



Bembala Foundation
Annual Report 2020 - 2021

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Introduction

Bembala Foundation was born over two years ago. Bembala offers support to women and child survivors of abuse. We have continued to help people through the COVID 19 pandemic. As the situation did not allow us to offer our support in person, we instantly set up a Helpline. Our Bembala befrienders have undergone special training to enable them to help extensively through our Helpline. Our ever-helpful partners have been there for us and we are grateful for that.

The Bembala Annual Report 2021 provides insight into the operations of Bembala over the last one year.

Vision and Mission

Bembala's Vision is a community with zero tolerance towards violence; a community that supports survivors of all forms of abuse/distress regardless of socio-economic, cultural or religious background. We aspire to create an easily accessible network of support services across Bangalore.

Our Mission is a coordinated and well-informed approach to violence, abuse, and distress faced by women and children, with sufficient interventions that lead to safe communities and families in Bangalore.

2020 - Our Journey

In February 2020, Bembala Foundation started its second year on a relatively normal note; women survivors walked into our Vydehi Center for support, and we supported local communities through our outreach and awareness sessions. A group of 24 artists participated in a 10-day exhibition of their creations called Oorja Expressions, and dedicated 30% of their earnings from this initiative to Bembala.

11th of March 2020 saw the declaration of the global pandemic, and by the 16th of March, Bembala closed its physical center at Vydehi Hospital. Globally, it was a stressful time for all, managing a work from home situation along with complete responsibility of the household, with no external help. This did not deter Bembala from being accessible; we gave our mobile number to our 100+ survivors so that they would know they could still reach us. When the lockdown was announced on the 24th of March, we went a step further and converted our number into a Helpline. Bembala volunteers jumped right in to get the Helpline up and running. It was very clear to us that our care for survivors must not be disrupted. It was imperative that support systems be up and running to be able to help hapless survivors. Schools had shut down and kids were at home; women were handling additional work and were stuck within four walls, often stranded with their abusers. People lost jobs, there was no food to eat, and some were trying to go back to their villages. Violence rates went up, confirming our belief that we needed to keep our Helpline running. Nine of our volunteer befrienders came forward. We quickly set up the process, guidelines and instruction manual, and trained our befrienders to handle the Helpline, with three of the nine taking on supervisory roles. We started running the Helpline from 9.30 A.M. to 4.30 P.M., Monday through Sunday.

By the 30th of March, Shakthi Shalini included the Bembala Helpline on their pan-India list of organizations offering support to survivors of domestic violence. As the country slowly unlocked, by the end of May, we moved to a six-day Helpline.

Our social media activity had to keep pace as we had to make women who were stuck at home aware of our availability. We also needed to share safety plans, and messages to neighbors of survivors to become upstanders. We sent audio messages through neighbors and friends to women in lower income neighborhoods who typically worked as house help. Comedian Aporup Acharya (aka MLA Manju, which is his stage name) became one of our recruits for a campaign. We also collaborated with other organizations such as Breakthrough India, and helped translate their messages into the South Indian languages.

Our message about domestic violence and the options available to redress it was also spread through Whitefield Rising Trust volunteers during their food distribution drives. Community champions were recruited among the women in these localities to help other women. In fact, one of our “champions” was herself being abused. We were able to counsel her and give her safety tips under the guise of ration distribution queries over a phone call, as her husband lurked around in the house.

In June 2020, DCP Anuchet helped Bembala open its second center at the Whitefield Police Division. However, with more than 12 policemen catching COVID within weeks of our starting work there, all non-police personnel were asked to stop working from the police station. We continue to support the police in any way we can.

With our Helpline going strong, additional Bembala volunteers expressed their willingness to be trained to help with befriending over the Helpline. We started their training on the 10th of July and we now have 12 plus volunteers providing active support on the Helpline. By the end of January 2021, we helped over 90 women and children and took over 228 calls, with many calling in several times.

