

[BEMBALA]

An Alternate Approach to Capacity Building

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
THE JOURNEY OF SELF DISCOVERY AND EMPOWERMENT:ACCOMPANIMENT AND SUPPORT	10
VOLUNTEER REJUVENATION	14
DEVELOPMENT OF SECOND LINE LEADERSHIP	16
STRENGTHENING EXISTING LEADERSHIP	24
CONCLUSION	27
REFERENCES	28



INTRODUCTION

Bemba was a capacity building initiative developed by Samraksha to strengthen and support communities, organizations and leadership of women in sex work in five districts of Karnataka. At the individual level, it included a set of perspective building, experiential training and exposure exercises, through which the women grew in their understanding of self and their place in society. The organizations were strengthened through the rejuvenation of volunteers, strengthening of existing leaders and support of emerging ones. Through these processes, there was a shift within these organization towards a feminist style of leadership (Batliwala, 2011). This meant an emphasis on inclusion, diversity and collaborative decision making. This document attempts to capture these processes that led to the empowerment of a socially excluded group of women.

Samraksha is a developmental organization which has been engaging with communities on HIV prevention, care and support since 1993. As one of the pioneering organizations in this sector, Samraksha recognized early that prevention and care were parts of the same continuum. Its interventions were, therefore, designed to reduce risk of, vulnerability to and impact of HIV on individuals and communities.

All of Samraksha's interventions have been guided by the core belief in the capacity of individuals and communities. This belief has meant that Samraksha has assumed the role not of an 'expert' but that of a 'facilitator'. Uncovering and building on the communities' strengths and capacities has been the key approach.

The contribution of communities and community-based organizations is now widely acknowledged in the development sector. There is an acceptance that they can provide a contextual understanding, ownership and sustainability of initiatives which elude externally driven projects. This has prompted interventions in the HIV sector to focus on the development of community-based organizations among its key populations: sex workers and sexual minorities.



Community-based organizations are fundamentally different in nature from professionally managed ones, relying more on membership structure, voluntarism and ownership. However, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and training organizations try to shape them into an "NGO" mould. Their capacity is measured by degrees of formal structure, differentiation of roles and tasks in the organization and other parameters which are more suited for NGOs. Capacity building is largely for the short term, to transfer a set of skills to the CBOs. The trainings are designed to make them function more and more like NGOs, and seldom focus on the CBO's own strengths. Often, they compromise some of these innate strengths like flexibility and responsiveness.

Yachkaschi (2010) notes that with constant interaction with donor agencies and NGOs, frequently CBOs themselves may start aspiring to function more like them and enter the development system in the role of NGOs. This subordinates the community capacity to the achievement of an end which has been defined by an external actor - a donor agency or NGO (Yachkaschi, 2006. Yachkaschi, 2010). Far from being an empowering process, this can be a disempowering one. Lentfer and Yachkaschi (2009) highlight the need for an alternate model of capacity building for CBOs. They advocate for one which focuses on the strengths of the organization and is process driven.

Samraksha, in its work with the different CBOs of women in sex work and sexual minorities in North Karnataka, has long felt the need of an alternative model. It started engaging with women in sex work in this region in 2004, when they were dispersed across the district and did not know each other. The HIV prevention programme helped the women to come together. Samraksha's processes helped them to develop a sense of collective identity, value each other and realize the strength of being part of a collective. It led to the formation of five community-based organizations in 2008.

From that time onwards, these organizations received many trainings, from donors and from the State AIDS Prevention Societies. But all of these focused on their future role as 'implementers' of an HIV prevention programme, trying to get them to function more efficiently, and develop programme management skills like formal accounting, reporting and documentation systems. But while the vision of the CBOs included HIV prevention and their role as implementers, it was not limited to it. They wanted to ensure a good quality of life for the women in their community and were committed to social justice and fundamental rights.



Samraksha recognized that these were organizations which needed a certain formal level of functioning, to get recognition from other stakeholders. At another level, their core strength was that they were social movements. As an extremely marginalized group of women, they were fighting for equality and acceptance. Hence capacity building for this group had to envision a broader, more humanistic understanding of 'capacity'. It would have to include empowerment, vision building and the emergence of democratic leadership.

