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Durbar Bulletin -57

Durbar celebrated World Aids Day in different red light districts of West Bengal

Every year 1st December is marked as World Aids Day. This year different red light districts of West Bengal marked the Day on Tuesday, 1st December, organized a day of awareness to inform people in and around red light districts of West Bengal about HIV, how it is transmitted, and address some of the common misconceptions regarding the virus.



December is World Aids Day in West Bengal on its own (1st of 2015). Durbar has been running a long campaign on World Aids Day in red light districts to keep the focus on HIV and not spread to other common diseases regarding the virus.

This program helps people to remind that HIV is spreading across the country so there is a need to increase awareness, fight prejudice and improve education. The global theme for this year is 'Getting to Zero' – to strive hard to achieve 'zero new HIV infections', 'zero discrimination' and zero AIDS related deaths.

On the eve of World Aids Day, sex workers of Seouraphuli red light district took out a candle light rally to demand an end to discrimination towards HIV infected people. A similar procession was held at Sonagachi red light district which started from Abinash Kabiraj Street and moved across the lanes of Sethbagan and Rambagan distributing pamphlets to the local inhabitants. The rally was flagged off by Sunanda Sarkar, the Councilor of Ward no. 26. Around 500 sex workers and their children, including members from the transgender community, participated in the rally, jointly organized by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee and Amra Padatik. Members of the sex worker community representing other red light districts of Kolkata and suburbs also organized similar campaign programs to aware different stakeholders.

Bicycle Marathon to spread HIV/AIDS Awareness

BCARE International in association with Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee and 24 other organizations organized AIDS RIDE 2015, Kolkata to Benapole bicycle marathon from 15th Nov to 19th Nov 2015. The marathon is aimed to END AIDS, TB and also to spread awareness about HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment in the remote areas. Around 50 cyclists, including transgender and sex workers paddled on Sunday (15th November 2015). The bicycle marathon was flagged off from Sonagachi red-light district in Kolkata.

Chief Guest Honorable MIC, Women, Child and Social Welfare, Govt. of West Bengal Dr. Sashi Panja emphasized the importance of awareness building to prevent HIV/AIDS. She also mentioned Durbar's commendable contribution in preventing HIV/AIDS in the sex worker's community. She said that the rally will address the misconception regarding transmission of HIV/AIDS among people. She remarked that Government of West Bengal is also supporting the cause to prevent HIV/AIDS.

Country Director of UNAIDS, Mr. Oussama Tawil, marked the importance of starting the rally from Sonagachi, the largest red light district in Asia. He also commented that the Sonagachi Model which is being replicated all over the globe has created mass awareness among the high risk population in this country. He congratulated this initiative taken up by Durbar and B Care and the other organizing partners.

Eminent epidemiologist and pioneer in recreating history in implementing Community Led Structural Intervention in preventing HIV/AIDS Dr. Smarajit Jana stressed on empowering the community in the prevention of HIV. He said that the accepted fact throughout the globe is ownership building of the community members over the program development and management of the "Zero Discrimination is the new indicator to assess the progress of reaching the Goal of eliminating HIV/AIDS".

Councilor of KMC Ward Number 18, Ms. Sunanda Sarkar, Ms. Bharati Dey Secretary Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, Director of Kolkata Rista, Dr. Santosh Kumar Giri, Mr. Surya Prakash Makrala, Ms. Abhirupa Kar from CWF, Mr. Anindya Dutta from Transgender Board, Government of West Bengal were among other dignitaries. 10 innocent children wished the riders for safe and secure journey by presenting handmade cards. Representatives from Kolkata Rista presented a beautiful dance performance named "Ganesh Bandana".

The kick off programme was inaugurated by Dr. Sashi Panja and Mr. Oussama Tawil with colourful balloons.

Durbar run ICTC operates according to WHO new guidelines

The HIV counselling and testing services, started under the guidance of NACO in the year 1997, have been scaled up in the recent years. Today, there are more than 8000 Integrated Counselling and Testing Centres all across India.

India has the third highest number of estimated people living with HIV in the world. Counselling and testing services are an important component of prevention program for HIV/AIDS in the country. Roughly 25–30% of the people who are HIV positive in the country are aware of their HIV status. All HIV-infected people in the country should know their status so that they could adopt healthy lifestyles and prevent transmission of HIV to others, and access life-saving care and treatment.

Durbar has a 'Community Based Stand Alone' ICTC Center known as Mamata Care and Treatment Centre located at 12/5 Nilmoni Mitra Street, few steps away from the Sonagachi red light district, established to address issues and challenges of HIV positive women and to help them serve services stigma and discrimination. Community members (sex workers) are accompanied by the peer workers to the centre. The centre provides counseling and other requisite support services. After testing blood for HIV Reports are delivered on the same day followed by Post-Test Counseling and positive individuals are referred to ART center.

The new ICTC operational guidelines of WHO aims to ensure uniformity in counselling and testing services across the country. The guidelines provide clear rules and mechanism on various administrative, financial and operational issues. This community led ICTC center has successfully conducted pre- test and post- test counseling. The data presented the last 5 years, could justify its importance.

