

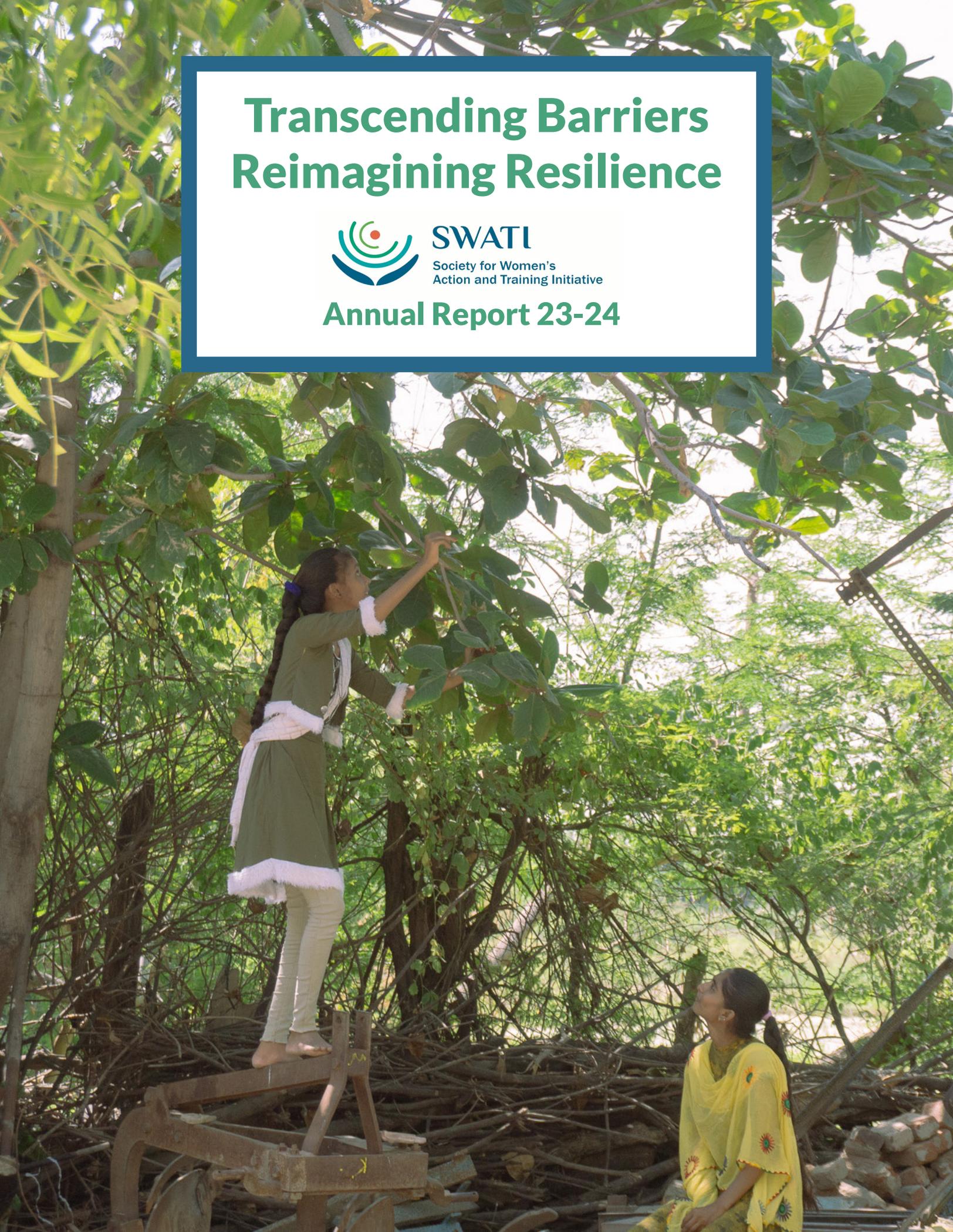
# Transcending Barriers Reimagining Resilience



