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A FEMINIST APPROACH TO COLLABORATION

A sex workers' network in India

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Introduction

Research on civil society partnerships and their power dynamics largely focuses on North–South relations, often emphasizing funding relations, including implications for who gets funded, as well as how funding relations constrain civil society organizations (CSOs) and force them to change their agendas and ways of working (Banks et al., 2015; Deo & McDuie-Ra, 2011; Jalali, 2013). Efforts to equalize power relations (e.g. the #Shiffthepower movement¹ and the Grand Bargain's call to allocate more funds to Southern CSOs)² have mainly sought to address these constraining factors. Debates and experiments concerning reshaping these power relations are also taking place, as seen with, for example, the RINGO project (RINGO, n.d.) and efforts towards 'localization' (van Brabant & Patel, 2018) and more equal partnerships (O'Brien & Evans, 2017). However, limited attention has been directed to the development of localized and more equal collaboration 'from the ground up' through direct engagement among organizations.

In this chapter, we focus on a case of CSO collaboration in India, where feminist collaboration provided space for narrowing resource gaps through a shared commitment to the rights of the represented groups. We illustrate how feminist engagement with intersectionality, positionality, and agency can shape how sex workers' advocacy emerges from lived experience while harnessing the power of a country-based feminist CSO acting as a donor and partner. This example of the bottom-up management of power differentials in pursuit of shared goals through mutual support involves a collaboration between a sex workers' network in India and a Delhi-based feminist human rights CSO working on issues related to sexuality and women's reproductive rights. The network brought together organizations throughout India (16 states) to advocate for respect, reliance, and

recognition for sex workers. The network and the feminist CSO worked with a shared commitment to sex workers' rights in feminist rights-based discourse. Building on their reflections on internal and external challenges to equal partnership, the partners drew on joint feminist principles of sharing, learning, and critiquing with a non-patronizing approach to narrow the power differential between the sex workers' network and the other organizations involved.

We begin by presenting the case context and methods, followed by a discussion of the feminist theory and practice influencing how the feminist CSO shaped their collaboration with the network. Then we present our findings (the application of the feminist principles and how they shaped the network), concluding with lessons learned for CSO collaboration more broadly.

Case context

Advocacy around sex work and sex workers' rights in India was in a significant phase when we started our research on this subject in 2018. The sex workers' network in India was focusing its advocacy on responding to the 'Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Protection, and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018'. This bill, which is commonly known as the anti-trafficking bill, garnered attention from sex workers' groups. In 2021, organizations in the sex workers' movement again came together to respond to a draft anti-trafficking bill put forward by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

There are two sex work narratives in India. The dominant narrative portrays sex work as immoral, forced, and a consequence of trafficking. According to National Crime Records Bureau data, 95% of victims of trafficking in India are forced into prostitution (Divya, 2020). Sex work perspectives rooted in this narrative centre on how to prevent trafficking and rescue and rehabilitate those who are "trapped" in this immoral trade (Misra et al., 2000). This view is popular in policymaking circles in India, and the 2021 anti-trafficking bill reflects this discourse. The secondary narrative situates sex workers and their marginalization within a human rights discourse, approaching sex work as work chosen by people whose choice should be respected. Organizations working in this vein advocate for better health facilities, educational opportunities for sex workers' children, and social security³ for sex workers. These organizations, largely led by sex workers, advocate for reducing the stigma around sex work to allow sex workers to live with dignity and respect.

The feminist CSO in this study, a human rights organization based in the Global South and led by women from the Global South, partnered with a network of community-based organizations (CBOs) primarily led by sex workers. The feminist CSO had worked to expand sexual and reproductive freedoms and advance the human rights of all people for over 20 years. The network advocated for the recognition of sex work so that sex workers would be provided with access to social and health security. The Delhi office of the feminist CSO worked with the network from a human rights-based approach, aiming to strengthen organizations and social movements while playing a supportive role, aiding

local partners in achieving their goals. The feminist organization's principles of sharing, learning, and critiquing with a non-patronizing approach allowed the sex workers to take the lead in determining their advocacy goals and methods. This approach created space for conversation and dialogue on sex work with international organizations, national collectives, and diverse types of sex workers (brothel-, street-, and home-based). Despite the feminist organization's privileged position (e.g. as the donor and resource creator), they consciously worked to make the partnership more equal through their channels of communication.

