

SANGRAM

Sampada Grameen
Mahila Sanstha

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Annual Report
2023 - 2024

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Our Mission

People should believe that they can change things. It is not about a few activists fighting for other people's rights. Anybody who has imbibed this understanding should be able to go and fight for their rights.



Concept

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SANGRAM Sanstha would like to acknowledge its Board members for their unstinting support.



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Activities for 2023 – 24

- **HIV/AIDS Prevention, Care and Support - Targeted Intervention**

For female, trans and male sex workers in Sangli, Satara and Kolhapur.

- **Social Entitlement, Legal Literacy, Strengthening of Collectives of NNSW**

Increasing legal awareness amongst sex workers

Advocacy with district stakeholders on sex worker rights

Ensuring Sex workers are able to access identification documents, open bank accounts, access social entitlements

- **Leadership Development**

VAMP, Muskan and SANGRAM team members

- **My Body My Rights**

Campaign for Health Rights of Sex Workers

- **Training, Advocacy and Cross Movement Dialogues on Sex Worker Rights**

- **Children of Sex Workers Program**

Strengthening education, nutrition support

- **Research and Developing Evidence**

- **Sex Workers and Allies South Asia**

Year in Review

It has been a busy year for SANGRAM Sanstha and its Collectives in 2023 – 24. The team has faced numerous challenges and also notched up achievements. VAMP, Muskan and the SANGRAM team have shown remarkable resilience in standing up to the scaling up that has happened due to SANGRAM handling the Global Fund Project for the National Network of Sex Workers. At the same time, ensuring that SANGRAM's regular work and project continues has been a huge challenge and achievement. This has been shaped in a large measure by the leadership building processes initiated under the Born To Win Program to build second line leadership in SANGRAM and its collectives.

The results have spoken for themselves. Community members have stepped up to take on project responsibilities and have handled the work with tremendous responsibility and ownership. SANGRAM and its collectives have strongly believed that children of sex workers must be strengthened to step forward, build their careers, give back to the community. Despite shutting the hostel in Nippani, the women of VAMP decided to take on the challenge of providing facilities to children of sex workers in Sangli. SANGRAM has continued to support this initiative by providing educational, food and nutrition support for children of sex workers.

1. HIV/AIDS Prevention Activities (Targeted Intervention) – Government of Maharashtra for female, male and trans people in sex work in Sangli, Satara, Kolhapur.

HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support for female, male and trans sex workers continues to be the primary and core area of SANGRAM and collectives in 2023-24. SANGRAM teams continued to implement community led HIV/AIDS Prevention, care and support for sex workers in Sangli, Miraj, Ichalkaranji, Satara and Karad. Community members from VAMP, Muskan took the lead in implementing six interventions in these sites. Over 5000 sex workers were provided HIV/AIDS prevention services, referral for sexually transmitted infections, care and support for people living with in 2023-24. The programs are supported by the Maharashtra State AIDS Control Society, Department of Health, Government of Maharashtra. Three interventions are run directly by SANGRAM while the other three interventions are directly implemented by VAMP and Muskan and supported by SANGRAM.

Table 2. Breakup of sex workers receiving HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support services.

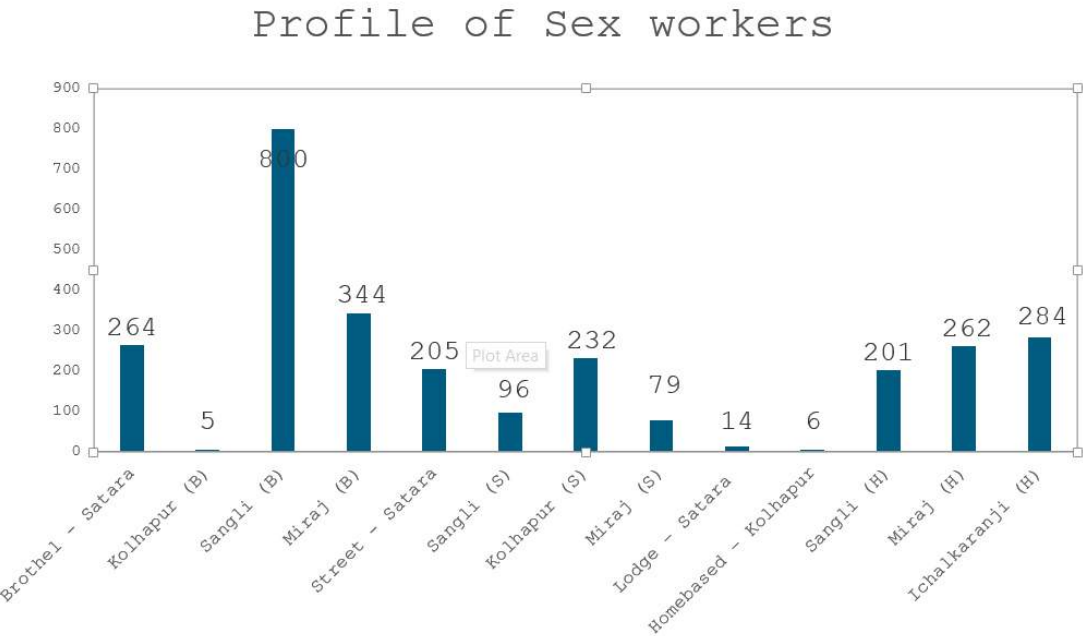
	Satara	Sangli (FSW)	Sangli (MSM)	Kolhapur	Ichalkaranji	Miraj	Total
Female	483	1097		243	284	685	2792
Male	460		436	247	617		1760
Trans	174		192	163	137		666
							5218

Over half of the population of sex workers that were provided HIV/AIDS prevention services are women in sex work. Around 33 percent are males in sex work. And around 12 percent of those who were provided services are trans people in sex work.

Table 1. Classification of Targeted Interventions

Implemented by		Population
VAMP (SANGRAM support)	Miraj – female sex workers	685
VAMP (SANGRAM support)	Sangli – female sex workers	1097
VAMP (SANGRAM support)	Ichalkaranji - female sex workers	1038
SANGRAM	Sangli – male and trans sex workers	628
SANGRAM	Kolhapur – male, female and trans sex workers	653
SANGRAM	Satara – male, female and trans sex workers	1117
	Total	5218

Table 3. Profile of female sex workers receiving services under project.



VAMP and SANGRAM reaches out to brothel, street and home - based hidden sex workers in all these areas. The collectivization strategies have enabled VAMP and Muskan peers workers to access sex workers in hidden settings more easily in the previous year. Across the six interventions, over 75% of the population was tested at least once in the year for HIV/AIDS. This is especially commendable since a significant amount of the women in sex work are street based (612 out of the 2792 women in sex work 22%) and hidden in nature. These women are extremely difficult to do outreach and provide services consistently. Hence strong community collectives need to be in place to provide services.



Table 4. Services provided under Targeted Intervention Project, 2023-24

HIV/AIDS COUNSELLING, SERVICE DELIVERY FOR SEX WORKERS [2023-2024]

	SANGLI (FEMALES)	MIRAJ	ICHALKARANJI	SANGLI (TG/ MSM)	KOLHAPUR	SATARA	TOTAL
	23-24	23-24	23-24	23-24	23-24	23-24	23-24
Population	1058	656	1035	612	649	1042	5052
Clinic Attendance	1056	651	1035	611	649	1027	5029
Counselling and Testing	901	563	903	268	211	733	3606
Pre ART	59	35	39	33	60	65	291
On ART	59	35	39	33	60	65	291
Counselling	1057	652	1035	609	638	1042	5033
Condom Distribution	555120	279940	123096	96733	84992	149760	1289641
% Age Tested	90.1	90.6	94.8	47	35.8	75	75.7

291 people are living with HIV/AIDS and all of them are on ARV services. Community led implementation continues to be the key approach for the high success rates achieved in the project. The project teams comprise of sex workers and are therefore accountable to the community. Since they also come from the very locations that they are working in, their knowledge of minute changes has been extremely helpful in shaping immediate course corrections. The community also monitors the activities such as condom distribution, ICTC camps.

