



Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha

(SANGRAM)

ANNUAL REPORT

2011-2012

A. Context of the organization

Undoubtedly, a narrative of violence connects the lives of people from marginalized communities in Sangli district. Whether structural, familial, intimate or social violence, all of the stories disclose the ways differently marginalized populations experience varying types and degrees of injustice. The multiplicity of injustice is arresting and the brutality that many have experienced is, at times, harrowing. But equally compelling are the descriptions of unending supplies of compassion and energy to help others, despite ‘difference’. The ability to reach out to the ‘other’ has come to characterize SANGRAM as an organization where people unite and take action against prejudice affecting others as much as self.

B. Internal organization

There is no any change in the formal structure of the organization

C. Results and Reflections

a. Stories of violence and compassion

For some women, entering sex work has been catalyzed by one or more incidents of violence. Once active in the industry, violence is routine. Contrary to popular assumption, clients are not the main perpetrators. Law enforcers, gharwalis (brothel owners) goondas (thugs) perpetrate most of the violence. Sex workers often find themselves in situations that put them at increased risk of violence. However, this is mostly due to sex work being an illicit or illegal activity which forces their work underground. The root cause of violence against sex workers is stigma. Common attitudes that sex workers don’t matter, or worse, ‘deserve what they get’, makes it very difficult for them to obtain protection from violence and to access support when they have experienced violence. Women in sex work display immense resilience and strength in the face of uncompromising social criticism of what they do. Breaking with the norm of sex within marriage, for love, and reproduction, they are regarded ‘immoral’ because they have multiple sexual partners and earn money through sex. A key theme shared in their stories is overcoming the internalized shame surrounding what they do.

In the lives of rural women, domestic and societal violence against women is endemic in the villages. A rigid patriarchal system operates, requiring women to demonstrate that they are ‘good’ wives. Their respectability hinges upon being married and conforming to the family/wife expectations. Infused with these values, and despite cruel and often life-threatening conditions, most women choose to stay with violent husbands and in-laws. The women’s natal family faces a ‘spoiled’ reputation which makes it difficult for them to return. The pressure to resolve a broken marriage is intensified by the attitudes of other players. Their stories illustrate how neighbours, god men and friends alike convince the women to return and ‘adjust’ to violent situations. While domestic violence is often thought of as abuse between intimate partners it has far wider

connotations in India. Given the complicity of society in upholding the status of the 'boy's side', husbands and in-laws get away with not only physical, but emotional, psychological, legal and economic violence. However, the Tanta Mukti Samiti (a local conflict resolution body) has been set up by the government. This is composed of different stake holders of the village. The SANGRAM activists have interacted with the Samiti and convinced them to take up cases of domestic violence. Some Samitis are sensitive to the women who approach them. However, it is not always so. In the stories of this book, one woman was able to get help from the Samiti.

A sizable Muslim population resides in Sangli district. In September 2009, communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims erupted over an inflammatory poster put up by Hindu groups during Ganesh Utsav festivities. These unprecedented disturbances were politically incited by right wing Hindutva factions, in an attempt to gain votes for the BJP. Formally a Congress stronghold, the intention was to cultivate anxiety amongst the Hindu population in Sangli that another Congress win would mean an overly empowered Muslim community in the district. Images of the clashes rapidly spread to each village via mobile phone clippings. A video was also circulated with the intent of inciting violence against Muslims. A ten day curfew was imposed. Muslim women have suffered extreme stress due to these threatening circumstances. With memories of Gujarat and Babri Masjid still fresh in their minds, they speak of running to the fields with children and family members, terrified of what might be about to happen. Considering it was mainly young people who were used to carry out the anti-social activities, SANGRAM has subsequently launched a youth-led campaign against communalism.

Men who have sex with men and transgenders (MSM-T) encounter familial and social violence because they are female presenting or refusing marriage. Same-sex desire is perceived as unnatural. The stories of sexual difference illustrate how MSM-T struggle with similar issues of internalised shame because they fail to conform to hegemonic versions of masculinity. They are invariably estranged from their families who disrespect them, try to 'change' them, and attempt to deny them their right to property. Leading double lives, many MSM are married to women. Extraordinary as it might seem, there can be love and a great deal of respect in these unions, despite the truths concealed. While vilified by men - sometimes verbally abused, physically attacked and through blackmail - MSM-T are simultaneously desired by them. These men's stories reflect both the jubilation and disenchantment of same-sex desire.

While HIV positive people have to deal with life-threatening health issues, they are socially alienated by stigma and prejudice. HIV positive women demonstrate how the medical profession and family members violently react to a positive status. Couples are forced apart and the women are beaten or cruelly treated by partners, members of family and/or in-laws. Undeterred, they struggle towards claiming their rightful property and maintaining dignity in the face of this violence.

