

I'M EVERY  
WOMAN TRUST  
(DURGA INDIA)



# 2024-25 ANNUAL REPORT



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# ABOUT DURGA

Durga is a citizen sector initiative of I'm Every Woman trust, founded in 2013, with a vision of gender-just public spaces that harnesses the full potential of everyone - agnostic of gender, class or other intersectionalities. We enable this by taking a holistic approach to safety, ensuring that safety is not the responsibility of the vulnerable, but that of everyone who is present. We work with all actors who are a part of these spaces.

## OUR MISSION

**Public Spaces are equally occupied by people of all intersectional identities for commute, leisure and other activities.**

## OUR VISION

**Enabling gender-just public spaces that are free from sexual harassment by building the capabilities of all actors who use these spaces through Theatre of the Oppressed.**

**We are:**

**Value Driven-** Durga's four values are Respect, Sensitivity, Trust and Empathy.

**Feminist-** Intersectional & transnational in our thinking.

**Rights Based-** Equipping people to learn and claim their rights.

**Action Oriented-** We use theatre and interactive approaches towards interventions.



# A NOTE OF HOPE

— Priya Varadarajan, Founder and CIO



2024 has been a year of both challenges and resistance. Across the world, we've witnessed a re-shaping perhaps even a re-wiring of how gender is understood, what gets funded, and what gains acceptance. Wars rage on, genocides unfold, and while these crises may seem distant, they remain impossible to ignore. Time and again, whether in the face of human-made disasters or the recent pandemic, one truth has been evident: no two people experience hardship in the same way. Our identities shape and complicate our realities. Is that what we loosely refer to as intersectionality?

I'm not here to dwell on technical terms, they often serve the elite. What matters is acknowledging that identities are complex, and so are the experiences they shape. This is something we at Durga have come to understand deeply over the years.

The past year has been one of immense learning. We got many things right, we got some things wrong and, as always, we learned the most from our missteps. We've built a robust Theory of Change for our work with both women and men, and we've seen its tangible impact not just in creating safer spaces, but also in enabling women in the informal sector to access economic justice.

Through the pages ahead, we share what we've done, how we're evolving, and how we're working towards truly gender-just public spaces for all. We are proud. We are pleased. Most of all, we are practitioners.

# WORKING IN PUBLIC SPACES

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Working in public spaces is essential because these spaces reflect and reproduce social hierarchies, inequalities, and power dynamics present in society. They are where people of diverse backgrounds interact daily—yet they are often unsafe, exclusionary, or hostile, especially for women, gender minorities, and marginalised communities.

By focusing on public spaces, we challenge who gets to belong, who feels safe, and who is visible in everyday life. Public spaces are not neutral. When we intervene here, we can disrupt patterns of violence, discrimination, and exclusion at their roots. Changing public spaces changes how people relate to each other—shifting from fear or indifference to empathy, dignity, and shared responsibility.

Moreover, because public spaces are highly visible and accessible, transformation here has a ripple effect. It can inspire broader cultural change, signal collective values, and create a sense of belonging for those often pushed to the margins. Working in public spaces also democratises safety—moving it from a private, individual concern to a public, collective responsibility.



# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## Work with Women

- Women at work program has been in existence for over a decade, with its refined approach in place for the past five years.
- We have engaged with **more than 20,000 women, working in-depth with over 7,500 of them.**
- Our work with women in the informal sector was informed by the view that skill-building initiatives, while undoubtedly important to increase women's participation in the workforce, are not sufficient to enable women in their professional journeys. Beyond technical proficiency, **women require spaces that actively promote their inclusion and well-being and are sexual harassment free.**
- Therefore, our work with women is centered around **rights at the workplace**, and how to occupy workspaces with confidence and dignity.



# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## Why Work with Women?

Women's participation in the workforce is not just an economic necessity but a fundamental right. However, systemic barriers—unsafe workplaces, sexual harassment, wage gaps, and limited leadership opportunities—continue to push women out of jobs or prevent them from entering the workforce altogether.

Currently, women make up only 23% of India's labor force, contributing just 18% to the country's GDP, despite carrying out unpaid labor valued at 15-17% of GDP. Studies show that if women participated in the workforce at the same rate as men, India's GDP could grow by up to 60%, adding \$2.9 trillion by 2025. However, this potential remains untapped because 90% of working women are in the informal sector, where legal protections and workplace safety measures are nearly absent.

