



Taaras Coalition

Amplifying Voices, Envisioning Change



PREFACE



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Co-Founder, Director
Catalyst Management Services

A promise was made towards the end of Avahan III phase project with a vision of continuing our support to the sex worker community- building sustainable institutions, nurturing strong leadership and fostering a resilient network that will continue to thrive-without or without Swasti. Taaras was born out of this promise as a collective vision, to support women in sex work & their community organisations and provide them with a platform to rise over ideologies, barriers, reclaim their voices, and pursue a life of dignity. Swasti, as the national secretariat, along with partner organisations came together to form this transformative coalition in October 2016 with the aptly chosen name, ‘rapid progress’.

Today, as we stand in the 7th year of this transformative journey, I am humbled to say that we have kept our promise and learnt a lot. Taaras over the years has evolved into a powerful entity, driven by the passion and resilience of over 1000 women leaders, who have found their voice and purpose. Witnessing the way they advocate for themselves and their community, charting their own path to a better future, fills our hearts with pride and joy. Together, we have anchored Taaras in five states and 21 regions, working alongside 62 community-based organizations. This vast network has enabled us to touch the lives of more than 100,000 community members.

Taaras’s achievements are a testament to the power of collaboration and the resilience of those who we serve. Leaders and COs have enabled marginalized communities to access essential services, exercise their rights with dignity, and significantly reduce vulnerability to health risks and socio-economic challenges. It is not just the numbers which defines Taaras’s success, but also the stories of transformation and hope that resonate deep within our hearts. Through Taaras, we have witnessed individuals finding their voices, leaders rising from within the community, and communities breaking free from the shackles of adversity.

As we celebrate the achievements of Taaras, we also recognise that the journey is far from over. There are still countless lives waiting to be touched, countless barriers to be broken and countless dreams to be realised. But, with the unwavering support of our community and the shared determination to create lasting change, I am confident that Taaras will continue to make a profound impact on the lives of those we serve.

We wish Taaras, its leaders and community organizations all the success in the years to come.

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Taaras Commenced- A New Chapter of Empowerment



Women in sex work continue to struggle in realising their fundamental human rights. In most places, mainstream financial security, a life of safety and access to services is difficult to imagine, let alone live, among the sex worker community. Over the last 2 decades, women in difficult circumstances have been collectivised by different interventions, agencies and movements across India.

With both National and International funding declining, community organisations, especially those of the marginalized communities, find that there is no support available to them. NGOs and other civil society organisations are also often unable or unwilling to support given the absence of financial resources to do so.

With the Avahan III project nearing its conclusion, a collective vision to ensure ongoing support for women in sex work prompted the collaboration of Swasti and its partner community organizations. This harmonious effort led to the formation of a coalition in October 2016, with Swasti serving as the national secretariat. This coalition, named Taaras, encapsulates the essence of 'rapid progress'.