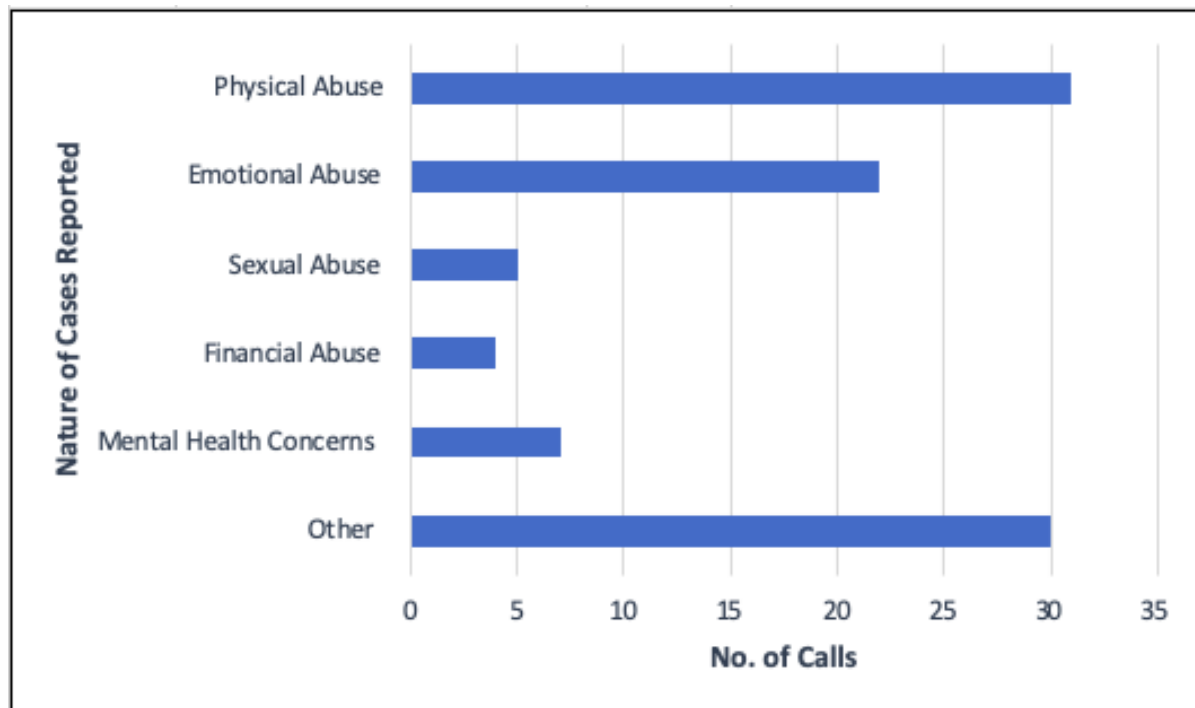
Bembala Foundation also conducted various training programs and awareness talks for partner organizations, school children, communities, and even a technology company. We conducted training for Vidya teachers and Teach for India fellows, wherein we talked about how they could help their students who were stuck at home and were facing abuse. We had a very interesting story-time and awareness session for Ramagondanahalli Government school kids.

As we finish what has been a really eventful and unique year in our lifetimes, it is important to note the passion and sincerity of volunteers, who despite going through stressful times themselves, diligently gave their valuable heart and time to be the support for those survivors who reached out. Putting together a manual and training eight volunteers to run a Helpline; all of it happened in a couple of weeks when our office was shut down in March. The zeal and commitment of the active volunteers ensured the continuum of care. Our motto for the year has been and continues to be, to bring in more awareness and to empower all, and to ensure the right to safety for all beings.

Reach and Impact

This section illustrates the number of survivors helped by Bembala in the last year, the nature of cases, and the type of interventions by Bembala.

Nature of Cases



Additional Interventions


Nature of Intervention	Cases	Details
Couple Mediations	3	Multiple sessions with each couple, two couples got back together, and one pair was happy at the three month follow up
Shelter	2	Successfully placed two women in shelters despite stringent COVID testing requirements by Shelter Homes
Baby's Adoption enabled	1	
Police Help Sought	2	Police arrived within 15 minutes

Other Categories of Calls



Nature of Call	Cases
Out of State Callers	4
Calls requiring Kannada speaking befrienders	5
Third party callers calling on behalf of someone else needing support	4

Bembala Campaigns in 2020

Bembala ran themed campaigns during the year to create awareness about domestic violence, the rights of survivors of domestic violence, child abuse, gender based violence, and everyday sexism.

