

Notice that it is not only the commercial sex workers themselves that make up the social structure of their community. As you have seen above, the residential CSWs social structure is made up of the owner, manager, chairlady, deputy chairlady and policing agent. In addition, we identified both the clients and partners (boyfriends) of the CSWs to be important parts of the social structure. Without their cooperation, the women will not be able to consistently use condoms. We also feel it is important to include children, since many of the CSWs have their children living with them in the hotels or visiting them from time to time. Often there are chemists or injectionists who live near the hotels or visit them regularly to provide services to the women living there. All of these people make up the social structure of the hotel community.

### What is "community"?

Before we begin to talk about entering into the CSW community, it may be helpful to talk a little about communities. Just what is "a community", anyway? Are all the people that live in your town a community? How about all the people that live in your neighbourhood? We would like you to be very careful about how you use the word "community". A community is not simply a group of people that live in close proximity to each other. Being physically close enough to have frequent, meaningful contact is an important part of being a community, but it is not all. In order for a community of people to exist, there must be some social structure, and some relationship between the people setting the norms, roles and patterns of behaviour that are acceptable for the group. There must be a sense of "common good" among the members of the group. "Community" is not necessarily where you live, but rather something that a group of people together can achieve. These ideas are important to keep in mind as you begin your work with CSWs. Never assume that because a group of CSWs live together in the same hotel or work together in the same bar they are a community. There is a struggle for survival going on among these women, and they are fiercely competitive. There is not always the idea of a "common good" among them. You must search deeper, and assist with the building and/or strengthening of what community does exist.

## Fostering Community Life

As was stated earlier, you can never assume that just because people live together, they are functioning as a community. Let us give you an example of how "community" developed in the hotels in Calabar:

### Example from Calabar

When we began our work in Calabar, we wanted to hold monthly meetings of the chairladies from all the hotels to discuss the progress of the project and any other issues they might like to address. However, the owners did not want to allow such meetings to take place, and did everything they could to stop them. We were not even allowed to hold the meetings in the hotels. With time, the owners were willing to let us have our "chairladies' meetings" but they required us to limit the discussion to health topics, and they only allowed the chairladies to attend. Of course we agreed to their conditions, since any meeting would be better than none. With time, we have been able to increase the communication and understanding between the women and the owners to the point where the monthly chairladies' meetings are held in the hotels, and the location of the meeting rotates among the hotels. In addition, all of the women that live in the hotel hosting the meeting are **encouraged** to attend by the owner and manager. Owners from other hotels often attend the chairladies's meetings and even contribute food and other items, which were paid for by the project in the beginning. They actively promote the programme, and support the women's involvement in all aspect of project implementation.

Another example from our own experience will illustrate for you how "community" may not exist when you begin your work, but how it can develop over time and as the result of your intervention. In addition to our monthly "chairladies meetings", we also began regular "proprietor's meetings" that were designed to involve the owners and managers of the hotels in the implementation of the project and provide them with a forum to discuss issues that concerned them. When our meetings with the owners and managers began, only the owners and managers themselves, along with our project staff, were allowed to attend. Again, this illustrates how fragmented the hotel "communities" were at the beginning of the project—so much so that the owners did not even want the women present at their meetings. Over time, however, this has changed. The chairladies are now invited to every proprietor's meeting, and the meeting has become a forum in which the women working in the hotels can discuss problems that have arisen between an owner and the women in a particular hotel. Now the women's grievances can be heard before a meeting of all the owners, and peer pressure among the owners has halted some of the exploitation of the women by the owners.