**SWATI**

Society for Women's  
Action and Training Initiative

**Annual Report 23-24**



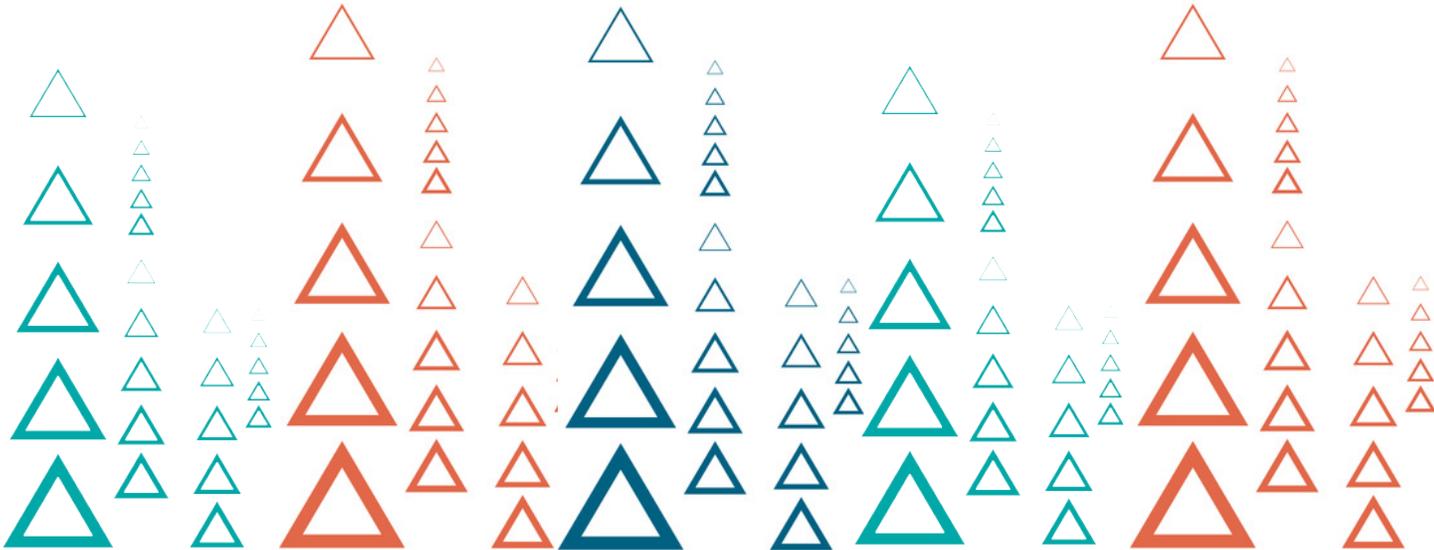
For decades, feminists movements have fought against gender-based violence, advocated for adolescent rights, and empowered communities. These movements have proven that there is no dearth of resilience amongst women who continue to march forth despite everything. But in a world where gender justice remains an unfinished struggle, resilience alone is not enough. Real transformation demands more than resilience, it requires responsive systems, where empowerment is not just about individual agency; it is about shifting power structures, dismantling inequalities, and holding institutions accountable.

This year, our journey has been about moving beyond barriers where we began not just overcoming challenges but reshaping the systems that perpetuate them.

Rebooting resilience is about reimagining the way we work. It means strengthening grassroots leadership, deepening institutional engagement, and leveraging policy frameworks that drive systems to create sustainable impact. From building survivor-led responses to influencing governance structures, we are shifting from reactive interventions to proactive, systemic change.

As we reflect on 2023-24, this report captures the initiatives SWATI has taken to *reshape the landscape of justice and equity*, ensuring that resilience leads to long-term transformation.

Join us in this journey as we transcend barriers, rethink/ reimagine resilience, and build a future of systemic justice.



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# About SWATI

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## Vision

A gender just society for women and girls

## Mission

To empower rural women through leadership and access to resources while setting up gender just platforms for policy formulation and implementation

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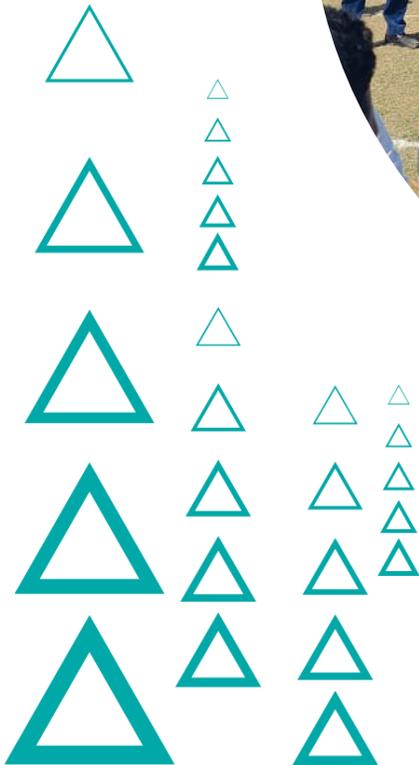
In 1994 we set out with a vision of initiating a rural women’s movement that was ‘For the women, By the women, Of the women.’ The vision pragmatically evolved into developing rural women’s leadership and managerial capacities and supporting the formation of independent platform-Mahila Vikas Sangh (MVS) led and governed by the women themselves. This vision is a reality and has allowed SWATI to transit towards becoming a strategic combination of grass roots activism and policy advocacy through collective action, research and innovative approaches.