YEAR	TOTAL CLIENTS	TOTAL NO. MALE CLIENTS		TOTAL NO. FEMALE CLIENTS		TOTAL NO. OF POSITIVES		TOTAL NO. OF MALE POSITIVES (out of male clients)		TOTAL NO. OF FEMALE POSITIVES (out of female clients)	
		Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
2010	3711	431	11.61%	3280	88.39%	135	3.64%	19	4.41%	116	3.54%
2011	1209	118	9.76%	1090	90.16%	53	4.38%	11	9.32%	42	3.85%
2012	3220	397	12.33%	2823	87.67%	123	3.82%	35	8.82%	88	3.12%
2013	3091	551	17.83%	2538	82.11%	85	2.75%	25	4.54%	60	2.36%
2014	3090	401	12.98%	2689	87.02%	63	2.04%	21	5.24%	42	1.56%

Observance of Anti Violence Fortnight

Every year the 'anti violence fortnight', which begins from 25th November till 10th December.



To celebrate International anti violence fortnight Maitree, a network of 32 women organisations including Durbar organised a cultural program and a rally on 5th December 2015 in front of the Khalsa Hotel opposite the Radha Krishna temple at the Hazra crossing. The network decided to sensitize women on domestic violence. The premise of the day was to raise awareness on the issues of Domestic violence against women and how to address issue to prevent

occurrence of violence.

An act (The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005) was enforced on 2005 to provide more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the

constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family. This year the Domestic Violence Act completed its 10 years of existence.

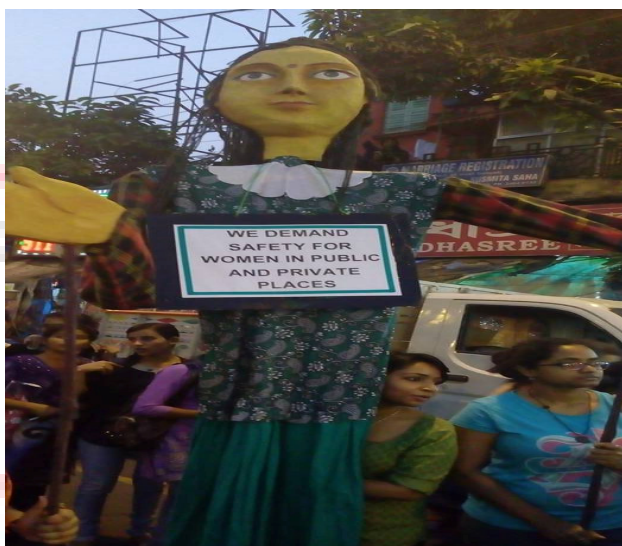
As per the latest statistics, 2 in 5 married Indian women face Domestic Violence (National Family Health Survey). Additionally, every day, in India during the year 2014,

- 337 married women were Tortured by their husband and or by her his relatives
- 27 women were Murdered due to Dowry
- 6 women committed Suicide due to dowry

(National Crime Records Bureau data)

For the past 7 years continuously, West Bengal has recorded the highest incidents of Domestic Violence in the country. Hence, as part of International Campaign to stop Violence against Women and Girls, the Network members organised this rally.

Hundreds of women including sex workers came down on the street with colourful placards and raising voices 'Sudhu Pothe noi Ghoreou nirapotta chai'(Security is needed not just in the road but also in home). At the end of the rally the participants formed a human chain holding candles in their hand. The rally moved from the Khalsa Hotel opposite the RadhaKrishna temple at the Hazra crossing, proceed across Hazra Road, Panditya Road, Mahanirban Road, Rashbehari Road and finally end at the Gariahat Crossing. A dance drama on anti domestic violence was also organised before the rally begins.



Information Camp for from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Kothi, Hijra (LGBTKH) community

On 10th December 2015, on the occasion of Human Rights Day, Balaram Dey Street Anandam and Friends Association organized an information session on legal rights and health issues pertaining to the transgender community in West Bengal and India held at Adarsh Club, B.B Bazar, Chiria More. It was attended by approximately 50 participants from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, kothi, hijra (LGBTKH) community in Kolkata and its surrounding areas.

The event started discussing public health issues relevant to the LGBTKH community, legal and human rights issues, and guidelines for forming self-help groups with Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd (USHA). They were provided information on the importance of safe sex practices in preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs), use of condom and dental dams when performing anal sex and oral sex, various symptoms of STIs such as sores, itching, bleeding, etc and the importance of taking STI tests at regular intervals.

Sexual Reassignment Surgery (SRS) was another hot topic of the session. Many participants were curious about the procedure and the side effects associated with it. Dr. Protim Roy mentioned that SRS is recently on its way to being accessible at public hospitals although it is advised to always consult a specialist doctor before one decides to undergo the surgery. Hormone therapy is compulsory prior to the surgery while breast implants and laser

removal for body and facial hair are other increasingly popular options. Lastly, attending counseling sessions is also recommended throughout the length of the process.

