

“LEGAL AID EVENT: AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ON ENERGY CONSERVATION DAY”

*(Report on the event conducted in slums of
Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida, Uttar
Pradesh on December 14, 2020)*

Abstract: This event was conducted by Para Legal Volunteer, Legal Aid Centre, and S.L.S. Noida. Firstly, children mainly belonging to the age group of 5-12 were explained the importance of planting trees and their benefits, the inspiring story of the Chipko movement, the ill effects of plastic and deforestation, the importance of waste management and the mantra of ‘Reduce, reuse, recycle’. Interactive discussions on sustainability and water conservation were conducted.

Conducted by:

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1. Concept Note :

The Legal Aid Centre at Symbiosis Law School, NOIDA conducts various awareness programs to sensitize the society towards a plethora of legal and social issues. As an extension of such initiatives I, student of the college and a Para Legal Volunteer at Legal Aid Centre conducted a session on *World Energy Conservation Day* in various slums around Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh in collaboration with the reputed NGO, Robin Hood Army, Greater NOIDA Chapter on December 14, 2020.

The statistics pertaining to the environment today are alarming. Unprecedented economic growth, which has lifted millions out of poverty in Asia and the Pacific, is putting heavy pressure on ecosystems. Increasing unsustainable consumption patterns have led to worsening air pollution, water scarcity and waste generation, threatening human and environmental health. Increased demand for fossil fuels and natural resources – extensive agriculture, palm oil and rubber plantations, aquaculture and the illegal trade in wildlife – are causing environmental degradation and biodiversity loss.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, in Southeast Asia, the average area deforested annually is more than 1 million hectares, resulting in the release of hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide every year between 2005 and 2015. The contamination of water sources by human and industrial waste, including pharmaceutical and personal care products, is a major problem in the region, the GEO-6 reports state.

Water-related diseases and unsafe water contribute to 1.8 million deaths annually and 24.8 million disability-adjusted life years in the region.

Thus, making people aware about topics such as Environmental and Resource Conservation is the need of the hour today.

2. Objectives :

The main objective of the Legal Aid Centre of SLS-N was to create awareness and educate people, especially the younger generation about preventive measures pertaining to environmental degradation. The urban populace is relatively more educated about such topics and thus, the target audience of this demonstrative and interactive session were children belonging to the age group of 5-12 years. With the next generation being the torchbearers of tomorrow, it is imperative for growing kids to be well versed with ways to prevent the pollution and degradation of the environment. Therefore, the main objectives were :

- a) To make young children realize the gigantic responsibility that they have on their shoulders to utilize resources responsibly and preserve the environment for themselves and their future generations.
- b) To make them aware about possible steps that need to be undertaken to prevent environmental degradation.
- c) To imbibe into them the mantra of 'Reduce, reuse, recycle' and how it can be incorporated in day to day life.

- d) To inspire them to take a stand for themselves and the environment by taking small steps by interactive storytelling of inspiring stories such as that of the *Bishnoi community* and the *Chipko movement*.
- e) To inculcate in them ideas of waste management, resource conservation and sustainability.

3. Preliminary Preparations :

Before conducting the event a few important preparations were made :

- a) Collecting plastic bags, cloth bags and other similar material for effective demonstration of the mantra 'Reuse, reduce, recycle'.
- b) Researching effective strategies to make discussion revolving around environmental pollution and preservation child-friendly and well-received by the slum dwelling audience.
- c) Gathering support from the Legal Aid Centre to ensure maximum participation from volunteers. Dividing work between the one who signed up, sharing my vision for the event with them and devising a pedagogy.
- d) Taking suggestions from other members of the Robin Hood Army and working on their inputs to make the session as fruitful as possible.

4. Conducting the programme :

The awareness programme was conducted in two slums around Gautam Buddha University, Greater NOIDA. These sites were chosen mainly because of a large chunk of their population belonging to the age group of

5-12 years. Due to the extreme cold, covering other areas or conducting extensive sessions was not possible. Collaborating with the NGO ensured mass mobilization of people so that more and more people could be benefitted by my session on *Environmental Conservation and Resource Management*. I went to the members of the Robin Hood Army, Greater NOIDA chapter with a detailed proposal of the event and they were elated to have me on board. They have divided the slums around Gautam Buddha University into two parts, namely GBU clusters 1 and 2.

