

Recognising, Empowering & Inspiring: Impacts of Martha Farrell Awards



The Awards

The Martha Farrell Awards (MFA) for Excellence in Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality were initiated in 2017, in memory of civil society leader, adult educator and passionate feminist, **Dr. Martha Farrell**. The Martha Farrell Foundation was set up in 2016, to carry forward her legacy after she was killed in a terrorist attack in Kabul in May 2015.

(<https://www.marthafarrellfoundation.org/foundation/martha-farrell-legacy>)

The Awards recognize the *struggle, effort, and achievements* of both individuals as well as institutions that have contributed to women's empowerment, gender equality and have imbibed practices of everyday feminism in their life and work.

The Martha Farrell Award for Excellence in Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality is a first-of-its-kind initiative to discover, recognize, and honor mid-career individuals and committed institutions which have made valuable contributions in the areas of women's empowerment, gender equality, and living feminism in their everyday lives and practices.

(<https://www.marthafarrellfoundation.org/award/martha-farrell-award>)



The Award offers nominees and winners a platform to grow and network with like-minded professionals and institutions working in the space of gender empowerment and equality. Winners also receive a prize money component of INR 150,000 each.

The Most Promising Individual for Women's Empowerment recognizes a young person of any gender; Best Organization for Gender Equality recognizes an organization that has mainstreamed gender in its internal and external everyday functioning.

After the first three rounds of the Awards (2017-2019), a Jury's Recommendation award was added to both categories (2020-2022). Hence, 9 individuals and 9 organizations have received Martha Farrell Awards till date.

(<https://www.marthafarrellfoundation.org/award/previous-winners>).

What **impacts** have these Awards made on the life and work of individual and organizational Awardees?

Individual Awardees

Individual Awardees work in a wide range of locations, many very difficult, and work on a wide range of issues with a diversity of communities...

- Child trafficking
- Women in conflict zones
- Youth leadership and creating gender leaders for the future
- Rights of girls belonging to nomadic communities
- Rights of Dalit women
- Safety and inclusion at urban workspaces
- Rights of the transgender community

The cash prize is a flexi award that can be used by the recipient in whatever way they deem fit. While some Awardees used it to meet urgent personal needs, others used it for community work. The money has been used in one instance to pay the mutation fee for a piece of land that would provide long term economic security for one recipient, salary support during pandemic for another, camera equipment as investment for the tools of work for another. Others have used it to hire consultants for important review work, roll out workshops, enroll for courses, carry on education, maintain an office, travel for workshops or in one case provide support to members of the *trans* community who were writing government examinations.



Critical Impacts

The impact of this award on the lives, life goals and interventions of the Awardees have been varied but very significant at the personal level. An interesting finding is that the very process of applying for this award and answering questions generated a process of introspection and reflexivity regarding their life and goals. Some of the responses on the impact of the award on their lives:

- Feeling of appreciation, personal recognition and validation: This was a response across the board. All respondents articulated that the award had not just recognized their achievement and successes but also their struggles and ability to overcome their setbacks.
- Enhanced self-confidence and self-belief particularly after the downtime related to COVID. For all Awardees, the Awards helped build self-belief and gave them the motivation to carry on their work.
- Change in their personal identity and stature, in the eyes of the stakeholders they are working with; it was particularly so among Awardees working with marginalized.
- Augmented financial support: It especially provided a much-needed relief and support during the pandemic. As one young awardee put it ... “the award came at a time when I was feeling broken” and came into her salary account at a time when her regular salary was unavailable. For another, the cash award enabled her to continue to roll out vernacular versions of workshops and use the services of a consultant to review the safety rules in workplaces is at the core of her interventions.

Most Awardees felt that it was too early to tell if the award had significantly impacted their professional and work life, though some common strands were mentioned:

- Reflexivity regarding their work: For some the award had certainly brought about a significant change in the overall perspective within which they viewed their own work. This was evident in the conversations with Rakhi Gope who spoke of now paying more attention to the overall ecosystem within which the specific issue she worked in (trafficking) was embedded. Meghana Srinivas shared how the award had been instrumental in encouraging her to think afresh on how the dynamics of the entire gender spectrum play out as “dignity of the individual” at the workplace.
- The award expanded the canvas within which gender was being discussed. As Manu Gulati shared, the award gave her a voice that enabled her to expand her outreach and to convey her ideas and thoughts well beyond the school context and the specific subject on which she worked.