On the one hand, these all of these lives could be singularly defined by despair. Too often, the NGO typically foregrounds the victim narrative above all else. Misery is an excellent selling point. However, to do this would neither be true to the beneficiaries, nor would it challenge others into ‘thinking outside of the box’ about those who make up the ‘minorities’, or the discriminated against. It is important to pay heed to their resilience and many acts of compassion. The simple, yet life changing, action of a sex worker who provides shelter to an unknown girl she finds sitting on her doorstep. A member of the positive women’s support group takes care of a pregnant woman, abandoned by family, husband and lover because she is positive. The refuge offered by Hindus to a Muslim family with the mob on their doorstep; and the many other acts of kindness which result from a common understanding of what it means to survive the violence of stigma.

Regaining agency through a rights-based approach

Violence leaves a person feeling vulnerable, powerless and, often, with low self-esteem. A lack of trust in others and paralyzing fear are common after-effects. Each individual we work with has, in one way or another, come into contact with a member of SANGRAM, and, finding support and understanding, taken the route of recovery and resolve. These journeys could be individually, by taking court action and undergoing a process of counseling. In contrast, SANGRAM has advocated a collective approach to making these journeys. We have recognized that violence generates anger and immense resilience. These are resources that can be positively harnessed for political action. There are myriad examples where collective action had succeeded in reinstating the ‘victim’ with self-respect and hope; by confronting abusive husbands and family members, by engaging village councils to help HIV positive women recover denied property, and by challenging police and NGO raids on sex workers’ homes.

Taking these steps would not have been possible without a clear understanding of the law and a perspective which looks at violence beyond isolated incidents to viewing it within the wider frame of stigma and discrimination. Developing this perspective within the communities we work with and endowing people with knowledge of legal and human rights, is a powerful tool to restoring agency. Feminism and the language of rights have given sex workers the tools to evaluate what they do and understand it as ‘business’, rather than something inherently ‘wrong’ or dehumanizing. The usual NGO approach is to make sex workers aware of their rights in order to ‘free’ themselves from the trade. However, SANGRAM has stood firm in the belief that sex work is work. This has been a major contribution to sex workers regaining their self-esteem. In our experience, MSM sex workers are far less exposed to the rights discourse. Those who earn money through sex do so under extremely disorganised working conditions. This increases their vulnerability to violence and HIV. Female sex workers in Sangli district have been hugely influential in building an awareness of rights amongst MSM.

Entitlement to women's rights is particularly difficult to talk about in villages. It challenges deeply ingrained, traditional, patriarchal structures. However, we have stood by our belief that people have the right to reject harmful social norms. Working with MSM, transgender people and sex workers has encouraged us to opening address subversive issues in the villages such as those regarding gender norms, sexuality and sexual diversity. Reaching out to rural women with the language of rights and urging them to take control of their lives has been a struggle, but greatly helped by learning from these groups.

And so the communities we work with display a palpable sense of regaining power. This could be through monetary gain, economic stability, a feeling of security through being part of the collective, or a sense of liberation from constricting social norms and judgmental attitudes. There are many examples of how, through articulating knowledge of rights, sex workers have found respect in places where there was otherwise contempt. For instance, they now have an extremely cordial relationship with the police, made possible only with knowledge of the law and how it relates to them. Some women, while offered a chance to leave sex work, have chosen to remain; accepting it as a more honest 'a way of life', better than the double standards they witness in mainstream society.

The road to supporting each other through the collective

Endemic intolerance of difference and unbending social morality and religious hegemony is the main cause of the violence amongst these various communities. Every problem experienced by each community is underscored by versions of morality that are bigoted and deeply oppressive. Despite the variation in issues, the similarities in oppression are starkly apparent. Invisibility is a predicament shared by all. Sex workers, people living with HIV and MSM have to hide their identity from families if they are to be accepted, and from outsiders if they are to access health care, education and housing. Women victims of domestic violence are often shamed into hiding their abuse. Muslims are forced into silence on their political opinions for fear of being considered unpatriotic. Most of these groups have difficulty in accessing their property rights. Sex workers, despite sending money home, are cut out of property ownership by their families. MSM lose their rights over property when forced to leave home. Positive people are often compelled to sell their property to pay for treatment, and women in villages are denied property as daughters or wives. The legal system, flawed with its bias, is of little help. Though there are extremely progressive laws to address domestic violence in India, access to justice for women who have been abused is minimal due to misogyny by judges, and the police, characterised by disbelief and blame. There are no protective laws for sex workers, MSM-T or positive people. Discrimination on the grounds of religious affiliation is unconstitutional. However, as we have seen in trials against the murderers of Muslims, the notion of justice is sadly lacking.

