

## Making Workplaces Safe

*Training with Internal and Local Committee Members in the District of Sonapat*

February 11, 2021

### Background

The Supreme Court of India passed the Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. Under Chapter III, Section 6 and Chapter VII, Section 20 of the Act, the government lays down clear guidelines for District Officers for the implementation of the Act in the District:

Every District officer to constitute a Local Committee (LC) to receive complaints of sexual harassment at the workplace and to (a) monitor the timely submission of reports furnished by the Local Committee; and (b) take such measures as may be necessary for engaging non-governmental organisations for creation of awareness on sexual harassment and the rights of the women.

Further, the Act mandates employers to constitute an Internal Committee (IC) to address all issues related to sexual harassment at the workplace, including within government departments. The main objective of constituting an Internal Committee is to bolster efforts for the prevention, prohibition and redressal of sexual harassment at the workplace.

The District of Sonapat, in Haryana has, in accordance with the Law, created a Local Committee at the district level and Internal Committees in each department within the district level.

### Context

The Martha Farrell Foundation is committed to promoting safe workplaces and lifelong learning across the world. As a part of this commitment, and in partnership with the District Administration of Sonapat, MFF organised an intensive training workshop with all the Internal Committee and the Local Committee members in the district.



The training workshop, held at the Mini Secretariat Sonapat, focused on behavioural approaches to breaking down the PoSH Act and interpreting it in a gender-positive, survivor centric manner. The objective of the training was to sensitise the committee members to the nuances of the law, and equip them with the necessary information to handle complaints in a manner that's fully and meaningfully compliant with the law.

### Key Points of Discussion

The training session focussed on the following key points:

- How did the PoSH Act come into being?
- What is sexual harassment at the workplace?
- Who is the aggrieved and who is the respondent?
- How does the PoSH Act define the workplace?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of the Internal Committee?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of the Local Committee?
- What is the process for redressal of complaints of sexual harassment in the workplace?
- What are the duties of the employer?

The training focused on all of these elements using a behaviour led approach, and with focus on interpretations of the Law that don't just focus on due process, but also the basic practices, behaviours and actions that make a workplace safe and conducive for all employees.

### Key Learning

- Sexual harassment is of four forms and two types
- Sexual harassment is a heavily silenced topic in the workplaces of the employees
- Because it happens in the workplace and with people we know, sexual harassment is very difficult to report, and it is the responsibility of the Internal Committee and Local Committee to create a conducive structure and work environment to ensure employees' safety
- The role of the Internal/Local Committee isn't just Redressal of complaints, but also Prevention and Prohibition of sexual harassment through a responsive and proactive approach
- Internal Committees should have **one female presiding officer, 2-3 members from the organisation, one third party facilitator from an external organisation/individual who is aware of the issue, the Law, works with gender or sexual harassment. The Committee should have at least 50% female members.**
- We all have different cultural biases and beliefs that we learn from our communities and families, which we must leave behind while entering the workplace, so that we're able to work in an environment of professionalism and safety for all, and as Internal/Local committee members, also be able to ensure justice for survivors who speak up or file a complaint.

### The Trainees

The training session was attended by:

- Local Committee members of the District of Sonapat
- Internal Committee Members of different departments of District Sonapat



### Next Steps

- MFF and District Sonapat to jointly conduct more training sessions of the Internal Committee members and the Local Committee members to add value and build on the base that was created through this training session.
- Internal Committees to put up clear, simple and easily accessible information about the committee and its commitment to prevention, prohibition and redressal of sexual harassment within their departments.
- MFF and District Sonapat to explore further opportunities to facilitate more training sessions with government employees, as well as in the public sphere, to further understanding on gender, gender disparities and safety/unsafety, through localised, targeted interventions.