

Respect and Relevance: Supporting Self-Organising as a Strategy for Empowerment and Social Change



Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women

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Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Self-organising can potentially be a very powerful tool for empowerment and social change but it can also be very challenging and complex. Self-organised groups may face unique challenges and concerns, some of which may benefit from the support of external stakeholders, such as donors and NGOs. External stakeholders, such as donors and NGOs, can either strengthen or hinder self-organising efforts, through their involvement with self-organised groups.

In 2007, an opportunity arose to check-in with the self-organised members in the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women and to systemically document anecdotal information the GAATW International Secretariat had been hearing over the years. The ultimate objective of this exercise was to inform GAATW on how the GAATW International Secretariat (IS) could better support its self-organised members but we also felt that the information we gathered would be useful to other organisations wanting to support organising efforts among marginalised and stigmatised groups.

Generally, we wanted to reflect on the following questions:

- How do self-organised groups contribute to individual and collective empowerment?
- How do self-organised groups contribute to social change?
- How can NGOs and donors support self-organised groups in a way that respects their unique strengths and challenges?

GAATW is using the term 'self-organised group' to describe any group that comprises women with direct experience of the issue they're working on (e.g. sex workers organisation comprised of sex workers, survivors of trafficking organisation directed by survivors of trafficking). It's important to note that this description is one that's defined by GAATW IS, not by member organisations.

Although self-organised groups represent a relatively small cluster within GAATW's membership (approximately 15 organisations), they have been some of our most active members in the Alliance and they include organisations that are respected for their knowledge, innovation and commitment. Self-organised groups in the Alliance are groups of trafficking survivors, migrant workers, domestic workers, sex workers and Afro-descendant women working for empowerment and social change. The particular self-organised groups in the Alliance are distinctive in that (1) historically, these groups are relatively 'new' in using self-organising as a strategy; (2) they are groups working on issues of empowerment and social change; and (3) they embody particular social identities that contribute to their marginalisation, stigmatisation and social exclusion. In this way, the self-organised groups in the Alliance differ from other self-organised groups, such as trade unions in the formal work sector, groups devoted to social or cultural activities and local citizens' groups organising around local environmental issues.

Data collection methods for this report included a combination of activity observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and email questionnaires with members of self-organised groups and other non-member organisations (e.g. regional network organisations). Secondary analysis of GAATW materials (e.g. newsletters, publications, conference proceedings, evaluation reports, workplans, etc.) pertaining to self-organised group members was also reviewed for main themes.

Women in self-organised groups most valued the formation of social networks, the opportunity to take on new roles, and gaining access and contributing to individual and collective learning processes. Self-organised groups provided a space in which: (1) lived experiences of oppression and social exclusion could be recognised as a valuable resource to assist other women in need (rather than being framed as a personal deficiency); (2) meaningful social roles could be created for women with lived experience and negative social identities could be challenged; (3) women could gain self-confidence in taking action; (4) women could access and create new analysis, new skills, and new ways of perceiving the world; (5) supportive and strong communities could be created; (6) women could assert their right to participate and to influence their environment; (7) living and working conditions could be improved; (9) a power base could be built; and (10) a sense of collective responsibility could be fostered. The above elements have been presented as separate categories in this report but it's important to emphasize how interconnected all these elements are in practice. For instance, learning within self-organised groups helped women take on meaningful social roles which impacted their assessment of themselves and sense of collective responsibility.

Self-representation and collectivity strengthened both personal autonomy and community. It was clear how important community and connection were to many women and this seemed to be the most important goal for some of the groups we spoke to. Given that many of the self-organised groups comprise women from heavily stigmatised or socially isolated groups, the sense of community and connection may be a more powerful motivator and fuel for collective action than achieving personal mastery and control. Much of the academic social science literature on empowerment tends to stress one aspect as the key characteristic of an empowerment process or tends to position autonomy and mastery in opposition to community and connection (e.g. Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002; Riger, 1993; Sheilds, 1995; Sprague & Hayes, 2000; Mok, 2004) but from our discussions, it became evident that community and connection provided a means for women to gain autonomy, mastery and control over their environment.

Discussions highlighted the importance of empowering internal relationships within the organisation and respectful partnerships with external stakeholders, organising processes that accommodated women's individual circumstances and needs, and the need to have

opportunities where women could learn from shared experiences with other women. For organising efforts to benefit women, we found the following elements are involved: (A) space and opportunity for women to share similar experiences and struggles; (B) in addition to sharing experiences, women need to share common interests and ideas of what needs to be changed; (C) women need to see themselves as change agents (e.g. through work roles, seeing others 'like us', and helping others); (D) the activities women are involved need to add value to their lives in a way that's meaningful to them; (E) organising processes need to respect women's circumstances, needs and aspirations (e.g. limited time for organising activities, limited literacy levels, safety concerns); (F) groups need to have genuinely respectful partnerships with external stakeholders that are able to contribute toward group aims; (G) women need access to technical knowledge and resources to interact with professional NGO and funding sectors; (H) women need supportive, empowering relationships within the organisation; and (I) access to resources needs to be relevant and accessible to groups of women who may have varying levels of literacy and education.

NGOs and external stakeholders need to respect the strengths and efforts of self-organised groups and the right of affected women to influence NGO/advocacy sectors (e.g. right of trafficking survivors to influence anti-trafficking activity). Groups welcomed interaction and relationships with external stakeholders (such as donors, NGOs, community supporters) not solely to access resources, but also as a measure of solidarity, to inform each others work and to learn from the experiences of NGOs in using social change and organisational strategies, such as social campaigns, providing direct assistance, research and documentation. However, a major issue and source of tension was the (un)willingness of external stakeholders to respect their role in providing support (such as resources, expertise, moral support, conceptual and political support) while respecting groups' autonomy and authority in organisational decision-making. Some of the partnerships provided support while respecting group ownership of organisational decision-making processes, while other organisations have experienced tensions in seeking their autonomy from organisations that have provided material or conceptual support.

Summary of recommendations

The suggestions we received from groups and organisations ultimately stress the importance of *how* partnerships with self-organised groups are managed rather than *what* specific supports are given. The discussions brought up two important points: (1) the need for donors, NGOs and external stakeholders to critically analyze and reflect on their own assumptions the abilities of self-organised groups and (2) the need for donors, NGOs and external stakeholders to genuinely respect the boundaries of their own role, ultimately, as a supporter rather than as a driver of self-organising efforts.

For self-organised groups

1. Self-organised groups need to be able to access guidance on conflict resolution and consensus building techniques from skilled resource persons, partners in solidarity and other self-organised groups.
2. Given the high mobility of women involved in self-organised groups (due to increased career opportunities or changes in life circumstances), self-organised groups need to plan for and invest in continual membership and leadership renewal.

For NGOs and partner organisations

3. Groups of women should be permitted to formalise into registered organisations. NGO initiatives should not ban groups involved in NGO projects from formalizing into registered associations.

4. Providing participation options

- Supporters of self-organising efforts (such as NGOs) need to be aware of the risks in participation and be creative in developing a range of options for participation rather than assessing participation and self-organisation on the basis of visibility alone.
- Linking learning and support activities together with opportunities for active involvement can increase opportunities for empowerment in what can sometimes be experienced as disempowering environments (e.g. shelters).
- Rather than solely focusing on sources of trauma and oppression, it may be more empowering if women are given opportunities to reflect on their experiences of oppression in parallel with their experiences of resilience and determination.

For donors

5. Access to funding

- Donors can increase access to funding by not requiring groups to be registered as formal associations in order to apply for funding.
- Conditions cannot be tied to funding.
- Donors should provide access to core funding rather than project-based funding. Donors can assist the development of self-organised groups by investing in organisational building (rather than project implementation only) and/or by linking groups with a donor/ NGO liaison that is able to communicate with the self-organised group and provide technical assistance (e.g. report writing).
- Responsibility for packaging reporting requirements should fall on donor or NGO staff rather than the self-organised group. Donors and NGOs should provide technical bureaucratic support and seek alternative methods of communicating (e.g. verbal reports) and ways of reporting that are accessible to self-organised groups.
- There needs to be absolute transparency on how resources will be allocated and how much support will actually reach women working at the ground level and survivors rather than intermediary NGOs.
- The work of self-organised groups represents both an outcome (e.g. of empowerment, skill development, etc.) and a process (e.g. to achieve certain objectives, to provide certain services). The processes of empowerment and self-organising need as much support as the outcomes of self-organising. Donors may need to formulate new measures or indicators to accurately capture the work done and progress shown by self-organised groups.

For NGOs and donors

6. One of the most important challenges for external supporters of self-organising efforts is to genuinely respect their role as supporter rather than as a driver or owner of organising efforts. No matter what the degree of involvement a supporting organisation has with a self-organised group (e.g. providing resources, providing ideas and options for action), the self-organised group should ultimately retain decision-making power.
7. Initiatives solely based on donor or NGO definitions of empowerment or a group's needs may not be empowering or valued by self-organised groups. Donors and NGOs need to keep in mind that self-organised groups' may differ in how they define empowerment, participation, and ownership.
8. The most oft-mentioned training needs concerned organisational development, organisational management and skills for 'emotional labour' such as counselling. To this we would add self-care given that many women in self-organised groups are undergoing personal processes of healing and empowerment while participating in collective activity. Women also require opportunities to deepen their critical analysis and professional development opportunities for their new roles as counsellors, advocates, educators, health promoters and researchers.

9. Donors and NGOs can support the sustainability of self-organised groups by providing income security for women working in self-organised groups.
10. Organisations supporting self-organising efforts should try to facilitate learning and sharing opportunities between self-organised groups locally, regionally and internationally. Links between self-organised groups in various regions provide valuable models of empowerment and social change, allow groups to share issues and concerns with 'peers' that may not be available in their country.
11. External stakeholders can support self-organising efforts by disseminating the work and analysis of self-organised groups at regional and international levels and by strengthening communication and exchange channels between groups.
12. Self-organised groups should be supported in participating in international fora as advocates and activists rather than as victims providing testimony.
13. Self-organised groups should not be used as a cost-cutting measure to replace services such as healthcare. Self-organised groups cannot be expected to provide service provision without adequate resources, infrastructure and income security.

INTRODUCTION

The ultimate objective of this exercise was to inform GAATW on how the GAATW International Secretariat (IS) could better support its self-organised members. Over the years, GAATW has had an ongoing dialogue with its self-organised member organisations about the strengths, benefits, successes and challenges of self-organising. From GAATW's discussions with member organisations, it is evident that self-organising can potentially be a very powerful tool for empowerment and social change but it can also be very challenging and complex. Self-organised groups can face unique challenges and concerns, some of which may benefit from the support of external stakeholders (e.g. donors, NGOs). External stakeholders, such as donors and NGOs, can either strengthen or hinder self-organising efforts through their involvement.

In 2007, an opportunity arose to check-in with the Alliance's self-organised members and to systemically document anecdotal information GAATW IS has been hearing over the years. The knowledge produced and lessons learned by self-organised groups can be a powerful resource and evidence base for groups and organisations working for empowerment and social change. We felt the information we gathered would also be of use to other organisations wanting to support organising efforts among marginalised groups.

Generally, we wanted to reflect on the following questions:

- How do self-organised groups contribute to individual and collective empowerment?
- How do self-organised groups contribute to social change?
- What contributes to the success of self-organised groups?
- How can we support self-organised groups in a way that respects their unique strengths and challenges?

Self-organising has long been a strategy for individual and collective empowerment and social change among women's movements and peoples' movements globally. Women around the world have used self-organising in conjunction with feminist principles in their efforts to link personal experiences to political issues and self-organising has provided a concrete tool to help marginalised populations to speak for themselves. Self-organised groups represent one strategy for marginalized groups to change living and working conditions, influence discourses, and create new roles.

However, self-organising still remains a controversial issue. While self-organised groups and NGOs may not differ in terms of the strategies that are used (e.g. outreach, research) or the issues involved in organisational development (e.g. power struggles), organising efforts by marginalised groups differ because of *who* is allowed to set agendas and determine organisational direction. The idea of particular groups of marginalised and stigmatised women (e.g. women in the informal economy, stigmatised women) forming organisations and working for the rights and development of their communities is still a radical idea for some. For example, the concept of sex workers organising amongst themselves has been met with some resistance and some of this resistance has come from certain feminist movements. In this context, self-organising provides a space for women marginalised by existing women's movements. Given that marginalised communities have often been excluded and misrepresented within mainstream discourses, it is essential to recognise the knowledge produced by and within marginalised communities.

Although self-organised groups represents a relatively small cluster within GAATW's membership (approximately 15 organisations), they have been some of our most active members in the Alliance and they include organisations that are respected for their knowledge, innovation and commitment. They include trafficking survivors, migrant workers, domestic workers, sex workers and Afro-descendant women working for empowerment and social change.

Self-organisation as an empowerment and social change strategy

GAATW has always tried to promote principles of self-organisation, self-representation and self-help in its work. Self-organised group members are a living example of the principles GAATW promotes and the need for critical analysis on centering the voice of target groups has been very important for GAATW since the very beginning.

We support the self-organisation of women migrant workers, ensuring their presence and self-representation in international fora. GAATW aims to build new alliances among various sectors of migrants.

– From GAATW's mission statement

Primacy of the principles of accountability, participation and inclusivity / non-discrimination in working methodologies, and organisational structures and procedures. In this respect, self-representation and organisation of those directly affected by trafficking are strongly encouraged and supported.

– From GAATW's basic principles

Self-organisation as an anti-trafficking strategy



Women / survivors / trafficked persons / victims of crime should be encouraged to organise themselves for self-help and self-empowerment as a core element in a human rights based approach to anti-trafficking work.

– Workshop on “Participation and Self-Organisation / Representation as Core Elements of the Rights-Based Approach, GAATW 2004 International Members Congress

Supporting self-organising efforts is an important part of GAATW’s anti-trafficking work and the voices of self-organised groups are part of GAATW’s value and contribution to the international anti-trafficking community.

Self-organised groups are both targets and providers of prevention and re-integration activities in addition to carrying out advocacy, rescue and direct assistance. The self-organised groups in the Alliance that encounter trafficking cases include migrant domestic worker groups (e.g. ATKI), migrant women groups (e.g. Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women’s Centre), sex workers organisations (e.g. DMSC) in addition to organisations that work specifically with trafficked women (e.g. Shakti Samuha, SEPOM). Self-organised groups in the Alliance are involved in many areas of anti-trafficking work, from prevention (e.g. awareness raising, educational activities), identification (e.g. DMSC’s Self-Regulatory Boards), rescue, direct assistance (e.g. lobbying embassies, arranging for return, assisting citizenship claims), developing policy (e.g. drafting guidelines for rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration) and re-integration (e.g. income generation, involvement in community organising activities).

In addition to directly working with trafficked women, sex workers groups and trafficking survivors groups have also been involved in ensuring that the rights of trafficked women are respected by law enforcement agencies and service providers, particularly by shelter homes and remand centres. As groups that are part of the communities they serve, they are recognised as a safe, trustworthy point of contact for women who have been trafficked or who are vulnerable to trafficking.

Although some positive steps have been taken in the area of legal provisions, we think that the situation will not change unless women are encouraged to speak for themselves, exercise their choices, affirm their rights – all of which would empower them to address exploitation.

- From GAATW’s “Partners in Change” Conference, 2002

DEFINITIONS

In exploring how self-organising contributes to empowerment, participation and social change, it's important to note the lack of theoretical and practical agreement (amongst academics and practitioners) on what these terms mean.

Self-organised group

GAATW is using the term 'self-organised group' to describe any group that comprises women with direct experience of the issue they're working on (e.g. sex workers organisation comprised of sex workers, survivors of trafficking organisation directed by survivors of trafficking). It's important to note that this description is one that's defined by GAATW IS, not by member organisations.

Self-organised groups in the Alliance are groups of trafficking survivors, migrant workers, domestic workers, sex workers and Afro-descendant women working for empowerment and social change. The particular self-organised groups in the Alliance are distinctive in that (1) historically, these groups are relatively 'new' in using self-organising as a strategy; (2) they are groups working on issues of empowerment and social change and (3) they embody particular social identities that contribute to their marginalisation, stigmatisation and social exclusion. In this way, the self-organised groups in the Alliance differ from other self-organised groups, such as trade unions in the formal work sector, groups devoted to social or cultural activities, and local citizens' groups organising around local environmental issues.

The self-organised groups in the Alliance encompass a wide diversity of organisations in terms of occupational sector, level of organisational development, activities, and approach (e.g. rights/support). However, it's important to note that while the specific self-organised members in GAATW's membership represent a wide range of experiences

in organising, they do not represent the entirety of organising experiences among marginalised groups.

In discussing the relationship between self-organised groups and external stakeholders, we are differentiating between groups of women with direct experience of the issue they're working on, and organisations that aren't directed by women with direct experience of the issue they're working on (e.g. NGOs staffed by development professionals). However, we do recognise that these distinctions can be blurred and that definitions of 'self-organised group' and 'NGO' are not absolute. A self-organised group can have multiple identities and some of the larger self-organised groups in the Alliance may function and be recognised as powerful NGOs. Self-organised groups can also be strategic in deciding which identities to assert in which contexts (e.g. as a self-organised group to a donor and as a NGO to clients). In addition, self-organised groups differ in how women with direct experience are involved. A self-organised group may be directed by women with direct experience but staff implementing workplans may not be women from the target group. Or an organisation may be directed by development professionals with work being implemented by women from the target group.

Self-organised groups are not all necessarily autonomous bodies, some self-organised groups may formally exist as an NGO project rather than a formal organisation. Although most of the self-organised groups in the Alliance were initiated by an external catalyst (e.g. an NGO not directed by the target group), we're describing these groups as self-organised as it is women from the 'target group' that are directing or formulating strategies and approaches for empowerment and social change.

In addition, not all of the self-organised groups focus on organising efforts. Some of the 'self-organised groups' we spoke to concentrate on providing services or support. GAATW's membership includes groups that organise to advocate politically for their group and groups that work together to provide support. It is important to recognise the work each group contributes to their respective social movements. The caring and support work done by community support groups still plays an instrumental role in sustaining social movements by ensuring the physical, material and emotional survival of those involved. The ability of some organisations and groups to openly participate in political work depends on contextual and environmental factors (e.g. physical, legal, social safety) and we shouldn't assume that focus on support activities means an organisation doesn't have political aims or analysis.

Empowerment and participation

'Empowerment' and 'participation' both refer to processes and outcomes (Zimmerman, 1995 as cited in East, 2000). Different definitions of empowerment and participation are provided across various disciplines and across various contexts (e.g. cognitive, affective, social, political, spiritual). In reviewing the academic social science literature, what most researchers do agree on is that empowerment and participation are extremely vague, elastic and dynamic terms (e.g. Shields, 1995; Rappaport, 1984 and Zimmerman, 1990, 1995 as cited in Foster-Fishman, Salem, Chibnall, Legler, & Yapchai, 1998). For instance, some empowerment theories focus on communication as the key determinant in empowerment processes (e.g. Papa, Singhal, Ghanekar, & Papa, 2000) while other empowerment theories emphasized systemic transformation as the key determinant of whether empowerment 'occurred' or not (e.g. Malhotra, Shuler, & Boender, 2002; Almeleh, Soifer, Gottlieb, & Gutierrez, 1993; Manchester, 2004). The elasticity of the terms empowerment and participation may also lead to overestimating the effect of various development interventions (Cornish, 2006).

We believe that all of the main themes that arose during our discussions are processes that can empower and disempower. For example, new social roles are both a means and an outcome of empowerment initiatives. Women's relationships with other women with shared experiences can be empowering or disempowering. Rather than highlighting one factor above all as the primary influence on empowerment processes, we posit that all of the main elements that were brought up during our discussions have the potential to empower or disempower.

Despite the multitude of definitions for empowerment and participation in the academic social science literature, there are a few issues worth noting:

- Empowerment shouldn't be framed as something that is 'done' to people (VanderPlaat, 1999). The idea of 'giving' empowerment locates too much power to the privileged and diminishes the agency of marginalised groups, however the idea of 'taking' empowerment places a great burden on socially excluded groups to overcome exploitative social and political contexts (VanderPlaat, 1999).
- Empowerment is not the same thing as participation (Malhotra, Shuler, & Boender, 2002). Participation alone cannot be automatically assumed to be empowering and empowerment may not occur through participation (e.g. women may be empowered by measures that haven't included their participation such as new legislation or availability of new resources).

METHODOLOGY

Data collection methods for this report included a combination of observation of group activities; semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and email questionnaires with members of self-organised groups and non-member organisations. Secondary analysis of GAATW materials (e.g. newsletters, publications, conference proceedings, evaluation reports, workplans, etc.) pertaining to self-organised group members was also reviewed for main themes.

GAATW was able to visit most of the Asian self-organised groups in the Alliance. Due to geographical distance and financial considerations, 2 self-organised group members in Latin America and one self-organised group in India were contacted via email and telephone. One of the self-organised group members in India, Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), was not directly contacted for interviews or focus groups. DMSC is internationally known for its work on sex workers rights and has also received considerable attention from researchers and policymakers. Because of this already existing research base with this particular group, we referred to past research on DMSC in addition to referring to GAATW materials referring to DMSC. We were also not able to visit a self-organised group member in Cambodia due to logistical issues. For the Cambodian Prostitutes Union, we referred to materials from their participation in past GAATW events.

Activities (e.g. learning exchanges, capacity-building support, training) were coordinated for several of the self-organised groups. One of the issues GAATW has been grappling with in regards to the self-organised groups in the Alliance is the allocation of support. Due to practical considerations such as geographic proximity, most of the support and most of the activities coordinated during 2007 were organised for self-organised groups in Asia. One of the issues GAATW will need to address in the future is how the Alliance can extend its support to self-organised groups outside of Asia.