The shared experience of being unjustly treated could so easily have led to despondency, power struggles, and inertia amongst, and between, these communities. However, we have seen the reverse taking place. A profound unity exists between MSM, sex workers, rural women, and people living with HIV in Sangli district, which has often been found lacking in HIV/AIDS organisations elsewhere. Whilst other NGOs work with vulnerable and marginalised communities, sometimes with one or more, there is seldom such cohesion between beneficiaries.

The roots of this solidarity are embedded in the ideology of SANGRAM. Rather than enrolling staff and volunteers as workers in an NGO, each person joins with the knowledge that they are becoming part of a social justice movement. Encouraged to adopt an activist identity has the effect of expanding people's commitment beyond doing a particular job. As activists, everyone works towards the same goal – the removal of social inequality. They work from a united platform towards achieving this. The work ethos is respect for community knowledge, experience and participation. Services are offered in a way that allows agency.

Shared experiences, rather than individual identities, are the rallying point for collective support. The interrelatedness of issues *between* the communities is foregrounded. For instance, activists are perceptive towards the sex worker in the non-sex worker community and the victim of domestic or communal violence in the sex worker or MSM communities. In sum this translates as those working in SANGRAM recognising that the issues being taken up project-wise are relevant to everyone, as opposed to being related to a specific target group. If women sex workers are working to make health facilities more accessible to their constituency, it is clear to MSM, or to staff on the rural programme, that it benefits their constituency as well. This encourages cohesion between the populations, setting up an order where no one project has priority, or more importance than another. Ultimately, all projects are working towards the same goal; the removal of stigma and discrimination towards *all* marginalized people.

To reiterate, a central tenet of SANGRAM's work has therefore been the task of empowering the marginalized through participation. Collectivizing, in our experience, has been the most effective strategy to resist violence and bring about social change for those living in the margins. We believe that without this, there is no hope of resolving injustice through public registers in ways that will be heard and acknowledged. Collective power with a rights-based approach is the critical combination. This enables people to make radical changes in viewing themselves positively. Their empowerment will lead to a paradigm shift in power.

b) SANGRAM has initiated to work to strengthen 'the intersectionality' between the sex worker movement and the women's and dalit movement.

Some quotable quotes!

My mother, sister, maternal aunt are all sex workers; a reality my friends and followers of Dr. Aambedkar are unable to fathom. – Vijay Kamble

We are treated as subhuman. We appeal you to treat us as human beings and recognize sex work as work. – Meenakshi Kamble.

When we plan to celebrate Jayanti, they threaten to beat us. We are not even allowed to do what we wish to do. – Kamalabai Pani

They tell us to get educated, but our children drop out as their caste certificates fail to get through verification. We are Indian citizens, aren't we? Then why can not we relate with Babasaheb as well? – Raju Naik.

Temple in a sex worker's colony is considered sacred. Why the women are deemed impure when their offerings to temple are acceptable? – Lata Pratibha Madhukar

Being based on exploitation it sounds inhuman to consider sex work a form of work – Uttam Kamble

If Babasaheb were there today...

My *Namaskar* and *Jai Bhim* to the honorable audience...

As a son of a Devdasi, who is a sex worker, I greet you with *Namaskar*, and

As a follower of Babasaheb Aambedkar, I greet you with *Jai Bhim*.

I have my roots in both these cultures, which has often posed different challenges before me. My mother, sister and maternal aunt all are women in prostitution; a reality that my friends and followers of Babasaheb's ideology disapprove of. They look down upon my family and all my best efforts to be one among them have been thwarted.

I would have sought justice if Babasaheb were there today...

Alas, he is not among us now. So, like all his followers do, we wish to celebrate his *Jayanti* (birth anniversary) as our tribute to him. However, our efforts to do so are often opposed.

Vijay Kamble from Miraj gave vent to his long suppressed agony at the outset of seminar that was aimed to be a dialogue between Dalit and Sex Worker Activists. Organized on behalf of *Kavivarya Narayan Surve Vachanalay*, renowned socio-cultural forum in Nashik, on 4th March 2012 this seminar brought together a group of activists in Maharashtra and was chaired by Uttam Kamble. He is President of *Vachanalay*, editor of leading Marathi daily *Sakal* and more importantly an avid social writer who has extensively written on the lives and plights of devdasi women. The day long seminar deliberated on several socio-economic issues and embarked upon a journey towards amicable solutions.

Reasons for such a dialogue lie in an incident five years ago. Being sex workers, the women who contributed sizable share to public collections to celebrate Aambedkar Jayanti, were not allowed to participate in the programme. Why are not we acceptable while our money is, felt the women. Under the banner of their own organisation – Veshya Anyay Mutki Parishad (VAMP), they decided to independently celebrate the jayanti. All community raised over fifty thousand from among them and women in 7 districts joined in on the programme day. However, as they took out their rally, it was fiercely attacked by no one else, but groups and parties claiming to be followers of Babasaheb's ideology. The incident kept repeating each successive year; the women would enthusiastically prepare for Jayanti and were fiercely opposed by dalit activists. So much so that it became violent last year and women were assaulted and beaten badly. In anticipation of resistance VAMP members are unsure whether this year they will get to celebrate Jayanti or not, expresses Kamalabai Pani, VAMP President.

