

KERALA NETWORK OF SEX WORKERS (KNSW)

ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20

Kerala Network of Sex workers (KNSW) is a collective of sex workers under National Network of Sex workers (NNSW). KNSW is a group of sex workers from 9 Community Based Organisations (CBOs) from 7 Districts working in the state. KNSW have a democratically elected board and they are taking decisions on the activities for the sex workers of the state. KNSW conducted several programmes for the life of sex worker in a decent manner. We believe sex work as like as a normal work. We have a right to live in pride like all the women of our society.

List of CBOs engaging with KNSW with districts

| SI No | District | Name of CBO | Population Size |
|--------------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Pathanamthitta | Punarjani Vanitha Sangam | 854 |
| 2 | Alappuzha | Santhwanatheeram | 760 |
| 3 | Kottayam | Snehitha | 520 |
| 4 | Idukki | SHREE Vandiperiyar | 720 |
| 5 | Idukki | ARSHA Kattappana | 742 |
| 6 | Ernakulam | Swaruma Perumbavoor | 785 |
| 7 | Ernakulam | Swantham | 850 |
| 8 | Thrissur | Sangamithra | 1198 |
| 9 | Kozhikode | Vanitha Society | 969 |
| TOTAL | | | 7398 |

In the year 2019-20 KNSW engaged with different activities for making the life of sex workers in pride. KNSW executed a board for the administration of activities. It have representatives from different districts which are KNSW working. The main activities undertaken by KNSW are follows.

Annual General Body Meeting and Board Election.

In the beginning of the year KNSW conducted our Annual General Body Meeting at Government Youth Hostel Kakkanad, Kochi on 2019 April 2 and 3. Aiman Khan and Eswar were attended as observers from Sangram also attended the Meeting. Discussed the bylaw of NNSW during the meeting. Each clause of the bylaw were discussed and doubts also were cleared because NNSW board will elect in the month of May. Participants from each CBO will attend the AGM at Sangli, Maharashtra.

The next agenda is the board election for KNSW. Supporter Ms Ambika Savitry described the roles and responsibilities of each members in the board. Candidates can stand for the election and who will get the majority votes will win. This board is very responsible and each member need to do it in good manner. The board members elected to the KNSW Board are:

| | | |
|-------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| President | : | Omana Ravi, Arsha Kattappana |
| Vice President | : | Jayanthi, Sangamitra Thrissur |
| Secretary | : | Valsala N T, Sangamitra Thrissur |
| Joint Secretary | : | Pushpa, Vanitha Society Kozhikode |
| Treasurer | : | Sarada Stanly, Swaruma Perumbavoor |
| Executive Members | : | Leela Rajan, Snehitha Kottayam |
| | | Jijimol, Santhwanatheeram Alappuzha |
| | | Rukkiya, Swantham Ernakulam |
| | | Lekha, Punarjani Pathanamthitta |

The elected members expressed thanks to all the members who presented and they entrusted their service to the growth of the organisation.

NNSW Annual General Body Meeting at Sangli

There are 9 participants along with supporter were attended the AGM.

1. Omana Ravi, Arsha Kattappana
2. Mary, Swantham Ernakulam
3. Rukkiya, Swantham Ernakulam
4. Jayanthi, Sangamithra THrissur
5. Lalita Satheesan, Sangamithra Thrissur
6. Lekha Babu, Punarjani Pathanamthitta
7. Shyamala John, Snehitha Kottayam
8. Vijayamma Madhu, Snehitha Kottayam
9. Sarada Stanly, Swaruma Perumbavoor
10. Rejaneesh M R, Supporter KNSW

Shyamala John elected as NNSW Joint Secretary and Lalith Satheesan as Board Member. The participants were attended the 6 technical sessions during four days of AGM. After the 4 days programme we visited some red light areas in Sangli. Miraj, Sangli, Gopalpur were the areas we visited. Experienced the real life of sex worker. The interaction with the sex workers given an opportunity know their life. The participants conversed with them about their life, operation, income from sex work etc.

