

***“Hum sabko apne haq ke liye aage aana hoga
(We must come forward and fight for our rights)”***

Domestic Worker leaders participate in a training session on advocacy strategies for voicing their right to safety in their world of work

Date: 17th February, 2022

Place: Martha Farrell Foundation Office

Number of participants: 70 women domestic workers,

Resource Persons: Nandita Bhatt, Director, Martha Farrell Foundation

Field Facilitators: Helen, Sister Bibiyana, Gudiya

Introduction

#मेंभी is a program led by women domestic workers of Delhi-NCR and the Martha Farrell Foundation, with support from the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and Girls. The program aims to strengthen institutional mechanisms that address and respond to women domestic workers’ experiences of sexual harassment in their world of work, and build resilient systems of change. In line with the goals of this project and ahead of the Municipal Corporation Elections (New Delhi) scheduled for April 2022, Domestic Worker Leaders participated in a training session on advocacy strategies for voicing the demands and rights of domestic workers to safe and conducive workplaces.

Participatory methodologies were used to conduct the training program, also envisioned as a ‘Training of Trainers’. The leaders trained in this session will further train women domestic workers in their community areas, to mobilize a larger number of women domestic workers, keeping the voices of women domestic workers at the front and center of all advocacy initiatives.

Participants for the training program included Women Domestic Workers associated with Network for Rights and Voices of Women Domestic Workers¹ in Delhi-NCR. The intensive four-hour training program was aimed towards:

- Identification of stakeholders who can affect positive policy changes in favor of the rights of women domestic workers
- Creating a comprehensive manifesto of the demands of women domestic workers related to the issue of their safety in their world of work, to be presented in front of the stakeholders identified
- Strategizing the best practices of advocacy and collective action for presenting the manifesto to the stakeholders identified

Highlights from the Conversation

The training program started with a briefing on the objectives of the session, facilitated by Nandita Bhatt (Director, Martha Farrell Foundation). A short introduction was also provided into the aspects of the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act (2013), including

¹ A Network of seventeen organizations, unions and civil society enterprises working on the issues and rights of Women Domestic Workers in Delhi-NCR, co-founded by the Martha Farrell Foundation

definitions of ‘workplace’ and ‘employer’— particularly as it relates to workplaces in the informal sector.

Participants began discussing challenges with respect to redressal of complaints of sexual harassment in the workplace faced by domestic workers, drawing from personal experience, as well as experiences of their colleagues and counterparts, including systemic challenges such as the non-institution of Local Committees and lack of information about nodal officers responsible for forwarding complaints from communities to the Local Committee (which sits at the offices of the District Magistrate).

Box 1: Nisha (name changed), a domestic worker leader on the lack of accountability among those responsible for complaint redressal —

“Jab shikayat karte hai, police bolte hain ki khud ki safety khud karo” (when we complain to the police, they tell us that we are responsible for our own safety)

Through the participatory discussions, and in light of the upcoming Municipal Corporation (Delhi) Elections, participants discussed their power as voters, and began placing responsibility for their safety with authorities rather than themselves as individuals. Participants then began strategising for identifying key stakeholders in the MCD elections— including political parties contesting the elections. It was collectively recognised that a ‘More People’ approach would be more beneficial, to ensure that the largest number of stakeholders could be mobilized on the issue of safety in the world of work of domestic workers. Participants also took a collective decision to keep adding to their data on experiences of sexual harassment of domestic workers in their world of work to strengthen their advocacy strategies.

Box 1: Domestic worker Parvin (name changed), on why the period before the elections would be the most appropriate for advocating for the rights of domestic workers—

“Jab election ka time aata hai, tab humari maangon ko woh sunte hain” (they are most likely to listen to our asks ahead of the elections)

Following this, a list of 15 demands which was co-created with women domestic workers associated with the #मैभी programme was presented to the participants. Demands included the following²:

- हम चाहते हैं कि हमारे काम के जगह पर हमारे साथ गरिमा और इज्जत से व्यवहार किया जाए (We want to be treated with respect and dignity in our workplaces)
- हम चाहते हैं कि हमारे एरिया में महिलाओं के लिए सुरक्षा हो, हमारे देश में महिलाओं की सुरक्षा के लिए कुछ कानून बने हैं, जैसे कि 'महिलाओं के साथ यौन उत्पीड़न (रोकथाम, निषेध, निवारण) कानून, 2013' के अंतर्गत हमारा जिले की लोकल समिति तक पहुंच हो, साथ ही हमारे पास एरिया के नोडल अधिकारी का नंबर हो (We want our residential areas to be safe. We want laws in India such as the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act of 2013, to be implemented effectively. We want redressal mechanisms such as Local Committees to be instituted, and we should all be given the numbers of each nodal officer in a district)

² This is not an exhaustive list.

- हम चाहते हैं कि घरेलू कामगार महिलाओं की सुरक्षा के लिए 'महिलाओं के साथ यौन उत्पीड़न (रोकथाम,निषेध,निवारण) कानून, 2013' के विषय में महिलाओं, नियोक्ताओं और एरिया के लोगों का ट्रेनिंग के माध्यम से जागरूक किया जाए, ताकि घरेलू कामगार अपने अधिकारों को समझे और नियोक्ता अपने जिम्मेदारी को (To ensure safety in our world of work, we would like women domestic workers, employers, and other people in the area to be trained on the provisions under the sexual harassment at workplace Act of 2013)

Suggestions such as— there should be no discrimination on the grounds of caste and religion in the world of work of domestic workers, and that there safe places for leisure needed to be provided so that women domestic workers may be able to enjoy breaks between work— emerged through the discussions around demands.



The women participated in role plays, to practice their advocacy techniques and strategies using the finalized set of demands, and learn to approach their political leaders, to place their asks. They learned negotiation skills and tactics to respond to evasive or non-committal responses from institutions. The women expressed feeling more confident and prepared to initiate and take forward their campaign after the role play sessions. They reiterated their faith in the fact that there is more strength in numbers, revealing that participatory methodologies of training also inculcated a greater sense of solidarity and trust among the women, who had lost trust in one another and their communities due to the hardships and challenges brought on by the pandemic induced lockdowns.



Key Learnings

- Safety in the workplace is a significant concern for participants, who expressed their inability to speak up and seek their rights to safe workplaces because of economic challenges in their lives, exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. The participants also expressed confidence in working together to bring their concerns to their leaders and push for sensitive and prompt redressal of complaints, keeping in mind the specific constraints and contexts of the lived realities of domestic workers
- Role play exercise increased confidence among participants to begin their advocacy strategies with their local leaders. Given the nature of their work and their vulnerabilities, participants had expressed fear of approaching authorities in the past.
- A sense of solidarity and trust among one another is growing among domestic workers. In the aftermath of the pandemic, their faith in one another had strained given massive economic, social and mental health challenges they faced. Working together through a ‘more people’ approach has helped them feel confident, not just in their own capabilities, but also in collective solidarity and action

Next Steps

- Participants will take their learnings from the session to other domestic workers in their communities, to build momentum for the people-led advocacy strategies and demands they discussed

- Campaigns are being planned to take domestic workers' asks for safety in the workplace to candidates contesting in the upcoming municipal elections in Delhi
- Women domestic workers will continue to create awareness and add to their existing repository of data they have gathered, the only women domestic worker-led study on their experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace. Using the data, they seek to work with institutions to ensure greater institutional accountability for their safety from sexual harassment in the workplace