



2018 LEADERS

# Archana Vaidya

## Managing Trustee - Krantijyoti



Archana is a community leader who strives for new opportunities for herself and her community. She believes in empowering young women by providing them with information that will help them make key life decisions. Archana started out working on child rights issues and comes from a background where she had to be tough and take care of her family. She eventually started her own organization to focus on community leadership.

Archana currently works to secure scholarships for girls. Through her advocacy, her organization has been able to increase their number of scholarships for girls in the last year. They developed a 45-day curricula for women and girls that includes training on human and women's rights, social issues, laws, communication, and public speaking. She would like to increase women's participation in government so that they can break out of the currently limited roles.

# Anuradha Bhosale

Program Coordinator - Avani Organization



Anuradha has been working since 1995 with waste pickers. Her focus is on economic empowerment and effective leadership. Through the Avani Organization, she has facilitated the formation of a national association for waste pickers, lead training on “going green,” advocated for access to water and facilities in areas of residences, and for policy implementation by the local municipal corporation for shelter homes in Kolhapur. Anuradha has also advocated for and had the local municipal corporation implement the policy for shelter homes in Kolhapur. She and the organization also focus on keeping the children of waste pickers population in school and train them in life skills and leadership.

Currently, she is advocating for a welfare board for the protection of waste pickers to the central government. Anuradha has great leadership qualities and knowledge. She has clear plans for working with the state and central government on policy reform. She is personally connected to the issue and highly motivated.



# Kajal Jain

Program Coordinator - MASUM



Kajal has been at MASUM for nine years and coordinates the women's health program. MASUM has five main programs, with three coordinators and 17 staff. Most of Kajal's work originally focused on nutrition and sanitation, but she soon saw that many health outcomes were due to poverty and limited livelihood options.

Currently, Kajal focuses on RH/FP access through a rights-based approach—she empowers women to articulate their needs and demand their rights. She manages a network of women across 50 villages and helps them advocate with local village councils to access government schemes. She also oversees a self-help group network of 3,000 members, linking them to other organizations, banks, and CSR support/training.

Kajal has a vision for strengthening MASUM as an organization. Her leadership style is very collaborative and she has a nuanced understanding of the conditions that men and women face in access to services and negotiating at home. With her early experience in community-based monitoring, she is results oriented in a framework that is focused on tangible outcomes for women and communities.

# Komal Bharam

## Program Coordinator - Kriya Program



Komal is a part-time program coordinator and trainer for Kriya, a program that provides training to youth on gender-based issues and for girls on physical fitness as a way to push their boundaries. She teaches girls basic physical skills, like riding bicycles, ultimate frisbee, surfing, kayaking, trekking, and swimming, and then provides opportunities for them to build their skills.

In India, girls are not usually allowed to participate in sports or outdoor activities because of limits on their time, mobility, and decreased physical fitness due to prevalent anemia among girls and women. This widespread anemia is due to imposed female-only fasts, menstruation, and the fact that women often eat last and don't have the choice of the most nutritious foods. Komal addresses anemia specifically in her work with girls. The Kriya Program is training 90 girls and boys about nutrition, gender, and provides a space for them to interact and play together. Since 2017 they have trained 300 youth.

Komal is a daring young leader – the youngest of the cohort — she is excited about more capacity-building opportunities and would like to expand her work on girl-centered advocacy. Her vision of growing Kriya throughout the immediate demo geographic area and beyond is inspiring.

# Kumaribai Jamkatan

Program Coordinator - Amhi Amicha Arogyasathi



Since 1998 Kumaribai has worked with the tribal communities in her village as an advocate for equal rights for women. Her focus has been to create and work with women's groups to promote savings and small businesses within the communities, linking them with government entities and increasing their access to bank loans. Through self-help groups and larger women's federations, she has also promoted education for women to combat gender-based violence. She has worked with the block and district-level officers to advocate for better health access which has made the primary health care center in her village functional.

Kumaribai has been advocating for equal wages for equal work for men and women within her village and with the larger block assembly (87 villages) since 2000. Today, men and women receive equal pay for farm work in the area. She has also worked on increasing women's participation in Gram Sabha and decision-making bodies.

# Kushaverta Bele

President - GMVS, Doni



Kushaverta works with women's self-help groups for loans and savings generation so that women can be economically independent. She has facilitated the creation of lower caste women's groups and linked them with larger networks so that marginalized women can associate with other women, increase their bargaining power, and negotiate their rights.

Kushaverta's organization partnered with the Paul Hamlin Foundation to do a large survey on early child marriage and the prevalence of violence in her community. She submitted the findings to the block and district level officials which led to the district government prioritizing her region and working on the issues of health of young girls and women. This has also strengthened the health access of the community as the Primary Healthcare Center is now functional. Based on the findings of this report, they also worked with the local police, the village chief, and the director of police at their block level to sensitize them on the issue of child marriage. Thanks, in part, to the work of Kushaverta in her area, the prevalence of child marriage has reduced.

