



CRBG

Coalition of
Rights Based Groups

A civil society coalition
for advocacy and capacity building
of sexual minorities and
people living with HIV
in West Bengal to advance
their health and rights

Discriminated against, disowned and denied their rights, most 'people living with HIV (PLHIV)' and 'sexual minorities' in West Bengal lack access to basic health services and social security. They live in dire poverty and are denied basic healthcare because of severe stigma attached to their HIV status or criminalization of higher risk and socially non-conformant sexual behaviours. Denial ranges from non-availability of services or refusal of health workers to treat them to outright violence, abuse and even death.

In effect, the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) status of these groups of people is severely compromised and their vulnerability to HIV increased several fold. Any efforts to ensure the well being of PLHIV and sexual minorities must take into account their SRH and HIV concerns. But within the policy framework, government health programmes like the National AIDS Control Programme Phase III (NACP-III), National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), and the Reproductive and Child Health Programme Phase II (RCH-II) are yet to adequately address the SRH needs of sexual minorities and PLHIV.

Many civil society initiatives (including community-based ones) in West Bengal also lack an appreciation of the wide range of SRH and HIV needs of sexual minorities and PLHIV, most of them providing only limited safer sex education and medical services related to STI/HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

Moreover, the concerns of certain sections of PLHIV like children infected or affected by HIV and sexual minorities like Hijras, other transgender people, lesbians and bisexual women are yet to find adequate space within the larger health and development discourse in the state.

While the government acknowledges that an 'enabling environment' created by protecting the rights of PLHIV and sexual minorities is essential and will result in an uptake of SRH and HIV services, much needs to be done on this and other fronts to ensure that their 'right to life and health', as guaranteed under the Indian Constitution becomes available to them in the fullest sense of the term.



The Coalition of Rights Based Groups (CRBG) aims to facilitate collective action among sexual minorities and PLHIV in West Bengal to fight stigma and discrimination, and ensure rights, equality and well being for themselves in the spheres of SRH, HIV and associated health and development issues as promised by the Indian Constitution, government and non-government programmes.

Established in March 2009 with 34 founder members, the CRBG has been initiated under a project titled “Building the Capacity of Sexual Minorities and People Living with HIV in Orissa and West Bengal to Advance their Health and Rights”. The project is an initiative of Solidarity and Action Against The HIV Infection in India (SAATHII) in partnership with Interact Worldwide, London and with funding support from the Department for International Development - Civil Society Challenge Fund, Glasgow. It builds on SAATHII’s past experiences of working with issues of disadvantaged PLHIV and sexual minority communities.

One of SAATHII’s key learnings from work on stigma and discrimination faced by disadvantaged communities over the years has been that bringing about change needs focused and sustained advocacy with various stakeholders, and advocacy is most effective when claims are made in a collective voice. CRBG consequently is a platform for community based initiatives and other NGOs in West Bengal to collectively work on issues of stigma and discrimination faced by sexual minorities and PLHIV as well as other marginalized groups in the state.



While CRBG currently functions through the founding secretariat run by SAATHII, in the next few years it aims to be in a position to operate as an independent entity, with its own resources and sustainability mechanisms.

CRBG's members include community based initiatives and other NGOs working with PLHIV and sexual minorities. It also includes civil society organizations that work on SRH, HIV and a range of associated issues like gender, sexuality, human rights, sexual abuse, migration, trafficking, domestic violence, substance use, child, adolescent and youth health and development, old age, mental health, and physical disabilities.

In keeping with its policy of inclusive representation, CRBG tries to ensure that the most disadvantaged sub-sections of PLHIV and sexual minorities find space and voice in the coalition. This includes those who are particularly disadvantaged because of their gender and sexuality, income, age, HIV status and impact, disability and geography.

The coalition is based on democratic principles with every member organization - large or small - having an equal voice in the organization. Membership of the coalition is restricted to organizations; individuals can be part of the coalition only as 'friends', 'advisors' or 'observers' and may participate in coalition activities, but will not have voting rights

Shared stigma

Shared concerns

Shared potential

CRBG activities

We leverage the power of the collective to advocate for change at individual, community, programme and policy levels.

Identifying leaders and coalition building

We use outreach and networking to identify potential and existing leaders among sexual minority and PLHIV communities and invite their networks, groups or organizations into the coalition as members. If needed, we strengthen our member organizations through financial and technical help.

Advocacy

Advocacy forms the core of our activities, is informed by ongoing creation of an evidence base, stakeholder analysis and policy research, and is carried out through campaigning, lobbying and sensitization programmes at local, state and national levels. Each advocacy area is overseen by a sub-committee.

Current advocacy agenda

- Eliminating stigma and discrimination in health settings (including focus on NACP-III, NRHM and RCH-II promises)
- Protecting the sexual and reproductive health of young people
- Campaign for the HIV Bill
- Campaign against Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code
- Media advocacy on issues concerning PLHIV and Sexual Minorities

In order to carry out advocacy work effectively, **ongoing coalition functioning** includes general planning and review meetings, administrative and other sub-committee meetings and training of coalition member agencies on SRH, HIV, rights based approaches, advocacy and associated issues.

CRBG also provides direct access to SRH and HIV information and services for PLHIV and sexual minorities in West Bengal through the following:

- ✓ A **phone helpline** (call 033 2484 4841 on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays 12 - 5 pm)
- ✓ An **email helpline** (saathiihelpline@rediffmail.com)
- ✓ A **reference library** situated at the CRBG secretariat (library hours Monday to Friday, 12 - 5 pm; please call 033 2484 5002 to fix date and time of visit)
- ✓ **Mobile libraries** that travel through the districts to ensure that information reaches all corners of the state
- ✓ A **legal aid unit** (call 033 2484 4841)
- ✓ An **electronic resource centre** available at www.saathii.org

For more information on CRBG's activities log on to www.saathii.org/calcuttapages/dfid-cscf-interact-coa-project-components.pdf

Coalition of Rights Based Groups Secretariat

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