

***Society for Women's Action  
and Training Initiatives -  
SWATI***

***Annual Report 2016 -2017***

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## About SWATI

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Society for Women's Action and Training Initiatives (SWATI) is a feminist organization that works on issues related to violence against women (VAW), livelihood, health, right to information (RTI) and governance in rural areas of Gujarat.

In 1994 we set out with a vision of initiating a rural women's movement that was *For the women, By the women and Of the women*. The vision pragmatically evolved into developing rural women's leadership and managerial capacities and supporting the formation of independent platform - Mahila Vikas Sangh (MVS), led and governed by the women themselves. This vision is a reality and has allowed SWATI to transit towards becoming a strategic combination of grassroots activism and policy advocacy through collective action, research and innovative approaches. The report of the year 2016-17 of SWATI is in many ways important year as it elaborates on the progress of the new initiatives of SWATI.

## Goal

To promote the rights of women and the marginalized; influence formulation and implementation of gender just policies and build an enabling environment for the achievement of the democratic rights of all.

## Mission

To build women's leadership and managerial capacities, empower them to take charge of their own development and mainstream women's perspective, needs and issues in every institution and sphere of society and the state.

## Strategy

Within the women's equality and empowerment framework SWATI selectively works on issues that question the patriarchal and masculine power structure and have the potential of having a broader ramification. To broaden our perspective and the outreach of our work, SWATI aligns with other groups and organizations through collective action, capacity building and networking in relevant areas of work.

Our initiatives during the period January 2016-February 2017 include:

## ***Prevention of Violence against Women***

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Prevention of Violence against Women (VAW) is a primary focus area of SWATI and the organization works to combat it, at multiple levels.

The strategy adopted by SWATI for an in-depth and wider impact on VAW has three primary components:

- Empower and equip women to combat VAW- through setting up of Mahila Nyaya Panchayats that are women led gender just mechanisms that support women survivors through mediation counseling and legal aid support.
- Make violence against women a *public health concern* and make the public health delivery system responsive to the issue of VAW.
- Make violence against women a *governance concern* to be addressed by the rural political leadership and governance agencies namely the gram panchayat.

## ***1. Empower and equip women to combat VAW***

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To empower and equip women to combat VAW the following initiatives were taken up during the period 2016-17.

### **a) *The Mahila Nyaya Panchayats***

To empower and equip women to combat VAW the Mahila Nyaya Panchayats (MNPs) have been set up. The MNP as a forum for handling issues of violence against women was initiated in 2002.



MNPs as women led gender just platforms are functioning in four blocks of Patan and Surendranagar districts. The Mahila Nyaya Panchayats works in a combination with resistance and arbitration strategies and are an effective alternative to women facing violence in the domestic sphere. The members of the MNP are systematically

trained and equipped in feminist perspective, laws for women, and counseling and understanding of judicial procedures. The MNP is held on a fixed day once ever week in a public place or in the sangathan office. The process of holding it in a public space is important as the private complaint of a woman is converted into a public discourse on what is a right and wrong- thus reshaping community norm.

The women who approach the MNS include those beaten physically and psychologically abused, women harassed for dowries and birth of daughters, doubted for fidelity, sexually abused and victims of bigamous marriages. Women seek help from MNS for getting custody of their child, getting back their dowry, their rightful share in the property; and getting back of assets that belong to them. 89% of cases that have come to the MNP since its inception in 2002 belong to these categories. The MNPs extend support through counseling, mediation, accompanying

women for child custody, fighting dowry cases; coordinating with shelter homes; helping them with police and legal aid. During the period 2016-17 the MNP in the two blocks collectively handled 118 cases of domestic violence and abuse.

***b) Empowerment Workshops: A methodology to help develop a vision for their life***

This is a different kind of positive intervention by SWATI, undertaken since the period 2014-15. SWATI's director Ms. Poonam Kathuria was invited by the highly acclaimed and prestigious



New York based empowerment institute to train with them as an 'Empower Imagine' practitioner. The empowerment institute has recently developed a strategy for working with marginalized, disenfranchised and women who are victims of violence and abuse. India is one of the countries that this institute is focusing on. The philosophy of empowerment is rooted in the faith that each individual has the power to create

life, the way s/he wants.

SWATI has been conducting workshops with survivors of VAW using this approach and tools. The model has been culturally adapted the model, however the basic structure and process has been kept intact. So far two workshops with 42 survivors have been conducted with extremely positive outcomes. SWATI has so far conducted 5 workshops with 137 survivors with very positive outcomes. SWATI has now included the empowerment workshops a part of the process of working with survivors.

### ***A few glimpses into possibilities of change:***

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Earning enough to be independent, neglecting one's own needs, putting the needs of others in the family over self, relationship, letting go; came up as areas that a lot of women prioritized for change.

***D: I am divorced, have a son and was working as a casual laborer and dependent on my brother who wanted to marry me off just so as to get rid of me. But I am not willing. I bought a sewing machine and now stitch clothes. My business is booming. I am no longer dependent on my brother.***

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***R: I am separated and have two children. My husband broke both my arms and I came to stay with my cousin brother, as my parents are dead. My son and I were treated as beggars. But I had no choice. I have now taken up land on sharecropping basis and if all goes well I hope to be able to rent a house and educate my children.***

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***M: reported that she had been wearing worn out footwear for past one month, her eyesight needed a recheck and that she walked home two miles every day from work as there was no transport available. She mentioned that she has purchased new sandals, got herself a new pair of spectacles, and had asked her husband to buy a second hand scooter, so that he can drop and pick her up.***