Methods

The first author (based in India) conducted 14 semi-structured interviews with the key network leadership, CBO members from six different states, feminist CSO staff members, and activists associated with the network. The data include interviews with brothel-based and home-based sex workers. The first author also visited the office of the sex workers' network on the outskirts of Delhi and interviewed members in their own space, where they could communicate more openly. Additionally, she attended a dialogue session that included a conversation among different stakeholders on how to articulate sex workers' rights. We also analysed documentation including public and internal documents such as reports from several dialogue sessions and discussions between the network and other organizations. The three authors analysed the data as a team, seeking to identify how feminist principles addressing power in collaborations were expressed in the collaboration, drawing out the related implications and challenges.

Feminist theory and practice

The concept of intersectionality was developed in 1989 by American legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who used this framework to understand how the courts and police failed to 'see' how women of different racial and class backgrounds experienced domestic violence. She argued that identity is not additive – each person exists at the intersection of multiple dimensions of identity. Each individual's location within the matrix of identity shapes their experiences. In the Indian context, Menon (2015) has rejected the term 'intersectionality', arguing that Indian social activists learned how to think about identity in this nuanced way on their own in the course of their struggle for freedom. Other Indian feminists have responded that intersectionality continues to be useful in pushing activism to be more cognizant of the dangers of exclusion and marginalization within a movement (Gopal, 2015; John, 2015).⁴ In this chapter, we find that an intersectional feminist approach to collaboration led the examined feminist CSO to create space for multiple voices and agendas within the sex workers' network, understanding that class, region, religion, caste, ability, and other dimensions of identity create a variety of experiences of sex work. Rather than trying to force one dominant narrative, the network actively included multiple voices and goals.

Standpoint theory, developed by feminist theorists, draws attention to the positionality of individuals in a dialogue, arguing that knowledge is socially situated (Hartsock, 1983)⁵ and that those on the margins are better able than those in powerful positions to see and deconstruct power structures (hooks, 2000). These ideas offer a check on power differentials in collaborative networks. By arguing that each person or organization has only partial and situated knowledge and that those who are in dominant positions have less knowledge, a feminist approach to collaboration has the explicit goal of addressing power relations. Work by theorists such as Mohanty (1988) and Rege (2003) has substantiated these ideas in the Indian context. Others have applied these ideas specifically to civil society networks in India (Chandhoke, 2005; Deo & McDuire-Ra, 2011). In addition to making explicit how resources lead to power imbalances, feminists also work to mitigate these imbalances. In the case examined here, the feminist CSO, powerful because of its access to funding and expertise, takes active steps to reduce the possibility that its access to resources will lead it to become dominant within the network.

Feminists have also increasingly embraced the importance of individuals' 'own voices'. This phrase refers to the idea that, in addition to needing diverse stories, these stories must be told by the individuals involved (Duyvis, 2015⁶). This allows marginalized groups to articulate their own personal experiences – no one needs to speak for them. This is the most recent moment in a powerful current in feminism emphasizing the importance of women finding their own voices, allies amplifying those voices, and these voices directly articulating women's political demands (Ahmed, 2018). The construction of a narrative about oneself is a powerful feminist moment (Rajeshwari et al., 2020), and the studied sex workers' network is committed to empowering sex workers to speak for themselves in this way. Below, we make the following three central claims and analyse how the feminist concepts of intersectionality, positionality, and voice shaped the collaboration:

- 1 The network's collaboration with the feminist CSO created a space for dialogue and engagement to make intersectional identities visible in the sex workers' network.
- 2 Power differentials in the collaboration were addressed through the CSO taking a self-reflective approach with consciousness of positionality. Despite this approach, the feminist CSO sometimes struggled because of complex power differentials.
- 3 The sex workers' diverse lived experiences and perspectives were translated by the network with the help of the feminist CSO and others, supporting the sex workers' agency to make decisions for their own movement.

Practicing intersectionality

One core aspect of the partnership was the creation of space for the sex workers to fully express their intersectional identities, which shaped their varying

experiences of sex work. Beginning with an acknowledgement of difference, the central need for respect and dignity when facing multiple forms of subordination was articulated in the collaboration.

The network aimed to bring sex workers from different parts of India together in a single platform where they could address problems they encountered. This goal faced two main challenges: First, the network did not have sufficient resources to bring the sex workers from different parts of India to participate in a single platform. Second, it was challenging to engage sex workers with diverse backgrounds (brothel-, home-, and street-based) in dialogue. Both challenges were addressed in the feminist CSO's collaboration with the network. The partnership provided access to physical space and resources (monetary and intellectual) and to other networks and organizations to facilitate dialogue among network members. Intellectual resources generally took the form of important information on international and national laws that could impact sex workers and their rights.

