



## FIRST PERSON A Brighter Future for Sunita

### An exploited laborer becomes peer educator among migrant workers



Photo: Anita Khemka

A USAID-supported organization gave Sunita, a migrant worker in Mumbai, the knowledge to stop being vulnerable at work and to protect herself and others.

***“I am determined to share my experience with other women like me, so that they can safeguard their lives and support their families with dignity,” said Sunita.***

Sunita migrated to Mumbai in search of work, and found a job in one of the 200 “nakas”, or open labor markets, around the city.

While employed at the naka, she was sexually exploited by managers at the construction site and the contractor. Unable to earn sufficient wages through the naka, Sunita was forced into sex work in order to support her disabled husband and five teenage children.

Sunita’s life began to change when she met an outreach worker from a USAID-funded non-government organization, NIRMAN, which promotes HIV/AIDS awareness among women working in construction. During the information session on HIV/AIDS prevention at Khar Naka in Mumbai, the outreach worker was able to provide Sunita with help and counseling.

With a new understanding of the possibility of acquiring the HIV infection, Sunita was able to protect herself from coercive sex. She shared her experiences of being sexually exploited at the hands of her employers with the organization and expressed a desire to work as peer educator to help others facing similar exploitation.

Sunita continues to work as a day laborer at construction sites, but is no longer involved in sex work nor is being sexually exploited. As a peer educator, she has set a motivating example to other women workers at the nakas.

New opportunities have come because of the changes in her life. Sunita has addressed a state-level discussion on sexual harassment at the workplace organized by the Women’s Commission and the India Center for Human Rights & Law. She also has counseled more than 200 migrant women workers about HIV/AIDS and sexual exploitation.