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# 35 ANNUAL REPORT

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### Saheli HIV/AIDS Karyakarta Sangh

Saheli HIV/AIDS Karyakarta Sangh is a Sex-Workers Collective. It is the only one collective of sex workers of its kind in the Pune City. The Collective was established in 1998, with the voluntary efforts of women in the red-light area of Pune City. It was

conceptualized to bring women in sex work together and resolve their issues by taking constructive actions to help them assert their rights as human beings.

In 1991, the People's Health Organization (PHO) was established with the goal of creating awareness about HIV/AIDS prevention and control amongst sex workers. On gaining some experience working with the women in sex work, it was realized that the sex worker's community encountered multiple issues and requires support. Thus, it was decided that a self-governing body run by and for women sex workers needs to be established to tackle their issues.

Since 1998, with the support of PHO, the voluntary efforts of sex workers and social workers from Budhwar Peth, Saheli was formed by women sex workers. Saheli is a community-based organization that works with the female sex workers of Budhwar Peth. Saheli is the only female sex workers collective in Pune. Saheli began with 9 members, but today the collective is 1500 members strong and counting.

## Premise

History has proved that collectivization helps in strengthening sense of belonging, and unite people in a common struggle so as to defend their rights and bring the mainstream society to deconstruct prejudices. At Saheli we are attempting to achieve the same and trying to have an accurate understanding of the status of sex-workers in context to sex-work in India.

Saheli believes that with little support, sex workers have the ability to rise up from the minerality of their living conditions. Our faith in the validity and legitimacy of the empowerment approach, both at individual and collective levels, has driven us to raise awareness among sex-workers, and support them in developing autonomy. The collectivization of sex-workers allows women in sex-work to create a community and kinship to counter their isolation and improve their living conditions. It provides a space for women to express their concerns and needs without fear of being judged.

## The Location- Budhwar Peth Red-Light Area

Pune's Budhwar Peth is located in the heart of the old city of Pune. It is a business hub for local vendors selling goods required for day to day purposes. Amid the buzzing market lies India's third-largest red-light area. It has been estimated that Budhwar Peth and part of neighboring Shukrawar Peth contain

about 500 brothels and 4500 sex workers. The area consists of seven main lanes and fifteen small internal lanes. Women from different states of India including Nepal and Bangladesh live here. Around 150 transgender sex workers are also part of the area

This area comes under Faraskhana Police station - Zone 1. Similarly, two police chowkis are located at Shukrawar Peth and Mandai (central market).

### **Target Group:**

Saheli has reached out to approximately 2000 women in sex-work out of which it has approximately 500 are non-brothel- based sex workers. It also provides support services to 50 children of sex workers, while 14 children of sex workers use Saheli's in 24 hr. transit home.

### **Vision**

Empowerment of women in sex work through Collectivization.

### **Mission**

To enhance and enable a greater level of self-protection among women in sex work through a sense of community and identity.

### **Aims & Objectives**

- ◆ To improve the overall well being of women in sex work through our work and to change the societal attitude towards women in sex work.
- ◆ To provide free health services to women in sex work and their children
- ◆ To work for the care and education of children of women in sex work.
- ◆ To provide free legal aid assistance, help to the deserving and needy women.
- ◆ To make the women in sex works aware of their own reproductive and sexual health; encourage them and assist them to take treatment for related issues.
- ◆ To take some steps to prevent minor girls (below the age of 18 years) from entering into sex work.
- ◆ To provide the care and support to women affected by HIV.
- ◆ To educate women to protect themselves from HIV infection.

- ◆ To provide for hospice care for terminally ill women.
- ◆ To prevent discrimination against women infected/affected by HIV.
- ◆ To become self-supporting and self-organized for long term HIV/AIDS-related interventions.

### **Current Issues:**

There is an evident change in the trend of sex work over the recent past. The number of brothel-based sex workers is decreasing. The perceived notion of customers that the prevalence of HIV is high among sex workers in the red light area as compared to non-brothel-based areas. Similarly, the increased number of police patrolling and rescue raid operations are adversely affecting the business. Forced rescue operation and arbitrary use of the Bombay Police Act, section 110/117 are regular events for sex workers in Budhwar Peth.

## **Projects & Program**

### **Advocacy against Violence & Alliance for Justice (AAVAJ)**

“AAVAJ” a project based on advocacy was implemented to sensitize Maharashtra Police Department, State Commission for women on the exclusion of sex workers from the arbitrary provision and implementation of Bombay Police Act section 110 and 117.

