



## PRIs positive response to Transgender people - A demonstrated model

### Resource allocation for the welfare of Transgender (TG) people at Kannur Panchayat in Kerala, India

#### Summary

Despite high rates of literacy (93.91 percent)<sup>1</sup> in Kerala, transphobia and homophobia is pervasive and deep rooted in the state. Gender non-conforming people in Kerala are oppressed and forced to lead a double existence because of mainstream notions of binary gender and hetero normativity. For sustained and tangible impacts, a focus on the personal, economic, social and cultural rights of transgenders to lead a life of dignity, respect and equality is the way forward.

Against this backdrop, the Voluntary Health Services (VHS)-MSA - DIVA Project with support of UNDP<sup>2</sup> - APRC<sup>3</sup>, with guidance from NACO<sup>4</sup> and in partnership with KSACS<sup>5</sup>, stepped in the state with a goal to improve the HIV service delivery through sensitisation, capacity building and advocacy initiatives in close coordination with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) / Community Based organisations (CBOs), government departments and other key stakeholders in the state.



#### Process

The visibility of transgenders was alarmingly low in Kerala as they have been grouped along with Men who have Sex with Men (MSMs). Hence a set of criteria was evolved through VHS-MSA DIVA Project to identify transgender individuals. Based on the past experience of VHS in working with transgender community, a well-articulated viewpoint emerged that targeted intervention in isolation will not result in sustained intervention impacts in the community. Rather a holistic approach that includes sensitization for



key stakeholders, availing welfare schemes, skill building for the transgender people, creating suitable employment opportunities and a response to felt needs in the community is the way forward.

As a first step towards creating visibility for the transgender community, VHS organized a series of sensitization programmes on transgender issues for health care providers, media personnel, advocates, police officials, CBOs and members of local governance bodies (the District Panchayat leaders). These were structured to enable societal acceptance of transgender people, reduce stigma and discrimination and improve access to services including health care. This slowly resulted in increased visibility for transgenders in the state.

Kannur is one of the eight out of the 14 districts in the state that implements the Targeted Intervention (TI) programme among transgender people through the NGO Health line. The TI staff of the NGO, in partnership with KSACS, was capacitated by VHS-MSA DIVA Project based on the prescribed NACO Operational Guidelines to improve HIV service delivery. A series of advocacy programmes for key stakeholders was conducted in order to create visibility for the transcommunity and address several common myths and misconceptions and highlight a human rights perspective in issues faced by transgender community.

As a result of sustained advocacy efforts, for the first time in India, the Left Democratic Front (LDF), the dominant political party in the state, included transgender welfare programmes in their election manifesto of the state early this year. As a follow up after the elections, the NGO continued its advocacy efforts with Mr.K.V. Sumesh, District Panchayat President, Kannur.

This resulted in the District Panchayat allocating Rs. 11 lakhs for the welfare of the transgender community—the first of its kind in the country.

#### Impact

- The most tangible impact of these initiatives has been an enabling environment created for transgender people because of concerted sensitization and awareness programmes for diverse stakeholders. This is necessary in the mainstreaming of the transgender community and in their social inclusion.

#### Lessons learned

- Policy makers were consistently invited for the advocacy and sensitization programmes. This enabled them to get a first-hand experience of several significant issues affecting the community. As a result they were convinced and this enabled them to support advocacy initiatives.
- The fact that several of them were invested with the power to make decisions was another significant factor in the impacts created.

#### Replicability

- Community involvement in sensitisation and advocacy initiatives is important for mainstreaming. Mainstreaming initiatives are crucial in situations where the community is invisible; but nevertheless wish to empower themselves.
- Successful mainstreaming initiatives require a convergence and coordination of all key partners in the state. For example in this case, KSACS, local NGO/CBO, Panchayat leader, communities and the VHS-MSA DIVA Project.

#### Reference links:

- Kerala budget: Provision for welfare schemes for transgender people: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/big-push-for-infra-welfare-in-kerala-budget/article8827530.ece>
- State transgender policy emphasizing local government bodies to give importance for welfare of transgender people: <http://swd.kerala.gov.in/images/VIKASBHAVAN/12704tgpolicy15.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> Census of India, 2011

<sup>2</sup> UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

<sup>3</sup> APRC - Asia Pacific Regional Centre

<sup>4</sup> NACO - National AIDS Control Organisation

<sup>5</sup> KSACS - Kerala State AIDS Control Society



#### Case study : KV Sumesh: Leading by example

KV Sumesh, the District Panchayat President, Kannur, has every reason to be proud. The affable and unassuming leader and his team has the credit of establishing Rs. 11 lakh as part of the Transgender Welfare Fund of the Panchayat. “The first group of people who visited me as soon as I took charge as President of Kannur Panchayat were members of the transgender community. During the election time itself, it was in our agenda that the problems of the transgender community should be considered and given prime importance,” recalls KV Sumesh, who also adds that they requested him to address their issues from a rights perspective.