<p>DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR RIGHTS (Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005)</p> <p>Domestic Violence Survivors have the right to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a protection order live in the same house claim maintenance custody of children claim compensation <p>If you or someone you know is subject to domestic violence and needs someone to talk to, call our Helpline or WhatsApp us on 9980660548 Mon - Sat 9:30AM - 4:30PM</p> <p>Or write to us at bembalainfo@whitefieldrising.org</p> <p>Bembala is a support centre for women and children facing abuse</p> <p>TALK TO US... WE'RE LISTENING</p> <p>follow us on   </p> 	<p>DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR RIGHTS (Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005)</p> <p>What is a Protection Order</p> <p>A survivor can approach the court for a stay order to prevent her abuser from coming anywhere near her if she is worried about possible violence, harassment or humiliation while she is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> staying with her parents at any other accommodation at her work place near her children's school in a public space <p>If you or someone you know is subject to domestic violence and needs someone to talk to, call our Helpline or WhatsApp us on 9980660548 Mon - Sat 9:30AM - 4:30PM</p> <p>Or write to us at bembalainfo@whitefieldrising.org</p> <p>Bembala is a support centre for women and children facing abuse</p> <p>TALK TO US... WE'RE LISTENING</p> <p>follow us on   </p> 
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September Campaign - Rights of a Domestic Violence Survivor

<p>DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH</p> <p>The most prevalent mental health disorders associated with domestic violence are depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Domestic violence has also been strongly associated with suicidal behavior, sleep and eating disorders, social dysfunction, and abuse of alcohol and drugs.</p>  <p>AN INFOGRAPHIC BY GENPSYCH PC</p>	<p>Do not suffer in silence</p> <p>You are NOT ALONE</p> <p>Call / WhatsApp BEMBALA 9980660548 Mon - Sat 9:30 am - 4:30 pm</p> <p>Email: bembalainfo@whitefieldrising.org</p> 
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October Campaign – Domestic Violence and Mental Health




"What mental health needs is more sunlight, more candour and more unashamed conversation."
- Glenn Close


World Mental Health Day is observed on 10th October every year, with the objective of raising awareness of mental health issues around the world.







Bembala is a support centre for women and children facing abuse



bembalainfo@whitefieldrising.org

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<p>CHILD ABUSE IS GENDER NEUTRAL</p> <p>INDIA CHILD ABUSE SURVEY* FINDINGS</p> <p>53.22% HAVE FACED SEXUAL ABUSE</p> <p>52.94% BOYS 47.06% GIRLS</p> <p>CALL 1098 REPORT IT</p> <p><small>* SURVEY BY : MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT</small></p> <p>BEMBALA OFFERS FREE & CONFIDENTIAL SUPPORT TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN FACING ABUSE</p> <p>CALL 9980660548</p> <p>MONDAY - SATURDAY / 9:30AM - 4:30PM</p> <p>bembalainfo@whitefieldrising.org</p> <p>follow us on   </p> 	 <p>There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.</p> <p>— Nelson Mandela</p>  
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November Campaign - Child Abuse

<p> TAKE ACTION TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE</p> <p>9980660548 Monday - Saturday 9:30 am - 4:30 pm</p> <p>#FORANGETHETHEWORLD #FINDANS #GENERATIONEQUALITY</p> <p>SUPPORTING WOMEN & CHILDREN FACING ABUSE</p> 	<p>16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM 2020</p> <p>TAKE ACTION TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE</p> <p>HOW TO KEEP YOUR CHILD SAFE WHEN YOU ARE FACING ABUSE</p> <p>TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WHEN AND HOW TO CALL 100</p> <p>GIVE THEM A LIST OF TRUSTED FRIENDS & NEIGHBOURS</p> <p>DIAL 100 IN CASE OF PHYSICAL THREAT OF HARM</p> <p>BEMBALA OFFERS FREE AND CONFIDENTIAL SUPPORT TO WOMEN AND CHILDREN FACING ABUSE</p> <p>  9980660548</p> <p>MONDAY - SATURDAY 9:30AM - 4:30PM</p> <p>bembalainfo@whitefieldrising.org</p> <p>  </p> 
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25th of November to 10th of December - Support for the 16 days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence



January 2021 - Everyday Sexism

Events in 2020

This section describes the events conducted by Bembala in 2020.