The feminist CSO helped the network to engage with sex workers with diverse identities because the CSO's intersectional lens allowed them to identify and counter exclusionary analyses of oppression where one form of oppression is prioritized over others. Indeed, in recent years, the recognition of intersectionality – driven partly by the work of the feminist CSO – has made the sex workers' movement in India more inclusive and flexible by giving space to the voices of diverse marginalized groups and trying to address underlying injustices. Its feminist background and intersectional approach allowed the feminist CSO to exhibit sensitivity to multiple identities in its collaboration with the diverse sex workers' network. The feminist CSO opened platforms for sex workers to speak about their experiences when they felt comfortable and safe sharing them. For example, the president of the network was included as a resource person speaking in feminist leadership training programmes offered by the feminist CSO for community-building organizations. A significant way the feminist CSO facilitated an intersectional approach in the sex workers' movement (where the sex workers were largely ciswomen but also included transgender women) was through making space for diverse network members to engage with other women's movement activists and university students, speaking to them about their experiences. This was important because other feminist organizations were not readily accepting of the network's narrative that sex work is a choice and were uncomfortable sharing a platform with sex workers. The network was able to engage with this feminist organization because it practiced feminist principles by acknowledging the diverse sex workers' agency to define themselves.

As the sex workers had different backgrounds and engaged in sex work in diverse ways, their struggles were not all the same. For instance, some sex workers wanted to engage with the network without being identified. One reason to avoid being publicly identified as a sex worker was to protect their other identities as wives, mothers, or providers for their families. The sex workers struggled with the complexity resulting from their multiple identities and sharing their experiences with others put them in a vulnerable position. Therefore,

trust needed to develop between the feminist CSO and the network members before the latter could share their stories on common issues. Working from an intersectional feminist approach, the feminist CSO understood these differences and imagined the possibility of a dialogue that gave space to multiple voices. As a feminist organization, it was also sensitive to the complex realities of the sex workers' lives, which helped the CSO to respect these women's boundaries and to engage with the network. The CSO's understanding of intersectional identities let them to reject activism based on a 'single, exclusionary identity or single-issue politics'.⁷ For example, the collaboration addressed the following challenge, expressed by a CBO office bearer from Ahmedabad, who explained the importance of bringing in the voices of sex workers who do not want to join open protests or public demonstrations:

Most of the sex workers [here] work from home, and there are no brothels as in the case of West Bengal and other parts of India. This makes it difficult for them to get organized, as not everyone wants to come out in the open and acknowledge their status as a sex worker. Many sex workers want to hide their identity and do the work, and this makes it difficult to bring them within the group. Even before the organization was made, everyone was doing their own individual work, and whenever any sex worker would roam around on the streets with condoms, then the police would harass them. This problem was mainly because we were not organized, but we did not know that this was the main issue 'til I and a few more sex workers were sent for an exposure visit to Kolkata.

Exposure visits, aim to introduce sex workers from diverse backgrounds, through practical and real-life situations, so that they can exchange views, build trust, and develop a common language of advocacy as a network. Through these interactions, the sex workers recognized their shared challenges, learned that they faced similar harassment, and saw the necessity of an organized effort to address their concerns.

A diverse set of organizations and groups participated in the agenda-setting meetings,⁸ which were primarily coordinated by the network and facilitated by the feminist CSO. These meetings gave space to different types of sex workers (brothel-based, home-based, street-based, and traditional sex workers⁹) to voice their views, creating a point of intersection for the different types of sex workers. Prior to this collaboration, only brothel-based sex workers had access to spaces for expressing their views and interacting with different stakeholders (e.g. Durbar Mahila in Bengal).¹⁰ The network, in partnership with the feminist CSO, extended this space to other types of sex workers. In this forum, cross-cutting themes such as labour laws, legal options for sex workers, and access to welfare schemes were discussed, which created space for positioning sex workers in a labour framework, thus widening the scope for claiming sex workers' rights.

Convergences between the struggles of sex workers and those of other marginalized groups, such as cleaners (*Safai Karamcharis*) and differently abled people, were also discussed. These meetings thus broadened the sex workers' horizon and helped them find common links between their own and others' struggles. The sex workers came to understand that the struggles related to their sexuality were not just about being sex workers but also about being women (and in some cases transgender) and reflected on how this impinged on their right to survive with basic social security.

