

# The Influencer bulletin

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When we welcomed you to the Influencers journey to empower the disempowered, we had promised that your support and voice will enable millions of nameless, faceless women to access social justice and equal opportunity. This issue that celebrates the month of the International Women's Day, features updates from our grassroots coalition partners Area Networking and Development Initiatives, Shaheen Women's Resource and Welfare Association and Nishtha. We are also proud to announce that two of our NGO partner leaders were anointed with the Nari Shakti Puraskar by the President of India.

## In the News



Chetna Gala Sinha



Ruma Devi

## Congratulations

Chetna Gala Sinha of **Mann Deshi Foundation** and **Ruma Devi** of Gramin Vikas Evam Chetna Sansthan for winning the Nari Shakti Puraskar 2019.

## Grassroots Leadership

In an example of grassroots leadership leading to demand for Government accountability, around 300 women from the **Panam Mahila Sangathan** a village women's leadership group, mobilised by our partner **Area Networking and Development Initiatives** (ANANDI) in Gujarat, participated in a rally to demand their NREGA rights. The women protested the delay in job provision and demanded immediate redressal of their grievances. What started at the Taluka Development Office soon escalated to the District level, when the women after finding the response to their protests inadequate, confidently marched to District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA) office. They relented only after receiving an assurance letter from the DRDA Director for an inquiry and guarantee of initiating work within the next week.

#grassrootsleadership

## Freedom from Discrimination and Violence

### Nishtha's adolescents groups - a source of peer support and courage to fight injustice

One day Sania was returning from her school, passing through a lonely place, when she was attacked by two boys on motor cycles. They pulled her bag, tried to molest her, but she managed to escape. A member of the Nilkamal adolescents support group formed by Nishtha as a means to build peer support, knowledge and capacities; she ran directly to her group leader's home. The leader alongwith three other members contacted the local police and lodged a complaint. They took a copy of the complaint and shared it with the Prodhan (village headman) of their Gram Panchayat. Since the incident, after follow ups by the group leaders, both the police and the community are cognisant of the risks girls face in certain localities. Police presence in these areas have been stepped up and community members too are alert and sensitive to the support needed by girls like Sania. The above incident was instrumental in highlighting the importance of the adolescents group to the community. Community members are more reassured now regarding the safety and security of their daughters wherein earlier they would view marrying off daughters as a way to keep them protected from such threats.

### Why is it that even when women victims of trafficking or their families give details of their offending agents, they walk free, and continue their trafficking racket with impunity?

Jameela Nishat, founder of **Shaheen Women's Resource and Welfare Association** and Amjed Ullah Khan of Majlis Bachao Tehreek (MBT) - both organisations working on cases of illegal and fake travel agents trafficking women from Hyderabad to the Gulf countries offer some **insights**:

- Delayed FIRs without which the Embassy, the Ministry of External Affairs can't take any action.
- Agents are booked under section 420 of IPC (cheating), instead of human trafficking, which is non-bailable.
- Many agents have the patronage of political parties as they fund them.
- Agents have no office, they operate in one area, pick the family from another, and seal the deal orally in another. There is no paper trail except the travel documents
- Resistance among police to crack down on such cases because of the influence these agents or their bosses have.
- Agents operate through sub-agents in smaller towns or villages - often only these "small fish" get caught
- The victims and the agents are often from Muslim communities in old Hyderabad - poverty stricken, indebted to loan sharks and therefore looking for a ray of hope to escape their fate.

### The Solution?

These communities are also extremely patriarchal and conservative, Jameela points out. "So, for many of them, selling their daughters in the name of marriage several times becomes a norm. The women are mostly unskilled. There is no real initiative to train these women in a vocation. If they are financially independent, in whatever small way, they'd be less likely to go to a foreign land."

## #WEinfluencers