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***K: It somehow always happens that whenever I have to go out for work or meeting important to me, my parents help goes on leave. Always so far, since I am the only one single, amongst us three sisters, I have cancelled my program. This time too their help went on leave but, for the first time I asked my mother if she could manage and told my father to help her and if needed ask one of my other sisters to come in. I am not feeling guilty. My sister was surprised that I had done this but she did not say anything.***

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***N: I spoke to my children and told them that I have been trying to learn computer since five years but not been able to as I just do not have the time between finishing office and household chores. I told them I too need to grow and not just them. I distributed work to my children and they willingly agreed. In doing this N not only delegated responsibility but also created a support group.***

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***J: My husband and I do not get along. I sleep with my kids, which irritates him further. I realized we were both feeding the relationship negatively. I moved into his room and this year on my birthday he took me to the bazaar and asked me to buy whatever I wanted as a gift. Not just that for the first time in fifteen years my children brought a cake and we celebrated my birthday.***

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## ***2. Making Rural Public Health Delivery system responsive to VAW***

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The public health system is recognized as one of the most critical sites for addressing domestic violence, as there is ample evidence and women's testimonies to indicate that the public hospitals and associated health care professionals are uniquely placed to intervene and prevent further violence against women. In July 2012 a unique initiative in the form of a Crisis Intervention, Support and Counseling Cell, was launched by SWATI at the Community Health Centre and Referral Hospital, Radhanpur. This systematic rural initiative is the first of its kind in the country and once again makes Gujarat a pioneer. The Initiative has been jointly undertaken by the Department of Public health and Family Welfare, Government of Gujarat and Society for Women's Action and Training Initiatives- SWATI.



### ***a) Advocacy to scale up the model and influence the health perspective on VAW***

It has been part of our objective to take up advocacy and share with other CHCs, tertiary care and general hospitals the impact of our work. The idea being that health care system/ hospitals see this as a viable and useful proposition from a health perspective in terms of reducing the burden on the health system and therefore see it as a part and parcel of their work.

Towards this end orientation meetings were held with medical staff of Dharpur Medical College and Hospital and with the staff of Siddhpur General Hospital. Thus we could succeed in achieving our primary and most significant target of setting up the Counselling and crisis intervention cell (hereafter referred to as cell) in two additional hospitals of Patan district. **The cell at Siddhpur General Hospital was inaugurated on 8th march 2016, and the cell at Dharpur Medical College and general hospital was inaugurated on 18th august 2016.**

Combined with the preexisting cell at Radhanpur, this takes the total number of cells in Patan district to three. This number we feel is adequate to test and demonstrate a rural health system response model on domestic violence.

Cells in all three hospitals reach close to the planned for outcomes in second year of their functioning. The table below is indicative of the successful functioning and the importance of hospital based cells.

<i>Outputs and Activities</i>	<i>Yr. 2016</i>	<i>Yr. 2017</i>	
<i>Counselling and mediation _Radhanpur</i>	<i>118</i>	<i>132</i>	<i>250</i>
<i>Dharpur</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>99</i>
<i>Siddhpur</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>130</i>
<i>Access to multiple support services e.g. police, shelter home, legal aid</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>111</i>	<i>197</i>
<i>Four day residential Empowerment workshops</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Asha Trainings</i>	<i>300</i>	<i>425</i>	<i>725*</i> <i>*</i>
<i>Orientation of Medical staff at the three hospitals</i>	<i>435</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>490</i>

*\*\* ASHAs from three blocks of Patan district covered*

A total of 479 cases were registered with the cells located in three hospitals over a period of 24 months. This number is much larger than what a cell located in a women's organization or any other setting would receive. A total of 197 cases were referred to various agencies like Mahila Nyaya panchayat, 7 women have been referred to shelter home 47 cases have been filed in court and in 63 cases support of police have been taken. In several cases multiple supports has been provided.

#### **b) *Analysis of a subsample - A glimpse about the relevance of the cell in a hospital setting***

Analysis of a random subsample of 79 cases showed that almost half (48%, 38/79) women travelled up to 10 km to reach the cell, another 47% (37/79) travelled up to 50 km to the cell but

the rest 5% (4/79) had travelled from up to 130 km. Reporting of Health conditions by violence survivors is high. 58.43% survivors reported health conditions caused by violence faced by them.

Distribution of cases over sources of referral to the centre highlights the importance of a multi-pronged approach for a rural model. Need for multi-agency support system was validated through the analysis of this subsample. In case of 51% (50/78) cases the Mahila Nyaya Panchayat were involved in indicating the need for legal guidance for the woman. In an almost equal proportion of cases (49%, 38/78) the counselor has reached out to the woman's family members to explore whether they could ensure the support the client needed till her problem was resolved. Involvement of police and doctors in more than one-fourth of the cases (30%, 23/79; 26%, 20/79 respectively) reiterates the need for the centre to have strong linkages with the formal systems.

Though the cases analyzed here have been with the counselor for differing period of time, data indicates that in extreme cases the counselor may be required to hold as many as 20 meetings with the woman. Most (67%, 52/78) cases however required up to three meetings with the counselor.

There is acceptance/and integration of the Cells in all three hospitals. This is evidenced in small but significant ways. At Siddhpur Dr. Darji, AHO of the Siddhpur hospital asked the counselor to sign the hospital muster register and that she should take permission if going on leave. Dr. Darji has initiated a Whatsapp group with doctors and SWATI staff. He regularly posts information related to the cell on it.

In Radhanpur the Cell counselors are invited to staff meetings. And the ward boys and security staff are ever ready to discipline errant family members who may be misbehaving or not listening to Cell counselors. The AHO of Dharpur Dr. Sharma has given a formal letter of allocation for the room and equipment for the cell.

