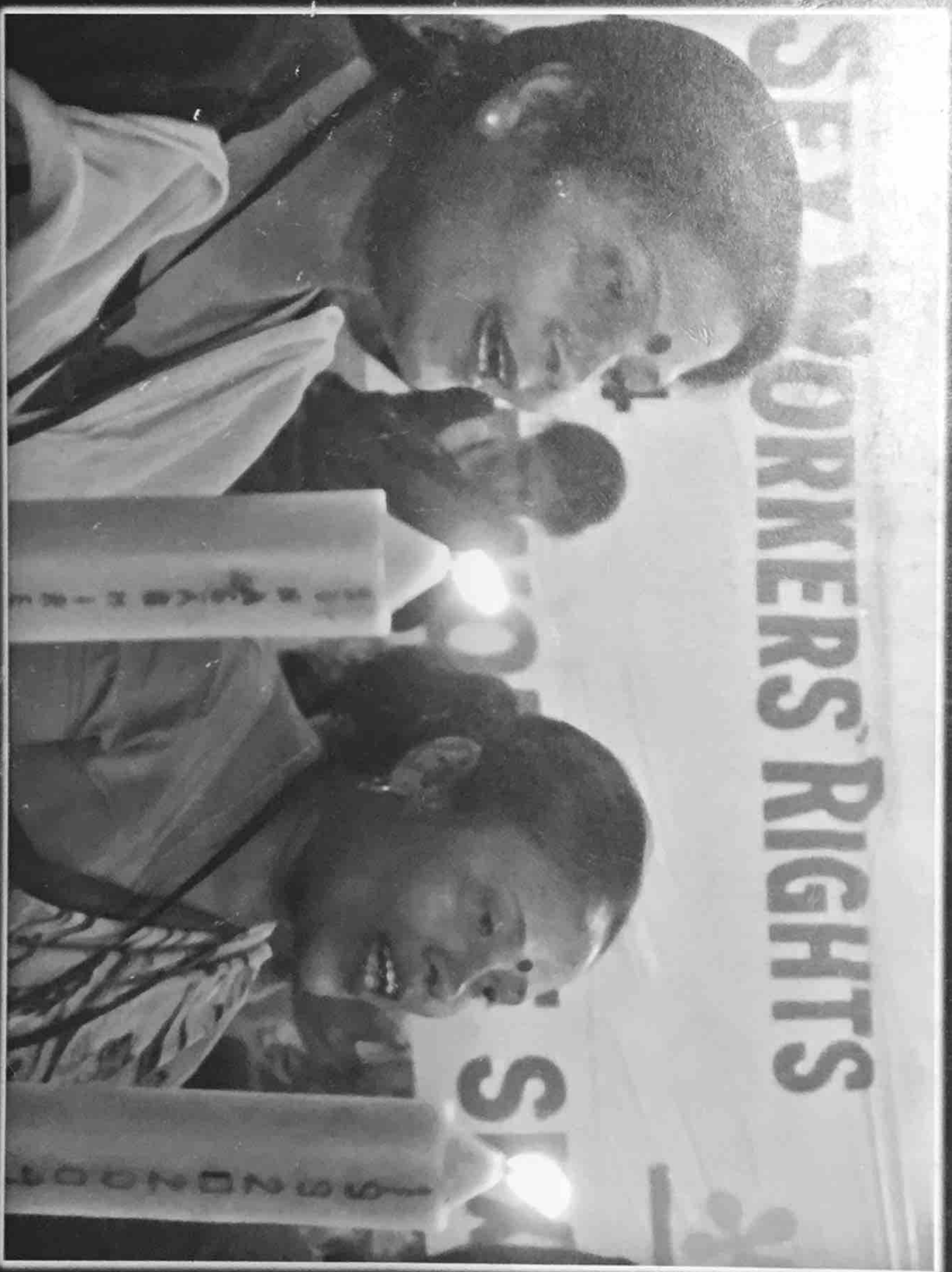


*Surbar : A
Brief
Profile*



Celebrating an era of Sonagachhi : 1992-2004

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4. Saswati Chakrabarty

5. Dr. Amitrajit Saha

1. Dr. Protim Ray

1. Suwendu Chatterjee

2. Kushal Ray

3. Nilayan Dutta

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बाल विद्या निकेतन
 वर्ष २००२

