

**Title:** Persuading, protesting and exchanging favours: strategies used by Indian sex workers to win local support for their HIV prevention programmes

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**More details/abstract:** Given that the communities which are most vulnerable to HIV often have little control over their own lives and their health-related behaviour, HIV prevention policies increasingly recommend that HIV prevention projects work to build relationships with powerful external groups (i.e., build “bridging social capital”). To aid conceptualisation of how community organisations may build such social capital, this paper outlines a typology of strategies for influencing local stakeholders. We present a study of two successful Indian sex workers' organisations, VAMP and DMSC, focusing on how the organisations have influenced three groups of stakeholders, namely police, politicians and local social organisations. Interviews with project employees (45), with representatives of the three groups of stakeholders (12) and fieldwork diaries recording 6 months of observation in each site provide the data. Three approaches emerged. “Persuading” refers to the practice of holding information-giving meetings with stakeholders and requesting their support. It appears to build “weak” social ties. “Protesting”; entails a collective confrontation with stakeholders, and appears to be useful when the stakeholder has a public image to protect that would be tarnished by protest, and when the protestors can stake a legitimate claim that their rights are being denied. In “exchanging favours”, the sex workers' organisations find creative ways to position themselves as offering valued resources to their stakeholders (such as useful information on criminal activities for the police, a stage and audience for politicians or a celebration for local social organisations) as incentives for their support. In conclusion, we discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, the implications for social capital theorising and implications for community HIV prevention.

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# **Persuading, protesting and exchanging favours: Strategies used by Indian sex workers to win local support for their HIV prevention programmes**

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## **Abstract**

Given that the communities which are most vulnerable to HIV often have little control over their own lives and their health-related behaviour, HIV prevention policies increasingly recommend that HIV prevention projects work to build relationships with powerful external groups (i.e. build 'bridging social capital'). To aid conceptualisation of *how* community organisations may build such social capital, this paper outlines a typology of strategies for influencing local stakeholders. We present a study of 2 successful Indian sex workers' organisations, VAMP and DMSC, focusing on how the organisations have influenced 3 groups of stakeholders, namely, police, politicians, and local social organisations. Interviews with project employees (45), with representatives of the 3 groups of stakeholders (12), and fieldwork diaries recording 6 months of observation in each site provide the data.

Three approaches emerged. 'Persuading' refers to the practice of holding information-giving meetings with stakeholders and requesting their support. It appears to build 'weak social ties'. 'Protesting' entails a collective confrontation with stakeholders, and appears to be useful when the stakeholder has a public image to protect that would be tarnished by protest, and when the protestors can stake a legitimate claim that their rights are being denied. In 'exchanging favours', the sex workers' organisations find creative ways to position themselves as offering valued resources to their stakeholders (such as useful information on criminal activities for the police, a stage and audience for politicians, or a celebration for local social organisations), as incentives for their support. In conclusion, we discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, the implications for social capital theorising, and implications for community HIV prevention.

**Key-words:** sex workers; India; community mobilization; partnerships; social capital; HIV prevention

As community organisations are increasingly being called upon to take the lead for HIV prevention (NACO, 2007; UNAIDS, 2007), recent attention has highlighted the importance of such organisations building alliances with other groupings (Nair & Campbell, 2008). Such alliances are hoped to compensate for the fact that the communities most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS are often communities that are marginalised from sources of power and with little control over their own health-related behaviour. Theoretically, such arguments are often informed by concepts of social capital, and in particular, 'bridging social capital'. 'Bridging social capital' refers to networks which link a community to potentially beneficial groups beyond that local community (Gittel & Vidal, 1998). Little is known about how communities forge such relationships – in other words, how bridging social capital is created. This paper seeks to contribute to understandings of the strategies which community organisations use to build beneficial connections with local groupings. We call these local groupings 'stakeholders', since, to the extent that they have a relation with the marginalised community, they have a stake in its trajectory.

We outline a typology of strategies for influencing stakeholders, drawing both on published literature, and on data from 2 sex-worker-led HIV/AIDS interventions in India.