### ***Empowering self and supporting others: from being a victim to becoming a survivor -***

25 years old Meena, one of the counselors at the Radhanpur Cell approached the Cell as a victim of violence at the hands of her husband and in-laws. She had returned to her maternal house about three years before she approached the Cell after multiple attempts at mediation by community elders failed to get her husband to take her back. Meena has studied till 12th. By her own admission, before her marriage she was a happy, confident, ambitious girl but the brutal treatment at her husband's hand turned her into a depressed, timid person with poor self esteem. Lack of support at her maternal home did not help either. She came to know about the Cell from her friend while visiting an acquaintance who worked at the hospital. Intrigued by the possibilities she approached the cell and was provided information on possible actions she could take at that stage. On the same day she decided to apply for divorce and sought help from the Cell. Despite total lack of support from her natal family she continued with counseling and followed steps advised by the counselor. When she showed interest in finding employment, the counselor asked her to participate in the recruiting process at the hospital. She was selected, underwent training and she has since been working as a junior counsellor at the Cell.

### ***Case of early detection and action by ASHA worker -***

***Date of admission 14/3/2016, Age 19***

ASHA worker identified the case during her home visits. R was just 19 years of age and pregnant. She was scared of having sex and did not concede to demands of sex with husband. He started beating her. In her second month he hit her with his leg on her stomach. She started bleeding. ASHA worker came to know of this during her routine home visits. She brought x to the hospital for treatment/check-up and then brought her to the cell. The cell counselor immediately called up the husband and asked him to come to the cell with his parents. They came. The situation was explained to them and reconciliation was mediated in the presence of parents and community

### c) *Creating an enabling environment*

Prior to setting up of the cell and processes undertaken to integrate the functioning of the Cell into the hospital an enabling environment had to be built. As part of this process the hospital staff had to be oriented on various aspects of VAW, build confidence among the women to talk about their problems, there was need to build awareness about the services provided by the cell and to activate grassroots health service providers to respond to needs of women facing violence and prevent VAW.

#### *i. Orientation and capacity building of hospital staff*

Over the last two years the ground for setting up of the Crisis cell has been prepared through conducting of regular training sessions on a monthly or bimonthly basis. One-day workshops were conducted on the following topics:

- Why public health services an important area in violence prevention
- Orientation to Violence against Women
- Gender and Gender based discrimination
- Patriarchy
- Health impact of VAW on women and on public health system.
- Screening for VAW
- Building an enabling environment for women
- Referral and record maintenance



#### *ii. Messages and posters on the issue of VAW at several places in the hospital*

Posters on VAW have been put up in several places in the hospital to give confidence to women that they can talk about their problems, the violence faced by them, as well as promotion and information on the cell through pamphlets and meeting with ASHA workers.

### *iii. Intensive Promotion Outreach and linkage building- Approach for a rural model*

The Crisis cell is unique in the sense that it is setup in a rural referral hospital. This poses challenges of promotion, creating awareness and reaching out to a large enough population that can justify the need for a crisis cell in a rural setting.

SWATI has successfully done this through creating awareness among the staff of all linked PHCs as well as with the village level ASHA workers. Regular trainings and follow-up meetings are conducted with ASHA workers and with PHC and CHC staff in Radhanpur, Sami and Santalpur blocks.

### *iv. Mobile based communication intervention to create awareness and activate grassroots level health service providers to respond to (preventing) violence against women*

To further the impact of their program SWATI is keen in spreading awareness about the issue, support services and referral centers. Awareness needs to be generated among the Health Workers, ASHA as well as community members. This strategy details out a plan for awareness and demand generation for the same through a mobile-based platform. A database of phone numbers of SHG leaders and ASHA workers has been created and 16 messages of 45 second to one minute audio productions have



been created and sent via mobile phones to this database. We are closely monitoring the project for its impact. And the learning is being used to process and improve the messaging.



### ***3. Making violence against women a governance concern to be addressed by the rural political leadership and governance agencies namely the Gram Panchayat (GP).***

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The work with GP around VAW prevention has been an evolutionary process rooted in our own experiences and learning from those. Our own education has been immense and this year we decided to make it a multipronged approach that involved Mahila Gram Sabha, evoking Women's citizenship, youth engagement and the institution of the gram panchayat working together in a strategic and synergistic combination of change in attitudes, behavior and provision of development infrastructure, towards making women's public space safety a governance concern.

#### ***a) kNOw Fear Project***

Fear of Sexual Violence against Women and Girls (SVAWG) in public spaces is a significant barrier to equitable development in India and elsewhere. SVAWG in public spaces has gained attention in India, but mainly in cities. In rural settings, where 70 % of India's population resides, violence of this kind remains an unacknowledged and taboo issue, yet prevalent. Safety for rural women and girls is typically achieved by confining them to the home, which restricts mobility, leads to school-drop out and rationalizes early marriage. Governance structures at the local level, the Gram Panchayats (GPs), though constitutionally mandated to address issues of social justice and violence against women and children, have reneged on this responsibility.

SWATI in partnership with International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) has undertaken a pilot initiative kNOw fear. The project looks at rural women's safety in public spaces and its impact on their lives. The objective is to develop and validate an innovative evidence-informed model, which fosters freedom from violence and safety for women and girls in public spaces in rural Gujarat, India. The project will use gender integrated strategies and leverage ICT to empower women and girls to demand and lead change, while engaging young men as partners. The project concurrently builds capacities of GPs, catalyzing them to respond to SVAWG, thereby positioning public safety for women and girls as a critical component of rural local governance. The model is to be tested over a period of three years, in select GPs of Dasada block, Surendranagar district.