Themes and ideas referring to the strengths and challenges of self-organising were identified, coded and categorized across interview and focus group transcripts, field notes, and GAATW published materials. Information was triangulated between interviews, focus groups, existing GAATW publications, GAATW internal documents (e.g. evaluation reports, workplans), and authentication by participants and GAATW IS staff. Grouped codes were then organized around two broad themes of (1) how self-organising contributes to social change and empowerment and (2) how the development of self-organised groups can be supported. Although there were differences between groups, the bulk of the analysis focused on the commonalities between self-organised group members.

In undertaking this exercise, we also encountered particular challenges which may serve as useful lessons for other networks, organisations or community partners. We are continuing to work with these challenges and hope highlighting these issues will also be useful for other partners.

Ethics of dialogue

The process we used to collect information was one we felt would be most useful for ourselves and other external stakeholders. Due to member organisations' varying levels of discomfort / comfort with research processes and varying levels of trust / mistrust with researchers, it was felt that a strict research approach would alienate rather than inform. We attempted to work in a way that felt most appropriate given our relationship as an Alliance. We framed this exercise, not as research, but as an in-depth discussion as part of an ongoing relationship (although participants were also informed about the products, how information would be used, and given the chance to comment on drafts). Our ethical behaviour stemmed from an intuitive sense and awareness of our position and privilege as an International Secretariat, but in the absence of formal research ethics processes, what are the ethical parameters of dialogue? Research ethical standards were useful in making ourselves aware of the main ethical issues but one concern was whether we were circumventing ethical issues by blurring 'research' and 'reflection'.

Linguistic and cultural fluency

Talking to self-organised groups in 8 different countries was a great challenge, culturally and linguistically. The role and sensitivity of translators can have an influence on the information gathered. The self-organised groups are composed of women from socially excluded groups, such as migrant women, trafficking survivors and sex workers. The translators varied in levels of sensitivity and awareness of the issues and in a few cases it was evident that translators experienced discomfort or personal curiosity when translating for particular groups of women.

Another question that arose was how would organisations react to a stranger interviewing group members on sensitive organisational issues. The main staff person involved was new to GAATW and an Asian-Canadian and there were concerns of how open groups would be discussing issues with a newcomer to the organisation and how cultural differences between interviewers and interviewees would impact the information gathered. Most of the groups were most familiar and comfortable discussing issues with the International Coordinator so the International Coordinator introduced new staff to the self-organised groups. In addition, the Secretariat also tried to match Secretariat staff with self-organised groups to maximize cultural and linguistic fluency. A Hindi-speaking staff member was sent to visit an organisation in Nepal and a Bengali staff member was sent to visit and interview a sex worker network in Bangladesh.

Related to this was how comfortable groups would feel discussing their internal concerns or whether they would feel the need to present a particular picture of the organisation. Smaller

grassroots groups and self-organised groups (particular those from stigmatised groups) often experience struggles in gaining credibility and can often experience increased surveillance or judgment by other organisations. We recognised that how groups represented themselves was part of their work in constructing new identities for themselves and their communities. We also recognise that every organisation is conscious of how it presents itself to external parties. We respected the messages and identities that self-organised members wanted to communicate and in general we found that the information groups shared acknowledged the internal challenges organisations faced but also recognised the strength and will of groups to address internal challenges.

Organisational representatives

Due to geographic proximity, GAATW was able to visit most of the self-organised group Alliance members in Asia. A few self-organised groups were contacted via email and telephone due to geographical distance, i.e. 2 groups in Latin America and 1 group in India. In general, we found that email questionnaires didn't yield as much information as in-person interviews and we were also very aware that the use of email questionnaires limited the information to one person's viewpoint. The main objective of the exercise was to contact groups to gain a range of perspectives, but in some instances, we relied on the information given to us by one contact in the organisation. The contact in a few of the organisations was not always a member of the group or organisation but was often someone with English fluency, comfort with email communication technology and a professional supporter or facilitator (e.g. social worker, development professional, etc.). While the key informants we contacted have a trusted relationship with the organisation and are allied with group concerns, we were aware that one contact person who, while they are firm supporters of participation and self-representation, are not representative of the women involved in the organisation.

Non-participatory approach

This exercise differs from past GAATW research projects in that, while this exercise is about participatory change, the methodology we used was not a participatory action research approach. Reasons for this included time, and logistical and financial limitations. Another reason was that this exercise was primarily meant to inform GAATW and other stakeholders on how self-organising efforts can best be supported.

The 'self-organised group' was an identity GAATW used to categorize groups and the organisations and groups we contacted may or may not use 'self-organised group' as their primary identity. The concerns and issues we identified stem from our own position as an organisation that is comprised primarily of development professionals rather than 'experiential' women and this may be apparent in the language we use or how we frame particular issues. As an organisation with relatively more material resources, most of the issues we identified concerned how we could support groups materially or politically rather than examining the intricacies of peer relationships within the organisation.

Interviews with member organisations

- Focus group and interviews with Sanayar-Thi-Pan's Women's Centre [Thailand]
- Focus group and interviews with Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM) [Thailand]
- Email questionnaire responses from key contact at the National Domestic Workers' Movement (NDWM) [India]

- Interviews with 3 members of Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI) [Hong Kong]
- Interviews with staff and peer workers at Action for REACH OUT (AFRO) [Hong Kong]
- Focus group and interviews with Shakti Samuha [Nepal]
- Focus group and interviews with the Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh [Bangladesh]
- Email responses from focus group at CRIOLA [Brazil]
- Email questionnaire responses from key contact at Movimiento de Mujeres Unidas or Movement of United Women (MODEMU) [Dominican Republic]
- Interview with staff at the Asia-Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) [Hong Kong]
- Email questionnaire responses from contact at Japiara [Brazil]

Interviews with non-member organisations

- Interview with members of United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFILS-HK) [Hong Kong]
- Interview with members of Thai Regional Alliance (TRA) [Hong Kong]
- Interview with contact for Association of Sri Lankans (ASL) [Hong Kong]
- Interview with staff of Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW) [Hong Kong]
- Interview with staff of Zi Teng [Hong Kong]
- Interview with staff of the Asia-Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW) [Thailand]
- Interview with staff of Committee for Asian Women (CAW) [Thailand]
- Interview with staff of Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (APN+) [Thailand]
- Interview with staff of Empower Foundation [Thailand]
- Meeting with Women's Rights Development Centre (WORD) [Thailand]
- Interview with Solidarity Group [Thailand]
- Visit with Housewives Group of Mittrapharp Pattana and Community Welfare Fund of Slum Women Network [Thailand]

Activity observation

- Visit and meeting between Orissa villagers and National Domestic Workers Movement [India]
- Learning exchange between Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM) and Shakti Samuha [Nepal]
- Economic empowerment meeting between Shakti Samuha and 7 groups in Orissa [India]
- Self-help healthcare training for Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh [Bangladesh]
- Self-help healthcare training for Navatara [Nepal]
- Self-help healthcare training for Pragati [India]
- Setting up food production income generation project for Pragati [India]
- Setting up food production income generation project for the Institute of Social Development [India]
- All India Conference of Entertainment Workers supported by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, February 25 – March 3, 2007 [India]

FINDINGS

The following findings are drawn from interviews, focus groups and questionnaires from most of the self-organised groups in GAATW's membership, other GAATW member NGOs committed to self-organising principles, and other non-member organisations (see Methodology section for full list of interviews) and observation of activities coordinated for GAATW's self-organised members. Discussions with self-organised groups and NGOs confirmed that organising among marginalised groups is a challenging, complex, and intensive process that can be a meaningful strategy for individual and collective empowerment and social change. The changes women and groups described included personal, interpersonal and political changes.

Although we've presented the main findings in separate categories, it's important to emphasize how interconnected all these elements are in practice. For instance, learning within self-organised groups helped women take on meaningful social roles which impacted their assessment of themselves and sense of collective responsibility. While much of the literature on empowerment tends to position autonomy and mastery in opposition to community and connection (Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002; Riger, 1993; Sheilds, 1995; Sprague & Hayes, 2000; Mok, 2004), our discussions reflected a 'feminine ethic of care' (Young, 1994) where community and connection provided a means to gain autonomy, mastery and control over their environment. Self-representation and collectivity increased both autonomy and community.

HOW DO SELF-ORGANISED GROUPS CONTRIBUTE TO INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE EMPOWERMENT?



1. Lived experience is recognized as a source of knowledge and strength, personally and professionally

*Our experiences are our resources.
– Action for REACH OUT
(AFRO) members at
GAATW's 2nd Annual
Consultation of Self-
Organised Women
Organisations, May 2006*

Self-organised groups present an opportunity where life experience becomes a source of authority, knowledge and strength. Representatives from self-organised groups and NGOs supporting self-organising principles recognised the value of

knowledge that came from lived experience. Knowledge based on lived experience was described as having authority, legitimacy, accuracy, and as having a greater impact on various audiences (such as policymakers).

If it is organized by migrant workers, they know what they're saying, they are the first ones engaged in domestic work. Other non-migrant worker organisations are very helpful and we're very thankful for their support but in terms of identifying specific concerns, migrant workers have the definitive say on that.

- Dolores, United Filipinos in Hong Kong, June 2007 interview

The self-organised groups in the Alliance are comprised of women from heavily marginalised, exploited, and stigmatised groups such as sex workers, domestic workers, migrant women and trafficking survivors. Stigmatised and marginalised groups are often portrayed as victims or as women with diminished capabilities. Self-organised groups can transform lived experiences of trauma and oppression from an internal deficiency to a source of knowledge for their communities and for advocates wanting to assist vulnerable groups.

Self-organised groups can not only change how lived experience is perceived (e.g. as a source of trauma vs. source of knowledge), it can also allow women the opportunity to define how their lived experience will be used, particularly in informing services provided to their communities. Their lived experiences of oppression grant them legitimacy and authority in professional and organising activities, particularly within their respective communities, communities that may be wary of assistance or intervention from mainstream NGOs. NGOs and self-organised groups provided examples where members from stigmatised groups were better able to reach other members from stigmatised groups, in both providing services in a manner groups could understand (e.g. sex workers providing health information to other sex workers) and in conducting research (research participants from stigmatised groups were more open and comfortable discussing their experiences with researchers who had similar experiences).

There were two people in a team when collecting information (one volunteer and one returnee migrant woman from Japan). They held in-depth interviews with those who have returned from Japan. At first the women interviewed were hesitant to respond but they were interested in participating in the interviews because the interviewers were also returnee migrant women who had been through similar experiences as themselves.

- SEPOM (Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women) representative, GAATW's 1st Annual Consultation with Self-Organised Groups, September 2005

The women and groups we met with spoke about how their lived experiences of trauma, marginalisation and oppression now allowed them to teach and reach out to other women in need, and allowed them to claim a space in organising and support service sectors. As members of self-organised groups, they recognised the value of their lives to other women, both in terms of shared injustices and in providing an example of how trauma and oppression could be resisted.

I was happy to pass out the message especially on the health aspects. When I was infected by an STD, I felt very panicky, I didn't know what to do. Now I know the resources that are available. When I meet other sex workers with the same problem, I could immediately pass on my knowledge to other sex workers. I'm happy to have that knowledge to give out to ladies.

- Agun, AFRO (Action for REACH OUT) peer worker, June 2007 interview

Women in self-organised groups continue to place priority on remaining connected to 'on the ground realities' or community experience as a measure of value. While they recognised the value of international human rights instruments, links to the lives of people in their communities remained a measure of their integrity and as the prime source of knowledge and information. Women's experiences became a trusted source of knowledge, both by themselves and their communities.

I gained belief in myself. Before I never imagined that I could be at this level and do this work for other people. I have confidence in my life and with my body. Whatever medical workers give us, we don't know if we can trust it. But I can strongly believe in herbal treatment and massage because I've experienced it myself and on my brothers.

- Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre staff, May 2006 group interview

Lived experience is not the only measure of commitment or validity. Constructing meaning from past experiences doesn't occur in a vacuum and this is not meant to suggest that there is an ideal of 'pure experience'. However, self-organised groups provide a space where those with lived experiences of marginalisation and oppression are able to construct another context in which to understand and use lived experience (e.g. as a resource, rather than as a deficiency).

NGOs that claim to support the empowerment of marginalised groups must also be willing to reflect and analyze their own assumptions of who is deemed 'authentic enough' to be a sex worker, trafficking survivor, etc. and what determines authenticity. During a panel on self-organising and participation during GAATW's 2004 International Members' Congress, panellists talked about the continual questioning of who represents 'genuine' victims. A representative from the Asia-Pacific Network of Sex Workers (personal communication, June 2007) noted that sex workers who obtain a certain level articulation, sophistication or savvy may find their 'authenticity' questioned by NGOs and other bodies that claim to support participation from target groups. In not analysing their own assumptions, external stakeholders may perpetuate disempowering stereotypes of groups if they equate articulation and political savvy with not being 'authentically representative' or a 'true' domestic worker, sex worker or trafficking survivor.



2. New identities and social roles are constructed

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the self-organised groups in GAATW's membership is that all of the groups comprise women with a particular social identity that greatly impacts their lives (e.g. trafficking survivors, migrant workers, sex workers, Afro-descendant women). Having a particular social identity isn't a salient issue for all self-organised groups; for example, a self-

organised group of village women organising for access to local water resources may not organize themselves around a particular identity. Constructing empowering social roles was one of the most oft-mentioned themes that arose from our discussions with self-organised groups in GAATW's membership.

Ambiguity and fluidity of roles may be more evident within self-organised groups. When women with lived experience undertake collective action to support their communities, roles can be blurred between recipient and provider, between NGO and self-organised group, between 'target group' and community worker, and between self-organised group and NGO. Women and groups can occupy different roles in different contexts and groups can strategically assert different identities in different contexts for desired impact (e.g. as a community worker when providing healthcare and as the recipient of an empowerment intervention when speaking with donors). Recognizing the fluidity of roles highlights the fact that empowerment is a cyclical process, that needing help doesn't diminish the strengths or contributions of an individual or a community, that both requiring and giving help are normal processes in community development and that providing assistance to others can be personally empowering (e.g. in carrying out peer education, women are both providers of education as well as recipients of capacity-building opportunities).

Creating new social roles

Contrary to initial expectations, most of the women we spoke to didn't refer to challenging stigmatised or marginalised identities in their work, although they recognised the serious impact of demeaning and belittling social identities. Instead, most of the discussion revolved around opportunities for new social roles that were based on their knowledge and commitment that came from lived experience. For women from stigmatised groups, the social roles that were the most meaningful were opportunities to help other women and opportunities to work with others "like them".

When I first started, I was on the staff team, and attending meetings even though I didn't have concrete work because I couldn't write. Sister Mari said "do what you want to do". I decided I was good at cleaning, so I did that. One time, I assisted with the folders and read women's cases and I realized I knew about Mae Sai. I read other stories and I realized I can remember these cases. It was so exciting! At the next meeting, I reviewed the cases, I even remembered more about the cases than the women who had recorded the cases. I thought, I can help them. At this point, I felt normal. I found my strength inside, discovered my strength inside, not just from working with SEPOM but from my personal life.

- Varunee, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 interview

New social roles also impacted women's interpersonal relationships and relationships with other community members. During the development of the Sonagachi Project and Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (or DMSC, a sex worker organisation in India), sex workers were recruited for peer education, frontline posts, outreach workers, and management and decision-making roles (Gooptu, 2000; Cornish & Ghosh, 2007). Contrary to the Sonagachi Project's initial expectations, sex workers were motivated to become involved in order to enhance their self-image, social standing, respectability and sense of involvement rather than for money or employment alone (Gooptu, 2000).

When I do something for women, I get respect from women, they give respect back to me. Before my story was one woman's story, and there was no question about 'why'. But when I listen to women's stories, I get the answer to the 'why'. I understand other women. I give something to other women, advice, and I get respect. This happened after I joined the Women's Centre.

- Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre staff, May 2006 group interview

Although women overwhelmingly talked about the meaning and fulfilment their new social roles as community helpers provided, women were also very acutely aware of the need for social and economic recognition of their roles as community advocates and community workers. Self-organised groups presented opportunities for alternative occupations but it is still a challenge to gain adequate economic compensation for these roles.

NGOs also make a governing body or an executive body to oversee day-to-day matters but they refuse to give a salary to the Executive Committee. Sex workers will do the job and it's a big job, it's overseeing the organisation and the project. It takes time away from other professions. Women are getting older and can no longer work as sex workers and no wants to pay them. Executive Committee work isn't salaried but we're required to be there everyday, fueling the movement but without monetary compensation. No one talks about it, otherwise the organisation won't get money. How do we generate money to do work that keeps the movement alive?

- Joya, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, self-help women's health care training, March 2007

There is a difference between asking women to take on stigmatised identities and providing opportunities for women to use their knowledge based on direct experience. While women may be reluctant to visibly take on stigmatised identities, many of the women we spoke with felt good that their experiential knowledge could help other women. When facilitating the participation of women from stigmatised groups, it may be more important to ensure space for meaningful social roles rather than emphasising acceptance of or reconstructing a stigmatising identity. Re-claiming a stigmatised identity may be empowering and can have a great social impact; for example, DMSC members have had great success through re-claiming and asserting their identity as sex workers. However, the practical social and physical risks may be too great for some women that are still in the process of healing and determining their future plans. It may be more useful to foster participation by developing social roles that utilise knowledge from lived experience rather than defining participation or empowerment by the extent to which women claim a "sex worker identity" or a "trafficking survivor identity". NGOs and external supporters of self-organising efforts also need to remember that while choosing identities is a part of empowerment processes, women from stigmatised groups may have a more accurate assessment of the practical risks involved with publicly representing a stigmatised identity.

Later on, in the mid-1990s, Indonesians started coming [to work as domestic workers in Hong Kong]. The shelter [for migrant women workers] was packed with Indonesians. We saw some potential leaders and identified roles. We also referred them to the chairperson of UNIFIL [United Filipinos in Hong Kong, a migrant worker organisation].

- Cynthia, Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW), June 2007 interview

Challenging identities

Self-organised groups challenge stereotypical notions of victims. Victim stereotypes can often portray women as helpless, incapable and in need of receiving intervention; self-organised groups present an example where groups typically portrayed as victims (e.g. trafficking survivors) are the ones actively providing assistance and working for change. A victim-based approach may provide more opportunities and power for service providers rather than women from exploited groups by constructing a 'victim' that lacks information, strengths and abilities. For service providers, a victim-based approach can also disguise structural inequalities by placing focus on an individual victim's capacities and limitations.

When the sex workers movement started, the women's movement did have some space for them. But they were only looked at as victims, as helpless women because they have to be in the profession. But the sex workers are not sure if they want to be looked at with pity and sympathy. Everybody agrees that they have fundamental rights but nobody agrees that they have workers' rights.

- Ishika Bose, All India Conference of Entertainment Workers, February 2007

Sex workers in Bangladesh, India and Thailand, have been very vocal in challenging negative social conceptions of sex workers by reconstructing sex worker identities as a strategy that allowed them to fulfil other important social roles, such as providing for their friends and family and providing pleasure to their clients. The women and groups we spoke to challenged stigmatised identities by recognizing the multiple identities women have. Within the GAATW membership, the Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh and DMSC in particular have been very assertive about recognizing sex workers' multiple identities as human beings, as citizens, as women, as NGO workers and activists, in addition to their identity as sex workers.

I'm a human being, I regard my profession with dignity and respect. I don't want to go back to the days that brought me here. But now through working with organisations, I respect myself. I have told my family (mother, siblings) and they know everything now. I tell them 'I had to choose this profession but I have been able to improve your life (e.g. by renting a flat for you). I look at myself with dignity and I expect you to as well. I don't feel that I should be hated. I feel honoured that I've been able to help my family.'

- Joya, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, self-help women's healthcare training, March 2007

Women from stigmatised and marginalised groups may also find their identities being questioned or determined by those that seek to help them. For example, members of a sex workers network in Bangladesh spoke about their frustrations in having to manage their sex worker identities to gain resources from NGOs.

We are not able to put children into school, we have to lie and say that we are domestic workers. NGOs are creating the UN cry about rights but there's a contradiction – if we don't reveal our identities, we won't get assistance but if we want to put our children in school, we need to deceive. We don't like either option, we don't want to be labeled and we don't want to deceive people.

- Razia, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, self-help women's healthcare training, March 2007



3. Fostering positive self-assessments

Women developed confidence in their capabilities, in their voice, and their judgment through their participation in self-organised groups. Developing self-confidence occurred through empowering relationships (e.g. working with peers) and empowering work (e.g. providing services to women in need) in a collective context that regarded women's lived experiences as a resource.

Confidence enabled women to act individually and collectively. In turn, accumulating experiences of success as a group deepened confidence in individual and collective power. Sex workers from DMSC argued that because of their involvement in DMSC, they were able to meet anyone with confidence and to stand up in society with respect (Gooptu, 2000).

During the Nepal trip [learning exchange visit between SEPOM, an organisation of returnee migrant women in Thailand and Shakti Samuha, a trafficking survivors organisation in Nepal], I can see many groups working at many levels doing activities. It makes me confident about myself to see others like us are doing this work.

- Varunee, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 interview



4. Providing learning opportunities

Self-organised groups as a site of learning was one of the major themes identified by the groups and women we interviewed. Conversely, lack of information (e.g. of workers' entitlements, advocacy processes) was identified as one of the key factors that contributed to women's disempowerment. The learning that occurs through self-organising provides an important foundation for individual empowerment (e.g. mastery), collective power and social change (e.g. knowledge production by marginalised communities).

For some groups, learning about human rights was new knowledge that had significant impact on how they viewed their lives and how they viewed possibilities for action. The concept of rights has been particularly effective for organising and mobilizing groups because the absence

of rights automatically suggests the need for action to restore rights (Stenner, 2005 and Parker & Aggleton, 2003 as cited in Cornish, 2006). For example, Shakti Samuha, an organisation of trafficking survivors in Nepal, started with the help of 4 organisations in 1997. Through the orientation and support provided, women realized that they were the ones who had been exploited and victimised. They received a 15-day training on health and formed Shakti Samuha on the last day with 15 women.

