

BUILDING TRUST

HOW TO OVERCOME BARRIERS AND REACH RESULTS IN MOBILIZING COMMUNITIES TO INCREASE YOUNG PEOPLE'S REPRODUCTIVE AND SEXUAL HEALTH IN INDIA.

TEXT & PHOTOS BY Anna Knöfel Magnusson

This article will describe how people in an intervention project located in three different sites in India succeeded in raising awareness among the inhabitants concerning issues on young people's (10-24 years old) reproductive and sexual health and rights. A process with barriers as well as success – a road which hasn't always been straight, but now shows positive changes in behaviour and hopefully will lead to an improval for young people's health situation in the future.



The intervention project is a cooperation between the Indian non governmental organization (NGO) Mother and child health institute (MAMTA) and the Swedish NGO Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU). The objectives included issues on HIV/AIDS, gender, early marriages, early pregnancies, preference for male children. And the project used the strategies like mass awareness meetings, sensitising meetings with local politicians and other stakeholders, meetings with parents, thematic rallies, educating peer educators, setting up Youth Information Centres and Youth Friendly Services.

People involved in this work will here describe some of the conditions, challenges and processes that they have undergone and experienced. People in these places, urban and rural, are all living in a

context of poverty. The settings are: peri urban villages near Varanasi in the state of Uttar Pradesh, rural villages in the district of Bawal in the Rewari region in the state of Haryana and urban slum areas in Bangalore, in the state of Karnataka. Three geographically, socio-economically, traditionally and religiously different settings. In the article each site has been given its own heading: Taking it into the school, Peer educators in action and Getting local leaders on board. But, focusing on how sexuality education in school was implemented in one place implicates that a lot of advocacy work have been done with local leaders before that was possible. The subjects will thus get entwined irrespective of heading and the effects described in one place also applies to the others.



The open climate makes the questions easier to discuss.



Mr. Ramesh Pandey and Ms. Mahima Mishra, teachers in Shree Surya Narayan Inter College in Pindra, involved in implementing and developing sex education in school.

Varanasi

The Varanasi region has all the vulnerability that is the distinguishing feature for the spread of the HIV-virus. In an area characterized by illiteracy and a low educated population the infection carries – except from the enormous suffering the virus itself constitute – myths and stigmas along that causes painful social effects such as exclusions from the family or the community. Hence, there was a need to implement new methods and to act on basis of the circumstances in the area. The villages in the outskirts of Varanasi are the first ones in this project to introduce sexuality education in school with purpose to increase knowledge among young people concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as gender issues.

Community workers within the SWI

In Varanasi MAMTA and RFSU cooperate with the local NGO Social Welfare Institute, SWI. The community workers who are employed by SWI have been trained in educating sexuality education and

they in turn have facilitated teachers and peer educators.

Taking it into the school

In Pindra, a block in the countryside 30 km west of Varanasi, sexuality education was implemented in four schools during 2007. Teachers and community workers have been trained by RFSU and MAMTA to teach sexuality education in a module with different sessions and levels. The session objectives, that later also are to be taught in the classrooms, were: Bodily changes during adolescence; Gender perspectives; HIV/AIDS and Condom-use.

In Shree Surya Narayan Inter College in the Pindra village the teachers Ms. Mahima Mishra and Mr Ramesh Pandey, have been deeply involved in the development of the sexuality education. Ms. Mahima says that before the training the crowded classes created a problem, to give 80-100 pupils sexuality education at the same time wasn't always easy. But now it actually works. Training is needed though.



Teachers in a girl class, Pindra.

”Girls are more open than the boys now. It used to be the other way around.”

They worry a lot about the increasing numbers of HIV-infected in the area but their initiative have been well received by the inhabitants and they can note several positive effects since they started their engagement.

– HIV increases all the time. But now we can see a different approach to the issue. There is another openness surrounding it. Girls have been very vulnerable before but we have put much efforts to strengthen them, the teacher Mr. Pandey says.

They also emphasise that it used to be the teachers who took initiative to conversations with the young about sexual health, but now, after the empowering sessions, it’s the young people, both girls and boys, that initiate dialogues. Even so more often the girls.