At the core of SWATI’s work to prevent violence both in public and private spaces is the collectivization of women and girls to promote their wellbeing, fostering awareness of rights, enabling girls to occupy public spaces, and strengthening responsive and gender-sensitive governance and service delivery mechanisms.

SWATI achieves this by building women’s leadership, engaging men and boys, and undertaking community outreach. It sets up alternative dispute resolution systems, facilitates access to legal counsel, legal aid, and survivor support services, and collaborates with the public health system and village-level governance bodies — the gram panchayats — to enhance their responsiveness to gender-based violence and discrimination.

# Impact

Strengthening Systems, Shifting Norms, Changing Lives



# Direct Impact

## Ending violence, restoring dignity

Over 1,000 women survivors of violence received counselling, legal aid, and crisis support through the three Mahila Sahayta Kendras (MSKs)- community-based support centers that empower women by connecting them to government schemes, services, and entitlements, while providing a safe space to seek help and build local Leadership. They have supported nearly 7,000 women since its inception, building a sustained network of care and justice.



- 90 trained ASHA workers referred over 400 survivors by recognizing health indicators of domestic violence – a crucial step towards institutionalizing survivor identification within the health system.

- 200 medical personnel from government hospitals were trained to identify and respond to domestic violence cases, embedding gender-sensitive practices into the health sector.





## Girls and women taking public space

- 300 adolescent girls across 14 villages now actively participate in team sports such as Kabaddi, challenging gender norms asserting their right to play and occupy public spaces.
- 10 schools from Mahisagar and 2 schools from Surendranagar incorporated Kabaddi for girls into school time table. They made school grounds available for girls to play kabaddi . 300 girls benefitted from this.
- Two inspiring women’s teams, with members over the age of 40, competed at block and zonal levels. One team went on to win third place in the zonal tug-of-war finals – defying age and gender stereotypes and becoming role models for younger girls.

## Fostering gender equality from the ground up

- More than 3,000 students across 35 schools regularly participated in gender awareness and life skills sessions, nurturing critical thinking, self-confidence, and equitable values among boys and girls alike.

- Women's collectives in 30 villages successfully negotiated with Gram Panchayats to secure vital infrastructure — including drinking water, sewage lines, roads, and street lighting. These interventions improved living conditions across 7 gram Panchayats, 17 hamlets, benefiting thousands. In total, the value of approved demands exceeded Rs. 5.17 crore across Patdi (Surendranagar) and Santrampur (Mahisagar) blocks, marking a significant shift in women's engagement with local governance and development planning.



## Securing livelihoods and resource rights

- Over 1,500 women farmers were trained in sustainable agricultural practices, contributing to improved food security and climate-resilient livelihoods.
- 157 women gained legal ownership of land, including 29 daughters who received land directly from their fathers — a profound shift in patriarchal land inheritance patterns and a powerful affirmation of women's right to property.



## Advancing health, rights, and dignity

- More than 5,000 women and girls were educated on sexual and reproductive health and menstrual hygiene.
- 1,600 women and girls adopted menstrual cups, promoting sustainable menstrual practices, reducing economic burden, and strengthening bodily autonomy.

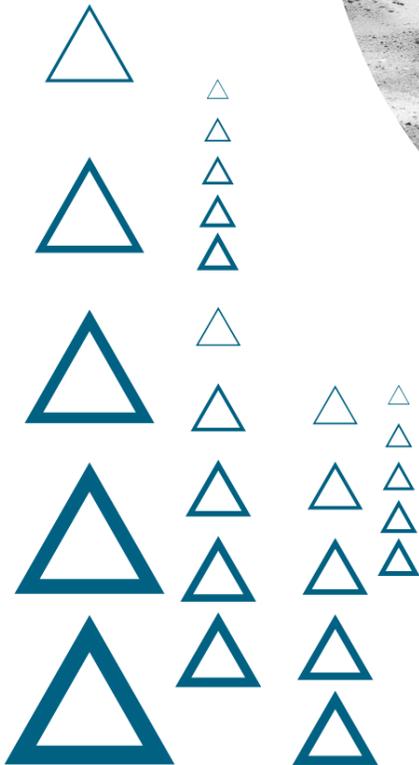
# Indirect Impact

## True Measure of Sustainable Change

While direct impact focused on participants, indirect impact captures broader shifts across families, communities, and institutions.