To build something like ATKI, everything is important. We're also learning and if we don't know how to do something, we'll learn how to do it...It's also education, not just social action. Without education, we wouldn't know how to campaign for human rights.

- Iweng, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), June 2007 interview

Self-organised groups provide an educational vehicle for practical skills (e.g. counselling methods, community organising methods) and critical analysis (e.g. gender analysis, class analysis) for women who may not be able to access formal education opportunities or vocational training (e.g. domestic workers in Hong Kong are not allowed to enrol in universities).

Self-organised groups also present an opportunity to discover hidden talents and develop skills that utilised women's individual strengths (e.g. political organising, research, counselling). The domestic worker and former domestic worker leaders we met in Hong Kong had first gained knowledge and experience in activism and political organising as domestic workers. Through involvement in migrant worker groups in Hong Kong, domestic workers developed networks and obtained a sophisticated and comprehensive understanding of migration, globalisation, and labour issues, and political and community organising processes.

I first came to Hong Kong as a domestic worker. I realized my problems as a migrant worker were not internal but attached to issues stemming from my homeland. I learned about organising and how to organize as a domestic worker... I started volunteering and requested opportunities to develop my skills. I shadowed other activists.

- Esther, Asia-Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM), June 2007 interview

In addition to gaining new knowledge and skills, women also talked about acquiring a new way of thinking or a new way of looking at the world as a result of participating in their groups and organisations. Women talked about gaining a long-term perspective and broadening their worldview.

I never imagined we would be involved with this profession, and getting to plan about our lives, thinking about the future. Before we only planned for the short term but now we can vision the future, we have that confidence.

- Varunee, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 group interview

The learning that occurs in self-organised groups differs markedly from formal educational structures. A large part of the learning that takes place within self-organised and grassroots groups is done collectively. While some learning occurred in structured, participatory capacity-building opportunities (such as workshops and training), a lot of learning new skills (e.g. communication skills, self-care skills, community involvement skills) and knowledge occurred through relating to other women with similar experiences (e.g. daily interactions, providing support to women in need, consciousness raising activities, role modelling, shadowing more experienced members), through active involvement in group activities, and through reflection of one's experiences.

The difference is that if NGOs run an organisation for sex workers then the sex workers themselves will not learn much. They will learn whatever the NGO tells them. But they won't gain experience and they won't learn from experience. But if sex workers are running their own organisations then they learn a lot more. They know how things are run and they become more aware of different issues that come with organising.

- Aleya, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, August 2007 group interview

I learned a lot when I was volunteering at the Mission [Mission for Migrant Workers] and at Bethune [Bethune House, shelter for migrant women workers]. Even from my own case, I learned a lot. You can sue your employer, you can have a rally, you can protest, lobby. From that small time in Bethune, I gained a lot of knowledge and experience, including guidelines on how to run a group.

- Eni, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), June 2007 interview

Learning from another group is so much more effective than training, even if the training is provided from an empowerment perspective. [SEPOM and Sanayar-Thi-Pan] learned so much more from each other and they were much more relaxed to learn from each other than from a trainer. They shared on how to keep themselves focussed, how to communicate and seek support and they gave moral support to each other... This kind of effect can't be facilitated by trainers. This was a friendship between 2 groups of activists or workers. They shared work issues, organisational problems and personal problems. It was just like coming to visit friends.

- Jiraporn, GAATW Working Group member and facilitator of learning exchange between Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre and Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), July 2007

Knowledge was recognised as a tool and responsibility. Education was seen as a key factor in empowering groups and an important task for many of the organisations we met with. While learning and knowledge offered opportunities for personal development, it was also continually linked with the needs of their communities, their organisations and their networks.

Continual learning opportunities are needed to fulfil women's increasing roles and ambitions, particularly for women engaged in caring and organising their communities and sustaining organisations. DMSK has been very successful in developing sex workers as community leaders

and activists by continually providing capacity-building opportunities for staff and sex workers (Gooptu, 2000). Preparing sex workers to work as community leaders included training in literacy, gender politics, poetry, literature and music (Gooptu, 2000).

It's also hard to work on following up with women and home visits because I'm one person but we have to listen to so many stories, we have to be careful and confidential. I'm running all my feelings, listening to all those stories, I put all this in myself... We don't know what to do with our feelings. I feel like sometimes I have so many feelings...Some of my friends release the feelings by making jokes. But although it's not my story, when someone makes jokes, I can't laugh sometimes because it feels like my story.

- Varunee, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 interview

We need to understand why we have an organisation – for empowerment, for multiple functions, to deal with practical issues, to change the laws, to formulate strategy, and to learn how to dance, sing and make music! Part of my training as an organizer includes learning how to dance and sing! Otherwise how can I engage the public? Grassroots leaders are not like NGO staff, we can't just be experts in one specific thing only, we need to know how to approach people in various ways.

- Eni, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), July 2007 interview



5. Creating community and changing relationships

Relationships are a key part of the empowerment process, as a means to empowerment (e.g. gaining self-confidence through supportive relationships), as an empowerment outcome (e.g. existence and continuance of strong communities), as a means to achieve social change goals (e.g. through the mobilization of migrant workers) and importantly, as motivation or fuel to sustain collective struggles. Creating and strengthening communities and relationships within communities and networks was one of the goals most mentioned by self-organised groups, network organisations and external stakeholders.

Self-organised groups allowed women to create or 'discover' a new community or network which can be particularly valuable for women that are commonly isolated or stigmatised. Groups such as domestic workers are usually isolated due to the nature of their work and groups such as trafficking survivors, undocumented migrant workers and sex workers are often stigmatised. Finding oneself as part of a larger group helped reduce isolation and social exclusion, prompted

reflection on one's experiences, linked personal issues to political issues, and connected women to other sources of knowledge (i.e. sharing information with other women).

Sometimes, women ask 'what will you give me?', and I ask what they would like, they say to please confirm 100% that you'll visit me and take me to visit SEPOM... When women stay with us in SEPOM and see other women working, that helps, she realizes women have the same background; SEPOM staff have the same background. They think, I can do that too, that helps a lot, I can do that kind of work.
- Varunee, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 interview

While the academic social science literature has recognised the importance of relationships in empowering individuals and communities, it has also sometimes positioned connection and mastery as two distinct processes in empowerment (Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002; Riger, 1993; Sheilds, 1995; Sprague & Hayes, 2000; Mok, 2004). From the discussions we had with groups and community stakeholders, connection with others and increasing mastery or control over one's environment were much more closely linked. Relationships provided a space for women to receive information and support and it also provided a space for women to take on empowering roles (e.g. such as mentoring other members, counselling, etc.). In addition, control over one's environment (such as changing working conditions) was a goal that became more feasible with the existence of strong networks and groups working collectively for social change.

Self-organised groups also provided a space where relationships could be changed. In working collectively towards particular objectives, women could define the "conditions of their collaboration" (Cornish, 2006, p. 311). For example, some self-organised groups blurred the distinctions between recipient and service providers by re-framing their work. Groups were defined as families and both those receiving and giving support were described as friends. The support that was given to a woman in need was more often characterised as part of an ongoing, continuous relationship or a friendship rather than assisting a client. Women's involvement in their groups and organisations provided learning and support that also resulted in positive changes in their interpersonal relationships.

The change is, I got more respect from the community, and more confident. I observed when I got more respect, my husband is more careful with me. Before he was bad, shouting and yelling, but after, he's a little bit more careful with me.
- Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre staff, May 2006 interview

That type of training (from Shakti Samuha) has encouraged us to tackle even our problems also in our households. Even I also tackle with my father. Whenever he come to beat me, while having drinking alcohol, I tackle with him, I tell him "don't do this" and "what did you do to my mother", "don't do this, that is bad", I tackle. I feel proud that I can protect my mother.
- Member of Navatara (an adolescent slum network in Kathmandu, Nepal), March 2007 group interview

It cannot be overstated how much the theme of empowering relationships permeated discussions. However, it was also evident from discussions that while relationships are one of the most valuable and empowering elements of self-organised groups, the process of developing empowering relationships and negotiating power in group relationships can also be very complex, problematic and challenging (see *Section 17: Relationship building, team building, and power sharing are important needs among self-organised groups*).

HOW DO SELF-ORGANISED GROUPS CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIAL CHANGE?



6. Determining and re-defining participation

Self-organised groups can challenge ideas of participation, from who is allowed to participate and influence agendas, to what participation looks like. Participation, like empowerment, is a conceptually vague, all encompassing term that refers to people's involvement in their development. NGOs and self-organised groups may have different ideas of what constitutes as meaningful participation.

While NGOs may seek partnerships with self-organised groups to foster participation of target groups, self-organised groups still need to determine the conditions of their participation and what type of participation is most meaningful for women involved. Participation can mean genuine decision-making power, implementation of organisational goals, public representation, developing analysis, sharing information, or social participation in collective activity. The self-organised groups we met with differed in how target groups participated in organisational activities but most of the groups agreed that decision-making power and the power to guide organisational direction was a key part of empowering participation (as opposed to participating in activity implementation alone).

In the future, SEPOM can be run fully by the [returnee migrant] women themselves. They will be able to do more through the women. Women know exactly what the problems and solutions are.

- Varunee, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 interview

Self-organised groups and NGOs may employ similar strategies for empowerment and social change (e.g. campaigns, consciousness-raising activities) and they may experience similar organisational development issues (e.g. internal power struggles, funding concerns) but self-organised groups differ because of *who* is defining objectives and directing organisational activity. For the self-organised groups in the Alliance, work is being directed and implemented by groups that are still not expected to undertake social justice work, such as migrant workers, trafficking survivors and domestic workers. While participation is a term that most stakeholders generally agree on, it is still difficult for some external supporters to accept in practice. While non-representative organisations may believe in providing support to particular groups of women such as trafficking survivors or sex workers, they still may find it difficult to accept an organisation headed by trafficking survivors or sex workers.

Some groups of women were not supported by mainstream NGOs during their initial attempts to set up their organisation. Members of self-organised groups talked about how mainstream NGOs in their community didn't believe trafficking survivors, sex workers and undocumented migrant workers had the skills or knowledge to direct an organisation. Although the barriers to participation presented significant challenges to the groups, overcoming these challenges also became one of the processes through which the group demonstrated its strength, resilience and commitment. Overcoming the disbelief of mainstream NGOs and services became a source of pride and part of women's individual, organisational and collective narratives that offered proof of the group's resilience, creativity and determination. Just as marginalised populations and the general public need to be made aware of structures and processes that oppress, the knowledge of how marginalised groups resist and survive oppression also needs to be disseminated. Rather than solely focusing on sources of trauma and oppression, it can be more empowering if women are given opportunities to reflect on their experiences of resistance and determination in parallel with their experiences of oppression and exclusion.

In 2000, we [Shakti Samuha] registered [as an organisation]... We faced harassment in trying to obtain registration, the officer would throw away the papers, insulting the women or telling the women they should become domestic workers. Even anti-trafficking NGOs would discourage us from organising and registering our organisation. However, we kept persisting and took it up as a challenge. Now we receive a lot of support from the government, whereas earlier, we received no credit from the government for the work we did. Now, our demands are taken seriously.

- Member of Shakti Samuha, March 2007 group interview

Self-organised groups challenge ideas of who is defined as an 'expert' and the basis for legitimacy. Lived experience becomes a claim to participate as 'experts' (as much as academic and professional credentials) and a claim to centre their issues and concerns. The groups of women we spoke with pointed out that their participation through self-organised groups was necessary to provide accurate information to mainstream organisations and service providers and to address the gaps of other NGOs directed by non-experiential individuals. Self-organised groups can help shift traditional power relations between marginalised groups and 'experts' by

positioning those with lived experience as experts and traditional 'experts' (e.g. academics, service providers) as supporters.

Because the people that are telling you how to empower people, they might have expertise but dealing with day-to-day realities is different. These 'experts' are not migrant workers, they're not domestic workers and they're not Indonesian. They didn't deal with employers every day, trying to negotiate holidays, having to deal with things like this. If we have a small victory with our employer, we need to share this with others and outside NGOs need to support those efforts.

- Eni, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), June 2007 interview

There were so many organisations working on anti-trafficking issues, but unless the voices of survivors were heard, the returned women will never be able to attain their independence or freedom.

- Member of Shakti Samuha, March 2007 group interview

Even if you don't have education or background, you don't need that to talk. We are the women so we know what the women need'.

- Fah, Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre, learning exchange between Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre and Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), July 2007

Participation, like empowerment, is a process that needs to consider women's specific circumstances, needs and safety. The particular self-organised groups in the Alliance comprise groups that are still highly marginalised and stigmatised (e.g. sex workers, trafficking survivors, undocumented migrants). As such, they experience different risks that can affect their level of participation or visibility. Such risks need to be recognised and accommodated. For example, violence is still a very real risk for sex workers organising. While NGOs may genuinely support inclusion of self-organised groups, external supporters and organisations need to respect the risks target groups perceive and both self-organised groups and supportive NGOs need to be able to accommodate those risks for women involved (e.g. providing awareness of risks involved, setting up support systems, training on dealing with aftermath of public disclosure). Facilitating the participation of target groups will require more creativity in providing a range of options and opportunities for participation that extend beyond public representation or visibility. Just as participation cannot be automatically equated with empowerment, visibility cannot be automatically equated with participation.

Once when we were in a rally, women covered their faces, they used masks in a rally, they said "we want to fight but we don't want to lose our job". They didn't want to be exposed so this is fine. They are trying to participate and it's a slow process over years to break the fear, open the gate and build confidence. It's a slow process.

- Eni, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), June 2007 interview

Some of the women we interviewed spoke about negotiating their participation with their families and balancing their roles as advocates and activists with their roles as wives, partners, mothers

and daughters. For example, women involved in a Housewives Group in Mittrapharp Pattana in Bangkok had to challenge their husbands' notions about their wives' work. Women argued "if women do useful things for people, husbands will be honored by other people, so don't block us or we will not develop" (personal communication, June 2007).

Our families ask "what do you get from going to Shakti Samuha"... They say "it's just social work", "just training", "just going to meetings". They say "we know our daughter's doing good work but it doesn't fill the stomach".

*- Member of Navatara (an adolescent slum network in Kathmandu),
March 2007 group interview*

Self-organised groups provide a source of power and credibility that allows participation with civil society on a more equal basis. Organisational structures can connote legitimacy and credibility to those with the power to grant resources (Cornish, 2006).

This is important because we can't do anything alone. The name of an organisation carries weight. There is power in the number of members. Look at what happened in Faridpur. It is because we came together and demanded that now it is permissible for sex workers to be buried in the graveyard there along with other people. If we speak alone, then no one will listen.

*- Kajol, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, August 2007
interview*



7. Affecting changes in living and working conditions

Some of the ways self-organised groups are working to improve living and working conditions for trafficking survivors, domestic workers, migrant workers, sex workers and Afro-descendant women is detailed in Appendix B. Self-organised groups are providing healthcare services and direct assistance to women in need, developing income-generation opportunities, influencing government policy, supporting the children of women involved (e.g. setting up

childcare, providing scholarships), raising public awareness, providing educational opportunities such as literacy classes and consciousness-raising activities, undertaking advocacy for individuals (e.g. citizenship claims), conducting research, providing refuge for women in need, creating social and cultural programming, promoting sexual health and decreasing HIV rates among sex workers, and reducing violence against women (e.g. violence against sex workers by clients and police).

Some volunteers, domestic workers and I joined with the AMCB [Asian Migrants Coordinating Body]...When we came together, we had a much bigger voice. In 1998, we had success with a wage cut proposal. We joined with them to work on the issue with UNIFIL [United Filipinos in Hong Kong]. We found that bigger voices were more successful. The government froze the wage cut.

- Bungon, Thai Regional Alliance (TRA, a Thai migrant domestic workers group in Hong Kong), June 2007 interview

The organisations that encounter trafficking cases include migrant domestic worker groups (e.g. ATKI), migrant women groups (e.g. Sanayar-Thi-Pan), sex workers organisations (e.g. DMSC) in addition to organisations that work specifically with trafficked women (e.g. Shakti Samuha, SEPOM). Self-organised groups in the Alliance are involved in many areas of anti-trafficking work, from prevention (e.g. awareness raising, educational activities), identification (e.g. DMSC's Self-Regulatory Boards), rescue, direct assistance (e.g. lobbying embassies, arranging for return, assisting citizenship claims), developing policy (e.g. drafting guidelines for rescue, rehabilitation and re-integration) and re-integration (e.g. income generation, involvement in community organising activities). In addition to directly working with trafficked women, sex workers groups and trafficking survivors groups have also been involved in ensuring that the rights of trafficked women are respected by law enforcement agencies and service providers, particularly by shelter homes and remand centres. For example, as a result of DMSC's vigilance, humiliation of trafficked women by police and the judiciary system reduced considerably (GAATW, 2005).

Self-organised groups in the Alliance provided support services and direct assistance in part to address gaps left by other service providers. One example is the Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre, a health centre staffed by migrant women on the Thai-Burma border. Migrant women from Burma working in Thailand are largely excluded from mainstream health services in Thailand due to their lack of citizenship status, lack of income security and language barriers. In addition, most migrant women are involved in precarious occupations that can take a toll on their health and well-being, such as factory work, domestic work and sex work. Migrant women needed health knowledge that would allow them to take care of their health and their communities' health given their limited resources and lack of access to mainstream health services. A group of migrant women started the centre after receiving intensive training in self-help health care (focusing on body awareness and the use of traditional herbal medicines) coordinated by GAATW.

This is the only women's centre using herbal treatments, that's only being done here. Our group provides healthcare in the context of social problems. We talk on a deeper level and analyze from the women themselves. It's set in a more realistic context, that's why women like to talk in this centre. From other organisations, they can get information but here they can talk.

- Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre staff, May 2006 group interview

The fact that migrant women are the ones directing the centre and providing treatment offered a level of safety and comfort for women seeking help. Although the workers from the Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre were greeted with initial wariness due to their lack of official credentials, they gained the trust of the community as their treatments and health guidance proved successful. Where marginalised and stigmatised communities may be wary of accessing

mainstream services, services provided by self-organised groups may be seen as a more trustworthy, respectful and accessible way of obtaining resources, information, assistance.

The women mentioned that the Centre offers services which they cannot find in other places or which they cannot afford. It is “an oasis of the poor” and can provide a real response to women’s health problems in a language they can understand. It is particularly helpful with reproductive health problems and also offers privacy and confidentiality. One woman suggested that more STI treatments at the clinic would be helpful because they do not have the privacy to treat themselves at home.

- GAATW staff writing about Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women’s Centre, personal communication, May 2006

Trafficking survivors from Nepal and India have expressed anger and bitterness at the treatment given to women in government or NGO-run shelters. Organisations such as Shakti Samuha, an organisation of trafficking survivors in Nepal, established a shelter for trafficking survivors, in part to demonstrate a respectful and ethical way of providing care: “Human beings do not need only food and clothes. We want women to realize their power and share the power with others in society” (GAATW, 2002, p.25).

Self-organised groups are also in a position to assess and anticipate the needs of their community. Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), an organization of returnee migrant women in northern Thailand spoke about the difference between their assessments of returnee migrant women’s needs and how a prospective donor determined the needs of trafficked women.

Those that have returned a long while ago are in need of help of getting their life together and of making plans, but those that have just returned, new returnees are in a period of return where they don’t want to sit down and plan. Some women come back with lots of money and are able to buy a house and car, but may only want to join SEPOM after the money is gone. We explained this to the donor but they always answered “it’s a matter of investment, the long time returnees won’t be around as long whereas the young ones still have long lives to lead”. The donor is only worried about migration, they’re just hoping that the project will stop them from migrating again.

- Varunee, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 group interview



8. Contributing to social debate

The self-organised groups in the Alliance are also active in developing and deepening analysis based on ground-level realities. Movements, NGOs and external stakeholders need the knowledge and analysis of self-organised groups to inform work that will genuinely address ground-level realities.

We know when issues are getting political. We always make sure that our political issues are migrants' issues. So it's not easy for us to call for an action right away because we have to take the time to find out how it's really impacting the workers. When something happens, sometimes people will call and say "why don't we do something" but we tell them it's because we have to check in and see how it's really impacting people on the ground.

- Cynthia, Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW), June 2007 interview

A couple of the self-organised groups in the Alliance have re-introduced traditional and indigenous knowledge back into their communities. CRIOLA, an organisation of Afro-descendant women in Brazil, organizes and empowers Black women through Afro-descendant culture. Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre, a group of Burmese migrant women in Thailand have successfully introduced traditional herbal remedies to the Burmese migrant community in Thailand.

Migrant workers in Hong Kong are challenging ideas of citizenship by asserting their right to influence Hong Kong society. Migrant worker groups are also developing and deepening analysis of migration, globalisation and labour issues and are translating and popularising analysis for their communities.

I'm human. I know I have the right to live, why should I be exploited? I can't refuse that I do domestic work, there is nothing else I can do, I can't go back to Indonesia to be a teacher so this is my land. This is where I'm employed, this is my land. If I don't have the courage to speak out, what does that leave me?

- Eni, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), June 2007 interview

We're always trying to deepen the analysis and understand the impacts. In our training, we also train how to analyse situations. When there is analysis, we popularise it and we go back to the migrant workers and ask them 'is this true?', 'is this how it's effecting you?'

- Cynthia, Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW), June 2007 interview

Sex workers groups have challenged social ideas and assumptions about sex work by demanding recognition and respect for the work they do in supporting themselves and their families. By calling for the recognition of sex work as work, they're challenging social and feminist assumptions of work, activism and empowerment.