The visit for AGM at Sangli given a good experience to all the members. They shared this experience to their friends in own CBO in following meetings. This given them a feeling that they are not alone. If they have any issue in their work, someone will be there to ask and resolve. This brings them a confidence in their life and courageously says that "sex work is work".

Spreading of NNSW Principles

For this we were conducted community meetings CBO wise. NNSW believes in three principles. "Sex work is work, Decriminalisation of sex work, Self determination and self organisation of people in sex work". This message spread over the community in various meeting in CBOs. We conducted community meeting of sex workers in Snehitha Kottayam, Punarjani Pathanamthitta, Snehitha Palakad, Vanitha Society Kozhikode, Santhwanatheeram Alappuzha, Arsha Kattapana. The sex workers are happy with the services given by the NNSW and KNSW. They have a feel that they are not alone a strong backbone working for them to raise their issues to the general community. They have given a good feedback on this.

Case Studies on violence against sex workers

Our community is facing many of the crisis from different levels of the society. We sit with the sex workers in a meeting in their respective CBOs. From the response of the community members, we understood a fact that brutal violence are facing by the community. But these issues are not coming in front of law. We have done a case study on this. Responses are came from all CBOs. Based on this we went for a conclusion that we need legal awareness needed for our community to raise our voice.

Legal Awareness programmes

KNSW conducted legal awareness programmes with the support of District Legal Services Authorities (DLSAs). Snehitha Kottayam, Santhwanatheeram Alappuzha, Vanitha Society Kozhikode, Punarjani Pathanamthitta, SHREE Vandiperiyar are the CBOs done the Legal awareness programmes. The services given by the DLSAs are described in the training programme. We are doing sex work voluntarily. We are getting income from this. So consider this as a work. We need to get all the rights and privileges as a normal woman in the society. But the people in the society is not accepting the sex worker. We are facing some sort of violence, discrimination from the society. With the training from advocates from DLSA we have got a confidence to bring the issues we are facing.

The advocates taken session in training programmes are:

Soja Baby, DLSA Kottayam

R Rajashree, DLSA Alappuzha

K Kala, DLSA Pathanamthitta

Neethu P, DLSA Kozhikode

Sunila Radhakrishnan, DLSA Idukki

They expressed their solidarity to the sex workers we are engaging. Ensured all the support to the community in their legal issues.

With response from the linkage with the DLSA we have got an opportunity to deal with a case of some sex workers in Alapuzha. In the year 2014, 5 sex workers arrested along with their clients and then they got bail. Then no proceedings undergone and in an arrest warrant in August 2019. But the sex workers have no idea about the case is ongoing. The court was issuing summons and someone receiving that without the knowledge of sex workers. In the month of August the court taken this case as winding up pending cases. Then only they knows it is active. With the support of DLSA we interacted with the advocate and withdrawn the arrest warrant with the previous bail. All the cases under ITP Act are taken over by the DLSA. This was a great achievement

which is done by KNSW last year. This experience we shared to all the CBOs which brings a confidence in the mind of sex workers. Many people expressed an opinion that they have somebody to speak for them.

Another result of linkage with the DLSA is the appointment of Para Legal Volunteers (PLVs) from sex worker community. If we get a PLV from our own community we can explain the issues we are facing. We can understand each other about the meaning of such discussion. The representatives from general community may not understand to our extent. For this we requested to DLSAs to appoint our representatives as PLVs in DLSAs. We selected 2 representatives for this. They ensured their support to such appointment. As of now appointment is done by the Idukki DLSA in Taluk Legal Service Committee. Others are in follow up and hope it will do immediately after the lock down because of COVID 19.

Board Meetings of KNSW

KNSW conducted its board meeting 2 times in the period of reporting. Both of the meeting are happened in Government Youth Hostel, Kakkanad Kochi. We met in quorum even the Secretary, Vice President were absent in both meetings. This meeting given a feel of responsibility among the board members that they are representing on behalf of community. They were actively participated in discussions and decision taking. They have got a capacity to do presentation on the activities they are undertaken during the board meeting period. This is to be considered as a greatest achievement that the community have developed a strong voice to raise. Every meeting had a sharing of NNSW Board meeting details. Shyamala John and Lalitha Satheesan were speak on behalf of NNSW in the board meeting.