Hence their confidence levels are also extremely high in the quality of and the community centred nature of the intervention.

This confidence is also reflected in the manner in which the community handles crisis through the Tanta Mukti Samitis. In 2023-24, the collectives handled around 112 cases of crisis from various quarters. Most of these crisis were handled through discussions and negotiations, except for the ones due to the police.

Table 5. Crisis response 2023-24

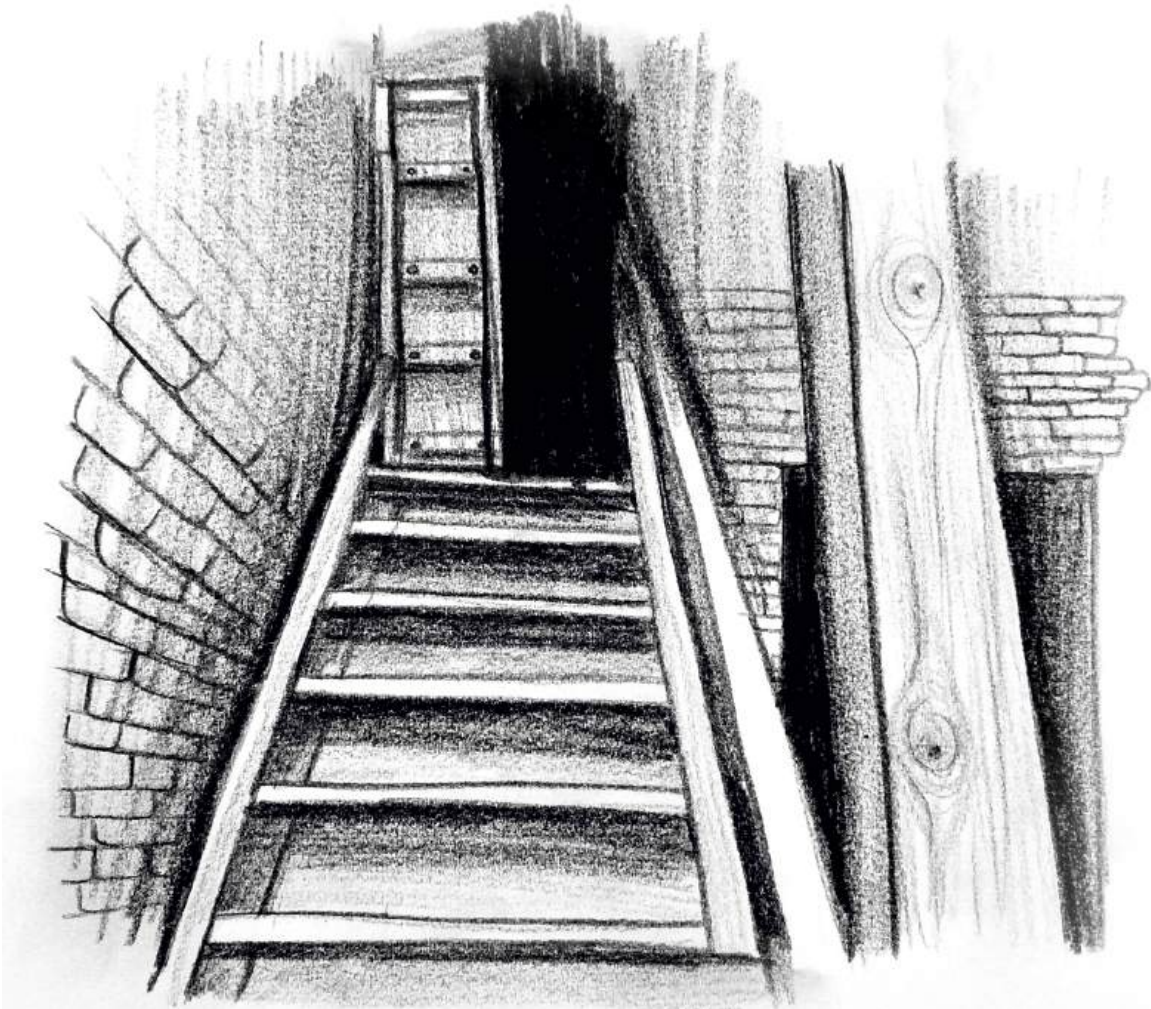
Increased confidence in addressing crisis through advocacy with local police, negotiation within the community member (2023-24)

	Female sex workers	MSM	Trans sex workers	Total
By Goons	8	1	6	15
By Clients	20	3	1	24
By Police	11	0	2	13
By Brothel Owners	4	0	1	5
By Partner	6	5	3	14
By Family Member	2	1	0	3
By Community Members	29	3	6	38
	80	13	19	112

The Ichalkaranji program was declared as being equivalent to a learning site by the NACO evaluation team that visited in 2023 when the program received 92 out of a maximum 100 marks in the evaluation. This has been a source of great pride for the entire program team and SANGRAM. Our belief in community centred programs has been constantly proven as a successful and sustainable model.

The predominant challenge for the program has emerged in the form of Index Testing for sex workers who are positive. This involves getting the partners or clients of HIV positive sex workers tested for HIV in order to identify new cases and to prevent the spread of the infection. However, in the community of sex workers this issue can lead to numerous ethical concerns and an underlying assumption that the sex worker who is positive may be the

automatic person who caused the infection in the partner or client. In an already stigmatized environment, this can further lead to ostracization, stigma and violence. The Index Testing figures within the Targeted Interventions has been extremely low. These concerns of privacy have also been voiced by people living with HIV in the general population.



In Satara the main challenge continues to be mainstreaming the trans people in sex work to access services and collectivise. Numerous efforts have been undertaken and outreach programs have been conducted, but the hesitation of the trans community continues.

The Satara population has been battling the challenge of high violence in the places where they used to work. The police used to constantly beat them when they stood for work. This had also impacted the community confidence in the program as a whole and service delivery was low. However, a lot of work has done with the police and the collector and an alternative spot was identified for doing sex work. This has reduced the violence and stress in the community to earn a livelihood.

In Ichalkaranji also the challenges concern the social grants that have been set aside for trans communities. The documentation required and the process has been made so complex that trans people are not able to access the benefit of the scheme.



2. Strengthening access to identification documents and social entitlements for sex workers; increasing legal literacy and organizational strengthening of Community Based Organisations (CBO) of National Network of Sex Workers.

Since 2022, as a member of the National Network of Sex Workers (NNSW), SANGRAM has been engaged in a project to strengthen access to identification documents and social entitlements for sex workers. The project is a remanent of the COVID period when it was realized that the lack of access to bank accounts and identification documents had severely limited sex worker's ability access emergency relief. NNSW entered into discussions with the Global Fund on AIDS Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) along with other networks of marginalized populations of sex workers, injecting drug users, people living with HIV/AIDS, MSM and trans people. Consequently, the Global Fund allocated the C19_RM Grant on Social Assistance Programs, Legal Literacy and Organisational Development for sex workers to NNSW through a primary recipient SAATHII.

Since January 2023, SANGRAM began the implementation of the first component C19_RM Grant – access to identification documents, bank accounts and Social Protection. Sixty -five Sex worker CBOs who are members of NNSW in nine states have been covered under this project which will be completed in December

2024. SANGRAM has contracted 17 NGOs and Community Based Organisations as sub sub recipients (SSR) including 8 CBOs.

The second component of the C19_RM grant was to strengthen community -based organisations who are members of NNSW. Members of 67 CBOs were identified as the beneficiaries for the legal literacy and Organisation Development (OD) grant which was initiated in June 2023.

Since 1 January 2023, 86 consultants have been bought on board to implement both the social protection and Organisational Development Grants. This has meant a tremendous scaling up to implement these grants. SANGRAM team has risen to various challenges posed by this grant including compliances of both SANGRAM and the 17 organizations given sub – grants, meeting the rigorous and often inflexible standards of the Global Fund, having stringent compliances in place, ensuring strong human resource management policies in place, liasoning with the National network of sex workers' members in a sudden scale up.