Sex work, because we're fighting for recognition, respect and dignity. We go to the doctor when we're ill. So am I, when I'm giving service to young men, I'm helping them to be happy in life. There is a demand for our work, we are not a parasite.

- Shehnaz, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, self-help women's healthcare training, March 2007

Although sex work is not legally recognised in the Dominican Republic, we have achieved more understanding and tolerance from the society (they understand now that many sex workers are so because of lack of other social and labour opportunities). We are now better treated by health staff in hospitals. The business (brothels) owners respect us more and exploit us less now.

- Francisca, COIN (Centro de Orientacion e Investigacion Integral), June 2007 email communication



9. Strengthening sense of collective responsibility and commitment to collective aims

For the particular groups we spoke to, having a collective sense of responsibility and commitment was a more frequently discussed topic than building a power base or a mass constituency. Women in self-organised groups told us how their involvement was motivated and sustained by a sense of responsibility to their families, their immediate communities, and for the next generation.

The women that the group helps is what motivates us: seeing them grow and get better...knowing that our ideas are being passed on. Moreover, helping women understand and fight for their rights is an incredible experience for us.

- CRIOLA's self-organised groups, July 2007 group interview

Politicizing the personal was seen as fulfilling one's responsibility to other women by using women's individual fights and victories to protect other workers and other women.

How do I defend my rights? I can't defend myself just against my employer – because that's personal, that's just me and my employer, whatever I do should be helping the majority of us.

- Eni, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), June 2007 interview

No matter how much individual assistance was given, no matter how victorious we were with individual cases, it wouldn't have much impact on the overall situation or overall capacity to stand up for rights. It's difficult for migrant workers because they are living in an outsider's house but they can do it step by step. If they don't speak up, there will be very little impact.

- Cynthia, Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW), June 2007 interview

Strengthening a sense of collective responsibility also helped ensure the sustainability of groups by facilitating an ongoing, cyclical relationship between groups and communities. Groups and organisations welcomed and expected a cyclical relationship with the women they served, where women who received support services were encouraged and expected to come back to support the organisation as providers, organisers and supporters.

We need all members to become active. Some ATKI members are active. If they want to join us every Sunday and we'll study together, that is how to get ATKI stronger. We want all members to know, to give, to teach new members about what ATKI is.

- Yatie, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong, June 2007 interview

We want to see our work continue. We also want to see the community we work with prepared, aware of its responsibilities and its rights. Community leaders want to empower other women so they can keep the work on.

- CRIOLA's self-organised groups, July 2007 group interview

These women take care of their families. When members get a scholarship, they use the money to set up their own small business, they go to university, they work in hotels, they become lawyers. And then they go back to work for Empower, for their friends.

- Worarat, Empower Foundation (sex workers organisation in Thailand), June 2007 interview



10. Developing a power base

The concept of more people equalling more power was brought up in several interviews, but the concept of a power base to affect change was discussed most specifically by migrant worker groups in Hong Kong and sex workers groups. For the other self-organised groups in the Alliance, other collective goals were mentioned more often, such as developing a collective sense of responsibility.

It's very easy to break one stick, but when it's a bunch of sticks, when it's five or ten, it's not easy to break. When we have something to say, when we have a complaint, if we just go as an individual, people won't listen to us. So we came together one by one and then we became a group of 10 and we also realized that as a group of 10, there is weight in that.

- Aleya, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, August 2007 group interview

Sex workers organisations in India (DMSC), Bangladesh (SWNOB) and the Dominican Republic (MODEMU) have emphasised the importance of developing a power base. For DMSC in particular, political activity was the main fuel in sustaining the organisation by mobilising workers and maintaining momentum through the “exhilaration and excitement” generated by collective political action (Gooptu, 2000,p. 45).

In 2005, a nearby bostee (slum, squatter settlement) was being evacuated because they did not want “bad” women in the area. Concern, BWHC, Naripokkho, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, everyone came and protested. We met with all the bigwigs of the area (District Commissioner, Chairman, etc.) and were able to do that because there were so many people backing us up.

- Kajol, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, August 2007 interview

HOW CAN STAKEHOLDERS SUPPORT SELF- ORGANISED GROUPS IN A WAY THAT RESPECTS THEIR STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES?

The success or struggles of a self-organised group depends on the interplay between various factors, both internal (e.g. power struggles) and external (e.g. funding sources, political context). From our discussions, it appears that the sustainability and success of self-organised groups depends on many factors, factors that may differ from the issues faced by traditional NGOs. Supporting self-organised groups may require different strategies than strategies used to support other types of organisations or NGOs. Although all of the factors mentioned below are elements of self-organising efforts among marginalised groups, groups differed in terms of which issues were most salient to their organisational development.



11. Opportunities need to be made available to women to share experiences and knowledge

The realisation of seeing and hearing other women 'like us' was still a strong, emotional memory for the

women we spoke with. Although we may assume that these opportunities for awareness and sharing are available, the stories from the women we met with highlighted how important and powerful the realisation of 'others like us' continues to be, both in terms of realising that other women have experienced similar oppression and the realisation that 'others like us' can work for change.

On Sept 5, 2004, they had a program at Victoria Park, a forum for Indonesia's Independence Day. Eni gave a speech on discrimination and rights, it was so 'aha!'. So I joined ATKI. From that moment, I helped ATKI every Sunday.

- Iweng, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), June 2007 interview

When I first started, I was on the staff team, e.g. attending meetings even though I didn't have concrete work because I couldn't write... One time, I assisted with the folders and read women's cases and I realised I knew about Mae Sai. I read other stories and I realised I can remember these cases. It was so exciting! At the next meeting, I reviewed the cases, I even remembered more about the cases than the women who had recorded the cases... From that starting point, I realised there were different stories, not just sad stories, but women who came back with money, built a house and were happy; some women came back with money but were unhappy; and some women came back with no money and were unhappy.

- Varunee, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 interview

Women stigmatised as trafficking survivors and sex workers and women isolated as domestic workers and migrant workers may find it difficult to access opportunities for collective support and learning. Interviewees emphasised the amount of time, energy and resources needed to create opportunities for sharing. Isolation increases vulnerability to exploitation and stigmatisation and it can be very difficult (emotionally as well as practically) for heavily stigmatised or marginalised groups to reach out to one another. Some of the women we talked to immediately became involved with their group after becoming aware of such opportunities, but other women took time to progress from receiving support to sharing their experiences to becoming actively involved to taking on leadership roles.

SEPOM heard about my work and came to my house. I found their brochure in front of my house. They wanted data about returnee women. I was interested at first but also worried – I had been cheated when I went to work in Japan, Hong Kong, cheated from my money by the authorities. It took a long time to decide to contact them. I went there and SEPOM told me about their activities.

- Varunee, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 interview

Women have to feel safe enough to reach out to other women and to share their experiences. The self-organised groups we spoke to come from sectors where powerlessness and oppression are common. Women who have been trafficked and women in the sex sector (for example) may have experienced harmful relationships and may be very legitimately wary of establishing

social connections. Groups and organisations need to be mindful of this process and of the social risks women perceive in talking about their experiences. Opportunities to learn about other women's experiences first may facilitate women's willingness to share their experiences.

I continued to stay at the NGO shelter in Nepal. They offered me a place to live and tried to teach me a few skills, but I was not ready to learn them because I was very upset by the way life had treated me. I was very disillusioned and unhappy... While at the shelter home I also got a chance to go to Bangladesh to participate in a meeting on trafficking where I met many people working on this issue and also other women who had gone through similar experiences to me.

- Member of Shakti Samuha, Alliance News (July 2006, p. 39)

Groups stressed the importance of proactive, continual and personalised outreach to individual women in the community. Some women had become involved when an organisation representative sought them out in the community or met them in their home. Groups also brought up the importance of integrating opportunities for sharing experiences and consciousness-raising along with social and practical opportunities.

Whenever we have a new program, we will call our members and tell them where it's happening. We also call them to ask "how is your experience in ATKI?", "is it good?", "is it bad?". We try to be friendly. It's a step by step process, it happens slowly as members get more experience.

- Yatie, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), June 2007 interview

CRIOLA: Women do not come directly to the organisation. It is necessary to attract them. To this end, the organisation offers workshops and courses that are of interest to women, such as sewing and embroidery. During these workshops and courses they are given information about the group, issues involving different themes, such as health, rights and violence. Another way to reach out to women is to visit them at home in their community. Lots of women go door-to-door to spread information.

- CRIOLA's self-organised groups, July 2007 group interview

Sharing experiences collectively with women with similar experiences provides a space for analysis and interpretation, and construction of meaning, identities and possibilities for action (Carr, 2003). Creating meaning from experience isn't created in a vacuum, the meaning people create around their lives and experiences is obviously informed by the social contexts they inhabit. What collective spaces allow is the creation of alternative meanings and alternative narratives for experiences. Individually, women may be more vulnerable to hegemonic discourses. Creating and asserting new meaning may be easier in a collective context.

The groups started small with only a few women and grew from there. Some groups started at 'terreiros' – places of afro religions. Few women started to do some meeting at these 'terreiros' and after a while they became a larger group discussing different issues and helping their local community regarding different needs.

- CRIOLA's self-organised groups, July 2007 group interview



12. Women need to feel that action or change is needed and have ways of generating ideas for action

Consciousness has been posited as a key factor in transforming marginalisation into activism (Unger, 2000; Manchester, 2004; Sprague & Hayes, 2000; Carr, 2003). Through opportunities for collective sharing, women realise that particular experiences of powerlessness and oppression are political issues requiring collective action rather than evidence of individual failure or

responsibility (Ilkharacan & Amado, 2005; Padilla, 2004; Stall & Stoecker, 1998; East, 2000; Chandler & Jones, 2003). In the process of consciousness-raising, people gain a critical understanding of power and the societal factors that create the context they live in and this knowledge can spur further action and commitment as women realise that their marginalisation is created by societal contexts (Gill & Rehman, 2004; Ilkharacan & Amado, 2005).

I didn't like the discrimination by the government, like fees only migrant workers are required to pay, and underpayment. I wanted to know why these things happened. Like when the consulate gives us a passport, why do we have to pay so much? Or after our contract has finished, we also have to pay [employment for Indonesians is only legally allowed through agency placement]. There were so many questions in my mind. I heard Eni's speech and I thought "I must do that!". I was so motivated, and I thought "we must unite!".

- Iweng, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong, June 2007 interview

For consciousness and awareness to translate into action, women with shared experiences also need to share common goals and common interests. The groups we met with stressed that sharing common goals contributed to a self-organised group's success by strengthening group cohesion and guiding action. To foster inclusion of diverse perspectives and needs, groups and organisations may find it more effective to offer a wide variety of practical strategies to achieve a few common goals to allow as many women to participate (e.g. empowerment can be achieved through education, through political organising, through social support activities). For example, while a group of sex workers may share similar experiences of powerlessness and while they may be aware of the political and structural causes of their oppression, women may not agree on strategies for empowerment or social change. For example, DMSC, a group of sex workers in India, has had great success with self-organisation as a strategy for empowerment of individual sex workers and social change (e.g. establishment of Self-Regulatory Boards to prevent trafficking, striving to legitimise sex work as work), whereas sex workers in Hong Kong have not seen self-organising as a beneficial strategy.

We give education but we accept their realities, awareness can't be forced, so those who don't want to accept that yet can still participate on social basis. It's not a matter of right and wrong, people have to deal with issues in their own way.

- Eni, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), June 2007 interview

Women also have to be able to generate ideas of what they want to do – to affect change, support communities, educate their communities, etc. Ideas on how change can be affected can come from various avenues and it may take a few key people to see that ideas are tested, used, and assessed. In the beginning, groups may rely on the lessons learned by other organisations on how change can be affected (such as through consciousness-raising activities, political campaigns, etc.). Many of the self-organised groups in our membership had a supportive initial contact with another organisation that provided the space for a new self-organised group to develop. It may be that the orientation of the catalyst organisation greatly influences the nature of a new self-organised group's activities, so that a migrant worker group will be more likely to be involved in political activities if those are the main strategies used by other migrant worker groups, whereas an organisation originally founded by a social worker may be more likely to use personal empowerment activities as the main strategy for change. Regardless of whether the initial awareness is provided by an internal catalyst or external catalyst (e.g. NGO awareness-raising activities), women themselves have to recognise a need for change. Implementing ideas initiated by external catalyst organisations or individuals shouldn't diminish a self-organised group's ownership.

It depends on the grasp of the situation and how far they can go, you can't force people further than they're ready to go. It means you have to provide options, e.g. discussing the option of a letter of protest and analysing how far that would go. It's about presenting options and analysing their potential impact, e.g. protesting on issue but is this going to be too much? Then it's exploring the possibility of dialogue and proposing a date with the Consulate and talking about what will happen and who is represented and what your response will be, thinking through what will happen, how scenarios will unfold.

- Cynthia, Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW), June 2007 interview

Women learned about common experiences in various ways: through working or volunteering at an organisation, through public forums, through contact initiated by organisations, trainings, social and practical activities (e.g. dance lessons, English courses), and during their stays receiving support at shelters. These particular strategies all involved a combination of realising common experiences and opportunities to work on these particular issues. Women were provided simultaneously with knowledge of shared experiences of injustice along with knowledge of how women could work for change.

Together with my fellow Indonesian migrant workers, we were given the opportunity to participate in various activities of AMCB [Asian Migrants Coordinating Body, a coalition of migrant worker groups in Hong Kong]. We learned a lot and were inspired by the way they united and empowered themselves through an organisation. Through this, we came to realize the importance of organising and being united and felt that we can do something for our Indonesian migrants in Hong Kong.

- Eni, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), Alliance News (July 2005, p.40).

Women should have opportunities to share their experiences of activism and struggle in addition to sharing their experiences of oppression. The power of sharing experiences cannot be overstated, at the same time, women should be given other opportunities for action besides offering their own experiences of trauma and oppression. Sharing experiences is a demand and expectations many NGOs have of target groups and the value of hearing women's stories was stressed by trafficking survivors, sex workers, domestic workers and migrant workers who had become more politically active. But the process of sharing experiences takes time, and it may be something women only feel comfortable with after a certain period of time during which they can hear about other women's experiences, support the work of other organisations, and take time for self-care.

She [a health messenger from COIN and sex worker] told me about COIN [Centro de Orientacion e Investigacion Integral] and what they were doing and invited me to their meetings. I went to some of them with other women and little by little I got more interested in their work. They also started asking me about my case and my experiences. In the beginning I never spoke in their meetings. I was very afraid. But one day I decided to break the silence. The injustices and mistreatment I suffered were what made me start talking. Also the help I received from COIN. I began to be more and more involved in their activities. This made me feel important. At the beginning I would only attend their trainings. Afterwards I became a trainer myself.
- COIN staff member, Alliance News (July 2006, p. 43)

GAATW has organised 3 regional consultations in Asia for self-organised groups to expand links between self-organised groups and to create an opportunity in which women can share their experiences and challenges as activists and organisers at a regional level. Several of our self-organised members are unique in their countries and communities (e.g. the only group of returnee migrant women in Thailand, the only organisation led by trafficking survivors in Nepal), and GAATW has tried to build links across regions for groups that may not have 'peer' organisations in their countries.



13. Women need to believe they can take action or affect change

For self-organised groups to flourish, the women involved need to believe in their capacity to take action or bring about change; it is not enough for marginalised women to have an awareness of the political and structural causes of their oppression or to have ideas of what strategies would be most effective. The women we spoke to gained a sense of themselves as change agents through contact with other established self-organised groups (before setting up their own self-organised group), accumulating success through their social or organisational

roles (e.g. service providers, successful political action, etc.), helping others, gaining meaningful roles in the organisation and community (e.g. as healthcare providers), and by re-framing their experiences as survival (demonstrating strength and knowledge) rather than as 'victimhood'. Merely telling women they are capable of creating change may not be enough, what may be more motivating is accumulating empowering experiences through concrete action.

The event of seeing 'others like us' undertaking organising and social justice work provides a meaningful model for action. Links between self-organised groups can be very important relationships. Meeting and learning from other self-organised groups enables sharing skills and strategies, and self-organised groups may also have more a realistic sense of risks involved in participation. For example, it is one thing for migrant worker support NGO to undertake certain visible activities, it's another thing for domestic workers mindful of keeping their jobs as domestic workers.

[During a learning exchange visit between SEPOM, an organisation of returnee migrant women in Thailand and Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre, a women's health centre run by Burmese migrant women in Thailand] SEPOM could see how [members] of Sanayar-Thi-Pan pooled their strength to make change. They saw other women that didn't have identity documents, that couldn't read, that had experienced violence for many years. But that couldn't stop women from using their strength. Matan Myint talked about how she came for the training, then after the training she realised that she was able to do something despite being powerless. It was a very strong message.

- Jiraporn, GAATW Working Group member and facilitator of learning exchange between Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre and Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), July 2007

In 1998, the first organisations who have come to talk to us, to work with us was CARE Bangladesh and Naripokkho and they came with information on HIV/AIDS. In the beginning we didn't pay attention to them. We said we don't need this sort of information, it's not important to us. And then some of our sisters were taken to India and they went to Durbar programme [DMSC] and realized that these were sex workers also but they were articulate, they knew of issues, they were aware of them and they could talk. They could formulate arguments and logic and there were big, big people at the Programme like Ministers who were also listening to them. That's when we realised there's a need to organize. We can't do things on our own. If other people, different groups can come together to realise their rights, to demand for their rights, then why can't we come together? Why can't we organise ourselves to demand our rights because we as human beings have rights too.

- Sultana, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, August 2007 group interview

Integrating support services with opportunities for active involvement may be a facilitating factor for women's organising. The groups and women we interviewed talked about parallel processes of discovering their shared experiences of exploitation and discrimination along with their processes of discovering their strengths and their abilities to work for change. The organisations these women came into initial contact with continually supported the participation of women, through awareness-raising sessions in shelters, training opportunities or by asking the women to become more involved. The support experiences these women encountered from other organisations often involved a combination of support services (e.g. shelter refuge) and an expectation of involvement (e.g. working or volunteering at the organisation). For example, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI) members outlined all the services they provided for members but they also emphasised their expectation that their members contribute their time, talents and abilities to the organisation.

For ATKI, the main work of ATKI is about empowerment. By who? Us. How? Through organising. ATKI is a machine producing organizers.

- Eni, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong, June 2007 interview

Just as experiences of support should occur in parallel with opportunities to demonstrate agency, material changes and concrete successes should be analysed and incorporated into organisational histories as they occur. Material changes and concrete successes can be incorporated into community narratives and group histories in order to fuel future collective action. Material changes that are undertaken without this analysis may waste an additional opportunity for collective empowerment.

For organisations wanting to support self-organising efforts, it may be necessary to urge women to stretch their capabilities and to propose suggestions for action. However, it is also important to accept a group's assessment of how much they can take on. Some women from marginalised groups may be hesitant or tentative in becoming involved which could be due to negative self-assessment but which could also be due to a practical assessment of the risks of making oneself visible as a sex worker activist or a migrant worker activist.

Once when we were in a rally, women covered their faces, they used masks in a rally, they said "we want to fight but we don't want to lose our job". They didn't want to be exposed so this is fine. They are trying to participate and it's a slow process over years to break the fear, open the gate and build confidence. It's a slow process.

- Eni, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong, June 2007 interview

You know, the process I've been going through, of first receiving assistance and afterwards providing assistance, is like what a butterfly would experience if it has been trapped in your hands – you open your hands, the butterfly starts fluttering her wings, slowly and tentatively in disbelief. And then a moment comes when the butterfly takes to her wings again. The world is hers, once again! That is how it has been for me.

- COIN staff member, Alliance News (July 2006, p. 45)



14. Organising activities need to add value to women's lives

Organising activities need to be respectful of women's priorities and they need to add value to women's lives. Women from marginalised and stigmatised groups (e.g. domestic workers, sex workers, trafficking survivors, migrant workers) may already be shouldering significant workloads and priorities (e.g. income security, food

security, family priorities, etc.). Economically and socially marginalised women need to maximize their time and resources to ensure their survival and they have to continually assess what activities and strategies will most benefit themselves and their families. Self-organised groups need to be creative, resourceful and adaptable in developing and revising strategies for empowerment.

I'm talking about self-help groups [SEPOM is trying to start up], women who have no serious problems (they have money, a house, family, economic security) are OK to spend time and talk a lot. But the women with problems come to the meetings two times and then stop because they haven't seen any positive results. This is the risk in holding groups together, the women that are most questioning of what we do are the women that have the most problems and that are in the most need of help, but they need results.

- Ampy, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 group interview

The specific strategies of self-organised and grassroots groups differ and often include a combination of practical and strategic methods. To increase interest and value, groups often integrated consciousness-raising and critical awareness activities with social and practical activities.

We also want to teach English and learn English together. We have English lessons, guitar lessons, dance lessons. We work for a better future for migrant workers, but if we have free time, we have other kinds of activities, like dance lessons.

- Yatie, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong, June 2007 interview

The value of and benefits from organising activities will vary widely, depending on the needs and aspirations of the women involved in group activities. Perceived benefits can range from material benefits (e.g. scholarships, supply of condoms, per diem), social benefits (community connections, social activities), or education (e.g. literacy classes, English classes), individual empowerment (increasing individual knowledge, new occupational role), to name a few examples. Groups and organisations should take care before presuming to guess what they perceive would be of most value for vulnerable groups. For DMSC, a sex workers organisation in India, donors were more concerned with health outcomes whereas sex workers were more interested in securing stable living and working conditions (Cornish & Ghosh, 2007). One NGO representative we interviewed admitted that participants often found per diems and accommodation provided during training to be more desirable than the actual training offered. Projects may need to ask the question 'empowerment to do what?' in order to clarify benefits and limitations of empowerment initiatives (Cornish, 2006).