राहुल विद्या निकेतन, बरपूर
 राहुल विद्या निकेतन, बरपूर, बिहार ८५१००१

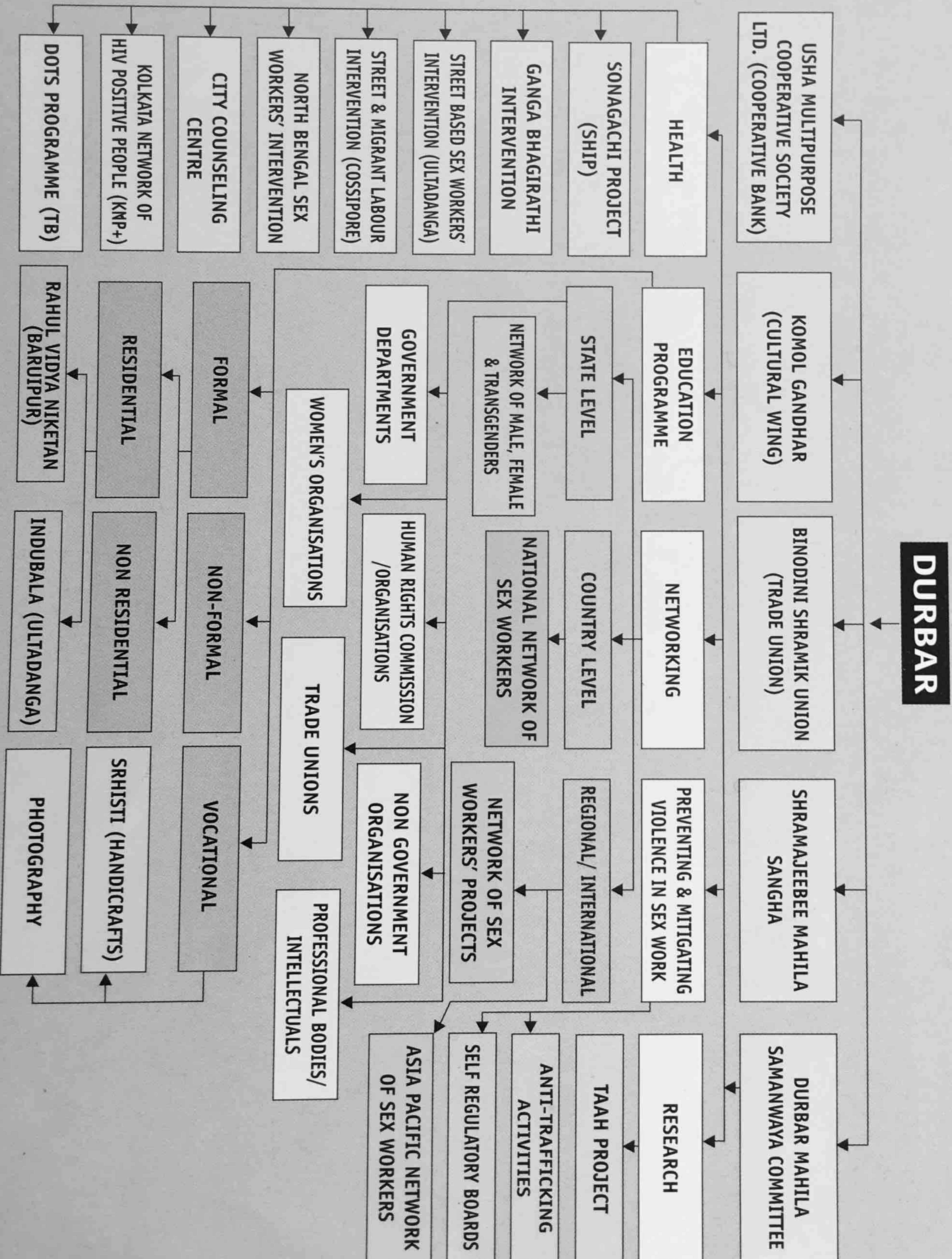


Durbar : An Introduction

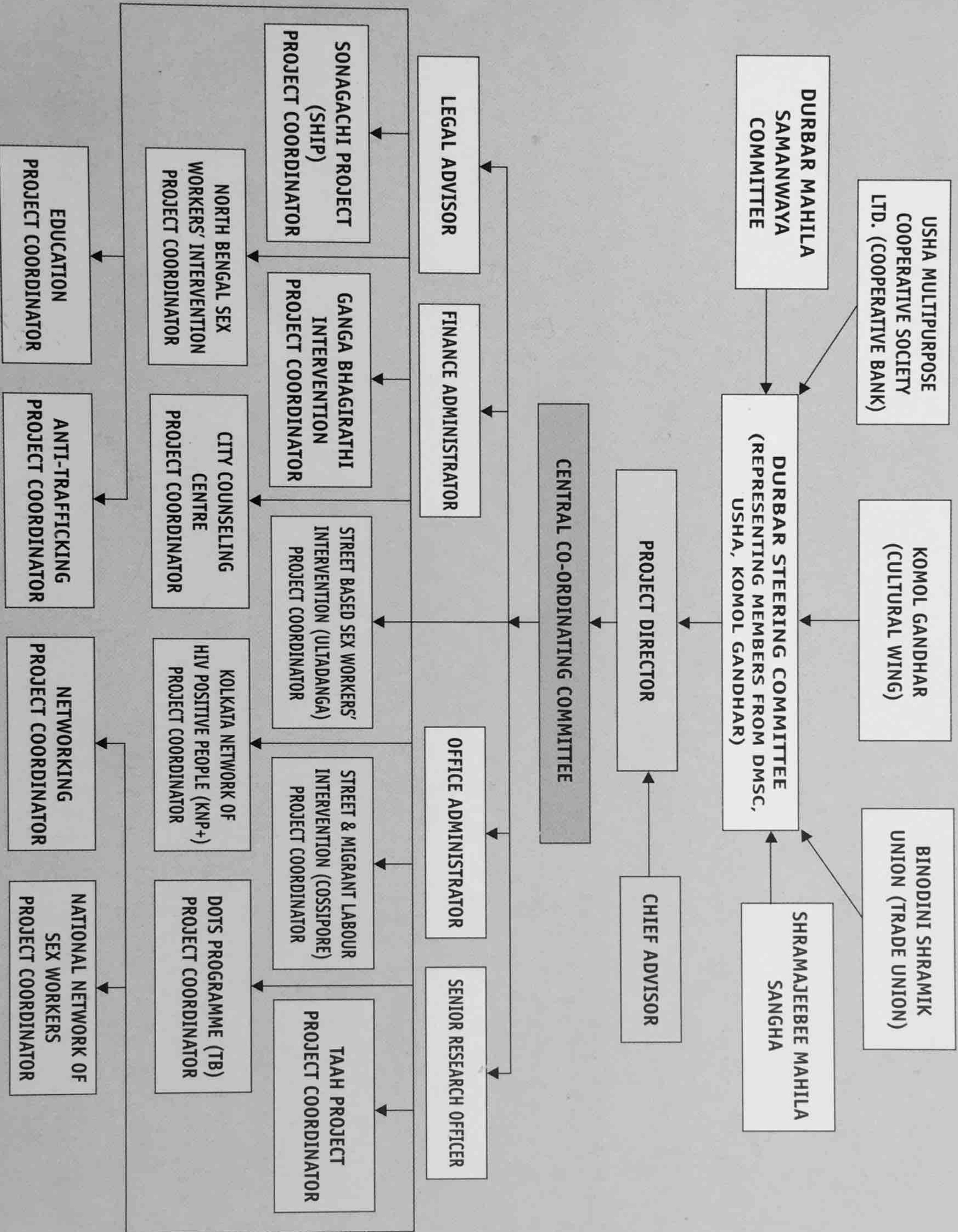
Durbar (Durbar in Bengali means un-stoppable or indomitable) is a forum of sex workers based in West Bengal, India. Durbar has been active in addressing the structural issues that frame the everyday reality of sex workers' lives as they relate to their material deprivation or their social exclusion. Durbar is explicit about its political objective of fighting for recognition of sex work as work and, of sex workers as workers and, for a secure social existence of sex workers and their children. Durbar also seeks to reform laws that restrict human rights of sex workers, tend to criminalise them and limit their enfranchisement as full citizens.