Sexual harassment is a significant deterrent—40% of women in the informal sector have experienced workplace harassment, with many leaving jobs due to unsafe conditions. According to the National Commission for Women (NCW), this figure is only 30% of the actual incidence, as most cases go unreported due to fear and lack of redressal mechanisms.

Without structural change, women will continue to face exclusion, workplace bias, and gender-based violence, preventing them from achieving their full potential. Workplace safety is fundamental to ensuring economic justice, and long-term financial security for women.



# THE IMPACT



## Economic Empowerment as a Catalyst

77%

now express personal decision making



## Strengthening Women's Voice Against Gender Based Violence

94%

of the women understand what consent is



## Increased recognition of the value of Allyship in the Workplace and Active Bystanders

90%

of our participants are building a Gender Responsive Community





# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## Work with Men

- Our work with men is centered on **reshaping the conversation around gender-based violence** by shifting the responsibility from survivors to the larger environment—particularly to men who hold privilege and influence.
- We believe that creating safer spaces for women requires men to actively participate in dismantling harmful gender norms and intervening in situations of harassment and discrimination.
- We equip men with the knowledge, tools, and confidence to become allies and proactive bystanders in their daily interactions.
- By fostering awareness and accountability, we encourage men to use their power to support women, call out problematic behaviour among their peers, and contribute to a culture of respect.



# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## Why Work with Men?

We believe that safety is everyone's responsibility and hence working with men is also integral in enabling gender-just public spaces. They are often key actors in shaping the culture, norms, and power dynamics of these environments. Men are frequently present in public spaces in greater numbers and with more social freedom than others, giving them both influence and responsibility. Excluding them from conversations about safety reinforces the idea that it's only women's responsibility to protect themselves, rather than making safety a shared, societal concern.

Engaging men helps to challenge harmful norms around masculinity, entitlement, and dominance that often underpin harassment and violence. Many men are not perpetrators, but they may remain passive bystanders. When men are included and equipped to recognize, challenge, and prevent harmful behavior, they can become powerful allies and change-makers. This shifts the burden from those most affected by violence to a broader, collective response.





# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## Work with Active Bystander

- Our Active Bystander intervention program aims to **enable everyday individuals to prevent sexual harassment in public spaces and facilitate gender-equitable spaces for everyone to use.** program which equips individuals, especially those who occupy public spaces as workplaces, to become 'active bystanders'.
- Active bystander intervention is a way to prevent, discourage, or intervene in potentially harmful situations by speaking up or taking action.
- We've developed a 21-day module to engage street vendors, petty shop owners, and other public figures who frequently occupy public spaces.



# Partnership with Bangalore Police and National Law School, Bangalore

We have worked with **all 112 police station** limits in the city, building positive power with people to intervene in sexual crime

Objectives:

1. To equip individuals across diverse community segments to identify, intervene, and respond effectively to situations of harassment or violence.
2. To nurture a culture of proactive bystander behaviour, thereby contributing to the creation of safer public spaces.



Through this collaboration, **5619 individuals across 86 police station limits** have been sensitised and trained.

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# TAKE A STEP

**THE ONLY WAY TO STOP VIOLENCE IS TO TAKE A STEP – HOWEVER SMALL IT IS!**

## **What is TAKE A STEP ?**

Take A Step is Durga's counselling service extended to all survivors of violence and abuse.

Durga works with survivors, step by step.

A range of pro bono services are offered at Durga; from counselling to legal aid as well as all the way case work.

**Our motto behind this initiative is:**

**The only way to stop violence is to Take A Step however small it is!**

## **What kind of cases do we handle?**

Domestic violence, Abuse- physical, sexual, emotional and financial, Dowry Harassment, Cyber Harassment such as stalking or bullying, Emotional Distress, IPV (Intimate Partner Violence) cases, POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) cases, Sexual Harassment at the workplace (POSH).

# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## Eco-system building

Public spaces can never be truly gender-just if we engage only with those facing challenges within them. Awareness alone is not enough systems must change, power must be shared, and accountability must be upheld.