### **i. *i. Inception Meeting***

An inception meeting was planned to once again review the project activities, there alignment with the objectives and to plan for implementation. The meeting was held on at Ahmedabad and was attended by members of the partnering organizations. The key concerns that emerged for the project after detailed discussions include the following points:

1. Women's citizenship and awareness of rights is central to the project
2. Women's gram sabha prior to the general gram sabha is important to put across a woman's perspective.
3. Men and boys need to be influenced to develop positive attitudes and support girls and women.
4. Gram panchayats need to be committed to receiving the inputs provided by the project.
5. A MoU should be drawn up with GPs seeking their permission and concurrence to participate in the project.

### **ii. *Baseline Study***

The baseline survey was conducted in 11 intervention villages and 5 comparison villages. The objective of the baseline study was to establish benchmarks on key indicators to be measured throughout the evaluation. The study included separate surveys with girls aged 15-19, women aged 20-45 and young men aged 18-22. Around 1800 people from these villages were covered in the survey, which includes information in areas like access and use of various public spaces in the GPs by women; perceptions about safety and gender roles and rights, experiences of different forms of sexual violence in public places; consequences and help-seeking; witnessing of violence and bystander intervention; response mechanisms to VAWG in public places; knowledge about government laws and policies around SVAWG; awareness and participation in GP activities, perceptions about role of GP in addressing SVAWG; use of ICT, mobiles and exposure to messaging. Some of the key findings from the survey were:

- 68 % of the adolescent girls reported that public spaces in their village are unsafe after dark.
- 80% of the girls think that public space safety is their own responsibility. (Whereas ensuring safety for all in public spaces is the responsibility of the local governance bodies)
- 30% of girls reported that they protect themselves from SVAWG by not going to school.

- 37% of adolescent girls and 26 percent of women reported experiencing some form of sexual violence (visual, verbal, unwanted sexual contact such as touching and groping) in the last one year.
- 23% of young men admitted of ever perpetrating SVAWG in public spaces
- While 26% young men have access to internet, only 4.3% adolescent girls have this access.

## ii. *iii. Preparation for Intervention -*

The team was oriented about the project, its key activities and the budgetary allocations for the same. Team worked on the annual plan of activities for the project and reviewed the progress so far. Discussions during meetings with village level groups were revisited and strategies to improve our communication with them were discussed. Detailed quarterly plans were made along with a list of events / activities with allocated responsibilities within the team for the same.

Curriculum development for all the stakeholder groups (women and EWRs; youth (adolescent girls and young men) and gram panchayat members was initiated during meetings with partner organizations. SWATI held meeting with Sahaj (a Vadodara based organization which is working with adolescent girls and boys) in June to brainstorm for finalizing sessions to be conducted with adolescent girls for the project. Both the teams worked together for the sessions and modules were developed for gyan sahayaks (village peer leaders for the girls' and boys' group), both male and female which included concepts like gender and patriarchy, relationships, rights and responsibilities, violence and safety in public spaces etc. Later, detailed session plans were prepared for gyan sahayaks. Regular communication with girls and young men in all the villages were done and the process of group formation around the project activities was done in all the 11 intervention villages. Selection of Gyan Sahayaks was also done by the groups in subsequent meetings.

SWATI held meetings with SETU (a Kutch based organization working extensively with gram panchayats and working towards enhancing political participation of women) to discuss and finalize the training plan for the panchayats. In addition to the training plan, communication strategies with the panchayats before signing the MoU were also discussed. Draft MoU with the

panchayats was also shared with them and some suggestions from the discussions during that meeting were incorporated in the final MoU. Draft TOR with SETU was also discussed in the meeting, which was finalized in subsequent communication. Training modules for gram panchayat members was discussed and tentative dates proposed for the same.

### *Citizenship dialogue with women -*

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The first dialogue of the Women and Citizenship series was held in August. A total of 110 women from 11 villages participated in the dialogue which included women sarpanch, elected women representatives, women and adolescent girls.

Two leaders from Mahila Swaraj Manch (an elected women and women leaders collective) from Bhavnagar participated in the event and shared their experiences and challenges in women's representation in panchayats.



Representatives from the ICDS participated and shared their experiences of working with women. They discussed about equity and equality, political participation of rural women, their constitutional rights and their public and private citizenship. The dialogue had a plenary session and then three group sessions on – a) women's political participation in rural areas b) constitutional rights for women and c) gendered social norms. The dialogue was very helpful to initiate discourse around citizenship rights for women where women shared their experiences and concerns pro-actively. The dialogue helped shape our further communication with women's collectives in the villages. We continued our discussion with village level groups in all the villages and the process of formalizing the same continued in later months. The concept of kNOw fear project was discussed and how usual developmental concerns affect the safety and

mobility of girls and women in rural areas. Discussions with women's collectives involved the selection of leaders by the group through informal voting, was done in all the 11 villages.

### iii. *iv) Intervention activities -*

Project aims to **foster accountability and enhance the capacity of Gram Panchayats (GPs) to understand, prioritize and make plans to respond to women's safety in public spaces.**

Profiles of all the gram panchayats were created and a list of all panchayat members was finalized. These profiles include the name, age and educational status of all the panchayat members; the internet connectivity in the villages and a brief on the socio-political setting of the villages. After a series of meetings with the selected GPs, common meeting was held where representatives from all the 11 intervention GPs participated. Details about the project, baseline study and expected outcomes of the project were shared with them. However, there are socio-cultural barriers to disclosing and acknowledging SVAWG as a concern by GPs, which are inherently very masculine spaces. This apprehension of the GPs was addressed through bringing them on board as partners for working towards gender inequality, aspirations of youth and the



digital divide which impacts women and girls severely. The communication with Panchayat bodies focused on how ensuring better access to education and resources including technology and ICT could bridge the knowledge gap that divides the rural and urban. This discussion also focused on how women and girls are the most disadvantaged group, primarily because of their lack of

mobility; despite the development of education, skill and job opportunities in the area.