- **Health System Responsiveness:** 90% of the 450 trained ASHAs now actively identify signs of violence through health symptoms and refer survivors to MSK. They've reported better outcomes like increased haemoglobin levels and weight gain in pregnant survivors, and improved healthcare access overall. Hospital-based providers are also stepping up as champions of the cause.
- **Survivor-Led Referrals and Growing Awareness:** Survivors supported by MSK are now referring others, creating a powerful chain of support. Family members and community leaders involved in mediation are also directing survivors to MSK, expanding the program's reach organically.
- **Strengthening Women's Participation and Leadership:** Successes through women's collectives and Mahila Gram Sabhas have motivated more women to take part in gram sabhas and other decision-making spaces.
- **Embedding Safety in Local Governance:** Women's safety is now a regular feature in Gram Panchayat agendas – from better street lighting to clearing roadside vegetation – marking a shift in how local development is planned.
- **Recognition of Women as Farmers:** Training in sustainable farming has changed perceptions, with women increasingly seen as legitimate farmers. Over 400 women, now included in inheritance registers, have accessed government subsidies and schemes.

# Programmes and Initiatives



## **kNOw Fear : A model to foster public space safety for women and girls in rural Gujarat, India**

In recent years, SWATI has focused on developing innovative models that adopt a systems approach and are rooted in policy imperatives. We believe this is the only way to ensure transformative and sustainable change.

kNOw Fear is a governance-based initiative to enhance public space safety for rural women and girls by building individual agency, collective voice, and gender-responsive local governance. Fear of sexual violence limits women's and girls' mobility and access to opportunities that contributes to early marriage. Despite their mandate, Gram Panchayats (GPs) have largely overlooked these concerns.

The initiative employs a multi-pronged approach: mobilizing youth with gender-equitable attitudes to lead awareness campaigns and monitor public spaces; engaging women through safety audits and Mahila Gram Sabhas; and sensitizing GPs to their roles in ensuring public safety.

Over the past year, these converging strategies have sparked positive shifts—villages show growing awareness and accountability, and women and youth are emerging as key changemakers in creating safer, more inclusive rural communities.

### **Leading through resistance**

The Dalit Sarpanch of Zainabad (Patdi block) , despite facing repeated complaints from the dominant community aimed at discouraging her, continues to attend all Gram Panchayat meetings—Even while observing the norm of wearing a ghunghat before men, she makes her voice heard. Undeterred, she persistently followed up with the Panchayat and Talati to address women's long-pending demands for borewell repairs and a gutter line. Her determination not only overcame social resistance but also resolved the village's drinking water crisis, demonstrating her leadership and commitment to the community's needs.

## Empowering through sport

We went out (Vadodara) to play in the competition. People would say - they roam around without any purpose. I say, no, it is not like that. When we go out, we get experiences which boost our confidence. Tomorrow if someone blocks my way, I will have confidence to question him about his behaviour. But if we have always been inside the house, we would only be scared – scared of everything. Then our fear emboldens the offender.. What is life worth without an identity?”  
(Jiviben, 62 years, Elected Representative to Gram Panchayat, a women’s group leader, Mohila Pad, Mahisagar)



In rural patriarchal societies, girls and women often lack access to leisure. With support from SWATI, over 500 adolescent girls across 25 villages in Patdi and Santrampur have taken up kabaddi—a sport traditionally seen as male-dominated. They now play in inter-village matches and state-level tournaments like Khel Mahakumbh, often stepping outside their villages for the first time.

Inspired by these girls, women in a Mahisagar village organized a late-night kabaddi match on August 24, 2023. Cheered on by their families, they stepped into public space with joy and confidence.

Their journey didn’t stop there—they went on to win third place at district and zonal tournaments, each earning INR 7,000. For many, it was their first step beyond the home—and a powerful act of defiance.

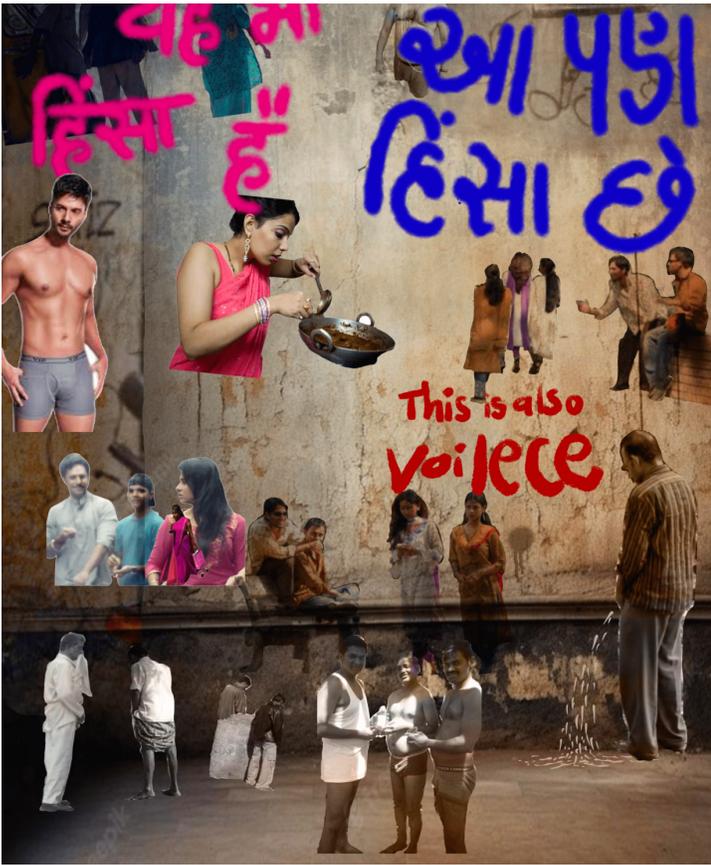
## A rural health sector response model to enable secondary prevention