An Overview of the Activities Undertaken by Durbar : A Conglomerate of Sex Workers' Organisations



Organogram of Durbar



HEALTH DEVELOPMENT

Preceded by a baseline survey conducted in the year 1992, by the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health (AIIH&PH), an intervention programme was initiated in Sonagachi, the largest red light district in Kolkata, having a population size of around 5000 female sex workers with the objective of controlling the spread of STD and HIV among the sex workers and their clients. The intervention programme incorporated three principal components, namely : provision for health services including STD treatment; information, education and communication (IEC); and condom promotion. The programme was put into operation through a collaborative network of government and non-government institutions, adopting a strong peer based outreach component. Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), a sex workers' forum which emerged with the direct support of the Project, became an active partner of the programme, on and from 1995.

Finally, Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) took over the management of STD/HIV Intervention Programme (SHIP) from the AIIH&PH, in the year 1999. After taking full control of the programme DMSC started replication of the basic principles and approach of the 'Sonagachi Project' in other red light areas, in the state of West Bengal. The organisation took special initiative to reach an increasing number of sex workers outside Kolkata. The basic approaches that Sonagachi Project adopted can be summed up as three 'R's : Respect, Reliance and Recognition. That is, *Respect towards sex workers, Reliance on the knowledge and wisdom of the sex workers' community and, Recognition of sex work as an occupation, thereby protecting sex workers' professional and human rights.* In practice the Project focused on translating this

approach through building a relationship of mutual trust and rapport between the community of sex workers and the staff members of the Project. DMSC expanded her STD/HIV intervention activities to include street based sex workers and their clients, to begin with within Kolkata : in Uladanga and in Cossipore covering a population of over 20,000 female sex workers (FSW). The major strategy of the programme is based on the creation of a safe physical and social space for the sex workers through establishment of 'drop in centres', in addition to education, counseling, case management of STDs and, social marketing of condoms. At present DMSC run clinics offer treatment for general ailments with special emphasis on STIs in 43 centres throughout the State of West Bengal, covering a sex worker population of 65,000. Our AIDS prevention activities include promotion of condom through social marketing and, community based marketing of condoms among sex workers of all the red light areas in West Bengal. The City Counseling Centre (our Voluntary Counseling and Testing Centre) was opened in 1998. The Centre is situated in Central Kolkata and provides HIV screening services with pre-test and post-test counseling. Diagnosis and treatment of allied diseases like tuberculosis are also a part of our activities. DMSC has facilitated the formation of the Kolkata Network of Positive People (KNP+), an organisation of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). As one of the key aspects of intervention activities, regular health surveys are also conducted in order to assess the improvement of their sexual health status. In addition, the impact of community development and social mobilization strategies deployed by the 'Sonagachi Project' is regularly assessed through an on going monitoring system using both quantitative and qualitative tools.



The following tables reflect the achievements of the intervention project over time :

Table :1

Comparative distribution of sex workers according to use of condom by clients

Sex Workers Surveyed	1992	1993	1995	1998	2001
Total Number of sex workers interviewed	450	612	1362	1174	1605
Number of sex workers able to persuade their clients to use condoms	5	289	1037	921	1314
Percentage of users	1.11	47.22	76.14	78.45	81.87

The data shows very significant increase in condom use. The percentage of sex workers able to persuade their clients to use condoms in 1992 was only 1.11%, but in 2001 it moved to 81.87%.

