



ANNUAL REPORT
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South India AIDS Action Programme
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Executive Summary

The year 2023–2024 marked a period of transformative impact and expansion for the South India AIDS Action Programme (SIAAP), reflecting our unwavering commitment to advancing the rights, dignity, and wellbeing of marginalized communities across Tamil Nadu and beyond. Through partnerships with UNICEF, the Azim Premji Foundation, AmplifyChange, GFATM, Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, AJWS, and EU Girl Child, our flagship interventions made notable strides in strengthening child protection systems, promoting family-based alternative care, empowering adolescents, advancing sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) for female sex workers (FSWs), and fostering LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

Strengthening Urban Child Protection Systems: In collaboration with the Department of Children Welfare and Special Services, we created multi-stakeholder child protection platforms, provided life skills, SRH, mental health, and gender-safety trainings to 1500 children and adolescents, and strengthened family environments through positive parenting programs. We also enhanced adolescent mobility through sports, improved school retention, and fostered community-led advocacy with adolescents leading campaigns on safety and sanitation issues.

Promoting Family-Based Alternative Care: SIAAP facilitated significant policy and systemic reforms for de-institutionalization, training over 30 district-level child protection officers, conducting policy consultations, producing evidence through cost-benefit analysis studies, and restoring 2000+ children to family-based care settings across Tamil Nadu.

Adolescent Health and Empowerment through Malarkal Initiative: We improved nutrition, hygiene, emotional regulation, and gender equality among adolescents. Over 45% of girls post-puberty engaged in sports and public spaces, previously restricted. Access to anemia control, menstrual hygiene products, mental health counselling, and child protection services was expanded to 1500+ adolescents, achieving major shifts in health-seeking behaviour and community attitudes towards gender norms and mental health.

Advancing SRHR for Female Sex Workers: Across three states, we empowered sex worker communities to advocate for comprehensive, stigma-free SRH and mental health services. We facilitated release of adult women detained under ITPA laws, built national consensus on rights-based SRHR access policies, and strengthened crisis response capacities within communities, increasing service access rates and building grassroots advocacy leadership.

Building LGBTQIA+ Inclusion and Rights: SIAAP intensified efforts toward systemic change by sensitizing educational institutions, legal professionals, and government bodies, helping secure policy such as transgender-inclusive admissions in universities and gender-neutral restrooms. Through Pride events, theater interventions, and leadership development, we fostered solidarity across LGBTQIA+ subgroups and shifted public narratives toward greater acceptance.

Emergency Relief and Mental Health Initiatives: Following the Chennai floods, we swiftly provided emergency relief and education support to disaster-affected families in Perumbakkam, preventing child labour and early marriages. Partnering with SCARF, we piloted mental health literacy programs reaching over 500 adolescents, preparing for scale-up across resettlement communities. Our strategic initiatives, such as participation in the World Social Forum, expanded our advocacy networks, while continuous engagement in research, training of community facilitators, crisis intervention, and evidence generation reaffirmed our focus on sustainable, community-led change.

Looking Ahead: As we move forward, SIAAP remains steadfast in its mission to create resilient communities, advance legal and policy reforms, and build youth- and community-led systems of care, safety, and empowerment. We thank our partners, stakeholders, and communities for their unwavering support in this shared journey toward dignity, equity, and justice.

Project name: Strengthen Urban Child Protection System

Objective:

Between April 2023 and March 2024, South India AIDS Action Programme collaborated with the Department of Children Welfare and Special Services to protect the rights and aspirations of children and adolescents in Perumbakkam with following objectives to help them to transition into successful and responsible adulthood.

- Establish a coordinated, multi-stakeholder platform for urban child protection at the community level.
- Strengthen the capacity of children and adolescents on issues such as safety, mental health, nutrition, gender equality, sexual health, reproductive health, mobility and access to safer public spaces through sports, art, and cultural initiatives.
- Support children and adolescents in accessing child protection, health, education, and legal services.
- Strengthen positive parenting skills among parents and caregivers to create nurturing home environments.
- Provide community-based mental health and psychosocial support for children and families.
- Build sustainable community structures to advocate for child rights and improve service delivery beyond the project period.

Intervention:

- **Establishing a Multi-Stakeholder Child Protection Platform:** Conducted coordinated meetings with government departments (child protection, health, education, housing, law enforcement) alongside community members and adolescents. This platform enabled cross-sector collaboration to address safety, education, health, and mobility challenges faced by children.
- **Capacity Building of Children and Adolescents:** Delivered 250 interactive training sessions for over 200 children covering mental health, safety, nutrition, SRH, life skills, and gender sensitivity. Sessions were designed to be participatory, using games, real-life case studies, and practical exercises to build knowledge, attitudes, and skills.
- **Positive Parenting Training and Family Strengthening:** Reached 300+ parents through 152 sessions to improve parenting practices. Themes included child rights, adolescence, non-violent communication, gender equality, mental health, and reproductive health. Parents were empowered to create nurturing, supportive home environments for their children.
- **Community Counseling Centers for Psychosocial Support:** Two safe spaces were established in the community, providing counseling services, emotional regulation training, help desk services for social protection access, and family-based case work. Specialized services included school outreach counseling and peer support models.
- **Building Advocacy Capacity Among Children and Parents:** Formed and strengthened Adolescent, Parent, and Children Advisory Committees. Conducted structured leadership and advocacy training (e.g., Ilam Mottukkal) to empower young people and parents to voice community issues, engage with policymakers, and monitor local services.
- **Sports, Public Engagement, and Awareness Initiatives:** Developed a community playground, conducted regular sports sessions, and organized a flash mob event in a public space to raise awareness on child safety, consent, and rights. These initiatives aimed at increasing girls' mobility, promoting teamwork, and building public dialogue on child protection.
- **After-School Educational Support:** Initiated structured academic support programs, linking volunteers and NGOs with children facing learning gaps to prevent school absenteeism and improve educational outcomes.