Violence against women (VaW) has been recognized as a health issue for over two decades. In recent years, its impact in rural areas has received greater attention due to higher prevalence, more severe forms, and limited access to support services.

Factors such as distance, lack of transportation, and greater acceptance of violence in rural communities pose unique challenges. With 70% of India's population living in rural areas, there is a need for a context-specific response model.





SWATI's model addresses this gap through a rural hospital-based crisis intervention and support centre—Mahila Sahayta Kendra (MSK)—along with an outreach strategy that engages ASHAs in early identification of violence. ASHAs are trained to suspect violence based on health symptoms and refer women to outreach counsellors who regularly visit sub-centres and Health & Wellness Centres.

Now in its fourth phase, the intervention continues to strengthen the health system's capacity to respond to VaW in rural contexts.

***Till date over 7000 women have benefitted from the intervention through the Mahila Sahayta Kendras.***

In recent months, MSKs registered 666 new cases—each one reflecting both the deep challenges women face and their resilience.

ASHAs referred the highest number of cases (35%), with Dharpur and Radhanpur seeing the strongest outreach. Hospital staff accounted for 24% of referrals.

Of the women who returned with new episodes of violence, most sought help within a week—though some waited up to 1.5 months, highlighting the ongoing need for trust and timely support.

Most powerfully, 13% of survivors made the decision to leave abusive homes and now live independently with their children—a quiet but bold act of transformation.

## **Towards a common cause strengthened collaboration with hospital**

A 35-year-old woman was brought to Dharpur Hospital in poor physical and mental health. Emaciated and anemic, she was referred from the medicine OPD to psychiatry and admitted. The doctor also informed MSK, and a counselor visited her in the ward. Initially unresponsive, she gradually improved over two weeks.

As she regained strength, she disclosed being starved and restrained by her family, leading to distress and agitation. When a relative said the doctor had approved her discharge, the counselor intervened, requesting more time to prepare her for mediation. The doctor extended her stay by a week, allowing successful mediation and ensuring better support post-discharge.

## **Health care providers facilitate early identification and support**

A 17-year-old pregnant girl faced physical violence from her husband. An ASHA noticed her declining health and repeated refusal of supplements. She convinced the family to bring her to Dharpur Hospital, informed the doctor, and facilitated the girl's referral to MSK for support.

## Promoting menstrual health and hygiene

In rural areas, many girls miss 1–3 days of school monthly during menstruation due to limited access to sanitary products, inadequate sanitation, and stigma—affecting both education and health. To address this, SWATI launched a menstrual health initiative across three blocks of Patan district, focusing on awareness and the promotion of menstrual cups.

Over 12 months, 900 cups were distributed through community meetings and awareness sessions. A survey with over 80 users who had used the cup in the past six months revealed that 80% continued regular use, citing comfort, ease, and durability. 20% opted out, mostly due to discomfort or hesitation in trying a new product.

While the initiative shows promise, menstrual stigma remains a challenge. Further studies are planned to better understand barriers and deepen acceptance.



## Women and land rights

The transformative potential of Women's right to land is widely acknowledged. SWATI has been working on the issue since 2016. Till date over 900 women have been provided the right to land and their names entered in the family inheritance registers.

This year 129 number got land, widows, wives and daughters, access to government schemes (provide figures) and women taking up production of agro based organic products.

### Ramila Ben's struggle for her rightful land



Widowed at 32 after her husband was martyred in the army, Ramila Ben fought for years to claim the 40 acres of land promised to her. Despite repeated resistance from local officials, and over 10 visits to the Collector's office, she persisted.

With support from the Patdi Swa Bhumi Kendra, a land survey was conducted and she was finally allotted land in her in-laws' village. She cleared and fenced the rocky terrain, and will sow jowar this year. Her determination won her not just land, but dignity.