Positionality and self-consciousness

In taking the role of a facilitating partner, the feminist CSO was conscious of its position of power in its relationship with the network. The feminist CSO engaged in continuous self-reflection on its positionality in this partnership and accepted that power differentials cannot be completely overcome but can be addressed openly. The feminist CSO also struggled with the tension between positioning itself as an organization based completely in the South and as an organization with connections to other international organizations in the North, Asia, and Africa, bringing global understanding and the 'privilege' that comes with this status.

The feminist CSO was conscious of its own positionality, which involved not only power but also the need for constant self-reflection. The need to question their position was articulated by a key CSO staff member:

There has been a huge amount of work to never co-opt the ability of that community to self-lead, which is very tricky. If it's a self-led movement, then we would not like to just come in between and co-opt their space.

The feminist CSO and the network maintained a working relationship based on mutual respect. Before deciding how to proceed with advocacy, a consultation between the feminist CSO and key members of the network was always held. The feminist CSO understood that it had privileged access to information and understanding of the global context, which could be helpful for the network. The feminist CSO could influence other women's rights organizations in India and globally, countering the narrative that sex work is never a choice or that sex work is violence. This CSO had long engaged on sex workers' issues from this stance, building trust with the group.

The CSO staff sought to ensure that asymmetrical access to resources (which drives power asymmetry) did not lead to the domination/imposition of one view over others. The feminist CSO viewed its privileged position as a strength that could bring global perspectives and experiences to the network. However, such global experience could also be a limitation if the CSO felt compelled to lead, which might result in co-option of the movement. Thus, the path was not always

straightforward for the feminist CSO, and they struggled internally in dealing with their position. The network embraced the feminist CSO's role as a partner bringing global perspectives on sex work, but such set roles in a collaboration suggest unequal relationships. Discussing the feminist CSO's role in the partnership, a central office bearer of the network noted that,

Better use of words is something that the [feminist CSO] helps the network with. We do not understand many times what exactly the donor wants. The feminist CSO has the organizational strength of skilled and educated staff along with the language skills to be able to guide them and help them in all this. They are able to package things well for reports. It is important to package, and even advertisement of the work is very important, and [the feminist CSO] helps us with all this. Yet, in doing so, the feminist CSO has never asked us to change our activities within a programme. They have asked us how we want to shape a programme rather than telling us how they want things to be done.

The network and the feminist CSO built collaboration-seeking common ground, respecting each other's requirements and expectations and remaining conscious of their positions. This was articulated by a central office bearer of the network as follows:

When we started working with [the feminist CSO], we wanted the sex workers' rights to be discussed at different levels all over the country. Beyond this, we realized that it was a feminist organization that believes that 'sex work is work' and that it should be decriminalized. We never felt these issues getting in the way while working with the feminist CSO, whose philosophy matches with ours, unlike a few other feminist organizations whose members privately agree with our core values but cannot support [them] as an organization. In the case of this feminist CSO, they support our core value – 'sex work is work' – as an organization; that is vital to us.

The collaboration was built on the common ground of regarding sex work as work. The network located its narrative around choice, respect, and recognition for sex work. This understanding emerged from viewing sex workers as having the agency to select their profession instead of viewing them as victims. Network members found it easier to work with organizations that also viewed sex work within this framework. The feminist CSO, despite being aware that many would call this false consciousness and stress the need for rescue and rehabilitation, respected sex workers' agency to choose. The sex workers' network saw rescue and rehabilitation as a forced solution – not one they would choose. Recognizing this ultimately provided a basis for supporting the sex workers in voicing their issues and advocating for their rights. Subsequently, the lived experiences of the sex workers in the

network shaped the language articulating and advocating for sex workers' rights, with the feminist CSO and the network working together on these efforts.

Acknowledging 'own voices'

The feminist CSO supported and acknowledged sex workers' 'own voices' by facilitating dialogue with sex workers, offering different starting points, and providing a platform for finding common ground for advocacy. The network's main objective was to build advocacy for sex workers' rights. For organized advocacy, they needed some common ground, while acknowledging their diversity. However, the diversity among the different types of sex workers (brothel-based, home-based, street-based, and traditional sex workers) made it challenging to determine common core principles for their demands. Each type of sex worker struggled with unique challenges, as mentioned above. The feminist CSO responded by facilitating dialogue among the diverse sex workers. The methods applied were simple – create space for dialogue and make the movement about sex workers' voices and not about the feminist CSO. The creation of such a space does not mean differences were dissolved but that the various types of sex workers were able to voice their views, be heard, and exercise agency to decide their path in the movement. These conversations were used to determine the demands and strategies for representing the sex workers at the national level. As the network grew to include additional types of sex workers, this challenge remained an issue. The feminist CSO realized that some CBOs working with sex workers did not want to join the network because they had other priorities such as everyday survival or the functioning of their own organizations. Even when sex workers are not formal network members, the network still engaged with them for larger advocacy goals and sought their support on issues such as the response to the anti-trafficking bill.