– Girls are more open than the boys now. It used to be the other way around. But both are very receptive and have loads of questions.

In a girl’s classroom (11th class) it becomes obvious. The girls are part of an open-minded atmosphere and they answer questions posed by both visitors and teachers honestly and freely without signs of shyness or fear. They express gratitude to their new knowledge and confirm that it doesn’t only stay with them, they continue to spread the word outside school in their families and among friends.

– I can speak more freely now to my husband. I can explain to him when I have my period and why I have those pains. I also understand how to manage during the period.

– I tell my sisters and my sister-in-law about my new knowledge. Nobody else does so it’s very useful.

As visiting a boy’s class one of the pupils makes clear that the gender-issue has been discussed and



Boy class in Shree Surya Narayan Inter College in Pindra.

”I have told my parents how HIV spreads. And also that there is no difference between a female or a male child.”



Girls in Shiv Kumari Balika Inter College, Pindra are content with how the education concerning HIV/AIDS is being performed.

they’ve been sensitised concerning the injustices that exist between the sexes. A boy says that girls are being discriminated in many ways and when asked how and how they have been working he answers:

– We discussed different tasks that boys and girls have to perform at home during holidays. It became clear how unfair things are – our list was very short whereas the girl’s were endless.

Traditions and cultural patterns can be changed, this boy is one evidence. When asked what they have been learning, he stood up in his class and spoke frankly about gender. It was obvious not only to him but to the whole class.

In another part of Pindra, in the girl school Shiv Kumari Balika Inter College, the girls are very content with the information on HIV/AIDS. One of the girls says:

– I have told my parents how HIV spreads. And also that there is no difference between a female or a male child.

They say that the difference between how their school teaches about HIV and how TV, or the public health advertisement does it, is that they here get profound knowledge how the disease is spread

(myths are being broken) and how to protect oneself. One girl, who’s new in this class, compares to her old school.

– In my old school the teachers read from the books. Here the information is more practical, they show us pictures and diagrams, and we get knowledge in how to use the condoms, she says.

Principals on the front line

At the National Inter College for boys in Pindra the principal Mr. Anand Pal Rai and the teacher Mr. Ramashraya Singh, who has been working together in this project, say that it’s important to discuss sex besides many other issues because young people are vulnerable. They need information about prevention so they don’t catch infections. India, Mr. Singh says, once had an oral tradition of passing information across generations on these questions. For boys it was primarily done by the grand parents and sisters in law for girls. But this tradition has been lost somewhere over the years.

– Maybe we have lost one generation by this silence. And it will take one generation to change back again.



Young peer educators describing their work in the Pindra village.

Mr. Pal Rai describes the obstacles they have experienced as directly connected to culture and traditions. But by insistent and strategical advocacy work they have more or less managed to stop those who created problems. Many

conversations, much dialogue face-to-face has been necessary with those.

They look upon the future with brightness. Now, Mr. Singh says, there are opportunities compared to before, when there were none. On a governmental level themes of sexuality education are in the curriculum. But they say that it hasn't been dealt with properly on a class-room level. This project brought an acceptance to take it further for those who wanted to do it. But, one has to realise, it is a slow process and, a slow process is needed.

– Patience is essential when trying to change social issues based on traditions. Our pupils are in a process of opening up right now. Taking it step-by-step is important, to start in one school and then slowly increase the methods elsewhere. Then you will get more acceptance and people around will understand what good is in it, Mr. Singh says.



The principal Mr. Anand Pal Rai and the teacher Mr. Ramashraya Singh in the National Inter College for boys in Pindra.

More to win

Providing schools with sexuality education have played a crucial role in more than one way. Besides the important outcome that the access to services for young people have increased, the collaboration between different actors in society



”Here we’ve managed to bring 31 out of 52 drop-out-girls back to school.”

Ms. Chandrawati, councillor at SWI Phoolpur and Mr. Rajiv Kumar, SWI. Both now voted members in the Panchayat of Phoolpur.

