

Building capacities through awareness, knowledge and information

1. **Workshop on 'Right to Information' with the women domestic workers in Harijan Basti ,Gurgaon.** *(The session was conducted on 27th August, facilitated by Babita rani, a paralegal consultant with Nazdik. The session was attended by 40 women domestic workers.)*

The needs and aspirations of women domestic workers are the focus of the “Sapne mere, Bhavishya mera” Project. It is critical that women domestic workers participate in capacity-building training in order to reclaim space and exercise their agency. Women domestic workers explicitly said in the needs assessment survey that they want a resource and support centre as an informative hub.

Babita Rani, a paralegal consultant with 'Nazdik', conducted a training workshop on the Right to Information Act for women domestic workers. She has expertise in Self Help Group processes and has worked with over 1200 women from the informal sector.

A brief discussion on SHG was also held, during which women domestic workers learned about the processes of self-help groups and numerous business possibilities from which they might start. The training session focused mostly on understanding the RTI Act, but participants also learned about their fundamental rights.



'Right to live,' 'Right to worship,' 'Right to eat and sleep,' 'Right to be treated with dignity and equality,' and 'Right to earn' were among the rights cited by women domestic workers during the session.

Following the discussion, women domestic workers were given an overview of the concept of 'Right to Information.' The resource person discussed the types of RTI requests that can be made. Because the discussion used a participatory style, real-life examples were used to help participants gain a better understanding. Women were told that if they did not receive a ration card, Adhaar card, or any other document for which they had applied, they may file an RTI. *'Knowledge is a fundamental right, and no one can stop us from exercising it,'* Babita Rani added.

The goal of the session was to raise women's knowledge of their rights as citizens. They will gradually develop the habit of asking questions if something is not right if they know they can ask "Why". At the end of the session, Madhumita said, *"I always thought that as a woman and the caste from which I belong – I can only listen and obey. I never imagined that asking question is my Right (HAQ)."*

2. Labor Laws Workshop for women domestic workers (*The session was conducted on 30th October, facilitated by Ms. Anita Kapoor, secretary of Sehri Gharelu Kamgar Union. The session was attended by 25 women domestic workers.*)

Domestic work is not recognized with so much dignity and respect. Over 94 percent of India's working population is part of the unorganized sector, 50% of which are women. Domestic workers comprise a significant part of the workforce in informal employment and are among the most vulnerable groups of workers. This workforce is among the most highly vulnerable group of workers in the country because they are invisibilised as labour and systematically excluded from the rights guaranteed under India's four Labour Codes.

Domestic workers are the second identity of these women and as a worker it becomes very important to know about their rights. A workshop has been organized for the women domestic workers of Harijan Basti, Gurugram. The workshop was conducted by Mrs. Anita Kapoor (Secretary of Sehri Gharelu Kamgaar Union) and has been working with women domestic workers for the past 20 years.



The workshop started by asking women domestic workers about their work and the recognition our Constitution gives to them. It is important to know this so that the workers are informed about the possible ways in which they can seek legal help.

Women domestic workers were explained about India's role in the Geneva Agreement during the ILO Convention. They were made aware of how India was one of the countries who agreed to provide social security to the informal sector through equal pay for men and women and fixed and fair wages for all.

The discussion was further probed by the facilitator with the women about the reality on the ground. The women participants agreed that there are still women in the various divisions of the informal sector that get paid lesser than men. Other rights for the informal sector under the convention include social security in terms of health benefits and pension is an illusion for many informal sector women especially women domestic workers. *"humein ek din ki to chutti milti nahi hai, insaano k tarah to vyavhar hota nahi hai. Ye yojnae to bahot door ki baat hain"* **(We even don't get one day leave; we are not treated as humans. These schemes and laws are far from the reality)** said Sonia (a women domestic worker in Gurgaon). She then asked the women if they are aware of any domestic worker getting health benefits and pension. They all said no and then she explained the reasons behind it. The biggest reason is of not being identified as a 'worker'.

The facilitator then steered the discussion towards safety at the workplace. The women said that their workplaces are not safe at all. WDW Statements-

"Carlton wale building mei ladki ko niyokta ne neeche phak diya tha" (At carlton one of the employer pushed women domestic worker from their window)

"Ek aur jagah pe gharelu kaamgaar ko pankhe se latka diya tha" (At one place, women domestic worker was hanged from the window)

The facilitator then talked about the different kinds of challenges faced by part-time, full-time and living women domestic workers. To this, a woman said "Part-time sabse acha hota hai"

For full-time and living domestic workers, the facilitator informed that the employers are supposed to give a proper room, food, safety and medical support. Women said that this does not happen anywhere. Domestic workers like us are made to sleep in kitchens, balconies and sometimes with pets in the house.

The facilitator probed, "Who decides the salary for domestic work? Is it you or your employer?"

The women replied by saying that it is our employers who decide our salary. We don't have a say in it because they know that we have nowhere else to go. The pandemic has left women to take any jobs that they can and live in any kind of conditions to look after their families.

The facilitator then compared their employer's job with a domestic workers' job. Domestic workers do not get compensated for over-time work and most the places they are not even given paid leaves. The law for informal workers clearly says that a worker must be compensated double of his/her daily wage if they work over-time.

The facilitator then moved the discussion towards the socialization of women into domestic work. She asked, "Kya mard bhi kothiyo mei kaam karte hai?"

One of the women replied, "Pehle jab humne kaam shuru kiya tha tab nhi dekha kissi mard ko, par ab dekhte hai"

It was further discussed with the workers how they decided that they want to do domestic work. We have seen and learned from our mothers the daily tasks of the house. This is why we were okay with performing the same tasks in someone else's house to earn a living. We must have felt that domestic work is probably safer than working in a factory or at a construction site.

One woman said “Factory mei aadmi ke saath kaam karna hoga, par ghar ke kitchen mei aisa nhi hai” (In factories, we have to work with the men, but at household kitchen there is no men)

It was further discussed about the e-shram cards and how they for the first time identify domestic workers as workers. Although, there are no benefits announced by the government, except for getting compensated after death or getting handicapped.

The session was concluded by explaining the need for a new law that identifies domestic work as ‘work’. Various states have made changes regarding this. So to achieve this domestic workers have to come together and speak up. She also explained the need to increase their bargaining power and the benefits of unionizing.

The question related to their identities was asked to them, “What do you call yourselves?” Many women did not say anything. Few of them replied “*we are domestic workers. we are workers.*”