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Durbar Bulletin -61

Durbar's participation in the ICAAP 12



The 12th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific was held for over three days from 12th to 14th of March 2016 at International Convention City Bashundhara, in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Limited and Komal Gandhar, the cultural wing of Durbar were invited to this congress. A twelve member team of Durbar supported by UNAIDS India participated in

the program. Komal Gandhar put up their cultural performance in the Asia Pacific Village on 13th March 2016. A transgender from Anandam (LGBTKH community, a sister organization of Durbar) presented a dance performance to showcase their talent. They had 30 minutes time slot to put up their shows which was highly acclaimed by the audience.

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee and Usha Multipurpose Cooperative Society Limited also organized their stalls in the Asia Pacific Village and both the stalls were attended by number of visitors who in addition were very curious to know about the activities of Durbar and the success story of Usha as well. In addition to that Durbar delivered a presentation on Monitoring Health Interventions through use of Mobile Technology.

In a session named as I- Monitoring, Durbar shared their knowledge and experiences about how they effectively address violence perpetrated by different stakeholders like police, customers, local hooligans etc on sex workers and how they use the technology for documentation and transmission of facts of incidents with a view to address at the earliest possible opportunity.



Consultative workshop with the urban poor of the city

“We are the backbone of the urban society yet we are often discriminated in the city in terms of rights and entitlement”- says Moumita Naskar, Secretary of Durbar Disha Mahila Griha Sramik Samanwaya Committee in her inaugural speech in the workshop held on 31st



March 2016 at ICMARD, Kolkata. Moumita was optimistic about the process which focused on inclusive approach development through synergistic participation of the city dwellers irrespective of their economic and social status. Secretary of Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee Ms. Bharati Dey stated about the long overdue issue related to recognition and dignity of

the workers which includes domestic helpers and sex workers. She raised the various issues impacting the life of marginalized workers country like fixed minimum wages, social security measures and their incorporation under health insurance scheme like ESI.

Veteran Social worker Mr. Naba Dutta said that worker's housing need was never figured in the charter of demands raised by the collectives of unorganized workers. No government policy is in place to address the housing issue need of the workers forcing them to live in a sub human living situation in the city. He suggested to include this demand in the Charter very soon.

Mr. Surajit Neogi, the member of the Supreme Court Shelter Committee in West Bengal stated that the apex Court of India gave verdict to made housing provision in each and every city having a population of more than 5 lakhs. He commented that in reality the provisions made in the court is yet to be implemented.

Prof. Samita Sen, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, explained the existing system to determine minimum wage. She said wage could be decided based on two different methods, one is through calculating Subsistence wage or it could be done through adopting Living wage method following Aykroid formula. Also wages could be decided based on 'time or piece rated' principles depending on the type of work or viewing the market scenario. She said 1 out of every 4 female workers. She also stated that 14% of the working women in West Bengal are literate. 1% of the total workforce in India is domestic workers.

Renowned Trade Unionist Mr. Somnath Ghosh commented about Trade Union rights of the unorganized workers. He said that the Victorian Trade Union Act should be reviewed in the light of the present state of affairs.

Social Activist Ms. Achinta Ghatak questioned about the very basic tenets of our society in viewing domestic workers. They are truly considered as worker and their labor as 'work' It is also not recognized as 'skilled' work because we look at domestic workers more as a general helpers at home, who lend a hand in the daily chores. She pointed out problem areas like conflict of interest between employers and domestic workers, safe mobility of domestic workers when they commute from her residence to workplace and back in addition to that she raised about lack of infrastructure and minimum support to maintain well being and hygiene in their living and working environment.

An open discussion was held where representatives of the Urban poor shared their views and experience on a range of issues including rights, recognition, minimum wage, housing etc. The consultation came to an end to prepare a common minimum programme for the urban poor.