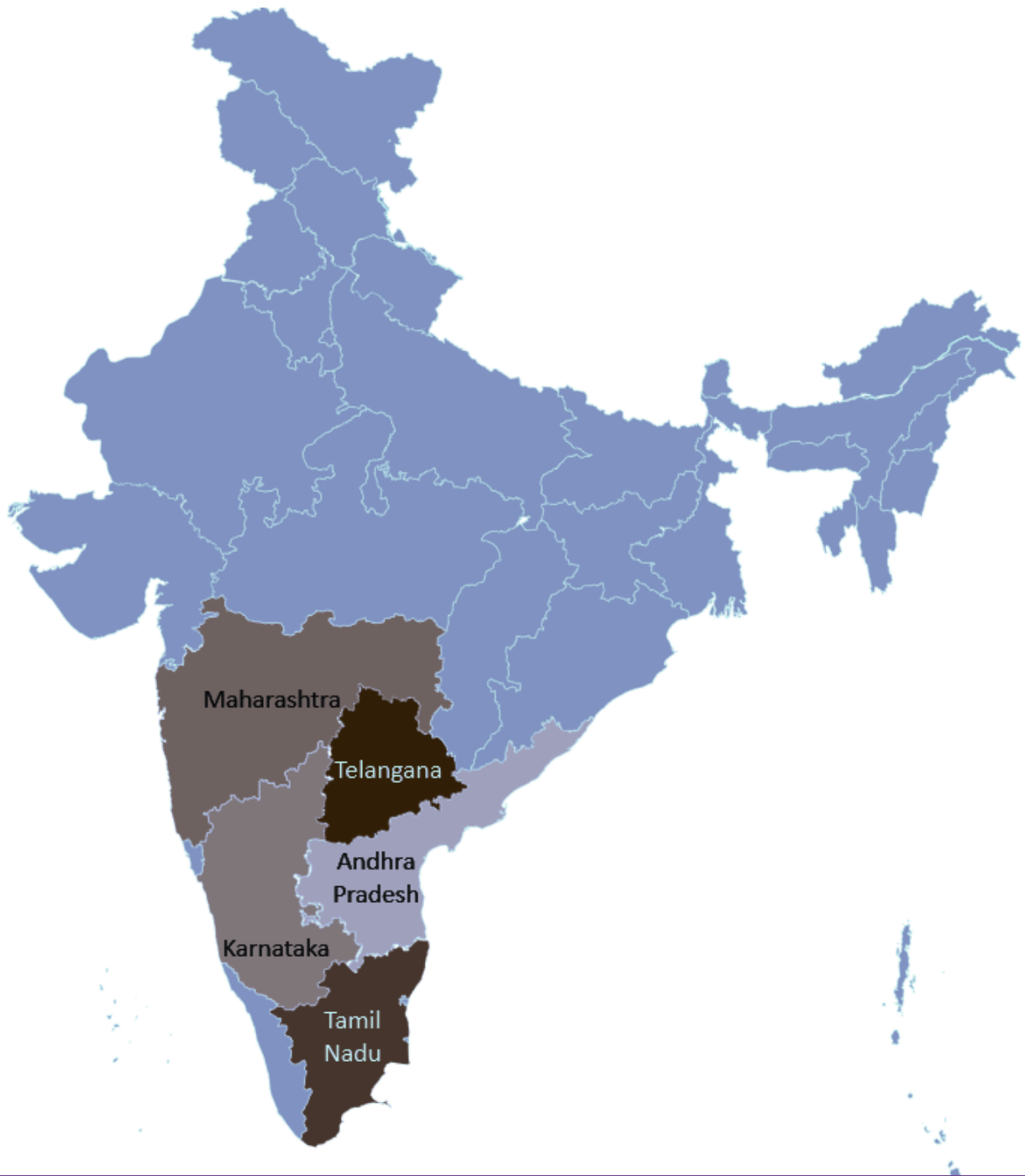
Taaras Coalition & what it envisions



Taaras, meaning rapid progress, is a coalition of women in sex work (WSW) and their organisations, that provides a platform for their voices, aspirations and joint actions. Taaras rises above ideologies, geography federations, cultural and language divisions. Taaras aims to empower marginalized communities and enable them to enjoy their rights as citizens, accessing services and support with dignity, and substantially reduce their vulnerability to HIV, other health risks and socio-economic factors.

- Building a community connected vibrant partnership which evolves with time (and issues)
- Inculcate a community centric and community-engaged approach in all interventions, especially those for the community
- Work towards making community interventions self-sustaining
- Systematically work on addressing and mitigating coercive and exploitative factors
- The agenda for Taaras in entirety is set on the basis of active listening to the members and Taaras is focussed on building articulate negotiators and leaders.
- The Taaras coalition is advised by a range of leading development professionals, who are experts and advocates of Women in Sex Work movement and welfare.

Reach: Empowerment Across Regions



Taaras is currently anchored in 5 states, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Telangana.

A Vision of Empowerment

Every woman in sex work realising all citizenship rights and living with dignity. Seeking to work with all stakeholders and members of the community as equals, Taaras envisages having community members as active participants rather than recipients or beneficiaries.



Journey of Nurturing Communities

2016-2020-Launch of Taaras Coalition, Continued National Level Taaras leaders Meetings, Formation of regional level Taaras teams, 22 regional level Taaras teams formed, Leaders from 91 COs (68 Avahan supported COs & 23 Non Avahan COs) meet regularly on monthly basis and discuss issues of community members, Reaching to North India, Formation of Taaras Advisory Group.

2020-2023- Supported over 1 Lakh Families from 62 Community Based Organizations, Our COVID-19 response had a computed commodity value of INR 68.7 Cr, 736 Oxygen concentrators were deployed to health facilities across 5 states and it has given immense visibility for Taaras among stakeholders and government, 80% of the services facilitated through Govt, 20% resources mobilized through local resource, Mobilized support from 305 donors, Each family received around Rs 5800/- worth commodities, Mobilizing an additional 10 million USD for COVID Relief to KPs Relief from Global Fund, SMS as the nodal agency for implementing GFATM SP & KP 11 crore project as the SR.