**Who answers when justice is sought? Who holds power in these spaces today? And why does the burden of safety always fall on the most vulnerable?**

At Durga, we shift the focus to those who wield influence yet fail to use it for good. We work with men, institutions, and systems those who shape public spaces **to drive structural change, build allyship, and create sustainable impact.**

### How We Intervene

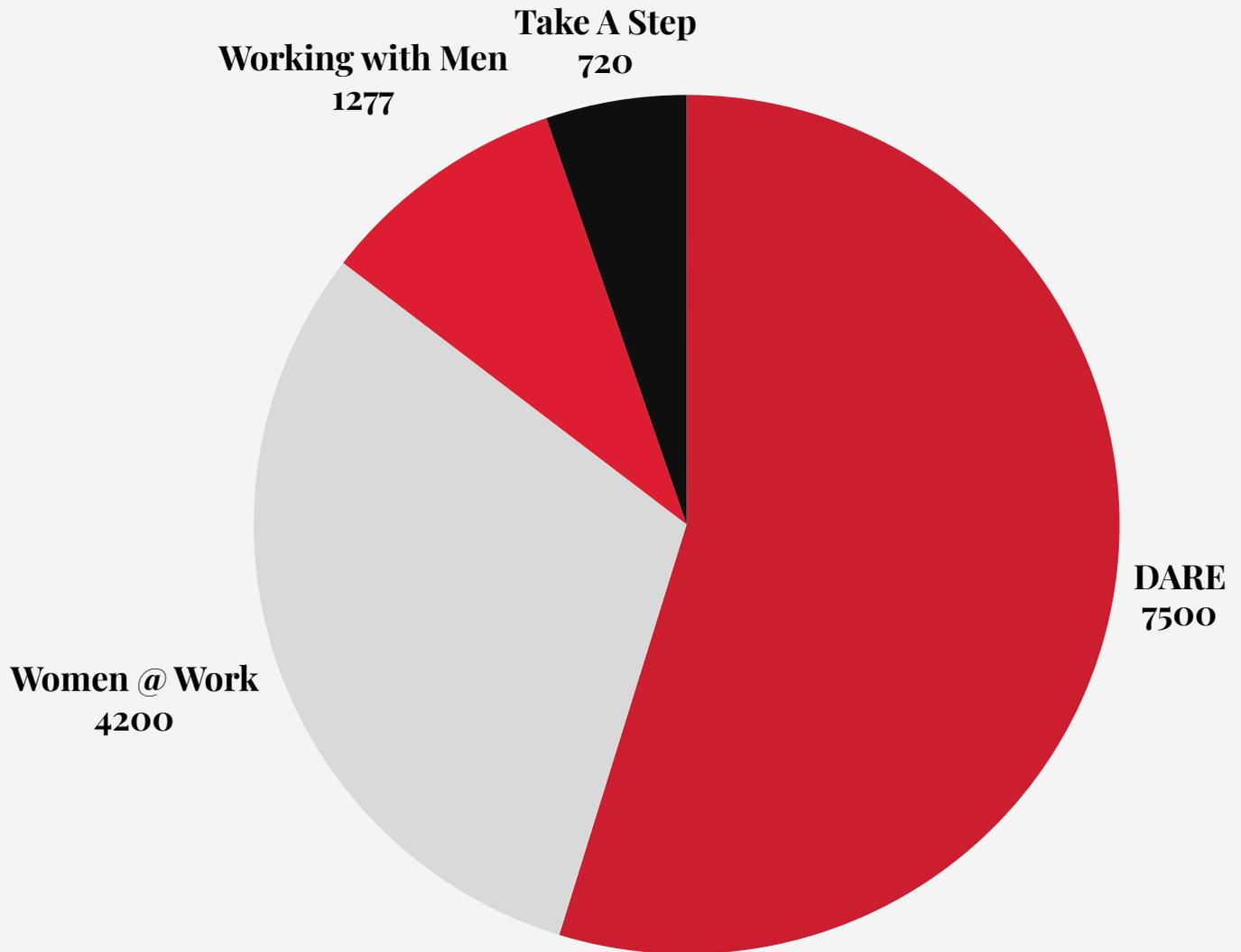
- With the WCD (Women and Child Development Department): As part of the Task Force and Local Committees (LCs), we strengthen justice mechanisms, ensuring accessibility and accountability.
- In informal workplaces: Where supervisors are predominantly men, we push for policy changes that allow women not just to exist but to thrive. We urge institutions to commit to gender-just, harassment-free workspaces.
- In educational institutions: We instill values of inclusion and leadership in students, empowering them to engage in decision-making with a gender-sensitive lens.
- With the public at large: We foster a culture where bystander action is the norm, where witnessing gender-based violence (GBV) demands intervention, and where victims are never blamed, but perpetrators are held accountable.