Outcome/ Impact:

- **Enhanced Child Safety and Mobility:** Regular police patrolling initiated through advocacy efforts increased safety perceptions among 57% of parents. Girls' mobility improved through sports initiatives, with 30 girls participating in weekly sports sessions, challenging traditional restrictions on girls' public presence.
- **Increased Resilience and Health-Seeking Behaviour:** Life skill sessions enabled 70% of children to approach support services (like 1098 Childline). Treatment-seeking for SRH issues among girls improved from 21% to 31%. Prevalence of SRH-related morbidities reduced from 68% to 26% within a year.
- **Reduction in Violence and Risk Behaviour's:** Physical bullying incidents dropped from 85% to 39%, and self-harm behaviour reduced from 30% to 14%. Child marriage and teenage pregnancy awareness among adolescents increased, leading to early identification and legal intervention in critical cases.
- **Strengthened Family Environment:** 58% of adolescents observed positive behavioural changes among parents after training less physical punishment, more emotional support, and better communication. 99% of adolescents reported feeling secure at home post-intervention.
- **School Retention Improved:** Regular school attendance increased, absenteeism rates dropped from 40% to 22%. 78% of children were confident about completing higher secondary education.
- **Community Empowerment and Advocacy:** 27 adolescents trained under the 'Ilam Mottukkal' initiative led advocacy on school infrastructure, health services, and safety, directly engaging with the District Collector and Sub-Collector. Advisory committees initiated independent petitions and campaigns addressing water, sanitation, and safety issues.
- **Mental Health Awareness and Support Access:** Through the counselling centers and school outreach, 100% of children accessing services expressed satisfaction. Symptoms like sleep disturbances, sadness, and emotional distress showed significant improvement after counselling.
- **Shift in Gender Norms:** Gender identity sessions encouraged acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities among adolescents. Gender-equal practices, like boys sharing household work, increased within families.
- **Strengthened Community Systems:** Establishment of advisory committees and crisis intervention team addressed domestic violence, child abuse, and advocated with policy makers for safe water and introduction of police patrol in the community to improve safety and mobility of girls and women.

Donor: UNICEF

Primary stakeholders / Beneficiaries: Children and adolescents, health care providers, parents, teachers, police, Department of Social Defence, TNUHDB, Department of Education.

Project name: Building an alternative care system to promote family-based care

Objectives:

- Build a technical resource group comprising government departments and domain experts to strengthen family-based care policy frameworks.
- Improve the capacity of child protection functionaries for effective implementation of non-institutional care programs.
- Provide continuous onsite mentoring plan and technical support to field functionaries and review of district action plans to promote accountability of functionaries in Tamil Nadu.
- Generate evidence through high-level consultations to inform the development of state guidelines and action plans for alternative care.
- Create visibility for family-based care models and child protection best practices through newsletters, films, and reports.
- Develop and disseminate knowledge products to improve awareness and technical understanding among government stakeholders.

Intervention:

This year, our initiatives made significant progress in promoting family-based alternative care and enhancing child protection systems across Tamil Nadu. A group of government department officials, experts, and professionals were identified to become members of the think-tank group was identified and a draft Terms of Reference was developed and shared with the Director for approval and further action.

- **Capacity Building and Onsite Supervision and Handholding Support** Conducted intensive training programs and provided 12 onsite mentoring for 30 staff across districts in Tamil Nadu. Focus areas included foster care, kinship care, aftercare, and legal frameworks supporting non-institutional alternatives. Provided continuous support visits to frontline child protection functionaries to address challenges in implementation, strengthen case management, and build practical field-level capacities.
- **Thematic Consultations for Policy Advocacy:** Organized high-level policy dialogues involving government, judiciary, and civil society actors to generate evidence and build consensus on de-institutionalization and family strengthening strategies.
- **Development and Dissemination of Knowledge Products:** Designed and circulated newsletters highlighting best practices, success stories, beneficiary perspectives, and emerging evidence to motivate and inform functionaries and policymakers. Redrafted the Standard Operating Procedures for Foster Care and reintegration with biological families.
- **Release of Short Films on Alternative Care:** Produced and shared two impactful short films showcasing the lived experiences of children in family-based care, aimed at changing public perceptions and building political will.
- **Cost Analysis of Care Models:** Conducted a detailed cost comparison study demonstrating the economic and social benefits of family-based care over institutional care, providing critical data for resource reallocation advocacy.
- **Monitoring and Documentation of Training Outcomes:** Monitored the effectiveness of basic training programs, collected field insights, and developed recommendations for strengthening future training batches for child protection functionaries.

Outcomes (Elaborated):

- **Policy and System Strengthening:** Recommendations from consultations directly influenced Tamil Nadu's emerging guidelines for promoting family-based care. Think tank inputs are being incorporated into the state's de-institutionalization strategy.