Table 6. C_19RM Project Details

States Covered under the Social Assistance Grant	9	Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh
Community Based Organisations covered by grant	65	
Sub sub recipients	17 NGOs and CBOs	8 Community based organisations implemented the grant

Table 7. Staff structure for C19 RM Grants

	Social Assistance Grant	Legal Literacy and Organisational Development Grant
Oversight	1	1
Network Coordinator	1	
Program Specialist	1	1
Finance Manager	1	
Finance Officer/ Admin and Finance Officer	1	2
Admin Officer	1	
Program and Advocacy Officer / Legal Literacy Officers, Organizational Development Officers	5	11
M and E Manager	1	1
Verification Coordinator	14	
Help desk Coordinator		44
TOTAL	21	60

Table 8. Grant Outcomes – Social Protection services provided 2023-24

Sex workers trained under the social assistance grant	1015	
Sex workers to whom services delivered under the grant	16966	13909 women, 1463 men, 1594 trans gender sex workers
Identification documents provided to sex workers	11948	PAN Card, Voter ID Card, Income certificate, TG ID cards, Caste certificate, residence certificates, domicile certificates
Bank accounts opened for sex workers	3808	
Social assistance programs of the State and Central Government accessed for sex workers	4783	E- shram card, Ayushman bharat, chetna scheme, Ladki Behin Yojna, Gruh Lakshmi scheme, Dhanashree scheme, Atal pension yojna, widow pension, Karnataka self employment scheme, Mythree pension scheme for transgender, NIVA Bupa Accident policy, Old age pension, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojna, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyothi Bima Yojna, Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna, Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana



Within nine months of the completion of the social protection grant, the achievements have been impressive. The project has been able to achieve 65% of its targets of providing services to sex workers give the time frame of only nine months of the grant period in March 2024. Against a target of 31530 services, SANGRAM and the various teams in nine states were able to provide 20539 services.

At the frontline of the provision of these services have been over 1500 sex workers who have been trained as community facilitators. Their tasks include reaching out to a cohort of their peers every month and motivating them to get identification documents made, open bank accounts. One of the key features of this effort has been overcoming the natural fear that most sex workers have of approaching government departments and officials for documentation and for accessing government schemes and benefits. Traditionally, this hesitation has been caused by their fear of being criminalized and stigmatized for their work. Overcoming this hesitation has taken a lot of time. In the past year, the amount of mobilization and motivation of sex workers on the ground has been tremendous.



Legal literacy training modules

The legal literacy grant was initiated in December 2023. The project aims to provide sex workers with information on crucial laws that impact their lives such as the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, Domestic Violence Act, Transgender Persons Seven training modules were developed inhouse. These modules have been translated into eight languages and will be used to train sex workers.

- Supreme Court Order on rights of sex workers
- Immoral Traffic Prevention Act
- Cyber Laws
- Domestic Violence Act
- Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019
- Section 377, IPC
- Developing skills in writing complaints
- Legal Aid Authority We hope that the trained sex workers will form the basis for a sustainable initiative beyond the project period.

Legal Literacy Training- Jan to March 2024				
State	Total Participants	Sessions		
		1 to 1	1 to G	Total Sessions
Tamil Nadu	897	75	145	220
Andhra Pradesh	381	8	59	67
Telangana	375	27	66	93
Karnataka	1368	249	181	430
Maharashtra	892	60	100	160
Kerala	332	111	51	162
Delhi	380	1	40	41
Uttar Pradesh	213	2	35	37
Gujarat	-	-	-	-
Jharkhand	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	4838	533	677	1210

3. Leadership Development of Sex Workers and Staff of SANGRAM Sanstha

Since 2022, SANGRAM Sanstha has been engaged in a concerted effort to build leadership within VAMP, Muskan and the SANGRAM Team. A partnership was forged with a company called Born To Win, led by Ram Seshu. 20 participants meet every two months and undergo leadership training. To date around 19 trainings have been conducted by Born To Win. Some of the discussions in the leadership series includes

- Using various wisdom tools to improve our work – bite size chunks, strength summary, Win Win, Positive Attitude, 4 by 4, Moving from I CAN to WE CAN, Look For a Pattern, 6 C's Collaboration, Courtesy, Clarity, Crisp, Consistent, Conviction, Overcoming Fear, Do not be Value Judgmental, Great Attitude leads to Great Behaviour etc.
- Understanding what is a team, who is a team player, characteristics of team building
- Resolving conflicts within collectives – working within the collective to achieve more
- Managing Negative emotions with positive emotions
- Developing a Common understanding of the History of SANGRAM
- Problem Solving and the four stages
- What is our vision for SANGRAM 4.0
- What is leadership and what are the qualities of a leader?

As the name suggests, the sessions are intended to devolve practical skills that the participants can use in their personal and professional lives. As the sessions progressed, participants began to show numerous changes in their behaviour and attitudes, in the work atmosphere. The bi – monthly space also became a place where people could speak to each other of things other than their daily work pressures.

4. My Body My Rights – Campaign for Better Health of community

For a while there has been a general feeling that there needs to be a more broad -based focus on the general health of sex workers instead of limiting it to only HIV/AIDS and STI. Many women and trans people have been having basic health concerns such as blood pressure, high sugars, stress related illnesses, menstrual health and hygiene issues etc. In 2023, SANGRAM and the collectives decided to start a community initiative known as My Body My Rights. The aim of the campaign is to ensure that the community gets access to health related information and testing and where possible linkages to quality medical care. The campaign will run throughout 2024, with different health issues being selected including diabetes, coronary conditions, alcohol addiction that impact sex workers in VAMP.

Four camps were held in the year over various issues.