We began with our event at GBU Cluster 1. I was joined by LAC volunteers Ms. Saniya Khanna and Mr. Pratham Arya. We visited the slums along with members of the Robin Hood Army and invited all children and young adults to come out and attend the event. Firstly, I explained the importance of planting trees and their benefits. I made them repeat after me how trees attract rainfall, provide animals with homes, give us wood, paper, rubber and other useful resources, protect us from soil erosion and floods and are an amazing food resource. I followed it up with demonstrating by using paper bags, cloth bags, plastic bags etc.. which article of daily use is eco-friendly and which is not. We discussed and thought out loud which articles can be reused or recycled and what would be the best disposal mechanisms for single use articles. Later, I narrated the inspiring story of the Chipko movement and reiterated the extremely positive collective change that individual action and citizen participation can bring and to motivate them

to always stand up for themselves and do their bit. We had a detailed discussion about the impending water crisis and practices to ensure that not even a drop of water goes waste. Similar events later transpired at Gautam Buddha University Cluster 2.

Response of the Target Audience :

With World Energy Conservation Day falling in the month of December, it was really chilly. Moreover, it rained heavily a day before and rain showers were expected on 14th December, 2020 as well. Therefore, I could not gather a crowd as big as the one I would have liked to. But the children who were present were greatly involved throughout the event. They paid close attention to my session. They were answering my questions loudly in unison and repeating points after me. They had their own unique suggestions for all topics and issues and were not afraid to voice them.

They enjoyed and appreciated the child-friendly way in which a seemingly boring topic like this was conducted. I was amazed to hear their innovative ideas on what materials can be recycled and how. It was a fruitful session.

5. Key Personal Takeaway :

The feeling of making a difference in the lives of so many budding citizens of the nation and influencing them in a constructive way was indeed an amazing experience. Most of the children present there had never been briefed about the environment and thus the feeling of being their 'first' was

incredible. Secondly, it made me realize the importance of education and its power to change lives and the world.

However, while preparing for the session and brainstorming about the sub-topics I would like to cover, the entire thing seemed like a façade under which I was trying to somehow conceal my privilege. One thought kept striking me - How do I talk about energy and resource conservation with slum dwellers who live below the poverty line and do not have access to running electricity and water supply? How do I, without sounding extremely privileged, tell people who are fighting every day for their survival that they shouldn't be using a conventional *choolha* as it emits toxic gases that pollute the air and that they should be using more environment friendly and hence, costlier ways? How do I tell people who have to set out on foot by sheer lack of choice that they should avoid using motor vehicles and should use public transport or walk instead? How do I ask people who can barely make their ends meet that they should not utilize the plastic utensils, bags etc. that they can easily procure and should rather spend money out of their meagre income to arrange cloth bags and metal utensils?

How do I outrightly erase all their daily struggles just so that I can give myself the hollow satisfaction that I did 'good for the society'? This campaign in particular, gave me the most important personal takeaway. In the process of trying to 'educate' the underprivileged, I got educated on how to move out of my own position of privilege. I learnt that the only way

to actually do good, is to get into the shoes of the people who I am trying to 'help'. I learnt that people today do not need sympathy, they need empathy. Once I realized that, I was able to think beyond the definitions of sustainability and environmental conservation that we were made to mug up in school. Instead of asking them to throw away the plastic items that they have or will get in the future, I discussed with them methods of reusing them with the basic example of a plastic bottle. I utilized a similar pattern in talking about waste management, water and environmental conservation.

6. Future Plan of Action :

Considering how the resources are getting depleted and the environment is getting degraded at an alarming rate, one session talking about awareness and preventive measures is not enough to ensure that people make environmental conservation methods a part of their lifestyles. Thus, more such sessions need to be organized in the future.

Keeping in mind my inability to conduct such sessions frequently owing to academic and time constraints, I briefed other volunteers who had accompanied me that day as to how they should go about things in my absence and shared with them relevant articles and links so that the unavailability of one person does not hinder slow but necessary progress. I will be following up and will be kept in loop throughout and will conduct similar sessions in the future as and when possible.

7. Suggestions/Feedback :

Follow up action should be encouraged and more and more such topics to be taken up not just with children but with people of all ages so that these preventive measures that we talk about become habits and a way of life. However, while conducting a session of this nature, the volunteer should not be basing it on their perspective, but should adjust their perspective ranging from one target audience to another.

The administration of the LAC should regularly have discussions with the volunteers about how to keep their privilege in check and should be given topic choices that will be more realistic and relevant to the ground reality.