### **Social Media Campaign**

Saheli along with the National Network of Sex Workers and its other partners celebrated “Legal Aid Day” on 9<sup>th</sup> November. On this occasion, a social media campaign was launched and a positive discussion was conducted with expert representatives from the various field with the community at large with an aim to protect the rights of sex workers.

A Social Media Campaign is a coordinated effort to reinforce or assist with a goal to be achieved using one or more social media platforms. These campaigns are strategically focused to have measurable outcomes and are ultimately aimed at influencing people to feel or act in a certain way.

Dignitaries named Sanket Deshpande (Maitra Yuva Foundation, Pune), Sanyogita Dhamdhare (social activist), Vidhu Prabha (Rise-up Coordinator), Tejaswi Sevekari

(Executive Director, Saheli Sangha, Pune), Meena Kohli and Mahadevi Madar (Saheli) were the chief guests of the program who inaugurated the campaign and launched the introductory pamphlets about the project both in Marathi and English. Members of different organizations, people from the press, community members and leaders were present at the event. Everyone shared valuable opinions regarding the position of women in our society and so as of the sex workers' rights as a human being.

## Rise Up

### Study on Police Intervention

Saheli conducted study on the police interventions in brothels. The objective of this study was to collect information and evidences on police harassment in the red-light area. It made visits to 351 Brothels and collected data from approximately 2100 sex workers and .....the brothels owner.

The study showed that although it is legal for sex workers to do business in the brothel and solicit in the lanes of the red-light area, police forcefully imposed fines.

### Legal Aid Day

A Social Media Campaign was launched on the occasion of the 'Legal Aid Day'. The purpose of this campaign was to share expert's views and initiate positive discussion with the community. The experts Sanket Deshpande (Maitra Yuva Foundation, Pune), Sanyogita Dhamdhare, (social activist), Vidhu Prabha (Rise-up Coordinator), Tejaswi Sevekari (Executive Director, Saheli Sangha, Pune), participated in the program. Ms. Meena Kohli and Ms. Mahadevi Madar (Saheli) were the chief guests of the program.

Nearly, 1000 community members took advantage of the campaign. It helped in creating awareness on the legal rights of the sex workers and empowered them to reduce police harassment.

### Highlights

1. Saheli conducted the preliminary meeting with District Legal Services Aid (DLSA) and introduced Saheli's programs and activities with its senior members of DLSA. The dialogue would be continued for better insights.
2. A concept note on the AAVAJ project and plan of the National Level Consultancy on Bombay Police Act section 110 and 117, is shared with partner organizations.

On this occasion several experts addressed issues and appealed the sex workers to unite and collectively fight the issues concerning police harassment, equal rights, and need to effectively use social media. The campaign particularly focused on the need to de-criminalize adult consensual sex-work, so as to ensure sex workers rights to livelihood and other labor rights by repealing the Bombay Police Act.

The media coverage of the campaign helped in advocating decriminalization of adult consensual sex-work so as to ensure sex worker's rights to livelihood. It also emphasized other labor rights of the female sex workers by repealing The Bombay Police Act.

Saheli also published pamphlets based on the concept of the campaign and distributed to the Maharashtra State Police, and the Network of the organizations. The pamphlets were published in both Marathi and English language.

### **Fact-Finding Committee**

Saheli Sangh, along with its partners in the National Network of Sex Workers (NNSW), Dr. Manisha Gupte of Mahila Sarvangin Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM) Alka Pawangadkar of Stree Mukti Sanghatana (SMS) and Adv. Lara Jesani (PUCL, Mumbai) formed the Fact-Finding Committee to assess the impact of the police crackdown in the red-light area of Maharashtra. The fact-finding survey was conducted in May 2019.

The data related to police crack-down and rescue operations in the last six months was collected from the Women and Child Development Department (WCD), Pune and Faraskhana Police Station. The study focused on the number of minors and women rescued during the raids and the current status of the rescued during that period. The Fact-Finding Team (FFT) also met women in sex work impacted by the police raids and collected their testimonies. These testimonies are evidence of the overt physical violence perpetrated by the police personnel. The FFT also visited the Shukrawar Peth and Faraskhana police station as well as the Dy. PI, Social Security Department. to understand their outlook towards the raids.

The FFT also studied the treatment sex-workers received in the court and looked into various media reports. They also met political leaders and non-governmental organizations operative in this area to understand their approach towards this issue.