## **HIV in India: Why focus on community-stakeholder engagement?**

In India, HIV infections are concentrated in three historically marginalised social groups: female sex workers, men who have sex with men, and injecting drug users (Chandasekharan et al., 2007; NACO, 2006). The HIV prevention

policies of both national government and international philanthropic organisations focus their efforts on these three “high risk groups” (NACO, 2006, p.ii), giving a special role to Community-Based Organisations (CBOs). CBOs are defined in this context as organisations of people categorised as members of one of the “high risk groups”, e.g. sex workers’ organisations. India’s National AIDS Control Programme III (2006-2011) aims for 50% of all targeted HIV prevention interventions to be handed over to CBOs by 2011 (NACO, 2006).

While respecting the skills and role of marginalised communities is laudable, there are also strong arguments that relying on communities alone is unrealistic (Nair & Campbell, 2008). Affected communities often lack control over their health-related behaviour, with the actions of more powerful others having a determining influence (Campbell, Nair & Maimane, 2007). At the level of the sexual encounter, sex workers’ male clients and managers often have greater control over whether condoms are used than does the sex worker herself (Sedyaningsih-Mamahit & Gortmaker, 1999). At the level of HIV prevention projects, sex workers’ active participation has often been undermined by risks of stigmatisation, or police repression (Asthana & Oostvogels, 1996). From a more positive point of view, stakeholders such as representatives of public services or politicians have the potential to channel useful resources to sex workers in their HIV prevention efforts (Basu *et al.*, 2004). Overall, this line of argument is a case for community organisations to make special efforts to manage their relationships with others so as to be in a position to influence them in positive ways. Such arguments are making their way into policy and practice, with some form of networking with stakeholders becoming a key recommended component of interventions (e.g. NACO, 2007). It is not yet clear, however, what strategies community organisations might use to influence their stakeholders.

## **Building bridging social capital**

We reviewed literature on community-stakeholder relations in the context of HIV/AIDS, to begin to elucidate possible strategies for building bridging social capital. Although not explicitly identified in the literature as 'strategies for building bridging social capital', 3 potential approaches emerged. We define these three approaches here, to provide a context for the presentation of our findings. We then use our presentation of data to illustrate these strategies in action, to explore the strengths and weaknesses of each strategy, and to consider the conditions under which each strategy appears most suitable.

In practice and policy, in India, the main means suggested for winning local support is 'doing advocacy' or 'sensitisation'. These take the form of meetings between sex workers and police, policy-makers or the media (Avahan, 2008; NACO, 2007; Biradavolu, Burriss, George, Jena, & Blankenship, 2009; Dandona et al, 2005). Such meetings are intended to provide information to the stakeholders, to clear up misunderstandings, reduce stigma, and provide an opportunity to make a request for help. We call this approach 'persuading'.

The second approach, protesting, is informed by a tradition of social movement literature, and argues that the strength of community mobilisation efforts is in their ability to mobilise collective protests, demanding recognition of their rights and practical support from stakeholders (De Castro-Silva *et al.*, 2008; Parker & Aggleton, 2005). In contrast to the polite overtures of the persuading approach, collective protest is combative and adversarial.

Persuading and protesting are relatively well-established and distinct approaches to securing better treatment by local stakeholders. Recent ethnographic work suggests an additional, more complex and contradictory approach, using concepts such as 'patron-client' relations (Evans & Lambert, 2008; Swidler, 2009) or 'rewarding engagement' (Friedman & Mottiar, 2005). These authors have found that community organisations often do not choose to pose themselves as adversaries through protest, nor do they simply seek to influence through verbal requests. Rather, communities are portrayed as engaging with their stakeholders, negotiating support, and making bargains.

In this paper, we use the term 'exchanging favours' to describe this third approach.

## **Study sites**

Our study is based in two of the longest-established and highest profile sexworker-led CBOs in India.

DMSC<sup>1</sup> (Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, or Unstoppable Women's United Committee) is an organization of sex workers based in Kolkata, with a presence throughout West Bengal. Working in partnership with an NGO, the STD/HIV Intervention Programme (or SHIP), by 2001, DMSC was running HIV prevention interventions in 51 sites, claiming to serve 40,000 sex workers, and by 2008, DMSC claimed a membership of 65,000. Outcome evaluations of their HIV interventions have demonstrated increases in condom use and decreases in STIs (Jana et al 1998; Basu et al, 2004).

VAMP<sup>2</sup> (*Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad*, or Prostitutes' Organisation Against Injustice) is a sex workers' collective based in an agricultural area of Maharashtra, in the town of Sangli. In collaboration with an NGO, called SANGRAM, VAMP operates in rural areas, along highways, in villages and towns along the Maharashtra-Karnataka border, seeking to support a population of approximately 5,000 sex workers.