Flood Relief Project

In the month of August in Kerala there was a heavy flood. Many of people are affected in the flood and lost their things and things of livelihood during flood. Our woman were also affected in the flood. The mostly flood affected districts were, Kottayam, Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta. We have given a list of 218 sex workers who are affected which categorised as “fully affected, partially affected, less affected”. The representative from Sangram, Ms. Aimen Khan visited randomly to the flood affected areas and evaluated the rate of loss.

With the support of NNSW we have got an opportunity to support 73 fully flood affected sex workers. Rs.2000/- each deposited directly to their bank account without having a mediator. We know this amount is not sufficient to their loss. But definitely it is a support and solidarity to our own women. They all are happy with the support from NNSW and they expressed it in meetings.

Sex Workers' Rights Day Observance

2020 March 3, we are assembled in Kozhikode Sports Authority Indoor Stadium Hall in the eve of International Sex Workers' Rights Day observance. It was a proud moment for our community as a state wide gathering. Around 53 sex workers are met there from across the state. The participants taken this as an opportunity to explore themselves. A famous writer, women activist, unorganised workers movement activist Ms. Gargi Harithakam inaugurated the event. We also done a signature campaign that was inaugurated by Dr. PP Pramod Kumar, District TB Officer and AIDS Control Officer, Kozhikode. He is supporting our community very well in Calicut District. This event noticed by the common society.

After the event there was a group discussion of sex workers gathered. The major points derived from the discussion are:

- Consider sex work as a work.
- Legal protection to sex workers during their work.
- Right to occupy the public places and resting places.
- Scandalous acts on social media which are reported on police stations and they are not following up. Demanding the solution for this issue.
- Prevent unwanted arrest when occupying public spaces.
- Acceptance to sex work as like as other jobs.
- Help for getting social entitlement records.
- Help for getting proper shelter facility.
- Help for getting welfare pensions.
- Projects for old aged sex workers who have no shelter and family support.

News Links and Report on the event

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kochi/sex-workers-meet-demanding-equal-rights-held/articleshow/74465497.cms>

<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/kerala-sex-workers-host-state-meeting-demanding-safety-right-work-and-benefits-119636>

Report on Mathrubhumi Malayalam Daily



Challenges

In the KNSW elected board a continuous absence of Vice President and Secretary is challenge we faced. Their support is not getting and we are not elected to substitute them. For this we are planned to do a new election with active members.

Flood in last year made some issues with the activities we are planned. The activities had not done in time. Later we have done these activities but not time bound.

In the month of January, February and March was the time of TI Programme evaluations. Our CBOs are closely working with TI Programmes. So there was a lagging of activities we were planned.

PLV appointment is also in waiting list. When we were contacted with DLSAs we are informed that most of the PLVs' current tenure will end by March 2020. They will accept our request after that.

We were planned to select 2 members each from our working CBOs as District Leaders. Our plan is to make capable them to problem solving among communities, leadership skills to lead KNSW or NNSW in future. And we planned to give a training to such leaders. This is also in waiting list. Hope we can do it after lock down.

Communities' experience to working with NNSW

As a board member in NNSW, I have a great experience to work as a team member. I have got great chance to make friendship with the sex workers from other states which gives a clear idea of sex workers' life there. That also reflected in the working for my own community. We think we have got a supporting friend when we are working with NNSW. I would like to continue my service for the enhancement of capacity of our community

Lalitha Satheesan, Sangamithra Thrissur, NNSW Board Member

I am from Alappuzha is very happy after joining with the activities of KNSW and NNSW. Now I am doing many services to my community. The linkage with DLSA is also a result of NNSW partnership. Now we have a confidence to face our issues. We have a strong backbone named NNSW. Now we are living in proud.

Jijimol K B, Santhwanatheeram Alappuzha, KNSW Board Member