MoUs were signed with the Panchayat bodies during subsequent meetings with each of the GPs after the GPs passed the resolution of deciding to work with the kNOw fear project. Out of 11

GPs, formal MoUs are signed with 10 GPs and in the remaining 1 GP, work is being continued with other stakeholder groups except the capacity building of GP members.

Capacity building sessions with the representatives from all the panchayats were conducted every two months and the major topics covered include - 73rd amendment to the constitution; good governance for Panchayats; Gujarat Panchayati Raj Act (GPA) and functions of GPs; and approaches to development; the importance of planning and the provisions of planning in the GPA; planning process for Panchayats - examples from Gujarat; planning for issues of social justice and women's safety; decentralized planning and GPDP; understanding the government budgeting system from the national to the local level; and budgetary allocations, taxes that Panchayat can raise and other sources of income. 38 members from 10 GPs participate (15 EWRs and 23 EMRs) in the sessions.

The action plan decided during this training included working on the Gram Sabha campaigns and working on conducting and finalizing the GPDP for selected GPs. The work on the gram sabha campaign was delayed a bit because the notification from the central government for conducting gram sabhas was delayed



due to panchayat election in Gujarat. However, we worked on the campaign material and planned for holding special gram sabhas in villages after discussion with panchayat bodies and Talathi. During the reporting period, special Gram Sabha was held in one village, Gavana to address the demands of women collectives. On Republic Day, Gyan Sahayaks (GyS) participated in the school events and shared their experience of working with the project and the importance of safe spaces for women in rural areas.



The project implementation is in the initial phase, therefore the actions taken by the GPs and other stakeholder groups are more of symbolic accomplishments towards exercising their political agency and understanding their scope of work and expanding and elaborating on the same.

### ***Few actions taken by the Panchayats after the capacity building sessions***

- One of the EWRs from Sedla Panchayat (one of the project villages) was to demand the Sarpanch to call an emergency panchayat body meeting which was pending for the last few months for various reasons including the state elections to take action on some emerging issues. The EWRs collectively raised the issue of growing menace of increasing garbage dump in the village and the body passed the resolution to get it immediately cleaned. Women supervised the activity themselves.
- The Panchayat bodies from 4 GPs decided to plan and work on the budget as to increase the revenue for the Panchayat, which will be utilized for better service provisioning (street lights, regular cleanliness and maintenance of public spaces)
- Panchayat bodies started regularly visit the schools and keep a regular check on attendance of girl students and quality of education; regular interactions with the school teachers and discussing how the Panchayats can help to improve the education status in their respective GPs.
- Sarpanch from Mithaghoda visited the Taluka Panchayat and requested for his GP's Village Development Plan – the Panchayat body has decided to work on improving the same. This is also the first GP which volunteered to conduct the exercise of GPDP in their village.



Project aims to **organize women to exercise their political agency through mahila gram sabhas, and to demand action on women's public space safety from their local governance bodies (Gram Panchayats).**

Women's groups have been formed around the idea of Citizenship rights of women and girls in 11 GPs. The number of women in each group ranges from 23 to 25. The process of group formation was undertaken through intensive village level meetings of women drawn from all communities. SWATI has a strong presence in these villages by way of SHG groups. However, the earlier groups were formed around the idea of savings and credit and for ease of functioning



were often localized to one community / area in the village. Hence, the decision to form new groups was taken. At the initial stage this slowed down the pace of planned for interventions. Two capacity building and training workshop of two days each have been conducted with 39 women from 9 GPs. Training topics included understanding the distinction between sex and

gender; understanding the concept of patriarchy and resulting inequalities; women's political participation in developmental agenda in the GPs; introduction to the 73rd amendment to the Indian constitution.

The action plan towards the end of the training session was to conduct ward meetings in each of the GPs and list out concerns of women about their safety, mobility, education and hygiene which would be discussed and presented to the GP bodies. Monthly sessions with the women collectives are conducted in each of the intervention villages, where the EWRs also participate. The average numbers of women who participate in each of these sessions are 18 - 22 in each of the GPs.

## *Mahila Gram Sabhas (MGS)*

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They are one of the core components of the project and a platform which helps the women to discuss, priorities and plan for their issues before presenting them in the Gram Sabha meetings.

Continuation to the above mentioned description about planning meetings for the MGSs, the



process for planning of a MGS includes conducting ward meetings in each of the GPs where women groups from each ward discuss their problems and concerns through a rapid needs analysis.

The identified needs from each of the wards are then collected and presented in the MGS where

women from the whole GP priorities the cross cutting issues that concern the maximum women and plan on ways to present them to the GPs, primarily through Gram Sabhas. So far there have been MGS in 8 GPs and the major issues that have emerged are about the sanitation and hygiene of the village, proper and timely waste disposal, timely availability of safe transport, especially for the girls to attend their schools regularly; concerns about the safety of the common bathing platforms near the village pond and the actions that the Panchayat needs to take to tackle the rising menace of alcohol addiction among men. The common charter of demands has been prepared in these villages, so far.