Sit on demonstration to protest against misbehavior of the Police officers

A 15 year old girl's name was changed from her original name to Dharshita(Raped) while lodging an FIR by a Sub Inspector of Muchipara Police Station. Startled by this action, the father first thought it was a mistake but the attitude of the said police officer made it crystal clear that it was done intentionally. Das Theke Das Hazartake this issue to launch protest against official(it is a forum to protest sexual violence in West Bengal and Durbar is a founder member of the forum). On 18th March 2016, Das Theke Das Hazar organized a sit on demonstration

in front of the Bank Of protest against hour long sit in includes its participants, also performed songs and performances. different walks spontaneously the



Bowbazar India,Branch to this practice. 5 demonstration speeches from besides they street skits, various other People from of the society participated in

demonstration. Professor Kunal Dutta was emotional during his speech and said that the state sponsored atrocities are increasing day by day. While Mitali Biswas questioned the police that whether this incident could take place if it would happen to their family members or to influential people of the society. Rama Debnath from Durbar commented the necessity to promote discourse on sex and sexuality in our society. Sexual violence is directly associated with the power dynamics of the society so there is a need to address underlying the power structure in our social fabric. A team from Das Theke Das Hazar visited DC Central of Kolkata police with a demand to start departmental enquiry for the miss deed by the “protector” of the society i.e. The DC Central assured to take action within 15 days. Another team from Das Theke Das Hazar visited the office of Special Superintendent Of Police, West Bengal with a demand to take immediate actions against sexual violence related cases in the study of West Bengal. The Superintendent of police asked to provide the case numbers so that he can inquire about the present status of the said incident.

More than 200 Pedestrians, local shop owners listened to our deliberation with patience in making the programme a successful one.

Durbar in support of Jute industry workers

Jute used to be called the Golden fiber but in the recent past the condition of Jute Industry including Jute cultivation in the state of West Bengal is in shambles. The heyday of jute industry fallen apart after independence and situation drastically changed after partition of Bengal while the factories of West Bengal lost the supply of the raw material from the then East Pakistan. Bangladesh set up factories with modern technologies. From then, Jute industry in West Bengal lost its competitive edge and was tagged as sunshine industry. The

jute cultivation prevalent in some parts of West Bengal lost its importance. Factories which were run by the Traders lost interest in new investment and deliberately making it sick. A large number of jute mill workers lost their regular job due to 'layoff' and closure of mills for a few months in the year. A large category of casual workforce was created to run mills. Introduction of polythene bags and promotion through government policies which was lobbied by the industrialist put a death rail to jute industry. Ironically the demands for Jute in National and International market is quite high and the present productions in West Bengal are not even meeting with their demand.

In this backdrop, synergistic effort is required to revive the condition of Jute Industry taking into account of environmental, agricultural and worker's related issues. It was initiated by trade unions like TUCC, NTUI, jute cultivators and jute mill workers to protect natural environment. With an aim to raise issues from different segments of the society and to coordinate among various groups a convention was organized on 30th of March 2016 at Bharat Sabha Hall. Academicians, researchers and representatives shared their views which includes suggestions not to cultivate new variety as well as genetically modified jute saplings while in West Bengal there are 8 natural varieties of jute in West Bengal. Representative from Jute cultivators shared that the cultivators are not getting price of their crops. The traders with their vested interest are cheating the cultivators where as they put entire responsibility on the Factory owners. So, there is an underlying conflict between the cultivators and the jute mill workers. He advocated building coordination among the two worst affected groups. Environmentalist Mr. Naba Dutta raised environmental advantage of jute over polythene. Pradip Roy from All West Bengal Sales Representative Association mentioned about the solidarity among other working class people so that they can understand the issues of the jute industry looking from the broader prospective. Mr. Somnath Ghosh from NTUI shared the incorrigible condition of the jute mill workers working in various jute mills in West Bengal. He also said that appropriate Government policy should be prepared and implemented in this regard.

The convention ended with forming a Presidium with representation from various stakeholders to strengthen and to synergize the efforts.

Editor: Smarajit Jana

Bulletin team: Mousumi Chowdhury (Dam) and Paromita Chowdhury

Published by Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee,

44 Balam Dey Street, Kolkata -700006, India/ For feedback:

durbar.communication@gmail.com; For facebook: www.facebook.com/durbar.mahila

Website: www.durbar.org / Blog: www.durbarblog.org