Capacity-building opportunities, training and learning opportunities must be meaningful and relevant to self-organised groups involved and should include adequate resources for follow-up to evaluate benefits and limitations. The failure of groups to implement or carry forward trainings cannot be a rationale for stopping support but instead, should be taken as an opportunity to evaluate the relevance of the learning opportunity, the means and capacity to implement it, and other group priorities.

The practical value of activities will vary between women and across time. The specific strategies used by groups of women will be informed by their identities, and by the social, historical, political, economic and cultural contexts they operate in. For example, GAATW has found self-help healthcare training to be a very valuable tool for various groups of poor or marginalised women. However, we have to take care not to assume that this is a tool that would provide great benefit for all groups of self-organised women. Self-help healthcare training proved to be very valuable for a group of migrant women workers on the Thailand-Burmese border whereas it wasn't as valuable for sex workers in Hong Kong. Self-help health care training was a valuable tool for migrant women workers excluded from mainstream health services and with little income security but for sex workers in Hong Kong, good health care was readily available and income wasn't as limited a resource.

Just as we cannot assume universal definitions of empowerment, we also cannot assume a universal strategy for empowerment. Women may seek out groups for different reasons and facilitators should take care not to assume what will empower women. Self-organised groups are a powerful strategy for empowerment and social change but involvement with self-organised groups may not be an urgent need if existing structures and organisations provide adequate opportunities for social change and empowerment.

Action for REACH OUT (AFRO), a support organisation for sex workers in Hong Kong, was founded by 3 Western women that centred self-representation as a guiding principle of AFRO's work. However, AFRO has experienced significant challenges in actualising self-representation and self-organising among sex workers in Hong Kong, due to a variety of factors. For example, self-organising may connote a level of commitment which may be unrealistic for migrant sex workers who see their lives and work in Hong Kong as temporary. Sex workers' basic needs can be met from their income and Hong Kong's existing infrastructure (e.g. good healthcare services), while visibility is still a significant risk that can bring on police violence and brutality. Within the organisation, sex workers have voiced the need for change (e.g. addressing increasing police surveillance) but they have voiced this as a role for support organisations, not for sex workers. Support organisations have to consider that vulnerable groups may have a more accurate assessment of the risks involved. It is important for communities to continually assess their capability and comfort in participating but it is also important for NGOs and external supporters to think critically about participation and to formulate opportunities for participation that extend beyond public representation.



15. Organising processes need to accommodate women's circumstances, priorities and needs

The realities of women involved in self-organising efforts influence the organising strategies they use. These realities (e.g. time limitations, mobility of populations) were often identified as deficiencies or limitations but they may be more accurately framed as natural consequences of women's lives. Rather than seeing life circumstances as a deficiency or a failing of a particular

group, groups can help make organising and social change processes more inclusive by creatively accommodating these particular issues.

Part of this involves seeing women in totality, recognizing women's multiple identities, and recognizing the various social, economic and political contexts that impact their choices. For example, it means recognising sex workers' roles as mothers rather than reducing them to their sexual behaviour. Sex workers groups such as Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (India), Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh (SWNOB), and Cambodia Prostitutes Union (Cambodia) provide services for workers' children such as childcare, shelter, educational opportunities and assisting children's admittance to schools.

One of the main barriers in organising domestic workers and sex workers is time limitations. Domestic workers working full-time in Hong Kong only get one day off per week. Long working hours are also an issue for some sex workers. While organisers welcomed the participation of workers, they also respected the immense workloads women are already under and the need for women to recuperate on their day off. Domestic worker organisations proposed that building a critical mass would be one strategy to offset the limited time of individual members so that a larger number of people offering a portion of their time would increase the overall organisation's impact.

There are many members who join but who are not really active. Most domestic workers only get one day off so they need that day to call their families, send money home, etc. Employers make demands every day so domestic workers need to rest on their day off.

- Yatie, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), June 2007 interview

It can be quite difficult to meet with the women; they usually meet one Sunday per month. Often the women don't want their employers to know of these meetings so the organisation meets the women when they are out buying groceries and vegetables or performing other errands that take them out of their employers' homes.

- Member of National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM), GAATW's annual consultation with self-organised groups, September 2005

Women may not prioritise political change as much as social connection or leisure activities after immediately leaving an oppressive situation. Many women in self-organised groups may have experienced trauma, social exclusion and discrimination. While surviving trauma can be an important source of strength and knowledge, this can also affect women's capacity to contribute to organising processes. Women will negotiate and determine their participation in various ways during their time with an organisation and supporters need to respect women's processes of healing and renewal.

Those that have returned a long while ago are in need of help of getting their life together and of making plans, but those that have just returned, new returnees are in a period of return where they don't want to sit down and plan. Some women come back with lots of money and are able to buy a house and car, but may only want to join SEPOM after the money is gone... Around the age of 35 is actually a good age to reach out to because by then they're mature enough to decide what they want to do, and they may often have kids, so they're more able to see and work for the next generation.

- Varunee, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 group interview

Another challenge is the high mobility and fluidity of particular groups such as sex workers, migrant workers and domestic workers. Domestic workers often moved due to their employers' moving and many sex workers in Hong Kong were only working in Hong Kong temporarily. A group of trafficking survivors in Nepal also noted the high mobility of members (to other career opportunities) due to the organisation's successful empowerment and development of trafficking survivors. Undocumented migrant women often move residences or workplaces in order to avoid detection by the authorities. The Cambodia Prostitutes Union explained that their members were continually mobile in order to avoid detection and apprehension by the police but that providing sustained support and training was still valuable as women would "take their knowledge with them wherever they go" (GAATW, 2005, p.6).

Self-organised groups are spaces where women develop into advocates, activists and community workers so groups, organisations and external stakeholders need to strategise how mobility can be factored as a natural part of an organisation's life. This can include continual recruitment in communities and building the capacity of as many women as possible, so that an organisation's survival isn't dependent on the personal capacities and time of a few women.

Recognition of self-organised groups as a vehicle for empowerment cannot be used as a rationale for denying necessary support, resources, infrastructure and capacity-building opportunities. The hard work, responsibility, time and commitment that's required of organising and community support work also needs to be acknowledged. It's evident that women find gratification and fulfilment in organising efforts but it's also very demanding and challenging work that can impact women's well-being. This is particularly true of the caring work or emotional labour women provide for others. Although women bring various strengths and skills to supporting and counseling encounters, women also talked about the challenges of processing others' experiences. Emotional skills are required for emotional labour (Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002) and adequate supports need to be given to women undertaking caring work.

Sitting here, we know how hard the work is, and we think about how hard it is before we recommend women to come here. Women not in this profession can't imagine how hard it is, and some can't continue. When we know women from work, we feel reluctant to advise her to come here. They are not prepared for the work and the pressure and we don't want to disappoint the women.

- Ampy, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 group interview



16. Self-organised groups can benefit from respectful partnerships with external stakeholders

From our discussions with the self-organised groups in GAATW's membership, external influences can have significant impact on a group's success or stagnation. Relationships and partnerships with external supporters were seen as desired and necessary for most of the groups we met with. Groups stressed that it could not only be marginalised groups fighting for the rights of marginalised groups, and that those with resources and privilege needed to contribute to struggles for migrant rights, sex worker rights, trafficking survivors' rights, domestic worker rights and the rights of racialised groups. The social exclusion marginalised groups experience can make it extremely difficult to initiate organising efforts without any external support or input whatsoever (Raju, 2005; Cornish & Ghosh, 2007). Just as fostering collectivity with women with similar

experiences is a strategy for empowerment and social change, developing respectful relationships with professional NGOs and organisations can also be considered part of a group's strategy for empowerment and social change (Chowdhury, 2006).

In discussing the relationship between self-organised groups and external stakeholders, we are differentiating between groups composed of women with direct experience of the issue they're working on, and organisations that aren't directed or composed of women with direct experience (e.g. NGOs staffed by development professionals). However, we do recognise that these distinctions can be blurred and that definitions of 'self-organised group' and 'NGO' are not absolute. A self-organised group can have multiple identities and some of the larger self-organised groups in the Alliance may function and be recognised as powerful NGOs. Self-organised groups can also be strategic in deciding which identities to assert in different contexts (e.g. as a self-organised group to a donor and as a NGO to clients). In addition, self-organised groups differ in how women with direct experience are involved. A self-organised group may be directed by women with direct experience but staff implementing workplans may not be women from the target group. Or an organisation may be directed by development professionals with the work being implemented by women from the target group.

Rather than holding groups to an unrealistic standard of 'pure' participation or independence, self-organised groups and supporting organisations can help develop a more sophisticated understanding of participation and develop strategies that allow self-organised groups to benefit from the support of external influences while remaining in control of group agendas. Groups and external supporters may have different definitions of independence, autonomy and empowerment. Unrealistic expectations or definitions of self-sufficiency may lead to misguided judgments of a group's dependence or failure, particularly new, emerging groups operating in heavily exploitative or oppressive contexts (Cornish & Ghosh, 2007). For instance, DMSC's success has been partly due to its strategic relationships with various non-sex worker groups yet these nuanced dynamics have not generally been acknowledged as part of the DMSC story (Cornish & Ghosh, 2007). Sharing this part of DMSC's history could enable other groups to manage partnerships more strategically.

It's how self-sufficiency is understood by NGOs. When Durjoy says it's self-sufficient, NGOs defines that as meaning it doesn't need money. But we define self-sufficiency as taking care of ourselves. Why is self-sufficiency defined in terms of money?

- Shibu, CARE Bangladesh, self-help healthcare training, March 2007

In dealing with NGOs, we need them for training and skills development. But it's very clear, in terms of decision-making, NGOs have no say. They may have advice but at the end of the day, the self-organised group will decide.

- Dolores, United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFILS, a migrant worker organisation in Hong Kong), June 2007 interview

Empowering partnership characteristics

Self-organised groups were greatly appreciative of NGOs and other supporters that were willing to share and contribute their resources (time, money, skills, connections) towards self-organised group goals. The technical skills of NGOs were particularly valued (e.g. proposal writing, reporting, documentation) as several of the groups felt that this was a challenge for the women involved in self-organised groups due to literacy and educational levels. The Sonagachi Project (or SHIP), an NGO HIV prevention initiative, assisted Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), a sex workers collective, in gaining funding, providing logistical and strategic planning support, and providing office infrastructure (Gooptu, 2000). Naripokkho, a Bengali NGO has assisted organising sex workers through providing material resources (e.g. food, vehicles), organisational, logistical and planning support, such as linking sex workers with media and policymakers (Chowdhury, 2006). Organisations such as COIN (Centro de Orientacion e Investigacion Integral) in the Dominican Republic and CARE in Bangladesh facilitated self-organising efforts by providing roles for sex workers as health messengers and outreach workers for HIV initiatives. These roles allowed women to gain experience and familiarity with outreach, education and organising strategies (e.g. increasing awareness, planning meetings) prior to developing self-organised groups. The MODEMU H.O.P.E. Foundation was set up in 2005 by a group of students at the University of California at Riverside in partnership with MODEMU, a sex workers organisation in the Dominican Republic (Cazares, 2005) to channel donations from the US to the Dominican Republic (it is difficult for those in the U.S. to receive a tax break for donations made to organisations in the Dominican Republic). The MODEMU H.O.P.E. Foundation is also helping MODEMU access resources by researching and writing grants.

During meetings with self-organised groups and community-based organisations in 2007, groups stressed that increased interaction with GAATW was desired but they also spoke about the technical and communication barriers they face. Given GAATW's relative privilege in terms of technology, financial and human resources, the onus is on GAATW to take responsibility and initiative in addressing these barriers. The support self-organised groups have requested from GAATW IS have included opportunities to share experiences with other member organisations, training (e.g. organisational development, self-help health care training), material resources, social support, facilitating communication between members, disseminating member resources, and support for members' political campaigns.

Groups particularly appreciated relationships with external supporters where they felt free and trusted enough to present their concerns and difficulties. Some of the groups may experience heightened scrutiny (due to their identity as trafficking survivors or sex workers, for example) and may feel they cannot share their concerns or difficulties without losing credibility. In a consultation facilitated by GAATW in 2005, most of the groups said they felt the need to present a united front to outsiders. In this context, groups appreciated relationships that were ongoing, with continued and informal communication and moral encouragement that responded over time to the changing needs of the group. This is not to say that all interactions need to be in the form of a long-term relationship, sometimes groups welcomed short-term projects that were deliverable and provided tangible benefit for the group over a mutually agreed upon timeframe. However, supporting organisations that want to foster the development of self-organised groups may require more flexibility and creativity than a traditional project-based approach.

Because of GAATW's support (money and training), Sanayar-Thi-Pan didn't have to deal with mainstream donors, we could just run Sanayar-Thi-Pan happily and if there were technical problems, we could just go to GAATW. We appreciated the way GAATW provided technical support, it was in a way we could learn from it and use it. The relationship between GAATW and Sanayar-Thi-Pan is supportive, there's room for me to run Sanayar-Thi-Pan. And in terms of reporting, I don't need to conform or confine myself. I never felt like GAATW was 'the boss'. The way GAATW supports Sanayar-Thi-Pan increases our confidence.

- Fah, Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre, learning exchange between Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre and Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), July 2007

Disempowering partnership characteristics

There was a sense that funders and large INGOs require significant caretaking and there was a worry that valuable time and resources were disproportionately allocated to fulfilling funder needs that wouldn't further the objectives of the self-organised group. Self-organised groups are aware that donors, funders and INGOs have their own needs to consider, such as project deadlines and outcome targets. Managing funder needs included fulfilling funder requirements for reporting and trying to reconcile support services with funder perceptions of the target group. Some groups were also wary of NGO activities and perceived some activities (such as training provided for self-organised groups) as meeting the needs of NGOs (to meet donor requirements, to fulfil project targets) rather than the needs of self-organised groups, particularly when such activities were initiated by an external organisation rather than requested from the group itself.

Some of the requirements are a burden. Reporting formats can be so complicated. You're dealing with groups that may not have a formal educational background, such as drug users and sex workers. Expectations from donors can be so complicated, e.g. 20 page reports. We hold capacity building workshops on things like proposal writing but ultimately, this is to fulfil the needs of donors, not the people themselves.

- Shiba, Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (APN+), June 2007 interview

NGOs have to be aware, they have to have sensitivity. With some projects, once the money is gone, the group is gone. How can we do work that serves both the project and the group? The challenge among NGOs is how to make conditions that allow working hand in hand together, so that when the project is done, it leaves the movement and the organisation stronger.

- Eni, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), June 2007 interview

Donors and large NGOs can demonstrate respect when working with self-organised groups by ensuring transparency regarding project objectives and resources. External stakeholders such as donors should place the onus of fulfilling NGO requirements on their own staff in addition to making technical support accessible to self-organised groups (e.g. by having NGO staff prepare reports based on verbal feedback from group). There needs to be transparency in how much money will actually filter to the target group after overhead, administration, project management requirements and professional salaries are factored in.

Some donors use us for their own gain, they'll plan a project which has to do with us but then they'll increase the salary of the project coordinator and their staff and by the time they've done with everything, when it actually comes to us getting any money, you'll see that we don't get any money from that project, so that also happens a lot.

- Chumki, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, August 2007 group interview

I feel that the donor has been insincere...I feel like during the proposal process, they enter our house, grab everything, take it away, say it's not good enough, tell us to bring them more, but they still keep what they've already taken.

- Varunee, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 interview

Economic self-sufficiency is an integral part of the empowerment process and part of the empowerment self-organised groups can provide is by creating meaningful employment alternatives for women. Empowerment through involvement in self-organising efforts cannot be considered payment or reward enough for the women involved and self-organised groups cannot be used as a cost-cutting, instrumental tool by donors and large NGOs. A study on the role of PLWHA (people living with HIV/AIDS) in AIDS activist efforts argued that NGOs and governments exploited the commitment of PLWHA to provide cheap or free care in substitution for healthcare services (Manchester, 2004). Women should be recognised and compensated adequately for the work they do. Donors and NGOs can support the sustainability of self-organised groups by providing income security for women working in self-organised groups.

NGOs discriminate against staff and create divisions (e.g. peer educator vs field organizer) in terms of benefits, perks, per diems, etc. However, the NGO would boast that it's given 5 sex workers jobs and pulled them out of the sex trade. But the money and benefits are not enough to live on.

- Kajol, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, self-help women's healthcare training, March 2007

If an outside organisation comes, even if they work for things that would benefit us when they hire people, they hire other outsiders. They don't create opportunities for us to get jobs. Whereas if it's our own organisation and we're the ones managing the money, then you would see that we always employ other sex workers, to provide them with employment opportunities. We use our money to pay our people, to feed our people, that's what the difference is.

- Rani, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, August 2007 group interview

Managing external influences

Groups generally agreed that no matter the degree of involvement a supporting organisation had with a self-organised group (e.g. providing resources, providing ideas and options for action), the self-organised group had to ultimately maintain decision-making power. Learning how to manage external influences and learning how to maintain control of group agendas is an important skill self-organised groups need to acquire, in part due to the sophistication of the professional NGO sector. Groups emphasized the need for support but also stressed that external stakeholders needed to be comfortable with having a background or supporting role. Although this may be a generally agreed upon principle by both self-organised groups and supporting organisations, the experiences of self-organised groups showed that this was an area many external supporters had difficulty fulfilling.

You have to be aware that this happens among NGOs. We know grassroots groups who have stopped or changed or have been monopolised – by money, by experts (who were not workers). We need to be aware of that. We need to correct this within the movement and within NGOs.

- Eni, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), June 2007 interview

When you bring in too many people without realising their agendas, it happens. And some new groups can get influenced so easily, because these professionals are experts, they know how to talk. It happens very often. It happens when groups don't have resources but they have the desire to do something together. Then they meet up with an NGO and they have to compromise to get the money offered by an NGO... We talk about this when we talk to national members, that they have to negotiate and they have to keep a balance in their relationship. If they don't have resources, they have to negotiate, which is often fine with donors. At first, donors will try to impose but they're also willing to negotiate. They have to get a name too and a reputation by working with self-organised groups.

- Shiba, Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (APN+), June 2007 interview

Target groups have a right to determine their needs and they have a right to determine how their communities will be supported. The priorities or assessments determined by self-organised groups may differ dramatically from the priorities determined by organisations not composed of directly affected women. Supporting self-organised groups isn't solely about empowering or uplifting an exploited group, it's also about ensuring movements and initiatives that accurately represent and address the needs and aspirations of marginalised populations. Self-organised

groups provide important knowledge for organisations seeking to support marginalised women and organisations need to realize the capacity of self-organised groups to contribute knowledge and expertise to professional NGO and social service sectors.

We know the problems and what the women need and we need to tell donors that they need to adjust to the community, not the other way around.

- Fah, Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre, learning exchange between Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre and Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), July 2007

Role of catalysts

Self-organised groups can form when women identify a gap in existing services and structures and organize to address that gap or self-organised groups can be formed when an external catalyst identifies a need for an organized group and introduces that option to a target group. Most of the self-organised groups in the Alliance were initiated by a support organisation or initially began as an NGO project. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), a sex workers' organisation in India, and Cambodia Prostitutes Union (CPU), a sex workers' organisation in Cambodia, both arose from HIV prevention programs undertaken by NGOs. DMSC took over responsibility for management of the Sonagachi Project in 1999 (Cornish & Ghosh, 2007), whereas CPU still functions under the infrastructure of Cambodian Women's Development Agency. Given the greater resources, organisational and development experience of NGOs, community organisations and development professionals (e.g. social workers), or changes in political context (e.g. insurgence of funding for HIV in India in the 1990s), it is understandable that many groups were initially guided by an external catalyst. NGOs are likely to have more familiarity and experience with organisational tools and strategies that can enable collective action such as advocacy campaigns, public forums, Boards, and advisory panels. What remains a significant challenge is managing relationships with external catalysts (such as donors, development professionals, NGOs) as the organisation grows. The groups and external stakeholders we met with talked about the difficulties addressing the tensions and concerns that arose between self-organised groups and their facilitators.

In the beginning, they do tend to be dependent. We do recognise that we have the luxury of time – we can work on these issues full-time, [as domestic workers] they can not. We try to assist but eventually they will have to do it themselves. We do what we can. We have very close coordination with them. The dependency in the beginning was on analysis and materials and how to do certain things. These can be learned. It's easier for us to learn because we're full-time.

- Cynthia, Mission for Migrant Workers (MFMW), a migrant rights NGO in Hong Kong, June 2007 interview

CORDAI(D) and DED supported COIN's accompanying process to MODEMU until it was understood that MODEMU was ready to work in an independent way. This process lasted for 5 years.

- Francisca, COIN (Centro de Orientacion e Investigacion Integral), June 2007 email communication

The actual fact of how the group initiated is of less importance than the group ultimately claiming and asserting ownership. It is evident that different groups have different opinions of what constitutes ownership. From our discussions with self-organised groups and NGOs, ownership claims have been based on such roles as: who allocates resources for group activity, who initiates the group, who carries the work of the group and who directs or guides the organisation's activities and objectives. For two of the self-organised groups, stories of the organisation's origins differed between self-organised members and an NGO that provided initial support and guidance (Penfold, 2005; Gooptu, 2000). Women in the self-organised group claimed ownership of the group whereas supporting organisations presented the groups as starting from NGO initiatives.

The whole idea is that yes, there are other people who are helping to run our organisation but we have made sure that we have a strong hand on it, that we are part of the decision-making and that we retain control at the end of the day, of what goes on in the organisations... We don't have the capacity to run an organisation so there are people who tend to the administrative things. We don't have certain skills so that's why we get assistance from people to run some activities. But we also know what is ours and we also know what to do with what is ours.