Both CBOs were formally established in 1995, emerging from NGO-led HIV prevention programmes initiated in the early 1990s. The CBOs now run the HIV prevention activities, which centre on peer education delivered by sex workers, STI clinics, and condom distribution. However, they have also significantly expanded the scope of their work. In the early years of the interventions, sex workers and the social workers and activists who worked with them developed an increasingly social and contextual understanding of

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see [www.durbar.org](http://www.durbar.org)

<sup>2</sup> See [www.sangram.org](http://www.sangram.org)

the threats to sex workers' health (Jana, Basu, Rotheram-Borus, & Newman, 2004). The lack of a sufficient income was a major risk factor. In addition, they noted that HIV/AIDS appeared a distant threat to sex workers who faced daily harassment or violence from local men, or risked arrest and extortion in police raids. Such groups also undermined HIV prevention efforts, for instance, intimidating health promotion workers, refusing access to buildings, or refusing to allow public health promotion events to take place. In response, both DMSC and VAMP broadened their activities, to include advocating with a wide group of stakeholders, seeking to win their support for their HIV prevention work.

This paper focuses on the efforts of DMSC and VAMP to influence the actions of three groups of people who have a profound effect on sex workers' lives within the red light area: the police, politicians, and local social organisations.

## **The power nexus in the red light areas**

On the borders of legality and illegality, the subject of stigmatisation and fear, the red light areas are relatively contained communities, isolated from their neighbours. They are not disorganised, but have complex social hierarchies, in which three interlinked groups are of particular local importance.

Firstly, the police have an active interest in the red light areas, due to the potentially incriminating activities being undertaken. The roles of the police include conducting raids to rescue trafficked women or minors, stopping sex workers from soliciting publicly (through arrests or threats of arrest), and pursuing sex workers' complaints against troublemakers (Biradavolu et al., 2009). According to sex workers, policing practices are seriously flawed, with raids often violent, traumatic, and resulting in wrongful arrests, police reluctant to register sex workers' complaints, and frequent demands for large bribes.

Secondly, politicians whose constituency includes the red light area seek to exert their influence to obtain votes, using both threats and offers of support. They can promise better infrastructure, smooth the way for individual sex workers and the CBO in their interactions with government offices or police, help sex workers to resolve local problems, or threaten a loss of support or punishment if they are not elected.

The politicians' local presence is made tangible through the third important set of actors, local social organisations, which include the local branches of the political parties, clubs associated with the parties, and the strong arm of *goondas* (locally translated as 'anti-socials' or 'rowdies', *goondas* are men whose reputation for violence and coercion makes people obey their demands). The underground and conflictual nature of red light areas means that sex workers have often had a need for powerful men to take their side in conflicts or disputes. Local *goondas* and local organisations (with the back up of political parties) have fulfilled that role, in exchange for protection money and votes. Politicians need the help of local organisations to bring out voters, and consequently may turn a blind eye to sexual exploitation and physical abuse carried out by members of these organisations.

Against this unpromising background, both CBOs have managed to negotiate significantly improved relationships with each of these local groups. In relation to the police, sex workers' complaints are now much more likely to be registered and attended to, and violent raids are fewer. Politicians have used their influence to provide significant infrastructure: in Sangli, improving the roads and drainage, and in Kolkata, donating land for the construction of a clinic. Both CBOs have developed a more 'live and let live' relation with the local organisations, so that there is less direct harassment and opposition, and occasional cooperation. In this paper, we seek to understand what the sex workers' organisations have done to foster those more supportive relations.



## **Methods**

### ***Data collection***

Data collection in Kolkata was carried out by RB (3<sup>rd</sup> author), and in Sangli by AS (2<sup>nd</sup> author). Both are women with several years of experience working with sex workers and fluent in the local language. Data collection began in each site with an orientation phase, in which interviews and observations were undertaken jointly by the 1<sup>st</sup> author and the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> authors, in the interest of achieving consistency. Observation notes were recorded in daily fieldwork diaries. The present analysis focuses on observations of events where the CBOs came into contact with their stakeholders, such as a confrontation with police, or a public meeting with politicians in attendance. We draw on interviews with project employees, including both sex worker employees (30) and non-sex-worker employees (15), and interviews with representatives of politicians, police, and local social organizations (12). See Table 1 for details of the sample used for the present analysis.