(teachers, nursing staff, doctors) has made it possible for the community workers to target young people to make them participate in other important programme events. For example paying visits to the Youth Information Centres, YICs, where peer educators are active in informing and supporting local youngsters concerning sexual health. Teachers and school leaders have recommended the YICs and hence given them a good reputation – a good rapport – in the community. A good rapport is something that is invaluable in succeeding with a project like this. Schools also inform community workers and peer educators about girls who have dropped out of school too early. It’s then much easier and quicker to find them to start to persuade their families about the values of a continuing education for girls.

– It’s a very time consuming but important job. Here we’ve managed to bring 31 out of 52 drop-out-girls back to school, Mr. Rajiv Kumar, Programme Officer at SWI, says.

Girls coming for their rights

Discrimination against girls is a huge problem in India. But changes in cultural and traditional patterns – as described as a major obstacle by several people in the project – can be made. An important part of the sexuality education is the

Gender Sensitization Module. The outcome of it in the Varanasi region is clearly positive. As the boy in the example before showed, gender consciousness is obvious in this area. And as visiting a YIC in the Binda village the young people said that from the beginning it was difficult to reach the girls who weren’t allowed to gather in meetings like that. Some of them were accompanied by their mothers, but after a while, when parents felt safe with the activities that took place, more and more girls attended the meetings. (More about the work in the YICs in the part about Bawal.)

Future aspects

The very successful collaboration with the local NGO SWI and its founder, Mr. Patak, is a possible guarantee for a winning continuation when the project itself is going to end in June 2008. SWI has worked with various health and development related issues such as empowerment of women and children, watershed management, clinical services for all age groups since 1994 and is well known in the area. SWI has a good reputation; its employed community workers have been successful not only with how they have managed to change behaviours due to ancient patterns but also in how they have built trust. From the beginning almost nobody



Committed workers at the SWI. From the left Mr. Sheshdhar, Mr. Surendra Kumar, Ms. Chandrawati and Mr. Girja Shankar Singh.

knew them but now, just a few years later, they are respected on all different levels. For example, they are always invited when different school projects takes place, but the most significant success is that two of them have been voted members in the village council, the Panchayati Raj. Also they have trained the peer educators with great success, now they reckon that the young are taking the lead. The key role is being performed by them.

SWI also worked hard on reducing stigmas. For example when one man died from AIDS in a village nobody wanted to take care of the body, to prepare and cremate it. The SWI community workers did it instead and at the same time they taught the community members that AIDS does not pass on by the smoke when burning a body, but by unprotected sexual intercourses and by blood. Their experience from the field and devout work will ensure that the issues concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights will continue to be spread.

”Patience is essential when trying to change social issues based on traditions.”



MAMTA community workers are training the peer educators in Bawal, Haryana.

“From the beginning I wondered to myself ‘how can I talk to other people about sex when I don’t do it with my own family?’”

Bawal

In Bawal and the villages surrounding this block there have been many problems with girls dropping out from school, with early marriages, early pregnancies and preference for male children. Here, unlike the project in Varanasi, the local MAMTA office is in charge of the intervention programme. We will meet Ms. Sunita Pawar, who is supervisor here, her staff at the field office and the peer educators from several villages in the neighbourhood to get to know more about how the peer educating system works.

Spread the word. Peer educators in action.

In the Bawal area 32 villages are involved in the project and 184 young people (88 male, 96 female) now work as peer educators among 8500 young people. They have been trained by community workers employed by MAMTA who started to visit the villages. They met and talked to young people and identified persons who they considered would fit as peer educators. These were later contacted and those who responded positively were trained. A batch of becoming peer educators consist of 20-30 people. The

training is done by one female and one male leader during six sessions, one thematic area for each month; each class last 3-4 hours. The sessions are:

1. Introduction of MAMTA, Peer Education & Gender
2. Adolescent Growth and Development
3. Reproductive Organ, Night Fall and Menstruation Cycle
4. Early Marriage, Early Pregnancy and Contraception
5. Sexuality & STI
6. HIV/AIDS

After this completion two days of training for trainers (ToT) is organized to further capacitate them on the issues. After the last session MAMTA gather all old and new peer educators from different villages for an informal interaction to share field work experience and to build a feeling of togetherness and linkage between them. This to ensure them that they are many young who associate in this programme and can carry the issues further from the community workers after the project is finished in 2008.



