

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

Episode 2

“Sex workers are workers! They should enjoy equal rights” Interview with Seema Sayyed,
Aastha Parivaar, India

Vanita

00.52 Seema thank you for joining us on this podcast. First of all, tell us about yourself and your community?

Seema

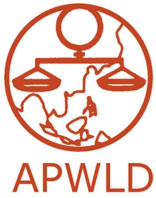
01.00 Namaste Vanita, thank you for giving us this opportunity. I am Seema Sayyed and I represent Aastha Parivaar. Aastha Parivaar is an organisation that works in two districts of Maharashtra, Mumbai and Thane. We basically work for sex worker community including female, transwomen and male sex workers. We reach out to almost 15 thousand sex workers and their children. We work on some verticals along with the board members of Aastha Parivaar. This is a unique organisation as it is a community led organisation which means it is of, by and for sex workers. And it has a secretariat and a team of professionals where I work as a manager. We work for sex workers and their health issues primarily HIV aids. We work for their legal awareness, social protection, financial literacy and also for their children.

Vanita

2.20 Seema, I would like to know about your experience of FPAR. How has this journey been for you?

Seema

2.27 FPAR was a unique opportunity for us in which we got a chance to work with migrant sex workers. The objective of FPAR was mainly on migration but when we talk of migrant women, usually we do not focus on migrant sex workers because in India sex work is illegal and criminalised. So FPAR gave us an opportunity to work for such women. Last two years have been very enriching for us. We got to know about many issues. The participation of the community has been on forefront all along this study. We collected certain evidences during this FPAR. Also our researcher has played a major role in this study along with whom we



were able to reach out to migrant sex workers and understand their issues and problems and amplify their voices, which made our association with FPAR successful.

Vanita

3.48 COVID-19 has been a difficult phase for the entire world so during this time how difficult was it to continue with FPAR and what were the challenges that you faced?

Seema

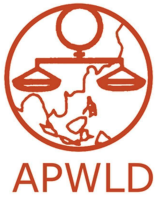
4.00 COVID-19 has severely affected the sex worker community. During this period, they were completely out of work. Like most of the other professions the patterns of this profession also changed. Priorities had changed. During FPAR our major concern was to know about their issues which was impossible without meeting them. So during the pandemic, it was very difficult to reach out to them because of the restrictions and lockdown. They were also not in a right state of mind to talk during that period. In fact, we had to stop everything for a while but then we tried to adapt different ways to connect to them virtually, like the whole world was doing. Keeping in mind their limitations, we connected with those who had smartphones or used whatsapp. It was mainly a research based project so we connected on phones, conducted group discussions through whatsapp groups, voice and video calls. Like I said before, the priorities had changed and at that moment what was most important was to send relief to them. During the pandemic one more thing that we noticed was that the migrant sex workers were facing a lot of issues because as per the evidences collected they were undocumented migrants and they were not willing to come out before the authorities or law enforcement personals or police and therefore they did not have access to the relief they needed. So that period was quite difficult. Gradually as the situation became better, we were able to reach out to them and continue our study along with them. So we conducted group discussions and individual interviews, both personally and on virtual platform.

Vanita

6.48 What was the biggest impact of FPAR on you and your community?

Vanita

6.52 It has been a learning experience for us. With the help of FPAR we were able to listen to the experiences of other partners of Asia Pacific region, we got to know about the issues of migrant women across the world. Before this Aastha Parivaar had never been a part of such kind of project so this experience has been very good for us. And further when we



participated in training sessions, the support that we got from FPAR team and the knowledge we gained with the help of APWLD, for example the recent talks on UN treaties or such kind of platforms where we could talk about the issues of migrant sex workers, helped us to get a global approach. We could acquire knowledge about things that we did not know and it has been very useful for all of us working at Aastha Parivaar. If I talk about the community it was very different from the projects we work on, for example projects related to health. So when we met the community and told them that we want to work on this project along with their participation, that it is a project that looks forward to a participatory approach by all, it gave an assurance to them that it is for their benefit. When there is participation of a community in any project then the result is always good. Personally also, it has been a satisfying experience for me. There was a lot of technical knowledge that I gained through this project. The training of our community researcher was very well conducted. Sometimes we faced certain limitations, like language barriers, there too APWLD provided us interpreters which was very helpful for our community researcher. Overall I would again say that it was a learning and enriching experience which also gave us an exposure to what is happening around the world in various other countries. Especially when we talked to the partners in Nepal about the migrant sex workers coming to India from Nepal or Bangladesh, we could discuss about the similarities and impacts of laws and policies of the host and destination countries and how we can carry on our work keeping those factors in mind. So we have been able to understand and learn a lot of things.

Vanita

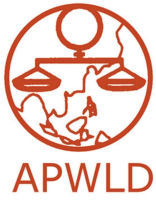
10.34 The journey of FPAR has ended but how do you and your community plan to continue working on these issues?

Seema

10.42 Yes, the journey has ended but the experiences will remain. Evidence collection and research has ended but the knowledge and experiences that we have gained has given us a clarity about how we can progress in our work for issues related to migrant sex workers. Or if we want to do advocacy or wish to bring about changes in policies then how we can achieve that and what are the issues we could face. I think the work is still not complete in fact it is a new beginning and we cannot stop here. We have a lot of knowledge now based on which we wish to go ahead and find out ways to resolve these issues.

Vanita

12.03 Seema thank you so much for being with us on this podcast and sharing those insights.



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Seema

12.09 I would like to thank you and the entire APWLD team for giving us this opportunity and believing in Aastha Parivaar, a community led organisation that works for the issues of this community. I hope when people listen to this conversation they would recognise our work which will give us more strength. Thank you everyone, thank you so much.