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INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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### ***Data analysis***

We analysed the data from DMSC and VAMP together, with the aim of producing an interpretation which made sense of stakeholder relations in both cases. Analysis took place in 3 stages. The first, descriptive stage, conducted by the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> authors, extracted every reference to the relationship between the CBOs and their important stakeholders. Using this data, the second, analytical stage (conducted by the 1<sup>st</sup> author), sought to condense this array of references into a set of distinct strategies. Interpretation of the strategies and choice of terminology was achieved in team meetings among all 3 authors. We conducted a workshop and meetings with both CBOs to

share our initial interpretations and seek critical feedback. Their feedback generally concurred with our analysis but added nuance and precision.

## **Findings**

### ***Persuading***

We use the term 'persuading' to describe efforts to win stakeholders' support which are based on friendly overtures and verbal requests, without the force of any other kind of leverage. DMSC and VAMP members create a great variety of opportunities to build connections. DMSC has a designated 'Liaison Officer' who is well acquainted with police officers, government officers, journalists, celebrities, and the red light area's political representatives at local, state and national levels. She has their phone numbers on her mobile phone, and can request a meeting. Persuading is used in a range of forms – from relatively formal invited meetings, to small-scale visits, and informal relationship-building.

In Kolkata, the STD/HIV Intervention Programme's funding stream requires that the Project holds various meetings in its intervention areas – in the largest area, Sonagachi, the target is 30 meetings per month. These meetings are held for a variety of local groupings, including madams, pimps, police, male clients of sex workers, members of the local clubs, sex workers' boyfriends, and local sex workers. The format of the meetings is usually that 15 to 40 people are brought together for about 1 hour, to listen to short talks presented by DMSC representatives. Common themes are educational talks on HIV prevention and transmission, an explanation of the work that DMSC does, and a request for help (or at least for no obstruction) in carrying out that work. The audience usually sits quietly and is invited to ask questions after the speeches. Snacks are served, and signatures or thumb impressions are taken to record how many people attended, as part of the project's reporting procedures. In the meetings which we observed, a relatively formal atmosphere prevailed, with little discussion between audience and speakers.

The audience were pleased to receive their packets of snacks, and appeared keen to leave as soon as the meeting was concluded.

Both organisations also initiate smaller-scale, more informal meetings with their stakeholders including politicians, police, and local clubs. VAMP employees described meetings which they held with local small stall-holders or shopkeepers in the red light area, asking them not to harass the sex workers, and educating them about sexual health. They outlined a key argument (which DMSC workers have also used with the intermediaries in the sex trade) that the shopkeepers' business depended upon the sex workers, and thus that the shopkeepers should respect the sex workers and facilitate VAMP's work. At meetings with police and politicians, both organizations typically begin by explaining the nature of their work, emphasising that it is not threatening, that they are doing good work, and making the case that sex workers should not be stigmatised or discriminated against.

Our members would go to police station and explain to the police about VAMP. We would tell them: "we work in the health field for the prevention of HIV. Ours is a budding organization." We would ask for their support. Police realized the authenticity of our organization working for sex workers. We have done small plays in the police station as well. We gave them information on HIV, STD, and the importance of condoms. (VAMP, Project worker, int 10).

Not all of the overtures made by DMSC and VAMP come with an explicit request for help. On her visits to government offices, DMSC's Liaison Officer would pop her head around the door of her contacts, in her words, to say 'hi, hello', with no apparent agenda other than maintaining a sense of friendliness. VAMP workers mentioned an occasion where they visited the police station, upon the retirement of a police officer, to garland him and wish him well.

The effectiveness of such apparently unconditional relationship-building is difficult to assess. Employees of both DMSC and VAMP felt that friendly

relations and a sense of familiarity with the project and its representatives were key starting points for more substantial requests or negotiations, although they may not have produced any immediate outcome. Inviting a politician to inaugurate a clinic, or requesting a meeting with a senior police officer, for instance, were seen to be facilitated by a sense of familiarity.