Progress And Beyond



- Taaras is currently anchored in 5 states, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Telangana, 21 regions, with 1000 plus active leaders and 62 community-based organizations Working with over 1,00,000 community members, Taaras envisages on uplifting, mainstreaming and including marginalized communities.
- Contributed towards - forming India's HIV/AIDS Key Population Network (Collaboration of 7 Networks)
- Succeeded in mobilizing an additional 10 million USD for COVID Relief to KPs Relief from Global Fund.
- Played an important role in providing evidence to the Supreme Court for passing Historic judgment in India-Distribution of free ration to all our community members without any document proof.



Taaras has played a vital role in advocating with state and local governments to empower community organizations and facilitate services to community members in terms of health, social protection, financial security, safety security & justice and resource mobilization.



Throughout the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus was on providing relief materials and in parallel exploring how to institute alternative livelihoods for the community - where rampant poverty, low literacy levels and a lack of marketable skills mean that the job market is inaccessible to them.



- With the second wave hitting in March 2021, the Taaras Coalition focused on strengthening both community and government facilities in their localities and setting up community care centres; partnering with institutions and foundations in the distribution of oxygen concentrators and cylinders, home quarantine kits, and medicines.
- The Coalition partnered with Swasti to run their own TeleCare for those in the community - meeting their health including mental health, social protection, financial inclusion and wellbeing needs. The Coalition ensured that community members were tracking and managing Non Communicable Disorders to arrest possible severity of COVID-19.



In a shift from relief to recovery, Taaras Coalition in partnership with Swasti and GIVE India, distributed 1000 oxygen concentrators to 346 primary healthcare centres and 42 district hospitals.

During 1st & 2nd Covid wave, Taaras facilitated Rs 112 crores worth of Covid relief materials into the hands of communities



Mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on marginalised communities, Taaras made its mission to persuade and educate eligible communities about vaccination which resulted in 100% uptake of vaccination services



Taaras advisors and mentors regularly visited the community members in their areas and provided guidance and support to amplify the impact and outreach of Taaras and its leaders



Ensuring effective addressal of issues of marginalised communities, Taaras is regularly organising meetings and consultations independently and facilitating action and follow ups



Taaras leaders creating visibility for Taaras through representation at various state and national platforms



Swathi Mahila Sangha, on behalf of Taaras, has been chosen as one of the sub-recipients of GFATM C19RM Grant and is implementing the project(April-Dec 2023) along with 14 other community organisations as the sub-sub-recipients. Through this project, SMS will be reaching out to marginalised communities through facilitating services for identity cards, bank accounts and social protection as well as working with the community organisations on their organisational strengthening and building capacities of community leaders.



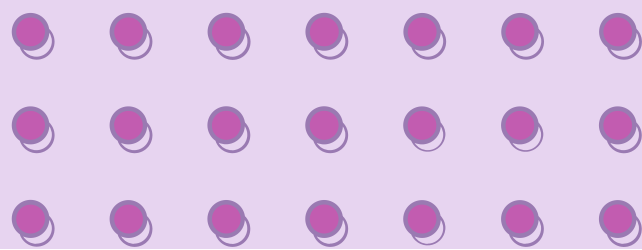


Stories of Resilience & Leadership

In Gulbarga, a small community organization of women in sex work - Jeevana Jyothi Mahila Sangha, borrowed INR 2 lakh from their corpus to distribute ration kits to 300 members who were facing financial and food shortages during covid time.

This was covered by the local news media and the staff of Azim Premji Foundation (APF) noticed the same. The Foundation then approached the community organization and offered support for ration kits - distributing ration kits worth INR 1500 to 1500 members. During the second wave, Azim Premji Foundation returned once again distributing ration kits worth INR 1500 to 1500 members. In total, APF supported the community with INR 45 Lakh worth of Ration Kits.

Azim Premji Foundation then picked up on the need of another Community Organization - Swathi Mahila Sangha (SMS) and distributed ration kits worth of INR 2500 for 1000 of it's community members too. This is a direct relationship between community organizations and the foundation.