- **Development of SOPs:** The review and refresher training for Protection Officers (PO-NICs) culminated in the scheduling of a workshop to revise Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Foster Care and Family Reintegration. A comprehensive consultation workshop further advanced the drafting of these SOPs, ensuring they align with the specific needs of Tamil Nadu, with final submission expected in April 2024.
- **Enhanced Capacities of Child Protection Workforce:** After training and mentorship, functionaries demonstrated increased proficiency in identifying, referring, and supporting family-based placements over institutionalization. Overall, more than 2000 children were restored into families.
- **Evidence-based Advocacy Achieved:** The cost analysis report provided concrete evidence showing that family-based care is significantly more cost-effective and beneficial for children's holistic development compared to institutional care. This evidence is being used in ongoing budget and policy advocacy.
- **Increased Visibility and Public Support for Family-Based Care:** Wide dissemination of newsletters and films helped shift narratives around alternative care. Functionaries, stakeholders, and even community members now better understand and support the importance of family-based solutions.
- **Knowledge Sharing and Motivation of Frontline Workers:** Quarterly newsletters featuring best practices, success stories, and real beneficiary experiences boosted morale among child protection staff and encouraged adoption of family-based approaches.
- **Monitoring Led to Training Improvements:** Review and monitoring of foundational training programs led to the identification of gaps (e.g., insufficient focus on aftercare support), resulting in tailored improvements in future batches.
 - SIAAP supported the Department of Children Welfare and Special Services in formulation of topics, duration of sessions, and timelines for basic training modules to ensure meaningful engagement with children in conflict with law. SIAAP shared the expression of interest to implement the Life Skills education training programme for children in conflict with law housed in Observation Homes, Special Homes and Place of Safety across Tamil Nadu, reinforcing family-based care as a sustainable and effective alternative to institutional care.
 - SIAAP co-facilitated the review of district action plan developed by protection officers from 38 districts. The alternative care programme was scaled-up to all 38 districts in the state with special focus on 15 high priority districts with more number of children in institutional care.
- **Preparedness for Scale-up:** Tamil Nadu is better positioned to roll out a larger family-based care program, backed by trained functionaries, evidence, political will, and community understanding.

Donor: UNICEF

Primary stakeholders / Beneficiaries: Children in institutional care and their families, care givers and child protection functionaries including District child protection unit (DCPU), State Adoption resource Agency (SARA), Central Adoption Resource Agency (CARA), District of Social Defence (DSD).

Project name: Malarkal – A million blossoming: Integrated approach to strengthening health, gender, safety, and employment preparedness of adolescent girls and boys in urban slums

Objective:

1. Strengthen nutrition, life skills, gender safety, sexual health, mental health through capacity building & establishment of service provision models for Sexual health & mental health, among 2500 adolescent girls and boys in urban slums in Chennai,
 2. Increase parental and community support in well-being of adolescent girls and boys in the community, for sexual health, Gender Safety, Mental Health for girls and boys and for planning, monitoring and advocate for sustainability of interventions
 3. Strengthen attitude and skills of service providers and establish systems for linkage and referral for SRH and MH services
 4. Strengthen evidence building about issues, services, challenges and cost-benefit ratios related to sexual health, mental health, nutrition and employment preparedness in the community (technology based)
 5. Ensure sustainability of interventions & scale up of integrated model to promote agency and health of adolescent girls in Tamil Nadu
- Establishing effective monitoring and evaluation systems and gathering evidence on factors contributing towards improved abilities of adolescents

Intervention:

SIAAP followed capabilities approach pioneered by Amartya Sen (1991) which focuses on building agency of affected people to pursue their rights they value. We attempted to build agency at two levels a) strengthen capacities of affected people to realize their potential and to pursue opportunities for their own development and b) strengthen capacities of service providers and policymakers to respond sensitively and adequately to need of all people. This is a participatory approach and the programme is adolescent and family led in terms of fixing priorities, advocacy with government agencies and in monitoring progress.

The project interventions are (i) Community perspective building carried out among 242 parents, youth groups, SHGs and other community members to help them understand, and be more sensitive towards the needs and concerns of adolescents in the community better, which will empower them to address the issues affecting children and adolescents. (ii) 448 Adolescent Skill Trainings were facilitated to develop knowledge, attitude and skills of 1200 children and adolescents in the community and 795 from schools related to nutrition, life skills, gender and safety, sexual health, mental health. Sessions were facilitated through play – based and arts -based methods of experiential learning strategies. (iii) Sensitization of 42 service providers including healthcare providers, Anganwadi workers, teachers and TNUHDB officials on SRH and mental health issues, and needs and concerns of children and adolescents were carried out after sample survey findings indicated that service providers lacked knowledge and understanding about attitudes of children and their behaviour. (iv) Training parents and guardians included positive parenting practices such as usage of positive language, planned discipline, parenting styles, domestic violence, human body and development, understanding adolescence and healthy coping mechanisms which in turn lead to the child demonstrating healthy behaviours conducted for 405 parents. (v) Establishing child / adolescents' friendly centres acted as one stop centre where children, their parents and other community members come together to access counselling (173 children and 134 parents) and social entitlements (72) and social protection schemes related support services. Centre is utilised to facilitate training sessions, to provide linkages and to avail social entitlements /welfare schemes and to access counselling sessions. (vi) Accompanied referrals and linkages for mental health issues, SRH and employment carried out for 234 adolescents. (vii) Establish platform to foster alliance between community collectives and policy makers and service providers. (viii) Identify children, adolescents and adults(30 members) in the community for

sustainability planning and capacity building and (ix) weekly sports coaching sessions facilitated for 119 children to improve mobility and use of public spaces.

Outcome/Impact

Health and Wellbeing

- **Nutrition and Hygiene:** 27.1% of adolescents adopted healthier food habits, including eating vegetables, green leaves, drinking milk, and avoiding junk food. 18.7% now consistently take three meals a day.
- **Hygiene Practices:** 13.6% improved personal hygiene by taking daily baths, washing genitals, and handwashing before meals.
- **Emotional Health:** 19.5% of adolescents began expressing anger in healthy ways, reducing incidents of physical aggression.
- **Gender Role Shifts:** 14.8% of boys began participating in household chores, and girls started independently stepping out to shops.

Adolescent Girls' Empowerment

- **Mobility and Sports Participation:** 45.9% of girls aged 8–15 years came out of their homes to participate in sports and self-defense classes after attaining puberty — a major shift in traditional restrictions.
- Among girls who were previously not allowed to move outside after puberty, **58.3%** (28 out of 48 girls) now participate in sports activities outside the community.
- **Communication on Puberty:** 11.5% of adolescents initiated open conversations with parents about periods, puberty, and reproductive health issues.

