator
Tangewa Terdale	TMS Member	Santoshi Rani	Research Coordinator
Tayawa Durgappa Kappad	TMS Member		

Targeted Intervention- Sangli (VAMP staff)		Targeted Intervention – Miraj (VAMP staff)	
Name	Designation	Name	Designation
Amjavva Dabnar	Peer Educator	Bharati Kamble	Outreach Worker
Anjana Gadade	Peer Educator	Chaya Kamble	Peer Educator
Bismilla Shaikh	Outreach Worker	Jayashri Gavali	Peer Educator
Chanda Vajane	Project Director	Kallapa Shivasan	MEA
Dilshad Pathan	Peer Educator	Kasturi Kamble	Peer Educator
Dipak Modi	Outreach Worker	Lata Nikam	Peer Educator
Kajal Pane	MEA	Mahadevi Sutar	Outreach Worker
Kalimun Sagari	Peer Educator	Maina Naikwadi	Peer educator
Kavita Mali	Counsellor	Minakshi G Kamble	Project Manager
Lata Pawar	Peer Educator	Minakshi J Kamble	Project Director
Mahadevi Pujari	Peer Educator	Mumtaj Attar	Peer Educator
Mahesh Manoji	Program Manager	Parubai Bhandari	Peer Educator
Manavva Sunthe	Peer Educator	Patrabai Waghmare	Peer Educator
Manju Sorgave	Peer Educator	Punam Kamble	Peer Educator

Maya Gurav	Peer Educator	Renuka Kale	Peer Educator
Mina Barke	Outreach Worker	Renuka Kamble	Peer Educator
Nirmala Aiwale	Peer Educator	Salima Mujawar	Peer Educator
Pushpa Kolekar	Peer Educator	Sarika Waghe	Outreach Worker
Sangita Manoji	Outreach Worker	Shewanta Raymur	Peer Educator
Sapane Shinde	Counsellor	Subhadra Kamble	Peer Educator
Shala Aiwale	Peer Educator	Subhadra Kengar	Counsellor
Shanta Gosavi	Peer Educator	Suman Kamble	Outreach Worker
Shobha Hiremath	Peer Educator	Surekha Kamble	Peer Educator
Suman Patil	Peer Educator	Vijaya Ambi	Peer Educator
Sunil Terdale	Peer Educator		
Sunita Kamble	Peer Educator		

Targeted Intervention- Satara	
Name	Designation
Durga Pujari	Project Director
Nilavva Sidhreddy	Program Manager
Sujatha Jadhav	MEA
Malavva Nadgeri	Outreach Worker
Amar Bhondave	Outreach Worker
Shilpa Sidhreddy	Outreach Worker
Vaishali Hiramani	Outreach Worker
Hanmavva Dodmani	Peer Educator
Shanta Pujari	Peer Educator
Rekha Shinde	Peer Educator
Pooja Pujari	Peer Educator
Ambarnath Chavan	Peer Educator
Amol Salunke	Peer Educator
Chaya Jadhav	Peer Educator
Rupali Kaamble	Peer Educator
Jaya Barge	Peer Educator
Nurjaha Nadaf	Peer Educator
Sachin Sonawane	Peer Educator
Ananda Rathod	Peer Educator