Clearly, a face-off would lead nowhere, but a dialogue could. This realization led to organization of the seminar in Nashik. "My granddaughter had to discontinue education in junior college as her caste certificate does not include name of her father," says Kamalabai sharing the stark reality faced by many women like her. "Why people are unwilling to accept the fact that a large number of women in this work come from dalit caste groups," asks Raju Naik who is born and brought up in the sex workers colony. "Now it is mandatory to include mother's name on the child's birth certificate, which is certainly a progressive measure. Ironically, the same government debar caste certificates for children who do not include their father's name in them. These children do not get valid caste certificates and eventually drop out of educational stream," he shares. These are just some of the issues, sex workers and their children have to face but remain as invisible as their own existence. It is painful for them to see their attempts to voice their concerns as human beings and as citizens fall on deaf ears. 'Why are we treated as lesser humans', asks Meenakshi Kamble. These real life experiences and questions pertinent to the seminar opened up the discussion.

Why the followers of Dr. Babasaheb Aambedkar so much against sex workers? The reason lies on what Babasaheb proclaimed;

"It is most appalling to sell your body and it causes great personal and social harm. It is most painful to listen to people saying to me that our women do sex work and perform in tamasha. Leave this work. Dhamma insists upon good character. You get out of this work or else my samata sainiks (workers) will get you out of it."

This appeal by Dr. Aambedkar is the touchstone for his followers to oppose sex workers and their attempts to celebrate Jayanti. Even so majority women in prostitution, being from dalit backgrounds, look upon Babasaheb as their leader.

In the context of failure of present law in eradicating sex work and ineptness of rehabilitation measures in ending problems of women, what they say is worth listening. 'We are into sex work to earn money. It is our livelihood, so please do not look at it from moralistic viewpoint', state the women and appeal that sex work be recognized as a form of work and their right to livelihood should be protected. "Consider us as capable human beings", maintains Meenakshi Kamble, VAMP Treasurer.

Key issues presented in the following discussion as presented below;

Historical context:

- From Aamrapali in Buddha's era to saint poet Kanhopatra, we come across several references to sex work being part of social fabric in different eras. Researchers assert that the word 'Veshya' (conventional term for sex worker in Marathi) has originated from 'Vaishya' that is a community involved in trading.

Social Contradictions:

- Religion / temple priests used services of Devdasi women, but did not give them a share in the temple property.
- Temple in a sex worker's community is considered sacred, services of devdasi women are also rendered pure, however the women themselves are considered as impure, immoral.
- Men visiting sex workers are acceptable, however the women in prostitution are stigmatized.
- Women's movement perceives sex work as a heinous form of exploitation based on gender discrimination and therefore does not accept it as a form of work. The movement supports work for the children of women in prostitution, but does not support work with women who want to be in the same work. Instead of sex work women can take up any other form of physical labor, feels the women activists, however, they do not speak so much about the exploitation inherent in other forms of work they have to offer.
- How many sex workers would like their daughters to be in the same work? – this is perhaps the oft repeated question when sex workers assert their right to work. Do the sex workers, who are socially marginalized really have the answer to this question? They have been branded as 'bad' women involved in 'indecent' profession. However they have earned livelihood for them and their family through this work. They donated money and land to local priests and temples, to earn social acceptance. Despite their efforts, in reality most women have their daughters in the same work. Although they are better educated than their mothers, they have dropped out of it for various reasons.
- No parent would want their children to be part of a profession that neither gives dignity nor security. Such moral judgments are unnecessarily distracting.
- Women in sex work are marginalized since it is not considered work. No parent would want their children to lead an ostracized life, maintained the women.
- That sex work is simple and profitable than other labor intensive works, is a misguided view. It is full of violent, exploitative and unfair practices. Any parent would loathe to see it as a prospect for their children, maintained the women.
- State is for annihilation of sex work and devadasi custom. However, despite several legal measures, eradication has not become possible.
- In the light of failed legal measures, the government stressed upon reform and rehabilitation, but failed to implement at these levels as well.
- The women's movement originated during 1960-70 was highly individualistic in nature and therefore did not become widely acceptable.