# Laila Garda

Director - KEM Hospital Research Center



Laila received a medical degree from Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences Sevagram Wardha and a masters degree in Preventive and Social Medicine from the Armed Forces Medical College Pune. She was always interested in community health and social issues from the start of her medical career, with a specific interest in women and adolescent health, women's empowerment, disability, sex and sexuality, and HIV/AIDS. Laila has been at her organization for 23 years and has served as the director for the last three years.

Laila also works with another NGO called Helplife which assists in the empowerment of differently-abled adolescent girls. She is currently looking at creating model tribal villages addressing holistic development. She gets funding from national and international organizations and CSR. KEMHRC has a rural Women's Skill Development Centre through which various courses are run for tribal girls. Currently, courses like bedside assistant, tailoring, electric wireman, and animal husbandry are ongoing. She would like to empower rural and tribal adolescent women and girls focusing on economic empowerment and rights. She would like to concentrate on providing women access to government schemes and laws by creating a local resource base through training of community and Panchayat raj members and developing an easily accessible web-based interface for bridging the gap between community and government.



## Madhuri Deshkar

Regional Coordinator - Om Ganeshaal Institute



Madhuri is an environmental activist, trainer, and current member of the Gram Panchayat. There is a fifty percent reservation for women in GPs, and she plans to serve out her term and seek re-election. She sees the potential to create opportunities for women's economic empowerment from her position within local government. Madhuri is a master trainer and trains women on waste management, health, budgeting (especially for the environment), and does skill-building with them on making reusable jute bags. Her vision is to empower women with access to funding (loans) and education to create a sustainable future in an environmentally-focused economy.

# Mahananda Chauhan

Program Coordinator - Kamdhenu Saamajik



Mahananda has worked with women, men and children advocating for women's rights in her community since 2008. For the past three years, she has been working with single (divorced/ separated/ widowed) women to facilitate their access to government schemes and for children to access education. To date, 150 individuals have access to government schemes as a result of her work.

Mahananda also works on the issues of gender sensitization in schools, male responsibility for sexual/reproductive health, early marriage, and gender-based violence. She has designed and implemented surveys and campaigns that have established the baseline to document various issues (such as access to livelihood, access to schemes and documents and prevalence of sexual violence) in the 100 villages she works in.

# Malti Sagane

State Covener, Mahila Rajsatta Andolan - RSCD



Malti Sagane is passionate about women's leadership and political influence and trains elected women officials to understand their roles. Many elected women don't know their duties, rights, and responsibilities despite the requirement that 50% of seats in Parliament and legislative assemblies are reserved for women. With the right information, she knows women can solve the issues that impact them, like gender-based violence and lack of electricity. She believes it's important to translate the women's representation requirement into opportunities for empowerment.

Malti Sagane has created manuals and training systems on the budget process, as well as a three-month village plan for elected women officials. She works with women village chiefs and connects women's groups to policy decision-makers, for example, she conducted a village safety audit and a study in 90 villages, where she brought the gram panchayat and police together to address the issue of lack of light and pushed for them to take responsibility.

# Manisha Tokale

President - Jagan Pratishthan



Manisha has been an activist since she earned her BA in human rights and has worked on farmers' access to seeds and water rights, on sex workers rights, and in caste-based advocacy on issues of child marriage, education and land rights, and bonded labor. She has worked with Dalit women on organic farming models and land rights across 13 districts and also participated in state-level advocacy on the Forest Rights Act. She worked effectively with farmers to help them collect and document proof of their rights to farming and grazing land. She has a good understanding of the challenges of privatization and the power held by upper caste landholders. Manisha has been able to effectively advocate for property rights of farmers in graze lands in her region and facilitated conferences to bring decision makers and women farmers together. She was able to effectively follow up and ensure that people get their property rights.

Manisha was instrumental in forming Bachat Garh for Dalit and poor women to organize them and increase their leadership. Manisha worked in reproductive health and developed a network across the Marathwada region focused on providing safe abortions for women. She has worked with men, women, and children on gender equality and is a member of the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Committee at the district level. Her organization, Jagan Pratishthan, received the 'Padmashri Karmaveer Dadasaheb Gaikwad' award from the state government of Maharashtra in recognition of their work procuring land rights for Dalits. Manisha received the 'Ahilyadwi Holkar' award by the state government of Maharashtra in recognition of her work on women's empowerment.