“I must admit that in the beginning, I too was completely ignorant of the issues affecting the transgender community. However, the advocacy efforts in the state through VHS-DIVA Project were an eye opener. I began to see them as people—as human beings with equal rights and opportunities as anyone else.”

According to KV Sumesh, the Kannur Panchayat has launched several initiatives towards creating suitable employment opportunities for the transgender community. One such promising initiative is evolving an agreement with a local entrepreneur group, Dinesh Apparels, to employ transgender people. Building a day shelter for the transgender community and a transgender culture fest are other plans on the anvil. The Chief Minister of Kerala has lauded the Kannur Panchayat for its pioneering efforts.





## Distinctive response in protecting Transgender people rights

### Positive Story of Special Prison Cells in Kerala

#### Summary

Across the world, trans persons are subject to a range of recurring and pervasive violence, violations and discrimination by law enforcement agencies based on their non normative gender identity. In India, despite the Supreme Court judgment (2014) that officially recognized their right to self-identification, transphobia continues to be pervasive and deep-rooted. Transgenders are been subject to the repeated pattern of being arbitrarily targeted, detained, and arrested on false charges, verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse and custodial rape. A study by a team from the National Institute of Epidemiology<sup>1</sup> among 60,000 transgender people across 17 states revealed that the biggest perpetrators of violence against transgender people were the police and law-enforcing authorities.

Voluntary Health Services (VHS)-MSA-DIVA project supported by UNDP<sup>2</sup> - APRC<sup>3</sup>, and guided by NACO<sup>4</sup>, in partnership with KSACS<sup>5</sup> and



the Thiruvananthapuram-based NGO Dale View, conducted a series of sensitisation programmes for key police officials in the state. The training was an eye opener for the officials to know about transgenders and the multiple issues they face such as socio-economic, civic and health issues. The efforts resulted in an attitudinal change among the police department in the state that resulted in the creation of special cells for transgender people in the state.

#### Process

Dale View TG Suraksha project, an NGO has been working towards mainstreaming transgender issues in the community and is implementing a Targeted Intervention project with support from KSACS. VHS-MSA-DIVA project facilitated Daleview in conducting a stakeholder analysis, using a tool as prescribed by NACO. It was evident from the analysis that police officials were rather indifferent and insensitive towards transgender people and their issues. Ignorance, apathy and low levels of awareness and hetero normative attitudes emerged as some of the areas that needed to be addressed. Even during arrest, transgender individuals are considered as males; in contrast to the affirmative principle of consensual gender identity as articulated in the Supreme Court Third Gender Judgement (2014). Thus it was apparent that many police officials were not aware about transgender community and their issues.

Given this situation, a sensitization programme for law enforcement agencies on the issues affecting transgenders was conducted at Thiruvananthapuram by the VHS-MSA DIVA project, in collaboration with Kerala State AIDS Control Society (KSACS) and Daleview. Mr. Loknath Behera, IPS, the Director General of Police (Prisons) was invited as Chief Guest. Mr. S. Sreejith, Commissioner, State Human Rights Commission; Mr. Anil Kumar Pillai High Court Lawyer; and officials from Department of Social Justice - Government of Kerala were invited for the programme and they spoke on the human rights and transgenders. Representatives from the transgender community shared their real life stories. The Chief Guest admitted, "I was not aware about the issues of the transgender community and

the programme provided me several useful insights to take concrete steps for the betterment of the transgender community".

VHS-MSA DIVA project systematically followed up with KSACS and Daleview and together maintained regular contact with the Department of Police for further course of



action from the government. The concerted efforts resulted in the announcement of special blocks for the transgender community in Kerala prisons—a historic first of its kind in the country. The special cell will come up in the new district jail complexes being constructed at Thavanur in Malappuram, Muttam in Thodupuzha and Malampuzha in Pallakad districts. Additional blocks are also being constructed at Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta district jails and the high security prison in Thrissur. The move comes in the wake of the Supreme Court recognizing members of the community as the third gender.

#### Impact

- The creation of special cells for transgender people is an effort to protect their privacy, dignity, human rights and affirm their identity. The move is perceived as a welcome step towards ending the sexual harassment faced by transpersons when housed in cells for men, as is the current practice.

