

## **Meena Saraswathi Seshu**

Meena Saraswathi Seshu is the General Secretary of the Sampada Grameen Mahila Sanstha (SANGRAM), a health and human rights NGO based in the rural districts of western Maharashtra and north Karnataka in India. In 1992, Meena was instrumental in guiding SANGRAM in the change of direction of its work.

Under her stewardship, SANGRAM began to address social inequality and to promote justice among marginalized communities, discriminated against because of sexual orientation, sex work, HIV status, gender, caste and religious minority.

Meena has steered this women-centered organization to focus on building solidarity among diverse and marginalized communities by using a rights-centered approach to self-determination that organizes the voiceless to collectivize. SANGRAM is an umbrella organisation that has initiated communities to collectivise to fight for their rights: Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad (female sex workers), Muskan (male and transgender women in sex work), Mitra (children of sex workers), Vidrohi Mahila (rural women's collective) and Nazariya, (Muslim women's collective).

Her work around health through a human rights approach embraces the philosophy of transforming public health systems from the grassroots by community-based monitoring and planning as a key intervention to reclaim public health systems. The approach has been developed in collaboration with public health systems but is led by a network of civil society organisations. The approach focuses on claiming rights, changing power relations, improving services and working towards an accountable public health system.

Meena began a regional initiative called the Sex Workers and Allies South Asia (SWASA) that aimed to assist sex workers from Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Sri Lanka to form national alliances across movements resulting in joint submissions to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee. Meena joined the ICASO board in 2010.