Webinar Hosted by Vidya

On Friday, the 5th of June, two of our Bembaligas conducted a session hosted by Vidya, an organization that believes in empowering women, and their communities. The session focused on the violence endured by women, and the support systems they can access for help. They discussed how survivors can transform their lives by reaching out. The webinar also had a survivor join in; she bravely spoke about her ordeal and how Bembala helped her overcome it.



Opening of New Bembala Center



On the 15th of June, we opened our second center at the Whitefield Police Station, and started meeting survivors who needed our help. However, with a rise in the number of COVID 19 cases in Bangalore, we have closed the center.

Helpline Training

In July, we held an intensive training program to equip our Bembaligas with everything they need while handling a helpline. They have enhanced their skills and can handle helpline calls effectively.

Awareness Sessions

On Saturday, the 4th of July, Bembala conducted an awareness session organized by the Shantinagar Residents Welfare Association. We spoke about the violence faced by women, and how bystanders can help, thus becoming upstanders.

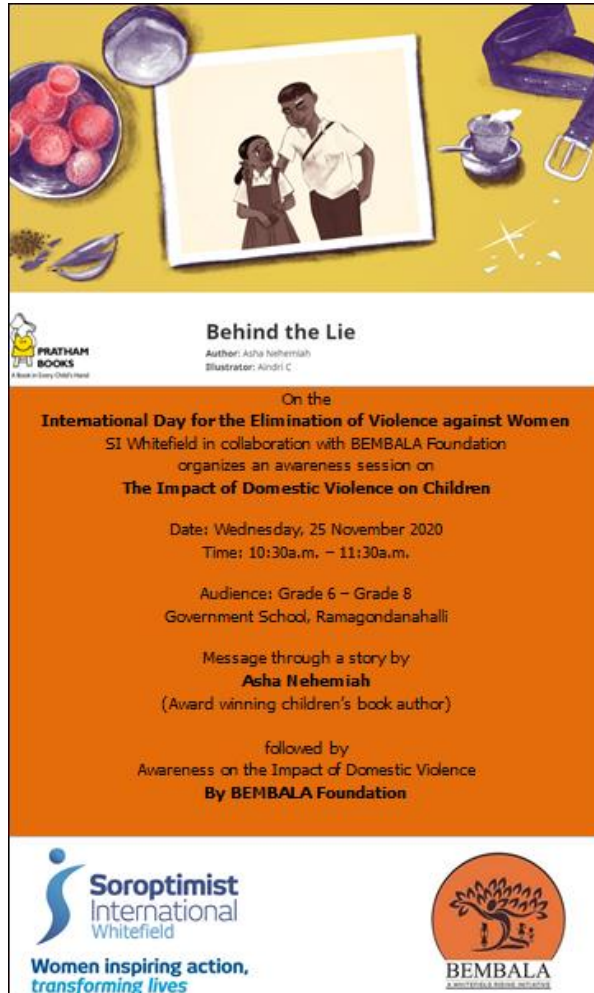
On Thursday, the 9th of July, we conducted an awareness session for the women employees of Sandvine. During the session, we discussed violence, the various forms of help available to survivors in crisis, and the rights of women.

Training

A training session for Teach for India Fellows was held on 29th of September 2020, on Domestic Violence and its Impact on Children. The training covered information on the types of domestic abuse, how it affects children, and how teachers can help children navigate and handle difficult situations.

Kickstart to 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence

To kickstart the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence campaign for 2020, Bembala and Soroptimist International, Whitefield, organized an online event on 25th of November 2020, for children of Grade 6 and 7 of Ramagondanahalli Government School.



The event included book reading by children's author Asha Nehemiah who read the book **Behind the Lie** followed by an awareness talk by Bembala. Bembala's awareness talk sought to educate children who either witness domestic violence in their homes or want to help a friend on how to respond to such acts.

Volunteer Day

To mark International Volunteer Day, Bembala conducted an online volunteer meet on 5th of December 2020. We invited a legal expert to enlighten Bembala volunteers on how the law deals with sexual harassment in the workplace. JK Legal founder, lawyer Samartha Srinivasa, interacted with volunteers and explained the various provisions of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act). The talk helped volunteers understand the working of the POSH Act and how to help survivors who seek help to address issues of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Financials

Following is the summary of Bembala's financials from 1st of February 2020, to 31st of January 2021:

Donations	10,64,750 (in Indian Rupees)
Operational Costs (Salaries, utilities, etc.)	98,452 (in Indian Rupees)

Survivors Speak...