### ***Protesting***

Both DMSC and VAMP explicitly articulate a philosophy of empowerment in which solidarity or unity among sex workers is of primary importance. Inspired by the labour movement and women's movements, they cite 'strength in numbers' as the source of their power, through their ability to mobilise large numbers of women to protest and demand fairer treatment. In both sites, representatives of the sex workers' organisations described instances where they had called together a large group of women to protest at the police station, at government offices, or to politicians. The visible and noisy presence of a large group (often over 100) in a public protest is difficult for their stakeholders to ignore, drawing public attention and disrupting their everyday activities. A focus group of sex worker leaders of DMSC discussed how they had taken this approach to a national scale. In 2008, a Bill (modifications to the Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act) was before the Indian Parliament which sought to criminalise renting out a premises for the purposes of sex work (i.e. criminalising brothel-keepers), and purchasing sexual services (i.e. criminalising clients) among other things. DMSC strongly opposed the Bill, arguing that it made sex workers' livelihood impossible, and organised a series of rallies in 3 Indian states and at the Indian Parliament in Delhi.

Once established and recognised, the sex workers' organisations no longer have to actually hold a protest, but simply to threaten one. For example, one of VAMP's Project Workers explained how the sex workers in one area generally support a particular political party, because a former Chief Minister

of the state had donated government land for the building of their houses – so that their homes and brothels had a more secure status. If the current politicians of that party neglect to help the sex workers, they have threatened a demonstration (*dharna*) at the statue of the former Chief Minister, to protest that the party betrays his memory.

While our research participants were enthusiastic about the role of collective protest, our observations revealed that it is not used indiscriminately or even frequently. During our 6 months of fieldwork in each site, for instance, there were no cases of confrontational collective protests. Among the participants' discussions of previous protests, three types of issues were likely to trigger a protest: a violent police raid, a failure of government services to provide sex workers with their entitlements (e.g. to free condoms or appropriate treatment at the hospital), and a failure of politicians to represent the interests of the sex workers' constituency. Collective protest was not used to influence local social organisations. What is common in instances of collective protest is that the stakeholders have an important public image to protect, and the sex workers are able to occupy a 'moral high ground' with symbolic legitimacy (being denied their entitlements, discriminated against, or subject to violence and harassment). Both organisations' protests are usually supported and enhanced by activists and journalists – enabled by the sense of legitimacy of their demands and the public interest in the topic.

Confirming that collective protest is only used under restricted conditions, representatives of both organisations spoke of careful efforts to maintain friendly relations with police, politicians and other social organisations, and only to use their collective strength as a last resort.

“Sometimes we need to speak to them [police] sweetly and sometimes in fight.” (VAMP, Project worker, int 2)

“This is my personal thinking that instead of categorizing an individual as enemy, its better to keep him neutral. I will maintain this in my work.” (DMSC, Project Worker, int 3)

### ***Exchanging favours***

The two approaches discussed thus far allow for a choice between a nonconfrontational ‘rapport-building’ approach which might create familiarity but has little forcefulness, and a confrontational ‘protest’ approach which has force, and perhaps risks creating enemies. The third approach, ‘exchanging favours’ is a more nuanced and ambiguous process, in which the CBOs have creatively identified ways in which they can offer something of value to their stakeholders, explicitly or implicitly, in return for their co-operation.

#### *Exchanging favours with politicians*

Sex workers' primary means of influencing politicians is through their role as voters in a politician's constituency. For instance, a local-level politician in Maharashtra, who became a crucial supporter, was initially approached at election time, by 4-5 representatives, requesting his presence in their red light area for 10 minutes every day.

During campaigning, you have to reassure everyone who is in front of you. So I said ‘okay’. (VAMP, local politician, int 14).

Upon his election, he followed up his commitment and learnt of ongoing exploitation of the women by *goondas* connected with the opposing political party which had previously been in power. Perhaps with a political motivation to undermine the opposition, perhaps with a motivation to help his constituents, he proceeded to use his authority with the police to prevent further exploitation of the women. Exchanging votes for supportive action is a relatively formalised and familiar relation with politicians. In other instances, the exchange is less explicit.

During our fieldwork in Kolkata, on several occasions, politicians from the local, state, and national levels accepted invitations to public events being hosted by DMSC, such as an event promoting DMSC's work on antitrafficking, a celebration of International Women's Day, and a festival celebrating sex workers' international collective struggle for their rights. DMSC was keen to secure the politicians' presence, to bestow public legitimacy upon their project, to demonstrate to the politician their levels of local support, and to encourage the politician to endorse their various causes.

