Annexure 1: Notes on Identity, Gender and Sexuality

For Outreach Workers and Counsellors

1. Identity is never constant; it changes with factors such as time, roles, social milieu, geographic location, and phase in life to name a few.
2. Identity is a matter of choice. Sometimes, however, it may be ‘forced’ and the person then internalises over a period of time.
3. While dealing with outreach clients try to understand more about their identity—how they would like to identify themselves. Even if they seem to be MSM, there may be other identities that they would want to be identified with.
4. Identity is often not linear; each individual may have multiple identities. An interaction of these identities may lead to complex life situations, and this should be borne in mind.
5. Recognise that although there is one main identity assumed by a person at any given point, it may clash with other roles and responsibilities of the person. Understanding the predominant identity will help ORWs to understand various issues related to the individual on the field; for example a man may be more concerned about being a son than about his sexuality, or he may be more concerned about his work status rather than safe sex practices. These issues will help you address the main concerns of these individuals.
6. Identity and behaviours are fluid and are a matter of individual choice. Do not try to impose your identity on the individual while dealing with them in the field.
7. All individuals with the same identity may not necessarily display the same behaviour.
8. Individuals may self-identify the way they want to; however, they should practice safe sex practices irrespective of their identities.
9. Remember that nearly all who are born as a biological male and have now taken different identities are vulnerable to HIV and other STIs; for example, a panthi, giriya, may be masculine looking and muscular; however that does not mean that the person is not vulnerable.

For Advocacy Officers

1. The role of the Advocacy Officer is to understand the work of ORWs, and the problems they face while dealing with subjects on site.
2. The role is to mediate and facilitate, between the counsellors and outreach subjects, negotiation skills related to understanding one’s identity, the interactions with different identities, and the most pressing issues related to it. (By this we mean that even though the NGO might be working on issues such as HIV and STI prevention for MTH, if the MSM has a child who is facing discrimination then the NGO has to realise that the pressing issue for the person is the child’s welfare and education, because the person is also a father. The Advocacy Officer will have to explore the possibilities of crisis management regarding that issue.)