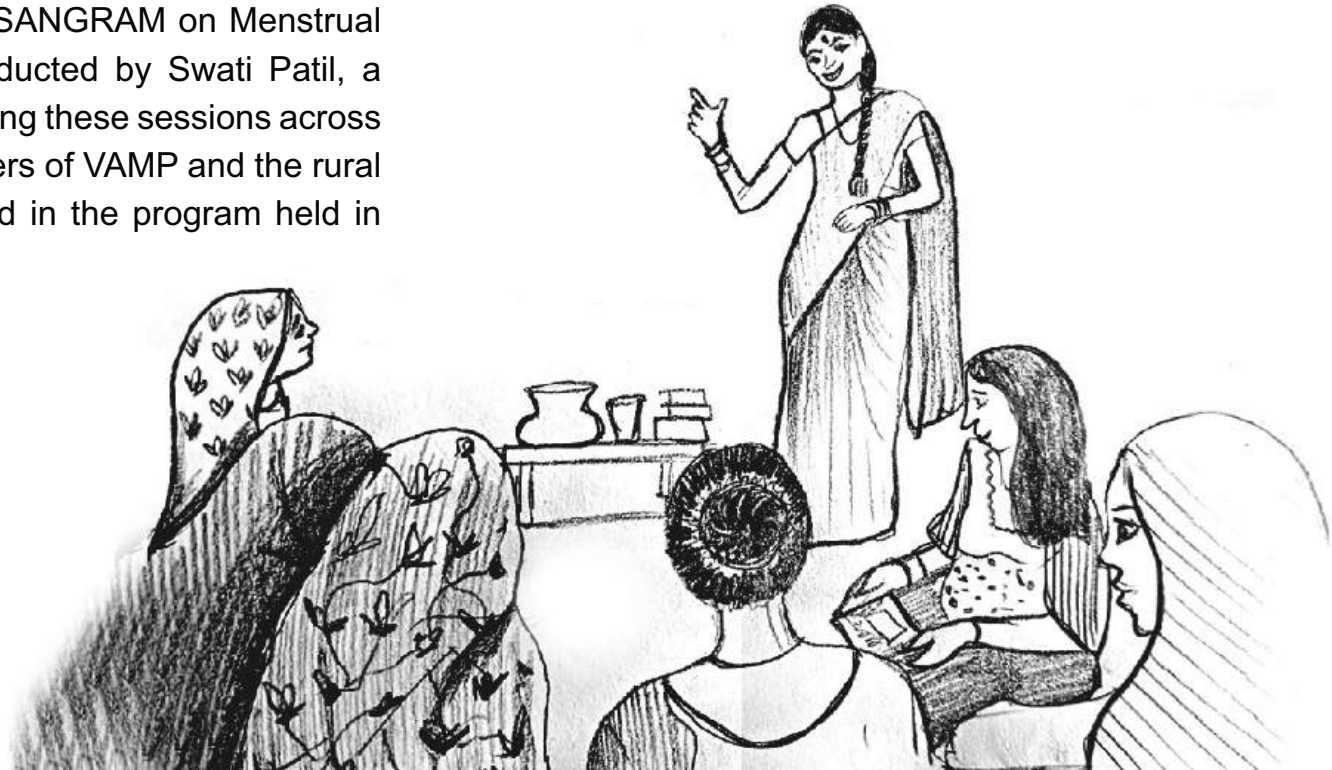


Menstrual Cup information dissemination and training for use – Sangli

The use of menstrual cups has been seen as a way to overcome period poverty. Period poverty refers to the lack of access to affordable and hygienic menstrual products, safe and private facilities to manage menstruation, and adequate information and education about menstrual health and hygiene. For instance, in India 27% of young rural women use unsanitary methods for menstrual protection. 57% percent of rural women and 50% according to the study had used cloth for menstrual protection at some point. SANGRAM has also taken up the challenge of scaling up access to menstrual cups for rural women including sex workers.

A training was organised by SANGRAM on Menstrual Cups. The session was conducted by Swati Patil, a trainer who has been conducting these sessions across Maharashtra. Over 30 members of VAMP and the rural women's program participated in the program held in

Sangli. During this discussion women narrated the problems related to Menstrual period. The symptoms includes pain in abdominal, feeling dirty, anger, laziness which leads to delay in movements, work. Women also spoke about being kept in isolation for 4-5 days. The Discussions held on health and Hygiene. The facilitator gave an introduction to menstrual cups, different types of cups and sizes. She engaged with the challenges and myths associated with menstrual cups which are often linked to incorrect use. These include lack of comfort, lack of proper information, misconception regarding overflow, reusing cups and hygiene. Swati provided information on simple methods of cleaning the cups in hot water and wiping with a clean cloth.



She spoke of the benefits of Menstrual Cup including being a money saver, giving freedom for women to swim, washable material and reusable, enabling women to drive during periods, feels safe while walking. Facilitator further narrated on healthy lifestyle which includes importance of Yoga, and regular exercise this helps in improving healthiness. SANGRAM Sanstha will monitor the impact of the program and see if it is possible to further motivate women with this information.

Good eyesight – Sangli, Satara, Kolhapur

SANGRAM organized a three-day special eye camp under My Body-My Rights Campaign. Traditionally sex workers in Sangli do not like to wear eyeglasses because they feel it makes them look old and ugly. The challenge is also that eye – glasses that are good looking and a fashion statement are also quite expensive and unaffordable for poorer women. Hence SANGRAM Sanstha decided to initiate a camp as a collaboration. Ms Gillian Caplan, Ethical Vision London and with support of Ms. Andrea Cornwall, Kings College, London and Dr Shekhar Paranjpe, an ophthalmologist based in Sangli came together in a unique partnership with SANGRAM Sanstha to provide better eye wear for members of VAMP and Muskan at lower cost.

Dr. Shekhar Paranjpe helped in organizing the camp at Nayantara Hospital Sangli. 114 members from VAMP, Muskan, Mitra collectives participated in the campaign and around 97 underwent free eye check-up. Free frames were distributed to the members of collectives who needed eye care. Ms.Gillian Caplan also coordinated with an ophthalmic service provider based in Mumbai to produce the lenses free of cost.

Members who participated		Community	Non-Community
Male	99	93	6
Female	14	7	7
TG	14	14	-
Total	127	114	13

5. Training, Advocacy and Cross Movement Dialogues on Sex Worker Rights [Core Grant]

Advocacy on sex worker rights continues to be a key area of SANGRAM's work at the district, state, national and international level. Numerous opportunities for this advocacy emerged in 2023-24

National Commission for Women – Supreme Court Order and its implementation (State Meeting in Delhi and Mumbai)

In 2023, the National Commission for Women held State level multi stakeholder consultations to popularize the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court on the rights of sex workers. Meena Seshu was invited to a national consultation held in Delhi and Aarthi Pai and Kiran Deshmukh from VAMP spoke at the State level Consultation held in Mumbai. The Mumbai meeting was chaired by Ms. Rekha Sharma, Chairperson National Commission for Women.

Kiran Deshmukh spoke of the achievements of collectives in improving the lives of their children. In VAMP, sex workers collectivise around the fight against exploitative practices, oppression and violence.

They consider their work as a means of earning a livelihood and supporting their families, much like other women. However, society and law casts them in the role of victims of trafficking and sends them to rehabilitation

homes. This process has the negative effect of separating them from their families rather than benefiting them. The history of the VAMP movement first started with the right to health and safe working environment, advocating against violence.

Aarthi spoke about the Supreme Court Order recognizing rights of sex workers and the need to ensure implementation of the Order. In Delhi at the national consultation organized by National Commission for Women, Meena Seshu spoke of the challenges of children faced by sex workers. The children of female sex workers inhabit two separate worlds.

“Your mother is bad. The company she keeps is bad. Her behaviour is bad”: this is the child's first world; while the other is: “My Mother”. When children step out of their home, one world begins; when they return home it is the other; the conflict between these two worlds traumatises the children.

This dichotomy has many consequences, including a high school drop-out rate and consuming intoxicants at an early age. Moreover, these children are forced to resort to falsehoods when dealing with the rest of society, in the process denying the history of their own lives. What is the approach of society in dealing with children from such a context?

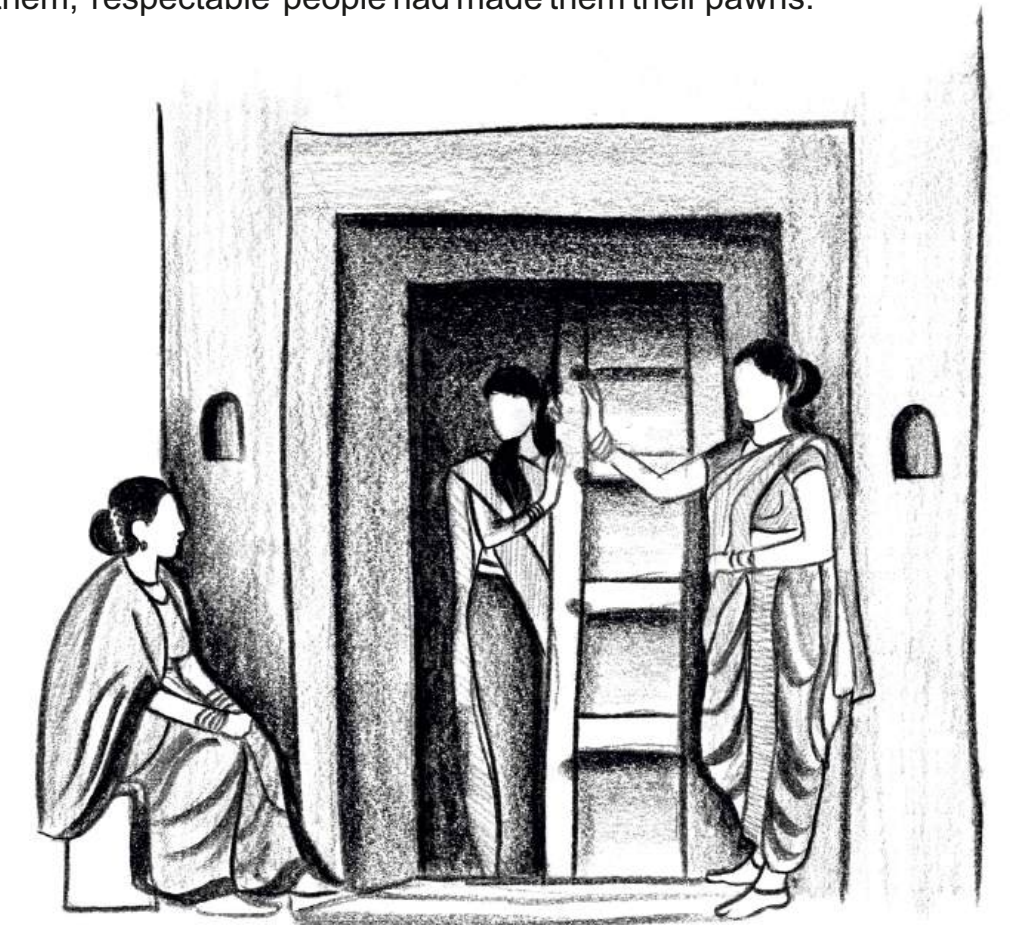
Society says that these children should be kept away from their mothers, thus resulting in them feeling increasingly abandoned. Besides intense loneliness, the impact is both physical and psychological. When Sangram began working among sex workers from 1992, it became necessary to address the problems of these children who lived in such a divided mental universe.