Testimonial from Survivor 1 – in her own words

I appreciate Bembala to help me, support me get through all my problems, I'm very grateful for your time, encouragement and for your professional care and assistance. Thanks for being friendly and reliable. Your care and guidance helped me make better life choices, I wouldn't have been here in this beautiful place if it wasn't for your guidance. Thank you for suggesting ways to achieve my full potential, I can't express how grateful I am to have Bembala's support during my difficult times. You helped guide me to exactly what I wanted from life. Your positive thoughts are always an encouragement for me. The discussions we had gave me great comfort, hope and courage to deal with my problems. You took time for me to understand me and listen to me when no one else was ready to. You saved a once broken relationship, thank you so much for helping us rediscover our happiness together.

Testimonial from Survivor 2

In June 2020, Bembala volunteers were involved in a session with Vidya Foundation during which they discussed domestic violence and what women could do to get help. During the session, one of the survivors who had reached out for help in the early days of our work, came forward to discuss how she found help and support with Bembala when she finally decided to break her silence on being subjected to severe abuse that had made her suicidal. Following is her testimony:

The survivor first described how she had endured abuse from the beginning of her marriage. For someone who had come from a happy childhood home, this completed shocked her and made her reclusive. She did not try to share her experiences with her parents, friends or colleagues as she felt that whatever was happening to her was her fault and needed to stay within four walls. She kept adjusting her personality and the way she behaved to reduce the triggers of violence, and didn't realize that she could reach out for help. When she had a child, she continued to feel the need to protect the "father of her child", but after enduring physical, mental and sometimes even sexual abuse for nearly eleven years, she was at the end of her tether. The abuse had reached a point where she felt that she might lose her life and not be around for her son. Around that time, she happened to see a WhatsApp message about Bembala's services. As the Bembala Center at Vydehi Hospital was near her home, she picked up the courage to walk in. She said that just unburdening herself and talking about her ordeals felt so good, relaxed her, and gave her a lot of strength. She kept telling the audience that Bembala volunteers made her feel better about herself.

They were very supportive and helped her figure out her rights and the recourse she had under the law against domestic violence, and that it was okay to talk about the violence outside the four walls of her house. She left her marital home and eventually shared her story with her friends and family and was given so much love and support. Bembala also helped guide her on safety plans, including leaving the home with all her documents, in addition to her clothes. She concluded the conversation saying that women should be strong and self-reliant, and that she was forever grateful to Bembala for their part in her story.

Volunteers Speak...

I started my journey with Bembala two and half years ago, even before we opened doors to the public at Vydehi. When I joined the Bembala team, I thought that I would volunteer my services for a maximum of six months to a year. However, as a Bembala volunteer, my first interaction with a survivor and her children made me realize that I was in for the long run. A woman in her late 30's reached out for help saying that her alcoholic husband had been torturing her physically as well as sexually. She had grown up girls in a one room home and used to face unbearable embarrassment in front of them due to the sexual abuse. She was at her wit's end. While I started exploring her options with her over several befriending sessions, her husband died. Typical to our system of patriarchy, her in-laws blamed her for his death, accused her of having an extra marital affair, and refused to allow her and her three children to participate in the last rites of the husband. That's when I saw first-hand how a woman can be rendered powerless and helpless, and can be brainwashed into feeling guilt. I knew then that I had to continue volunteering with this organization of volunteers whose primary focus was to support women and children who have faced abuse, whose primary focus was not to dictate solutions but to put the control back in the woman's hands, enabling her to explore her own options.

2020 further stamped that faith in me. Bangalore was one of the first cities in India to reduce interactions in the physical space to curb the spread of COVID 19. As we shut the center at Vydehi, we were filled with apprehension and worry as to how we could provide care for the survivors who would need support. It was so heartening to see that nine of us, despite the pressures that each one of us was facing on the home front, with the stress of the pandemic, children at home and other such issues, put their best foot forward to ensure the continuum of care. The Helpline was started almost immediately. As volunteers, we also conducted awareness sessions, reached out to legal authorities to curb the silent pandemic of domestic abuse, rescued women from the streets and ran a campaign on Bystander movement.