- Predominantly sex work is viewed from established moral convictions. However, double standards are evident when we brand it 'bad' work at the same time are not able to eradicate it. Moreover, it is expanding and nature of sex work is increasingly becoming complex.
- No externally imposed measures are going to work, unless women in prostitution get recognition as workers. State and society should recognize fundamental rights of sex workers. Sex work has survived despite changing nature of policies; from opposition to this work, to eradication to rehabilitation. Nothing has worked and collectives of women in prostitution do not agree with either of them. Women in prostitution will get due recognition as human beings only when sex work is recognized as work, they maintain.
- Women in prostitution came into mainstream attention around 1980 just as intensity of HIV pandemic became apparent in India. Sex workers topped the groups playing crucial role in HIV prevention. In fact, initially focus of entire campaign was upon sex workers, not for their protection, but for the safety of their male customers. Sex work was posed as the biggest threat for HIV. Nevertheless, due to HIV the existence of sex workers was admitted for the first time.
- Around 1990 female as well as male sex workers and transgender communities all across India began to collectivize to assert their rights.
- Sex workers played a crucial role of promoting condom, by insisting its use with their clients even though it meant losing their business. Sex workers' collectives worked effectively to protect them and their client and prevent spread of HIV infection. As a result the intensity of spread came down in high prevalent districts like Sangli.
- We took care of our own health as well as that of society in checking spread of HIV. Now, when we are presenting our views and demands, the public needs to consider them, feel the women.
- Sex workers want to have a public debate on issues that matter to them. Whether or not sex work should be legalized? What are pros and cons in either case? They wish to dialogue with people, however most their efforts in this regard have elicited negative responses.
- Meenakshi Kamble said that they can speak without fear in countries abroad or in big cities like Mumbai, however people in their own towns are not willing to listen to them. She is treasurer of VAMP and also associated with Global Network of Sex Workers, Asia-Pacific Network of Sex Workers and National Network of Sex Workers.
- It would be wrong to think that these women can not think or they do not have an opinion. They do, but they are weak in articulation. They look at sex work as 'work'. In Marathi they call their work as '*dhandha*' (business/work), in Karnataka people say, 'She has gone out for work (to earn)'. Her service is needed and her income is accepted, then why the work is condemned, ask the women.
- Hoping that the activists in women's movement will be open to dialogue with them, VAMP members attempted talking to them in major cities in India. However their initiative met with lukewarm response.

Economic Aspects

- Apart from manual labour Dalit and other suppressed castes were also repository for traditional skills and folk arts. However, they neither got due recognition nor the returns when these skills were adopted by the market and service industry. For instance, as traditional birth attendants women in marginalized communities helped many to have safe deliveries. However becoming a gynecologist is far beyond them and these opportunities are accessible only to privileged castes. Tamasha performers survive under pathetic conditions, however filmmakers and dancers make money by using this dance forms, which has become a popular entertainment. Tamasha dancers or devdasi women lead a marginalized life, but their artistic skills are adopted to suit the market.
- Progressive groups should attempt to analyse socio-political and economic dimensions of lives of women in prostitution from caste, class, gender perspectives.
- As compared to a decade ago, when the number of illiterate women was more in sex work, today we find many educated women here. The women from upper castes entering in sex work change their to resemble to dalit castes. We should seriously analyse this trend.
- For this purpose, all women, dalit, workers organisations, progressive groups and activists should engage in a consistent dialogue.
- Sex workers have been able to make their voice heard as they are organised. Through VAMP they are actively taking their thoughts and demands to various forums. As a result, the ILO this year has declared sex work a form of decent work.
- Sex work is a major industry contributing to economy and therefore risk factors and exploitation in this work should be reduced, appeal the sex workers.
- Exploitation is integral aspect of market driven capitalism and is seen in all work sectors. Then why do we single out sex work? Exploitation of and violence against workers in all sectors should be checked through appropriate measures, demand VAMP members.
- Women in prostitution are part of unorganized sector that is the most suffered lot in the aftermath of globalization. Therefore, they argue, recognize our work so that we are able to collectively fight against oppression as workers. They are standing together with groups fighting against globalisation and also wish to dialogue with the worker's movement.

Lack of congruent policies

- Government policies and law pertaining to sex workers and their work are not congruent. For instance, sex work by an adult per se is not illegal. However, police routinely take sex workers in their custody under charges of indecent behavior in public places. Women also have to face other atrocities by police.
- Although not illegal, sex work is perceived as morally offensive and sex workers are viewed as criminals. Government policies and societal mindset is all for reforming women in prostitution. Therefore rescue and rehabilitation is the most appropriate measure feel the police and the State.
- However, sex workers have different take. They are against rescue-rehabilitation pattern and assert that sex work be recognized as work.

- Inconsistencies and confusions are apparent in government response to sex workers and their work. For example, In the daytime the government health department distributes condoms to sex workers as part of HIV prevention programme and a police raid takes place during the night. Inconsistencies within the state departments are intimidating for the women.