Table:2

Distribution of specific sexually transmitted diseases (clinical diagnosis of STD) among the sex workers in successive surveys

Names of disease	1992	1995	1998	2001
Candidiasis	16.51 %	7.58 %	9.49 %	3.42 %
Bacterial Vaginitis	NA	8.84	1.98	0.49
Syphilis	4.78	1.68	0.99	0.65
Chancroid	1.19	1.26	0	0
Molluscum Contagiosum	2.39	4	2.37	2.12

Table 2 reflects decline in the prevalence of five common STDs over the years.

HIV prevalence remained stable at around 8.7% as shown by the National Sentinel Surveillance of 2003.

Table : 3

DURBAR Run STD/HIV Intervention Programmes of West Bengal

Number of Interventions	Total Population Covered		Supported By
	Sex Workers and Clients	Migrant Workers	
In BROTHEL SETTING	31	19,285	NA
In BROTHEL SETTING	6	2088	NA
In STREET SETTING	6	27,381	8,000
			SACS
			SACS
			DURBAR



POSITIVE HOTLINE and CITY COUNSELLING CENTRE

Durbar runs testing, counseling and care services for people living with HIV/AIDS through its independent wing, the City Counseling Centre. City Counseling Centre aims to promote positive attitude towards infected and affected people, besides providing services for people, living with HIV/AIDS. This initiative addresses the needs of PLWHA and their families to cope with the social and psychological traumas associated with HIV. City Counseling Centre extends its services beyond sex worker communities to the general population.

Objectives of City Counseling Centre :

- a) To raise awareness about care and support for HIV infected individuals.
- b) To develop a replicable model for community based care of PLWHA.
- c) To train in care and support of PLWHA through workshops and training programmes.

d) To change social attitude towards HIV/AIDS and to fight against the stigma and discrimination that affects people living with HIV/AIDS. City Counseling Centre also took initiative to influence the attitude and practices of health professionals.

The centre also provides :

- HIV and VDRL testing facility.
- Pre-test and Post-test Counseling.
- Access to specialised investigations like CD-4⁺ cell counts to PLWHA, in collaboration with the National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases (NICED) Kolkata.
- Medicare services for common and opportunistic infections.
- Anti-retroviral therapy is provided to 22 PLWHA based on their need and on clinical priority. This programme is run without any external aid. It is directly sponsored by Durbar.



KNP+

KNP+ is a collective of people living with HIV/AIDS. Kolkata Network of Positive People (KNP+) includes both sex workers and non-sex workers and, has a current strength of 300 members. Apart from working in conjunction with the City Counseling Centre. KNP+ has currently completed a needs assessment survey among PLWHA. KNP+ has launched campaign for wider access to anti-retroviral treatment. They also run an advocacy programme to counter stigma and discrimination.

Major activities of this network :

- Creating solidarity through networking with other PLWHA organizations. KNP+ works in close liaison with the Government Departments.
- Campaign against all sorts of social injustice, stigma and discrimination aimed at PLWHA.
- Arranging medical treatment for opportunistic infection including anti-retroviral treatment.
- Psychological needs of positive people are addressed through group therapy and cultural initiative through a peer based approach.
- Providing information and social support services regarding care and legal support to PLWHA and their families.
- Creating awareness among the general population about HIV/AIDS.





DOTS (Direct Observed Therapy Short-Course) Programme

In our experience, the commonest opportunistic infection suffered by PLWHA is tuberculosis. Estimates show that one out of three HIV+ person is suffering from tuberculosis. In addition, prevalence of pulmonary tuberculosis is high among sex workers in different red light areas. Most sex workers live in crowded, damp and, poorly ventilated quarters and, are overworked. These social and environmental factors make sex workers vulnerable to tuberculosis. In addition, it is difficult for sex workers and PLWHA to access services from ordinary health care centres, for there they are discriminated against. To address the needs of these two vulnerable groups, sex workers and PLWHA, in September 2002 Durbar launched the CB-DOTS Programme (Community-based DOTS programme) to treat tuberculosis in

collaboration with Care WB and Kolkata Municipal Corporation. Under this programme those who have cough for more than 3 weeks along with mild fever, difficulty in breathing, chest pain and haemoptysis, can access sputum test and chest x-rays free of cost. If the person is diagnosed as having tuberculosis, s/he is provided with a full course of anti-TB drugs by Direct Observed Therapy Short-course (DOTS) according to the Revised National Tuberculosis Programme (RNTCP) guidelines.

Till December 2003, a total of 605 sputum tests have been performed and 83 persons (14%) were found to have tuberculosis and, were brought under DOTS. In addition, 10 PLWHA were diagnosed as having tuberculosis and, they are currently under treatment.

DURBAR'S ANTI-TRAFFICKING ACTIVITIES AND THE FORMATION OF SELF REGULATORY BOARDS

Dubar has a clear stand on trafficking and under age sex workers. We believe that inequality between classes, genders and nations are the root cause of the demand for trafficked labour in various sectors of the market and, hence trafficking. The solution to the problem lies in a political struggle for the rights of the workers engaged in informal sector and, for free movement of labour across the geographical and nation-state boundaries. We define trafficking as an outcome of a process where :

- People are recruited and moved within or across national borders

without informed consent and are coerced into a 'job' or occupation against their will.

- The trafficked individual loses control over his/her occupation and life.

