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from **DURBAR**

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Combating trafficking in sex work sites-Durbar's successes and challenges

Durbar has been carrying out Anti-trafficking programme through "Self Regulatory Board"(SRB)- a community led structure. The concept of SRB was mooted during 1997 at the All India Conference of sex worker held at Kolkata.

Over the years, there has been a steady increase in DMSC's anti-trafficking activities through its SRBs. Presently SRBs operate in 30 sex work sites throughout West Bengal- of which 8 are located in different sex work sites of Kolkata and the remaining 25 are spread over the different districts of West Bengal.

The objective of this intervention is to remove all criminal activities surrounding sex trade be it violence against sex workers, entry of minor and trafficked girl into sex work site. DMSC stands against any form of exploitation and infringement of rights of human beings that includes sex workers and their children. Our experience is that Immoral Trafficking (Prevention) Act (ITPA), as enforced by police, is insufficient to combat trafficking and entry of minor into sex trade. Therefore, DMSC felt the need to constitute Self-regulatory Boards (SRBs) in the sex work sites.

Self-regulatory Board followed a public- private partnership model. It is presided over by the elected member of that region, in cities it is MLA or MP and in Panchayat area it is Counselor or Panchayat Pradhan and other members of this board are from representatives of Indian Medical Association, lawyers living in the vicinity and local medical practitioner and also Women activists. Efforts are made to include, wherever possible, Social Welfare Officers, State Women's Commission members, and other government functionaries.

Self-regulatory Board present in sex work sites are uniquely positioned to intervene in, and prevent trafficking into sex work, minor girls and unwilling women from any part of the country and the world as the peer workers and members of DMSC who live in the same red light district keep a strong vigil for any new entrants into the sex trade.

The success of SRB led anti- trafficking program as compared to police raid and rescue operation can be verified from the findings of the outcome of their activities in 4 successive years.

Total number of rescued girl in the state of West Bengal

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010
Through SRB's	77	113	69	69
Through police department	18	40	32	15 (Till June)

While analyzing the records of the rescued girls of the last 8 months (January 2011-August 2011) we have discovered that among 613 rescued girls, 565 i.e., 92.17 % of these women came in the red light districts/sex trade opted to this profession out of choice. Even in the cases of underage girl we have observed that most the girls who have been removed from sex work opted to sex work primarily to find a livelihood option and to support their family members.

USHA- the cooperative of sex workers providing technical support outside of the country

Economic insecurity coupled with extortionate money lending practices that exist in the red light areas, have always been a part of sex workers lives. This had made them unable to save their income and often made it impossible for many of them to escape the debt trap. Usha was formed in August 1995 by a dozen of sex workers from the Sonagachi red light district with the aim of achieving economic empowerment. The cooperative is presently run by a board of elected members from within the sex workers' community and has expanded its operation to all the sex workers sites in the state of West Bengal.

The Usha Cooperative is designed to provide financial support for the sex workers to fall back on in moments of crisis. Its runs a micro credit program for sex workers; creates alternative jobs for the retired sex workers; does social marketing of condoms and other consumables.

Having developed the necessary technical expertise and infrastructure, Usha now operates as the principal financial institution for the entire range of sex workers' organizations affiliated to Durbar. At present Usha have more than 18882 registered members with an annual turnover of 12.75 crores.

USHA being the largest sex worker cooperative since last few years started lending technical and handholding services to sex workers and other marginalized communities in India. Recently a team of professionals from UNAIDS and UNFPA Bangladesh along with two sitting MP's of the parliament of Bangladesh visited USHA cooperative society with representatives from sex workers community of Tangail (brothel). They were inspired by the activities of USHA cooperative. The Nari Mukti Sangha, the sex workers collective from Tangail brothel decided to open a cooperative in their area after taking lessons from Sonagachi project and USHA cooperative. As a consequence of their visit they hired a representative from the Usha Cooperative society who spends a week there not only to help the collective in imparting necessary training to establish a cooperative society but also facilitate opening of the same during the same period what has started operating as an independent co-operative society of sex workers from December 2011.

Durbar voiced their concern regarding Socio Economic Caste Census

DMSC raised its voice to the discriminatory practices adopted by the Central Government in conveying out the said census. Government of India is presently conducting a National Socio Economic Caste Census to determine the number of poor people in India. A new BPL list will be drawn as a direct offshoot of this survey while it will provide the base for other schemes of the government.

In West Bengal, the sample survey conducted among 1275 rural households with a population of 5395 spread across 9 districts and 159 urban poor household with a population of 551 in urban municipal wards of West Bengal. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee was a part of the

urban survey. Durbar conducted a mock survey in Sonagachi red light area and in an unauthorized slum in Dumdum to identify gaps in the methodology used in the survey.

Durbar's objective was to help Government authorities to identify issues of vulnerabilities for women living in the red light area as well as in unauthorized slums. The sex workers even though enjoy social amenities like electricity, closed drainage and others, they are often looses both money and materials due to police raid and harassment from the local goons. They are also exploited and discriminated by section of service provider because of their 'criminalized' status. The very survey tool is incapable of identifying issues of vulnerability and insecurity because of social and structural constraints co defined in its laws and problems. DMSC also identified that in the unauthorized slums the threat of eviction or eviction forced urban people to loose their property and income. The survey tool fails to incorporate these types of issues specific to these communities thereby will remove them from the 'social safety net' as densed by the government.

A collective of civil society organizations (GAM & PBJSM) including DMSC organized a National level workshop on SECC at the Press Club, Kolkata on 13th December 2011 followed by a press meet to brief the press about the methodology and outcome of the 'mock survey' conducted in the state of West Bengal. Representatives from Durbar gave her testimony in the event. On the very next day a public gathering was also organized where people from different districts of West Bengal participated and demanded 'right to food, shelter and education'. Around 2000 people participated in the event which was participated by the member of Durbar, representatives of domestic workers union who spoke on their vulnerabilities along with the other participants representing daily wage labours, slum dwellers, footpath dwellers, Lodha and Shabars.