8. Conclusion/Remarks :

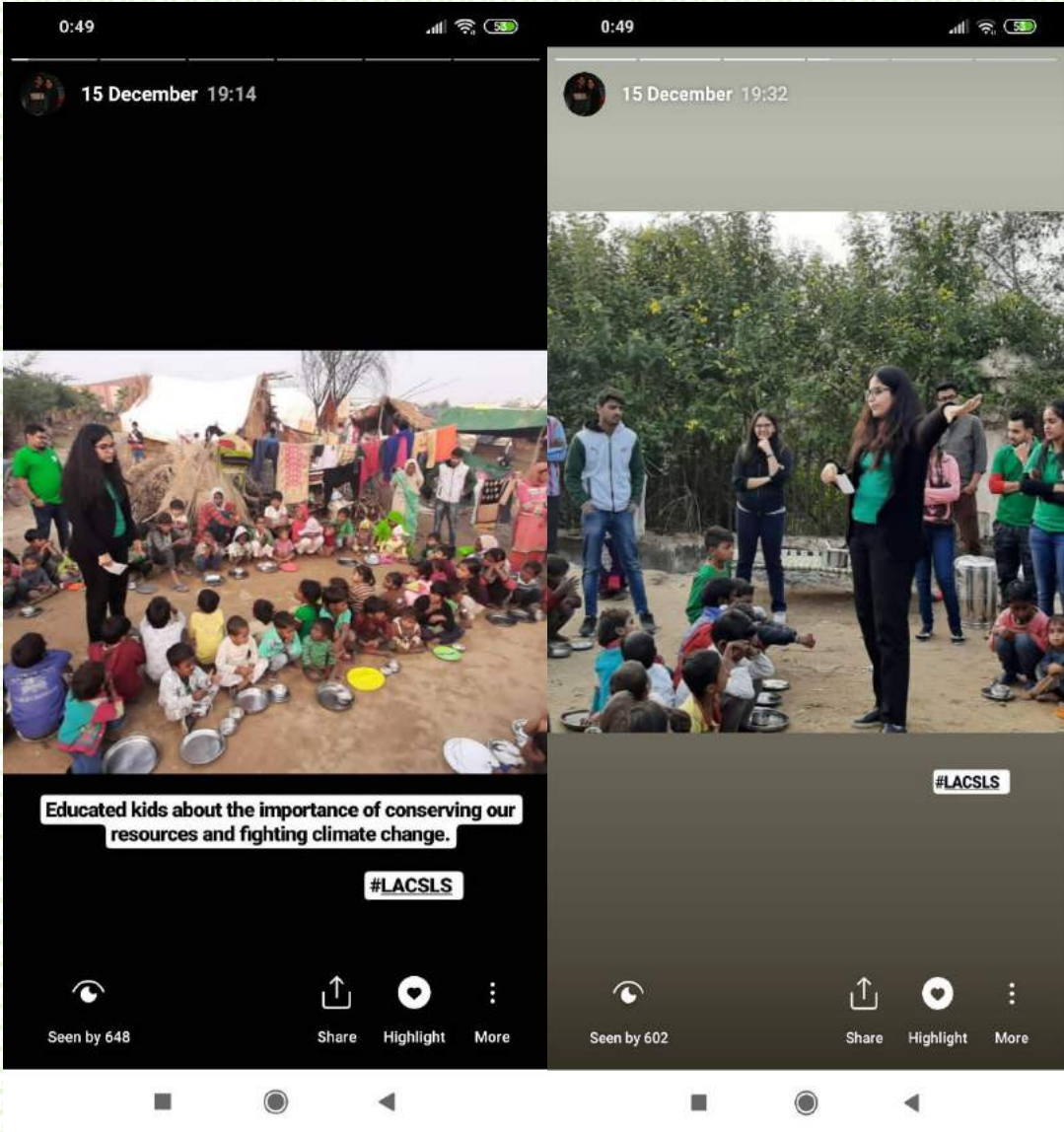
This was a great learning experience. I got the opportunity to take a progressive stand on an important issue and also got the chance to educate people on it. Also, as a law student and a future legal professional, it was of tremendous help as I understood some techniques and strategies to be used while dealing with the rural populace, who are not often educated on such issues so as to create a comfortable space for discussion.

Annexure 1





Annexure 2





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15 December 19:18



#LACSLs



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