An appeal for dialogue

Women in prostitution say that...

- Do not look at us as victims, but as human beings and citizens
- We have right to dignified living and right to fulfill our basic needs such as education, food, clothing, housing and health
- We want to live in a violence-free environment. We want to ensure our rights as citizens, such as voting.
- We are marginalized and discriminated because of the nature of our work. However we choose to be sex workers and wish the society understands our points of view.
- We believe that sex work is a livelihood option and is like any other form of work. We are not in sex work to please men, but for our own living. We look after our families through this income.
- Some call it selling of body and some term it as trafficking; we disagree with both these terms and consider it as a work.
- We are Indian citizens, however our children are discriminated. They drop out of education for not being able to get caste certificates. We do not get ration cards and therefore face problems.
- We are judged on established standards of morality and are deemed as criminals. We challenge these very established norms which are based on biased notions of sex and sexuality. Rather we would like to have comprehensive discussion on sexuality, its complexity and hypocrisy surrounding it.
- Get out of preconceived notions and listen to us with open mind. Look at our profession as work and us as workers. We appeal you to be part of movement we have initiated to ensure our rights and dignity.
- Although we have been marginalized by the society, we consider ourselves a part of this social system. Therefore we wish to talk to different social groups. As citizens we have a right to voice our concerns and views. Do not take us for granted, let us together think of ways to improve our life. We are seeking your response and active participation is a dialogue. Together we will be able to create a new egalitarian social order.

Concluding discussion

- Being based on exploitation it sounds inhuman to consider sex work a form of work
- Sex workers cater to the social system, however they are denied of any human existence by the very system. Although historically sex workers enjoyed reputable status, they did not get social recognition. Caste becomes irrelevant while providing sexual services, however social prestige is closely linked to one's caste.

- Social banishing and marginalization is declining as sex workers are getting organised. Now they are empowered to analyse their problems and express their views. It is a social responsibility to let them have their space and present their viewpoints. For this purpose, there should be enough openness to accept sex workers as humans and preparedness to listen to what they have to say.
- We must be open and willing to listen to what sex workers are saying. However, it would not be correct to insist it as the only viewpoint. Let them present their thoughts and let it become a stimulus for self reflection for the people, social groups and government.
- Therefore a dialogue of various social groups with sex workers is essential.
- This will be a long term, ongoing process, which will need involvement of like minded groups and support mechanisms.
- At present, the women can not voice their concerns. Face severe opposition. We must deliberate on causes of resistance and ways to counter them. Primarily it is necessary to listen to what they are saying and asserting.
- Thoughts and views of our social leaders are specific to context and period and therefore they need to be reinterpreted. Women in prostitution are treated inhumanly. All efforts to rescue and rehabilitate have failed, which is clear from ever growing number of women in this work. When the women try to educate their children, they fail to get caste certificates. ‘What Dr. Babasaheb Aambedkar would have advised us to do in such a subduing situation?’ asked Raju Naik who himself is a son of sex worker.
- The questions posed by Meenakshi, Kamalabai, Vijay, Raju are all relevant yet disturbing. As a society we are responsible to answer them and take further the process of social interaction. There are no easy, simple answers. Are we going to cut down all *mahua* trees to ban cultivation of *Afu*? Why on one hand government releases licenses to liquor shops but dissuades nomadic tribes from their traditional occupation of alcohol making?
- It may happen that people will find the sex worker’s viewpoints completely unacceptable. Still they should get a chance to say what they want to say. We must remember three stages in a dialogue process – negation (*nakar*), empathetic response (*hunkar*) and acceptance (*sweekar*). We have stepped onto the first stage with this workshop. In subsequent meetings we will deliberate on concrete points and issues, concluded Uttam Kamble.

c)To Speak is to be Human

Sex workers march for change on International Sex Workers Day

To speak is to be human, to stand up and be counted is a step forward in the campaign for rights. Sex workers – female, male and transgender – are slowly beginning to be recognized as persons and citizens only after decades of struggle. The right to dignity, to work, to earn a livelihood, to education, to health and leisure – rights available to all citizens have only just begin to be extended to sex workers. Either reviled or pitied by the state, society and social workers, sex workers have now dared to break out of the victim mode and demand that they be seen as real human beings with rights, needs, fears, hopes and aspirations, just like anyone else.