- Rina, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, August 2007 group interview

Groups welcomed close involvement with supportive organisations but they stressed that it needed to be a relationship where self-organised groups were free to determine their priorities. Maintaining a respectful but supportive relationship is extremely complex and it may be difficult for supporting organisations that are internationally recognised as 'experts' to remain in the background as a genuine supporter, particularly when their knowledge and experience is needed during initial organising efforts. Sometimes it was supporting NGOs that urged self-organised groups to become more independent, in other cases, self-organised groups felt stifled by a 'parent' organisation or external catalyst. Groups stated their desire for relationships that are willing to nurture them over time but that also allowed them to grow and be autonomous.

People may not be happy to take this type of role, they may not be able to handle it. It's hard to find the right person. People with high educations, they feel they're correct and would contradict with what we want to see, they may not be happy with the work, and the women wouldn't be happy. Some staff can't work with women who've worked in sex work, even though they may not say this openly but we see this in their attitude. And women are quick to pick up on this attitude from others so they would immediately reject that person.

- Mari, Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), April 2007 interview

One relationship model that seems to be particularly valuable and empowering is the relationship between more established self-organised groups and emerging self-organised groups. For example, the relationship between established Filipino migrant worker groups and support organisations and emerging migrant worker groups in Hong Kong provided an interesting contrast to other self-organised groups that were initiated by NGOs or development

professionals in other countries. In both cases, external catalysts provided space, material resources, education and suggestions for actions. However, although established migrant worker groups and migrant support organisations in Hong Kong provided the same level and type of support as NGOs in other countries, they continually and emphatically emphasized this as peer support. Providing support to an emerging group was not framed as an ownership claim in any way. This provided a contrast to other 'parent' organisations, where initial support allowed organisations to 'claim parentage', including GAATW. Although GAATW is firmly committed to supporting self-organised groups, GAATW has also made ownership claims in the past for a couple of the self-organised groups in its membership due to its provision of material resources and training opportunities.

We share our experiences of organising. We want other organisations to know what we know. We know organising is very important. We share issues and strength as migrant worker organisations. If we're working individually, it's that much harder to accomplish success. If they organize, they can achieve more.

- Dolores, United Filipinos in Hong Kong (UNIFILS, a migrant worker organisation in Hong Kong), June 2007 interview

APMM helped to pave the way for a worldwide alliance of migrant workers organisations called MIGRANTE International. We didn't claim to establish this. We know when we should be in the background, otherwise we'd be just like the government, claiming the efforts of migrant workers as our own.

- Esther, Asia-Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM, a network organisation of migrant rights groups), June 2007 interview

The self-organised groups in GAATW's membership have contributed a great deal to the network, by sharing their experiences and knowledge with other members, by contributing their stories to our communication products, and by representing GAATW in various arenas. GAATW is also in the process of continually reflecting on its relationship to the self-organised members in the Alliance. For example, we have asked self-organised groups on various occasions to share their experiences and their challenges (in conferences and consultations, for our newsletters) but it's unclear how often we've followed up on those questions with tangible support.

You've asked us about our work here and about our challenges and successes. But I wrote a report about a month ago, explaining about our situation, the challenges, the problems and successes. I submitted the 2007 plans to GAATW but there hasn't been any feedback... We would like GAATW to give us advice, suggestions, and comments. We want communication between GAATW and us.

- Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre staff, April 2007 group interview



17. Relationship building, team building, and power sharing are important needs among self-organised groups

Some of the groups we spoke to described their organisational style as familial, and work within the organisation was described as working with family and friends rather than working with clients. Empowerment has been defined as the outcome of supportive social relationships (Sprague & Hayes, 2000) and it's clear that friendships

and social bonds are a key draw for self-organised groups, partly because they allow women to nurture others (e.g. mentor, friend). Self-organised groups may function as an alternate family for women from stigmatised groups (e.g. sex workers, trafficking survivors) or women isolated from their families and communities (e.g. domestic workers, migrant workers).

Thai people in Hong Kong have solidarity. We're staying far from our country but the people here are like brothers and sisters. We never forget Thai culture.

- Parichat, Thai Regional Alliance (TRA, a Thai migrant domestic workers organisation in Hong Kong), June 2007 interview

While it's true that women can find their shared experiences to be a powerful link in driving collective activity, it's also true that groups of women such as trafficking survivors, domestic workers and sex workers are also very heterogeneous. Many women from marginalised and stigmatised groups may have also experienced harmful relationships or interactions that can impact the way they relate to other women, even women they share a solidarity with. Past human relationships may have been characterized by violence, distrust, and stigma and it takes time, confidence and strength to trust others after past exploitative relationships.

You need to understand, we come from a violent background, extremely violent, so that could be why we don't respect each other, we're very conscious of who gets what. Because of NGO interventions, we have changed, we can talk now, but we're keeping conflicts alive between us. We've gotten a lot of training but maybe we need training about this work.

- Parul, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, self-help women's healthcare training, March 2007

It became evident in our discussions that learning to create and sustain supportive and empowering relationships within groups is a big challenge. Issues of trust and communication were recurring topics that came up in our conversations. Stigmatised and marginalised women such as trafficking survivors, domestic workers and sex workers are often kept isolated, either through the nature of their work (domestic work) or through social ostracisation (e.g. sex work, trafficking survivors). Part of coming together collectively involves a tremendous shift in working

with other women and trusting other people. The fact that collective efforts are undertaken in parallel with individual processes of healing and empowerment adds to the complexity but also adds to potential benefits.

I had difficulty in the beginning in communicating with sex workers. I was a sex worker before but I lacked experience in communicating with others. I had only communicated with clients and close friends before, not with other people.

- Agun, AFRO (Action for REACH OUT) peer worker, June 2007 interview

Learning how to work together and support each other is a continual process as organisations grow and develop. Developing positive relationships and social connections is a large part of individual and collective empowerment. Relationships are necessary to carry out group activities and to support individual growth processes. Supportive relationships are also needed to sustain movements in the face of significant social barriers and limited resources (e.g. by members providing emotional encouragement to other members).

At the end of the day, we may not have money but the people are there. We will still be working with people even when the project is gone.

- Eni, Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), June 2007 interview

Self-organised groups, like other organisations, can experience internal power struggles, ego struggles, leadership tensions and discrimination between members. For women that have experienced extreme powerlessness in other situations, leadership or dominance in a self-organised group may present the only viable means of gaining authority, power and recognition. The dominance of particular leaders may make an organisation easily identifiable to the larger NGO community but it can stagnate the growth of an organisation in addition to becoming a source of resentment and conflict within an organisation. The dominance of one of a few people in the organisation can hinder the development of the rest of the women involved in the organisation which can ultimately threaten organisational sustainability.

As an external supporter, this has been an ongoing concern for GAATW. As a network, we have relied on contact with a few key people in each organisation. In providing opportunities for sharing between self-organised groups (e.g. consultations), we have restricted involvement to a few people from each organisation. One of the major challenges for GAATW is to find ways to genuinely support groups rather than selected representatives. As a network, one worry has been that in only offering opportunities to select representatives, we have contributed to organisational hierarchies and internal power dynamics.

Conflict is an inevitable part of any collective action that can generate change and creativity and learning to deal with conflict productively and creatively is a major task for any organisation. Self-organised groups need to be able to access guidance from skilled resource persons on conflict resolution and consensus building techniques. Other women talked about the value of referring to a common vision and common objectives to provide clarity in organisational discussions. Groups managed conflict through yearly team-building and problem-sharing sessions, discussing problems as a group, trying to identify the causes of conflict, and building relationships between members.

A source of conflict is the fact that all of them are working part-time and on a volunteer basis so sometimes there are frustrations as they are putting so much of their own energies and their (very scarce) free time on ATKI. However, they all said that it is more rewarding than frustrating.

- GAATW staff writing about Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), personal communication, February 2007

A pattern among the self-organised groups in GAATW's membership is the high mobility of members, either due to demands of their work (e.g. domestic workers) or due to moving onto other career opportunities after developing their skills within a self-organised group. Another pattern among several member organisations is the focus or reliance on one person within the organisation. The combination of these two patterns, high mobility of members and reliance on a few key people is a significant threat to group sustainability.

Power sharing is an important part of organisational sustainability and continuity but groups and organisations need to begin to develop a more inclusive, generative understanding of power. Given that one of the informal roles of self-organised and grassroots groups is that of a 'training ground' for new community leaders and activists, sustainable organisational structures need to expect and allow for continual renewal in membership and leadership. Locating an organisation in one individual is not a sustainable strategy. As women develop skills and experience and seek other opportunities, or change life circumstances (e.g. children, moving away), organisational structures need to ensure that group objectives and efforts can be maintained across changes in membership and leadership.

A sign of a good leader is that they want to hand over their power to others and make good leaders out of others instead of hoarding power. As leaders, [members of self-organised groups] will need to teach others to lead in the future... In making a leader, we can't remain a leader forever, one day I will have to give up my seat. I receive a lot of respect from the group but if I give up my seat on my own without force, I will be even more respected. When you're not in this seat, but showed leadership qualities in the past, you will be respected. The greatest strength is not power but respect. Society only shows power of power, but not power of humanity or humility.

- Sabala, GAATW Working Group member and facilitator for self-help women's healthcare training, March 2007

And now it has become such where pretty much half of all members have received such trainings, have understood how organizations work, have understood what leadership is and are enthusiastic about being in a leadership position. Many tell us nowadays, okay you've been leaders for long enough, now move off and give us a chance to play that role.

- Rani, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, August 2007 group interview



18. Awareness of professional NGO processes

The people we spoke to highlighted the professional skills that are needed to access resources and sustain organisations (e.g. proposal writing, documentation, reporting). Accessing resources and managing organisations in the development sector assumes a certain level of education and experience with professional office environments and processes which women from particular groups or classes may not

have. Trafficking survivors, migrant workers, sex workers and domestic workers may have expertise from experience but they still require capacity-building opportunities to interact with the professional NGO sector. There is a baseline knowledge base and norms NGO workers in mainstream or traditional NGOs may have that women in self-organised groups may not have.

While it is important to provide capacity-building opportunities to further skill development, we also need to be aware of how definitions of capacity building may differ between NGOs and self-organised groups. Some professional skill development capacity-building opportunities may ultimately serve the donor's needs rather than the self-organised group's felt needs. Supporting organisations also have to take care that capacity-building opportunities are not solely about managing the donor – recipient relationship (e.g. report writing). We cannot say that self-organised groups will find bureaucratic processes empowering simply because they connote a certain level of professionalism. Some women may genuinely want to acquire these skills, while other groups may want a technical support person / NGO liaison to navigate bureaucratic channels on their behalf. Norms of the professional NGO sector don't need to be taken up by self-organised groups, but communicating awareness of the challenges of NGO work and of NGO environments may help place the efforts of self-organised groups in perspective.

NGOs and donors also should not assume that the goal of self-organised groups is to become a 'real' NGO. There are trends towards professionalisation and specialisation in the professional NGO sector that self-organised groups may not want to replicate (and may want to guard against). Professionalisation and specialisation in the professional NGO sector exclude women without a certain level of education and privilege. These trends towards professionalisation and specialisation in the professional NGO sector not only impact self-organised groups but also other grassroots and community-based organisations. Self-organising efforts may also be initially prompted by the lack of opportunities within more established venues of activism or forms of mobilization (e.g. NGOs) (Bays, 1998; Abbott, 1997). Self-organised groups may offer a more collaborative and participatory approach to social change, whereby marginalised and stigmatised women are provided the space and support to develop as individuals while contributing towards collective empowerment and power.

Part of the value of grassroots and self-organising strategies is the development of new ways of involvement for marginalised groups. During consultations with self-organised groups in 2005 and 2006, self-organised groups identified technical expertise (e.g. strategic planning, fundraising, report writing) as key to ensuring organisational sustainability and were concerned about their lack of technical knowledge and saw this as a serious limitation impacting organisational sustainability (GAATW, 2006). It can be argued that self-organised groups need knowledge of NGO processes to continue their work but it can also be argued that the professional NGO sector needs to be more willing to formulate processes that enable more groups and more people to participate as change agents. Learning organisational management skills would certainly provide learning opportunities that might be otherwise inaccessible (to certain groups of women) and skill development would assist organisers in their careers but it is also important to recognise the responsibility of the NGO sector in making participation accessible to groups from various social locations (e.g. different classes) with differing abilities.



19.Resource allocation and capacity-building opportunities must be relevant and accessible to self-organised groups

The self-organised groups in GAATW's membership currently raise funding through grants, street theatre, membership fees, selling group products (e.g. CDs, handicrafts, condoms, clothing), donation boxes, events (such as walkathons) and renting properties and vehicles. Groups were also very cognizant

of managing their funds frugally and implementing cost-saving measures such as reducing air conditioning, saving electricity and water.

Access to resources and training was a need mentioned by many of the groups we spoke to, but as discussed in the above section, the process of accessing resources and training also assumed a certain level of familiarity with funding bureaucracies and technical knowledge that not all groups possessed. Groups stressed the need for resources, but the amount of technical knowledge needed to access resources posed a significant barrier for several groups.

One of the barriers was having formal NGO registration as criteria to apply for funds. New emerging groups can be perceived as risky for funders, although funding is needed in order to develop projects (Ploumen, 2001).

Groups were also concerned about conditionality of support, particularly when conditions for support were solely based on NGOs or donor definitions of the marginalised community's issues.

Projects require that the children are labeled as the children of sex workers but there's stigmatization once children are known as the children of sex workers. The agencies and funders are not bothered by this. There are NGOs working with sex workers' children but their work can be stigmatizing...[Children] are required to be labeled otherwise we don't receive funding and we don't receive financial help.

- Shehnaz, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, self-help women's healthcare training, March 2007

Funds are received through donors. Lately there have been problems with donors from America who have been offering funds on strict terms. The group has to meet certain terms to use these funds. The group has refused such funds, but some organisations have questioned why they do not accept their funds and these have been unpleasant experiences.

- Shakti Samuha, GAATW 2nd Annual Consultation of Self-Organised Women Organisations, September 2006 (p.31).

Self-organised groups and funders also had different assessments of who project beneficiaries should be and what the most effective intervention would be. Both the Cambodia Prostitutes Union (CPU) and Action for REACH OUT (AFRO) noted the difficulties in seeking funding from donors that prioritised health projects for sex workers over the empowerment of women in the sex industry (GAATW, 2005; personal communication, June 2007).

Another challenge ATKI faces is that many donors do not see migrant workers as being suitable for development grants. Additionally, most of the work done with migrant workers concentrates on the migrant worker in isolation. It is ATKI's belief that you cannot look at migrants in isolation – you have to look at the underlying reasons for them leaving their home and family.

- Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia or Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong (ATKI-HK), GAATW 2nd Annual Consultation of Self-Organised Women Organisations, September 2006 (p. 6).

A new way of thinking about resource allocation may be needed that addresses the unique challenges and strengths of self-organised groups. Self-organised groups may benefit more from long-term relationships with donors that allocate resources for organisational development rather than a strict project-driven paradigm. Self-organised groups may also benefit from relationships with donors that designate a donor/NGO liaison that is able to communicate on an ongoing basis with the self-organised group (in their local language) and who can provide technical assistance (e.g. report writing). It should incumbent on donors and NGOs to provide technical bureaucratic support and to seek alternative methods of communicating (e.g. verbal reports) and ways of reporting that are accessible to self-organised groups. Requesting self-organised groups to be responsible for the bulk of reporting and bureaucratic responsibilities may not be an empowering form of participation.

With this project-based funding, the problem is that you're able to feed a sex worker for 2 days but on the third day she's out of a job, so it's back to square one. But with core funding, the life change would be more sustainable and also it would help in getting the job done. I'm not saying that we just want money and not do the job, we can plan something long term. We can definitely get it done effectively but we need something a little more permanent and that's what would be helpful.

- Rina, Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, August 2007 group interview

Making resources more accessible to self-organised groups will also mean recognising that the nature of the work done by self-organised groups may differ from the work carried out by mainstream NGOs. The work of self-organised groups can blur lines between NGO / NGO activity, service provider / client, recipient of services / provider of services. The work of self-organised groups represents both an outcome (e.g. of empowerment, skill development) and a process (e.g. to achieve project objectives, to provide certain services). The processes of empowerment and self-organising need as much support and validation as the outcomes of self-organising. A revised or alternative funding paradigm may be needed to more adequately and accurately capture the gains of self-organised groups. Seemingly small gains may represent important steps for heavily stigmatised or socially excluded groups and it is necessary to formulate evaluation processes that are able to capture those gains and to recognise the value of 'failed' actions as opportunities for analysis, learning and conscientisation (Carr, 2003). It is necessary to remember that the transition from powerlessness to power or from trauma to leadership takes time and that working for social change with limited resources is challenging at the best of times, with numerous small victories and setbacks.

The work of self-organised groups is not success or failure. Rather, it is like a spiral where problems are identified, deep analyses are undertaken, strategies and collective solutions are devised, and the work is evaluated to determine the level of success.

- GAATW 2nd Annual Consultation of Self-Organised Women Organisations, September 2006 (p. 28).

CONCLUSIONS

How do self-organised groups contribute to individual and collective empowerment and social change?

Self-organising provides a space in which: (1) lived experiences of oppression and social exclusion can be used as a valuable resource to assist other women in need; (2) meaningful social roles can be created for women with lived experience and negative social identities can be challenged; (3) women can gain self-confidence; (4) women can access and create new analysis, new skills, and new ways of perceiving the world; (5) supportive and strong communities can be created; (6) women can assert their right to participate and to influence their environment; (7) living and working conditions can be improved; (9) a power base can be built; and (10) a sense of collective responsibility can be fostered. Although these elements have been presented as separate categories in this report, it's important to emphasise how interconnected all these elements are in practice. For instance, learning within self-organised groups helped women take on meaningful social roles which impacted their assessment of themselves and sense of collective responsibility.

Self-representation and collectivity increased both autonomy and community. It was clear how important community and connection were to many women and this seemed to be the most important goal for some of the groups we spoke to. Given that many of the self-organised groups in GAATW's membership comprise women from heavily stigmatised and socially isolated groups, the sense of community and connection may be a particularly powerful motivator and fuel for collective action. Much of the academic social science literature on empowerment tends to stress one aspect as the key characteristic of an empowerment process or tends to position autonomy and mastery in opposition to community and connection (Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002; Riger, 1993; Sheilds, 1995; Sprague & Hayes, 2000; Mok,

2004). From our discussions, it became evident that community and connection provided a means to gain autonomy and control over their environment.

Empowerment and social change are not linear processes. Collective action provided both power (e.g. means to participate as an equal partner in civil society, power to change living conditions) and support (e.g. for women's individual healing processes). Sometimes new knowledge sparked organising efforts; in other situations, working for tangible benefits provided the foundation that sustained collective action. While it is true that gaining new awareness was part of many women's experiences, the role of awareness-raising differed amongst groups – in some cases, an awareness raising activity was the catalyst for organising efforts; in other cases, critical understanding was gradually accumulated while working for practical and tangible needs. Identity re-construction is likewise an ongoing process. For some groups, reconstructing a negative social identity was the impetus for their action; for other groups, the role of identity was something that was negotiated individually by members in different ways over time.

The benefits of self-organising that were discussed most in-depth by interviewees were the formation of social networks, the opportunity to take on new roles, and gaining opportunities for and contributing to individual and collective learning processes.

Relationships are a key part of the empowerment process, both as a means to empowerment (e.g. realising one's personal strengths in helping other women), as an outcome (e.g. strong communities), a means to achieve social change goals (such as through the mobilization of migrant workers) and importantly, as motivation or fuel to sustain collective struggles. Creating and strengthening communities and relationships within communities and networks was one of the most important goals identified by self-organised groups, network organisations and external stakeholders. Relationships provided a space for women to receive information and support and it also provided a space for women to demonstrate mastery through empowering roles (e.g. such as mentoring other members, counselling, etc.). In addition, control over one's environment (such as working conditions) was a goal that became more feasible with the existence of strong networks and groups working collectively for social change. Having said that, it was also evident from discussions that while relationships are one of the most valuable and empowering elements of self-organised groups, the process of developing empowering relationships and negotiating power in group relationships can also be very complex, problematic and challenging.

The particular self-organised groups in the Alliance include women with distinctive social identities such as trafficking survivors, sex workers, domestic workers, migrant women, and Afro-descendant women. Discussions emphasised the importance of gaining meaningful social roles rather than accepting or re-constructing a stigmatised identity. The idea of working with other women 'like them' was a powerful idea for many of the groups we spoke to. While some women may be reluctant to visibly take on stigmatised identities, many of the women we spoke with felt good that their experiential knowledge could help other women. In nurturing participation and self-organisation, supporters and facilitators (such as NGOs and donors) need to seriously consider concerns women may have regarding participation, and need to be more creative in developing a range of options for participation rather than assessing participation and self-organisation on the basis of visibility alone.

Self-organised groups as a site of learning was also one of the major themes identified by the groups and women we interviewed. The learning that occurs in self-organising efforts provides an important foundation for individual empowerment (e.g. skill development), collective power and social change (e.g. knowledge production by marginalised communities). Through involvement in collective organising efforts with other affected women, women gained practical

skills (e.g. communication skills, counselling skills), critical analysis (e.g. globalisation issues, gender theories), and new ways of perceiving the world (e.g. long-term planning). Self-organised groups also presented an opportunity to develop skills that utilised women's individual strengths (e.g. research, counselling).

The learning that occurs in self-organised groups differs markedly from formal educational structures. A large part of the learning that takes place within self-organised and grassroots groups is done collectively. While some learning occurred in structured, participatory capacity-building opportunities (such as workshops and training), a lot of learning occurred through relating to other women with similar experiences (e.g. daily interactions, providing support to women in need, consciousness raising activities, role modelling, shadowing more experienced members), through active involvement in group activities, and through reflection of one's experiences.

What are the factors that contribute to a self-organised group's success?