Theirs was a strange situation. Deeply troubled, they cursed their mothers, even beat them at times. But underlying this aggressiveness was one major trait – self-destructive. Much time was devoted to understanding these young people. We also found that women in sex work – who are also mothers – often try to purchase the love of their own children.

The converse is that the children were turning violent, some even threatened to kill their mothers, sometimes mothers might themselves ask the police to arrest their child, frustrated by their waywardness. Spoilt by attempts to purchase their love, the children are more often than not headed towards delinquency. When working with the women, we began with the standard approach of telling them that they were making a mistake. Bad idea! It just alienated the women and the children!

We changed our approach. We need to work WITH the community not For the community. We attempted to unravel the complex reality, to understand the problems faced by the children, many of whom were accused in criminal cases. Indeed, charge sheets had been filed against quite a few.

Clearly they were trapped in a circle of crime. This was not their fault. Even before they were fully aware of the reality surrounding them, 'respectable' people had made them their pawns.



As they began to understand their situation, they changed. We kindled awareness among these children: “Who is a mother? What is her role in your life? What is life? What is your role as children?” We decided to meet the children once a week. As our conversations continued, positive changes were visible.

The biggest problem the children faced was their inability to openly assert their identity. The inability to openly say, “This is my mother”; the inability to take their mothers to the doctor when they fell ill because the doctor would ask innumerable questions; the inability to take their mothers to their school day functions; the inability to take their friends home with them. Alongside, the agony of an unacknowledged father was an ever-present issue.

Likewise, the deep sense of alienation: “What is to be done about a society that refuses to listen to what I have to say?” A radical change in their thought processes began with questioning the society that was rife with hypocrisy and double standards. As such, we began a parallel education, right from the school level: an education that equipped the child to question and deal with society.

The children could now tell a society which was trying to rob them of their self-esteem: “We will not let you do this.” These changes are the yield of 30 years of work.



Trafficking, sex and labor; Partner's in Law and Development organised a meeting on 10 years of Laws implementation

On the occasion of the completion of 10 years of Criminal Law Reform on sexual violence, harassment and trafficking the Partners for Law in Development organised a national meeting in Delhi from 23rd to 25th August 2023. The meeting was aimed at taking stock of the implementation of law reforms that had taken place in 2013. A panel was organised on Trafficking Sex and Labor. The background of the panel was the efforts to introduce a law on Trafficking in Persons in 2021 which was criticised by sex worker collectives, labor rights and child rights groups. The challenge posed by the proposed bill included lack of clarity in definitions, myriad of legal provisions that clashed, lack of clarity on the continued conflation of adult consenting sex workers and victims of trafficking. The continued approach of criminalisation of sex work by viewing it through the lens of trafficking reflects a lack of understanding on the offence of trafficking. So there is only focus on sexual exploitation and a lack of focus on labor. The panel discussion was attended by Aarthi Pai and Kiran Deshmukh. The discussion centred around the absence of feminist support for sex workers who looked sex work as a form of labor. Many feminists continued to posit sex work as a form of service provided under force. The panel was attended by lawyers, trans activists and labor activists.

1. Conversations with other movements to build awareness – Cross movement dialogues [Core Grant]

1. Women in Working People's Coalition

SANGRAM, VAMP, Muskan and National Network of Sex Workers are members of Working People's Coalition since 2022. The Working People's Coalition is a network of organization working on issues related to the concerns of informal workers from construction, domestic work, brick kilns, care work, self employed, farm labor, forest workers, health workers, gig workers, sweatshop labour, contract workers and sex workers. The Coalitions interventions converge to a great extent with the work that SANGRAM does on sex work including registration of informal workers, guaranteed income and decent wage, social security and social protection, unsafe migration and trafficking, access to justice for all workers.

The coalition brings together all these informal workers to address common issues of labour and ensure that policy formulations are inclusive to these concerns. In 2022, the Coalition included in its debates the context of sex work as labor. SANGRAM is a part of its member based network called Labour Axis which comprises of academicians and activists working on labor issues at the local, national and international level. The main function of Labor Axis is to disseminate knowledge and perspectives on a broad range of issues that impact labour including political economy, history, sociology, labour policy and intersectionality. As part of this dialogue series, a webinar was organized on “Understanding sex work and sex worker rights in India”. The webinar was attended by over 50 members of WPC. A panel of representatives from VAMP and SANGRAM Meena Seshu, Kiran Deshmukh and Aarthi Pai spoke on the fight against trafficking, current status of the law and its impact on sex workers, demand for total decriminalisation and what it meant for the movement. Kiran Deshmukh explained the notion of sex work as work and the struggle for financial security, access to treatment and safe working conditions, fight against violence by state and non-state actors, educating clients and workers on health

and safety; which were key aspects of the sex worker rights movement.

In 2023, a two -day cross movement feminist dialogue for Women in WPC was conducted under the VAMP Institute initiative, in Mumbai on 27th and 28th September 2023. 25 participants from a broad range of labor movements attended the meeting. Some of the common issues faced by women workers were discussed during the two day meeting including Patriarchy and trade unions, violence against women in working spaces, sexual harassment, reproductive health and birth control, ratification of C 190 ILO Convention, single earner households run by women and their concerns.

Four focus areas were discussed during the meeting including Awareness and conscious raising on Violence Against Women in WPC organization, leadership through knowledge and information in mainstream worker movements, politicization of issues of feminist and women workers movements; reproductive rights and the need to emerge from a heteronormative framework and be sensitive to LGBTQ movement workers also.

Conversations around work and the fights of sex workers was also presented in the discussion. In the case of sex workers, the stigma and marginalization due to their work, made it difficult for them to even speak of themselves as workers. Unlike many other women worker movements which began closer to zero, in the case of sex workers, they had to begin from the negative often having to justify their work as a form of labor and face a backlash from activists and feminists who said they suffered from false consciousness. This made it difficult to even argue for their rights as workers.

A discussion on issues faced by women established that while there was a strong participation by women in the labor workforce, their contribution was often invisibilised. They were either scheme or volunteer workers or disguised in care, unpaid or under paid work even by institutions such as ILO. Secondly when there was a rise in unemployment, it was often women who bore the brunt by being ill paid or in less skilled jobs. Women workers were often subject to greater surveillance by a patriarchal state, rather than focusing on safe migration strategies that kept women workers safe. Hence patriarchal attitudes and exploitation were key mechanisms of the State apparatus.

Crucial outcomes of the meeting was the need to conduct a deeper analysis of policies related to women workers, POSH

training for women workers, developing and building communication material for women workers including newsletters, blogs, facebook page for women in WPC. Some of the topics on which the Coalition of Women in WPC will work in the coming year include – Sexual harassment at the workplace, stories of women leaders and activists in WPC, backlash faced by women in labour unions, new labor codes and its impact on women, women in non -traditional jobs, ILO C 190 ratification campaign.