The Bembala initiative was launched in 2011. This was a crucial time in the development of the CBOs. Three of the CBOs had just taken over the management of the HIV prevention programme and had signed a contract for its implementation with the State AIDS Society. They were faced with the challenge of taking on a project where HIV prevention was defined largely by the parameters of clinical services, HIV testing and linkage with treatment. This management model of HIV prevention provided little room for individual development or community and organization strengthening. The CBOs recognized that for their success in the delivery of the project, they had to invest in institution building.

The communities assessed their needs and identified certain critical inputs needed in the current phase of growth. These included inputs for strengthening the CBO board, as well as for strengthening the members. They also felt the need for leadership development. This was both in terms of giving current leaders further opportunities to grow and nurturing young leaders for the future.

Bembala was based on adult learning principles. It focused on respecting the participants, valuing their lived experiences and creating comfortable and safe spaces for them to reflect and grow. Interestingly, it achieved this with a group of largely non-literate participants, using art, drama, music, films, dance, games and role play to help the women understand and internalize various concepts.

In 2011-12, 292 women participated in this programme. This includes 42 existing and 30 emerging leaders of the CBOs and 210 community volunteers.



THE JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY AND EMPOWERMENT :ACCOMPANIMENT AND SUPPORT

Community Strengthening Activities : A History

Samraksha's engagement with the communities began in 2004 with the HIV prevention programme. Right from the beginning, it was recognized that the HIV prevention programme would itself strengthen and empower the community. Thus, values of concern, commitment, inclusion and respect were built into all programme activities. While the activities satisfied a specific project need, they also created a space where the women could come together and discover the value of being together. These also provided the platform for the early leadership to emerge.

Even at this stage, Samraksha was conscious of the need to build capacity on multiple dimensions and at multiple levels. Hence, certain community strengthening activities were initiated right then. This chapter will briefly describe some of these. These have been discussed in greater detail in one of Samraksha's earlier publications¹

Building Self-Esteem: The Saksharata Programme

For women in sex work, marginalization and exploitation sprang from different sources. It was not limited to their involvement with sex work. As women, they had faced some level of discrimination within a patriarchal society right from birth. Many had not had access to education. They were also largely from marginalized castes and poorer socio-economic backgrounds. All this meant that they had been denied many opportunities.

¹ For more information on these activities, see Samraksha (2009) Celebrating Life and Solidarity : Women in Sex Work, Collectivization and HIV Prevention. Available online at www.samraksha.org



During discussions with the women, they spoke about how lack of basic literacy had affected their lives, their self-esteem as well as the ways in which their family and society perceived them. They felt that some initiatives to promote literacy could really help them in the ways they interacted with their immediate environment. Samraksha, therefore, helped the woman organize literacy classes in different accessible locations across the districts. These classes were held in 81 different locations identified by the women themselves and 982 women took part in the programme.

Being literate means more than just being able to read and write. For most of the women who have never been through formal education, being literate is about having a greater sense of control over their lives. It is about being able to understand many things on their own, and having the confidence to make independent decisions. It is about being able to use the different services that they are entitled to and having the courage to challenge some of the injustices that they are routinely subjected to.

According to the women, even very basic literacy changed the way they thought about themselves. The transition from a person who has to use a thumb impression to a person, who can sign her own name, had a huge impact on their self-esteem and confidence. It influenced many small routines in their lives-like reading boards while traveling, interacting with their children's teachers or applying to a savings group for a loan.

Community Support Team: Bonding Across Differences

The women who started coming together were from different backgrounds. They practiced sex work in different locations: streets, brothels, lodges, highway dhabas, homes, forests etc. While a few acknowledged openly that they were sex workers, there were many who could acknowledge this only in certain safe spaces. There were also women with families: parents, husbands and children. There was concern that these relationships would be affected if their involvement in sex work was widely known.

This diversity of backgrounds meant that the women actually faced diverse problems. For instance, police harassment might be a pressing issue for someone who was open about being a sex worker, whereas for someone whose identity was not disclosed publicly, blackmail from a client may be the issue. In the initial days of collectivization, many women were pre-occupied with their own situation. They did



not always have the ability to understand and empathize with people whose situations were different from their own. The concept of Community Support Team (CST) evolved to address this.