Anemia Control

- 382 adolescents attended anemia screening camps; 108 were identified as anemic.
- 76 children aged 11–18 years received IFA tablets, and 32 children aged 8–10 years received IFA syrup, ensuring a continuum of care.

Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Products

- 10,144 sanitary pads were procured and 9,888 distributed through community counselling centres.
- 213 adolescent girls regularly accessed free sanitary pads, promoting menstrual hygiene management.

Access to Child Protection Services

- 20 vulnerable children (single-parent orphans) were linked to sponsorship programs; 17 received Rs. 4000 per month to prevent institutionalization and strengthen family-based care.
- 23 dropout/long-absentee children from the project and 19 non-project absentee children were supported back into school.
- 13 children stopped using abrasive strings for kite flying, promoting safety.
- 14 cases of child marriage, child labour, child sexual abuse (CSA), and domestic violence were reported and supported. Notably, community members themselves came forward as witnesses in CSA cases.
- 13 children received direct support to deal with experiences of child sexual abuse.

This year, the Malargal program has achieved remarkable milestones, underscoring our deep and positive impact on the community. We gained significant recognition from key external stakeholders, including the police department, which invited the SIAAP team to inaugurate the Police Boys and Girls Club, and school management, which included us in their School Management Committee

meeting, broadening our outreach. The Tamil Nadu Urban Habitat Development Board (TNUHDB) also acknowledged our contributions by providing a community hall free of charge for our Independence Day celebration.

Our focus on mental health has led to a notable increase in awareness within the community, with several cases being referred to us. We established a Crisis Management Team comprising active PAC members, who maintain ongoing communication and support through a dedicated WhatsApp group. Our efforts have made parents more conscious of mental health, integrating counselling into their daily lives and actively monitoring their children's emotional well-being.

About 50 children undergone mental health literacy and character building session and the assessment showed mixed result.

In advocacy, we successfully halted the construction of a playfield in a community park by engaging with Greater Chennai Corporation officials, thanks to the active participation of parents from our Crisis Management Team. We also played a pivotal role in supporting victims of domestic violence and sexual offenses under the POCSO Act, providing legal assistance, counselling, and ongoing support to ensure their well-being.

Our efforts to introduce sports to the community have been successful, culminating in their participation in the Tamil Nadu Marathon, where one child won a bronze medal. Additionally, 17 children participated in the Athletic Fest by FIT India, securing 5 gold, 3 silver, and 2 bronze medals, with one child achieving overall championship status.

We secured crucial sponsorships and entitlements for 21 children through the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), providing financial relief and educational opportunities. Our commitment to education is further reflected in the re-enrolment of dropout students and successful registration of children for undergraduate courses at Azim Premji University. Our life skills sessions on puberty, menstruation, and awareness-raising on teenage pregnancy and child protection laws have empowered children to navigate these topics confidently.

Lastly, our Health Care Providers sensitization program concluded with the successful establishment of an adolescent-friendly clinic at the Urban Primary Health Centre (UPHC), now operating every Friday, ensuring that adolescents have better access to medical services. These achievements demonstrate our ongoing dedication to empowering the community, enhancing child welfare, and fostering positive change across various aspects of life.

Donor: Azim Premji Foundation

Primary stakeholders / Beneficiaries: Adolescent girls, their parents, their neighbourhood communities and schools, Anganwadi Workers, TN Urban Habitat Development Board and Police Officers.

Project name: Strengthening access to SRHR and wellbeing among female sex worker community in 3 states in India

Objective:

- Growing a stronger SRHR movement by empowering sex workers to advocate as a community
- Improving access to comprehensive SRH and well-being services and information through policy and community advocacy
- Organisational strengthening to enhance the effectiveness of the coalition, particularly in the COVID-19 context
- Generating evidence of the impact of COVID-19 on SRHR in the SW community

Intervention:

Our project aimed to break down barriers hindering female sex workers (FSWs) in India from accessing vital services concerning safety, protection, sexual and reproductive health, and mental well-being. We identified several key challenges such as restrictive laws, pervasive stigma, discrimination, and violence from service providers, as well as a lack of awareness among FSWs regarding safety, sexual health, and mental health issues. Our strategy involved implementing interventions across multiple levels—structural, institutional, organizational, and individual—targeting policymakers, healthcare institutions, community organizations supporting FSWs, and individual sex workers. These interventions were designed to empower and improve the overall sexual and reproductive health and well-being of FSWs. (i) Policy recommendations for comprehensive and non-discriminatory access to these services for FSWs. (ii) Strengthening sex worker organizations helped to build the capacity of FSWs to advocate for their rights to safety, health, and well-being, and to initiate a national, inclusive, and multisectoral collaboration to translate these rights into actionable policies and programmes. (iii) Strengthening knowledge and skills of individual sex workers to help community members to access safety, SRH and MH health and social services without fear of discrimination. (iv) Integrating a pleasure-based approach into SRHR

Outcomes:

- Building broad and inclusive movement for strengthening SRHR (and Mental health) for sex workers. This is evident in the overwhelming support of key national stakeholders including the sex worker networks, government agencies, UN bodies, international and national CSOs, and independent experts for the policy recommendations developed by SIAAP to strengthen access to comprehensive and non-discriminatory services for safety, sexual and reproductive health, and mental health for FSWs.
- Strengthening advocacy capacity of FSWs to support and represent sex workers, and confront/collaborate with government authorities, law enforcement agencies and healthcare providers;
- Establishing an effective crisis response mechanism through training to be assertive, interact confidently with authority figures, take pride in their work, and participate in regional and national meetings.
- Significant increase in numbers of FSWs accessing SRH and safety services at government healthcare facilities, especially for safe abortions, protection from IPV, and nutrition assistance for sex workers living with HIV/AIDS. talking openly about their problems, and seeking help.
- We have seen changes related to focus, approaches, and quality of our SRHR related engagement. Our focus has extended from facilitating service access to capacity building for advocacy by beneficiary populations. We have learnt to include safety and mental health as

critical components of strengthening SRHR, and we have learnt to establish community led crisis intervention mechanisms in all SRH related interventions we undertake.