Pursuing our principal objective of decriminalising sex work, we began our anti-trafficking activities in 1998 and, quickly developed our strategy to stop trafficking of women and children into sex work in Kolkata and its vicinity. To address this critical issue we have constituted 27 **Self-Regulatory Boards** (SRBs), a body constituted by sex workers and representatives from government organizations.



Components of the Self Regulatory

Boards:

1) Regulation of entry into sex work

- To regulate the entry of minors and unwilling women in sex work, the Board tries to examine each and every case where a woman wants to enter the sex sector, and the Board attempts to provide alternative jobs and alternate choices (through help from other NGOs, CBOs and Govt. Organisations) for those who want that.
- If the candidate insists that she wishes to enter the sex sector consciously, and if the Board deems that she is fit to enter the profession (i.e. she is of age, and is aware of what she is doing) she is allowed to enter the profession.
- The Board ensures that men, women and transgenders engaged in sex work enjoy free and fair working environment and, have access to health care and, that they may work without fear of threats, torture, or compulsion.
- All possible attempts are also made by the Board to elicit reasons viz., if physical or other forms of coercion (like abduction, deception, fake marriage etc.) were responsible, for her entering the sex sector.



- As one of the objectives of the Self Regulatory Board is to stop the entry of minors into the profession, minor girls who are under the age of eighteen years are counselled and returned to their families. They are provided with a minimum support system so that they can continue their education or are provided with vocational training at the initiative of the Board. The Board keeps contact addresses of all such minor girls who have been returned to their homes, keeps channels open for counseling and follow up of these girls and their families.

- The board plays the role of arbitrator in respect of any dispute which might occur between sex workers and madams, between sex workers and local inhabitants, police and so on.
- 2) Social welfare**
- a. The Board works to provide for proper drinking water and sanitation facilities in the red light areas. It also looks after non-formal education for the sex workers.
 - b. The Board supports co-operative ventures undertaken by the sex workers.
 - c. It also provides for the night drop-in centres for the children of the sex workers.



- d. The Board arranges to provide for vocational training for the aged sex workers and women unwilling to join/continue in the sex sector.
- e. The Board also facilitates and encourages cultural activities for the sex workers and their children.
- f. The board arranges schooling for the sex workers' children through boarding schools. In addition, the board provides over all guidance, so that the children are admitted at schools.
- g. The board assists aged sex workers by providing alternative livelihood options.
- h. The board helps to obtain new avenues/rehabilitation for sex workers who are willing to change their occupation.

Proposed Composition of the Boards at the district level

The Board is to be constituted from among the members of both central and local units of DMSC. It shall work in close liaison with the Panchayati Raj institutions in addition to the involvement of the Ministries of Social Welfare, Health and Labour. At the District level the Board shall comprise of 15 members, of which :

- i) 8 members shall come from sex worker community (preferably from the sex workers' representatives of the Self Regulatory Boards functioning at the local level.)
- ii) The remaining 7 members shall comprise of the following representatives, one each from the :
 - (a) Zilla Parishad,
 - (b) Labour Commission,
 - (c) National Commission for Women,



- (d) Dept. of Health and Family Welfare (Govt. of West Bengal),
- (e) Dept. of Social Welfare (Govt. of West Bengal),
- (f) District Bar Association.

At the local level, Self Regulatory Boards are composed of 15 members, of which :

- i) 8 members of the Board are representatives of the DMSC Branch Committee functioning at that red light area (local level).
- ii) Remaining seven members are :
 - (a) Local councillor (President),
 - (b) Medical doctor practicing in that area,
 - (c) Representative of the State Commission for Women,
 - (d) Local lawyer,
 - (e) Representative of other Women's Organisation working at the local level,
 - (f) Representative of the Social Welfare Board (State level),
 - (g) Representative of NGO working in that area.

Self Regulatory Boards have already started functioning in many red light areas (RLAs) of Kolkata and the districts. The RLAs that have functioning Boards are : Rampagan, Sethbagan, Bowbazar, Khidderpore, Chetla, Kalighat, Ghoradanga, Sheoraphuli, Damjur, Uluberia, Kalna, Basirhat, Kanthi, Durgapur, Asansol, Dinhat, Siliguri, Coochbehar, Sonagachi and Rajgunji. Although at present there is no earmarked funding for the self-regulatory boards, and no particular space from where they operate, these boards have rescued a number of under-age girls and have taken the necessary steps to return them to their homes or to provide them with alternate life choices.

Impact of Anti-trafficking activities undertaken by DMSC

1. The proportion of minor (age < 18 years) girls in the red light areas where the 'Sonagachi Project' is operating has declined :

Year	1992	1995	1998	2001
% of Girls < 18 years	25.29	21.47	3.56	3.12

2. The median age of sex workers in the red light areas where the 'Sonagachi Project' is operating is going up :

Year	1992	1995	1998	2001
median Age (in years)	22	22	27	28



CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Our experience has taught us that for a marginalized group like ours to achieve empowerment, it is imperative that we improve our self-esteem and begin a process of self-actualisation. We have realized that in striving collectively against all social injustice, we must protect our right to information and right to education. Our long-term goal is to achieve a better life, a better tomorrow for our children. In order to achieve the above objectives, we initiated a comprehensive education programme that addresses our children's and our needs.