Peer educators in the prevention programme, and later, some community volunteers were offered the opportunity to take part in the CST process. This involved a one week module on self-development, which focused on self-awareness, communication and relationship building. This was followed by a community immersion process, where the participants traveled across the district, listening to other women in sex work, whose lives might or might not be similar to theirs. They listened to their stories, problems, dreams and aspirations. This then turned into listening and sharing within the CST itself: their own personal lives. The sharing process was followed by time for reflection and analysis.

The most important achievement of the CST was that it allowed the women to connect with each other across differences. It helped them to recognize that despite these differences, many of their problems lay in the way society perceived their involvement in sex work. With this came respect for each other and a capacity to understand and empathize with different situations. This led to a commitment to work for the benefit of all women in sex work, whether practicing in a street or brotheland whether willing to disclose the sex work identity or not.

The CST was instrumental in allowing the early leaders of the community to emerge. It also ensured that even at this early stage, there were a broad range of leaders from within the community. This ensured a vibrant leadership and made true democratic choice possible.

Drawing Inspiration from Other Social Movements: Exposure Visit to Aadima

The CBOs had opportunities to visit other sexworker collectives in different parts of the country and learn from them. However, most of these had grown out of the HIV preventive interventions and hence were not organic. In many ways they had been “brought” together. The collectivization had not developed from an inner cry. In order to help the leaders of these collectives to develop their own vision for their emerging community, it was important for them to engage with other social movements. This would help them to see what gave them impetus and to draw inspiration from them. With this in mind, a week’s visit was arranged for some of the community leaders to visit Aadima, a Dalit social movement. Aadima sees itself as a



shared space to preserve indigenous cultural traditions and also to serve as a challenge to caste based discriminatory and exclusionary practices.

During the visit, the women had opportunities to learn from the members of Aadima and also from each other. Sharing of stories, cultural performances, team activities and systematic debriefing every evening enhanced the learning environment. The women developed an insight into the levels of commitment needed to build a community and a social movement. They also realized the need to reach within themselves for the spark that could catalyze them into action.

Aadima represented the culmination of persistent efforts to create something from within. It was built on voluntary contributions, where people set aside one rupee per day. For the women, there was a realization that even such small actions could have a lasting impact. Directly after this visit, the women were so inspired that on their return, they initiated something they all felt the need for- summer camps for their children. They felt that this would encourage creative capacities and aspirations in their children. This has become an annual event.

These were some of the early activities for community strengthening that influenced the growth of the communities in certain ways. It helped them in developing self-esteem and self-confidence. The women developed the capacity to relate to each other across differences. They were also inspired to pursue their own goals, and draw satisfaction from each step in the process, even if the goal itself was distant.

The Bembala programme went on to build on some of these earlier initiatives, but did it in a more structured, systematic and sustained way over the period of one year. The following chapters will discuss different aspects of Bembala.



VOLUNTEER REJUVENATION

The spirit of voluntarism is critical in any social movement and this was what drove these collectives in their initial phase of formation. In recent years, many development projects are seeing community volunteers as people who will carry forward certain pre-determined activities, as unpaid workers in the programme. However, the voluntarism which Samraksha envisaged while engaging with these communities was different. It was stirring the voluntary spirit which sprung from a genuine sense of concern for the community. It was more about a voluntary response or action to an issue that caused concern. It was taking responsibility and ownership, rather than just the performance of certain tasks which were allotted to them.²

The women felt that while voluntarism had sustained their collective in the initial years, that spirit had faded, especially as project structures created hierarchies and distance between community members and project staff. The growing distance between public health targets and deliverables, and community needs had also led to the decline of the voluntary spirit. The community had largely stopped seeing the HIV prevention programme, which provided the space and platform for them to come together initially, as “theirs”. As the leaders began focusing on the programme, they had less time than before for connecting with the women, as a collective.

The voluntary spirit had to be revived so that more and more women, especially women who had joined the collective recently, would also be motivated to contribute for the betterment of the community without any expectation of material or individual gain.