**Project aims to engage young men and young women as partners in preventing and responding to public space violence using gender transformative approaches.**

There are currently having 22 Gyan Sahayaks (GyS), one male and one female in each of the intervention villages. The training modules include most sessions which are common for both, the male and female GyS, however, there are certain sections where we need to work separately with young men and adolescent girls. The workshops are designed and conducted in ToT format where the sessions which are discussed with the GyS are then subsequently taken by them in



their villages with the groups. The workshops include simulation and role plan techniques to ease the GyS and prepare them for the monthly sessions. 22 GyS from 11 villages participated in the training.

Training topics included discussion about understanding the basic concepts of gender discrimination, difference between sex and gender; concepts of gender equality and equity; understanding patriarchy and its ramifications; discussion about gender behavior and roles; understanding healthy relationships - understanding adolescent emotions of attraction,



infatuation, friendship, love and jealousy; masculinity - understanding the consequences of the present roles that boys play on women as 'protector', 'perpetrator' or 'equal partner'. Monthly sessions in the villages with groups of adolescent girls and young men are usually conducted by GyS where they discuss with the groups the issues from the training workshops. The average numbers of people who participate in each of these

sessions are 18-22 in each of the GPs.

**Project aims to empower women, young women and young men to use and leverage ICT to generate evidence on safety to towards creating awareness, undertaking advocacy and monitoring public space safety.**

In addition to the aforementioned work with the youth groups, we are also working with them on aspects of ICT where they utilize it to further their cause of awareness generation and helping the discourse on gender equity. All the GyS have been given a mobile tablet, in which videos about gender discrimination, importance of education and early marriage etc. were uploaded; which

they can utilize for their monthly sessions. Trainings for the GyS were also conducted on technical aspects of ICT and utilizing the same for awareness generation.

An action plan was decided with the GyS after the training where they were given certain tasks for photo documentation on selected topics from their village. For eg., in one such task, GyS were asked if they believed in the notion that men are physically stronger than women and they had to take photographs from their village to support their answer.

GyS had taken some really good photographs as a part of this process and a photo exhibition of all their photos where they also substantiated the photos with captions in their own words was also held at Patdi. While this activity acted as a stimulator for discussion about gender discourse in their houses and their villages, it also transformed something the GyS and they realized in practice what they were learning during the gender workshops.



#### *v) Advocacy with the State*

Officials at the state, block and district level have been contacted and oriented about the project. Ms. Mona Kandhar, Commissioner and Secretary, Rural Development is also on board for the TAG and is updated about the project's progress regularly during meetings with her in Gandhinagar. Meetings with the District Development Officer and Head, District Rural Development Authority have also been conducted twice during the reporting period at Surendranagar where they were oriented about the work with the Panchayats and in the second meeting, they were informed about the plans for conducting safety audits in the selected GPs. They have expressed their interest in pursuing the work with the GPs, especially the trainings and planning for the GPDP. Meetings with the Taluka / Block officials are held quite often at

Patdi and their representatives also participate in the project meetings with the Panchayat bodies and GPDP planning.



#### 4. The Mahila Vikas Sangh

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Of the Women, For the Women, By the Women- the women's federations working for Women's empowerment through control over resources, political participation, and citizenship is largely exercised through men as women relegated to the confines of the home and men take on the public mantle. As a result women's needs, development and access to resources take a male perspective and are under their control. In order to build women's leadership at the grassroots and help them gain control over resources in a rights perspective, SWATI has organized women



into large-scale, block-level collectives the Mahila Vikas Sanghs (MVS) (Women's Development Unions). These collectives work on developmental issues of women and communities. The MVS in two regions have an independent identity and are today powerful unions of over 5000 women that are from the local community based development organizations.

Managed by the women themselves the MVS signify the women's leadership and empowerment process and conduct various programmes that support women's development and empowerment at the community level.

##### a) *Savings and Credit:*

The federations independently and comprehensively manage their members' savings and credit activity. The program is not linked to banks and operates in the true self-help spirit with members' savings. The savings and credit program has an annual turnover of Rs. 93,60,200.00 in loans. The number of women who have availed of loans during the period 2013 to 2015 is over 800, Of that 67% is for productive assets, 25% is for essential needs such as education, illness, house repair and about 8% is for social events. This has given women a say in the household and for several women it has created assets, which was earlier, not the case. At the same time the



Sangh have resisted from becoming a micro finance (MF) organization, which would get focused on MF alone.

Member Savings with the Mahila Vikas Sangh				
Block	Total Members	Savings 2015-16	Savings 2016-17	Total savings on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2017
Dhranghdra	2244	440546	530212	3008861
Patdi	2657	828735	138915	4845157
Total	4901	1269281	669127	7854018

Total Loans to members from the Mahila Vikas Sangh				
Block	Number of members availing loans 2015-16	Number of members availing loans 2016-17	Total loan in year 2015-16	Total loan in year 2016-17
Dhranghdra	221	223	3773000	4341000
Patdi	177	242	3018100	5019200
Total	398	465	6791100	9360200

### b) *The SHG process:*

The SHG process helps in -

- in developing a membership stake and the federation to become a membership organization ;
- women gain skills of managing resources;
- in building capacity to generate a surplus which can sustain the activity; and above all
- to focus on other primary and strategic needs of the women which the MVS



has successfully taken up for its members given the above perspective.

These women's collectives have evolved to meet a wide range of community needs and channel many of SWATI's initiatives. Under the MVS umbrella are Mahila Nyaya Samitis (Women's

Justice Committees), Nagrik Adhikar Sahayata Kendras (Citizen's Rights Help desks) and the Jan Sunwais (Public Hearings).