**Amplify Change (can we mentioned background of this project? Such as SARVOJANA coalition project SRHR advocacy etc. From project proposal)**

Saheli developed two effective tools, pictorial weekly sheet and referral slip under this project. It also conducted two types of training one was to build capacities of the community leaders and second was to build awareness on various issues of concern such as human rights, breast and cervical cancer, etc.

**Pictorial Weekly Sheet**

Saheli has developed a pictorial weekly sheet for its peer educator to collect information from the sex workers. The peer educators belong to the community. They are illiterate therefore easy format was developed to collect information from the community on sex worker's health conditions. Saheli provided training to these peer educators to administer this tool. This tool has been effective in collecting information from the community.

**Referral Slip**

Referral slip was developed to collect health status of the sex workers, such as pregnancy, abortion, contraception, etc. and the infection or illness she is suffering such as STI/RTIs, HIV/AIDS, cancer, mental health, etc. This tool helped in understanding the health condition of the sex worker who were referred to the clinics.

**Awareness Trainings**

Saheli has conducted several trainings for the community leaders. A few of the training were focused on the activities that were initiated under the project such as administering weekly sheet and referral slips, while others were on awareness building on crucial issues. (Please add- Training conducted on cervical and breast cancer, contraception, pregnancy and abortion, infertility, mental health, counseling, leadership and governance, sexual health and sexual violence, sexual orientation etc.)

The community leaders of Saheli belongs to the grass roots and are part of the community it works with. Therefore, small trainings are required to help them understand the purpose and the procedures of the activities. The awareness building training focused mainly to share knowledge and empower women by disseminating information. The details of the training conducted is listed below:

## Awareness Building Trainings/ Conducted for the Peer Educators/Community Leaders

Topics	Month	Participants
	January	
	February	
	March	
	April	
	May	
	June	
	July	
Access to govt. schemes for sex workers	August	14
Method to use weekly sheet and referral slip	October	15
Baseline Assessment Report and Action plan	October	11
Social Media Training	November	80
Breast Cancer and Cervical Cancer	December	20
Fundamental Human Rights	December	31

### Baseline study

Saheli participated in an intensive baseline study that was conducted on ‘Advocacy to Improve Access for Female Sex Workers to Comprehensive, Non-Discriminatory SRHR Services’ in 3 states of India, mainly, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Maharashtra conducted by South India AIDS Action Programme (SIAAP). This assessment was conducted among 1000 FSWs during April and July 2019 in Tamil Nadu (398), Maharashtra (300) and Karnataka (302) and 20 Key influencers. Saheli took the responsibility of study conducted in Maharashtra.

The study focused on several aspects such as access to comprehensive, non-discriminatory, and confidential SRH services including services for mental health, abortion, contraception and against stigma, discrimination, and violence of FSWs in family, community, and healthcare settings. The study also tried to understand FSWs awareness on SRH programs, the services they availed pertaining to the currently available schemes and entitlements, and the challenges they faced.

## Ongoing Programs

### Healthcare Services

Saheli started community education interventions during the way back in **2013 we left government fund**. After interacting with the sex workers during the initial period we realized that they have a poor health condition and so we decided to provide health care services. Saheli started a clinic for general healthcare. Women found it useful, but within a few years, we realized that it was not enough and additional

services in sexual and reproductive healthcare were required. Thus, clinical sexual and reproductive healthcare services were provided. The clinic runs twice a week and provides a free service.

Since 2012 (2013), the Family Planning Association of India (FPAI) has been conducting a weekly clinic for Saheli's community. The treatment on the Sexual and Reproductive Health Project was started under the Suraksha Project. During this period 500 women access medical facilities from Saheli clinic.

Saheli also provides referral services and has established linkages with government health facilities for providing quality care to the women. During the year about 102 Patients were referred to Gadikhana hospital, Kamla Neharu hospital, Sasson hospital, NARI, FPAI govt. and private health facilities.

#### List of beneficiaries at Saheli's Health Clinic

Number of Persons		Patients Availing Treatment	
Old patients	435	General Treatment	462
New patients	70	HIV/STI/Reproductive and sexual health treatment	43
<b>Total</b>			

### Counselling & Legal Aid services

Counselling is an ongoing activity of Saheli. Since its inception, Saheli realized that women in sex-work lead a vulnerable and isolated life. They face issues related to health issues, children's education, family issues, legal issues, etc.

Saheli provides counselling support to women sex-workers. The counselling service is provided Monday to Saturday and legal aid clinic twice in a week (Tuesday and Friday) for 2-3 hours days of the week. This year 30 women took advantage of the service.