Ms. Sunita Pawar (brown dress) and the experienced staff at the MAMTA office in Bawal.

Problems targeting girls

From the very beginning there were nearly 50 boys and no girls who volunteered for becoming peer educators. The girls were not allowed to come because their families wouldn't let them.

– Initially we had problems finding girls who were allowed to take part. Today it's not difficult to recruit new girls as peer educators, we have now even more girls than boys. The word is spread and there's a good rapport concerning the activities, Mr. Mange Ram, supervisor at the MAMTA field office, says.

There was an insecurity and a mistrust of what was going on. So, when gathering the third batch they focused on girls in particular. As one of the peer educators says: "It's important because if you want to reach girls you also need female peer educators." When girls finally started to come they were always accompanied by their mothers or female relatives. The sessions were held in gender diverse rooms. But as the peer educators acted, the parents noticed that there was no harm done, so today the girls come on their bicycles, on their own. The parents now trust the activities. And Ms.

Sunita Pawar hopes that she, as a female leader of the office and this job, will work as a model for young girls.

– I remember, when I started to work in this organisation, that I looked up so much to a female boss I had. I wanted to become as successful as she. Today I hope young girls will see me the same way.

The biggest challenge for the community workers has been to reach out to the young people. When they finally managed, the youngsters were closed and shy, they didn't speak or wanted to discuss the issues. But gradually – as they were educated – they opened up. Ms. Indra, one of the community workers understands this process.

– From the beginning I wondered to myself: 'how can I talk to other people about sex when I don't do it with my own family?'. It was awful – but during the training I started to see the point. Training and experience made me self confident. That's what it's all about, she says.

– The first period is important with the peer educators – try to make them stay for three months then they are stuck forever!, Mr. Pawan fills in.



Ms. Urmila, in charge of the youth information centre in Nangal Ugra.



Messages concerning sexual health and rights on the wall in one YIC.

Visit in a youth information centre in Nangal Ugra village

The youth information centre in Nangal Ugra is situated in the middle of the village. It's a spacious locality and a lot of people is meeting up. Young, elderly, women, men and children. Also the leaders of the village are here, they support the centre both in an economic (the YIC dispose it for free) and moral way. Mr. Pratap Singh, committee member for the YIC, in the village, says:

– This was the Panchayat house before. We have chosen it especially for the youth centre activities. It has always been a place where people have met, they sat together discussed and shared opinions. Now it's the young people's turn to gain the benefits. Here they can meet, talk, read papers and pamphlets, get informed and get knowledge. So a good advise for others would be: take two-three hours a month to talk sex – share good and bad. I think these are basic human health questions for everyone.

Ms. Urmila is in charge of the YIC here. The walls are covered with simple but very informative posters concerning sexual health and related issues. Here the young can read the paper Arushi about sexual and reproductive rights for young people; and other easy and straight forward information material. The young people in Nangal Ugra (like

elsewhere!) have many questions concerning sexuality. Due to Ms. Urmila the centre works as a very useful link between the young people in the village and the field-office which is to far away to visit for many of them. Questions like When having sex? How to have sex without getting pregnant? What is AIDS? Why is early marriage bad? are common here:

– We give the young people answers. Sometimes they need many details and repeated answers to



Two members of the YIC in Nangal Ugra. Mr. Pratap Singh and Mr. Hanuman Singh.



Two community leaders in Nangal Ugra, Ms. Santosh and Ms. Anuradha.

”Girls who have been sent away experience violence to a much lesser extent today. So on a social level we now see changes in behaviour. It’s very satisfying.”

fully understand. We also help them with counselling, addresses where to go for medical examinations, what to do if a girl’s menstruation is late, and so on.

Girls drop out from school

Getting back dropout girls to the schools is one of the key strategies that have wide impact on all sexual and reproductive rights. Continuing education delays marriage, hence delaying first and subsequent pregnancies. Delaying marriage has impact, not only on the present generation (the mother and child) but also next generation (the child's child, particularly if the child is female).