The success or stagnation of a group depends on the interplay between various factors, both internal (e.g. internal power dynamics) and external (e.g. funding sources, political context). Although all of the factors mentioned below are part of organising efforts, some of the issues were more salient for some groups than others. We can posit that for organising efforts to benefit women, the following elements are involved: (A) opportunity for women to share experiences and struggles; (B) in addition to sharing experiences, women need to share common interests of what needs to be changed or what action should be taken; (C) women need to see themselves as change agents (e.g. through work roles, seeing others 'like us', and helping others); (D) the activities women are involved in need to add value to their lives in a way that's meaningful to them; (E) organising processes need to respect women's circumstances, needs and aspirations (e.g. limited time for organising activities, limited literacy levels, safety concerns); (F) groups need to have genuinely respectful partnerships with external stakeholders that are able to contribute toward group aims; (G) women need access to technical knowledge and resources to interact with professional NGO and funding sectors; (H) women need supportive, empowering relationships within the organisation; and (I) access to resources needs to be relevant and accessible.

The elements above that groups emphasised the most were the importance of both empowering internal relationships within the organisation and respectful partnerships with external stakeholders, organising processes that accommodated women's individual circumstances and needs, and having opportunities where women could learn from shared experiences with other women.

Organising processes with self-organised groups have to consider and accommodate women's circumstances, priorities, aspirations and needs. Self-organised groups are attempting to develop and utilise inclusive forms of participation and involvement that accommodate the circumstances of domestic workers, migrant workers, sex workers, trafficking survivors and racialised groups. Self-organised groups are working in a context where many of the women involved work full-time as domestic workers, have varying literacy and educational levels, and are undergoing personal processes of healing. The experiences of self-organised groups in fostering involvement within these circumstances can offer valuable lessons on how to make participation more inclusive and relevant to target communities.

External stakeholders can also learn from self-organised groups' struggles to develop and formulate avenues for participation that are more inclusive. Part of the value of grassroots and

self-organising strategies is the development of new ways of involvement for marginalised groups. It can be argued that self-organised groups need knowledge of NGO processes to continue their work but it can also be argued that the professional NGO sector needs to be more willing to formulate processes that enable more people to participate as change agents. While learning organisational management skills would certainly provide learning opportunities that might be otherwise inaccessible and while skill development would assist organisers in their careers, it's also important to recognise the responsibility of the NGO sector in making participation inclusive of groups from various social locations (e.g. different classes) with different capacities and strengths.

Relationships are crucial to sustain movements in the face of significant barriers, carry out group plans, assert collective power when making demands and to provide a space for learning. However, it was evident from our discussions that creating and maintaining supportive, empowering relationships within groups is a challenge, partly due to the heterogeneity of groups (e.g. although trafficking survivors may share some experiences, they may differ in many other ways), past relationship patterns and sharing limited resources. Learning to work with others and trust others may be a huge challenge for women that may have experienced exploitation, mistrust and trauma in past relationships.

Self-organised groups, like other organisations, can experience internal power struggles, ego struggles, leadership tensions and discrimination between members. For women that have experienced extreme powerlessness in other situations, leadership or dominance in a self-organised group may present the only viable means of gaining authority, power and recognition. The dominance of particular leaders may make an organisation easily identifiable to the larger NGO community but it can also hinder the development of other women involved in the organisation which can ultimately threaten organisational sustainability.

The combination of the high mobility of members and the reliance or dominance of a few key people are significant threats to group sustainability. As women develop skills and experience and seek other opportunities, or change life circumstances (e.g. children, moving away), organisational structures have to ensure that group objectives and efforts can be maintained across changes in membership and leadership. Power sharing is key to group sustainability and organisational continuity and supporters or self-organised groups have to develop a more inclusive, generative understanding of power.

How can external stakeholders best support self-organised groups?

NGOs and external stakeholders need to respect the strengths and efforts of self-organised groups and the right of target groups to influence NGO/advocacy sectors (e.g. right of trafficking survivors to influence anti-trafficking activity). Self-organised groups face unique challenges and concerns, some of which may benefit from the support of external supporters (e.g. donors, NGOs). It is important for external supporters to critically reflect on their role to ensure that they are genuinely contributing to the development of self-organised groups.

Self-organised groups provide important knowledge for organisations wanting to support marginalised women. Supporting self-organised groups isn't solely about empowering or uplifting an exploited group, it's also about ensuring movements and initiatives that accurately represent and address the needs and aspirations of marginalised populations.

Partnerships between external stakeholders and self-organised groups should leave the group and social movement stronger. External stakeholders and self-organised groups can evaluate

project processes by asking 'how will this leave the group and movement stronger'? Evaluating bureaucratic processes and desired project outcomes through this filter can help ensure projects will provide tangible benefits to groups and organisations.

Discussions emphasised *how* external stakeholders work with self-organised groups is as important, if not more important, than *what* specific assistance is provided. Groups welcomed interaction and relationships with external stakeholders (such as donors, NGOs, community supporters) not only to access resources, but also as a measure of solidarity, to inform each others work and to learn from the experiences of NGOs in using social change and organisational strategies, such as social campaigns, direct assistance, research and documentation. Given the extreme marginalisation of some groups (such as trafficking survivors, migrant women, sex workers) and given the relative wealth and experience NGOs have in terms of time (e.g. full time employment within NGOs), connections, material resources and experience in social change efforts, it is very unlikely that a self-organised group could succeed organisationally without respectful partnerships and solidarity links with other organisations.

Examples of empowering partnerships were characterised by a more flexible and responsive approach than mainstream project-based approaches typically allow. Several of the groups stated that they appreciated relationships that were ongoing, with continued and informal communication and moral encouragement that responded over time to the changing needs of the group. Groups particularly appreciated relationships with external supporters where they felt free and trusted enough to present their concerns and difficulties. Supporting organisations wanting to foster the development of self-organised groups may require approaches that are more flexible and creative than a traditional project-based approach.

However, a major issue and source of tension amongst several self-organised groups was the (un)willingness of external stakeholders to respect their role in providing support (such as resources, expertise, moral support, conceptual and political support) while respecting groups' autonomy and authority in organisational decision-making. Some of the partnerships provided support while respecting group ownership of organisational decision-making processes, while other organisations have experienced tensions in seeking their autonomy from organisations that have provided material or conceptual support.

Groups identified technical skills (e.g. writing proposals, reports, etc.) in particular as being key to organisational sustainability. However, women also perceived donors as requiring substantial caretaking that sometimes detracted time and attention away from a group's priorities. While some groups wanted to acquire NGO technical skills such as grant writing, other groups suggested technical assistance would enable organisations to access resources without taking women away from their priorities of empowerment and social change.

Funding processes in particular presented various obstacles to self-organised groups: (1) some funders require formal NGO registration from groups seeking funding; (2) emphasis on short-term project-based funding rather than core funding; (3) tying conditions to funding (e.g. anti-prostitution pledge); (4) using self-help groups as a cost-cutting measure (e.g. expecting groups to provide healthcare without adequate resources); (5) and determining project criteria without consulting groups. A more accessible and respectful approach from donors would be one that is transparent, recognises the cyclical nature of self-organised groups undertaking social change activities in conjunction with empowerment processes and that allows for an ongoing relationship between donors and self-organised groups.

Economic self-sufficiency is also an integral part of the empowerment process. Empowerment through involvement in self-organising efforts cannot be considered payment or reward enough

for the women involved. Donors and NGOs can support the sustainability of self-organised groups by providing income security for women working in self-organised groups. Although groups may have skills and expertise based on lived experience, they should also be adequately compensated for the work they do and be able to access capacity building opportunities that allow them to fulfil their new roles as advocates, activists and community workers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The suggestions we received from groups and organisations ultimately stress the importance of *how* partnerships with self-organised groups are managed rather than *what* specific supports are given. The discussions brought up two important points: (1) the need for donors, NGOs and external stakeholders to critically analyse and reflect on their own assumptions about self-organised groups and (2) the need for donors, NGOs and external stakeholders to genuinely respect the boundaries of their own role, ultimately, as a supporter rather than as a driver of self-organising efforts. Although these points were generally agreed upon by both self-organised groups and external stakeholders we met with, it was evident that it is extremely challenging for external stakeholders to provide substantive support while respecting the autonomy of self-organised groups.

For self-organised groups

1. Empowering relationships

Self-organised groups should have access to guidance on conflict resolution and consensus building techniques from skilled resource persons, partners in solidarity and other self-organised groups. Learning to develop teamwork skills and dealing with conflict productively and creatively are major tasks for any organisation and working collectively can involve a tremendous shift for women that have been heavily stigmatised (e.g. trafficking survivors) or isolated (e.g. domestic workers).

2. Mobility

Given the high mobility of women involved in self-organised groups (due to increased career opportunities or changes in life circumstances), self-organised groups need to plan for and invest in continual membership and leadership renewal. Groups and organisations need to ensure that group objectives and efforts can be maintained across

changes in membership and leadership. This can include continual recruitment in communities and building the capacity of as many women as possible, so that an organisation's survival isn't dependent on the personal capacities and time of a few women.

For NGOs and partner organisations

3. Forming associations

Groups of women should be permitted to formalise into registered organisations. NGO initiatives should not ban groups involved in NGO projects from formalising into registered associations.

4. Providing options for participation

- It may be more useful to foster participation by developing social roles that utilise knowledge from lived experience rather than defining participation or empowerment by the extent to which women claim a “sex worker identity” or a “trafficking survivor identity”. In nurturing participation and self-organisation, supporters and facilitators (such as mainstream NGOs) need to be aware of the risks in participation and to be more creative in developing a range of options for participation rather than assessing participation and self-organisation on the basis of visibility alone.
- Linking learning and support activities together with opportunities for active involvement can increase opportunities for empowerment in what can sometimes be experienced as disempowering environments (e.g. shelters). Many of the women involved in self-organised groups had received support from various organisations (e.g. refuge, shelter) but also had access to opportunities for involvement (e.g. working as a health promoter, providing training).
- Just as marginalised populations and the general public should be made aware of structures and processes that oppress, the knowledge of how marginalised groups resist and survive oppression can also provide an important example to service providers and others working with women who have suffered trauma and oppression. Rather than solely focusing on sources of trauma and oppression, it may be more empowering if women reflect on their experiences of oppression in parallel with their experiences of resilience and determination.

For donors

5. Access to funding

- Donors can increase access to funding by not requiring groups to be registered as formal associations.
- Conditions cannot be tied to funding. Donors need to respect groups' assessments of group priorities and aspirations.
- Donors should provide access to core funding rather than project-based funding. Donors can assist the development of self-organised groups by investing in organisational building (rather than project implementation only) and/or by linking groups with a donor/ NGO liaison that is able to communicate with the self-organised group and provide technical assistance (e.g. report writing).
- Responsibility for reporting requirements should fall on donor or NGO staff rather than the self-organised group. External stakeholders can provide technical assistance, whether in the form of skill development opportunities or in providing direct technical assistance (e.g. writing proposals, etc.) but it should be incumbent on donors and NGOs to provide technical bureaucratic support and to seek alternative methods of communicating (e.g. verbal reports) and ways of reporting that are accessible to self-organised groups.

- There needs to be absolute transparency on how resources will be allocated and how much support will actually reach women working at the ground level and survivors rather than intermediary NGOs.
- Donors need to be aware that the nature of the work done by self-organised groups may differ from the work carried out by mainstream NGOs. The work of self-organised groups represents both an outcome (e.g. of empowerment, skill development, etc.) and a process (e.g. to achieve certain objectives, to provide certain services). The processes of empowerment and self-organising need as much support as the outcomes of self-organising. Donors may need to formulate new measures or indicators to accurately capture the work done and progress shown by self-organised groups.

For NGOs and donors

6. Respecting roles

Groups stated their desire for relationships that are willing to nurture them over time but that also allowed them to grow and be autonomous. One of the most important challenges for external supporters of self-organising efforts is to genuinely respect their role as facilitator or supporter rather than as a driver or owner of organising efforts. It was generally agreed that no matter the degree of involvement a supporting organisation had with a self-organised group (e.g. providing resources, providing ideas and options for action), the self-organised group had to ultimately maintain decision-making power.

7. Defining empowerment and support

External stakeholders need to respect self-organised groups' right to determine what assistance is most needed and how that assistance should be given. Initiatives solely based on donor or NGO definitions of empowerment or a group's needs may not be empowering or valued by self-organised groups. Donors and NGOs need to keep in mind that self-organised groups' may differ in how they define empowerment, participation, and ownership.

8. Capacity-building

The most oft-mentioned training needs concerned organisational development, organisational management and skills for 'emotional labour' such as counselling. To this we would add self-care given that many women in self-organised groups are undergoing personal processes of healing and empowerment while participating in collective activity. Women also require opportunities to deepen their critical analysis and professional development opportunities for their new roles as counsellors, advocates, educators, health promoters and researchers.

9. Economic compensation

Women should be compensated adequately for the work they do. Economic self-sufficiency is an integral part of the empowerment process. Donors and NGOs can support the sustainability of self-organised groups by providing income security for women working in self-organised groups.

10. Links with other self-organised groups

Organisations supporting self-organising efforts should try to facilitate learning and sharing opportunities between self-organised groups locally, regionally and internationally. Links between self-organised groups in various regions provide valuable models of empowerment and social change, allow groups to share issues and concerns with 'peers' that may not be available in their country (e.g. as the only organisation run by trafficking survivors in South Asia, the only health centre run by migrant women in Thailand). The self-organised groups in GAATW's

membership stressed the practical and symbolic value of learning and sharing with other self-organised groups.

11. Dissemination of self-organising efforts

External stakeholders can support self-organising efforts by disseminating the work and analysis of self-organised groups at regional and international levels and by strengthening communication and exchange channels between groups. Supporting self-organised groups isn't solely about empowering or uplifting an exploited group, it's also about ensuring movements and initiatives that accurately represent the needs and aspirations of marginalised groups. The self-organised groups in GAATW's membership are working in a context where many of those involved work full-time, have varying literacy and educational levels, and are undergoing personal processes of healing. The experiences of self-organised groups in fostering involvement in the face of these circumstances can offer valuable lessons for practitioners and other stakeholders on how to make participation more inclusive and relevant to target communities.

12. International participation

Self-organised groups should be supported in participating in international fora as advocates and activists rather than as victims providing testimony. In supporting the participation in international forums, supporters should also be aware that some training may be required to deal with the aftermath of public representation, such as responding to questions of legitimacy (e.g. in speaking in an international arena) or authenticity (e.g. some NGOs may equate verbal articulation with not being truly representative of a marginalised group).

13. Instrumentality

Self-organised groups cannot be used as a cost-cutting measure to replace services such as healthcare. Self-organised groups cannot be expected to provide service provision without adequate resources, infrastructure and income security.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Acronyms

AFRO	Action for REACH OUT, sex workers support organisation in Hong Kong
AMCB	Asian Migrants Coordinating Body, a coalition of migrant worker groups in Hong Kong
APMM	Asia-Pacific Mission for Migrants, a migrant rights network organisation in Hong Kong
APN+	Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS, network organisation in Bangkok, Thailand
APNSW	Asia-Pacific Network of Sex Workers, network organisation in Bangkok, Thailand
ASL	Association of Sri Lankans, a migrant worker group in Hong Kong
ATKI	Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong or Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia, an Indonesian domestic worker group
COIN	Centro de Orientacion e Investigacion Integral, NGO working on education, social participation and human rights promotion in the Dominican Republic
CAW	Committee for Asian Women, a network organisation for women worker organisations, located in Bangkok, Thailand
CPU	Cambodia Prostitutes Union, a sex workers organisation
CWDA	Cambodian Women's Development Agency, a women's NGO in Cambodia
DMSC	Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, a sex workers organisation in India
GAATW	Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, a network organisation
GAATW IS	Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, International Secretariat, the Bangkok-based office
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ILO	International Labour Organisation, UN agency
INGOs	International non-governmental organisations
ISD	Institute of Social Development, a community-based organisation in India
MFMW	Mission for Migrant Workers (Hong Kong) Society, a migrant worker rights organisation in Hong Kong
MODEMU	Movimiento de Mujeres Unidas (or MODEMU, Movement of United Women), a sex worker organisation in the Dominican Republic
NDWM	National Domestic Workers Movement, a domestic workers organisation in India
NGOs	Non-governmental organisation
PLWHA	People living with HIV/AIDS
SEPOM	Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women, an organisation of returnee migrant women in Thailand
SHIP	Sonagachi Project, an HIV prevention initiative for sex workers in West Bengal, India
SOGs	Self-organised group, or an organisation comprised of the target group (e.g. a sex workers organisation staffed by sex workers)
STI	Sexually transmitted infections
SWNOB	Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, a network of sex workers organisations
TRA	Thai Regional Alliance, a Thai domestic worker group in Hong Kong
UN	United Nations
UNIFILS-HK	United Filipinos in Hong Kong
WOREC	Women's Rehabilitation Centre, NGO in Nepal

Appendix B: Profiles of Self-Organised GAATW Members

Action for REACH OUT (AFRO) [Hong Kong]

Action for REACH OUT (AFRO) was formed in 1993 to foster the self-representation of sex-workers and to provide necessary services and support to women working within the commercial sex industry in Hong Kong, including women coming to Hong Kong from other countries. AFRO's main goal is to form a support network for women working within the commercial sex industry in Hong Kong. Services provided by AFRO include skills training, drug rehabilitation, a drop-in centre, hotline, referrals for support services, health screening, newsletter preparation and peer education on issues such as legal rights, life skills and health. Outreach workers visit nightclubs, karaoke bars, hair salons and the women working on the streets. Workers accompany women to the doctor, through the legal system, and make prison visitations. AFRO also works to increase public awareness of sex workers rights.

CONTACT DETAILS

Address: P.O. Box 98108, T.S.T. Post Office, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Telephone: (852) 2770-1065

Fax: (852) 2770-1201

Email: afro@afro.org.hk / afro@iohk.com

LINKS: <http://hkaid.med.cuhk.edu.hk/reachout/>

Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong or Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia (ATKI-HK) [Hong Kong]

Following its inception in October 2000, ATKI has worked to build up a mass movement of progressive Indonesian migrant workers based in Hong Kong. ATKI's main objective is to assert and defend the rights and welfare of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong. ATKI has organised a series of advocacy initiatives against the anti-migrant policies of the Indonesian and Hong Kong governments (e.g. press conferences, forums with the Indonesian Labour Ministry and the Immigration and Labour Department of Hong Kong SAR, campaign against a wage cut together with the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB), held congress in Indonesia for returned migrants and their families). Workers also provide on-site welfare assistance, mobile counseling in Victoria Park (a main congregation point for Indonesian migrant workers on Sunday), education (on workers' legal entitlements), and socialisation activities (e.g. dance, art and music classes). ATKI is an active member of the Asian Migrants Coordinating Body (AMCB) and has collaborated with Solidaritas Perempuan in Jakarta to educate people on migrant issues in Hong Kong.

CONTACT DETAILS

Address:

c/o Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM)

G/F, No. 2 Jordan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong SAR

Telephone: (852) 2314-7316

Fax: (852) 2735-4559

Email: atkihk_2000@yahoo.com

Cambodia Prostitutes Union (CPU) [Cambodia]

The Cambodia Prostitutes Union was borne out of an HIV prevention project implemented by the Cambodian Women's Development Agency (CWDA). In 1998, 14 peer educators created the Cambodia Prostitutes Union. CPU's work focuses on the empowerment of women working

in the sex industry; reducing violence through research, collective action and advocacy; improving women's health, particularly in regards to HIV/AIDS infection. CPU implements three main programmes: (1) education (health, law, women's rights, training for peer educators, life skills training, literacy classes for children) and services (counselling, HIV testing and treatment, HIV support group, library) to women working in the sex industry, brothel owners and the police; (2) research, documentation and public awareness materials (videos, T-shirts, photos); and (3) advocacy on women's right to health and right to work (through public forums, statements to the mayor and the government, campaigns, TV and radio talk shows, liaising with the Minister of Women's Affairs).

CONTACT DETAILS

Email: cwda@online.com.kh

CRIOLA [Brazil]

CRIOLA (based in Rio de Janeiro) was founded in 1992 by a group of Afro-Brazilian women with diverse backgrounds. Its mission is to enable Afro-Brazilian women, teenagers and girls to become agents for change in the struggle against racism, sexism, and homophobia, and work for the creation of better conditions of life for the Black population in Brazilian society. The main "lines of action" of the organisation include: black women's health; economic development - work and a living wage; human rights; political action and dialogue; and dissemination of information and publications. CRIOLA is also a member of Projeto Trama, an anti-trafficking consortium of 4 organisations (the other members being the Human Rights Organisation Projeto Legal; the Brazilian Institute of Innovation in Public Health (IBISS); and the University of Grande Rio – UNIGRANRIO).

CONTACT DETAILS

Address: Avenida Presidente Vargas 482, sobreloja 203, Centro, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, 20071-000, Brasil

Telephone: (55) (21) 2518-6194

Fax: (55) (21) 2518-7964

Email: criola@criola.org.br

LINKS: <http://criola.org.br/>

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) [India]

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee is a forum of 65,000 sex workers based in West Bengal, India. Durbar is explicit about its political objective of fighting for recognition of sex workers as workers and for a secure social existence for sex workers and their children. Durbar currently runs STD/HIV intervention programmes in 49 sex work sites in West Bengal. Durbar provides testing, counseling and care for people with HIV/AIDS. DMSC's anti-trafficking work is done through Self-Regulatory Boards comprised of both sex workers and community supporters. Self-Regulatory Boards monitor brothels in cooperation with brothel owners in order to identify women and children who have been trafficked and to arrange for care. DMSC has also created a hostel for sex workers children, worked to decrease violence and abuse by law enforcement agencies, implemented an initiative to admit children in schools, organised loan programs, provided vocational training for the children of sex workers (as electricians and beauticians), created the Usha Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society (the largest cooperative society for sex workers in Asia), provided literacy training for adults, organised annual conferences for sex workers, established Komol Gandhar (sex workers performance troupe) and the Binodini Srameek Union or the Binodini Labour Union.