- Our approach has shifted from a stand alone SRH issue (e.g., HIV/AIDS), to adopting towards a life cycle approach to SRHR to ensure relevance and comprehensiveness.
- Finally we have invested in ensuring rigorous methodologies to ensure quality outcomes so as to strengthen credibility and acceptance.
- Connect and credibility were strengthened with a range of partners/potential partners, through close collaborations and strategic engagements in specific areas. Our partners included the sex worker community in the project areas as well as nationally, government agencies, UN bodies, national and international CSOs, and other key stakeholders. Strategic engagements were made for work related to release of women forcibly detained under prostitution laws crisis interventions and policy recommendations.
- Visibility was strengthened through multiple physical and virtual meetings held with stakeholders from across the country as part of building consensus for the policy recommendations.
- Capacities of junior staff were built on the job in areas related to project planning and review, data collection and analysis, collaborations and advocacy with government agencies, and writing and documentation. Most importantly, the project inspired and motivated staff to continue working on SRHR issues, especially for sex workers and young people, instilled a desire to learn and practice advocacy, and built confidence in themselves as change agents in collaboration with communities and other partners.

Donor: Amplify change

Primary stakeholders / Beneficiaries: Female sex workers, LGBT, PLWHA, Survivors of violence and others children of sex workers.

Project name: Assessing Consent of Adult Women held in Government Homes in Tamil Nadu

Project Background:

On May 19, 2022, the Supreme Court of India (SCI), recognized the rights of consenting adults to practice commercial sex, and directed all State governments to “do a survey of all ITPA protective homes so that cases of adult women, who are detained against their will, can be reviewed and processed for release in time bound manner” (SCI, CrI. Appeal No. 135/2010).

Following the Supreme Court order, SIAAP, together with the Directorate of Social Defense (DSD), Government of Tamil Nadu, conducted a total of four surveys in Government Vigilance/Protective Homes in Tamil Nadu between August 2022 and May 2024.

Key findings

Age: The mean age of the women was approximately 29 years.

State of Origin: About 60 per cent of the detained women were from Tamil Nadu. Approximately 30 per cent were from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Pondicherry, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Kerala and Odisha, and the remaining were from Bangladesh and Kenya.

Place of arrest: The women were mainly arrested from Chennai, Madurai, Trichy, Nagapattinam, Coimbatore, Krishnagiri and Kanchipuram, Nilgiris, Namakkal and Tiruppur.

Marital status: Approximately 82 per cent were either currently married or had been married earlier. Of those who were married, only 33 per cent were currently living with their partner/husband, while others were widowed, separated, or deserted.

Children: About 70 per cent of the detained women had one or more children.

2. Consent to sex work: About 58 per cent of the women said they were practicing sex work voluntarily (“with our consent”); about 7 per cent said they were trafficked, and the rest (34 per cent) said they were spa workers or others not involved in sex work.

3. Arrested without information: About 92 per cent of the women said they were not clearly informed why they were arrested by the police at the time of the arrest, or by the magistrate at the time they were sentenced to detention. Some were told that they were being rescued because they were “victims” of sex work, others were told that they were arrested for “prostitution”, while the majority were not given any information. Only two out of 188 women had received a copy of the First Information Report.

4. Detained without consent: Approximately 96 per cent of the women said they were being detained without their consent. They said that they had not been asked by the police, judge or others for their willingness to be sent to the GVH/GPH.

5. Legal support delayed/denied: About 92 per cent of the women said that they were not informed about their right to free legal aid. About 45 per cent said they were not aware of this service.

6. Want to leave GVH/GPH: All the women said that they wanted to leave the GVH/GPH as soon as possible. Approximately 53 per cent of the women said that they needed help to do so.

Outcomes:

More than 100 women detained against their will were released from vigilance homes

Donor: EU Girl Child, SIAAP

Primary stakeholders / Beneficiaries: Females arrested under ITPA act, female sex workers, ITPA protection homes, Directorate of Social defence

Project name: COVID 19 Response Mechanism Grant

Background:

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) has entrusted SAATHII to work with the key population through a project entitled COVID19 Response Mechanism (C19RM). The project aims to reach nearly 58,000 FSW, MSM, and TG population in accessing Identity cards and Bank account services through three Sub Recipients (SRs) namely, The Humsafar Trust (HST), Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha (SANGRAM), and Swati Mahila Sangha (SMS). These individuals will be reached 50 Sub-Sub Recipients (SSRs) sub-granted by the 3 SRs, covering 14 states (Delhi, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Jharkhand, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Telangana, and West Bengal). The Project will also work closely in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO), State AIDS Control Organizations (SACS) and various central and state departments for seeking support on social welfare schemes and services. Further, these 50 SSRs will identify 4000 Community Facilitators (CF) and train them on facilitating the application for ID cards, bank accounts and various centrally and state sponsored social protection schemes. The trained CFs would reach out to the target beneficiaries based on their needs and assist them to apply and obtain ID cards, bank accounts and for social protection schemes based on the community needs.

SIAAP as SSR

South India AIDS Action Programme (SIAAP) is selected by SANGRAM as Sub-Sub-Recipients (SSR) to implement the C19RM project in 5 districts namely Tiruvannamalai, Theni, Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli, Madurai by selecting and training 80 Community Facilitators. As per the grant contract (please refer enclosed signed contract)

- SIAAP coordinated with CBOs of Thiruvannamalai nadadeepam pengal Nala sangam, Sudhoroli Pengal sangam, Unnamalaikadai Nightingale Women Welfare Society, Kanmani Pengal Sangam, Nallai Mangai sangam, Bodi Natural Pengal Nala sangam, Shymala Pengal Nala Sangam, Theni madurai vadamalar Pengal nalasangam members for providing services to their members/beneficiaries.
- SIAAP identified community Facilitators to be trained on social protection and reach out to community members, educate them and facilitate the process to obtain ID cards, open bank accounts and access social protection services.
- SIAAP will select 80 Community Facilitators (CF).