### Kariben Thakor's fight for land rights

Kariben Thakor, 45, from Porda, raised five children without formal education. Determined to live independently, she joined the Women Land Ownership Campaign and fought for 20 acres of her father's land, facing resistance from relatives.

Borrowing money and selling belongings to cover legal fees, she succeeded in securing the land and also ensured her husband's property was equally divided among her children. Kariben's courage stands as a powerful symbol of women's land rights.

## Progress towards safe villages

Meethaghoda, a village in Surendranagar, achieved significant progress in women's empowerment under the leadership of Sarpanch Bhanuben.

From a total of 1,757 people, the village's women's group consisted of 18 members, met eight times and participated in two Mahila Gram Sabhas.

They submitted four demands to the Gram Panchayat, addressing issues of road construction, water logging at the primary school, and clearing encroachments. All demands were met except for the encroachment removal.

A major accomplishment was the construction of a 16 km road to Patdi, crucial for access to healthcare and education.

It was a remarkable joint effort of three gram panchayats under the leadership of Bhanuben.

The women's group's persistent follow-up led to its completion just three months after the demand was submitted, earning them respect in the community. Additionally, Bhanuben initiated clearing brush along a road to a high school, addressing safety concerns that had affected girls' attendance. This effort resulted in increased school attendance as girls felt safer using the road.

Over the past two years Mahila Gram Sabhas led by women's groups have supported elected women representatives in alleviating women's and girls needs. The demands fulfilled range from major constructions benefitting the entire village to hamlet level needs of water, toilets, electricity or bush fencing.



### Mahisagar

- 13 School dropouts from total 7 villages have been brought back to school
- 15 women groups present their issues in Gram Panchayat
- 95 women joined the Mahila Gram Sabha

### Surendranagar

- 13 School dropouts from total 4 villages have been brought back to school
- 15 women groups present their issues in Gram Panchayat
- 120 women joined the Gram Sabha

## **Government response to demands of women and girls**

Rs.58,80,000 - 52 Houses

Rs. 3,00,00,000 - 8 Main Roads

Rs. 6,00,000 - 6 Internal Roads

276 families - Social and Government Security Schemes

70 families - Gutter Line

450 families - Drinking Water: Taps and Borewells

65 families -Community Toilets

# Bringing a gender lens into daily life

## Events and Campaigns

### Mari patang mari dheel

Adolescents leading discussions on gender-equal norms among their peer groups and communities.



A three day long feminist festival Maree Patang Maree Dheel provided a platform for adolescent girls questioning existing inequities and restrictive social norms.

This event where 103 adolescent girls participated was a culmination of lead up events where 107 girls had participated. In these events girls used arts such as photography, painting, theatre for expression of complex emotions.

*What is 'samaj'? and how does it influence lives of girls in shaping as well as curbing desire?*

*“How do we know what is right and wrong for us?”*

Discussions around sex, pregnancy and abortion in the same event showed the inhibitions experienced by girls around these issues. The discussions also brought forth the centrality of marriage for the rural adolescent girls when they could not even imagine a society without marriage. At the same time, these girls were aware of inequalities within marriage and a small minority that chose a life without marriage cited this as the reason.

The event stimulated the girls to reflect on their lives and whether the control over their lives lies with them. In the feedback session, several participants spoke about realising the inequities they lived with and the rights they need to exercise.

“Maree Patang Maree Dheel is a short name but has a deep meaning. Kite symbolises my life. We reflected on who holds the strings to our lives....It is not me ...first it is the parents who controlled my life and in future it would be the husband and his family. But it is my life. I need to take control of it. I need to decide how I want to live it.”

(An adolescent girl participant)

MPMD inspired Alpa from village Anjanva, to resume her education. With support from a SWATI Field Officer, she re-enrolled in 10th standard.

Khushbu from Anjanva aspired to study science but had to manage household duties and a long commute while in 12th grade. After failing, she became a temporary teacher. A SWATI session rekindled her dream, and with guidance, she switched to Arts, where she excelled, scoring 88% and ranking first in her college. SWATI’s scholarship supported her education.

Payal from Mohila Pad, had dropped out after failing 10th, With SWATI’s financial aid for books and a uniform, she cleared 10th with good marks and has now enrolled in college.

Despite challenges, these young women are forging paths toward their dreams.



## Ghar ka kam sabka kam

*In India, women spend 280 minutes daily on unpaid care work, while men spend just 36 (NSO 2019).*



Ghar Ka Kaam Sabka kaam campaign is an online and community based campaign targeted at boys and men to take part in household chores and care work to challenge the social & masculine norms and reduce the burden of unequal unpaid care work.

