

Sarvojana is a coalition of development organizations working synergistically to enable marginalized people/communities to deepen their agency and exercise choices that can enable them to pursue healthy and creative lives. Our shared values and emphasis on ethical approaches have helped to generate evidence and influence laws, policies, and programmes affecting such communities.

The four partners involved in this programme are

**SOUTH INDIA AIDS ACTION  
PROGRAMME (SIAAP)**

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**WINS**

6-8-1033, N.G.O.s  
Colony, Tirupathi

Funded By



# Me and My World

*An Initiative of Sarvojana*



**Catalyzing Social Change among  
Marginalized Women by building Agency**

Me and My World is an initiative that helps to deepen the agency of women in sex work by helping them to develop the capacity to protect against exploitation and to improve the quality of their lives. Following Sen (2005), we define agency as the capacity of an individual to pursue objectives she values.

Women identified six areas for capacity building:

- self respect and self confidence,
- relationship with families, partners and children,
- seeking and using resources,
- dealing with power structures in family, neighborhoods and communities,<sup>2</sup>
- developing resilience,
- greater freedom to practice sex work.

Using a mix of methodologies – workshops, digital access, experiential learning, literacy classes, counselling, linkages with government and social movements, and policy dialogues – we worked intensively with 203 women across 12 districts in South India.

*"Earlier trainings through different HIV programmes increased our knowledge levels. But they did not impact us at a personal level. In this programme, in very real terms we have understood that it is about me and my progress in my life." A CBO leader from Chittor summing up why this training was unique.*



Following the 18 month programme, participants reported these changes

**A greater ability to understand and interact with the world :** *I have passed the literacy exam. I use my tablet a lot and take photos and share it through whatsapp. If I don't know about something, I try to find out about it in the internet.* A woman from Uttar Kannada.

**Greater ability to address conflicts at personal and professional level:** *Anger is the main reason for a strained relationship. Now I try to understand the other person's point of view. In all issues there is another point of view to consider. Now, I sit with the other person and try to resolve the issue.* A woman from Tirunelveli.

**Greater ability to claim rights and entitlements for self and the community:** *I was able to ensure that my colony got water supply. Now my neighbors respect me a lot because of this.* A woman from Chittor

**Greater self esteem which is helping them move beyond exploitative personal relationships :** *I faced a lot of violence from my partner. After joining this course, I decided that I had had enough. I moved out to a separate house, and told him he would have to change his behaviour if our relationship had to continue. Because of that action, our relationship has improved a lot.* A woman from Gadag.

**Understanding of the right to practice sex work and greater self confidence :** *I was able to reflect on one's choice of profession and accept sex work as work. Now I have started loving my body and taking care of it. I no longer feel guilty of my work, and therefore I am more open to talking to friends and neighbors.* A woman from Theni.

We are currently evaluating the project, and invite partners to work with us to expand this approach and reach larger numbers of women in sex work, as well as people from other communities seeking to empower themselves in the pursuit of better lives.