The opportunity and space created for the sex workers to speak for themselves and voice their concerns acknowledged and facilitated their agency to decide the future of their movement. The sex workers themselves determined with whom to engage, how their movement should proceed, and what shared ground they wanted to highlight. In this journey, the sex workers needed allies and collaborations with organizations that would give them space to exercise their agency to decide their own path. This supportive role was played by the feminist CSO in its collaboration with the sex workers' network.

The dialogue and space for conversation gradually led to the identification of points of convergence among the sex workers. Most of them wanted the right to live with dignity and respect and as people who had chosen to engage in sex work to support their families or themselves. An organized effort on this issue was important, given the everyday harassment by local gang leaders and police and the need for legal measures and norm changes to protect sex workers' rights. In the interviews, the sex workers described their experiences. As a sex worker from Tamil Nadu explained,

When a sex worker goes to file a report, the police say that they deserve it, as they are doing this kind of work. We also want to be treated with respect and dignity. We are doing sex work, but that does not mean that we are open to abuse or sexual favours without consent. This is something which becomes very difficult to make the others understand, who just assume that our work leads to abuse. We are told that we are sex workers, and, because of our work, we should be ready to face such situations as physical abuse. This is not the sort of response that we expect from the police. It means that we have no respect or dignity.

The president of the network suggested that all sex workers need to come together and build a sense of reliance on each other, as they often face multiple levels of exploitation:

We find many of the sex workers, particularly those working from home, reluctant to come out in the open and identify themselves. We tell them that they can engage in the network by choosing to not reveal their identities. This is how we can build support for each other by recognizing their difficulties in identifying themselves. This support will be important for the movement, in the long run – more than any outside aid or help. We have to fight for our own cause.

Such sex workers shared their lived experiences individually with the central office bearer and sometimes in open discussions organized by the network and facilitated by the feminist CSO.

The collaboration with the feminist CSO was important to the network, but, over the years, they also relied on support in shaping their advocacy from individuals and other partner organizations. For example, they worked closely with professionals such as doctors and lawyers in the struggle for their rights. A doctor who had worked with the network since its inception and who was revered by them as an inspiration described what the sex workers wanted while forming a network:

‘Respect, reliance, and recognition’¹¹ – the three Rs – are what the sex workers are looking for at the national level. I came to this conclusion after my constant interaction and conversations with the sex workers. I also feel that they do not share this reality with everyone – that they come to this profession by making an informed choice. They often project themselves as victims for an easy way out. They do not want to be judged and are scared of being stigmatized.

The three Rs were a result of conversations between those who worked with the sex workers in different capacities (as health practitioners, target interventionists,

and the feminist CSO) and the sex workers themselves. In this dialogue, the sex workers spoke about their work and arrived at common ground, and shared core principles. Respect was interpreted from the sex workers' constant use of '*izzat*', and recognition was taken from '*pehchaan*', another word the sex workers often used. Reliance emerged from an understanding among the sex workers that they must build trust ('*bharosa*') among each other and construct a network. With help from the feminist CSO and other partner organizations, the network was able to build this trust by providing space for the open discussion of grievances, dialogue bringing out disagreements, and an atmosphere where sex workers realized that these disagreements and differences would not stop them from engaging with each other. Everyone could speak and every voice counted.

These views were translated by the feminist CSO for national-level advocacy for the rights of sex workers. It would not have been possible for the feminist CSO and the network to formulate these three core principles (the three Rs) if the sex workers had not been able to construct them in their own voices. The sex workers voiced their issues, fears, and insecurities. The network's role was prioritizing these three rights for national-level advocacy, creating consensus through dialogue with different types of CBOs and other groups struggling for their rights. These groups included trade/labour unions, pension unions, and unorganized sector workers.¹² The language of advocacy focusing on 'respect, reliance, and recognition' resulted from internal conversations among the sex workers. In collaborating and engaging with the other groups, the sex workers broadened their demands, wanting to be recognized as workers like the other groups. This, they believed, would strengthen their movement and advocacy for access to the social security schemes available to other workers. As suggested by a network member,

The idea was to make the struggle for the rights of the sex workers more and more inclusive. They wanted to build a consensus among several groups for the rights of sex workers. They wanted to build the Delhi-based CSO's understanding as well on this – that not only sex workers are talking for their rights, but there are others also who are talking about their rights. They also wanted to make those who represented the rights of the sex workers understand that the sex workers were not just talking about their rights but also about the rights of the other groups who were marginalized and not included.