- **Adult Literacy Program (KORAK AND DIGANGANA)**

Our adult literacy program was first started in 1993 in the name of KOROK and



DIGANGANA. The education programme has helped and enabled our community in designing health and other intervention activities including empowerment and community mobilization. Currently, 14 adult education centres covering almost 300 sex-workers are being run in Kolkata and in the neighbouring districts. A spoken English class has also been started recently, and we hope to expand it further.

- **Educational Assistance for the Children of the sex workers (BERABHENGE)**

A perennial problem with the children of sex workers happens to hover around their father's identity. The fear of the inability to answer queries on father's identity keeps children of sex workers on tenterhooks in schools and other public places. In addition, they have to constantly be on their guard lest someone finds out that they live in red light areas, or that their mothers are sex workers, because once their origins are known, they become stigmatised and are discriminated against. This constant vigil to protect the 'secrecy' of one's own identity and origins adds stress to their lives, particularly at public spaces like schools.

We tried to address this problem with special educational approaches. Berabhenge

(Tearing fences), as the name suggests, tries to address these issues. Basically Berabhenge is an assistance programme with three components, viz., special assistance centres for the young school going children, education centres for school drop-outs and, special coaching centres for children of higher classes. Classes are held in the evening, the time when most sex workers are busy with their work and, the children have to fend for themselves. Currently 15 Berabhenge centres are running in Kolkata and other districts, covering almost 500 students.

Additionally, the broader objective of Berabhenge is starting and continuing a constant interaction with the 'mainstream' children's activities through participation in quiz contests, sit-and-draw events, photography workshops, sports, etc. It is heartening to note that these 'Ekalavyas' are competing well and are on a par with the 'Arjunas' in such events¹. In 2003, Berabhenge children have won prizes in two inter-school sit-and-draw competitions : one was organized by Gorky Sadan and another by the Lions' Club of India in Kolkata. We are in the process of bringing teachers of various 'mainstream' schools to help our children through special meetings. We also organise interactive sessions involving important and influential persons from the neighbourhood.

To further institutionalise the process of learning for our children we have started libraries : one in Kolkata and the other in



¹ Ekalavya a self taught 'low' caste archer and, Arjuna a super warrior prince in the epic Mahabharat.



Kanathi, in the East Medinipur district. Any one from the locality, aged or young, has access to the reading facility in these libraries.

- **Vocational Training for Community members (SRISHTI)**

We began a vocational training programme for community members with the modest aim of initiating some productive engagement for the aged sex workers and for sex workers' children. At SRISHTI (Creation) training as well as production (of handcraft goods : terracotta toys and figurines, soft toys, jute objects, beadwork toys, badges, etc.) are undertaken. The unit is housed at the Lolita Mali Mukta Mancha in our office premises. At the end of the six months'

training we confer certificates to the trainees and attempt to increase their access to the market. SRISHTI markets its products through one sales outlet in SWABHUMI (a crafts park) in Kolkata. In addition, SHRISHTI delivers beadwork badges and other handcrafted mementos to different NGOs, CBOs and government organisations against job orders. We are planning regular sales in urban and district level handicrafts outlets. Over time, we hope to employ certificate holders of our training programme in our units. We also have plans to organize training and workshops on marketing and packaging for our staffs and trainees.



RESIDENTIAL HOMES FOR THE CHILDREN OF SEX WORKERS

RAHUL VIDYANIKETAN and INDUBALA ABASIK VIDYALAYA

The residential home in Baruiipur, named RAHUL VIDYANIKETAN, is located in the southern suburb of the city. Rahul Vidyaniketan presently houses about 30 children in the age group of 5-14 years. We are also running another residential school in Ultadanga named INDUBALA ABASIK VIDYALAYA that presently houses about 20 children in the age group of 4-10 years.

All boarders at the Rahul Vidyaniketan have enrolled in the local school and are performing well. In order to improve the children's access to books, a small library has already been started at the Rahul Vidyaniketan.

We offer drawing and music lessons as part of our education programme. We plan to develop the two residential homes for children as self-sustaining units, with the vision of providing our children gainful employment in agriculture, handicrafts and in other occupations after they complete their vocational education. To this end, we have planned to start vocational training for the children in these two residential homes in addition to the existing programme.

Change in Literacy status among sex workers :

Category	1992	1995	1998	2001
ILLITERATE	84.4%	68.6%	53.3%	57.49%
JUST LITERATE	12.2%	17%	11.8%	11.56%
PRIMARY SCHOOL	2.6%	8.4%	27.5%	25.9%
SECONDARY SCHOOL	0.7%	5.7%	5.3%	5.05%



Sex workers within the reach of the Sonagachi Project have become consistently more literate.

CULTURAL CHANGES AND DEVELOPMENT

KOMOL GANDHAR

As workers in the entertainment sector, we have always had association with the performing arts - in particular with theatre, music and dance. After DMSC was formed and we began to demand and fight for our rights, we felt a need to begin and develop a cultural wing through which we could express our feelings and performing skills and, also reach out to an wider audience with our messages and demands for workers' rights and for decriminalisation of sex work. KOMOL GANDHAR, the cultural wing of the sex workers was built through our grass root efforts. Komol Gandhar has its dance, music and theatre troupes. Many of the troupe members have performed in different parts of India and abroad. The troupe has received praises and several prizes in various cultural competitions in India and abroad. We also stake our claim as performers in the mainstream cultural arena. Komol Gandhar has emerged as a platform for exchange with various artistic traditions, across linguistic, religious and regional barriers. Komol Gandhar has helped to forge a common identity of the sex workers and has emerged as a political tool in the sex workers' movement across the globe.