- Deepening and rethinking gender dynamics: The Awardees shared how their awareness of and understanding of gender had undergone subtle yet critical shifts. Suman Devathiya spoke about how the gendered division of labour at home had shifted and discussions around this subject had deepened. As Deepa & Vaishali mentioned, there seemed to be a gradual appreciation of a more dialogic approach to bringing about change by identifying and working with all those who believed in gender equality.
- A shift towards a non-binary perspective to gender equality: While Grace Bano has actively worked for the rights of the transgender community as the first transgender software engineer from India, several other Awardees also indicated a shift in thinking from equating gender equality exclusively as women's empowerment to a notion of gender equality as protecting the rights of disadvantaged "non men". For instance, Nadiya Shafi the award has made her focus camera lens on the hitherto unreported community of transgenders in Srinagar; likewise, while Deepa Pawar shared that sexual minorities are included in their work and in their committees.

Organizational Awardees

The nine Awardees for the best organization for gender equality work in diversity of contexts and issues:

- Women's political leadership and participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions
- The rights of the girl child
- Gender sensitization to combat child marriage, domestic violence, everyday violence, creating safe spaces for mobility of girls in the community.
- Promotion of women farmers
- The rights and dignity of tribal women
- Women in non-traditional occupations such as travel and tourism.
- Women's intellectual and skill development in areas that were earlier male bastions such as masonry, carpentry, plumbing, driving at all.
- Rights and expressions of individuals with non-binary gender and sexual orientations.

The flexible award money was used to support varied needs of each organization at that juncture:

- As an emergency fund: For REDS the award money came during COVID years so was used for emergency purposes at a time of lockdown enabling the organization to tide over the crisis. The flexi award was useful to procure groceries, counseling services and salary supplements for teachers whose salaries had been suspended during COVID. Another organization that used the cash prize as an emergency fund was SAPPHO for Equality as this also came at the time of the pandemic. It was used for providing help and aid to those in the queer trans community who were facing problems due to the pandemic.



- Training and advocacy: For a grassroots network like RSCD the award money helped them set up the Savitri Academy for advocacy, research, and training. The academy has not only trained over 5000 participants from the grassroots in the field of women's empowerment, political participation, and good governance but it has also been instrumental in handling the "drop out challenge", the phenomena of women getting pushed back into the kitchen after they serve their five-year term as elected representatives in local self-government. In the Savitri Academy a unique social innovation was tried out by bringing back these women as trainers on governance, drawing on their firsthand experiences and practical knowledge, so that the push back could be averted. Another woman led organization that invested the award money for training new people was the Ladakhi Travel Company. The Archana Women's Centre invested the cash award to conduct training and special programs for (mostly male) politicians as they make policy and require gender sensitization.
- Perspective building: For MJAS the cash award came at a time when they were facing the challenges of transitioning from a loose network where the emphasis was on process to a registered organization with its associated rules of engagement and donor demands. The award was seed money towards strategizing this shift.
- Investing in the mobility of girl child: In another innovative use for the award money, ASHA bought scooters for all the girls in the team which was an investment to ensure the mobility of girls as a step towards safe mobility and participation.
- Appreciation and team spirit: The Archana Women's Centre used the cash prize to promote a feeling of appreciation and teamwork among the staff by providing them all with mementos.
- Website and scholarships: For the Shaheen Collective the award money came in handy to augment their website and provide scholarships to young women for further education.

Several critical impacts of the award on the organization have been described:

- The process of application itself had set off critical reflections and offered a unique opportunity to look critically at the work and assess organizational strengths, weaknesses, successes, and challenges over a period of time. This is especially true of grassroots organizations like RSCD and Archana. This has helped them to begin to systematize their experiences.
- Visibility to larger publics: The media coverage of Awardees and the award ceremony provided an opportunity for some of these women leaders (like RSCD) to travel to Delhi, meet people and strengthen the process of alliance building that lies at the core of their work.



- Scale-up: The Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti (MJAS) that uses sports and technology to empower girls, was able to expand outreach from 52 villages to 300, partly because of the award money and partly because of the positive publicity following the award.
- Support from New Stakeholders: The Rural and Environmental Society (REDS) which works on capacitating and collectivizing women farmers shared that the award has helped them to connect with police officials and government officials who now view their work much more empathetically. Echoing a similar sentiment about the award helping create an atmosphere where their work is understood appreciated and supported by government officials too, The Archana Women's Centre which works for the sustainable and non-traditional livelihoods for women, also acknowledged that the attention of officials and politicians were drawn to their "work in the workplace". Shaheen Collective shared that after the award a filmmaker came down from Dehradun to make a film on their work and a German artist came to interact and paint.
- Increased Recognition: Shaheen Collective also shared that not only was attention drawn to their gender work, after the award, organizations like Bank of Baroda and different corporates asked the founder Director to be a part of their internal compliance committees. The award also resulted in a torch being shone on the issue of trafficking and sexual abuse which the Shaheen Collective had been working on.