The partnership with WPC and women workers within it will be continued as a crucial cross movement dialogue with the workers movement in the coming year.



2. Kink Conversation on Consent

In 2022, SANGRAM and the sex workers began a partnership with people who practice kink. One of the reasons that VAMP, Muskan and SANGRAM partnered in this VAMP Institute was to understand how consent plays out in other similarly stigmatised forms of expression of sexuality or work. Kink is often imagined as a elite and western construct which has been imported into India. This workshop series was meant to explore whether clients of sex workers also have or engage in kinky desires. “Kinky desires are those desires that involve fetishes and / or power play and/ or are an intermingling of pain and pleasure” (Kinky Collective, 2022). Some of the areas of convergence between kinky desires were seen in terms of receiving pain for some participants, power play as a form of pleasure, importance of giving and receiving consent in any act, pleasure as a right of all those who participated, ability to negotiate acts of pleasure.

Some of the ways forward for a cross -movement dialogue is to enable a better understanding of consent. Consent to other and consent to self. In case of consent to self is closely linked to attitudes within the community in this case – sex workers; building an understanding of feminism vis a vis kind and sex work.

As a continued partnership, SANGRAM participated in the National kink Festival in Goa on 15th April 2023. A panel was organised on Kink and Feminism by Nirantar, Kinky Collective on Feminism and Kink. The key issues raised in the discussion were whether there is a conflict between feminism and submission. The manner in which kink contributes to feminism. The sex workers movement of engaging with feminist was shared by Meena Seshu and the impact that it had in shifting perspectives of feminists on the Fault lines in understanding sex work as a form of labor.

Table 10. Training conducted by SANGRAM 2023-24

Year	Subject	Place	
2023	HIV/STI prevention and treatment session	Satara	Dr. Vinay Kulkarni, for female, trans and male workers in VAMP and Muskan
2024	HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support, pandemic preparedness	Pune	Dr. Vinay Kulkarni, for female, trans and male workers from CBOs across Maharashtra
2023	Basics of HIV/STI, Counselling and care	Kolhapur	Meena Seshu for trans sex workers in Muskan Kolhapur
2023	Collectivisation Model of SANGRAM Sanstha	Sangli	Meena Seshu and Aarthi Pai – for visitors from Naz Foundation. A team of 10 counsellors, workers and activists visited SANGRAM, VAMP and Muskan to interact with community leadership and understand the collectivisation model that was used by SANGRAM.
2023	Women's Health - Menstrual Cups, Health and Hygiene	Sangli	Training by Swati Patil for women from VAMP
2024	Leadership Development	Goa	Community Centered Approaches - Developing Leadership for your social work professionals in SANGRAM conducted by Born To Win and SANGRAM
2024	Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women	Bangalore	Training 60 leaders of NNSW to make a formal submission to the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women on her call “Prostitution and Violence Against Women and Girls”
2023	Collectivisation and building strong collectives	Bhuj	Training 30 members of Samvedna in principles of Collectivisation
2023	Collectivisation and Networking	Alapuzzha	Training 25 members of the Kerala Network of Sex Workers on Importance of networking

2024	World Social Forum Maharashtra	Satara	Two-day training cum workshop on the world social forum process and participation
2023	10 Years of Criminal Reforms – Sexual Assault, Trafficking	Delhi	Kiran Deshmukh and Aarthi Pai attended a three day meeting of Partners in Law and Development to mark the 10 th anniversary of the Criminal Law Reforms. Session on trafficking, labor and sex work was organised.
2024	World Social Forum, Global, Kathmandu, Nepal	Nepal	Three-day meeting of activists across the globe
2023	Kink and Sex Work, Goa Festival	Goa	Discussion between workers from VAMP, Muskan and Kink Collective on commonalities between sex work and kink
2024	Education for Empowerment, 24 th General Conference of International Federation of Worker's Education Association (IFWEA)	Cape Town	Aarthi Pai and Meena Seshu attended the 24 th conference of IFWEA as part of the Transformation Global Leadership Program – which is a joint initiative of Center for Innovation in Work Organising (CIWO) based in USA and Labor Research Service (LRS) based in South Africa.

The program aims to address the gaps in women's leadership and provide spaces where women can connect, share their stories and receive support in developing their leadership. A leadership journey mapping exercise was undertaken by the CIWO and LRS with women leaders using the zoom and whatsapp platform to provide this leadership space for women leaders. At the conference, leaders who participated in the leadership journey mapping workshops shared their learnings with educators. A side event was also held at the conference to host a strategy session with women leaders to develop a gendered frame for leadership in the workers movement globally.

Meena and Aarthi shared the experiences of workers from VAMP, NNSW and SWASA on educating workers as leaders who came from the margins and worked in stigmatized and marginalised forms of work.

3. India – on Submission to the Special Rapporteur on call for inputs on prostitution and violence against women and girls

The Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women called for inputs on her proposed report to the UN Human Rights Council on Prostitution and Violence Against Women and Girls. The call is extremely insulting to sex workers. The thematic report of the SR on VAW was presented to the UN Human Rights Council at its 56th session in June 2024 and examined the nexus between the global phenomenon of prostitution and violence against women and girls.



scan for the report

The one day training was aimed at building awareness of the UN Special Rapporteur Call for Submission on “Prostitution and violence against women and girls”. The participants had detailed discussions on the questions posed by the Special Rapporteur.

Members of the National Network of Sex Workers made a submission to the UN Special Rapporteur mechanisms. The National Network of Sex Workers and allies across India came together and sent an online petition to the Special Rapporteur calling on her to recognise the progress made in recognition of rights of sex workers globally, instead of conflating human trafficking, sexual exploitation, force and sex work. Over 3000 people signed the online petition globally. Members of the National Network of Sex workers who were provided extensive training on the call for inputs also made a submission.



4. Trans sex workers from Muskan Sanstha filed individual petitions in the Maharashtra High court to implement the transgender reservations guaranteed under the Transgender Act. Impact of training provided on the Transgender Act of 2019.

A fight for justice - The decision of the Supreme Court in 2014 on the rights of transgender people was a watershed movement, which was followed by the Transgender Law in 2019. In 2022 the State of Maharashtra sought to recruit 17000 police posts of police constables. This was the largest recruitment that the state was undertaking in recent years. Contrary to the direction of the Supreme Court and the 2019 Transgender Act, no provisions had been made for transgenders in the recruitment. The forms gave only two options of male and female. The State government refused to amend this. Trans people who were undergoing training in Muskan had started preparing for induction into the police constabulary. A small group of transgender people approached the Maharashtra Tribunal seeking implementation of their rights. This was contested by the State on ground that sexual abuse of its police men and even transgenders would be at risk. The Tribunal directed the State government to include transgender as an

option in the form. The order was challenged in the High Court where the State claimed that the transgenders would disturb the heterogenous nature of the police force. The High Court confirmed the order of the Tribunal and went further ahead to direct that if the recruitment rules were not modified then no written examinations could be conducted for any candidate.



In response to the order, the Maharashtra government amended its rules and made provisions for transgenders to apply as well as prescribe physical standards for transgenders. 73 transgender people applied in the two -day window. However, since the Maharashtra government did not prescribe any reservations, transgender candidates were made to compete with male candidates and their were eliminated in the physical rounds. Muskan members who had participated went to the Tribunal on grounds of having gotten more points but not being considered as they were expected to compete with male cut off points in the physical. The Tribunal directed the State government to allow transgender people to sit for the written examination and two seats were reserved for the transgender candidates. In November 2023, the Maharashtra Tribunal passed the following judgment

If the transgender candidate has more than 50% marks they should be appointed. Secondly, if any transgender candidate has got more than 45% marks but was not successful and age barred then they should be given one more chance to apply. By this judgment the tribunal has made a critical contribution of how the State

Governments recruitment policy for Transgender should be

- A. Fix lower bench mark for transgender in preliminary and main examinations.**
- B. Give grace marks to reach cut off**
- C. Give more chances to appear for the examination by giving age relaxation**
- D. Offer concession in education qualification and experiences.**

Specific relief was given with reference to the applicants stating that one post for transgender was to be reserved.

