



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

### Episode 4

“Fight for an equal society where migrant domestic workers are being recognised” Interview with  
Aayushi Bam, NAWHRD, Nepal

#### **Dia Yonzon**

Aayushi, can you introduce yourself?

#### **Aayushi Bam**

Namaste! My name is Aayushi Bam. I am a public health graduate and currently, I am working at NAWHRD as a young research and associate programme officer. Our institution NAWHRD has been working on women's empowerment. It has been doing its advocacy focusing on labor, body and identity.

#### **Dia Yonzon**

Can you tell us a little more about the work that you do and how you got involved in this project?

#### **Aayushi Bam**

I began to be involved in issues of migrant workers when I was given a project relating to women domestic workers. I didn't know that it was an important topic and that their labor should also be recognized as work. But slowly after research work and getting to know their issues, I began to learn its importance. Currently we are at the initial stage of the project “Samanwan” and advocating for the rights of women migrant workers.

#### **Dia Yonzon**



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Let us talk about the FPAR, what has that experience been like?

## **Aayushi Bam**

FPAR has brought a lot of evidence that can be used for advocacy. Like, how we could assume that most women migrant workers were unaware about laws and policies, but now, we have data to back up that claim. We have come to learn that for most women domestic workers are paid about 1000 – 3000 NPR and that mostly there isn't any contract as well. Some of them work for 13 to 14 hours a day, but still are paid 1000 – 3000 on a monthly basis. This just goes to show that domestic work is not considered as proper dignified work. Their neighbors and their husband would not call their work – work. They are going to do this domestic work and come back home to do additional housework and still, it remains as unpaid care work. The FPAR is urging us to reflect on how deeply rooted the system of patriarchy is.

## **Dia Yonzon**

Hearing you talk about your experience, the theme of how men and women are treated differently seems to come up. Are there any observations from the field you'd like to share with us?

## **Aayushi Bam**

In our society, women, by the virtue of being a woman, in comparison to men have been facing a lot of problems. This is because, our society has been moving forward with the notion of patriarchy and there is unequal power dynamic between men and women, and so, works taken up by women are not respected. Women are seen as someone who can only do domestic work, rearing children and doing laundry. This is a tag by society. Because of this, there is a double burden for women, as one, they work outside their home and second, they have to work within their household as well. These are the challenges to women. Because of patriarchy and unequal power distribution, domestic workers, sex workers, women in entertainment sector are being oppressed in our society and that has been the biggest challenge that I see.



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## **Dia Yonzon**

Indeed, these are very strong observations. Were there any particular stories that stuck out to you during your journey that you'd like to share with us?

## **Aayushi Bam**

In FPAR, we had the opportunity to hear a lot of stories of women domestic workers. One of those stories is from Basanti Shrestha from Danusa district but currently lives in Kathmandu with her two children, 6 and 10 years old respectively. She is staying with her mother and her children. She is also a domestic worker. She took this job because she believed that it was the only job that she could do without formal schooling. However, due to an extremely low paying salary, she wasn't able to take care of her two children and her mother. Her husband had gone to Saudi Arabia for foreign employment. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, her husband is unable to come back to Nepal as well. She is very stressed due to the fact that neither her husband is able to return back to Nepal, nor she is able to sustain her family. Over that, she also had to lose her job. It is difficult for her to feed her family daily. This is the story of Basanti.

Similarly, we have another story of Kabita who is also a domestic worker. She is very stressed at the moment because she recently found out that her employers hired someone else to replace her, so now she doesn't have work. She was staying on rent paying NPR 5000 per month, but now because of COVID and no work – she hasn't been able to pay her rent for the past two months. These are not just stories of these two women but of domestic workers. This is because there is no recognition of their job which means that there is no recognition of their identity.

## **Dia Yonzon**

COVID does seem like a running theme in both the stories and how it affected these women, personally, how was the impact of COVID-19 to you and your work?

## **Aayushi Bam**

We were running our Programmes even during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were issues



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surrounding the transportation and travelling due to the restrictive measures for lockdown. A lot of people were fearful if they wanted to continue their work if they had to be in the vicinity of other people. From the organisers, to facilitators, to domestic workers, everyone was anxious.

## **Dia Yonzon**

When you look back, how do you think FPAR has impacted you then?

## **Aayushi Bam**

As a young feminist researcher, the lessons that I had learned during the FPAR will stay with me throughout. The intensive trainings and behavioral knowledge have allowed me to better transfer my knowledge and skill to others – this is what I feel. Additionally, I have learned to carry on my advocacy more effectively whether that be by use of media and other digital platforms. During the FPAR training I got to understand that what are the perception of people towards feminism and what they should be. I also got to understand that the things I would take for granted or rather small are actually deep and make a bigger impact. This has deepened my understanding of feminism. I got to learn that all work is equal and respected and that no one should be discriminated against based on their gender. I mean, these are simple things we have been hearing and taking for granted but my journey of FPAR has brought me closer to them. More importantly, because of this FPAR, I believe that my knowledge and skills have also increased. Every day was a learning opportunity as I look back at the FPAR.

## **Dia Yonzon**

Thank you for sharing that with us. On that note, I wanted to ask, perhaps, how would you take these learnings and bring about a change in society? Or maybe, to rephrase it, what kind of society do you imagine in the future?

## **Aayushi Bam**



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In the future, I see changes in the society where there is no discrimination, especially because of gender – no one should be treated in an undignified manner. We youth are the ones who can bring changes in our society. This will not happen at once, but we need to continue working on it through advocacy, and training. That is how we can build a better, prosperous, equal society where there is no discrimination based on gender. I hope we can live in that society where everyone's work is respected equally. There is recognition of everyone's work. And I know that these types of changes are possible and that we will work towards it.

## **Dia Yonzon**

Finally, I wanted to ask you, before we end, what drives you to work to create these changes?

## **Aayushi Bam**

For me, the thought of living in an equal society has been the source of motivation for me, especially where women migrants and domestic workers are treated and respected equally. Even though we are living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are still under the grasp of patriarchy. To create a world where there is no gender disparity and gender discrimination, we (youth) have to work harder, and I will continue working for it.