Some Milestones

- In 1998 Komol Gandhar was chosen as the only cultural team to perform in



the inaugural ceremony of the 12th International AIDS Conference (28th June - 3rd July) held in Geneva, Switzerland. Komol Gandhar was invited to a cultural competition organised by 'Gurina' a well-known Varanasi-based organisation and won the first prize competing with other cultural troupes from various parts of India.

- In September 2002 Komol Gandhar participated in a cultural programme in New Delhi organized by UNDP. They captivated the audience by their dance-drama "I am that woman".



SEX WORKERS' ORGANISATIONS IN WEST BENGAL WITHIN DURBAR

DURBAR MAHILA SAMANWAYA COMMITTEE

Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC, the Committee for Co-ordination of Indomitable Women) is a forum exclusively for the sex workers and their children. In July 1995 a group of sex workers from Sonagachi, one of the oldest and largest red light areas of Kolkata, India, founded DMSC to create solidarity among individual sex workers, to collectivise and gain strength as a community of sex workers and, to mark out a space for centre-staging their demands that would enable them to change their lives.

We the members of DMSC have come together through our involvement in the STD/HIV Intervention Programme (SHIP), which was running in Sonagachi since 1992. SHIP provided the immediate context within which DMSC was formed. The peer educators of SHIP were instrumental in forming DMSC.



It was perhaps for the first time in India that we were directly involved in a developmental project, which accepted us as sex workers and did not aim to reform or rehabilitate us. We were paid a daily stipend to compensate for the customers we lost during the working hours of the programme, which created the opportunity for us to think about our immediate survival. This gave us the initial impetus and a supportive space to reflect on the conditions that control our lives and to take steps to change them.

In order to motivate a large body of sex workers to change their sexual behaviour and encourage them to participate in SHIP's activities, the peer educators had to ensure that all sex workers developed a positive self-image and self-esteem. It was this realization that prompted us to form the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee as a forum of our own, distinct from the funded intervention programme. At present, we demand workers' rights for all sex workers (male, female and transgender), we strongly urge for the repeal of the Indian Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (ITPA), and decriminalization of sex work. Male and transgender sex workers now represent particular sections of sex workers whose needs and existence are commonly denied.

We at the DMSC do not confine ourselves to any narrow limits of identity politics. We continue to identify and involve ourselves

with social movements and support the fight for rights to livelihood and existence of the other marginalised groups. We proudly claim to be part of the anti-nuclear and anti-war movements and have taken part in several state and national level protest marches. In addition, DMSC has always voiced strong protests against sectarian and communal violence and against censoring of artistic endeavours. We have shared platforms with other movements of the marginalised people like the All India Fisher people's movement, etc.

Presently DMSC has 66 branches and represents around 60,000 sex workers in West Bengal (India). We have an elected central executive committee based in Kolkata and, 66 elected sub committees functioning in almost all the districts of West Bengal.



USHA

Economic insecurity coupled with extortionate money lending practices that exist in our red light areas, have always been part of our life. This had made us unable to save our income and often made it impossible for many of us to escape the debt trap. To change this, we took one of the most significant steps by registering a consumer co-operative society (Usha Multipurpose Co-operative Society Limited, or Usha). Usha is for and by the sex workers. During August 1995, we succeeded in persuading the Government of West Bengal to remove certain clauses from the

Cooperative law so that we could register our cooperative society as a co-operative of 'sex workers' rather than being passed off as some ubiquitous 'housewives'. The registration of the co-operative marks an important strategic advantage for us sex workers in our struggle to re-frame the definition and meaning of our occupation. Usha hopes to use the fact that a state institution has formally recognised sex workers as co-operative society members to bolster our campaign for social recognition of sex work and of sex workers' right to self-determination.



Usha runs a micro-credit programme for sex workers ; crates alternative jobs for out-of-work or retired sex workers ; does social marketing of condoms and other consumables; and plans to start a large scale production unit for generation of employment for retired sex workers and those who want to opt out of sex work.

We, the members of Usha, are very emphatic that the Co-operative is not meant for economic rehabilitation of sex workers who are in the profession, but is designed to provide financial support for us to fall back upon in moments of crisis, and to minimize our economic desperation by creating a space for negotiation. Moreover, through social marketing of condoms in areas where we do not yet have an organisational base, Usha aims to acquaint more and more sex workers with the aims and objectives of the sex workers' movement. The cooperative has rendered a

tremendous service to the cause of sex workers' empowerment by disempowering the local moneylender-pimp-trafficker nexus, which works as the pivotal coercive node in the trade.

Having developed the necessary technical expertise and infrastructure, Usha now operates as the principal financial institution for the entire range of sex workers' organisations affiliated to Durbar, and manages grants from external agencies for them. At present Usha has more than 5,000 registered members and its increasing turnover is trumpeted by the government as a success story of the co-operative movement in West Bengal. USHA is run by a board of elected members (12 in number) from within the sex workers' community. At present USHA functions in six (6) red light districts of Kolkata.