In India girls often don’t go to higher education. Because it can be unsafe for girls to travel or walk long distances to reach these few schools many families won’t let them continue their studies. In Bawal (as in the other programme sites) the programme has aimed at persuading young girls – and their families – who have dropped out from school, or are about to do it, to change their minds.

– There was a girl who dropped out after 10th class. We explained to her and her family the benefits of continuing to study. The new knowledge was valued by the family and now she is a graduate and work half-time here in the centre!, Ms. Urmila says.

It’s difficult to change the fact that there’s a lack of schools but with insistent work it’s likely to find solutions. For example in the Bawal district it’s now possible for girls to perform distance-studies. The students then study at home and go to school only at times for tests and meetings with teachers.

Stop of early marriages

In some villages in this region some Panchayats no longer accept early marriages (before the girl is 18). To change this tradition a lot of advocacy work has been done specially towards the elderly. Due to the community workers the crucial part has been to educate the community members, families and stake holders on what benefits there are in education instead of getting married to early with the medical implications that might convey. But also the girls in particular have been informed about their rights and they have in turn influenced their families.

How does a Panchayat work to change this situation? Mr. Pawan says that it’s a duty for the Panchayats to register every marriage, also the early marriages. But if the Panchayat is



Peer educators in the Rewari district, Haryana.

Advices from peer educators in Bawal

- First and foremost: Build confidence in the young people. They will then open up for dialogue and honestly and freely share the objectives – so get them on board before moving forward!
- Be clear and honest about your objective.
- Select communicator. People, especially elderly, doesn't listen just to anyone. Important that a person with much influence initiate the discussions about the benefits.
- Advocacy on a community level is very important to be able to work with the issues.
- Avoid conflicts in groups with young people! There *will* be different opinions, sort them out but don't let them lead to conflicts.

against early marriages it's hard for someone to go and register. This has influenced people indirectly, few people do that now.

Mistreated young girls

Due to Ms. Santosh, another committee leader in Nangal Ugra, it's difficult to make older people understand why it's bad to have the girls married early. For them it's often an economic issue. Even though dowry is against the law it's very much a reality for millions of families with daughters. Often it's more economic to marry away two or more daughters at the same time – no matter what age they are. If harvest is good one year it's not a guarantee for the next, that's why they don't want to chance. It's not uncommon that young girls that are sent to their new families far away, get problems in their new families. Young and immature as they are, and with little experience from house work that they all of a sudden are expected to do, they are being treated differently from other family (female) members. Sometimes very bad and violence is not unusual. But here in the area, after much advocacy work, changes can be noted:

– Girls who have been sent away experience violence to a much lesser extent today. So on a social level we now see changes in behaviour. It's very satisfying, Ms. Santosh says.

Positive changes in general

In the state of Haryana there has also been huge problems with preference for male children. Sex selective abortions have been very common. But this cultural tradition too has, due to the people of this village, gradually stopped. One of the peer educators says:

– We have informed people that those enterprises travelling around offering ultra sounds to determine sexes are not appropriate. Sex selective abortions are against the law. Now people start to realise that they are no good.

The peer educators in the area can see clear changes over all. Specially among the girls who now can move freely out of the villages for activities outside; and they are better educated and more confident. With more and better education there is a whole change in young people's lifestyles, they say.



The people in charge of the MAMTA-office in Bangalore. From the left: Ms. Meenakshi Devi, Mr. Raj Kulandai, Mr. Manjunath, Ms. Mary Shaila, Mr. Clinton Cristopher.

Bangalore

In Bangalore, in the state of Karnataka in the south of India, the setting changes. We have left the rural areas and will now focus on how the project works in an urban slum. Like in Bawal it's the community workers at a local MAMTA-office who are in charge. In the Koramangala slum of Bangalore, where approximately 50 000 people live, there are a lot of NGOs with different objectives active – how to make messages come through during that condition?