As a volunteer, I feel I have grown and evolved as a person. The spirit of giving, the spirit of friendship and the strength in being together as a team have all allowed me to grow as an individual. The privilege of having been able to volunteer at Bembala has given me a fresh perspective into the strength of collaboration as a team, and how, when one has support one can learn, grow and thrive.

When I joined Bembala, I wondered what I could give to Bembala. Today, I reflect, and think of all that I have received in the process. I believe this association to be one of my most cherished experiences, and am truly grateful that I am a volunteer at Bembala.

Newspaper Articles

The work done by Bembala in 2020 was covered via interviews in various media:

A Bembala volunteer was interviewed by RJ Rubina of Red FM (93.5) on her show, **Thoda Personal**, on 4th of December 2020, during the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign. They talked about abuse and domestic violence.

They started the conversation with the question, “Is physical abuse fair in the name of love?”, to which our volunteer responded “absolutely not!” The discussion that followed explored how even one slap (referring to Thappad, the Hindi movie) was inappropriate in a relationship; that abuse comes in all forms including physical violence. They spoke about how nurturing children meant teaching them the value of respecting others, teaching them about empathy; that girls are as important as boys and that an abusive relationship messes up their well-being. In response to other questions by Rubina, our volunteer told the audience how to reach out for help, especially the Police Helpline 100 for immediate assistance. The volunteer walked the audience through their rights and the laws, safety apps, about Bembala’s availability on the Helpline for emotional support, and about our access to referral partners, from shelter homes to lawyers. The conversation was a very insightful interview for listeners with a lot of key take-aways.

On 27th of April 2020, a Bembala volunteer gave an interview for Women's Web in Hindi. Here is the link:

<https://www.womensweb.in/hi/2020/04/bengaluru-bembala-foundation-against-domestic-violence-aprw5/>

On 15th of November 2020, there was a podcast by a Bembala volunteer:

<https://thethirdeyeportal.in/nirantar-radio/stay-home-kitna-surakshit-episode-3/>

Advisory Committee

Bembala's advisory board comprises eminent citizens as well as some of our partner-representatives.

- **Dr Jagadeesh N** is a Professor and HOD of Forensic medicine at Vydehi Institute of Medical Sciences Bangalore. He is a rights-based doctor working on ethics, domestic violence and sexual violence protocols. He has rich experience in advocacy and training on these issues for all stakeholders - doctors, NGOs, Police, lawyers and judiciary.
- **Dr Vidya Sathyanarayanan** is currently a Consultant Clinical Psychologist, after being Professor of Clinical Psychology in the Department of Psychiatry at St John's Medical College Hospital, Bangalore. In her 25-year experience as a teacher, researcher, and clinician, she has worked with a variety of clients - adolescents, adults, elderly, couples, families, people with disabilities, individuals with chronic medical conditions, and the LGBTQ population.
- **Christy Abraham** has in 30 plus years, worked in the areas of gender and women's rights, and with people with disabilities. She is currently an independent consultant, working with national and international organizations to help develop policy documents, strategies, program frameworks, training manuals, and facilitate evaluations, and is on the Board of Ashraya, Praxis Institute and The Leprosy Mission Trust, India. She was the CEO of The Association of People with Disability (2016-20). Prior to that, she was with the International organization, Action Aid (1991-2016), occupying multiple positions at both India and global levels.
- **Nitya Ramakrishnan**, a Certified Public Accountant (US) and Cost & Works Accountant (India), spent 18 years in the IT sector, working around the world before calling Bangalore home, in 2008. Learning that contribution was the secret to a good night's rest, she enjoyed creating and nurturing a citizen movement called Whitefield Rising for eight years, along with other volunteers like herself. The work has ranged from cleaning footpaths, lobbying with the government for various civic improvements such as Varthur lake, fighting cases in court such as against Graphite India, nurturing groups like Bembala, and so on. A journey of personal growth for her has meant a look inwards and a natural progression to a vegan lifestyle, and focus on sustainability.
- **Sumithra Acharya** is a National Law School of India alum, who has assisted and clerked with eminent lawyers, and the Chief Justice Of India, Justice YK Sabharwal (in 2006). She has helped draft manuals to combat trafficking of women and children for UNICEF, and worked for the Karnataka State Commission for Women and Protection of Child's Rights. She works with women facing abuse, and is involved with victims of acid attacks.



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