



Podcast Series: A Glimpse in to Two Year Journey of Migration FPAR Partners

Episode 1

“We need protection, not restrictions on the freedom of movement” Interview with Amira Subba,
AMKAS, Nepal

Dia Yonzon

Amira, welcome to this podcast.

Amira Subba

Namaskar, my name is Amira Subba. I have been working in AMKAS Nepal for the last two years advocating with the government of Nepal that foreign employment should be made safe and dignified for women migrant workers as well as raising my voice to demand their rights.

Dia Yonzon

Can you tell us a little about AMKAS Nepal?

Amira Subba

Aprabasi Mahila Kamdar Samuha (AMKAS) or the Returnee Women Migrant Workers' Group, is a civil society organisation led and run by returnee women migrant workers. Established in 2016 by a group of well-known and experienced Nepali migrant rights activists, AMKAS pushes for the rights and interests of Nepali migrant workers, in the home and the destination countries, on the ground that Migrant Rights are Human Rights.

Dia Yonzon



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So, talking about your two years of experience working in the FPAR at AMKAS Nepal, what have been some of the challenges that you have seen that women migrant workers have had to face?

Amira Subba

Since many of them are undocumented and go to gulf country via illegal means, they are in a vulnerable position, like not getting paid salary on time. Even when they want to return to Nepal, they must go through a lot of hurdles. The reason for these women migrant workers taking these unsafe journey and unsafe work in foreign land is restrictions. Even though the Nepal Government has been rolling out restrictive policies specifically for women migrant workers in the name of protecting them from labour exploitation and misconducts – due to limited work and opportunities in Nepal, the number of womens who have opted to undertake, often dangerous and at times illegal means to go to foreign countries to work as domestic help is on the rise.

While talking about the rights of women migrant workers, one of the major underlying problems is that there is a lack of proper data since most of them opt for illegal measures and are largely undocumented because of the restrictive laws and policies. If we had these data, even at the local level, it would easier to act on them to reduce or even eradicate the cases of abuse and exploitation. It would also be easier to follow up on many cases of the disappearance of women migrant workers.

The Government of Nepal hasn't also addressed the issues of returnee migrant workers, such as their reintegration into the society from a socio-economic lens or reunion with their family members. If the government had addressed these issues, then the issues of having to go for employment would have not been the only situation. They could do something in Nepal itself. Another problem is how society views returnee women migrant workers in comparison to returnee male migrant workers – concerning various social taboos. Especially in terms of a survivor of human trafficking, it is very difficult for them.

Dia Yonzon



Since you mentioned that you also had the opportunity to engage with these women as well, firsthand, is any particular story that sticks out to your mind that portrays these issues you were mentioning.

Amira Subba

A woman had decided to opt for foreign employment to escape from her abusive husband and mother-in-law. Since her son and daughter were young and her husband didn't have a good income source, she also wanted to apply for foreign employment opportunities for her children's future. Since she didn't have much knowledge, she used an agent to go to Kuwait through India. This was because the Government of Nepal had laid restrictions for migrant workers going to Kuwait for domestic work. Once she reached Kuwait, she was immensely mistreated by her employers. They didn't give her proper food or sleeping space. From time and again, she had to endure both physical and mental torture from them. She pleaded to be sent back to Nepal many times, but her request was denied; this was because her contract wasn't over, and mainly she couldn't seek help because she was an undocumented migrant worker who entered the country through illegal means.

Furthermore, they had taken away all her legal documents. She had a driver there in the same house. He empathised with her or pretended to do so and influenced her to leave and move in with him in a rented room. Since the guy had all his documents he could work, but she, since she didn't have her documents couldn't work. A few months down the line, she got pregnant. Since she didn't have any other option, she gave birth to a daughter. Soon after this, the COVID-19 pandemic began spreading. Her name was also selected among the migrant workers to be brought back to Nepal by the Government of Nepal.