### ***Towards Autonomy***

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The Mahila Vikas Sanghs are active organizations, in two blocks of Dhranghdra and Patdi in Surendranagar and have their own offices, governance structure, bank accounts and an identity independent of SWATI. However MVs were not a registered entity, thus limiting its autonomy. In 2011 it was decided to register the federations independently, however the process took much longer than anticipated mainly because the two organizations – SWATI and the MVS had to chalk out a new role for themselves and also a new relationship with each other. Over a two year period 2012-14 we carried out intensive organizational changes through organization development process with experts like Mr. Gagan Sethi and Mr. Vijay Parmar. Mr. Gagan Sethi focused on the vision building and preparations for the new responsibilities of the Mahila Vikas Sangh leadership. Mr. Vijay Parmar focused on the rules, regulations, norms and statutory responsibilities involved once the group is formally registered. In February 2015 Mahila Vikas Sangh was formally registered as a society and a trust under the Bombay Societies Registration Act, 1860.



The MVS has a governing board of 13 women of which 11 are from the community-based membership of the MVS. It is a two tier federal structure where there is autonomy in the day to day functioning and programs at the block level. However, there is a Governing board drawn from the working committees of both blocks that takes decisions that have implications on the objectives, value system and impact.

## 5) Women and Land Rights

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Land is a major resource and a source of earning in rural areas. Very early on in its journey SWATI focused on women's access to land. The Mahila Nyaya Panchayat (women justice committees) a woman led gender just platform for handling issues of violence and exploitation often dealt with cases of women facing destitution post the husband's death, as her name was not in the land records. The initial focus was on access. However post 2010 we started delving in to ownership and rights of women over land. SWATI coined the term "helplessness quotient of women" and worked to mitigate it. In rural areas, given the limited opportunity for employment, gaining women's access to agricultural schemes, subsidies, benefits and land rights became our goal.

Thus for SWATI working on inheritance and property rights of women is part of a continuum of working on prevention of VAW, and women's rights and entitlements. SWATI is a core group member of the Working Group on Women and Land rights (WGWLO) and has been working intensively in a socio-legal perspective to change social mindsets and to support women in using the law to claim their right to land, property and inheritance.

Revenue procedures are complicated. At the same time, in several cases, families where women's rights have been violated have to be convinced. These roles require understanding of women's issues and a gender perspective. SWATI with support of WGWLO trained a cadre of Para Legal workers since 2007-08, on revenue and revenue related social matters.

### a) *Swa Bhoomi Kendra: A Centre for Land Legal Literacy and access to productive resources for women*

In 2013 it was further decided to consolidate the work through setting up of a mechanism for institutionalizing these activities through a dedicated Centre at the Taluka level – The Swabhoomi Kendra (SBK). The Swabhoomi Kendra's run by SWATI are functioning in two blocks of Surendranagar and Patan districts and are managed by two Para Legal Workers (PLWs) who provide guidance and handholding support to marginalized women in their land related struggles.

The role of the PLW is to:

- Create awareness on the inheritance rights of women among rural community.
- Motivate the women who have been discriminated against, to fight for their rights; convince her Natal/Marital family to give her due share; and assist them to get the documents from the Patwari/Tehsil.
- Interact formally and informally with officials at various levels within different Government departments including Revenue, Rural Development and Agriculture department as also take up matters to the Deputy Collector- the Prant officer, if needed.



The Kendras are located in the Mamlatdar Kacheri which is the block revenue official's complex. Being located in the revenue office complex gives faster accessibility to the revenue records making work more efficient; as also makes Kendra more accessible to women as compared to any other private place.

The activities of the Swa Bhoomi Kendra during this period include the Swa bhoomi campaign to create awareness on land ownership and the Varsai drive to update land record in along with the Government of Gujarat.

### ***Swa bhoomi Campaigns***

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To explain the importance of land ownership of women Swabhoomi campaign was taken up. The campaign was specifically targeted at men and male leadership (Sarpanch and panchayat members) of the village.

#### **Outcomes**

- 32 men have so far come forward to put land in the in joint names (husband and wife)



- Three men agreed to give their land in equal parts to their three daughters
- Women began thinking and discussing the importance and need to have land in their name.

**Facilitating women's ownership in land inheritance :** The Swa Bhomi Kendra initiated a drive to ensure that women - daughters, widows, daughters in law are not left out of their names in family owned land.

Inheritance -Widows	231
Inheritance- Daughters	112
Inheritance (Joint names ,couples)	36
Inheritance-Family	351
Total	730

Apart from this every effort is made to develop women's identity as farmers. This is done through women farmer's events, campaigns and setting up stalls (managed by women) in the agricultural fairs organized by the government. This has increased visibility of the Kendra, made men more receptive to the idea of having land / inheritance for women; the support from government officials to the issue has gone up and most importantly the confidence levels of the para-legal workers to put forth their views on largely male platforms, such as meetings of talatis, sarpanches and government revenue officers or in village gram sabhas has gone up.

## Case Study

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Kulsum as 28-year-old woman joined us as a paralegal worker for women and land rights. She is 7<sup>th</sup> class pass. However, post her separation from her husband was emphatically clear that it is important that for women to retain their dignity women are self-reliant and secure. So she began her work on women and land rights. In the meantime, reconciliation was mediated and Kulsum went back to Bajana a village in adjoining Patdi block. However she chose to work in Dhranghadra her natal village, even if it meant that she travelled an hour more to reach her selected cluster of Dhranghadra block.

The quality that Kulsum has is that she does what needs to be done, without being deterred by social norms, other people's fears, negative experiences. It is this simple belief in the law that has been her biggest strengths. As an example in 1995 in Rajgadh village of the 250 families who filled forms eight families were allocated land under the ceiling act from government. They however were not allowed to till as the forest department claimed that this was their land.. Of the eight families two are of retired soldiers ( this was part of an effort to rehabilitate them). They had been talking to various authorities including lawyers, but to no avail Kulsum with her knowledge knew that the district collector is the person to approach. And that is what she did. The case went in to a hearing with the collector and in a matter of six months an order was issued in favor of the families. The forest department has however appealed. against the order.

