Domestic Worker Champions take part in a participatory training on Documentation and Participatory Collectivisation methodology to highlight the issue of sexual harassment in their world of work

Date: 31st March, 2022
Place: Meeting Room, Participatory Research in Asia
Number of participants: Domestic Worker Champions (Field Facilitators) from the #मेंी program
Resource Persons: MFF staff, Anshuman Karol (Lead- Local Governance, Participatory Research in Asia)

#मेंी is a program addressing the issue of sexual harassment in the world of work of women domestic workers. Led by Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF) in partnership with UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and Girls, #मेंी has been developed with and for women domestic workers, to strengthen and build accountable institutional mechanisms that prevent, prohibit and redress cases of sexual harassment. As a means to understand and develop the technical skills necessary to ensure vast awareness generation of the issue of sexual harassment in the informal sector, MFF field facilitators engaged in a participatory training workshop on documentation and methods of collectivisation.

This workshop was developed in collaboration with field facilitators, who regularly engage with groups of domestic workers in several regions of Delhi-NCR. In line with the needs of the field facilitators, the topic chosen for this workshop revolved around documentation—including report writing, and photographic documentation. In addition to this, as field facilitators also noted that collectivisation of women domestic workers posed challenges, such as those related to finding safe spaces and a commonly acceptable meeting time, a session was also dedicated to participatory collectivisation methodologies.

Field facilitators also noted the attitudinal and behavioural changes that they observed in themselves while working on the issue of sexual harassment at workplace, including feeling empowered, and being recognised as community leaders. Each field facilitator estimated that they have respectively been able to reach approximately 350 domestic workers across Delhi-NCR, to create awareness regarding sexual harassment at workplace, and the redressal mechanisms for the same under the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act, 2013.

To ensure a greater and more diverse outreach, field facilitators learned new insights on documentation and collectivisation, as it related to women domestic workers and the issue of sexual harassment in their world of work.

Highlights from the Conversation

Field facilitators discussed the methodologies and approaches they had been following so far to collective women domestic workers, take forward their participatory data study and reach wider groups with information about the SHW Act, 2013 and the issue of sexual harassment at workplace. The methodologies of using participatory discussions and

“Jin mahilaon ke saath hum kaam karte hain, unki awaaz jaise aage le chalein, won humein seekhna hai (We want to learn how to take our work with fellow women domestic workers forward and further our voices)”
opening up conversations have thus far led to acceptance and positive reception on the issue and the Act by community members. Field facilitators also reported that they are being perceived as leaders among the community, a critical step in impactful collectivisation.

Box 1: Field facilitator Rajni describes how women domestic workers experiencing various forms of sexual and gender based violence approach her for advice and support

“Mai mahilaao ko humesha batati hun, ki aap apni ghar ki baat bhi mujhe bata sakte ho, jo bhi hinsa ho rahī hai aap ke saath. Ek din mere paas ek ghaṛelu kamgaar mahila aake bol rahi thi ki mere pati ne mere upar kal chakoo maraa, aur unki karyasthal pe bhi unke saath cher khani ho rahe hai. Maine unki batein suni, aur unko samjhaya kanoon ke baare mein, abhi dekhte hai unko kya karna hai”

(I always tell the women domestic workers that you can feel free to tell me anything, including about the violence you may be facing at home. One day, a woman came to me and said that her husband threw a knife at her the previous night, and she was also facing sexual harassment in her world of work. I told her about the laws and redressal mechanisms, and that I would support any decision she made in the future regarding filing complaints).”

Field facilitators learned the importance of prompt documentation of experiences, sessions and discussions to ensure continuous revision and learning, proof of work for advocacy, and to generate evidence. The unique aspect of leveraging participatory methodologies for data collection is that empowerment, knowledge generation and evidence building to facilitate change, all go hand in hand. The process itself is designed to bring out voices and experiences which have been unheard and largely ignored.
Field facilitators learned the importance of collecting demographic information of participants in sessions they conduct, highlighting narratives, quotes, and photographs ethically, including importance of and ways to maintain confidentiality and seek informed consent. Field facilitators also learned how to draw out experiences and participation without forcing participants to engage in the discussion against their comfort or will. At the same time, field facilitators were told to document body language, non-verbal cues and even silence among participants as crucial subjective data, given the nature of the issue.