CONTACT DETAILS

E-mail: sonagachi@sify.com

LINKS: www.durbar.org

Movimiento de Mujeres Unidas (MODEMU) [Dominican Republic]

Movimiento de Mujeres Unidas (or MODEMU, Movement of United Women) is an NGO made up of former and current Dominican sex workers inside and outside the country. It was created in 1996 after the first national congress of female sex workers held in the Dominican Republic in 1995. Its main objectives are to promote the human rights of commercial sex workers (including health, social and labour rights), to fight against trafficking and to promote the human rights of trafficked women who have returned to the Dominican Republic. In terms of practical support, MODEMU offers a literacy course and training in beauty therapy and provides material support and refuge to women in need. MODEMU, in partnership with COIN (Centro de Orientacion e Investigacion Integral), has developed a series of workshops and materials for sex workers and carries out awareness-raising campaigns on safe sex among sex workers and the general public through workshops, plays, street theatre and their newsletter. MODEMU's workshops seek to raise women's consciousness about issues of equality, wages, work conditions, and health and safety.

CONTACT DETAILS

Address: Calle 16 de Agosto Esquina Maria Nicolasa Billini, apt 204 Plaza San Carlos, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Email: modemu@verizon.net.do

Telephone: (809) 536-8998

Fax: (809) 536-6154

DONATION DETAILS:

For those in the United States, donations can also be made to the MODEMU H.O.P.E. Foundation (located at the University of California at Riverside) by contacting Dr. Amalia Cabezas at amalia.cabezas@ucr.edu or by phone at (+1) 951-827-3840.

LINK for MODEMU H.O.P.E. Foundation: <http://womensstudies.ucr.edu/modemu/>

National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM) [India]

The National Domestic Workers Movement has been very strong in networking between source and receiving areas. They strive to establish a just society for domestic workers. They provide assistance to rescued girls, provide trauma counseling, legal aid and medical assistance, and run schools for children involved in labour, legal aid and medical assistance.

Objectives

- To stand for the personal dignity of each domestic worker
- To recognise domestic workers as workers
- To empower domestic workers
- To prepare the workers to fight against all the injustices they face
- To promote awareness among the women regarding holidays, wages etc.
- To communicate and network with different NGOs

CONTACT DETAILS

Address: 104/A St. Mary's Apts, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India, 400010

Telephone: 91-022-3780903 , 022-3771131

Email: jeanne@bom8.vsnl.net.in

Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre [Thailand]

Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre was formed in 2004 by Burmese migrant women in Thailand after participating in a self-help health care training coordinated by GAATW. Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre addresses an important gap in healthcare services as most migrant women workers are excluded from mainstream healthcare services in Thailand due to lack of documentation, income insecurity, and language barriers. The Women's Centre is staffed by Burmese migrant women and has become a trusted community resource and refuge for the Burmese migrant community along the Thai-Burmese border. The women run a drop-in centre, provide health care and treatment (herbal remedies), provide counselling, offer refuge for women in need, and run an outreach programme offering mobile health care in factories and brothels. The Women's Centre also provides direct assistance to women who have been abused or suffer serious health problems, and produces information on women's health, migration and labour issues. Workers also teach women how to plant herbs for health treatments, assist women in locating employment and providing accompaniment to the police when necessary, and assisting women with return to Burma if desired.

CONTACT DETAILS

Contact person: Paerada (Pha) Ngaocholatharnchai

Address: 13/5 Bua Khoon Road, Mae Sot District, Tak, Thailand, 63110

Telephone: +66-089-855-7801

DONATION DETAILS

Bank account details: Kasikornbank, Mae Sot Branch, savings account number 212-2-467-21-2

Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM) [Thailand]

SEPOM was formed in 2001 by Thai women migrant workers who had returned from Japan and a Japanese volunteer. Many, but not all, of returning women from Japan have been trafficked. SEPOM's main objective is to empower and provide support for Thai women returnees from Japan. SEPOM outreaches to community members to identify returnee migrant workers and trafficked women, offers direct assistance (through home visits, self-help groups, counseling and legal aid, and an HIV/AIDS fund), coordinates care and treatment with the hospital and provides skill development training. SEPOM has also done extensive work in seeking citizenship for the Thai-Japanese children of returnee women and in supporting the well-being and development of Thai-Japanese children through scholarships, and educational and recreation activities. They have also developed income generation opportunities for women through seed funds, a cattle bank, a savings group and employment through the organisation.

CONTACT DETAILS

Address: 120 M15 Sankhongluang St., Muang, Chiang Rai, Thailand, 57000

Telephone / fax: +66-05-375-6411

Email: sepom2002@yahoo.com

DONATION DETAILS

Donations by Japanese postal order:

Account name: Thai Empowerment Program

Account number: 01780-2-96835

Donations through bank account:

Bank Name: Thai Farmer's Bank

Branch: Chiang Rai branch

Account name: SEPOM

Account number: 154-2-75677-9 (savings account)

Shakti Samuha [Nepal]

Shakti Samuha (*Empowered Group*) was established in 1997 as a mark of unity and strength by Nepalese girls and women who have survived trafficking and other forms of violence committed against women. Shakti Samuha was officially registered as an organisation in 2000 and has since become a powerful and well-respected organisation in Nepal and among international women's networks as the first organisation of trafficking survivors in South Asia.

Shakti Samuha's objectives are:

- To unite and empower those affected by trafficking;
- To analyse trafficking from the perspective of women's rights and operate an issue-wise movement;
- To provide services to those affected by trafficking and other violence;
- To change the perspective of society towards the victims of trafficking and to spread public awareness;
- To unite all trafficking survivors and work for their fundamental human rights.

Shakti Samuha fulfils its objectives through:

- awareness-raising programs in carpet factories, urban slum settlements and high schools (adolescent health, leadership, trafficking, human rights, law, HIV/AIDS, child rights), the creation and mobilisation of adolescent girls' groups;
- empowering survivors of trafficking through skill building courses (in management, computer literacy, videography, electronics, secretarial skills and cosmetology), income-generating programmes (e.g. setting small scale businesses), counselling and peer support;
- advocacy and lobbying activities, such as street theatre, video advocacy, and participation in national and international advocacy activities;
- networking with activists and service providers and producing publications.

CONTACT DETAILS:

Address: Shakti Samuha, P.O. Box 19488, Chabahil, Kathmahdu, Nepal

Telephone: 977-1-4494815

Email: info@shaktisamuha.org, shaktisamuha@wlink.com.np

LINKS: www.shaktisamuha.org

Sex Workers' Network of Bangladesh [Bangladesh]

In the early 1990s, sex workers formed a number of organisations in partnership with NGOs and INGOs. Sex workers organisations challenged stigmatising social views and state oppression and called for the acknowledgment of sex work as a profession. Practical efforts by organisations included working to decrease violence against sex workers, providing child care and child support for sex workers' children, disseminating sexual health information, producing video documentation of sex worker issues, and supporting income generation strategies such as cooking and savings groups. In 2002, sex workers formed the Sex Workers' Network of Bangladesh to network all sex worker organisations in the country. Some of the organisations involved in the network are Nari Mukti Songho (Women's Freedom Association), Jesson, Phultala, Doulatdia, Jamlepur, Bagerhat, Faridpur, Badhon, Sacheton, Durjoy Nari Songho (Undefeatable Women's Organisation), and Ulka (Comet).

CONTACT DETAILS

Email: swnob2002@yahoo.com

LINK to June 2002 Declaration by Sex Workers National Network: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/bangladesh0803/11.htm>

Mission and objectives

GAATW's mission is to ensure that the human rights of migrant women are respected and protected by authorities and agencies.

GAATW advocates for the incorporation of human rights standards in all anti-trafficking initiatives, including in the implementation of the Trafficking Protocol, Supplementary to the UN Convention on Transnational Organised Crime. GAATW strives to promote and share good practices of anti-trafficking initiatives but also to critique and stop harmful practices and harm caused by existing practices.

GAATW promotes women migrant workers' rights and believes that ensuring safe migration and protection rights of migrant workers should be at the core of all anti-trafficking efforts. We advocate for living and working conditions that provide women with more alternatives in their countries of origin, and to develop and disseminate information to women about migration, working conditions and their rights.

We support the self-organisation of women migrant workers, ensuring their presence and self-representation in international fora. GAATW aims to build new alliances among various sectors of migrants.

Our strategy

GAATW applies a Human Rights Based Approach to address trafficking issues, which means:

- Centring the human rights of trafficked persons and those in vulnerable situations, in all anti-trafficking activities,
- Acknowledging the equality of all persons to exercise, defend and promote their inherent, universal and indivisible human rights,
- Non-discrimination on any grounds, including ethnic descent, age, sexual orientation or preference, religion, gender, age, nationality and occupation (including work in the informal sectors such as domestic work, sex work, etc.),
- Primacy of the principles of accountability, participation and inclusivity / non-discrimination in working methodologies, and organisational structures and procedures. In this respect, self-representation and organisation of those directly affected by trafficking are strongly encouraged and supported.

Our Alliance

Member organisations in the Alliance include national, regional and community level non-government organisations committed to advocating for the human rights of trafficked persons and migrant workers. GAATW has actively built alliances with self-organised groups representing affected women. GAATW's research, advocacy and training activities are driven by the inputs and recommendations provided by members through regular consultations. GAATW has also organized consultations for member organisations providing direct assistance, as a predominant proportion of our members are involved in providing direct assistance to trafficked and vulnerable persons. Apart from the member organisations, GAATW also works with non-members who are committed to social justice and work on the issues that we address.

Our impact

The Palermo Protocol on Trafficking which came into force in January 2004 carries a definition of trafficking which owes much of its complexities to the advocacy led and steered by GAATW

at the global level. The strategic conceptual shifts outlined below have also been GAATW's crucial contributions to the anti-trafficking movement.

- Delinking trafficking from prostitution by introducing the notion of forced prostitution in identifying one of the purposes for trafficking.
- Distinguishing trafficking from migration, irregular migration and smuggling while underscoring that trafficking cannot be seen outside of the migration context.
- Expanding the definition of trafficking by representing it as a process, which includes recruitment, transportation and the outcome, through a third part involvement, leading to profit.
- Expanding the purpose or outcomes of trafficking beyond sexual exploitation to include labour exploitation, forced labour, slavery-like practices and forced marriage.
- Acknowledging that the anti-trafficking paradigm has serious limitations with regards to the protection and promotion of the human rights of trafficked persons unless an integral connection is made with the migration framework through the simultaneous protection of the human rights of all migrants.
- Acknowledging that there are certain marginalised groups such as sex workers and undocumented migrants who have suffered particular harms as a result of the deployment of the dominant anti-trafficking framework. This framework has been routinely used to control and criminalise sex workers and irregular migrants.
- Acknowledging that anti-trafficking groups need to make strategic linkages with networks and organisations which represent migrants, sex workers, labour unions, and groups that challenge the dominant frameworks of globalisation and trade liberalisation.

Our activities

Our ultimate accountability is to trafficked persons and migrant workers. We work on their behalf through our member organisations in the following ways:

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| Advocacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Making local issues internationally visible through representation of members at relevant fora• Supporting members in their advocacy efforts• Helping to apply international policies and standards locally |
| Capacity Building | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building, facilitating and maintaining mutual exchanges, communications and learning with and between Alliance members• Developing and making available, training modules on trafficking, gender, globalisation, informal economies, rights-based advocacy, and on relevant research methodologies to address these issues• Training in conceptual clarity |
| Research and Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collecting, processing, disseminating and making easily accessible to members, essential documents on trafficking, as well as generally relevant information, in support of their activities• Publishing a range of practical manuals, reports and working papers as well as a bi-annual newsletter and bi-monthly e-bulletin. |

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Appendix D: GAATW's Work with Self-Organised Groups

Women / survivors / trafficked persons / victims of crime should be encouraged to organise themselves for self-help and self-empowerment as a core element in a human rights based approach to anti-trafficking work.

Workshop on "Participation and Self-Organisation / Representation as Core Elements of the Rights-Based Approach", GAATW 2004 International Members Congress

To fulfill this principle, GAATW IS has used the following strategies to assist organising efforts. Given GAATW IS's role as part of an international alliance, our strategies have typically involved linking self-organised groups in order to foster regional and international linkages and member-to-member learning through consultations. The voices of GAATW's self-organised members are part of GAATW's value and contribution to international anti-trafficking, migration and gender discourses. An important part of our work with self-organised groups has also involved providing organisationally specific capacity-building in the form of skills training and conceptual support.

Realising Rights Programme

With increased funding in 2007, GAATW was able to formalize its support of self-organising efforts under a thematic programme called Realizing Rights. Some of the activities coordinated in 2007 included:

- **MEMBER TO MEMBER LEARNING EXCHANGES:** Learning exchanges between members is a powerful tool because it addresses local, organisationally specific needs and it strengthens international and regional links between members. Learning exchanges were exchanged between: Indian villagers and the National Domestic Workers Movement in New Delhi, India to address issues of stigma around domestic work; between SEPOM (an organisation for returnee migrant women in Thailand) and Shakti Samuha (an organisation for survivors of trafficking in Nepal) to share organisational development strategies; and between SEPOM and Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre (a migrant women's health centre in Thailand) to share organisational development and self-help strategies.
- **SUPPORTING SOCIAL ENTERPRISES:** GAATW provided financial and conceptual support and coordinated training for two food production income generation programs for community-based organisations in India working with returnee migrant and economically marginalised women at Pragati and the Institute for Social Development.
- **SELF-HELP WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE TRAINING:** Self-help women's health care training has been a very empowering practice with women in developing countries where access to health care by poor women (e.g. migrant workers, sex workers, young women living in slum settlements) is extremely difficult. In 2007, self-help training curricula was developed and provided for the Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh, Navatara (an adolescent slum network in Nepal) and a group of economically marginalised young women from Pragati and the Institute for Social Development in Orissa, India.

- **SANAYAR-THI-PAN WOMEN'S CENTRE:** In 2004, a group of Burmese migrant women in Thailand established the Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre after a month-long self-help health training coordinated by GAATW. As a women's centre coordinated by migrant women, they hold a unique position in Mae Sot and are well-respected and trusted by the migrant community and by the healthcare and NGO communities. Continued support has in 2007 has been provided under the Realizing Rights programme.

Knowledge sharing among members

GETTING OUR VOICES HEARD: 2nd ANNUAL CONSULTATION OF SELF-ORGANISED WOMEN ORGANISATIONS (2006)

The 2nd Annual Consultation of Self-Organised Women Organisations was held in Suphanburi, Thailand from May 22-29, 2006. The objectives of the consultation were: (1) to address the needs of capacity building (especially on health, self-help strategy, counselling and leadership); (2) review practical application of participation and empowerment strategies; and (3) devise a concrete and feasible plan for future work together. Participants from six self-organised groups attended, representing migrant workers in Hong Kong and Thailand, survivors of trafficking in Nepal, returnee migrant women in Thailand, and sex workers in Cambodia and Hong Kong. Groups generously shared their work, experiences, challenges, and achievements with all participants. Training sessions were held on health issues (Health and Its Politics from a Rights Perspective; Gender Discrimination and Violence Impacting Women's Health; Counselling; Self-Help Perspective and Principles; and Self-Help Health in Practice and Herbal Remedy Workshop), organisational development (Participation and Empowerment, Sustainability and Self-Sufficiency, and Leadership and Public Speech) and organisational sustainability (particularly access to funding).

OUR BODIES (AND MINDS), OUR SELVES: 1ST ANNUAL CONSULTATION WITH SELF-ORGANISED MEMBER CONSULTATIONS (2005)

Around 21 participants representing 8 organisations namely, Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), India; Cambodia Prostitutes Union (CPU) from Cambodia; Action for Reach Out (AFRO), Hong Kong; Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre, Thailand; Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Hong Kong (ATKIHK); National Domestic Workers Movement (NDWM), India; Shakti Samuha (SS), Nepal; and Self Empowerment Program of Migrant Women (SEPOM), Thailand gathered in the Thai-Burma border town of Maesot on September 28 to October 1, 2005 to share organising strategies and agendas for social change. The objectives of this consultation were to: (1) strengthen groups and garner support for them from various sources; (2) support specific needs such as building up campaigns on issues; (3) learn firsthand about the situations which the women face and (4) learn about the impact of anti-trafficking legislation. The three-day consultation meeting included presentations of each groups' current activities, success and challenges, and analysis of their struggle for the articulation and realisation of their rights. Given that the issue of health is a common one for all the groups, discussions also focused on the right to health, access to health services and the need to build a knowledge base on health. The groups developed a collective action plan and a small core group among themselves to discuss and revise collective plans in the next couple of months.

JOINT STATEMENT FROM THE 1ST ANNUAL CONSULTATION OF GAATW SELF-ORGANISED MEMBERS (GAATW Alliance News, December 2005)

We the self-organised member groups of Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW): Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC, India), Cambodia Prostitute's Union (CPU), Action for Reach Out (AFRO, Hong Kong), Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre (Thailand), Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia di Hong Kong (ATKI-HK, Hong Kong), National Domestic Workers Association, (NDWM, India), Shakti Samuha (Nepal), and Self-Empowerment Program of Migrant Women (SEPOM, Thailand), gather ourselves today at the 1st Annual Consultation with Self-Organised Member Organisations, organized by the GAATW International Secretariat, September 28th to October 1st, 2005 in Mae Sot, Thailand.

We come here today with similar histories and objectives, achievements and challenges, yet at different stages of organisational growth. We share the realisation that 'more people is more power' and believe in self-empowerment, self-representation and capacity building for our entire communities. We face similar challenges of social stigmatisation, the insensitivity of governments and anachronistic development policies. Our differences are many, as are our regions of work, but we are united in our common goals and beliefs.

In this consultation we have shared our mutual belief in social justice and equality. We believe in human rights for all and have a particular interest in the right to health, women's rights and labour rights.

To achieve these ideals will not be easy, but we are determined to continue with the work that we have been doing for several years. We believe that only through self-organising, skills training, networking, information sharing, and continued solidarity and support, we can improve our condition as women and as workers, and bring about social awareness and social change.

We all know that we are facing great challenges, but our motivation and will to fight is at least as big as the problems we rise up against. Solidarity is our first weapon. So we request that you, the members and friends of GAATW, lend us your full support and assistance as we continue this venture together. Self-organised groups are at the very heart of the trafficking issue; some of us have experienced trafficking and many of us work in sites in which trafficking is rampant. We hope that as we learn from other member organisations of GAATW, you too may learn something from us. We deeply believe that exchanging information, communicating and networking will be the key to the success of our common goal.

PARTICIPATION AND SELF-ORGANISATION / REPRESENTATION: CORE ELEMENTS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH, WORKSHOP AT GAATW'S 2004 INTERNATIONAL MEMBER CONGRESS

The work and importance of self-organised groups was highlighted at the GAATW International Member Congress in 2004. Emergent issues included addressing social exclusion and stigmatisation by the community, the disempowering image of 'the victim', the need for mental health support for trauma survivors, the misuse of survivors groups for fundraising and representation of NGOs in conferences and the need for media savvy in anti-trafficking work. Participants agreed there was a tremendous need for ongoing public awareness to change perceptions of 'the victim' and the need for affected persons to speak for themselves in various fora. Self-help groups welcomed partnerships with NGOs, particularly assistance with capacity-building, fundraising and accessing resources. Education of donors was called for to ensure that resources actually reach affected groups at the grassroots level. Three key principles to guide work with self-organised groups were extracted from the discussion:

- A belief in self-empowerment and self-representation
- The view of networking and solidarity as key weapons in groups' arsenal
- The deployment of a similar strategy to other groups (not only self-organised groups) to bring more people together to increase groups' power and ability to bring about positive change.

PARTNERS IN CHANGE CONFERENCE (2002)

Partners in Change brought sex worker groups, non-sex worker groups and trafficked groups together for a 3-day conference in November 2002. The objective was to create a space where self-organised groups could discuss the factors that had sustained them and the challenges they faced in supporting and working for their communities, and to discuss and analyse new conceptualisations of their work and their priorities.

"Rebuilding does not happen to a woman in isolation (although it is a very personal process). It can only happen in a context. It means having friends, forging bonds, and acting together...having a community and a country to which one belongs. Sense of power, sense of dignity and supporting relationships are central to being accepted...There is no substitute for the effect and the healing power of self-esteem and self-determination."

*– Conclusion of "Partners of Change" Panel on "Rebuilding Lives",
November 2002*

Capacity-building and skills training

GAATW has provided various capacity-building activities and skills training such as training in self-help health care, conceptual clarity sessions on trafficking, and organisational management skills (e.g. conflict resolution).

Research and documentation

In 2002, GAATW coordinated *Documenting our Lives*, a video filmmaking project with five women's groups from India, Nepal, Cambodia, Bangladesh and Thailand. The project was initiated after long discussions on the issue of representation with groups that speak for sex

workers, domestic workers or women working in the informal sector. The video production training was seen as a tool to enable women to tell their stories, and explore the differences between self-representation and representation by others. The five short films, which focused on their collective struggle, were screened together at the *Partners in Change* conference in 2002.

Participatory action research projects with sex workers in Cambodia and migrant workers in Thailand also provided an opportunity to facilitate links between sex workers and migrant workers. Women who had participated in both action research projects later organised as the Cambodia Prostitutes Union and the Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre. Organising was driven by the women themselves while GAATW provided funding and conceptual support.

In 2006, GAATW produced a short documentary on the Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre, a health centre run by Burmese migrant women in Mae Sot, Thailand.

Self-representation is both essential and irreversible; once we speak, we exist socially as persons who can vote for ourselves, work for ourselves, love and travel and- most fundamentally - think for ourselves.

- Gail Pheterson (from GAATW's documentary on the Sanayar-Thi-Pan Women's Centre)

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