



# A decade of **advocacy** efforts and **initiatives**

Tools and techniques used for encouraging change.

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Transpeople have been marginalised and discriminated due to their non-conforming gender roles within the larger society. They suffer innumerable atrocities and are subjected to varying and debilitating forms of discrimination and therefore, have resorted to begging and prostitution as livelihood activities<sup>12345</sup>. Their current disposition, unable to merge within society by carrying out mainstream roles of male and female, has forced them to be excluded living on the borders of society, discourse, policy, growth and development. Although the constitution grants citizens' fundamental individual rights, they most often do not extend to sexual minorities<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the Indian Penal Code (IPC) criminalizes the act of sodomy, therefore condemning the lifestyle of transgender (hijras) people, which also regrettably serves as their primary economic activity<sup>1345</sup>. As a consequence of the above

mentioned factors and added cultural stigma, the transgender community in India have been marginalised and relegated to the edge of social obscurity.

Their unequal and hindered access to basic services under constitutional rights granted to any individual in India, has also placed them at a very high risk for contracting and spreading STI's, HIV and AIDS. To address their inclusion within society, VHS promotes sensitization and capacity building training for health care providers, employers, law enforcement, judiciary, media and other government stakeholders. VHS through such opportunities has made the best use of building such networks and has championed for the cause of Transpeople in India. We encourage and

<sup>1</sup>Patel 2010

<sup>2</sup>Prakash & Karunanithi 2012

<sup>3</sup>McInnis et al. 2013

<sup>4</sup>Chakrapani et al. 2011

<sup>5</sup>Jose & Vinod 2014

2004

Transgender given the opportunity to act as master trainers, program officers, resource persons and, advisors for better program implementation with VHS

2005

Held a Transgender community leaders convention to initiate the declaration of a Transgender people day.

2006

Promoted transgender cultural troupes and celebrated Transgender Day for one week as part of mainstreaming efforts.

2007

Government of Tamil Nadu recognises transgender as a third gender and permits SRS at government hospitals.

2008

Successfully advocated the set up of a Transgender Welfare Board in Tamil Nadu

2009

Annual welfare budget allocated for transgenders people by the state of Tamil Nadu.

2010

Free land ownership provided for over 122 transgender people in Tamil Nadu.

2012

Transgender pension scheme for over 40 years of age announced in Tamil Nadu.

2013

Developed state specific stigma and discrimination reduction strategies.

2014

Judgement declared by the Supreme court on the acceptance of transgender as Third Gender.

2015

State of Kerala allocated funds for Transgender Welfare.

2016

Aided in the set up of a Transgender Welfare Board in 7 states.

promote community mobilization to ensure effective follow up and implementation of their submitted charter of demands. A few case studies to elaborate on the tools, techniques and strategies used in our successes on the advocacy efforts will be discussed in greater detail in this document.

Through the years, we have been successful in advocating for the mainstreaming and inclusion of Transgender people in the national agenda and policy. The timeline below is a brief summary of the successes we've had over the years.

VHS has been successful in its initiatives to bring forth change in ensuring transgender rights are given sufficient consideration while drafting policies and social initiatives. We were successful in bringing about such change not purely by advocacy efforts, but predominantly due to the manner in which we conduct and provide capacity building and sensitisation workshops to our stakeholders. We ensure that our workshops facilitate exchange of knowledge and ideas and encourage the participation of decision makers and key persons.

In this way we have managed to highlight and engage with members of the transgender community, thereby urging decision makers, policy makers, politicians, government officials and representatives in promoting a culture that is conducive to facilitating progress in transgender rights. We have been able to facilitate change in policy in multiple states through this way, and Kerala is an exemplary example in showcasing the progress over the years for the

### Loveland Arts Society - Kerala

Following a media sensitisation training conducted by the Loveland Arts Society, a CBO in Kollam, Kerala, the community was able to successfully lobby with the Local Government Panchayat Raj Institution for funds to secure the transgender community in their district. They allocated rupees 10 lakhs for the welfare of the transgender community. The same has happened in one more district in Kerala, Kannur, where the Panchayat Raj Institution has announced 11 Lakh rupees for transgender welfare.

transgender community.

A common theme that exists in all our efforts is the method we have identified to most effective in ensuring long term sustainable change, is by empowering the local communities. We work with local communities in all states, and encourage and promote dialogues between them and their government stakeholders and policy makers. Through this way we have found, that it creates a safe environment that is based in inclusion and acceptance of the transgender community.

Another key moment, that placed a badge to our colour was the national wide implementation of the TG Operational Guidelines as mandated by NACO. Previously there was no transgender specific curriculum in NACO's OG and all health centres and TI's across India used a common manual. VHS took this cause up and lobbied for the implementation of a separate transgender operational guidelines. This was possible due to discussions we held with the transgender community, that was previously not addressed. We found that some of these factors contributed to the poor testing and lack of adherence to treatment within the transgender community. VHS was successfully able to advocate for the need, relevance and implementation of a transgender specific guideline with the National AIDS Control body.

The Transgender people day conducted in Andhra Pradesh in 2017, was the first of its kind. Never before had the transgender community in Andhra Pradesh gathered together for their cause and this day was very significant to the community. We involved key government stakeholders to partake in this event, and overwhelmed by the response and dialogue they engaged in, they were making allowances and schemes available for transgender people. They requested that the community submit a charter of demands outlining their needs for review. This was managed by a local CBO, who were facilitated to follow up on its outcome. The government finally announced an old age pension scheme for all transgender people and is currently in the process of deliberation for the setup of a Transgender Welfare Board in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Our efforts have also yielded results as we've been able to not only advocate for change but in the

process develop the skills and capacities of the transgender community and transgender CBO's. A successful case in example will be in the state of Pondicherry, where we have worked with the local CBO, Sahodaran and initiated dialogue. Presently, the CBO and the Chief Minister engage in such close conversations, that the people feel heard and included within the larger community and no longer marginalised and excluded from decision making and schemes.

Similarly, in Delhi, we also conducted a Legal Aid Clinic in collaboration with Mitr Trust. During this clinic, we provided free education on the legal rights and schemes available to 20 transgender people in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. These enabled individuals went on to interact with their respective District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) and act a liaison in resolving and clarifying legal concerns and disputes within their transgender community.

Thus it is evident that through educating the community about their rights, we have empowered them to advocate for themselves and seek and ask for redressal forums for their inclusion in legal addendums.

## CHALLENGES

During our experience over the years we have been faced with challenges and hurdles. A lesson we would like to share was the situation in Delhi, where we

- Efforts and results in advocacy are not immediate. The changes VHS has been a part of, has only been the result of sustained and prolonged efforts.
- We have identified that it is first imperative to initiate and promote a healthy dialogue between the community and government personnel. Following which the CBO must take the lead on continuing a healthy relationship to achieve the desired outcome. By this way, we also reduce the gap between the common people and the state.

were unable to push forward our charter of demands to advocate for policy change. We initiated efforts in Delhi to facilitate the development of schemes and policies that would safeguard and provide the transgender community with opportunities. However, our submission of a charter of demands with the local CBO's did not bear fruit. We've held two consecutive Transgender People Days in Delhi for which we mobilised the entire transgender community in the area. This however, has increased attention and directed the spotlight on the issues faced by transgender people and we are hopeful the local CBO's will soon be able to drive change.



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