During the pandemic

It was the community-based organisations and local leaders among women in sex work who and supported their communities - guiding the response and demonstrating true leadership in crisis, showing up on ground everyday to run relief efforts overcoming fear and deeply entrenched societal stigma to mobilize resources for their community

The community organizations attuned their systems and processes to be able to represent the community in the bid to gather the resources needed. This required a swift and steep learning curve as well as putting the community first - above and beyond projects.

The Taaras leaders gave back to the wider community in their locations, honoring stakeholders in the process. To distribute the oxygen concentrators, they went through District Collectors and District Head Officer, which were deployed to the hospitals. The doctors were surprised to see the mobilizing capacity of a sex workers organization.



Some leaders are born women

“Taaras is so much more than just being in the coalition of people. It requires you to trust and lead yourself FIRST. It takes emotional intelligence and the ability to bring out the best in others.”

Pushpalatha R
Taaras Leader - Bangalore



“My thinking and actions have been completely transformed after becoming a Taaras leader. I’m extremely grateful for the Taaras, which allowed me to participate, listen, and work for marginalized community. It enhanced leadership qualities/skills in me and thinking on leadership in an incredible way!”

Suma
Taaras Leader - Chikkaballapur



“Before Taaras, I represented Sree Lakshmi Pengal Munnetra Sangam (SLPMS) at various forums. During that time, the stakeholders/officials treated me as a sex worker and one among the community. Because of Taaras, now their perspective has changed and I could see that they are approaching me as a leader of Taaras and I am getting respect and living a dignified life.”



"As Taaras leader, my confidence has developed, and I have been engaging with government departments and doing effective stakeholder engagement for the community. I have realized my own strength and how far I can go to reach to the unreachable population".

Ms. Renuka Jadhav
Taaras leader - Maharashtra



“Before Taaras, I have represented as a BoD member of CB. I was working for the community at CO level at that time and used to regularly visit police stations and other government offices. People used to look at me differently because I was a sex worker, sometimes they would support me, but sometimes would refuse. As a Taaras leader today, I interact with district and state level officers, I talk about community needs and challenges. Now district level officers invite me to participate in their meetings as a Taaras leader. I feel proud that I am getting the respect”

Sk.Khatija
Taaras leader
Telangana

Lessons Learnt



The Power of Community Leadership

- Taaras has witnessed firsthand the immense potential and power of community leaders. Empowering individuals from within the community to take charge and lead initiatives has proven to be instrumental in driving sustainable change.
- Everyone is a leader and a change maker since there is no hierarchy in the approach that Taaras works with. This has ensured accountability and ownership among leaders.



Trust, Collaboration & Respect

- Building trust among stakeholders and fostering collaborative partnerships has been fundamental to Taaras's success. By working together with various organizations and allies, Taaras has been able to leverage expertise and resources effectively.
- Taaras leaders have often expressed that they are getting more recognition and respect from the community members after their association with Taaras.



Amplifying Voices

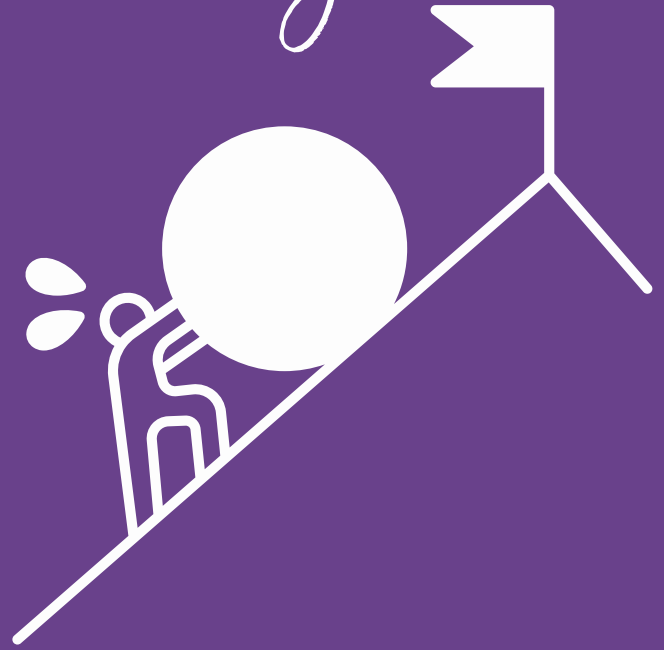
- Empowering marginalized communities to share their stories, aspirations, and challenges has been transformative. Amplifying their voices and involving them in decision-making processes have resulted in more impactful and sustainable interventions.