Politicians, of course, do not have to accept the CBOs' invitations to attend their events, yet many do. What do they stand to gain by attending? They are usually invited to take up an important formal role, such as Chief Guest, or speaker, which furthers their public image as important people responding to the needs of the downtrodden. In this regard, sex workers' recognition as 'poor, fallen women', among the most destitute and hopeless in society, who thus deserve the attention and help from respected members of society, becomes a resource that they can capitalise upon. Their status at the bottom of the social hierarchy gives sex workers value in the eyes of the media as a potential good story, and by association, in the eyes of politicians, who may stand to gain positive media coverage through doing 'good social work' for 'poor sex workers'. In Kolkata, we observed that the presence of politicians and journalists at the CBOs' public meetings were mutually reinforcing. The presence of one was invariably accompanied by the presence of the other, and in one instance, as soon as a prominent politician had finished his speech, leaving the venue early, the journalists promptly departed.

Meeting the politicians' interests, in this way, is not unproblematic, however. Both CBOs encourage an activist, de-stigmatising, and empowering discourse about sex workers which refuses to accept that they are poor victims in need of help from kindly donors. In Kolkata, at a public meeting concerning the problem of trafficking, the Member of Parliament's speech went directly against the CBO's philosophy, with a suggestion that the sex workers

primarily wanted to leave the sex trade and that the government and NGOs should help them to do so. The fieldworker observing the event was surprised that the CBO representatives, although they campaign against this point of view vociferously and daily, let the politician speak his mind without a challenge. Discussions after the event revealed that the CBO representatives did not wish to take any risks with the politician's support, and felt it more important to maintain that relationship than to initiate an argument. In this instance, we are suggesting that there is an informal and implicit exchange of a useful public platform for the politician's practical and symbolic support.

Holding such events is made possible by the existence of an HIV prevention project, which mandates and funds a certain number of public meetings at regular intervals, and the sex workers' organisation's access to membership fees, which can also be used to fund public events. Such resources are creatively capitalised upon by the CBOs, to create media-friendly events of interest to politicians. Even without any formal agreement of their exchange, the prospect of benefiting from future public platforms binds politicians into a reciprocal relationship with the CBOs.

#### *Exchanging favours with local social organisations*

Unlike the police and politicians, the local clubs and organisations are not in any formal way answerable to sex workers (so protest is an unlikely strategy). Hence, exchanging favours is particularly useful. To garner the local clubs' support, DMSC offers to support their social activities, such as sports days for children or religious festivals. VAMP has faced particular opposition from local branches of political parties which are concerned with the emancipation of *dalit* people (formerly called 'untouchable'). These parties are opposed to Hinduism because of its association with the caste system, and opposed to sex work, because they see it as exploitation of *dalit* women. They were especially enraged at the sex workers' celebration of the 'tying the beads' ceremony, a Hindu religious ritual accompanying the entrance of young women to the sex trade (in the *Devadasi* system). For some time, they were



at loggerheads, causing significant obstacles to the CBO's work. To deal with this conflict, VAMP activists came up with a compromise. They emphasised to the political groups that their aims were the same: to empower and emancipate *dalit* women, and offered to create and fund a public celebration of *Ambedkar Jayanti* – the festival celebrating the birthday of Babasaheb Ambedkar, the founder of the modern movement against untouchability – instead of celebrating 'tying the beads'. The local political groups were pleased with a 'free' festival supporting their interests and advancing their mission and profile locally. Subsequently, sex workers reported, they became much more accepting of the CBO.

### *Exchanging favours with the police*

The sex workers have an additional resource to draw upon in their relations with the police, in the form of laws protecting citizen's rights. Project workers in both sites mention legal awareness as having played a key role in sex workers' negotiations for more favourable policing. In this sense, they do not regard fair treatment by the police as a 'favour' but as their entitlement. The importance of this formal route to improving policing practices does not preclude the operation of more informal exchanges, however.

During one of the research team meetings with representatives of VAMP, a participant excused himself to take a phone call from the Police Inspector. It transpired that the Police Inspector was investigating a robbery, had few leads, and was calling to request the sex workers' help. Living and working in the red light areas, sex workers have privileged access to information and awareness regarding criminal or suspicious activities. In response to a question about what had convinced the police to reduce arrests and abuse of sex workers, one Project Worker explained:

Also, police benefited from us. We provide them with information of *goondas* and robbers who spend a lot of money. Or inform them about

fake money. This way the rapport developed. (VAMP, Project Worker, int 2).