This led to the concept of the Volunteer Rejuvenation Programme. This adopted a strengths-based approach called SALT, which focused on Stimulation, Appreciation, Learning and Transfer. Rooted in a firm belief in individual and community potential, this approach encouraged people to seek out other people’s strengths, and to

² For more on the concept of voluntarism, see Samraksha (2009) Celebrating Life and Solidarity : Women in Sex Work, Collectivization and HIV Prevention. Available online at www.samraksha.org



stimulate them to act based on those. This was based on the belief that appreciation of strengths and positive actions would lead to increased self-worth. It would also facilitate mutual learning in a respectful environment.

As part of volunteer rejuvenation, many members from the community, who had certain responsibilities within the programme (like peer educator, community mobilizer and co-ordinator) were exposed to the concept of SALT. This fundamentally changed the ways they interacted with the community; they started identifying the potential and building on strengths, rather than taking on the role of experts or advisors. This helped them build relationships with the community in more positive and respectful ways. This in turn, strengthened the community members' commitment to the collective.

This increased commitment had many benefits. It strengthened the CBO at the grassroots, and more and more people participated in the site level and *taluka* level *samitis*, and in other CBO events. The Annual General Body Meeting of the CBO was attended by over 60 % of the members dispersed across the district, reflecting the extent to which women at the grassroots had taken ownership of the CBO itself.

The practice of recognizing and appreciating volunteers at these events led to a sense of belonging and increased confidence. Thus volunteers were able to handle more than 60 % of the crisis situations faced by the community members and resolve it satisfactorily. More and more volunteers were motivated to seek services themselves and also provide information to other women and refer them to services. This strengthened the HIV prevention programme. It brought in more women within the fold of the collective.



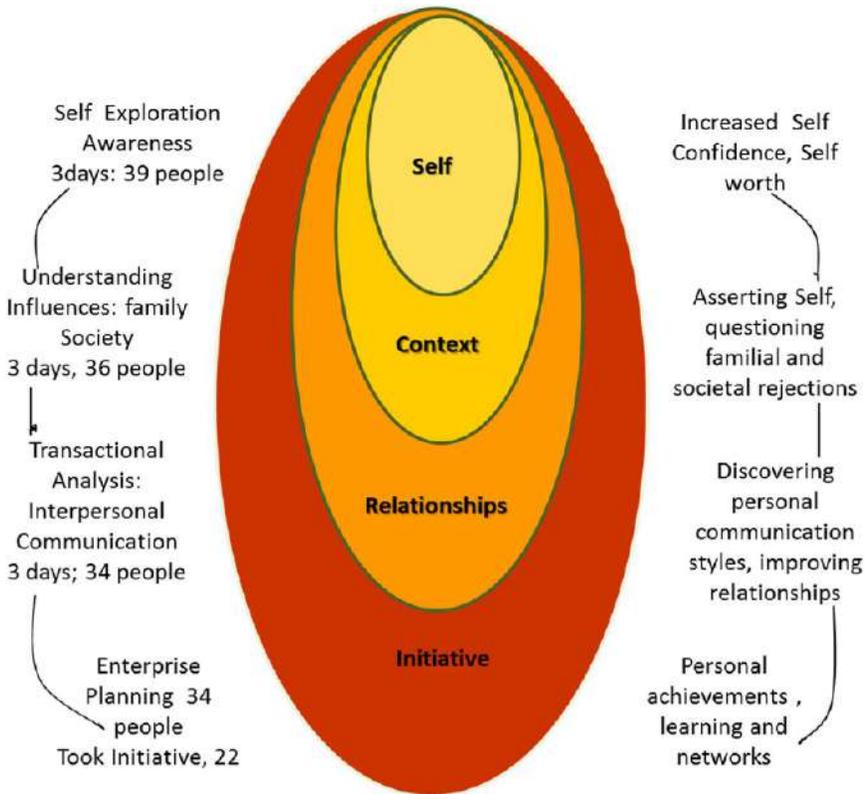
DEVELOPMENT OF SECOND-LINE LEADERSHIP

Samraksha learnt from its early involvement with the communities that leadership can seldom be taught. Rather that it emerges in a certain environment, which provides people with exposure and opportunities. It stems from an appreciation of small achievements and successes that motivates and from a space to explore and understand oneself which provides self-confidence. It evolves from a non-threatening and non-judgmental environment regarding decisions and mistakes that encourages initiative. The early years of community building afforded many such spaces for leaders. The community realized that in its growth phase, a second-line leadership needed to emerge. However, the luxury of time which the early leaders had was no longer available. They could not wait for opportunities and exposures to unfold; they had to be created. The Bembala programme tried to catalyze this process, by encapsulating some of these critical aspects into an intensive programme. It believed that this would accelerate the process of leadership development.