#### Lessons learned

- A strategic approach that identifies and explores multiple dimensions of the problem is crucial for sustained impacts. Once the crux of the issue (about the insensitivity of the law enforcement agency towards transgender community), was identified using stakeholder analysis, it proved to be the pivotal advocacy point for VHS-MSA-DIVA project in collaboration with the local NGO to explore for solutions to create a sustained impact.

#### Replicability

- Creation / adoption of policies to respect individuals' sexual orientation and gender identity for ensuring basic human rights
- Willingness of stakeholder(s) to be open to change and innovation

#### References

- Press brief announcing special blocks for Transgenders in Kerala <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/thiruvananthapuram/Special-blocks-for-transgender-community-in-Kerala-prisons/articleshow/49322439.cms>
- State Transgender policy emphasizing Right with Dignity of Life and Right to Live without Violence for Transgender people: <http://swd.kerala.gov.in/images/VIKASBHAVAN/12704tgpolicy15.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> timesofindia.indiatimes.com · City, Chennai accessed on October 22, 2016

<sup>2</sup> UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

<sup>3</sup> APRC - Asia Pacific Regional Centre

<sup>4</sup> NACO - National AIDS Control Organisation

<sup>5</sup> KSACS - Kerala State AIDS Control Society





## “Health for All”: Health Systems’ response that addressed Transgender communities’ health needs in Kerala

Improved access to clinic services for HIV by transgender communities in Kerala, India

### Summary

Transgender health has evolved from a disease-based identity in the 1950s and 1960s to an identity-based model today (Bockting, 2009). Stigma and discrimination against transgender people frequently causes them to be rejected by their birth families and denied access to health care services including access to HIV testing, counselling and treatment. Discrimination by health-service providers is one of the most significant barriers to accessing testing, treatment and care. Transgender people often fear having their gender identity divulged to others by health-care providers. Those who are open about their gender identity may be denied health services. Some patients report being refused treatment by doctors who clearly disapproved of their transgender identity. These range from gender insensitivity, displays of discomfort, denial of services, sub-standard care, verbal abuse, forced care and lack of awareness, sensitivity and knowledge of medical and sexual issues specific to transgender people.

In this scenario, Voluntary Health Services (VHS)-MSA-DIVA Project with the support of UNDP<sup>1</sup> - APRC<sup>2</sup>, under the guidance of NACO<sup>3</sup>, in partnership with KSACS<sup>4</sup> and



the Kasergod-based NGO Healthline organised a sensitisation programme for the health care providers, which was an eye opener for participants to know more about transgender communities and their issues. The training empowered the participants to deliver quality services for transgender people and this led to increase in the clinic flow for HIV services by the transgender community.

### Process

Transgender Day was celebrated at Kannur District in 2015 with the support of the NGO Healthline. During the occasion Dr. A.T. Manoj, Deputy District Medical Officer, in charge of HIV treatment and Prevention Services for Transgender people in Kannur, was invited as one of the Chief Guests. Being impressed by the talents of the transgender community, he expressed a keen interest to know more about the issues specific to the transgender communities and like to address few of them. Subsequent to his discussions with District Medical Officer (DMO), Kannur, a sensitization programme for health care providers on medical issues pertaining to the transgender community was organised with the support of VHS-MSA-DIVA Project.

After the training, the unanimous opinion of the participants was that it was an eye opener for them. For the first time they understood the multiple issues faced by the transgender community, especially the pervasive stigma and discrimination they faced at various levels, especially with health care providers because of their non-normative gender identity. Participants also said that the training enabled them to confront their own deep rooted transphobia that led to insensitive behaviour and attitudes towards the community in healthcare settings. Doctors, however, also highlighted the limitations of public health care system, especially the lack of privacy in government hospitals. However, they reiterated that if transgender individuals disclosed their identity to them, they would ensure maximum privacy and confidentiality in health care settings. This has special implications in Kerala where transgenders often cross dress (as men) in an effort to protect their identity.

The sensitivity training addressed inherent biases and transphobia among health care providers around trans identities, training regarding appropriate and sensitive language and terminology to use with transgender individuals, and knowledge of the overall challenges this population faces—factors which give health care providers informed perspectives and the necessary cultural competence to deal with such a sexually and socially marginalized and therefore vulnerable community.

### Impact

- The sensitization programme for health care providers in Kannur district has had significant impacts in the quality of services provided to the transgender community. It has resulted in improved clinical care at government hospitals in the district. It has reduced stigma and discriminatory attitude among doctors and this is an important first step in creating transgender-friendly health care services. The number of transgender people accessing STI services increased from 57 percent [Jan-Mar, 2015] to 66 percent [Jan-Mar, 2016] (Source: NGO-Healthline Clinic report).