Thus far, prostitution has symbolized oppression, victimization and the exploitation of womanhood for feminism. This is because it has looked at prostitution through the framework of a rigid understanding of patriarchy, viewing it as objectifying women's bodies, and as the commercialization of sex. Hence, for feminists, prostitutes are victims of unequal power relations between the sexes. No 'real' woman will agree to do sex work because if she does so she is living under the illusion of 'false consciousness'. We hear activists talk of prostitution as 'female sexual slavery' and 'sexual victimhood'. These perceptions echo the early reformist discourse, which views women as needing to be protected, preferably by laws, from lustful men. The fact remains however, that in India, prostitution is neither legal nor illegal. It has no status.[\[1\]](#)

A complex issue that has troubled feminists is the question of consent. Because feminism posits prostitution as violence, this viewpoint forecloses any discussion over whether women can actively choose sex work as a livelihood option. Accordingly, it is assumed that all female sex workers have been coerced into sex work. Violence against women (VAW) has focused on domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, acid throwing etc. So when VAW is conflated with sex work, it becomes difficult to see the wood for the trees. For example, most sex workers report that they experience violence and exploitation by and large at the hands of police and petty local thugs, rather than in sexual relations with clients. It is conveniently forgotten that a greater incidence of VAW occurs in marriages than between sex workers and their clients. Violence that does occur within the field of sex work is used to justify severe action against the sex work industry such as closure of brothels and 'clean ups'. The women's movement has raised the issue of consent in sexual relations mainly within the domestic / marital sphere. In prostitution, adult women consent to exchange sexual services for money, but this is disputed and the ability to consent is contested. The debates around trafficking further bolster the idea of sex work as violence. Exchanging sexual services for money [sex work] is conflated with selling of a body to another [trafficking].

The basic tenet of anti-trafficking rhetoric is that bodies are unwillingly 'sold' and transported across borders. This dovetails perfectly with the feminist argument that prostitution involves no choice and is the major cause for trafficking. Trafficking is not viewed as an issue of poverty that causes many women to willingly enter into agreements with traffickers because they desperately seek livelihoods, escape from home-grown violence, poverty, conflict, or displacement – in short, a better life. Many women report entering sex work because of 'majboori' or difficult circumstances, mainly poverty, and this leads them to think of sex work as a way of livelihood and thus work. But, without finding out the multiplicity of experiences, feminists have held that women are trafficked into sex work because of their vulnerability as women. The movement to stop trafficking, by feminist and other groups favoring abolition, is therefore framed as the necessity to stop prostitution.[\[2\]](#) Therefore the conceptualization of sex work as violence has limited the feminist understanding because sex work is not perceived as involving consent.

The victim trope has engendered several positions on prostitution. Because women are conceptualized as 'slaves', one approach is to put a stop to prostitution in the literal sense – by demolishing it. The State and other establishments, such as NGOs, often use this abolitionist approach. Reformism, another feminist position, posits that women in prostitution need reforming because, as women who do sex work, they have no 'character'. Rescue and rehabilitation strategies are used here. The assumption is that women need saving from sex work and then rehabilitation by giving them alternate jobs. A third strategy, the regulatory approach, relies on laws. This does not take the stand of banning prostitution but rather accepts that prostitution is here to stay and needs regulation. Laws like the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act 1956 (ITPA) in India is a reflection of this approach. Yet another approach is the rights-based approach – which is silent on the merits or morality of sex work, per se, but contends that women in sex work should have the same rights and entitlements as any other citizen, and the State must act as the duty bearer of these rights.

We consider sex work as work, as a business, and do not consider ourselves as either criminals or victims. In order for the stigma of discrimination to end, and fundamental rights extended to us to carry out our livelihood, societal perception must be transformed. To make the big change happen, small steps must be taken. Join us in our march for equality. - Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad, Sangli.

Sex Workers Pride-Sangli

We are delighted to invite you to join us at the Sex Workers' Pride March to be held in Sangli on the eve of the International Sex Workers' Rights Day, the 3rd of March. Every year for the past five years we have held our heads high and joyously marched together to declare to the world that we not only exist but do so with pride claiming our right to self worth, dignity and livelihood, a right that no agency can confer or deny.

Come all: Pride March: Gather at the Collector office, Sangli rally to the banks of the River Krishna. Date : 2 March 2012; Time : 5pm – 7pm

[1] The Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (ITPA, 1956) does not define prostitution as a crime per se. But many aspects of prostitution are defined as crimes: soliciting, brothel-keeping and pimping.

[\[2\] UN Protocol To Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in persons, Especially Women and Children](#)

The definition of trafficking in the Protocol is the first international definition of trafficking.