The campaign conducted over two weeks days was preceded by sessions in school about the gendered nature of roles and responsibilities within households. 200 adolescent boys from Mahisagar and Patdi participated in the campaign.

The event generated awareness about gendered nature of chores and the burden it places on girls and women, through interactive activities. Subsequent to the campaign, teams observed a greater awareness in boys in doing their share of chores. Others started helping parents and sisters in their share of chores. A decrease in controlling behaviour displayed by boys towards their sisters too was noted.

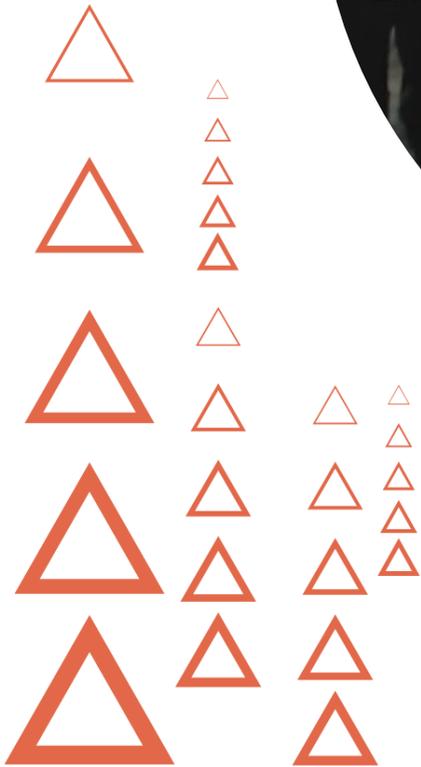
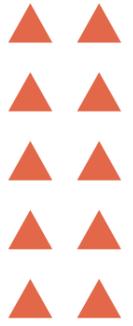


After the session on gendered nature of roles and equality, Suraj from Bajana and Rajesh from Kharaghoda, realised that burden of household chores was a barrier to his sister's education. These two boys took over some of the chores performed by their sister. They also now help at home with filling water, making tea and clearing beddings in the morning. Kishan and Arjun negotiated mobile phone access and playing kabaddi for their sister.

Alpesh from Sadla, Surendranagar felt validated after the session on gender equality. He had always liked cooking but was scared about what others from the family and community would say about it. After the session, he felt supported. Now he cooks shaak and rotli every evening and even encourages his friends to try their hands at cooking.

Discussions on citizenship and equality influenced boys behaviour among peers as well. The SWATI team in Surendranagar observed that after the session, Boys from Navrangpura, Surendranagar were observed playing in groups consisting of several communities where earlier they played in caste segregated groups.

# Team Capacity Building and Leadership



## Building inclusive leadership and strengthening team capacities

At SWATI, we believe that reducing socio-economic and spatial barriers is just as critical as addressing gender inequality. As an equal opportunity organization, we are committed to nurturing talent—regardless of education, role, or location. Our leadership model brings together women from the field with those who offer technical and conceptual strengths.

### Key Capacity-Building Initiatives

This year, several team members participated in intensive external training programs:

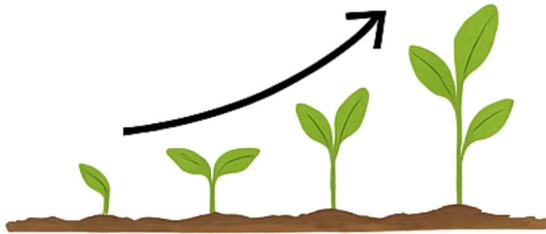
- Three staff completed the Developing Leaders, Designing Cultures program
- One member graduated from the India Leaders for Social Sector (ILSS) Fundraisers Program
- One team member attended CREA's Gender and Sexuality course
- Another completed a Training of Trainers (ToT) with Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra

These opportunities have significantly enhanced team confidence, knowledge, and peer learning—particularly around leadership, communication, and gender-sensitive programming.

Internally, we focused on strengthening systems and day-to-day capabilities:

- MIS and data management
- Understanding impact indicators for M&E
- POSH awareness and compliance
- Case study writing for field documentation

## Looking Ahead



Our efforts are guided by the belief that sustained impact comes from within. By building inclusive leadership and investing in our teams, we aim to foster a work culture where everyone can contribute meaningfully and grow professionally. These efforts are key to deepening SWATI's reach and responsiveness in communities we serve.