Thus, gaining access to information about criminal activities is an incentive for the police to co-operate with the sex workers. Although it is not spoken of by either side as an explicit exchange of one incentive for another, and VAMP representatives speak more generally in terms of 'building rapport', this information is a resource which they consciously use to influence the police.

Offering such a favour to the police does not transform the relationship entirely: raids, arrests and discriminatory treatment of sex workers persist, but according to our informants, have reduced in frequency. Nor is this approach without risks. Suspected criminals are also powerful stakeholders in the red light areas. Informing on them risks retribution, so it must be done with care. Moreover, if the accused is a son of a local sex worker, or in a position of power within the sex trade, sex workers may avoid informing on them, as it would risk creating a difficult conflict.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have presented a threefold typology of strategies available to marginalised communities to influence their local stakeholders: persuading, protesting, and exchanging favours. We here discuss each strategy in turn, examining its particular strengths and weaknesses, and considering its relation to the concept of social capital. We then consider implications of our argument for HIV prevention practice.

Although the polite and friendly activities of 'persuading' have no forceful leverage over the stakeholder, and do not observably result in concrete supportive action, they are considered by Project Workers to be a key foundation for later requests. From a social capital point of view, such activities may be generating 'weak social ties', i.e. relationships of

acquaintance, which have been argued to play an important role in improving people's prospects (Granovetter, 1983).

Collective protest, in contrast to 'persuading', is undertaken with specific demands, forcefully backed up by an embarrassing or inconvenient public demonstration. Somewhat counter to the "bridging social capital' perspective that collaborative relationships are preferable to conflictual ones, the CBOs sometimes decided that their stakeholders' behaviour was intolerable and that the risks of creating antagonism by mobilising a protest were justified. On the other hand, their frequent efforts to avoid conflict do suggest that collaborative relationships were highly prized.

Finally, we have sought to draw attention to 'exchanging favours' as a potentially powerful way of gaining leverage over stakeholders, by offering them something which they value. Exchanging favours is fraught with dilemmas, as the CBOs find themselves advancing the stakeholders' interests which may be at odds with their own. Exchange relations are a form of social capital backed up by mutual interest in co-operation, rather than by goodwill. They are stronger than 'weak ties' of familiarity, being based on valued resources and the potential of reciprocation.

In our case studies, we have found that both CBOs draw on all 3 strategies fluidly in calculated efforts to cultivate support. None of these strategies is ultimately preferable over another. The most appropriate strategy depends upon the context, including the degree of establishment of the CBO. A fledgling CBO, without a fully developed membership or public profile may not be in a position to sustain the risks of protest, or have a favour worth offering. At early stages, persuasion may be important as a foundation for later exertion of pressure. As they become more established and acquire a history of effective protest or exchanges of favours, CBOs' persuasive efforts may gain additional traction, with possible protest or exchanges of favours motivating stakeholders' co-operation. Related to this time dimension is an important question of 'who' represents CBOs in negotiations with

stakeholders. Stakeholders may initially not recognise sex workers as legitimate negotiators, preferring to speak to non-community advocates. The process of shifting from non-sex-worker representatives to sex worker representatives raises complex issues worthy of further investigation

For HIV prevention practice, our analysis suggests that the currently recommended 'rapport-building' skills for CBOs are only a first step in equipping community organizations to build productive relations with their stakeholders. To capitalise on the friendly rapport that they build, CBOs need highly sophisticated skills in political thinking and strategic negotiation – so that they may make good judgements about when and how to employ protest, or offer an exchange of favours. Establishing an HIV/AIDS intervention is a complex, multifaceted, and political task. If community organisations are to be tasked with running HIV prevention programmes, they need to become sophisticated political actors, not simply grassroots health promoters.

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**Table 1: Interviewees**

	<b>DMSC</b>	<b>VAMP</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Sex worker project staff</b>	11	19	30
<b>Non-sex worker project staff</b>	10	5	15
<b>Politicians</b>	5	1	6
<b>Police</b>	2	1	3

<b>Local social organisations</b>	2	1	3
<b><i>Totals</i></b>	<i>30</i>	<i>27</i>	<i>57</i>