Dharam from Friends Association wanted to know if medicines which work to enlarge breasts in men can result in side effects such as rashes and leakages or infections. Nitai Giri, president of Balam Dey Street Anandam responded by advising the participants to always consult a medically certified doctor before taking any medicines. Particular medicines do not complement certain body chemistries, resulting in adverse effects on the patient thus one must never attempt to self medicate.

Next, the legal information session kicked off with a question from a participant who identified himself as gay. He asked whether there have been any updates to Section 377 or any new laws pertaining to the rights of the gay community in India. Dr. Soma Roy responded by noting that there have been no progressive change in the laws and legal rights in regards to the gay community in the last couple of years. Section 377 is still very valid. Therefore, we must collectivize and stand in solidarity with all other LGBTKH groups in Kolkata in order to repeal it and any other laws or acts that constrain the human rights of the queer community. While it is not illegal to undergo SRS, it is still illegal to engage in same sex relations.

Sintu Bagui, the secretary of Balam Dey Street added that while there have been no updates to the Indian laws in place, countries such as Ireland and the United States have made great strides in promoting equality for LGBTKH groups. In June 2015, the Supreme Court of U.S.A had declared same sex marriage legal across all states in the US. Ireland, too, has legalized same sex marriage this year in November. There are variations between laws and regulations pertaining to same sex marriage Samaita Jana, representing USHA remarked that there are other countries across the globe where arcane laws that act to criminalize same sex relationships remain very much in practice. Examples include Uganda, Tanzania, and Sierra Leone where the offenders can even receive life imprisonment. On the other hand, in the US, many academic institutions and workplaces have become very sensitive and accepting of sexual diversity and provide additional services to those that identify as LGBTQ. Dr. Soma Roy wrapped up the discussion by explaining that the struggle is ongoing and we must acquire the courage to come out and collectivize against such laws and discriminatory practices in our nation.

A brief information session on cooperative banks and their role in providing access to financial services for marginalized communities such as the LGBTKH community was led by Samaita Jana who provided an overview on Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd., a cooperative bank run and managed by sex workers which has now expanded to include members of the LGBTKH community, domestic workers, and children of sex workers across West Bengal. Friends Association has recently collaborated with USHA to form a self help group of their own, on the hope that their members will gain better access to loans and savings while acquiring financial literacy.

Information camp for the Women Construction worker

Construction work in India is the second largest industry and women account 51% of the total workforce. Although the occupation is regulated by various labour laws including Minimum Wage Act, Building and other Construction Workers Act and the allied Cess Act, Contract Labour act etc but the workers are yet to get any fruits of those enactments. A section of construction workers engaged under the licensed contractors get the benefits

and entitlements as workers but the major section of the workforce are far away from it. Women construction workers are the most marginalized segment of the workforce and face extreme exploitation.

Durbar as a core member of Karmajibi Mahila Parisad felt a pressing need to sensitize the women construction workers about their rights and entitlements. To accomplish the objective a information camp was organized in Ultadanga on 4th December 2015. Deputy Labour Commissioner from Labour Department, Government of West Bengal was the resource person for the event. Ms. Bhattacharyya with her immense patience heard the issues raised by the women construction workers. The women complained about rampant Minimum wage violation. They said the women get only 200-250 per day as their wage irrespective of their skill and experience. Sexual violence and torture is very common. Ms. Bhattacharyya explained the women about the Construction Worker Welfare Scheme run by the Government and various facilities and entitlements there under. She clarified the process of registering under the scheme. She also explained the process of lodging compliant against Minimum Wage violation and informed about the stipulated of Minimum wage for the Construction workers (which is Rs. 6972 per month in Kolkata for the unskilled workers, Rs. 7670 for the semi skilled workers and Rs. 8437 for the Skilled workers). Rama Debnath, Joint Convener of Karmajibi Mahila Parisad was also present in the programme. "Trade Unions can be act together to end rights violation" she commented. Some construction workers expressed their interest in forming a trade union to continue the battle for worker's right. Information booklets about various schemes of Government were distributed and more than 25 women workers attended the programme.

India Country Coordinating Mechanism (India-CCM)

The India Country Coordinating Mechanism (India-CCM) was established by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and other relevant and interested stakeholders, in order to access Global Fund grant monies, ensure those funds were well-coordinated within the national response, and provide national oversight and ownership of grant implementation.

The goal of the India-CCM is to strengthen measures to fight HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria in India through multi-sectoral coordination and effective and inclusive dialogue among appropriate stakeholders, including key affected populations and persons living with the diseases.

The CCM is being newly constituted which has a number of representatives from the policy makers and also representation from the MARPS. After the discussions held at the office of UNAIDS on 19th and 20th of August, 2015, All India Network of Sex Workers decided to elect their 'Primary Representation' and the 'Alternate Member' from among the community members and finally Ms. Bhagya Lakshmi from AshodayaSamithi was elected as the Primary Representative and Ms. Bharati Dey from as the Alternate Member.

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