

15<sup>th</sup> April 2015

# Durbar Bulletin -49

## Durbar participated in the Workshop on Right to Food



A workshop for two days on Right to Food was conducted by Right to Food and Work Campaign , West Bengal. The meeting was attended by several representatives of civil society organization in addition to members of the Monitoring and Vigilance committee appointed by the Government of West Bengal. The workshop was held at Proggaloy, Barasat, North 24 Parganas on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

61 participants representing 16 districts of West Bengal were present for the workshop where Durbar actively participated in it.

The workshop started with the study of the West Bengal Public Distribution System (Maintenance and Control) Order, 2013, which deals with issues of Public Distribution System (PDS) and the role and responsibilities of stake holders and Monitoring / Vigilance committee.

The morning session was absorbing while as the DDPS Dr. Aurobindo Ghosh shared the expected roles and responsibilities of the NGO representatives and civil society members in the Monitoring and Vigilance committee. He responded to different queries related to

various issues and challenges of the PDS. The participants in the workshop also requested the DDPS to speed up the formation of committee at the Block and Shop level and to focus on the distribution of PDS effectively.

Participants representing different region based group presented various problem linked to PDS in their region. It was decided that those issues will be forwarded to the respective authority for redressal. The members then worked on a survey questionnaire which is going to be implemented focusing two issues: namely, the effectiveness of the Government helpline and the implementation of Supreme Court order on the PDS.

The second day was dedicated to National Food Security Act (NFSA) which is about to be rolled out in West Bengal from South Dinajpur District on 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2015. Serious concern was expressed by the participants regarding the implementation of NFSA. It was felt that the act has no teeth besides attitude of the present government, in addition to reduction in the budgetary allocation towards these activities will compromise the objective of the act and its outcome. The issues and challenges of cash transfers was discussed in the detail followed by the recommendation of the Shanta Kumar Committee's also discussed. The participants decided to take up the issues through organising various awareness campaigns so that people in general get the right knowledge on PDS and other schemes as prescribed in the NFSA and reap the benefits of those policies and legislation.

Some of the future plans of action as decided in the meetings are:

- The activists of the REC (Right to Food Campaign) will meet the respective DCFS and SDFS (i.e. District and sub-divisional controller of Food and supply) to pressurise them to conduct regular meeting of the vigilance and monitoring committees.
- The activist will trace down the development of committee at shop, village, panchayet, sub-division, block or a district level. They will also keep track of regular fortnight meeting.
- It was also decided that everyone will make 2 calls sitting two specific problems to the district helpline on PDS to check whether the help line number is properly working or not.
- Within next two months they will conduct a study to assess the performance of the ration shops in their area.
- The Right to Food Campaign, West Bengal will organise number of awareness program like, street corners, cycle rally with poster and handbills. A poster and hand bill will be produced centrally by the Campaign Committee.

### **Sex worker's children organized a nature camp in North Bengal**

On 15<sup>th</sup> March 2015 Durbar organized a picnic for the sex worker's children of Jalpaiguri district (North Bengal). A total number of 60 children, 4 mothers and 20 members from 3 voluntary organizations including Red Cross Society participated in the adventure held at Gorumara forest reserve near Mukti River. Gorumara National Park is an important habitat of one-horned Rhinoceros. The main objective of the program was to educate children about their environment and impart knowledge about the eco- systems.

The journey started early morning and participants from Jalpaiguri red light districts board on the bus and travelled through the hilly terrains of Doors and reached to the spot at around noon. The children were left to play cricket and after that they were taken for nature study where Mr. Manash Acharya, an environmentalist make children understand

about the difference between Indian Rhino and African Rhino through picture demonstration and imparted knowledge about the eco- system, their inter-dependence and its significance for everyone's survival on earth. He took lot of effort to make youngsters understand environment and environmental issues and how it persevere it for our interest. After completion of the nature study the children were served lunch and after lunch the children were again let to play 'choya choye' (hide and seek) which was accompanied by Priya, the secretary of komal Gandhar(a cultural wing of Durbar).

The children informed that they enjoyed it very much and would be glad if another such program could be organised in future. While returning back to the bus the children made a long queue in the field wearing Rhino masks on their faces and giving slogans to preserve forest and wild animals.

### **Campaign against child marriage in red light districts**

Child marriage is practiced in India for centuries. It is deeply rooted in the complex matrix of religious practice, tradition, social norm, economic factors and prejudices. Regardless of the faith that child marriages constitute a gross violation of human rights leaving physical, psychological and emotional scars in their life. An UNICEF report reveals that India is the second highest (after Bangladesh) in terms of child marriages.

Child marriage in red light districts of West Bengal is also not an exception. The sex workers are willing to marry off their girl child early as they are often worried about the safety and security of their girl child in the red light districts. A new trend is being seen where parents (mother) often choose to arrange early age for their daughters in the red lights districts with an expectation to provide her a better quality of life. Those two reasons jointly contribute to the incidence of child marriage in the red light districts.

Amra Padatik, the organization of sex worker's children is fighting against this social evil. They discuss about the harmful effects of child marriage in their meetings attended by their members and also sensitize their matter about the provisions of act which was meant to prevent child marriage.

During this month Amra Padatik took an initiative to sensitize the people of the red light districts using street theatre as a tool to built awareness. Amra Padatik in collaboration with Komolgandhar(the cultural wing of Durbar) organized two such campaigns in Bowbazar and Khiddirpore on 20<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> March respectively. The street play was performed by the members of Komolgandhar where they depicted how an early marriage can harm lives of girls. To activate members of the society what are possible preventive measures that could be undertaken to prevent early marriages was enacted through street plays. A good number of spectators watched those plays.

### **Raising voices against sexual violence**

Maitree-the network of women rights organizations in West Bengal gave a call to organize protest against the increasing number of incidents of sexual violence in the State of West Bengal. This year the network was trying to mobilize individuals, organizations beyond Maitree as they felt it is an issue where people from all walks of life should join. After long discussion and debates the leadership of Maitree and its allies developed a campaign program named as "Das Theke Das Hazar-Pathe Nambo Bar Bar"(From ten to ten thousand-will march in the street for justice).

Durbar as an active member of Maitree participated in the campaign. DMSC organized street rally on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2015. Sexual violence is very common and often perpetrated against the sex workers and LGBTKH. Most of the incidents of violence remained under the carpet as it is overlooked by the society and the law enforcing agencies in general.

The said rally started from College Square with great enthusiasm. College students, research scholars, sex workers gathered in front of Vidyasagar statue and painted a banner instantly demanding justice against sexual violence. In the very front row of the colourful rally, women carried placards identifying themselves as victims of the recent sexual violence in India. It was a spontaneous rally where the domestic workers, agricultural workers, sex workers, professors and teachers walked in the streets holding hands together. They carried placards and banners, sang songs, recited poetry, shouted to protest against the sexual violence. Girls, differentially able women also marched as they are probably the softest targets in a society. More than 3000 people representing different walks of life participated in the rally and formed a human chain in the Dorina Crossing (In Esplanade-the heart of the city) stopping the city traffic for some minutes. The rally actually inflamed positive anger in the hearts of the people and the commoners who are watching a series of sexual violence in West Bengal. The rally was concluded with an assurance to take forward the campaign in future involving more people from the society.

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