

Visioning exercise with women domestic workers for Resource and Support Centre

Date: 5th march, 2021

Place: Harijan Basti, Gurgaon

Number of participants: 25 women domestic workers

Introduction

The Covid-19 Pandemic has created a long term effect on the lives of informal workers, especially women domestic workers as they are the first ones who were pushed out of their jobs during the Pandemic. It has not only brought financial difficulties but it has further exacerbated the sexual and gender based violence. The women domestic workers became vulnerable to various forms of harassment - in their homes and workplaces; their bargaining power has reduced significantly which makes them prone to SGBV.

MFF, in collaboration with PRIA, Women on Wings, and Seeds, is implementing intervention based on its previous experience working with women informal migrant workers to provide a safe, secure, and dignified workplace for women. Through the establishment of a Resource and Support Center in Gurugram, the project aims to assist marginalized women who work as migrant domestic workers. This project believes that putting the money in women's hands implies gaining economic independence and breaking the cycle of poverty. The project's goal is to help migrant domestic workers gain social and economic empowerment.

Highlights from the visioning exercise

Women domestic workers organized an hour-long visioning exercise to discuss the function and scope of the Resource and Support Centre; they highlighted a complete lack of information regarding their legal rights as citizens, as workers, and as women. Many issues that they faced, from sexual- and gender-based violence to abusive employers, became invisibilised. The issue of sexual harassment at their place of work was also one that needed to be tackled. As an Information Hub, the Centre will provide support to survivors in approaching Local Complaints Committees in their district. It will also empower the women to take on employment where sick leave, casual leave, fair pay, and other protocols are followed by employers.



women domestic workers doing visioning exercise

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically reduced their incomes. Many cut loose their domestic workers without a salary or any support money. The importance of sustainable employment and economic well-being is certainly not lost on them. Now, more than ever, it is necessary to lay the foundations of a future where women, migrated to cities like Gurugram in search of work, don't just survive but *thrive*.

This project, 'Sapne Mere, Bhavishya Mera', has revealed very encouraging attitudes about how women in the community envision their futures through the Centre. Learning new skills will ensure better employment opportunities.

In the discussion they also brainstormed among themselves about the social enterprise they want to set up in the Resource and Support Centre.

Some of the social enterprise ideas as discussed by them are:

- Sattu is something which is used extensively by people in the Basti, in cooking, in making litti etc. It was discussed that since sattu is a one of the prominent diet of Bihar and many women in Harijan Basti hail from Bihar so starting business of sattu making could serve the demands in the community.
- Another idea discussed was to make seasonal pickles – '*achaar*', which can be sold throughout the year.
- Women domestic workers also talked about selling packed foods like papad, mathri, nimki, mangori etc. They said as these will require less time to make and also they can be fresh for 5-6 months.
- Women also discussed embroidery business and handicrafts.
- They also discussed cooking business- where they will cook and deliver to the nearby societies and offices on order.

Beyond the discussion of business ideas, women discussed their safety concerns when they start some businesses or go outside for work. They discussed that they can't sit on their food stalls in the evening because they feel unsafe with the crowd, ***"mauhal kharaab rahta hai shaam ko"***, said one of them.

Other women also said that there were no good health facilities around, most of them charge a lot and they don't have the money to pay for their expenses. They said they are scared to fall ill due to the heavy financial burden that their medical bills will put on them, ***"jitna kamayenge nai utna doctor ko de denge"***, said one of the women. Hence they expect that the Resource and Support centre will provide some medical consultations.

The visioning exercise was very helpful for the women. One of the women domestic workers said ***"I thought I had forgotten that I knew anything apart from cleaning and cooking. Today after talking to my other friends I again revisited my hobbies of stitching and embroidery."***