### Lessons learned

- There is a need for significant interface between health care providers and the transgender community to bridge the current barriers and obstacles the community faces in accessing health care services that are affirmative and responsive to their needs
- The sensitization programme has built the cultural competence of health care providers to offer sensitive, informed, non-coercive, respectful and non-stigmatizing services to the transgender community.

### Replicability

- Involvement of the health care providers is crucial for replicability, as he/she is invested with decision making, receptivity and willingness to undergo sensitization on transgender issues.



### Case Study : Dr. A.T Manoj - A trans-supportive doctor

The soft spoken Dr. A.T. Manoj, Deputy District Medical Officer, Kannur, and in charge of STI and HIV prevention services, is the kind of doctor every transgender person would like. Sensitive and informed about transgender issues, Dr. Manoj has spearheaded a campaign to make health care providers in Kannur district transgender friendly.

Until recently, however, Dr. Manoj admits that he was not aware of the multiple problems faced by the transgender community. However, a chance invitation to be the chief guest for a Transgender Day organized by Healthline in Kannur, was an eye opener. “I am impressed by the talents of the community and keen to know more about the issues specific to the transgenders”, remarked Dr. Manoj.

“With the support of VHS-MSA-DIVA project, we organised a sensitization programme for health care providers in Kannur district on medical issues pertaining to the transgender community. Many doctors were hearing about transgender people and their problems for the first time. The main problems doctors face is that when a transgender person comes to the hospital as out-patient, they don’t know whether the transgender should be considered male or female. There were ethical problems in that,” explains Dr. Manoj.

Dr. Manoj affirms that the programme has equipped the doctors with the necessary cultural competence and has given them informed perspectives to provide sensitive, appropriate and accessible services to a sexually and socially marginalized and vulnerable community, which frequently postpones, delays or avoids health seeking behaviour because of the pervasive trans phobia among health care providers that leads to high incidence of stigma and discriminatory attitudes.

<sup>1</sup> UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

<sup>2</sup> APRC - Asia Pacific Regional Centre

<sup>3</sup> NACO - National AIDS Control Organisation

<sup>4</sup> KSACS - Kerala State AIDS Control Society





# Manifesto in Spirit - Political commitment for Transgenders in Kerala

## Inclusion of Transgender welfare in the election manifesto of the Left Democratic Front (LDF)

### Summary

Despite high rates of literacy (93.91 percent)<sup>1</sup> in Kerala, transphobia and homophobia is pervasive and deep rooted in the state. Gender non-conforming people in Kerala are oppressed and forced to lead a double existence because of mainstream notions of binary gender and heteronormativity. For sustained and tangible impacts, a focus on the personal, economic, social and cultural rights of trans persons to lead a life of dignity, respect and equality is the way forward.

Against this backdrop, Voluntary Health Services (VHS)-MSA-DIVA Project with support of UNDP<sup>2</sup> - APRC<sup>3</sup>, with guidance from NACO<sup>4</sup> and in partnership with KSACS<sup>5</sup>, stepped in the state with a goal to improve the HIV service delivery through sensitisation, capacity building and advocacy initiatives in close coordination with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)/Community Based organisations (CBOs), Government departments and other key stakeholders in the State.



### Process

The visibility of transgenders was alarmingly low in Kerala as they have been grouped along with Men who have Sex with Men (MSMs). Hence a set of criteria was evolved through VHS-MSA DIVA Project to identify transgender individuals. Based on the past experience of VHS in working with transgender community, a well-articulated viewpoint emerged that targeted intervention in isolation will not result in sustained intervention impacts in the community. Rather a holistic approach that includes sensitization for key stakeholders, availing welfare schemes, skill building for the transgender people, creating suitable employment opportunities and a response to felt needs in the community is the way forward.

As a first step towards creating visibility for the transgender community, VHS in close collaboration with the KSACS and the CSOs organized a series of sensitization programmes on transgender issues for health care providers, media personnel, advocates, police officials, CBOs and members of local governance bodies (the District Panchayat leaders). These were structured to enable societal acceptance of transgender people, reduce stigma and discrimination and improve access to services including health care. This slowly resulted in increased visibility for transgenders in the state.

