

# **Vidrohi Mahila Manch - VMM REPORT 2011-2012**

## **a. Stories of violence and compassion**

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.

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.

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 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.

To reiterate, a central tenet of VMM'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.

### Summary of the activities: 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>1525</b>

#### 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
<u>Outreach</u>		<u>Advocacy</u>		<u>Service provision</u>	
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.attendence	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				