The second line leadership module focused on building an understanding among the women about themselves, their immediate environment, their contexts as sex workers and how these were tied up with larger structural manifestations of power. It covered effective communication as a way of interacting with and managing the environment. A micro-project at the end was designed to give the participants an opportunity to use their learnings and demonstrate their capacity for planning, implementation and decision making. 30 women completed this programme.



Development of New Leaders



Exploration of Self

This component consisted of various reflective exercises and discussions. It used theoretical frameworks as well as personal sharing. Art, drama, dance and films were used along with games, role play and group work to explore the self and recognize one's strengths. It used dream and aspiration building exercises. Over three days, participants had the opportunity to think about themselves and about what made them unique and special as people. Identification of their own strengths and linking this with their contribution to their communities, created a sense of pride and self-



worth. They went on to identify aspects of themselves that they wanted to change or strengthen. This component created opportunities to acknowledge diverse strengths and talents.



Understanding Context

This component aimed at building an understanding of the context of sex work as well as the context of the women's own lives as sex workers. It gave an opportunity for women to look at themselves within multiple contexts: their own dreams, their families, their extended families, their communities and the larger context of society.

The women identified different problems that they faced, such as anxiety about keeping their identities hidden, difficult relationships with their children and the problems faced with clients who resented their assertive behavior. The women were encouraged to think beyond just the manifestation of the problem to its structural roots. As they worked on a problem tree and analyzed the problem, they were amazed when the origin of all problems was traced to gender inequality and power structures.



Insights emerged regarding how violence was related to the changing power dynamics between themselves and their clients/ partners. This was especially as they grew more empowered and assertive. As they discussed and reflected deeply on these issues, they identified how they had themselves internalized society's low perception of them. They could see clearly how their low self-worth had its roots in societal attitudes towards sex work and sex workers.

They realized that their problematic relationships with their children could also be traced to this. It was also fueled by the negative attitudes regarding sex work not just in their children, but somewhere even deep within themselves. This insight strengthened their commitment to work for social justice including gender justice.

According to Girija, "I realized that women were not in any way lesser than men. I am now more confident and assertive while talking to men and demanding my rights. I expect to be treated with respect, and I demand it." Another participant recounted changing power relations at home. "I decided to tell my husband, since I am also going out and contributing to the family income, he can also now help out with the house-work and children. He did not accept it in the beginning, but now with time, he is also changing." Sunanda adds, "I realized that gender discrimination starts at home. I now make a conscious decision to treat my son and daughter as equals. I insist that my son also do some work in the house, just like my daughter does."

These sessions also helped the participants develop self-esteem and have a greater degree of comfort with their choice to be involved in sex work. According to Nirmala, "No matter what we said about our profession, somewhere deep down, many of us continued to feel that we have done something wrong. These sessions helped us start appreciating and respecting ourselves." Sunanda adds, "We really developed respect for our work, and because of that, we are now able to engage with our children in a very different and much better way."

The session on communication was designed to help the participants think critically about communication. It aimed at helping them understand texts and subtexts within a message and grasp larger contexts of power differentials which were mirrored in verbal and non-verbal communication. This could help them assess and assume their own positions in the different communications they had with other stakeholders. According to Parvati, one of the participants, "I learnt to be confident and comfortable with myself when speaking to others. When we went to Bangalore



to meet some well-known leaders and achievers, I saw how humble they were while talking to us. They respected us and treated us as equals. Yet, they were confident about themselves.”

Leadership Development

At the beginning of this module, the women identified certain qualities which they felt were essential in leaders. Through an iterative process, they arrived at three key qualities which each felt were important and which they needed to improve. Finally, they arrived at a common list, which had three critical qualities- Good Communication, Solidarity with the Community and Tolerance and Empathy to listen to and understand people.

While at the end of the four modules, they felt there had been a growth and change, they raised the benchmark for themselves and set newer goals. Their aspirations had risen.

For some women, even this process of self-assessment was a learning experience. “I realized that we change in phases,” a participant said. “I am now able to assess my change in different phases. I have learnt so much about managing my life through these reflections.”