Lessons for addressing power differentials in civil society collaborations

The feminist approach to collaboration described in this chapter shows how one organization addressed power differentials among organizations by recognizing the diversity in their partner network of sex workers, showing how a completely

Southern-led initiative addressed this issue. The chapter demonstrates that, even in this Southern context involving significant efforts to address inequalities, there are inequalities in terms of resources and access to power that impact how partnerships work. Our exploration of inequalities and how to address them can yield lessons for similar contexts across the Global South. A feminist approach to collaboration embedded in the recognition of intersectionality, diversity, positionality, and agency through facilitating people's 'own voices' offers the following three lessons for addressing power differentials in CSO collaborations.

First, CSOs that acknowledge intersectionality must enable multiple identities to be expressed, addressed, and incorporated into their collaboration, creating an inclusive space with similar conditions for everyone, where everyone can feel safe interacting. In the examined collaboration, inclusive space and shared understanding of intersectionality were not just symbolic; they were practiced through building an environment where different voices were heard. This is possible only when the feminist principles mentioned above are brought into everyday practice in partnerships among organizations with different strengths and positions. It is necessary to recognize the diversity of lived experience and see it as an asset rather than a problem.

Second, CSOs in powerful positions can begin by exploring and accepting their own positionality within collaborations. They must take a self-reflective approach, cultivating mutual respect, recognizing partner agency, and adopting a facilitating stance. Then, power can become a resource contributing to marginalized people making themselves heard, rather than a means to achieve compliance. The chapter shows that reflecting on positionality does not come easily or automatically and that CSOs sometimes struggle with positioning themselves. CSOs' continuous exploration of their own positions within partnerships is needed as the partnership evolves.

Third, CSOs can recognize the agency and voice of the groups they work with, accepting their choices and their ability to decide. CSOs can adopt this principle in forming collaborations, facilitating the expression of constituent voices, and taking these as starting points for further development of their vision and action.

These lessons suggest mechanisms through which power differentials can be addressed, if not entirely overcome. When adopted in partnerships, these principles can help community-led organizations make decisions for their movements, with more powerful partners taking a facilitating role rather than a leading role. Such pathways in partnerships can further strengthen the voices of grassroots Southern organizations in advocacy, supporting their movements.

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Notes

- 1 <https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/what-we-stand-for/shiftthepower/>
- 2 <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>
- 3 Social security would mean having a ration card, the Aadhar card, which is necessary to, for example, get a bank account or register to vote.
- 4 The feminist concept of intersectionality was coined in the West. As is the case with other concepts, Indian feminists have had their own take on intersectionality, creating space for a debate and allowing CSOs in India to use intersectionality as a way forward to address the rights of diverse marginalized groups.
- 5 Hartsock (1983) and later hooks (1984) and Mohanty (1988) are important reference points and add value as foundational standpoint theorists.
- 6 The hashtag ‘own voices’ was initially used by Corrine Duyvis, a novelist and the founder of the website ‘Disability in Kidlit’, trying to centre the voices of marginalized groups.
- 7 See Runyan (2018). Here, Runyan argues that those informed by intersectionality reject a monolithic movement based on a single, exclusionary identity or single-issue politics.
- 8 The network periodically convenes meetings where network members from different parts of India come together to decide their goals, agenda, and next steps.
- 9 Traditional sex workers come from families that have engaged in sex work for generations and consider this trade to be passed from one generation to another. During the interviews, they called themselves ‘traditional sex workers’.
- 10 The Durbar Mahila in Kolkata (India) was one of the first organized attempts by sex workers in India to advocate for their rights.
- 11 This is a slogan used by sex workers and not a translation by the authors. The translation emerged internally in the movement on the basis of conversations among the sex workers and collaborating CSOs.
- 12 In India, a large number of workers are in the unorganized sector. These workers do not fall under any government labour act and therefore cannot access the welfare schemes and benefits the government provides for the organized labour force.

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