Getting local leaders on board

When entering in the Koramangala slum in Bangalore a woman in a green sari immediately approaches. She is taking Ms. Meenakshi Devi, Assistant Programme Officer at the MAMTA-office, aside and talks to her – and, after a while both are smiling. The MAMTA-people are known here, one can tell. But it hasn't always been like that. The organization and their peer educators have done a lot of advocacy work on a high level to reach this position.

In the slum 26 NGOs are active with different issues, many of them occasionally and after their purpose is full-filled they soon leave the area. The inhabitants in the slum have therefore stopped to trust many of the NGOs. So, the MAMTA-workers realised that a lot of confidence had to be built.

– Church leaders, community leaders and other powerful people was initially targeted. We knew that people are listening to them. Once they were convinced it was easier, Mr. Manjunath, Programme Officer at MAMTA, says.

Also, much of the work was duplicated as there were no cooperation between the NGOs. The MAMTA-staff has for this reason put much effort in linking their NGO to other NGOs, governmental institutions and religious leaders – to build a network – which has been very effective and helpful for the purpose. For example, MAMTA is now part of Koramangala Slum Development Committee (KDC) from where most of the decision makers and influential leaders in the area act. One of them is Mr. Nataraj:

– When the MAMTA-people explained their purpose to me I was seriously interested. There are a lot of NGOs busy here, but MAMTA includes the health issues and that's a good idea. The youths in the information centres are very well organised and we will continue to support them when the project ends, he says.

Church leaders important

There are 7 churches active in the Koramangala slum and they all cooperate on the issue of sexual health and rights. The churches have big influence in this area, and some of them are also members in the KDC. Pastor Arumugham from the SAM Salvation Church, one of the most supportive leaders, finds the collaboration between the



Mr. Nataraj, one of the leaders in the Koramangala slum, Bangalore and Ms. Meenakshi Devi, Assistant Programme Officer at the MAMTA-office.

”The youths in the information centres are very well organised and we will continue to support them when the project ends, he says.”

churches and the NGOs as a fruitful solution and useful for the future. The issues MAMTA have brought to Koramangala have been adopted within this network and will continue to live, he says.

Education on all levels is his message.

– We show young people their possibilities in life. We want them to be educated and get themselves good jobs and a future. Unless that happens, they will fall into criminality, drugs or get



Pastor Arumugham of the SAM Salvation Church is very supportive and engaged in the issues on sexual health and rights.

serious infections as HIV/AIDS. As religious leaders we can speak about the bible but can’t educate them about AIDS, but the MAMTA-people can. Why shouldn’t we benefit in each other?

Therefore peer educators and community workers are present after Sunday mass when people are gathered. They “take care about the health discussion” as Pastor Arumugham says:

– Condoms protect people’s lives, and MAMTA can teach about them and provide them.

Pastor Arumugham means that as a result from the efforts people’s health situation has improved. And, he says that before the youth information centres existed there used to be a lot of fights between young people, but not anymore. Now the young have somewhere to go, and better things to do.

The knowledge is spread

Ms. Hamsa Veni, also a community leader within the KDC, notes positive results as well, the interaction for example between the community people. She says that now all of them are aware about the issue and can help the young and direct them where to go.

– The people here didn’t have knowledge concerning their rights to facilities and services.



Ms. Papamma is well known in the slum for helping young people finding right care and service.



Mr. KULANDAI Raj, Supervisor at the MAMTA-office

After MAMTA and the peer educators came they've got the knowledge and now they feel safer. For example, we now have access to a doctor in the area, something we lacked before. This work is really good and important, it must be spread!, Ms. Hamsa Veni states.

Another leader in the area, Ms. Papamma, says that since the project began female problems are to be recognized.

– As I got the knowledge I started to send young girls and women to the YICs where they can be supported. It's a platform for all young people which really helps them!

She as well has been empowered, and built up confidence which she uses in her daily deed.

– Before I sat home alone with not so much to do. Now people – young and old, females and males – come to my doorstep with their problems, they know that I will follow them to get proper care or counselling. I know where to take them, and I don't charge them anything.