After returning to Nepal, she couldn't go back to her family, so she stayed in AMKAS Nepal's Shelter Service Center. Currently, she has taken some training and is working small jobs. She couldn't reach back to her daughter's father who was an Indian. Now, she is working and living in AMKAS but in the future, there is uncertainty regarding many things including her daughter's citizenship once her daughter turns of age.



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Dia Yonzon

Talking about COVID-19 and its impact, what were some of the other challenges that these women had to face. And also, what were some hurdles you and your organisation had to face in your work?

Amira Subba

When we began the migration FPAR research, we had never thought that something like corona would start spreading. It hindered our plans not just by a little, but it impacted our plans tremendously. Even during that time, we applied a new methodology and tried to overcome the challenge and we were successful in doing that. We had researched Sunsari district, so it was difficult to travel from the capital to the district and hold events and different programmes. We had also returnee women migrant workers co-facilitating these events. This was an extremely difficult process. We also had to consider that not all women migrant workers had digital access, so we also had to work on that to ensure that everyone had equal access and knowledge to make the research more meaningful. We also had to engage them in constant conversation, so we also provided them with phone top-ups. As said before, not all participants were not equally knowledgeable about technology. We had cases where many of them didn't even know how to operate cell phones.

Dia Yonzon

And how has all this experience impacted you and your approach?

Amira Subba

This migration FPAR research has helped me get introduced, meaningfully, to the issues of women migrant workers. Learning about the challenges and difficulties faced by the women who are migrant workers, really made me sad. Before this, I didn't have any knowledge about their issues, but in the process of this research, I got learn about them. Like, what are the reasons behind them making this dangerous journey? Things like domestic violence and the restrictive policies that force them to take upon often dangerous means to travel for domestic work again. I



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see myself working in the future, continuing my activism, to minimize or eradicate these barriers for women migrant workers. Of course, the timeline of the migration FPAR research has been completed

But there are so many things that are yet to be achieved and I will keep working for it through various other activities. One example of it is the marigold campaign that we have started. It addresses the issues faced by domestic workers and I am taking this forward with zeal. Regarding human trafficking, I have been involved in “*paribartan ko lagi nyetrityo*”. Even though we weren’t able to capture every district of Nepal, but we were able to work in a district where there are a majority of cases of human trafficking, like the bordering district with India. We were able to achieve local-level commitment to work to eradicate these crimes.

Dia Yonzon

So, talking about your learnings, how do you see the government of Nepal stepping in to ensure the rights of women migrant workers?

Amira Subba

I want to see the government of Nepal addressing the issues of all migrant workers. Regarding women migrant workers and their human rights, the government should get rid of these restrictive policies, so that women migrant workers can find a more secure, dignified, and managed way that ensures their safety and security. Even after returning to Nepal, I want to see them being integrated into society; social, mental, and even economic prosperity. Regarding heinous acts like human trafficking, I want to see them being eradicated. I want to see more and more bilateral agreements from the government of Nepal with the destination country, so all foreign migrant worker’s rights are ensured. I don’t want to see any more migrant workers being exploited and their rights undermined.

This has been my attempt throughout, and I will keep working on it as well as I feel highly motivated. In the future, I also want to see the returnee women migrants who were survivors of human trafficking and exploitation being economically empowered here in Nepal because I think



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having economic security will surely lessen or eradicate the numbers of women opting for illegal and undocumented routes for foreign employment time and again.

Dia Yonzon

Thank you very much for sharing all this information with us. Before we wrap up today, is there anything you'd like to share with us?

Amira Subba

Listening to and writing stories of the rescued victims of human trafficking and labor exploitation at AMKAS Shelter Service Centre, I have been motivated to work in the same field. During the search period, when I met returnee women migrant workers, heard their stories, and later wrote down their issues and challenges, I was highly motivated to work further to not just minimize these cases but to eradicate them. A lot of pregnant women and women who have an unwanted child returning from migrant work aren't able to go back to their families due to social stigma. They came back from gulf countries without any income and can't sustain their life here as well. There is a lot of social stigmas and taboo revolving around the topic which makes their life even harder. I wish and work to create a dignified environment for them where they enjoy all their rights.