Objectives:

- To Identify and train 80 community facilitators to build a core group of trained sex workers who can assist their peers in accessing identification documents, bank accounts, and social protection schemes.
- Successfully apply and secure 1925 Identification documents (including Aadhar cards, PAN cards, Income and community certificates), 300 Bank accounts (including post office accounts and zero balance accounts), and 955 schemes (including Ayushman Bharat, E-Shram, and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana).

Intervention:

The intervention was structured into three key activities:

1. Identification and Training of Community Facilitators: A core component of the intervention was the identification and training of community facilitators (CFs). These CFs, themselves members of the sex worker community, were trained with specific objectives:

- Disseminating essential information about the process of obtaining identification documents, opening bank accounts, and accessing various social protection services.
- Building the capacity of sex workers to navigate these processes independently.

- Establishing a core group of trained sex workers within the National Network for Sex Workers (NNSW) who could assist their peers in accessing these services.

2. Needs Assessment by Community Facilitators: Once trained, CFs conducted thorough needs assessments among potential beneficiaries. This involved:

- Evaluating the services and benefits already acquired by each applicant and identifying gaps where additional entitlements were necessary.
- Educating the applicants on the importance of these benefits and schemes, while obtaining their consent to declare themselves as voluntary sex workers.
- Collecting the necessary supporting documents and assisting in the application process to ensure successful acquisition of the identified benefits.

3. Provision of Technical Support: To ensure the successful implementation of the intervention, technical support was provided through:

- Continuous motivation for CFs in identifying beneficiaries and assessing their needs.
- Sensitization of external stakeholders, including officials from the revenue department, banks, post offices, and village administrative officers (VAOs), to the unique challenges faced by sex workers. This helped fasten the application processes and minimize procedural delays.
- Coordination of the application process by CFs, including sharing acknowledgements, copies of original documents, and client registration forms with project coordinators.
- Verification of submitted documents against originals and acknowledgements, followed by data entry into the online database.
- Support for Sub Recipients in physically verifying the benefits received by beneficiaries, with on-site visits to assess the impact and effectiveness of the schemes in improving their lives.

Output/ Outcome:

Training of Community Facilitators: Over the reporting period, the project successfully conducted two training sessions in Kanniyakumari and Madurai, to equip voluntary female sex workers to become Community Facilitators (CFs). Out of the 80 identified candidates, 46 attended and completed the training. As of April 2024, 38 CFs remain active, playing a crucial role in the ongoing outreach and support efforts.

Application and Receipt of Benefits: The trained CFs have facilitated a significant number of applications for various benefits:

- Identification Documents: A total of 1,551 identification documents were availed.
- Bank Accounts: 139 accounts were successfully opened.
- Social Protection Schemes: 359 women availed Ayushman Bharat, E-Shram, and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana

Preliminary Outcomes: Though a comprehensive assessment of the impact of received social entitlements is still pending, initial feedback from the field has been promising. Beneficiaries have reported using the benefits to secure school scholarships for their children and successfully apply for financial loans within their Self-Help Groups. Furthermore, beneficiaries have reportedly claimed 'Kalaingar Magalir Urimai Thogai' (a financial support scheme offering INR 1000 / month for household women) through their newly opened bank accounts.

Donor: GFATM

Primary stakeholders / Beneficiaries: Female sex workers, CBO leaders, Revenue Department, Post office officials, Bank managers, Village administrative officers, and services providers.

Project name: General operating support for the LGBTI Program

Objective:

- Advancing equal rights for LGBTQIA+ people and to achieve significant legal, policy and cultural changes towards equal rights for LGBTQIA+ people
- To bring changes in public understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues and communities and/or new narratives by and about historically oppressed people within LGBTQIA+ communities
- Building stronger relationships, alliances, and partnerships to advance LGBTQIA+ rights
- Strengthening crisis response team and burnout prevention among social workers
- Sensitizing mental health professionals about LGBTQIA+ community and enhancing the quality and availability of mental health support services for LGBTQIA+ community

Themes:

Creating awareness about gender and sexual diversity and promoting inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQIA+, strengthening mental health support services for the LGBTQIA+, addressing crisis situations and building capabilities of the community groups

Intervention:

- **Institutional Outreach:** The organization successfully conducted numerous gender and sexuality sensitization programs across various institutions, including educational institutions, government bodies, professional groups, other social welfare organizations, and community organizations. This has significantly contributed to raising awareness about LGBTQIA+ issues and promoting inclusivity.
- **Legal Sensitization:** We have sensitized legal professionals and students to promote the legal rights and protections of the LGBTQ+ community.
- **Community Support:** We have provided essential support services to community members, including legal assistance, mental health counseling, and information on livelihood options.

Outcome / Impact:

- **Increased Acceptance and Inclusion:** The organization's efforts have contributed to a more inclusive and accepting society, where LGBTQIA+ individuals feel safe, respected, and valued. The programs have fostered a more understanding and accepting environment, challenging societal stereotypes and biases. This has the potential to lead to positive social change and reduced discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals. For example, the program for adolescents and children in June 2023 was very well received. Some of the children who participated shared their regret for having bullied others for their gender identity.
- **Positive Impact on Mental Health:** By providing mental health support and resources, the organization has helped to improve the mental health and well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** The organization has successfully collaborated with various institutions, including government agencies, educational institutions, and community organizations. These partnerships have strengthened the organization's reach and impact.
- **Strengthened Community Networks:** The organization has played a vital role in building and strengthening community networks among LGBTQIA+ individuals and allies, providing a sense of belonging and support. For example, we also provided technical support for community groups in Theni and Coimbatore to establish their own community based organizations (CBOs) and networks.