As part of its advocacy efforts, the NGO-Healthline conducted a series of advocacy programmes for the significant stakeholders—the community, media persons, government officials, health care providers, law enforcement agencies, political parties, the general public in order to create visibility for the trans community, address several common myths and misconceptions and highlighted a human rights perspective in issues faced by transgender community. During one of the sensitisation programmes of VHS-MSA DIVA Project, the Kannur Panchayat President KV Sumesh, who is also an influential person in the dominant State political party Left Democratic Front (LDF), was one of the participants. From thereon, he has been in constant touch with the Healthline and he spearheaded transgender advocacy with the political leaders from the LDF. He highlighted the complex and multiple issues faced by the transgender community to which the political leaders were receptive. As a result of sustained advocacy efforts, for the first time in India, a political party like LDF included TG welfare programmes in their election Manifesto of the Local Body



Election in Kannur early this year. Convinced about the need to address the issue, the LDF State committee then took the historic decision to include welfare measures for the transgender community in the election manifesto of the state election in May 2016.

### Impact

- An enabling environment created for transgender people because of concerted sensitization and awareness programmes for diverse stakeholders, especially the policy-makers.

### Lessons learned

- Advocacy with policy makers is very vital for policy level decisions. Policy-makers are to be invited for the

advocacy and sensitization programmes. This enabled them to get a first-hand experience of several significant issues affecting the community. As a result they were convinced and this enabled them to support advocacy initiatives.

### Replicability

- The concerted effort of the NGO and CBO is a key strategic initiative that could lead to sustained impacts.
- Mainstreaming initiatives are crucial in situations where the community is invisible; but nevertheless wish to empower themselves.

### Reference links:

- Kerala budget: Provision for welfare schemes for transgender people: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/big-push-for-infra-welfare-in-kerala-budget/article8827530.ece>
- State transgender policy emphasizing local government bodies to give importance for welfare of transgender people: [http://swd.kerala.gov.in/images/VIKASBHAVAN/12704\\_tgpolicy15.pdf](http://swd.kerala.gov.in/images/VIKASBHAVAN/12704_tgpolicy15.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> Census of India, 2011

<sup>2</sup> UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

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## Transgender communities showing way to people - Social acceptance through Traffic Volunteers

### Recruitment of Transgender persons as Traffic Volunteers by the Government of Odisha

#### Summary

Odisha has a highly visible transgender community who have been stigmatized, discriminated and ridiculed in the public sphere for challenging hetero-normative gender and sexual norms premised on a binary notion of gender. Because of the absence of education and employment opportunities, the community is involved in street based sex work and begging. With this scenario, as part of its mainstreaming efforts, the VHS<sup>1</sup> - MSA<sup>2</sup> - DIVA Project with support of UNDP<sup>3</sup> - APRC<sup>4</sup>, with guidance from NACO<sup>5</sup> and in partnership with OSACS<sup>6</sup>, seeks to create social inclusion for the marginalized community and also subverts negative stereotypes associated with them. As an outcome, the Government of Odisha has recruited male to female trans persons as traffic volunteers to assist the traffic police. It is encouraging to note that along with availing their fundamental human rights, the transgender community also express a deep sense of social responsibility and have redefined their visibility in the



public sphere as socially conscious, responsible citizens – no different from anyone.

#### Process

A group of transgender persons, led by the All Odisha Third Genders' Association explored the possibilities of transgender persons as traffic volunteers to assist the police in regulating the traffic in the city with the District Commissioner of Police. He was receptive to the idea. Besides, police officials were sensitised on the Supreme Court Judgement emphasizing the rights of the transgender community to a life of dignity and respect. This was an impetus for the law enforcement authorities to provide the community an opportunity to redefine themselves in the public sphere. Simultaneously, the Transgender communities in the district were sensitised about their fundamental rights including the right to live with dignity, by VHS-MSA DIVA Project as part of CSS<sup>7</sup> Seed advocacy fund activities through the CBO - SAKHA.

The Traffic Volunteers underwent training on road discipline, safety of commuters, traffic regulation at crossings, careful driving and parking and first aid, followed by two-week field training in traffic management at various junctions in the city. They were provided ID cards, T-shirts, shoes, and caps (with the logo of the Commissionerate of Police) which they had to wear while on duty. They work (on honorary basis) three to four hours every day and choose a time slot convenient to them.

Initially, there were few challenges. Among them were the resentment and hostility among the transgender community who were deeply suspicious and resistant to such a bold initiative. This led to a rift in the community, with some members opting not to be part of it and this was appropriately addressed by the CBO. Another major challenge was negative publicity in the media who described the transgender community as “managing traffic during the day and soliciting clients for sex at night.” Hence the CBO-SAKHA did a media sensitisation programme with the help of VHS-MSA DIVA Project to counter such perceptions and build their perspectives on rights based framework for initiatives involving the transgender community.