# Minakshi Birajdar

President - Integrated Agricultural Rural Development Organization



Minakshi's role is to gather and share information about government schemes to women. She works with self-help groups and the local government on economic and social empowerment and access to information. As President, she conducts staff reviews, and monitors and designs new training programs. Her community suffers from a high number of farmer suicides, leaving widows behind with no financial support or respect from the community. Minakshi wants to connect these widows to bank accounts, government schemes and loans for them to build or develop small enterprises.

# Naseem Shaikh

Associate Director of Programs - Swayam Shikshan Prayog



Born and raised in Solapur, Naseem started working with Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) in 1996. She started her work as a program coordinator and has focused on implementing different approaches and initiatives to women's economic empowerment in SSP. Naseem began addressing issues of health, hygiene, and sanitation after a massive earthquake in Maharashtra and Gujarat. She is interested in how women can take active roles in public and political spaces to ensure policy and program implementation.

In the last 20 years, Naseem has traveled across states in India and other countries to transfer women-led best practices and to raise women's issues on national and international platforms. The last six years have seen major drought in Maharashtra, and farming is a high risk and difficult enterprise. Naseem sees that women have a hard time accessing agriculture schemes and trainings in agriculture. Women aren't recognized as farmers in a state so they are not allowed to make any decisions (like what to plant) in farming even though they provide the manual labor on their farms. In the last four years, she organized women farmers in an agriculture group to shift climate resilience, create food secure agriculture, reduce the climate risk, and to improve the agriculture economy and food in the community working hard to access cultivation and land rights of women.

# Nanda Gaikwad

District Coordinator - Janawadi Rural Development



Nanda believes in collective leadership and empowering women through building collectives. She was elected village chief from 2005 – 2010 and wants to continue fighting the elections and be an example to other people in her community.

Nanda has worked with women's groups, elected representatives, child labor organizations, counseling centers, and organic farmers. She has a very focused and structured approach to each issue. With women, she sees the importance of making sure that they reach decision-making status through economic empowerment. If women start businesses and make an income, they can make financial and educational decisions, while gaining respect.

Nanda has also worked with single women's groups and advocated for their rights. She and the organization held public meetings on removing the taboo of second marriages for divorced, separated, or widowed women. She has worked with young people to conduct safety audits and taken the recommendations to make schools safer for girls to local police, the school headmaster, and the education minister.

# Prabha Desai

Director - Sanmitra Trust Projects



Prabha has a long history of working with HIV positive women, sex workers, and trans women in the second-largest Mumbai slum. She implemented a project funded by the Gates Foundation from 2004 to 2012. She sees the challenge of women's economic empowerment as not just about training and entering the labor force, but in creating the labor conditions for them to be able to sustain their work outside their homes. Currently, she is doing skill-building with 400 women and 127 adolescent girls (10 of whom are HIV+) on tailoring, at-home nursing, beautician, phlebotomy, and geriatric care. These are service-sector jobs that allow the girls/women more freedom in growing industries. Prabha also provides HIV support (medical care, ARVs, screening, nutrition) for women and girls. She also addresses NCDs with them to improve overall health.



# Pratibha Ukey



## Project Coordinator - Prakriti

Pratibha's work is centered in the Gandhian ideology of rural development which believes in the equality of men and women and that each individual has the potential for growth and if given opportunities. Since 1998, she has worked in the rural areas of Central India's underdeveloped and underprivileged villages and worked with young people to facilitate an exchange between rural and urban populations through a fellowship. She also worked extensively for Prakriti's program to promote economic self-reliance of women through self-help groups (SHGs).

Pratibha and the organization have been working with women farmers, with single women to advocate for their rights and to safeguard their entitlements, like succession rights, fair representation in decision-making bodies etc. The organization is associated with regional and national networks and holds joint consultations and such other events to bring the demands and needs of women on a platform for redress.

Pratibha also works with women elected into democratic institutions like Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabha, which are the local decision-making bodies and have the legitimate power to implement the program for the empowerment of women.

# Ratnamala Sudesh Vaidhya

Regional Coordinator - Mahila Raisatta Andolan



Ratnamala is an elected representative at the village level. She works with elected women officials and women from the community in six districts and sees the value in building a connection between the two groups. She is especially interested in working with young women who are educated to foster public engagement and works with a youth group.

Ratnamala has successfully advocated for women's access to water, local transportation (free transit passes for women), and to include both a husband and wife's name on a house nameplate. Through her own experience, she knows the challenges that women elected to office face, and that women chiefs face. She personally dealt with a no-confidence motion that men initiated and feel that women don't have the information needed when elected to local office. She believes that working with local elected panchayats is important since they have the power to remove barriers and to provide funds for women and other groups.