Donor: Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice

Primary stakeholders / Beneficiaries: Queer community members, social workers, children and adolescents from underserved communities, sex workers. etc.

Project name: Promoting Inclusion and Welfare of LGBTIQ Communities**Objective:**

To strengthen and empower members of the LGBTQIA+ community, facilitation of support groups for social workers and community leaders to include LGBTQIA+ community members and women in sex work, to create awareness, prevent discrimination, and promote understanding, sensitize legal and media persons, facilitate communities to come together and work toward inclusive policies, raise visibility through initiatives like the LGBTQIA+ Pride, to address issues within the subgroups of LGBTQIA+ community.

Themes: Inclusive policies for LGBTQIA+ communities, creating unity among the subgroups of LGBTQIA+ community and building capabilities of the LGBTQIA+ community groups.

Intervention:

We have organized various programs to bring unity among diverse subgroups of LGBTQIA+ and to develop second line leadership in the community. For example, in a program with transgender and kothi community members in Trichy, they said they came to know about intersex identities for the first time in their lives. We, as part of the Coimbatore Rainbow Coalition, organized the Pride March in Coimbatore in June 2022. This was the first after the coronavirus lockdowns and also the first Pride with full representation of all segments of the LGBTQIA+ community. We also organized various events like cycle rally, film festival, mental health awareness programs, etc., as part of the Pride month celebrations in Coimbatore. As part of capability building activities under this grant, some of our team members were trained in the theatre of the oppressed and one of our team members attended an advanced course on sexuality organized by Nirantar. We continued to be in follow up with the theatre group and through them organized programs for the general public in Chennai. For example, in one of the programs they organized the participants brought their family members along and they stayed with us for continued discussion even beyond the allocated time for the program. The learnings from these training sessions were also shared among our team members and the insights have helped us further develop our modules, for example by creative use of theatrical activities in our sensitization programs.

Outcome / Impact:

As a result of continued engagement with universities and colleges, we are seeing greater inclusion at the policy level as well, for example, University of Madras has launched a scheme for transgender students¹. Now, students are not only able to select transgender as a gender option but also there is one earmarked seat for free education for transgender students with relaxed eligibility criteria of 50% marks. While the demand to provide gender inclusive restroom facilities for transgender persons is already pending with the Honorable Madras High Court, we also see some institutions where we conducted sensitization programs earlier like the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD), Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu, are already providing accessible restrooms to transgender and gender nonconforming students by redesignating some of their existing restrooms as gender neutral restrooms.

One of the students who participated in our program at National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Chennai, Sreepriya, shared her own beautiful artwork about the session on social media². Another participant of that session also took efforts to organize a sensitization program for a jewelry store. Beyond the sensitization programs, our team members continue to be actively involved with theatre groups like Sterling Playback Theatre which serves as a safe space for the queer community.

¹ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/mu-plans-one-free-seat-in-each-college-for-transgenders/articleshow/90384824.cms>

² https://www.instagram.com/p/Cpp9n4YPg_Y/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D&img_index=1

The Tamil Nadu government has also amended the Subordinate Police Officers' Conduct Rules to specifically prohibit police from harassing LGBTIQ+ community members or those working for the welfare of the community³. In yet another positive development, while ruling on a case about maternity benefits for unmarried women, Honourable Justices Chandrachud and Bopanna have ruled that families include queer families (Deepika Singh versus Central Administrative Tribunal and Others⁴). As a result of our previous sensitization programs with writers and media persons, M Anandhan has authored the book Kairathi-377⁵ which includes the stories of 11 queer individuals. One of those stories is based on the personal experience of our team member Siva who was also invited as a special guest for the book release in Coimbatore⁶. Overall, although significant challenges continue to exist and there is a long way to go, we are already seeing more inclusive and sensitive reporting about LGBTIQ+, especially, in the vernacular media.

Donor: AJWS

Primary stakeholders / Beneficiaries: Social workers, Community leaders, LGBTIQ+ community members and their partners and family members, sex workers

³ http://www.stationeryprinting.tn.gov.in/gazette/2022/7_III_1a.pdf

⁴ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/26134676/>

⁵ <https://thamizhbooks.com/product/kairathi-377/>

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEn1eF2sG9s>

Other Activities

In addition to its flagship programs, South India AIDS Action Programme (SIAAP) undertook several strategic initiatives during 2023–2024 to further strengthen community resilience, expand access to rights and services, and respond to emerging needs. These efforts focused on empowering marginalized communities, building sustainable grassroots leadership, supporting young people's mental health, ensuring legal protection for sex workers, and providing critical humanitarian assistance during emergencies.

1. Participation in World Social Forum at Kathmandu Nepal:

Federation participated in the **World Social Forum (WSF)** held in Kathmandu, Nepal. This global platform brought together civil society organizations, social movements, and rights advocates from around the world, providing a valuable opportunity for learning, networking, and solidarity building.

Objectives of Participation: 1. To deepen understanding and gain new perspectives on critical themes including: Gender, sexuality, identities, and gender-based violence, Social movements concerning women, children, youth, adolescents, aging populations, and persons with disabilities, Health, social protection, and equity. 2. To connect with like-minded individuals, organizations, and movements working on issues related to sex work, adolescent rights, and social justice. 3. To share the experiences and best practices of Vadamalar Federation and SIAAP in addressing discrimination and violence against female sex workers.

Participation has strengthened advocacy and leadership capacities through exposure to diverse political viewpoints, strategies, and grassroots experiences, established new connections with individuals, networks, and movements working in intersecting fields of gender, sexuality, health, and rights advocacy and enhanced visibility for Vadamalar Federation and SIAAP's work on combating discrimination and violence against sex workers, particularly through policy advocacy and legal reform efforts at national and international levels.