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# PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED



# HIGHLIGHTS

## Scaling up our DARE work with Bangalore Police and NLS



**The Bangalore Police and The National Law School, Bangalore** have partnered with us to scale our work across the city. We are expanding our reach to all the 112 police station limits, building positive power with people to intervene in sexual crime.

So far, our team have engaged with 85 police stations and equipped 5600 active bystanders with the skills to create safer public spaces

## Long-term partnerships



Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies - 1+ 3 years - Work with men

Kantar - 3 years - Women at Work

Trellix - 8 years - Case work and mental health

Utopia - 6 years - Women at Work

CGI - 6 years - Women at Work

Uber - 2 years - Active Bystander Intervention

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# HIGHLIGHTS

## Team members' big milestones!

Celebrating team members  
Thejaswini Suresh and Priya Mani  
who've spent 8 years with Durga



## Expansion of the Board of Trustees

Our team has grown with Ramya  
Sunddarajan and Neelima Karath  
joining our Board of Trustees



# HIGHLIGHTS

## New partnerships

Durga has won a **grant** from **India Welfare Trust**.

We are using this grant to research, identify, test and pilot behavioural change nudges that can change "passive observers" of sexual harassment in public places, into Active Bystanders.

Partnership with UN Women and CEHAT to scale Active Bystander Initiative in Goa as part of Safe Tourism through gender lens



## New Office!



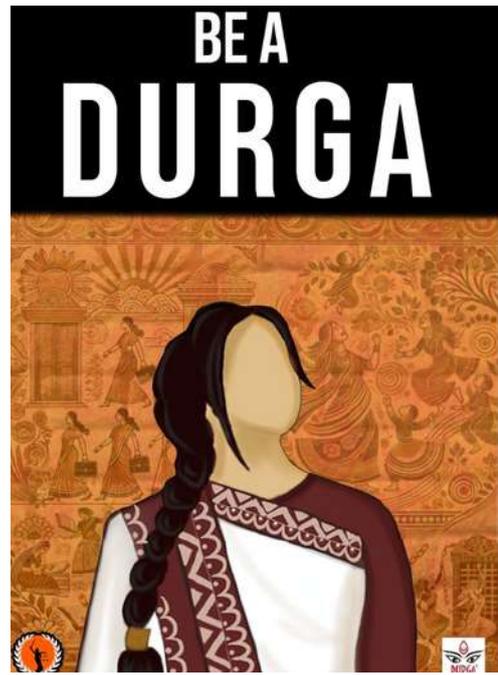
We moved to this lovely new location  
this year

172, 28th Cross, Banashankari 2nd  
stage, Bangalore 560070

# HIGHLIGHTS

## New partnerships

On the occasion of International Women’s Day, the Legal Services Clinic (LSC), a student run committee at NLSIU, Bangalore released the updated edition of the “Be A Durga” handbook in collaboration with us on March 8, 2025. Designed as an accessible and practical legal resource, the handbook aims to equip women with the knowledge and tools needed to understand, navigate, and assert their rights in the face of gender-based violence.



Originally published in 2020, “Be A Durga” was conceived as a guide to help individuals, particularly women—navigate the complex legal systems surrounding violence and harassment. The 2025 edition has been significantly updated to reflect recent legal reforms, including the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS). To improve accessibility and ease of understanding, the handbook has been restructured into a thematic FAQ-based format, covering legal protections in public, private, and digital spaces.

“

# STORIES OF CHANGE

## A STORY OF SOLIDARITY

The facilitators from Durga conducted a session with BBMP pourakarmikas on empathy — a theme that deeply resonated with us. So many women we knew had encountered some form of violence, and the discussion felt very personal.

The following week, during another session, I shared an incident that had recently occurred. I was in Gottigere, going about my daily tasks, when I noticed a woman in distress. She was surrounded by a group of men who were standing uncomfortably close to her. I could sense that something was wrong, and I felt that if no one stepped in, something might happen.

I shouted at the men and raised my broomstick, making it clear I wasn't going to stay quiet. They seemed surprised that someone was speaking up, but I think they realized I was determined to cause a scene — so they backed off and walked away.