Project Work: Putting the Learning to Use

The programme ended with a micro project . The project had to be which demonstrated strengths that they had, skills that they had acquired and something which demonstrated their capacity to plan and deliver on something Based on the assessment, the women chose used these assessment criteria in order to choose a micro-project.. It was also that which would give them scope to work on areas that they wanted to strengthen in themselves. The projects also had to be of benefit to the community and initiated in two months’ time on a small capital of Rs. 4000.

The projects developed by the women fell into 4 broad areas: Trading, small enterprises, services (like literacy, tuitions for children) or skill building. All the projects had a community focus.



Trading was about income generation through buying and selling goods for a profit which they put into a fund for women in crisis. This needed an understanding of the market, selecting products, sourcing pricing and promotion of their products, Some of the women also set up some small enterprise, through which they could meet some need for their community at a reduced price, for example sale of a nutrition powder, egg rice etc. Other projects undertaken involved either small businesses or teaching other women certain skills like basket weaving, or some specific business skills like marketing to set up their own businesses.

The women showcased their projects and shared their learning with the community during a two-day dissemination programme. A foremost learning for most women was the value of persistence. The women felt that they had not only learnt not to give up, they had also become alert to signs in the external environment and changed their own plans accordingly. For instance, they started discerning pockets of high demand for their products and attempted to saturate these areas. In this way, they were able to understand simple business concepts and the whole experience also underscored the need to be dynamic and responsive.



These projects were important for the community, as they highlighted some of the opportunities available for generating supplementary income. According to Muttamma, “We became confident with the whole idea of self-employment. We realized that we have so many opportunities to generate additional income for ourselves and for our CBO.”

Other women took up projects for the personal development of women and their children: for example literacy classes for women, arranging for tuitions for children, so that their school performance will improve and they will not drop out. These projects also significantly impacted the perception about the women, within their families, especially with their children. “I arranged for tuitions for the children of our women, so that their school performance improves. Because I did this, the children are seeing their mothers and her colleagues in a very different way. They realize that their mothers are also doing some useful work, and their work is also beneficial to them,” recounts Nirmala.



Other than the direct benefit to the community members, such projects were also learning opportunities for the participants. According to Leelavati, “I decided to teach basic alphabets to our women. The whole experience taught us the value of thorough planning and I am now confident that I can carry out many more such activities in the future.” Some of the senior CBO leaders also feel that these projects have developed good capacities in the women, which augur well for the CBO’s future. “At our recent AGM, not only did the younger women take up most responsibilities in organizing it, some of them have also come on to the board. I think this is good for our CBO,” says Renukamma, from SpandanaMahilaOkkoota.



STRENGTHENING EXISTING LEADERSHIP

The senior leaders of the CBO, who represented the early leadership and had nurtured the CBO through the fragile early years, were now facing different challenges. Their organizations had gained respect and recognition and had now been chosen to implement HIV prevention programme in their districts. They now had to perform the dual role of being efficient programme managers, while at the same time being wedded to the larger vision of their community and staying in touch with the grassroots.

This was an extremely critical period in the growth and development of the CBO. Samraksha had learnt through early experiences that when young organizations were suddenly expected to perform as per strict targets and deliverables, the pressures of doing this may make the organization lose sight of their larger vision. They could very easily slip into a solely project implementation mode.

Samraksha realized that the CBOs had to perform dual roles and needed support in both. Their contract to implement specific projects meant they had to have a professional work ethic. But they were also a social movement who represented the aspirations of a very marginalized group of women. The voices of these women were only now beginning to be heard. The leaders needed to constantly align with and reinforce the larger vision of community development and empowerment.

At this stage of development, it was important to ensure that leadership in these communities was collective, democratic, inclusive and compassionate – in short feminist in philosophy and practice, rather than the more notional feminine leadership. This module therefore consisted of different strands: gender, power and relationships; understanding leadership in different spheres; accountability; the role of a leader in facilitation and mentorship and place for values in leadership.

Different methodologies were used in this module. Sessions on organizational development and accountability helped women to review and clarify their multiple levels of accountability: to the project, their organization and their community. Experiential learning modules were developed on facilitative training. The leaders could have an insight into how not to slip into the 'expert' role while mentoring younger women. Conscientization sessions to understand concepts of patriarchy and how this was tied up with exploitative power relationships. This was supported



by exposure to feminist ideas of leadership focusing on collaboration and inclusivity, rather than leadership through the exercise of power.