#### Impacts

- The initiative has resulted in a huge shift in the trans phobic gaze that has been the lens through which society tends to view the transgender community.
- There has been considerable attitudinal



shift regarding the transgender community among the general public who now view them as, socially conscious and responsible members of society.

#### Lessons learned

- A rights and social responsibility approach adopted by marginalized communities is important to counter prevailing negative stereotypes, myths and taboos about marginalized communities.
- It is equally important that such mainstreaming efforts are to be collectively addressed by all the stakeholders in the State.

#### Replicability

- Supportive stakeholders who are willing to create space for innovative practices and encourage the marginalized communities.
- A willingness among the marginalized community to subvert negative stereotypes and redefine themselves in the public sphere.

#### Reference links:

Transgenders to assist Traffic Cops:  
[http://www.telegraphindia.com/1150424/jsp/odisha/story\\_16267.jsp#.WD1JO4VOK3A](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1150424/jsp/odisha/story_16267.jsp#.WD1JO4VOK3A)

<sup>1</sup> VHS - Voluntary Health Services

<sup>2</sup> MSA - Multi-country South Asia

<sup>3</sup> UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

<sup>4</sup> APRC - Asia Pacific Regional Centre

<sup>5</sup> NACO - National AIDS Control Organisation

<sup>6</sup> OSACS - Odisha State AIDS Control Society

<sup>7</sup> CSS - Community Systems Strengthening



Ms. Namrata Chaddha

#### Case study: Voice of Transgender (VoT): Countering the Trans phobic gaze

Voice of Transgender (VoT) is a convergence of people who believe in the rights of transgender people to

lead a life of dignity, equality and respect. Based in Bhubaneswar, Voice of Transgender (VoT), formed in 2016, includes lawyers, gender and social activists, healthcare providers, religious leaders, policy makers, business people, students, teachers, and general public—in short, just about anyone who believes in leading their voice to amplify the message -“We stand up for trans phobia. Do you?”

Currently, VoT is being spearheaded by Namrata Chaddha, Member, National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) and Dr. Madhumita Parida, both of whom are ardent supporters for the need to counter transphobia and create a trans friendly inclusive environment for this marginalized and vulnerable population. As part of VoT, they provide pro bono legal services for the community. Other services provided by VoT include psychological counseling, legal aid, referrals for healthcare services, linkages with social inclusion schemes and referrals for education and employment opportunities. The group played a key role in the involvement of the transgender community as traffic volunteers in the state.

“This is just the beginning... a pravah (flow)... Unless you step into their shoes, you will never know where the shoe pinches. We work to enable the community avail their rights and entitlements and live a life of dignity and equality. They are not vote banks in need of welfare or charity,” says the articulate Namrata Chaddha, who also point out that the journey towards equality is long and arduous and that band aids and quick fixes are not the solution.





## Political will for social inclusion - Odisha Government's response towards Transgender people

### Declaration of Transgender Day and BPL status for TG people: Efforts with policy makers in Odisha

#### Summary

Odisha has a highly visible transgender community. It is estimated that there are up to 25,000 transgender (TG) persons living in Odisha<sup>1</sup>, although in absence of a formal estimation this number is only an approximation.

Hetero-patriarchal norms in which hetero-normativity is the prescribed sexual norm results in social sanctions against people who do not conform to the societal ideal. As a result people with non binary gender identities such as the hijra community and transgenders are stigmatized and discriminated.

Most trans persons in Odisha live Below The Poverty Line (BPL) and are excluded in government schemes like Voter card, BPL card, UID (Unique Identification Number) and other government welfare schemes. Expelled from their birth families and schools, and thus denied access to education and employment opportunities, many of them resort to street based sex work and begging.

As part of its mainstreaming efforts, the VHS-MSA-DIVA Project launched a series of advocacy efforts with policy makers and successfully secured BPL status for the transgender community in the state—Odisha thus has the distinction of being the first state in the country to give

transgender people social welfare benefits such as a pension, housing and food grains usually allocated for only the most impoverished. The move to give the transgender community the same benefits as those living below the poverty line was aimed at improving their overall social and economic status.