Sustainable systems and Leadership

- Taaras has learned the importance of nurturing sustainable systems and fostering leadership from within the community. Building strong institutions and leaders ensures that progress continues beyond project timelines.
- Since Taaras is not a registered body, community members have been contributing from their own resources to participate in regional and state level meetings.

Challenges



- Lack of funding and support required to carry on the advocacy work for communities
- Since digital mode and social media are the new upcoming modes of soliciting clients, it becomes challenging to identify and deliver social protection services to the young individuals who are engaged in sex work
- It becomes difficult to work and sensitize different government stakeholders due to their transfers and change in the administration

Challenges



- Further strengthening government engagement and liaison, especially with the health department, to address different issues
- Language barrier for the leaders
- Intensifying the advocacy work to alleviate issues and influence policy change i.e reservations for schemes, sustainable employment, etc.
- Covid-19 had an unprecedented impact not just on the communities but also on the day-to-day activities of Taaras coalition like attending in person meetings, organising regional meetings, etc

Charting the Future: Taaras's Focus Areas Ahead



- Building capacity of 1000 leaders as second line leadership
- Setting up financial institution (NBFC) for marginalized communities
- Improving representation of Taaras leaders and coalition at various national and international forums
- Sustainability of community institutions and strengthening their systems
- Research study on community's need & priority areas



Members of Taaras

Andhra Pradesh

SI No	Name of the CO	Total Members
1	Prema Sangam Mahila Mandali	2031
2	Naarisaksham	2200
3	Udaya Rekha Mahila Mandali	1431
4	Siri Mahila Sadhikara Welfare Society	6439
5	Jeevana Rekha Mahila Sangam	1185
6	Swagati Mahila Sangam	1631
7	Kiranam Mahila Samaikya Sangam	1535
8	Pragati Mythri Mahila Sangham	1566
9	Shakti Mythri Mahila Sangham	2000
10	Ankitha Women Development Society	1477
11	Ushodaya Mahila Sangham	2794
12	Pragathi Mahila Sangam	2200
13	Chaitanya Jyothi Women Welfare Society	1168
14	Sri Shakthi Sangam	1160
15	Swagathi Sneha Sangam	1153
16	Adarsha Mahila Mandali	1124
17	Sneha Mahila Abudaya Sangham	2303
18	Swetcha Mahila Sangham	1250

Karnataka

19	Shakti Aids TadeGattuva Mahila Sangha	5246
20	Swathi Mahila Sangha	14067
21	Nisarga Society	1782
22	Soukhya Sanjeevini Samste	2168
23	Jeevan Jyothi Mahika Abhivrudhi Samsthe	3745
24	Jyothi Mahila Sangha	2500
25	Samara Society	5120
26	Vijaya Mahila Sangha	2648
27	Belaku Mahila Sangha	2420
28	Soukhya Samruddhi Samsthe	4025
29	Durgashakti Aids TadeGattuva Mahila Sangha	3650

Maharashtra

30	Muktagan Mahila Mandal	2400
31	Savitri Mahila Sanstha	1250
32	Disha Mahila Babhuddeshiy Sanstha	1875
33	Disha Mahila Babhuddeshiy Sanstha	1875
34	Kranti Mahila Sangha	3005
35	Jeevandhara Mahila Samiti	1189
36	Navchetana Yuva Vikas Sanstha	1821
37	Sakhi Sanghatan	1250
38	Sangharsh Sevabhavi Sanstha	689
39	Mahila Jagruti Sevabhavi Sanstha	1300

Tamilnadu

40	Dharmapuri Mavatta Pengal Membattu Sangam	1800
41	Dindigul Pengal Munnetra Sangam	1200
42	Sri Lakshmi Pengal Munnetra Sangam	2000
43	Salem Pengal Nala Vazhvu Sangam	1800
44	Salem Thirunangaigal Nala Sangam	1800
45	Annai Theresa Makkal Sevai Maiyam	1800
46	Theni Mavatta Samooga Porulathara Munnetra Sangam	1700
47	Erode Mavatta Pengal Suya Sakthi Sangam	1500
48	Gnanadeepam Sevai Maiyam	1750
49	Sudaroli Pengal Munnetra Sangam	1200
50	Vidivelli Thirunangaigal Nala Sangam	1400
51	Vellore Pengal Mempattu Sangam	1500
52	Coimbatore Mavatta Thirunangaigal Nala Sangam	1000
53	Idhayam Thirunangaigal Munnetra Sangam	1000