Such exposure and trainings impacted the way the women managed interpersonal dynamics within the organization much better. According to Latha, “I think we are now more collaborative in our work, with each other, rather than trying to compete and outdo one another.” Adds Renukamma, “As an organization, we are now more mature. Even if there are internal problems, we realize that the organization is bigger than all of us, and try to sort it out.”

It has also changed personal styles of working among people. According to Hasrat Bi, “I have learnt the value of management based on love, rather than management based on fear or anger.”

The leadership strengthening component included interactions with leaders and visionaries from all walks of life. People who had built organizations, institutions and movements in fields some of which were vastly different from theirs. These included Ruth Manorama, a well known women’s activist, Subroto Bagchi, a corporate leader renowned for bringing in participatory values into the Information Technology Company Mindtree, Dr. Devi Shetty, renowned cardiac surgeon who had strived to make cardiac surgery affordable to people, Arundathi Nag and Gauri Dattu, who had taken theatre to the people, Dr. Latha Jagannathan, who had achieved against many odds in a male dominated sector of blood banking and Geetha, the founder of Sadhane an organisation working on violence against sex workers.

These programmes also inspired the women to strengthen their CBOs more and achieve more for their community. Many of them recognized the efforts made by an organization like Mindtree to include differently abled people among them. “When I think of their efforts to include people with disabilities, I also want to reach out include all our women in our organization. I want to make similar efforts to do this,” says Kotramma. Hasrat Bi recounts the quote she saw in the office of the renowned cardiac surgeon Dr. Devi Shetty, “If you want to travel fast, go alone, if you want to travel far, go together.” “It made me realize the value of getting more and more women involved with our CBO.”



For some of the women, the achievements of these people highlighted their own resources and their capacity for similar achievement. “When I met Arundathi Nag, she recounted her struggles after her husband’s death. If, she as a young widow, with so many debts to discharge, could eventually achieve her dream, then what about our women. Yes, we are also in difficult situations, but we also have a lot of resources. What can we not achieve?”

The women also learnt valuable life lessons from these visits. According to Dakshayini, “ My major learning from this was that I should be a life-long learner. Learning does not stop because you reach a certain age or certain stage in life. You need to take every opportunity in life to keep learning.”

Recording their stories of change

The Bembalaprogramme also recognized the creative potential of the women, and encouraged them to develop material, which could be shared with other groups. Participatory processes were used to develop this material.

One of the things the women were very interested in recording and sharing were the stories of how they had overcome difficulties, stories of their empowerment, stories



of what it has been possible for them to achieve through collectivization. They felt that other women, who were new to the collective and who would join them in future and other women's collectives needed to understand these stories. As a way of recording them for posterity, they composed poems and songs regarding their lives and set them to music, using popular tunes from folk and film music. These songs were recorded and an audio CD was released. For the women, it was a gift they were giving to other women's collectives.



CONCLUSION

Bembala, as a training programme, was designed as an alternate template for capacity building with CBOs, which would build on their own strengths. Its success lay in acknowledging the multiple roles of the women within the CBO, and therefore the need for different capacities.

It also acknowledged the contribution of each participant into the training programme in the form of their lived experiences. A rich learning environment was created because each person brought their unique lived experience to share. As it was shared, it was layered with perceptions of the other participants who saw this through the prism of their own experiences.

Though working with a group with little or no formal education and largely not literate, the methodologies were flexible and responsive to their needs.

There is a need for such alternate training programmes, for the communities which have emerged in the wake of the HIV epidemic. HIV programmes have contributed significantly by giving these groups a platform from which a community identity has been forged. Now these communities have a vision for themselves, and development practitioners cannot distance themselves from this vision and see them only as instruments of HIV prevention. Rather, if HIV prevention has to have 'as its fundamental basis prevention, promotion and respect for fundamental rights' (UNAIDS Policy paper 2005) then it needs to focus on a model of community empowerment, which promotes social integration in these groups, builds their social capital and promotes social inclusion (Pathfinder International, 2008).



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Back Cover