Our systems response work will be strengthened through:

- A research collaboration with the Centre for Health and Mental Health, School of Social Work, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, titled “Impact of Early Detection of Violence Against Women on Women’s Health and Help-Seeking Behavior in Rural Gujarat,” examines SWATI’s Mahila Sahayta Kendra (MSK) model in Patan District. Operational for over a decade, the three MSKs handle 65-70 cases monthly, with 39% referred by ASHAs, including 30% high-risk pregnancies. Building on a 2022 qualitative study showing improved health outcomes (supported by Ogbe et al., 2020; Constantino et al., 2005), this research explores survivors’ perceptions of MSK services, changes in health-seeking behavior, and socio-cultural and economic barriers/enablers, using January–August 2023 data indicating one-fourth received health counselling.
- Our two pioneering pilot initiatives have gained significant traction and governmental support, marking a transformative step forward. The first initiative, focused on enhancing public space safety for rural women and girls, secured a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the District Collector of Mahisagar in Gujarat. This partnership aims to establish a “safe block” with robust government backing, setting a precedent for community safety.

- The second initiative, addressing the rural health sector's response to violence against women, achieved another milestone with an MOU signed with M.B. Hospital in Udaipur district. SWATI has been entrusted to establish a dedicated cell within the hospital, strengthening support systems for survivors. These collaborations are an important step in embedding our initiatives into existing frameworks, ensuring they are both sustainable and scalable for lasting impact.
- **A Space for Girls: Nurturing Leisure, Creativity, and Self-Discovery:** The Mari Patang Maari Dheel festival brought to light an urgent need: a dedicated space where girls can unwind, create, and simply be themselves. Leisure, often dismissed as a luxury for girls, emerged as a powerful tool for self-expression and growth. Building on this insight, SWATI is now developing a key initiative—a vibrant, safe space designed for girls to relax, explore their creativity, and reflect on their lives. This upcoming space will serve as a foundation for fostering self-agency, challenging norms, and imagining new possibilities.

# Balance Sheet

PARTICULARS	31.03.2024
	Total Rs.
<b>FUNDS AND LIABILITIES</b>	
Trust Fund	439,387.00
Other Earmarked Reserves	8,657,289.22
Funds/Grants utilised for capital assets	734,861.50
Advance received	2,500,000.00
Unutilised Grants	12,888,381.26
Current Liabilities and Provisions	428,426.50
Income and Expenditure Account:	
Balance as per last Balance Sheet	22,666,175.17
Add/(Less) : Excess of Income over	
Expenditure for the year	2,737,848.34
	<b>25,404,023.51</b>
<b>Total Rs.</b>	<b>51,052,368.99</b>

PARTICULARS	31.03.2024
	Total Rs.
<b>ASSETS AND PROPERTIES</b>	
Fixed Assets	1,589,231.00
Investments	40,085,092.00
Project Funds receivable	
Current Assets, Loans and Advances	9,378,045.99
<b>Total Rs.</b>	<b>51,052,368.99</b>

# Income Expenditure

<b>PARTICULARS</b> <b>Expenditure</b>	<b>31.03.2024</b>
	<b>Total Rs.</b>
Programme Expenditure	8,221,264.12
Administration Expenses	1,757,656.00
WGWLO Maintenance grant expenses	28,262.00
Administration Expenses -General	107,930.91
Depreciation	151,976.00
Less: Recouped from capital grants	99,058.00
Balance	52,918.00
Excess of Income over Expenditure	2,737,848.34
<b>Total Rs.</b>	<b>12,905,879.37</b>

<b>PARTICULARS</b> <b>Income</b>	<b>31.03.2024</b>
	<b>Total Rs.</b>
Project Funds recognised as income	9,978,920.12
Balance Trf from closed projects	122,442.00
WGWLO Maintenance grant	84,480.00
Interest Received:	
- On Fixed Deposits	2,594,269.00
- On Savings Bank Account	66,397.00
- On Income tax refund	
Profit on sale of Fixed Assets	18,794.00
Other Income	40,577.25
<b>Total Rs.</b>	<b>12,905,879.37</b>

# Governance



## Members of Governing Council

Name	Gender	Position on the Board
Dr. Archana Joshi	Female	President
Mr. Harinesh Pandya	Male	Vice President
Ms. Poonam Kathuria	Female	Executive secretary
Mr. Atul Pandya	Male	Member
Ms. Manjula Pradeep	Female	Member
Mr. Apoorva Oza	Male	Member
Dr. Shewli Kumar	Female	Member

The Council meets twice a year to review, guide, and support SWATI's vision and progress.



## Donors: 2023-2024

Your support fuels our work. Thank you.



Your partnership strengthens our resolve and extends our reach.

# Awards



[www.guidestarindia.org](http://www.guidestarindia.org)





Bungalow No. 2, Trimurti Society, Near National Park  
Society, Behind Government Polytechnic, Gulbai  
Tekra, Ahmedabad 380015.

Phone: 079-26300409  
Email: [info@swati.org.in](mailto:info@swati.org.in)



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