Telangana

54	The God Therisa Mahila Mandali	2027
55	Chandrodaya Social Welfare Society	2150
56	Vanitha Maythri Public Welfare Society	1571
57	Spandana Sri Mythri Sri Publi Welfare Society	1500
58	Adarsha Mahila Mandali	987
59	Navyasri Mahila Welfare Society	2215
60	Rudrama Devi Mahila Mandali	2000
61	Mahila Abhivrudhi Samsta	3320
62	Ushodaya HIV/AIDS Nivarana Ikhyia Sangam	1300

Advisors of Taaras



Dr. Sundararaman



Mr. Shiv Kumar



Mr. Vivekanandan



Late Dr. Samarajit Jana



Mr. Shirish



Mr. Raghunathan



Mr. Pradeep



Shama,

As we turn the pages of this booklet, it's not just the journey of an initiative that unfolds, but also the profound impact of your dedicated contributions over the years-before Avahan, during Avahan and beyond that. Your unwavering commitment, leadership, tireless efforts, most importantly, your care for the communities have shaped Taaras into the force of empowerment it is today.

This booklet stands as a testament to your dedication, a tangible representation of the lives you have touched, the leaders you have nurtured, and the transformation you have ignited. It's a small token of our immense gratitude for your invaluable role in this journey.

Thank you for being the guiding light of Taaras, for your dedication that knows no bounds, and for making every step forward a collective triumph.

With heartfelt appreciation,

Taaras Coalition & Secretariat Team

Partners of Taaras

State AIDS Control Societies

Catalyst Management Services

Swasti

Vrutti

Fuzhio

SAATHII

Community Action Collab (CAC)

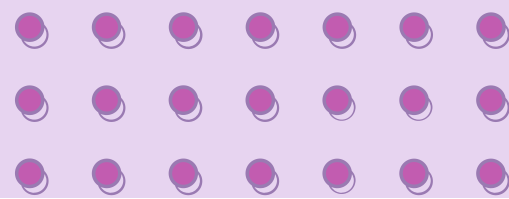


Gratitude for a Lifesaving Partnership: Taaras and Covid Action Collab

Our partnership with COVID Action Collab (CAC) during the trying times of the COVID-19 pandemic was a genuine blessing. As the pandemic wreaked havoc on our lives, especially for marginalized communities, CAC became our guiding light. While they didn't provide us with a simple solution or mere funding, their contribution to our journey was immeasurable. CAC, in essence, assumed the roles of a wise teacher and mentor, providing us with precise information and direction to navigate the pandemic. Most significantly, CAC's ability to connect us with the right individuals, institutions, and organizations was transformative.

The collaboration of Taaras with CAC was immensely meaningful in supporting the communities in areas of relief, recovery and resilience by providing awareness on Covid and vaccination, access to vaccines, social protection schemes, NCD screenings and livelihood support. Additionally, this partnership elevated Taaras's visibility on both national and global stages, allowing us to share our stories and experiences with a wider audience, thereby amplifying the impact of our mission.

As we reflect upon this journey, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to CAC (which is now known as Community Action Collab) for their support, guidance, and unwavering friendship. This partnership truly made a world of difference, and we look forward to continuing our shared mission of empowerment and positive change. Thank you, CAC!





Thank you to Donors

We are profoundly grateful to Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation-Mr Ganesh Ramakrishnan, Mr Narender Kande, Ms Matangi Jayaram, Mr Sameer Kumta and Ms Sakshi Gudwani for incredible support and generosity towards women in sex work community. Your contribution has been instrumental in driving our mission of empowerment and positive change.

Also special thanks to our friends at Ashraya Hastha Trust, GiveIndia, Godrej consumer Products Limited, Social Venture Partner-Hyderabad, Arghyam, for being a pillar of support, a partner in our journey, and a catalyst for positive change.

As we reflect on the impact of Taaras, we see your hand in every achievement, every empowered voice, and every life transformed. Your support has been a beacon of hope, inspiring us to continue pushing boundaries and creating lasting change.

With heartfelt gratitude,
Taaras Coalition & Secretariat Team



Taaras in Photos





Thank you