Saheli provides legal literacy and legal aid services to the women in sex-work with the support of pro bono lawyers as well as with District Legal Aid Authorities. About 100 Women took benefit of these services. Out of which 12 were given legal support during the police custody, 3 in filing case against the client, partner, and brothel owner, (other details)

### Children's Care Home

In the year 1998 Saheli identified the need to protect the children of sex-workers from the harmful and morbid environment of the red-light area. Since then Saheli is

running the Children's Care Home 24x7 for women in sex-work. The objective of this initiative is to provide a safe and healthy environment for the children.

There are about 21 inmates in the home. Out of which 14 are boy and 7 are girls. Their age expanse between 2yrs.... To 8yrs... age.

Peer Educators take care of the home. The children are provided educational support, and food breakfast, evening snacks (meals) twice a day, counselling and medical assistance. Play activities are also conducted here.

Saheli also provides assistance for school and hostel admissions for these children.

### Social Security/Entitlements

It was observed that not many sex-workers possess any identity proof, because of which they faced nuisance from police authorities. Thus, in the year 2013 Saheli took the initiative and started providing assistance to the women in sex-work in obtaining social entitlements such as PAN Cards, Aadhar cards, Ration Cards and Bank Accounts. So far more than 300 Many women have taken advantage of this facility. This year 100 women benefited from this initiative. Following are the numbers of beneficiaries who have availed the service:

PAN Cards	
Aadhar cards	
Ration Cards	
Bank Accounts	

Can we delete this table as we don't have specific figures with us.

### Drop-in Centre-

Saheli Sangh run drop in centre for women. For them we provide free meals, they can use wash room, rest and counselling. Children mothers taking benefits of this.

### Support Group-

Saheli has formed a group of People Living with HIV/AIDS, for whom monthly ration is provided. The monthly ration consists of rice, dal, and oil. This (each month 35-40 women)... Women took advantage of this facility. For this activity we get support from Mukul Madhav Foundation.

## Advocacy

All basic services and advocacy project for the sexual and reproductive health of women in sex work

## Building Awareness

Saheli builds awareness at two levels, one within the organization another at different institutions. Training and workshops on different topics are conducted for peer educators and women in sex-work. The objective is to strengthen them by sharing information on topics. This year Saheli conducted 9 training on topics such as ..... about sex workers rights, sex work as a work, decriminalisation, counselling and health etc. More than 500 Women sex workers and 20 Peer educators/ peer leaders participated.

Saheli participates in the training, workshops, and consultations organized by other organizations and educational institutes. Here, Saheli speaks on different issues of women in sex-work and the challenges they face and focus on their rights. During the year Saheli participated in the sessions conducted by organizations such as Mahila Hinsa Mukti Parishad, NNSW, KEM hospital etc.

## Annual day celebration and AGM

Saheli celebrates the Annual day on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019. Honorable Prithviraj Chowhan Principal District Judge and Chairman DLSA presided the event. On this occasion

## Key Learnings

Building awareness is the crucial to empower the sex workers.

Sex workers are not safe in their own homes. They need to be protected as they could be easily harassed and booked for soliciting, although they do not bypass the law.

Sensitization and awareness of the police authorities and officials on the fundamental rights of sex workers, is essential as most are unaware of the Bombay Police Act, 1951.

Collaborating with other organization was found essential to strengthen Saheli.

Advisory Committee members, Ethics Committee members, Board Members, representatives from the Donor agencies, Volunteers, representatives of organizations, community, and the well-wishers, participated in the event.

A member of the Board Director. Ms. Tejaswi Sevekari shared the Saheli's plan for 2020.

## Volunteers at Saheli

At Saheli, we encourage volunteerism. We believe that society needs to interact with the community and understand their plight and respect their existence.

We, therefore, encourage students from different national and international colleges to participate in different programs. The students from esteemed colleges, such as Symbiosis Law & Media College, SNTD College, ILS Law College, Alliance Students, Karve Institute of Social Service and SWI India Programme have contributed their time and served the community. Along with students, people working in different jobs, professional social workers also contribute as volunteers. The duration of the time they spent varies. A few of them have been associated with Saheli throughout the year. Saheli feels supported and the community is encouraged by their presence.

During the current year, 15 such volunteers participated in Saheli's varied programs. They supported Saheli in dispatching the newsletter to our donors, animating activities, translation work and digital writing, research, play activities with children, support in the kitchen. They have also helped Saheli in their program activities such as helping the community women to issue social security cards such as PAN cards and Ration Cards