The Tribunal rejected the stand of the State government that advantage of their transgender identity benefits once they apply under their vertical identity, stating that this was inconsistent with the Trans Act. However on the issue of reservation, the Tribunal states that there was no provision in the 2019 Transgender Act.

This fight waged by members of Muskan has been a highlight of the advocacy efforts undertaken through training and cross movement dialogues.

5. Supreme Court Order – Advocating for sex worker rights

In May 2022, the long struggle of sex workers in India saw some degree of fruition with the Supreme Court giving six crucial directives of the rights of sex workers on health, against police violence, directives against using condoms as evidence for commission of an offence, rights to seek medical assistance in cases of sexual violence, directives against voyeuristic media practices. Members of SANGRAM Sanstha, VAMP and NNSW had played a crucial role in obtaining these orders. Since 2014 they have been consistently meeting with the Supreme Court panel to speak of their concerns on the laws such as ITPA, trafficking laws. With this order the challenge under this grant was to disseminate this order amongst sex workers and also encourage them to use the order to engage officials and advocate for their rights at the national, state and district level.

In a shift seen on the ground women in sex workers started interacting with the police and districts legal services authority demanding that police take action against violence faced due to law enforcement authorities. They have called for greater assistance from the Legal Aid Cells to provide free legal services to sex

workers when faced with violence. They have also started calling for differentiation between sex work and trafficking. More sex workers have demanded and accessed social entitlements and identification documents. Traditionally sex workers have been unwilling to trust government departments with identification documents since they fear that their identities will be revealed, their documents will be given only if they provide sexual services. Many sex workers have shared this experience of exploitative practices in the past. Hence, a lot of confidence building has happened through training of leaders.

Sex workers have also demanded for safe working conditions through reduction of exploitative practices, filing complaints against exploiters and those who commit acts of violence. While there is a long way to go for the movement for total decriminalization, steps have been taken by the sex workers and supporters to strengthen their demands.

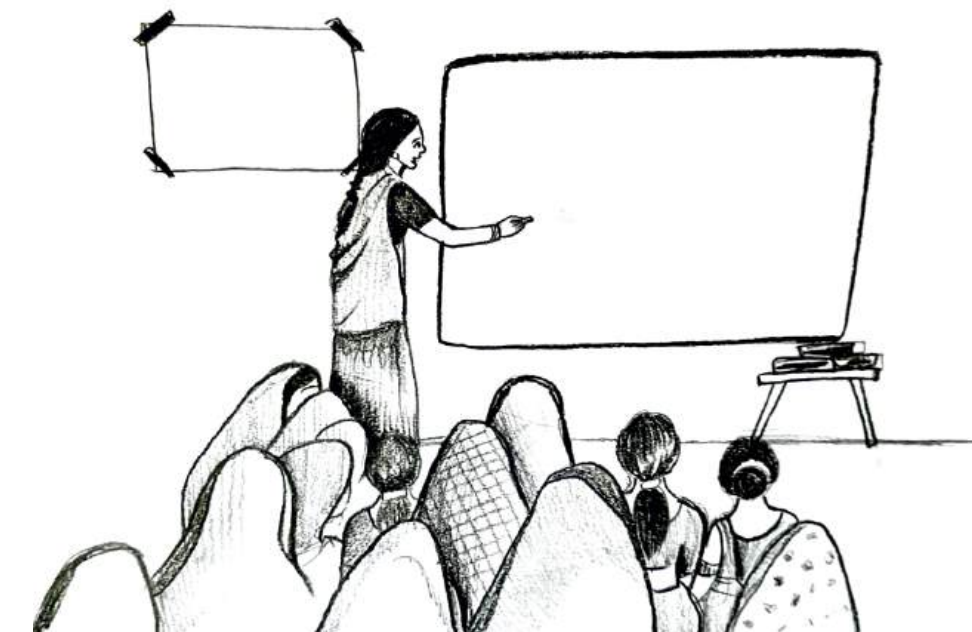
6. Children of Sex Workers Program - Strengthening Education, Nutrition support

Government of Maharashtra had denied SANGRAM the license to run a hostel for kids of VAMP. SANGRAM has now decided to support Ms. Babita Tarte, Ms. Laxmi Mali and Ms. Rupali Kale who have kindly stepped up to help VAMP fulfil their dreams of educating their young. Babita and Kavita are members of the Mira collective of children of sex workers. Babita's home as the facility is now called has 17 children who are there from morning to evening. 8 boys from the Mitra Hostel have been sent to Hutatma Nanaksingh Hostel in Walwa. A female student who passed out of Mitra Hostel is supported by SANGRAM for higher education at Krishna Institute of Medical Sciences, Karad.

Unfortunately, private hostels in Sangli district are expensive and they only offer English medium education. Government run/supported hostels require that the children are committed to the Child Welfare Committee of the Women and Child Department and sex worker mothers from VAMP are unwilling to do the same. Activists and sex worker mothers then decided to approach one of their own to help them care for their children in collaboration with VAMP and they took the decision to approach Ms. Babita Tarte who is the

daughter of a sex worker from VAMP. VAMP then approached SANGRAM asking for support under the supplementary education programme. SANGRAM now provides tuition fees, stationary, books, bags and other material needs of children of sex workers in Babita's home, Hutatma Nanaksingh Hostel, Krishna Institute of Medical Sciences and at all the sites where VAMP works.

SANGRAM is providing scholarship to 8 children for higher education in Hotel Management, Nursing, Physiotherapy, Automobile service, Auxiliary Nursing and Midwife, mechanical engineering, MPSC preparation.



Digital Literacy for rural women and adolescents in slum areas, Kolhapur.

Women from marginalised communities continue to be disconnected from the globalised world of today which is highly dependent on the digital highway. Lack of internet education, knowledge and awareness has meant that rural women and girls are deprived access to the information highway. Most physical information spaces like libraries and traditional mediums of knowledge have almost disappeared since they are competing with the World Wide Web information which is available at the fingertips. Young people depend highly on readily accessible information rather than spending time in libraries. In such an environment, those who are digitally illiterate are on the backfoot and dependent on the few who provide this information at a price. Hence digital literacy for rural women and young people has become the need of the hour.

SANGRAM Sanstha partnered with an academician and researcher in Kolhapur who conducted an interesting intervention and study on digital literacy for school going students and

rural poor women and adolescents in the slum areas of Rajendra Nagar, Kolhapur. Under the initiative, around 170 adolescents were to be trained in 4 batches of around 42 students each.



The three -month literacy training provided by Rehana's team focuses on the following topics introduction to computer – input, output and processing devices, starting and shutting down a computer; paints and applications; Microsoft Word and its applications; Microsoft Excel and its applications; composing emails and creating attachments; internet surfing, online banking, online purchasing, UPI payments; social media platforms.

A pre and post test was conducted by the team to understand the impact of the digital literacy classes along 25 indicators. The findings revealed that there was a huge increase in the awareness of students once they completed the three month course on all the indicators. 100 percent of the students who completed the course knew parts of computers. Students found paint related applications much more than older women. All the students were able to successfully open Word documents and around 90% acquired skills in the use of fonts, layout, use of commands like selecting, cut and copy matter. 50% of the total students were practiced in the use of excel application. Housewives were not very interested in the Excel application, while students found

tremendous use for it. A big achievement for the students was the use of mobile phones to surf the internet. The students began to take a lot of interest in searching for information on internet use keyword search, using UPI to transfer money.

This has been an extremely heartening experience in strengthening skills of rural women in digital literacy. SANGRAM Sanstha hopes to replicate this effort in rural areas of Sangli among rural women and adolescent girls.