#### Process

The transgender communities in Odisha, led by the CBO-SAKHA were collectivized and this gave them a new visibility and enabled them to articulate their demands assertively. Based on the past experience in working with transgender communities, VHS replicated the efforts of advocating for an exclusive day (14th April) for Transgender people with the help of the CBO and OSACS<sup>2</sup>. A major event was organised by the CBO with the support of VHS-MSA DIVA Project to celebrate the Transgenders Day wherein various Dignitaries including the Minister of Law & Panchayat Raj, Government of Odisha, NGO functionaries, activists, policy makers and senior bureaucrats besides members of the TG



community participated. During the event, the Minister assured his continuous support towards TG communities and promised to place their Charter of demands before the Honorable Chief Minister of Odisha. Some of the demands include declaration of 14th April as Transgenders day, formation of TG Welfare Board in Odisha, Welfare schemes for TG communities. The community used the forum as a platform to showcase the skills and talents of the transgender community. They also introduced another innovative strategy—a convergence of different stakeholders such as parents of transgender children, bureaucrats, general public, policy makers, NGOs, and the media to create awareness about the pressing needs and concerns of the transgender community.

The landmark Supreme Court Judgment on Transgenders (2014) was a major impetus to the transgender community in spearheading advocacy efforts. Among it is the directives that the states and the centre would have to evolve social welfare schemes for the community who were henceforth accorded OBC (Other Backward Caste) status. This was a major impetus and a “legal security” for the leaders of the



transgender community in Odisha to engage with stakeholders for social inclusion measures. Simultaneously they launched a multi-pronged programme to create awareness about the transgender community with diverse stakeholders such as school and college students, parents, teachers. VHS-MSA DIVA Project under its seed advocacy fund supported the CBO for conducting sensitisation programmes with media and health care providers.

With continuous follow-up, in April 2016 the Government of Odisha held a state level consultation with transgender people who highlighted their problems, concerns and issues. As an outcome, Thirdgenders were included under the Department of Social Security and Empowerment of People with Disabilities (SSEPD), Government of Odisha. It then took the historic move to accord them BPL status and made available and accessible to the community a range of welfare measures. Currently members of the transgender community are given a Below Poverty Line (BPL) card that allows them to access benefits under various government welfare programmes. This includes schemes that provide free housing, 100 days of paid work annually, pensions and loans to start up their own businesses. They are also entitled to 5 kg of food grains every month under India's National Food Security Act. The department also constituted a Transgender Welfare Committee.

#### Impacts

- The most tangible impact has been an enabling environment created for transgender people because of concerted sensitization and advocacy programmes for diverse stakeholders. This is necessary in mainstreaming initiatives for the transgender community and in their social inclusion.

- The initiative has articulated the need for greater acceptance and social inclusion of the marginalized and vulnerable community.

#### Lessons learned

- Social inclusion is an important first step in improving the Quality of Life of the transgender community.
- Successful advocacy and mainstreaming initiatives require a convergence and coordination of all key stakeholders in the state with active community participation.
- Political will is mandatory for any sustainable initiative for the marginalized community
- Rigorous follow-up is essential to ensure that the welfare benefits percolate to the community.
- Auto inclusion in the BPL scheme to be incorporated for Transgender people, post self-identification.

#### Reference links

- Welfare of Transgenders taken care by the Government of Odisha: <http://ssepd.gov.in/?q=node/203>
- Inclusion of Transgenders under the Department of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities : <http://ssepd.gov.in/?q=node/2>
- Procedure for change of name of Transgender: <http://ssepd.gov.in/sites/default/files/Procedure%20for%20change%20of%20name%20of%20Transgender.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> According to the Census of India (2011), there were around 20,000 transgender persons living in Odisha. However, activists and members of the transgender community claimed that the number of transgender persons was actually much higher, as many transgender persons would not have revealed their gender identities in the census. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/First-count-of-third-gender-in-census-4-9-lakh/articleshow/35741613.cms>

<sup>2</sup> OSACS - Odisha State AIDS Control Society





## Smart skills on advocacy - an entry point for social inclusion of Transgender people

Imparting advocacy skills for Transgender Welfare Committee members benefits the transgender community in Odisha

### Summary

Odisha has a highly visible transgender community. It is estimated that there are up to 25,000 transgender persons living in Odisha<sup>1</sup>, although in absence of a formal estimation this number is only an approximation. Until recently, transgender individuals were subsumed with Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) or the LGBT community in programmes and policies.

The Supreme Court Judgment (2014) conferred a legal identity to the community. The rights based framework of the Judgment has enabled the community articulate and avail several of their rights and entitlements. The pervasive stigmatization of the transgender community results in social marginalization, which includes the denial of educational, employment, and housing opportunities and health care. Transgender people must overcome a range of economic, social,

cultural, and political barriers to effectively advocate for their needs and rights. Advocacy initiatives must work to minimize these barriers. It is important to continue to strengthen the capacity of trans persons so that their voices can inform policies and programmes. This includes general organizational development and advocacy skills, as well as specific information and training related to sexual and reproductive health, economic, social, political rights.

