

15<sup>th</sup> April 2014



# Durbar Bulletin -37

## Sex workers as Workers- Accessing relevant services in Red Light district- dissemination

A state level dissemination of findings based on recent study conducted among the sex workers and their children in Sonagachi and Khidirpore by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee in partnership with Kadens International was held on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2014 in Swasthya Bhawan Mr. Malay Kumar Dey, (Principal Secretary, Dept. of Health, Govt. of West Bengal), Mr. Ajay Bhattacharya, (Director of NRHM), Ms. Madhabi Dey, (Deputy Director of Nursing, Dept. of Health, Govt. of West Bengal) and Dr Smarajit Jana (Principal, Sonagachi Research and Training Institute was among the participants of the said workshop. Along with these, the dissemination program was attended by other Government officials from the Department of Health, Govt. of West Bengal, representatives from different NGOs in addition to staff members of GOAL and Kadens International.

“In 1992 it was first felt that, to minimize the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, the incidents of violence has to be addressed and solved, this thought led to the collectivization of the female sex workers and inception of Durbar” mentioned Mrs. Bharati Dey in her presentation. But later it was also felt that in order to ensure overall development of sex workers, their rights to safe motherhood and access to relevant services has to be ensured keeping this objective in mind Durbar launched a project on mother and child health program with the support of GOAL India in Sonagachi and Khidirpore, red light districts of West Bengal.

The program included presentation of Mrs. Bharati Dey, (Secretary of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee) on Durbar and its programmatic approach, and Mrs. Swati Chakrobarty, (Program Officer, GOAL India) on the activities of GOAL India. Then the findings were shared which was followed by an interactive session. Following services was deemed necessary to improve the life of sex workers and their children which includes evening/night drop in centre closest to red light area, to ensure delivery in government hospitals, easy access to provisions made under various schemes such as Janani Suraksha Yojna, Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna and Janani Sishu Suraksha Karyakram and other. Apart from these services, distribution of sanitary napkins at subsidized rate to the adolescent girls residing in red light areas, referral service age determination test (X ray of joints) in Government hospitals were some of the issues proposed to the officers of Health Department, Govt. of West Bengal, who in principal agreed to support these services.

Mr. Malay Kumar Dey informed that Kolkata Municipal Corporation is planning to include sex workers as eligible beneficiary in RSBY. By providing Rs. 30/- they can register themselves and their family members. In return they will get health coverage of up to Rs 30000/- per annum. Mr. Dey also assured that sex workers irrespective of their age, profession and status of HIV can be enrolled under Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna. Moreover their RSBY card would be considered as equivalent to BPL card.

Dr. Smarajit Jana proposed that in order to ensure the accessibility of health entitlements, offered by the state government, ASHA and Anganwadi should be recruited from among the community members. In response to this Mr. Malay Kumar Dey acknowledged this idea and promised to take care in future recruitment of ASHA and Anganwadi workers.

Regarding IFA tablets and Vitamin A oil distribution among the new born children, health staff of DMSC-GOAL project shared that due to unavailability of these tablets and Vitamin A they will be prone to vitamin deficiency diseases. In response to this Mr. Ajay Bhattacharya stated that from next months onward it will be available in all government health centers. They could not provide it earlier due to short supply of these medicines. He also added that in case of children below 5 years, who has not received as yet, Vitamin A oil will be given to them with immediate effort.

### **“No to Violence, Yes to Rights” campaign**

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee participated in an event “No to violence, Yes to rights” organised by Swayam and supported by School of Women’s Studies Jadavpur University at Gandhi Bhaban in Jadavpur University along with other women organisations displayed some of its publication and few documentary films based on issues of women empowerment and how to address violence in sex work settings. Students from various colleges participated in poster competition, extempore, speech, story writing and music competition focusing the issue. A dance drama focussing on the current issue of women and how she is coping with her world of duties, staged on the same day. This event was followed by release of Women Manifesto in the Press Club on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2014 at 2 pm.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, West Bengal had the third highest number of rape cases in 2012 and a conviction rate of only 10.9% which is less than half the national average of 24.2%. According to a random sample survey there were 239 reported cases of rape in West Bengal from January 2012 to January 2014.

This Women Manifesto called upon the Chief Minister and the Government of West Bengal to create an enabling environment in the state to end Violence against Women so that women and girls can live a free and dignified life without the constant fear of assault.

It demands safety and security of rape victims, swift action against perpetrators of violence against women, develop code of conduct for elected representatives, government officials and police to minimise the incidents of insulting survivors of violence, regular sensitization programmes with judiciary and administrative departments of the state, develop protocol for police officer response to sexual violence including behavioral and investigation protocols, psycho-social and financial support, compensation and rehabilitation for survivors among others.

### **Delhi Ration-Pension Yatra 2014-Co-hosted By All India Network of Sex Workers**

Over the past year and a half the Pension Parishad has raised the issue of enhanced and universalized pension entitlements for marginalised members of the Indian Workforce, including elders, sex workers, primitive tribal groups and transgender. Pension Parishad demands minimum Rs 2000 as

pension for all which should be indexed to inflation and processed through a transparent delivery system to its recipient on a fixed date in every month.

In order to raise these demands and energise, mobilise and expand ownership of these demands and increase awareness about the new food security act Pension Parishad which includes All India Network of Sex workers with many other unorganised labour forces in the country organised Pension Yatra 2014 from 29th March to 4th April 2014.

On the fifth day of Yatra, 2nd April 2014 sex workers and members of AINSW participated in the campaign and raised the slogan “Ration, Pension nahin, to vote nahin!” (No rations and no pensions mean no votes). Around 100 commoners along with female sex workers based in Delhi participated in the rally. After the rally two meetings were held in Mongol Puri and Prem Nagar. The campaign ended with the submission of a charter of demands to the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi.



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