Once they were gone, my colleagues and I approached the woman to check if she was okay. She told us she had fled her home to escape her husband and had ended up lost in the city, with no one to turn to. Her maternal family lived in Bihar, but she was far from home and completely alone.

We knew we had to help. Together, we found a way to reach out to her family and made arrangements for her to travel back home safely. She eventually boarded a train that would take her back to her loved ones.

If it hadn't been for our engagement with Durga, I don't think we would have even recognized that the woman was in danger. We are grateful to the facilitators for helping us trust our instincts and for giving us the confidence to act when it mattered most.

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# I'M A DURGA

—Thejaswini Suresh (fondly called Theju)

How did your journey with Durga begin? How has your role evolved over the past 8 years at Durga?

“I feel really proud of my journey. I started part-time with impact measurement, then moved on to working in admin and accounts. After that, I became a co-facilitator, then a facilitator, an assistant coordinator, and now I'm the coordinator of our work with men. Today, I manage a team, and looking back, I can see how Durga has evolved as an organization while providing me with many valuable learnings. In the beginning, I was unaware of the sector, but now I'm working with women, BBMP workers, traffic police, been part of radio shows, and done interviews! I've gained so much exposure through these experiences. I've also had the opportunity to work with Rural India Support Trust and engage with school students through them. That was a pivotal moment when I truly felt growth in my work. I feel really happy about it.”

What does Durga's mission mean to you?

“Wherever I look at public spaces, I envision gender-just spaces where women can freely occupy, enjoy, and be themselves. Our work is expanding across Bangalore, and it feels to me like we are contributing to a global cause. The Active Bystander Intervention program makes me proud and feels like a dream come true.”

What has been the most significant learning experience for you during your time here?

“I feel like I have gained courage, knowledge, and skills around the issue at every stage of my journey here. At one point, we were just a three-member team, and now we've grown! Priya's flexibility and the nourishment she has given to my role—and to me personally—have made a big difference. In the communities, people remember my name and the conversations we've had, and that is deeply meaningful to me.”

”

What are some of the biggest challenges you've faced while working at Durga, and how did you overcome them?

“Each group we worked with initially felt experimental, especially for me. Asking, ‘How do we achieve the best outcomes?’ has been my approach to overcoming challenges and finding the right path. My colleagues have always stood by me throughout this journey.”

What keeps you motivated and committed to Durga after 8 years?

I don't know, I'm a Durga! That's it!

What opportunities do you see for Durga in the coming years?

“I would like to see us collaborating with larger organizations and expanding our work. There's a spark that Durga ignites, and it's this spark that keeps us going. I am hopeful that many opportunities are on their way for Durga.”

What's your dream with respect to gender-justice?

“Everyone is happy and free to do whatever they want, without judgment. They can go wherever they wish to go. Each Durga is an inspiration for others—that's how I see Durga. Every woman can occupy spaces in life freely and without fear.”

Anything else you'd like to share?

“I feel immense gratitude towards the organization and Priya for the 4Es – experiences, exposure, experiments, and enjoyment through the years.”



# PARTNERS



KANTAR

CGI



Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike



Namaskar



INDIA

Trellix



विश्वविद्यालय अनुदान आयोग  
University Grants Commission  
Quality higher education for all



# DURGA'S LENS: 2024-25



# DURGA'S LENS: 2024-25



# NEXT STEPS: 2025-26

—Priya Varadarajan, Founder and CIO

I started by saying that 2024 has been a year of resilience and we think 2025 will be one of growth! We are very excited with our work in public spaces and the way things are shaping. We are hopeful that through our partnerships with MIT-JPAL and with CSBC (Ashoka University) we will be able to do a bunch of things. Some of this includes:

- Establish a common understanding among people on sexual harassment. Leaving Context, Culture and Country behind.
- Build a few simple tools of interventions for bystander action so that inappropriate behaviour can be addressed
- Make a positive dent in the space of gender and mobility through interventions of bystander action in public transport, therefore enabling millions of women and vulnerable people to access public transport for their work and leisure
- Scale our work

Our other important agenda is to layer our work on access to economic justice for several 1000s of women with many NGO partners who are already working on livelihood, skill and job creation. We feel that intersectionalities play a key role here and therefore unless we work on the socio-cultural aspects, we will not see true economic empowerment among women and vulnerable people.