# Sabah Khan

Co-Founder and Managing Trustee - Parcham



Sabah is a feminist activist whose interests are minority rights with a focus on women. She follows this passion through her voluntary engagements. She co-founded Parcham, a group dedicated to breaking stereotypes based on religion, class, caste, gender and other markers of difference to create a society respectful of diversity. Parcham is best known for introducing the football initiative for adolescent girls in Muslim ghettos. She has been a member of the 'Muslim Women's Rights' Network', a group advocating the rights of Muslim women and Gender Just laws since 1999. As a member, Sabah was responsible for the formulation of the Progressive Nikahnama. She has edited a book of poems 'bebaak qalam' (Unrestrained Pen) a collection of poems in Urdu on the theme of identity.

She is a member of an autonomous feminist collective, Forum Against Oppression of Women. She is currently working as a Consultant to the Transforming M East Ward Project, an action research project of Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) that seeks to create a model of inclusive urban development in M East Ward, the poorest municipal ward in Mumbai. Sabah is member of the core group of the people's campaign 'Hamara Shehar Mumbai' on the Development Plan of Mumbai 2014-2034. Prior to TISS, Sabah has worked for more than a decade with developmental organizations on issues of urban poverty and women's rights. She has a postgraduate degree in Social Work from Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

# Savita Jadhav



Founder + Secretary - Sadhana Institute for Sustainable Development

Savita grew up in and has been working in cantonments, which are former Army areas created by the British that don't have the same bodies and governance as the rest of India. Her grandfather started the schools in her cantonment, where she studied psychology and worked in different areas of community development. There is supposed to be a Cantonment board, but no one understands their rights and responsibilities. The denial of rights in the areas has been unconstitutional, yet, no one is willing to address the issues because they lie in the purview of the Cantonment board. Advocacy has been challenging in this context. There are slums within cantonment areas who are the children of the domestic and other 'help' that were brought in to service the British and army officers. This is a little-understood population.

Savita collects data while dealing with a deep sense of fear about speaking up or getting involved in learning about rights amongst the members of her community. Savita's work has made the ICDS (Integrated Child Development service Scheme) accessible to the people of the cantonment and enabled the establishment of 'Anganwadi's' (daycare and malnutrition centers).



# Shilpa Kashelkar

Project Manager - Development Initiative for Self Help and Awakening (DISHA)



Shilpa is a dedicated professional with more than 20 years of progressive and multifarious experience in Social Work and Interdisciplinary fields. She is a visiting faculty at the College of Social Work, Mumbai University. Shilpa has worked in the social field, primarily with HIV+ groups, the LGBTQ population, and with sex workers within slum communities in Mumbai. She's also worked with Muslim women for law reform and justice throughout India.

Shilpa has spent many years getting to know different communities, gaining their trust, and learning their issues and cultures in order to be an effective ally and advocate. She moved to Pune in February 2018 to work at DISHA to coordinate various women empowerment projects at rural communities. Presently she is guiding a leadership development program for women self-help group members, and handling a program on gender, economic, legal, political and health issues for girls and women. She's most active in a Rotary cow project, where she is committed to encouraging women to take an active part in decision making and financial matters in cow rearing process. She is also connected to state networks that develop and conduct trainings on governance for women sarpanches, and sees the need for a stronger advocacy lens to improve the lives of women. Shilpa is an active member of various peace and women networks and movements.



## Urmila Salunkhe

Program Officer - Akshara Centre



Urmila has been involved with Akshara Centre since she received a scholarship from them as an adolescent. She has been employed officially with Akshara since 2007 working on their various campaigns for girls and youth including scholarship provision and technical training for 300 girls per year. Right now she is managing the “Empowering Dream Program.” Urmila has adapted the training each year to fit the girls’ interests—this year they are more interested in design and architecture, video and photography.



# Deepa Pawar



## Founder and Director - Anubhuti

Deepa Pawar is the founder and director of Anubhuti, a young women-led organization working for equity, justice, and democracy. A member of a vulnerable nomadic tribe, Deepa began working as a social activist when she was 14 years old. She has spent nearly two decades working with women, communities, NGOs, and state and local governments on issues of gender, health, rights, community development, and sanitation.

Deepa's primary interest area is youth leadership. In years of working with young women and men, she has formed youth groups and mentored young leaders to advance gender equity and rights in their own families and communities, as well as at the national level.

Deepa is a core team member of the nationally and internationally acclaimed Right to Pee campaign, a grassroots, young women-led initiative for safe, accessible, and dignified public toilets for women, girls, trans persons, and the disabled. As a voice for social and economic justice for girls and women, she writes in newspapers and magazines, speaks on news channels, and advocates with government officials and political leaders. Deepa was a finalist for the CII Foundation's Women Exemplar Award in Health in 2018 and is the winner of the 2018 Tell Her Story contest held by UC Berkeley.