Peer educators and YICs

As we have heard so far, from the influential leaders in the slum, the YICs in Koramangala plays an important role. Three YICs have started in four slum areas from where the peer educators

act with the same objectives as in Bawal and Varanasi.

– From the beginning it was difficult to get in touch with young people. We walked around, lane-by-lane, door-to-door, and tried to find people interested in our questions. It wasn't always easy, but we didn't give up and now, when we have a good rapport, it's not hard to find them, Mr. Raj Kulandai, once himself a peer educator now supervisor at the office, says.

The community worker Mr. Clinton Cristopher, means that the slum area is a closed-door-society where people follow traditions, are very orthodox and not interested in any changes. But, now he and his partners can see changes. For example in the YICs there is always a condom-box. From the beginning condoms was a very sensitive issue and people were scared to get a bad reputation if being discovered taking condoms out of that box:

– But we've worked a lot on those issues and have been successful, he says.

As we gather with a group of peer-educators in a YIC, two of the girls take out a pink condom-box. One of them demonstrates the different steps in how to use a condom properly. She's doing it very professional and there is no laughter during the session.



The peer educator Ms. Jacline demonstrates the different moments on how to use a condom properly.

Condoms are nowadays also available at no cost in the public toilets in the slum; uncertain though if they are used for the right purpose. More condoms however are taken from the female side than the male.

Future aspects

In June 2008 the MAMTA-project is over and the office in Bangalore is planning for its persistence within the existing institutions in the Koramangala slum. Days before our call the first independent youth centre, run by the local NGO Youth Welfare Association, has opened. We are paying a visit to it. The staff, Mr. Anthony, Mr. Kumar and Mr. Amurtha Raj, are key community members and work voluntarily here. The centre is open between 5 o'clock and 10 o'clock pm and each day has about 20 visitors around 15 years old, both girls and boys but mostly boys.

– From our experiences we have learnt that if there is only male staff there will be only male visitors. If you want to reach the girls you need female staff as well, Ms. Meenakshi, from the MAMTA-office, is advising them.

Here they can read, watch TV and do work-out. The peer educators come for special sessions on sex education. The plans are to open another eleven

independent centres where youth groups can gather and among other things get information on sexuality and rights. MAMTA will mobilize, sensitise and activate the staff of the Youth Welfare Association as it's MAMTA's wish that they take care of the issues in the future.

Finally, the woman in the green sari that met us in the beginning, what did she tell Ms. Meenakshi?



Ms. Manjula is in charge of one of the YICs In Koramangala. "It's a tough work to convince the elders. They say: 'Why are you interfering, we have problems already.' Now their attitudes have changed, we don't see so much resistance anymore."

“In the work with Jagriti Saptah or the Awareness week, many authorities cooperate. Doctors and health service providers, the police, church leaders, teachers and volunteers from different NGOs participate.”

– Initially she came to us because she had been married for two years without getting pregnant. I took her to a clinic for consultation and now – good news, she is four months pregnant she told me, Ms. Meenakshi answers.■

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Photo: MAMTA, Bangalore

In the work with Jagriti Saptah or the Awareness week, in the Koramangala slum, Bangalore, many authorities cooperate. Doctors and health service providers, the police, church leaders, teachers and volunteers from different NGOs participate with information stands, games, puppet shows, magic shows and other forms of performances. The purpose is to teach people – children, youngsters and their parents – about HIV, condoms, early marriages, early pregnancies and school drop-outs. To give performances is a much more appropriate method where people seem to remember the messages better than by pure lectures.

RFSU wants to point out three main aspects in succeeding and reach results in raising awareness concerning issues on young people's sexual health and rights.

1. Advocacy on a local level (with local leaders and stakeholders in the community), to build trust, is extremely important to achieve goals that have been set.

2. Sexuality education in school gives many social effects apart from sensitising the pupils. For example also the children's families will be informed; and it supports people to seek counseling services to a larger extent than before.

3. Peer educator's work means massive spread of knowledge, on one hand concerning sexuality on the other on social issues tightly connected to Indian cultural traditions. Peer educators also bring their knowledge with them into new stages of life – and continue to spread it.