2. NACO, UNAIDS and NCW Visit:

In 2023-24, South India AIDS Action Programme (SIAAP) actively engaged with key national and international stakeholders to advance critical policy and programmatic initiatives aimed at strengthening the rights and wellbeing of female sex workers (FSWs) and adult women affected by trafficking laws.

SIAAP had the privilege of meeting with Dr. Shobini Rajan, NACO, to discuss the finalization and mainstreaming of the *Draft Policy Guidelines to Strengthen Access to Quality SRHR Services for Female Sex Workers in India*. Following her valuable inputs, clear next steps were outlined, including sharing the revised policy guidelines and training modules with the Technical Resource Group (TRG) at NACO, collaborating with UNAIDS for advocacy, and mobilizing support for strengthening NACO's mainstreaming unit. These actions aim to integrate SRHR for FSWs into national frameworks.

Parallely, SIAAP engaged UNAIDS, discussing two strategic areas:

- (1) Mainstreaming the SRHR policy guidelines; and
- (2) Continuing the assessment and review of the consent of adult women held under trafficking laws in government protective homes in Tamil Nadu, in line with the recent Supreme Court directives. Key recommendations included expanding the survey across multiple states in collaboration with national sex worker networks, resource mobilization, and advocacy through UNDP and IPPF. These engagements have paved the way for stronger collaborations and strategic alignment with the Supreme Court's vision.

Further, SIAAP engaged with the National Commission for Women (NCW) on the issue of arrest and detention of adult women under trafficking laws. Based on discussions, SIAAP committed to

submitting a detailed proposal for sensitizing police officers in Tamil Nadu on the Supreme Court order regarding voluntary sex work, aiming to prevent unlawful detentions and uphold the rights of adult women.

Across all engagements, SIAAP received encouragement, constructive feedback, and strategic guidance, enabling us to build strong pathways for policy mainstreaming, field-level program expansion, and stronger stakeholder partnerships. These dialogues reaffirmed our commitment to strengthening access to rights-based SRHR services, promoting legal reforms, and ensuring dignity and justice for marginalized communities.

3. Training of Community Facilitators, Vadamalar CBO Meetings and Election Process and Crisis

Intervention:

To improve access to social protection schemes for female sex workers, SIAAP supported the Vadamalar Federation in training new community facilitators, in addition to those trained under the GFATM grant. Trainings were organized in Kanniyakumari and Madurai for women leaders from nine Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). These sessions built the capacities of women to independently facilitate access to identification documents and welfare schemes for their peers, reducing dependency on external actors. As a result, over **500 women** across five districts successfully accessed key documents like Aadhaar cards, ration cards, voter IDs, and health insurance coverage. This initiative significantly strengthened grassroots leadership, rights awareness, and community autonomy.

4. Sensitization on Supreme Court Directives Regarding Sex Workers

In alignment with the May 2022 Supreme Court order affirming the rights of sex workers, SIAAP conducted a technical session with the Samraksha team. Dr. Shyamala Nataraj and Ms. Sharmi led a comprehensive sensitization workshop explaining the directives and their practical implications, particularly regarding the unlawful detention of adult women in vigilance homes. Following the session, the team successfully intervened in cases where women had been remanded against their will, ensuring their release in line with the Court's guidelines, thus protecting their dignity and legal rights.

5. Meeting with Counsellors

Between 2009 and 2013, SIAAP had implemented the Rural Youth Project across 13 districts to prevent HIV among young people, build employability among young women, and provide community-based counselling services on sex, sexuality, and mental health. In 2023, a review meeting with former project counsellors revealed that many continue to serve as crucial community resources delivering HIV prevention messages, addressing domestic violence, and supporting mental health services. This long-term impact validated SIAAP's strategy of building sustainable, community-led service systems through localized training and empowerment.

6. Mental Health Literacy for Adolescents – Collaboration with SCARF

SIAAP, in collaboration with SCARF (Schizophrenia Research Foundation), initiated a pilot mental health program for adolescents in Ernavur. Training sessions were conducted for **509 adolescents**, focusing on mental health literacy, emotional well-being, character development, and resilience-building. The sessions showed encouraging outcomes, leading to plans for expanding the program across all adolescents in Ernavur and eventually to Perumbakkam, recognizing the critical need for mental health interventions among young people in resettlement communities.

7. Emergency Relief and Educational Support during Chennai Floods

During the devastating floods in Chennai (December 2023–January 2024), the Perumbakkam resettlement community faced severe hardships, including prolonged power cuts and dangerous flooding. SIAAP responded swiftly by providing emergency grocery and material support to **22 affected families**. Special attention was given to children whose education was disrupted due to family distress or loss. Through targeted educational support, SIAAP helped vulnerable children continue their schooling, effectively preventing potential child labour, early marriage, or teenage pregnancy, critical risks in disaster-affected, marginalized communities.

Conclusion:

Empowered adolescents today, resilient communities tomorrow

This year, SIAAP's work has once again proven that real, lasting change is built from the trust, solidarity, and the leadership of communities themselves. In every resettlement colony, every protective home, and every community network we touched, hope was not just restored, it was transformed into action, voice, and rights realized.

Together with our partners, we broke barriers that kept girls inside their homes, challenged stigma against LGBTQIA+ individuals, defended the rights of sex workers, and restored children to the warmth of family care. We stood with communities during crises, from Chennai's devastating floods to battles for justice in courts and witnessed the resilience and courage of the people we work with.

As we move forward, we carry with us not just the achievements of the past year, but the dreams of thousands who envision a world of dignity, equality, and opportunity. At SIAAP, we remain committed to walking alongside them and amplifying voices, strengthening systems, and building futures that leave no one behind.

We are deeply grateful to every child, every adolescent, every parent, every partner, and every donor who fuels this journey with belief and shared purpose. The work continues — and the best is yet to come.