Voluntary Health Services (VHS)-MSA-DIVA project supported by UNDP<sup>2</sup> - APRC<sup>3</sup>, and guided by NACO<sup>4</sup>, in partnership with OSACS<sup>5</sup> and the CBO - SAKHA, imparted advocacy skills for the transgender community under the CSS<sup>6</sup>: Seed advocacy fund activities. Through the training, the participants gained knowledge on how to self-advocate for their rights and also for their communities.

The creation of a Transgender Welfare Board in Odisha and imparting advocacy skills for its members has enabled them to articulate forcefully several of their needs and concerns in the public domain, which has reflected in need based policies and programmes. Such trans inclusive programmes have the potential to create trans affirmative environments that upholds the right of every trans person to live a life of dignity, equality and respect.

### Process

The Transgender Welfare Board in Odisha was established in April 2016. As a first step, the transgender community collectivized and derived strength from the solidarity of shared experiences as a group. An important strategy in their advocacy efforts was the involvement of the community in social causes ranging from relief and rehabilitation efforts in natural disasters, blood donation camps and environmental campaigns. This highlighted the fact that while the community insisted on availing their human rights; they also wished to highlight their social responsibility, as according to them, these are two sides of a coin.

The VHS-MSA-DIVA Project then provided a series of capacity building programmes for members of the Transgender Welfare Board to build their advocacy skills to engage purposefully with a diverse range of stakeholders. Advocacy skills were thus imparted to the community, by which a marginalized and vulnerable community is able to:

- Have their voice heard on issues that are important to them.

- Defend and safeguard their rights.
- Have their views and wishes genuinely considered when decisions are being made about their lives.
- Access information and services.
- Defend and promote their rights and responsibilities.
- Explore choices and options
- Undertake stakeholder analysis, identify strategic advocacy issues and effective intervention strategies and devise suitable action plans

This has enabled them acquire informed perspectives to articulate their need based demands.



### Impacts

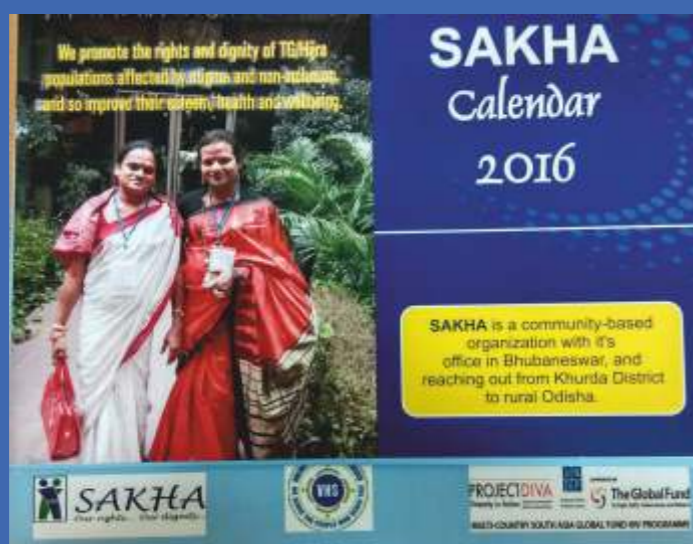
- The series of advocacy initiatives of the VHS-MSA-DIVA project is an important first step in viewing transgender issues through a human rights perspective that acknowledges and affirms their right to a gamut of human rights—civil, economic, political, social and cultural—available to every human being.
- Several negative stereotypes associated with the transgender community have been busted and they are now being viewed as socially responsible citizens of the country.

### Lessons learned

- Successful advocacy initiatives require a strategic approach that involves need-based sensitization efforts.
- The goodwill and rapport established by the transgender community with significant stakeholders as seen through their social responsibility initiatives is also a key factor in creating sustained impacts.

### Replicability

- A keen desire from marginalized communities to subvert negative stereotypes and willingness of stakeholder(s) to be open to change and innovation.



<sup>1</sup> According to the Census of India (2011), there were around 20,000 transgender persons living in Odisha. However, activists and members of the transgender community claimed that the number of transgender persons was actually much higher, as many transgender persons would not have revealed their gender identities in the census. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/First-count-of-third-gender-in-census-4-9-lakh/articleshow/35741613.cms>

<sup>2</sup> UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

<sup>3</sup> APRC - Asia Pacific Regional Centre

<sup>4</sup> NACO - National AIDS Control Organisation

<sup>5</sup> OSACS - Odisha State AIDS Control Society

<sup>6</sup> CSS - Community Systems Strengthening