Field facilitators then expressed the challenges they had been facing in collectivising participants for sessions, and the methodologies they had used to create a safe, conducive environment to hold such discussions more effectively.

Challenges to collectivisation of women domestic workers for participatory discussions:

- Finding a suitable meeting time for all participants, considering that women domestic workers are generally only available between 2-4 PM, having to work before and after
- The lack of safe meeting spaces in most urban settlements in Delhi-NCR, which leads to women having to gather in the small homes of participants themselves, or in the open (where there is the issue of lack of privacy)
- Differences in ethnicity, culture, religion, and places of origin among migrant women domestic workers, leading to differences in the levels of participation in groups. For instance, it was believed that women domestic workers who were originally from Bihar and West Bengal tend to participate in sessions to a greater extent than women from other regions. Another example, as noted by field facilitators is that Muslim women domestic workers had lower levels of participation in sessions, fearing retaliation.

Box 2: Field facilitator Helen on the lack of safe spaces to meet and hold discussions:

"Milne ke liye Jagah hi nahi milti bastiyo mein, aur mahila siri do se char baje tak time de sakte hai. Iske alava bhi, kyuki hum ration bhi dete hai, zaroorat ki hisaab se — iski wajah se kai mahila sochte hai ki hum doosro ko zyada pasand karte hai, aur woh nahi aate session ke liye"

(There is a distinct lack of safe meeting spaces for collectivisation in the bastis. Additionally, since women domestic workers are only available between 2-4PM, having to go to work before and after, finding a commonly suitable time for all is also a challenge. We also distributed ration kits to women domestic workers in a needs-based manner, some women also believe that we engage in favouritism and thus do not come to our sessions when we invite them.)
Participants then learned the importance of factoring in cultural differences, identities, contexts and historicising demographics of the participants. Sensitivity to each of these aspects, including factoring in the time commitments that participants were able to make, was emphasised as a critical need, given the layered challenges and marginalisations that domestic workers in India face. Some participants shared from their experiences of using multiple strategic approaches to ensure these discussions were held.

Box 3: Field facilitator Anima shares how she uses all available spaces:

“Mere paas ek ladki aayi thi, aur hum park mein baithe the kyuki humein aur jagah nahi mila tha. Usne mujhe bola ki uski saas ne usse ek ghar pe kaam karne bheja, aue waha uske saath bohaut galat hua.”

(A woman came to me, and we sat in a park, because we could not find another space to talk. She told me about her experience of sexual harassment in her world of work there.)

Participants learned from one another what alternative strategies they could use to mitigate the challenges they had experienced. Further, they learned about the importance of building strong, trustful relationships with the women they speak to. Positive reinforcement, such as celebration of small milestones, came out as an impactful method to ensure that women domestic workers felt safe, recognised and valued. Participants spoke about the fact that the women they work with are equal partners in the movement they envision. They also strategised working more closely with a smaller group of community
leaders to build their leadership skills, and gain support for mobilising women from across communities and backgrounds.

A participant reflected: “Humara unke saath juraav, aur unka unke saath juraav (how we can build trust with women domestic workers, and how they may be able to build trust among each other)”.

Game-based and art-based methodologies were identified as strategies to create a greater level of comfort and conversation.

Reflections:

- Participatory collectivisation methods were being utilised by field facilitators prior to this session. Contextualising their approaches against a theoretical framework proved effective in supporting Field Facilitators to solidify and enhance their lived knowledge and experiences of collectivisation.
- Co-creation of solutions to the challenges faced by Field Facilitators themselves encouraged participants, and reaffirmed their belief that challenges were resolvable, leveraging the power of participatory methodologies.
- Working to build trustful relationships and leadership skills of select few community leaders to create a second tier of leadership from within emerged as a
strong solution to resolving community challenges. It also increased participants’ faith in their community, and confidence in their peers and counterparts. It was also highlighted as a sustainable approach to language and cultural barriers within the community.

- Having periodic discussions and capacity building of field facilitators is an important strategy to ensure continued motivation. Field Facilitators also expressed feeling heard and understood during the session, and satisfaction about learning something new and different. With renewed purpose and vision, they seek to take forward their work, and document sessions and experiences to add to the growing research being led with and by women domestic workers.