7. Conducting Research

Nagpur Raids and Arrests and economic impact on sex workers

Sex workers in the Ganga Jamuna area have been facing constant raids and forced rehabilitation. In 2023 alone, major raids were conducted where over 81 sex workers were picked up from the Ganga Jamuna area. A research was conducted to study the economic impact that these raids cause on the lives of workers. Around 40 who had been picked up agreed to participate. Many women have been spending money on bails and then keeping their families fed and safe when there is no work due to the lock down of the area. The research has tremendous import since there is a common notion that women in sex work are forced, trafficked victims. The research however continues to show how women make a living against tremendous odds, in difficult and precarious work environments.

Sex Workers Organising in India : SANGRAM History

A team from SANGRAM wrote a chapter for the Springer Publication entitled '*Sex, gender and health: Perspectives from South Asia*'. The article explores the activism of SANGRAM and all the activists to claim sex workers' rights, with a specific focus on health and wellbeing. The chapter was co authored by Meena Seshu, Laxmi Murthy and Aarthi Pai.

Sex Workers movement globally/ position paper for UNAIDS on History of Sex Work

A team from SANGRAM developed a position paper for UNAIDS to chronicle the UNAIDS Secretariat's positioning on sex work and establish its historical evolution through community advocacy and evidence. This will ensure that UNAIDS builds on a shared understanding of said positioning and is better able to deliver on the Global AIDS Strategy and Political Declaration targets with and for sex worker communities globally. The paper was researched by Meena Seshu and Laxmi Murthy.

Researching into the History of Sex Work and Sex Workers in Medieval India

Sex workers in the Ganga Jamuna area have been facing constant raids and forced rehabilitation. In 2023 alone, major raids were conducted where over 81 sex workers were picked up from the Ganga Jamuna area. A research was conducted to study the economic impact that these raids cause on the lives of workers. Around 40 who had been picked up agreed to participate. Many women have been spending money on bails and then keeping their families fed and safe when there is no work due to the lock down of the area. The research has tremendous import since there is a common notion that women in sex work are forced, trafficked victims. The research however continues to show how women make a living against tremendous odds, in difficult and precarious work environments.

In North and Central India under the Mughal rule the institution of the dancing 'nautch' girls and kothas flourished, the Tawaifs of Benares and Awadh wrote classical compositions and contributed to India's growing Hindustani classical music scene (Dewan, 2019). In South India, there was the devadasi tradition, in which girls (both cis- and transgender), largely from the dalit community, were dedicated to the Goddess Yellamma, and were also

equipped with considerable skills in poetry, music and dance while being provided with livelihood, security, community identity, and support (Murthy L & Saraswathi Seshu, M, 2014; Bhushan, 2018).

Traditional communities allied with the sex industry have had a huge role in carrying forward music and dance forms, and eventually added to the emergence of modern cinema, where today, there still seems to be a fascination with age old dichotomies of the sex worker and the 'good' woman.

Amidst these contesting presentations and histories, the contributions and role played by sex workers through history has been criminalised or lost.



8. Sex Workers and Allies South Asia (SWASA)

At the South Asia level, SANGRAM has been extremely active as mentors and in building the profile of SWASA.

Submission to the SR – VAW on the call for inputs on prostitution and violence against women and girls

In the past couple of years, there has been an increase in submissions made by sex workers collectives and networks at the South Asia level to treaty bodies and special reporting mechanisms of the UN system. This includes submissions to the CEDAW Committee, Universal Periodic Review, UNHCR, Special Rapporteurs on Trafficking. Traditionally, sex worker organisations from the global south have found it extremely difficult to engage with UN processes because of the language, complexity of reporting processes, evidenced based submissions. Under this grant SANGRAM began a concerted effort to simplify UN treaty mechanisms such as CEDAW, UPR, Human Rights Council reporting mechanism. Graphic books were developed in Indian languages, Nepali, Bangla, Sinhalese to encourage sex worker engagement. Since 2014, slow and steady progress has been made in India at the South Asia level. Due to the VAMP Institute training in India which was scaled up in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka; sex worker networks from these countries



submitted status reports to the CEDAW Committee in 2014 (India), 2016 (Bangladesh), 2018 (Nepal, Sri Lanka). However, in an extremely biased manner, the Special Rapporteur's call for inputs exemplified rights-unfriendly approach and assumptions against which sex workers and their allies have struggled for decades. The Special Rapporteur rejected the term “sex worker” in favour of denigrating and archaic terms such as “women who have been prostituted”, which embody the idea of women not in control of their own destiny and livelihood. The call for input equated sex work and human trafficking, a conflation that the agencies of the UN Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS have condemned.

World Social Forum, Nepal

The 16th World Social Forum (WSF) was held in Kathmandu, Nepal from 15 – 19 February 2024, bringing together over 50,000 people and over 1400 movements and organisations globally. The Forum is seen as a “open space for the free and horizontal exchange of ideas, experiences and strategies oriented towards enticing and generating alternative to neo liberalism”. The Forum was held in Asia after a gap of over 20 years at a time when there is a churning amongst the people in the Global South.

SANGRAM, SWASA, NNSW and SWASA Partners from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh and India participated in the World Social Forum. SWASA organized a panel discussion to build solidarity. Rainbow Planet is a coalition of diverse progressive groups working for the rights of sexuality minorities and marginalized community members includes LGBTQ+ sex workers (Male/Female/ and trans gender and PLHA (People Living With HIV/AIDS) Main goal of Rainbow Planet is to bring together sexuality minorities, sex workers and PLHA to a common platform to build solidarity within ourselves and also with other social movements. The panel sessions was structured for Sri Lanka, India, Nepal and Bangladesh community leaders. The program was facilitated by Shanti Tiwari and moderate by Dr. Meena Poudel. In this panel session community from LGBTQ, Female Sex Workers and PLHIV have viewed their ideas for the state. The focused questions was what is another world for our community?

- **Shrabonti from Bangladesh:** We must live as being the human. There will be no exploitation, discrimination the people like us. We need the support for certainty of human right.
- **Amrita Tripathi from India:** They have the program of public hearing. She focused that margins will have power. She wished for the society based on equality. Patriarchy is very dangerous that the concept regarding the sexuality of the society is wrong. The system domination of Minority should be end and the people like me should be respected.
- **Bharathi from India:** As a person living with HIV just living is not so important. Living with dignified life is important. We have to search that the fundamental life of the people. We have not identified us within our family, law don't know us so I just want to introduce myself as a sex worker and a human being.
- **Preti Petter from Nepal:** We should choose our interest at first. We have to end the judgmental attitude of the society regarding the LGBTQI. We can capture our uniqueness and show the world that we are also human being.
- **Nabodika from Sri Lanka:** Most of the female sex workers are living in fear. But we have to be clear that sex work is our profession. Sex work is the matter of labor right. Sex workers are making money for the family for survive so how it can be a bad work? We should make people aware and the state should address the issues of marginalized community. Sex worker should be incorporated the labor union. She shared that they have requested the human right department to make guideline for the sex workers work as a profession.

Bharati from India and Nabodi from Sri Lanka have the common voice that sex work, trafficking and prostitution are different. Sex work is self-selection profession with consent. They asked for the government of related country that do not use the police force for the Female sex workers. Their demand was decriminalizing the sex work. Global term should be the same regarding the Female sex workers.



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Rainbow Stall: The stall of SWASA was very attractive and colorful. More than 2000 people observed and signed the solidarity the topic Sex work as a work. India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh community people and the supporters, allies and activist group managed and facilitated the whole 5 days of WSF. There was the little space where the women performing their art of makeup and Mehendi.

Rainbow Stall World Social Forum 2024

Rainbow Rally: During the solidarity march in WSF 2024, SWASA including the community moved the city with colorful dress up and carrying the play card and Rainbow banner. Red umbrella and slogan have made the rally so attractive and meaningful. There was the presence of LGBTQ, PLHA, FSWS and all.

Global Feminist Forum: SWASA also involved the Global Feminist Forum. All of the SWASA event was linked to Global Feminist Forum. A representative from SWASA South Asia MS Meena Seshu participated in the panel session. She had explained about the history of sex workers and why the sex workers work needs to be identified as a form of work.