The following table reflects the development of USHA Co-operative Society over the years :

Particulars	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Working Capital (Rs in lakhs)	0.01	8.45	9.91	12.65	62.33	95.68	115.33	180.00	250.00
Turnover (Rs in lakhs)	3.00	15.00	17.50	20.00	40.00	150.00	180.00	350.00	525.00
Members	94	104	214	483	1801	2219	2712	4771	5901
Loan to Members (Rs in lakhs)	-	0.97	2.20	3.59	2.61	3.41	17.70	23.69	44.64



SHRAMAJEEBEE MAHILA SANGHA (SMS)

Shramajeebee Mahila Sangha is one of the oldest surviving self-help group of sex workers that begun in Sethbagan to stop the violence of the local hoodlum “Langra”. The SMS was rejuvenated and integrated with DMSC, but maintains its independent partner sex worker organisation status within the DMSC.

SAATHI SANGATHAN

Babus or fixed non-paying partners of sex workers are an integral part of sex workers’ families and communities. DMSC realised that the fixed partners have a role to play in their empowerment process as well. DMSC therefore facilitated the formation of a collective for the Babus, which is known as the Saathi Sangathan (Companions’ Collective). Saathi Sangathan is beginning to play a role in support of our struggle against all kinds of violence and coercion meted out to our peers, children and clients.





BINODINI SHRAMIK UNION

We the members of DMSC and other Durbar organisations, maintain that sex work is not a moral condition but an occupation and as sex workers we are working women and men, who, like many other working people, are engaged in a marginal, sexist, exploitative and low-status job. For most sex workers, working in the sex industry is not an irrational act of desperation, but a rational choice made from the very limited options available, particularly to the poor, unskilled women, and poor gay men, in a capitalist and patriarchal society. Claiming recognition as workers has now become the immediate strategic aim for securing our basic needs as human beings.

From 1998 we have celebrated the international Labour Day every year by organising midnight torchlight rallies foregrounding our demand for workers' rights. To strengthen our demand, we have now applied for registration of our own trade union, Binodini¹ Shramik Union (Binodini Labour Union). Through the formation of the trade union we want to take this struggle forward and join the larger international labour movement for the autonomy of workers and for workers' rights.

DURJOY DURBAR

Recently, to formalise the loose affiliation of our organisations, an umbrella institution, Durjoy² Durbar has been registered.

1. *Binodini* in Bangla means one who entertains. The name also pays homage to a 19th-20th century sex worker from Calcutta, Binodini Dasi, who had become a stage actress, singer and, celebrity.
2. *Durjoy* in Bangla means that which is hard to vanquish.



FINANCIAL SITUATION

DMSC and the other affiliated members of Durbar have practically no internal source of income or any corpus fund. The resources generated through the membership fees of the core members of DMSC are spent in running its various branches. Usha's income from social marketing covers the cost of maintaining its own infrastructure, while the profits from the micro-finance activities are distributed among its members as per the cooperative laws. The organisations affiliated to Durbar implement their various activities from the earmarked funding from various donor bodies, both national and international. The DFID, U.K and the National AIDS Control Organisation, Government of India, fund HIV Prevention programmes through the West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society (WBSAPCS). NORAD (Norwegian Govt.), another principal donor, had funded the Sonagachi Project in its initial stages and, had later on been funding the education and training programme for sex workers and their children. We do receive, from time, to time small grants from other sources to strengthen our networking and anti-trafficking activities in West Bengal and in India. To build the capacity of the Self Regulatory Board





members, DMSC receives support from some national NGOs for a limited period of time (one to three years). We and other Durbar affiliates often begin new and innovative programmes on our own, by generating funding internally; for example, DMSC began replicating the Sonagachi Model in district RLAs of West Bengal much earlier, prior to receiving formal funding. However, for larger events and more comprehensive programmes we have to seek external funding from different donor institutions, including different government departments. We have successfully organised the First National Conference of Sex Workers and its follow-up meeting back in 1997-98, as well as the two carnivals. **Millennium Milan Mela** in 2001 and, **Shanti Utsav** in 2002, at the Salt Lake Stadium, Kolkata.







The Durbar-run health intervention programme that aims at reducing STD, increasing condom use and preventing the march of HIV/AIDS among sex workers of West Bengal is not just a vertical HIV Intervention programme, but a horizontal multi-dimensional programme that addresses the key issues which primarily affect sex workers and their families and, put them in a marginalised and stigmatised condition. The Programme has evolved into a broader development initiative in which HIV/AIDS prevention and other health interventions form a core component. The concept of 'empowering' sex workers by creating an 'enabling environment' for them that facilitates transformation of their subjectivity from that of a 'victim' or 'fallen woman' to one of a change-agent has been at the heart of this evolution or change. This very concept played a pivotal role in unleashing the long suppressed energy and creativity of sex workers. It has resulted in enormous and spontaneous participation of members of the community (which includes sex workers, their children and fixed clients or babus and male and transgender sex workers), and had led to the birth of an autonomous organisation of the sex workers. The gradual development and changing structure of the organisation, its participation in struggle for the rights of sex workers has enormously enhanced the positions and self-confidence of the community members. This may not be the first attempt at collectivisation of sex workers, but certainly this is the first successful attempt by a sex workers' collective to take over the management of HIV/AIDS intervention programme from a research institute and upscale its activities maintaining high standards of performance on the one hand and, on the other, Durbar has succeeded in institutionalising community empowerment strategy to sustain the struggle to establish the rights of sex workers including respect and dignity and, also to establish individuals' right to self determination.