In last 9 months Kulsum has convinced 21 families ( read husbands) in last one year to put their wives and children's land rights in the inheritance. This is no mean feat. However like Kulsum says" I have known firsthand what happens when women do not have a personal means of sustenance". This is like a life insurance. When all is well may not seem needed. But when things start going wrong, is when people realize the benefit. This has long term implications as for the first time men/ husbands have placed their wives as partners and recognized the rights of daughters into land.

In kulsum's case the change is not limited to others. Kulsum has convinced her father who has included Sakina ben's name (Kulsum's mother) in the 5 hectare land he owned. They have now also decided to include the four brothers and one sister (Kulsum) too in the inheritance. Kulsum lost a brother last year. So she has been insistent that his name too is included in the inheritance records so that her sister-in-law can get her right in property

**SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S ACTION AND TRAINING INITIATIVE**  
**BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31ST MARCH 2017**

( In Rupees )

Source OF Fund	31.03.2017	%	31.3.2016	%	Application of Funds	31.3.2017	%	31.3.2016	%
<b>Capital Fund</b>					Fixed Assets	2,234,998.00	10	1,481,663.00	7
Corpus	6,374,042.57	28	6,836,809.57	31					
					Balance in hand and in bank				
Funds/Grants utilised for capital assets	682,426.00	3	-	0	Cash in hand	1,619.00	0	1,689.00	0
	<b>7,056,468.57</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>6,836,809.57</b>	<b>31</b>	Saving Bank Account	425,768.83	2	2,563,878.93	12
					Fixed Deposits with SBI	15,958,187.00	71	13,054,763.00	59
						<b>16,385,574.83</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>15,620,330.93</b>	<b>70</b>
					<b>Advances</b>				
Unutilised Grants	2,686,514.00		3,062,198.00		Tax Deducted at Source	326,586.00	1	144,967.00	1
	<b>2,686,514.00</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3,062,198.00</b>	<b>14</b>	Deposits	39,009.00	0	39,009.00	0
					Other loans and advances	3,529,126.00	16	4,887,690.00	22
						<b>3,894,721.00</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5,071,666.00</b>	<b>23</b>
Current liabilities and provisions	462,354.00		1,124,453.00						
	<b>462,354.00</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1,124,453.00</b>	<b>5</b>					
<b>Income and Expenditure Account</b>									
Balance as per last Balance Sheet	12,309,957.26		11150199.36						
Add/(Less) : Excess of Income over expenditure (expenditure over income) as per income and expenditure a/c	<b>12,309,957.26</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>11,150,199.36</b>	<b>50</b>					
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,515,293.83</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>22,173,659.93</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>22,515,293.83</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>22,173,659.93</b>	<b>100</b>

**SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S ACTION AND TRAINING INITIATIVE**  
**INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST MARCH 2017**

( In Rupees )

Expenditure	31.03.2017	%	31.3.2016	%	Income	31.3.2017	%	31.3.2016	%
<b>Direct Project Exp.</b>					<b>Project fund and Maintenance Grant Received</b>	3,070,506.00	61	1,510,313.00	34
Women's Empowerment	2,864,030.00	57	763,231.00	17	Adjustments relating to earlier years	-	0	1,048,822.00	23
Women's Livelihood	69,092.00	1	660,126.00	15		<b>3,070,506.00</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>2,559,135.00</b>	<b>57</b>
Educational Material	-	0	30,109.00	1	<b>Contribution</b>				
Research and Training	140,376.00	3	-	0	Uses of Infrastructure and Assets	181,000.00	4	231,167.00	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,073,498.00</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>1,453,466.00</b>	<b>33</b>	Surplus from closed projects transferred	-	0	127,194.50	3
						<b>181,000.00</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>358,361.50</b>	<b>8</b>
Administrative Exp.	728,125.10	14	1,192,449.73	27	<b>Interest</b>				
Deficit in closed projects transferred	28,521.00	1	181,914.00	4	On Saving bank account	59,283.00	1	11,501.00	1
Income Tax Deducted at Source	-	0	272,558.00	6	On Fixed deposit account	1,575,849.50	31	1,536,693.00	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>756,646.10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1,646,921.73</b>	<b>37</b>	On income tax refund	141,530.00	3	-	0
						<b>1,776,662.50</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>1,548,194.00</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>									
Depreciation	210,777.00	4	82,642.00	2					
Less: Recouped from capital grants	(172,510.00)	-3	-	0					
Excess of Income over Expenditure	1,159,757.40	23	1,282,660.77	29					

	<b>1,198,024.40</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>1,365,302.77</b>	<b>31</b>					
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,028,168.50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4,465,690.50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>5,028,168.50</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4,465,690.50</b>	<b>100</b>

**SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S ACTION AND TRAINING  
INITIATIVE  
FCRA ACCOUNTS**

( In Rupees )

<b>Reciept and Payment for the Year ended 31.3.2017</b>	
<b>Receipts</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Opening Balance as on 1-4-2016	10,648,237.00
Grant Received	2,487,764.00
Intrest Received	974,205.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,110,206.00</b>
<b>Payments</b>	
Purchase of Assets	114,375.00
<b>Project Expenses</b>	
Women's Empowerment	1,047,815.35
Closing Balance as on 31-3-2017	12,948,015.65
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,110,206.00</b>