'Trafficking in persons' shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;"

D. Summary of the activities:

Following is data of Peer education program among sex workers in North Karnataka. 2011-2012

Sr No	Project Activities	Total
1	One to one session	28366
1a	Male	11510
1b	Female	16554
1c	TG	302
2	One to Group session	5157
2a	Male	5254
2b	Female	11854
3	Condom demonstration	29191
4	Condom Distribution	1105491
5	Private doctor visits	39
7	Private Lab Visit	420
7	Govt. Doctors Visit	478
8	New HIV +ve Outreach	99
8a	Male	20
8b	Female	79
9	Follow up PLHA	162
9a	Male	21
9b	Female	141
10	Home Visit To PLHA	526
10a	Male	114
10b	Female	412
11	Total ART Registration	134
11a	Male	29
11b	Female	105
12	ART Started	81
12a	Male	23
12b	Female	58
13	Other Patient	274
13a	Male	34
13b	Female	240
14	Refer for TB	49
14a	Male	22
14b	Female	27
15	Community Meetings	219
	Total Outreach	3494
16	Weekly staff meetings	86
	No.of attendees	702
17	Monthly Planning & Review Meeting	12
	No of attendees	621
18	IEC material - Pamphlet distribution	9174

Work with transport Workers in North Karnataka

Total Information-one to one	4228	Total Information-one to one	2671
Truckers	2212	Male	1398
Others	1967	Female	1231
New MSM	49	New MSM.	41
Condom dist.	9283	Condom Distribution	6110
Truckers	5168	Male	3265
Others	4115	Female	2845
Group Dis. Truckers	402	Number of Male group sessions	270
Total outreach	1843	Total outreach	1186
Group Dis. Others	386	Number of female group sessions	266
Total outreach	1596	Total outreach	1136
Condom Demonstration	800	Condom Demonstration	526
Truckers	404	Male	266
Others	392	Female	260
New STI	170	STI outreach	135
Truckers	98	Male	70
Others	72	Female	65
Refer to Civil	120	Refer to Civil	105
Truckers	71	Male	54
Others	49	Female	51
Follow-up STI	88	New PLHA outreach	18
Truckers	44	Male	11
Others	44	Female	7
Cured STI	99	Other Patient ref, Civil	110
Truckers	52	Male	56
Others	47	Female	54
PLHA follow-up	198	Home visit	592
Truckers	105	Male	317
Others	93	Female	275
Other patient	162	Pamphlets	1644
Truckers	88		
Others	74		
Pamphlets	1074		

District Campaign

The District advocacy campaign staff has carried out all the activities proposed for Hivos. Following table shows the quantitative data:-

Addressed cases of domestic violence at village level

2010 – 2012	Total
DC Staff-Negotiation with family	547
Village level secondary stake holders	104
Village level crisis intervention committee	160
Mahila Mandal	59
SANGRAM Maitrin	51
Court case	604
Total	1525

No of person living with HIV- 2011-2012

PLHA	Previous	New	Death	Current
Male	619	107	24	702
Female	1053	103	14	1142
Boy	154	10	5	159
Girl	129	25	6	148
Total	1955	245	49	2151

PLHA	Total No of Contacts	Indirect	Direct
Male	702	123	579
Female	1142	144	998
Boy	159	21	138
Girl	148	17	131
Total	2151	305	1846

District Campaign Activity Data 2011-2012

Activities	Total	Activities	Total	Activities	Total
<i>Outreach</i>		<i>Advocacy</i>		<i>Service provision</i>	
OPD attendees – Total	81723	Tarun Mandal	633	Referral Testing	1160
Outreach Total	70778	No. attendees	7545	Male	449
Female outreach	43318	Mahila Mandal	987	Female	508
Male Outreach	26608	No. attendees	16548	Boy	105
Booth Outreach	2636	Maitrin Prog	505	Girl	98
Male	1318	No. attendees	10993	Treatment PHC	2377
Female	1272	Teacher training prog.	50	Male	731
Condoms [booth]	3485	Outreach Total	740	Female	1139
Male	1490	Sex edu.Prog. School	98	Boy	260
Female	1684	Boys	7891	Girl	247
Boy	282	Girl	8067	PLHA Orphan Visits	6467
Girl	29	Outreach Total	15958	Boy	3221
Total Condoms distr.	83760	Palak melava	19	Girl	3246
New HIV outreach	219	No.of attendees	1041	PLHA visits	9793
Male	93	P. health Provider	325	Male	3160
Female	93	No.attendance	3834	Female	4641
Boy	8	Poster exhibitions	35	Boy	1105
Girl	25	No. attendance	3421	Girl	887
New STD outreach	642	Kishori program	184	D.V. cases total	305
Male	237	No outreached	3416	Sangram negotiated	220
Female	405	Village Campaigns	137	Village leaders	12
New T.B Outreach	866	Outreached	44494	Grampanchayat	65
Male	441	Public meetings	150	Mahila Mandal	5
Female	353	No. attendees	3798	Lawyer/ court	3
Boy	34				
Girl	38				
Lab Visits	750				
Doctor Visits	1224				

E. Monitoring performance and organizational quality

Weekly staff meetings held in the respective blocks and quarterly meetings held at central office of SANGRAM. All the DC staff attended these meetings for program reviews and planning.

Sex workers rights day rally in Sangli -