For the Association of Human and Social Awareness (ASHA) working on child rights, the Award identified them as an organization working on "gender issues". A significant outcome of the MFA was that one of their flagship projects with girls and football being used to break gender stereotypes, received funding to continue and expand. The work of ASHA has also spread among other NGOs after the award, opening up new avenues for collaborative work.

ASHA also noted that the award had brought about a change in the direction of their work. Previously they were working for girls and women by constituting all girls/women teams but now with a deeper understanding of patriarchy as a mindset they have started involving both men and women in groups and committees, encouraging conversations around changing the gendered division of work in homes, and treating men as *bhagidaris* (partners and stakeholders) in creating awareness about patriarchy.

Sappho for Equality gained recognition from a wider community of practitioners to provide support to make their work non-binary, an area of deep commitment and competence for them.



Road Ahead

The significant impacts on the lives and work of individual and organisational Awardees, as described above, provides for an excellent opportunity for Martha Farrell Foundation (and its partners) to support a nation-wide alliance towards women's empowerment and gender equality. Several concrete suggestions have emerged in this regard:

- **Share Expertise:** Each awardee is a committed and competent practitioner in some aspects of women's empowerment and gender equality. Their expertise can be utilized for building capacities of other individual and organizational practitioners.
- **Help build Connections, Networks & Alliances:** The vast reservoir of goodwill, interest, and capacity to share and learn with each other across the Awardees themselves can be a starting point for building a broader alliance where mutual learning and sharing of expertise can be enabled.
- **Perspective building:** There is a need for continuous opportunity for perspective building about gender equality, women's empowerment and feminism in everyday life. The Awardees can be excellent mentors to each other (as has already begun bilaterally), but also to younger activists and new professionals.
- **Onsite learning visits:** Several Awardees with strong grassroots presence are willing to facilitate and host onsite visits which could boost solidarity as well as facilitate mutual learning. They can host interns, especially college students and youth interested in this theme.
- **Co-designing & conducting Training:** Given vast expertise in diverse fields of women's empowerment and gender equality, MFF can work to co-design and co-facilitate training and workshops, both online and hybrid modes, sharing best practices and diversity of effective strategies.
- **Support for Documentation:** As evidenced above, many individuals and organisations are so busy doing their important work that they do not have time, resources and/or capacities to periodically systematize and document their work. Such support will create a greater body of practical knowledge based on actual experiences of Awardees, and others.
- **Connecting:** While award ceremonies and individual conversations afterwards have been good experiences, follow-up in connecting and communicating with them all on a regular basis has been identified as a big gap. Urgent steps need to be taken by MFF (and others) to change this, with an early opportunity for communications and conversations.



Note:

This is an abridged version of Report on Impact Review prepared by Dr. Sumona DasGupta for the Martha Farrell Foundation, based on her research during May-June 2023.

ANNEXURE:

Year	Winner (Individual/Organization)	Category	Date of interview	Name of the interviewee
2017	Rakhi Gope	Most Promising Individual Award	April 13, 2023	Rakhi Gope
	Majlis Legal Center	Best Organisation for Gender Equality	*	*
2018	Nadiya Shafi	Most Promising Individual Award	28 th April 2023	Nadiya Shafi
	Resource and Support Centre for Development (RSCD)	Best Organisation for Gender Equality	17 th April 2023	Bhim Raskar
2019	Manu Gulati	Most Promising Individual Award	31 st May 2023	Manu Gulati
	Mahila Jan Adhikar Samiti	Best Organisation for Gender Equality	19 th April 2023	Indira Pancholi
2020	Mamta Singh	Most Promising Individual Award	*	*
	Vaishali Jethava	Special Jury Award Individual	21 st April 2023	Vaishali Jethava
	Shaheen Rural and Environment Development Society (REDS)	Best Organisation for Gender Equality	17 th April 2023	Bhanuja Cheruvu
	Association for Social and Human Awareness (ASHA)	Special Jury Award Organisation	13 th April 2023	Ajay Kumar
2021	Deepa Pawar	Most Promising Individual Award	04 th May 2023	Deepa Pawar
	Suman Devathiya	Special Jury Award	24 th April 2023	Suman Devathiya
	Shaheen Women's Resource and Welfare Association	Best Organisation for Gender Equality	21 st April 2023	Jameela
	Sappho for Equality	Special Jury Award Organisation	17 th April 2023	Koyel Ghosh



2022	Grace Banu	Most Promising Individual Award	04 th May 2023	Grace Banu
	Meghana Srinivasan	Special Jury Award	24 th April 2023	Meghana Srinivasan
	Archana Women's Centre	Best Organisation for Gender Equality	26 th April 2023	Thresiamma Mathew
	Ladakhi Women's Travel Company	Special Jury Award Organisation	19 th April 2023	Thinlas Chorol

*They could not be reached.

