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**LEARNING IS CHANGING  
FACING FORWARD IN THE MOVEMENT AGAINST  
SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**



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# LEARNING IS CHANGING

## Facing Forward in the Movement Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

*“Gender-based violence is a silent pandemic, it's always been there. It is important to keep fighting it even though this war may not be won in our lifetime.”*

Meghana Srinivas, Founder - TrustIn, Winner of the Martha Farrell Award - Special Jury in the Individual Category

There have been significant achievements in the last twenty years towards the goal of gender equality. However, despite the many legislations and policies, institutions aimed to promote gender equality, gender relations in family, community, public agencies and market institutions remain unequal. Gender based violence is a worldwide yet still hidden problem. Today, despite a plethora of ground-breaking progressive laws that outlaw all forms of violence, gender based violence is still very much an integral part of our everyday lives. It is exacerbated by the expectations attached to how gender identities are expressed at home and in schools, workplaces, lack of access to safe spaces and the lack of privacy in queer-phobic spaces, where their identities (gender performance and gender markers) are under surveillance or invisibilized or responded with abuse or violence.

Adolescents and young adults globally are experiencing huge transitions. However, norms and practices based on entrenched patriarchy inhibit their economic participation, and restrict their mobility due to insecurity, sexual harassment and violence in schools, at home and in public spaces. Despite policies, legislation and institutions aimed at promoting gender equality, most school educational programmes remain gender blind, with adolescents not learning and practising equal gender relations. Equally important, being young, they lack space, confidence, voice and choice, to articulate their aspirations and shape their identities. These constraints operate together, resulting in continued exclusion from actively exercising leadership and making use of opportunities to fulfil their aspiration.

Workplaces, both formal and informal as microcosms of society often mirror the dominant ideologies that exist in society, especially with regard to gender roles and relations. And as institutions and organisations today become increasingly diverse, global and multicultural, it has become imperative to review workplace cultures and safety in the world of work. A TUC report on sexual harassment of LGBT people in workplace found that at least 7 out of 10 LGBT workers had experienced at least 1 type of sexual harassment at work. Further, a McKinsey report found that more than half of LGBTQ+ women report having experienced sexual harassment over the course of their career, 1.4 times more than straight women and 1.9 times more than LGBTQ+ men.

*“For women like me, what is #MeToo? Poverty and stigma mean we can never speak out. There is no place safe for women like us. Not our workplaces, nor our homes, and not the road we take.”*

- A domestic worker from Gurgaon affiliated with Martha Farrell Foundation, quoted in HRW’s 2020 report: No #MeToo for Women Like Us

The informal workforce faces further invisibility in the context of experiences of sexual harassment in the world of work. A 2021-22 study by Martha Farrell Foundation in partnership with domestic workers found 100% of 1939 women domestic workers have experienced sexual harassment in the world of work. A further 77% have experienced it in the direct workplace. Several lacunae exist in

India’s multidimensional gender inequality is reflected in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report, according to which the country has ranked 140th among 156 countries in 2021. While India had the lowest labour force participation rates for women in the world, the report also suggests that the gender wage gap between men and women has widened to 62.5%. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these inequalities in multiple ways. There is strong evidence of a sharp increase in the burden of unpaid work particularly among married women and unemployed homemakers. The pandemic also laid bare the existing inequalities for trans women and trans men, who found it hard to access work during the lockdowns imposed. According to CMIE, women, members of the transgender community, non-binary and gender fluid persons (the impacts on the latter three on whom there is a glaring data and information gap), are likely to bear the brunt of job losses triggered by the pandemic disproportionately. Similar challenges and fractures have been reflected across countries in the rest of the world as well.

Martha Farrell Foundation's study in partnership with domestic workers found that 100% of 1939 participants had experienced sexual harassment in the world of work. Adolescents partnered with us have spoken of rampant sexual harassment in their community spaces that hampers mobility, education, professions, particularly for girls and women. Conversations with men and boys further found that they are rarely engaged with, on understanding their personhood, their perceptions of love, friendship, ego and vulnerability, among other themes. Personal reflections and experiences are a reflection of the larger reality, and require systemic responses, if we are to envision a world that is free of gender-based violence, gender discrimination and the deep impacts of the pandemic.

Since its inception in 2016, Martha Farrell Foundation has been working towards creating gender-just and gender-equal communities, institutions and public spaces, working at the individual, institutional and community levels to counter sexual and gender-based violence. During this journey, we have worked with partners from among adolescents, informal workers, members of the formal workforce, academicians, law keepers and government officials, among many others, both within India and across borders. These partnerships have resulted in several milestones, including empowering individuals to break their silence on issues of gender-based violence, on communities to learn and support one another and build bonds of solidarity, and enabling safe, non-threatening structures for institutions to reflect on challenges, shortcomings and loopholes, and collaborative efforts to begin bridging the gaps.

Dr. Martha Farrell, a passionate civil society leader, had a vision for a safe gender just world. MFF upholds the beliefs held by Dr. Martha Farrell. We share this vision with all our partners, together with whom we align in building safer, gender just workplaces, communities and academic institutions where everyone is free to live, learn and work fearlessly.

As we complete seven years of facilitating change and creating impact, we're at a tipping point. The deep fractures that the COVID-19 pandemic has created have thrown up several new lessons for us, on how to reimagine and build upon our efforts to create and sustain positive change. The roots of gender inequality are deep-rooted and complex and is a stark reminder that gender education needs to begin early. While adolescents and young adults need to be provided with the tools to dismantle rigid gender binaries (including sexism) and offer them more options for gender identification and expression; efforts to end gender based violence should focus on transforming unequal social structures in families and communities.

While the role that young people can play in bringing this transformation is gaining recognition, the significance of capacity building on gender as a cornerstone to influence personal and institutional change cannot also be denied.

This year, on MFF's seventh anniversary, close partners, friends and allies in the movement for a just, equal and gender-inclusive world, joined us for an evening of unlearning, learning and relearning from one another, and building new pathways towards eliminating sexual and gender-based violence through:

- Collaboratively determining inclusive approaches for preventing and prohibiting sexual harassment
- Discussions on concrete steps and guidelines that institutions and governments can practise to ensure workplaces are safe.



# Art Based Installations

MFF's seventh anniversary celebrations had a display of artwork made by our domestic worker partners and adolescent partners.

**Art based methodologies** are a critical part of MFF's methodologies of engaging and empowering communities. Adolescents and women domestic workers working with MFF have used several art pieces as tools for advocacy to change attitudes around gender-based violence.

With the theme for MFF's 7th anniversary being Learning for Change, artwork created by our adolescent and women domestic worker partners was installed for other community-based organisations and academic institutions to learn from, add inputs to, and facilitate exchange of ideas.

The art included:

1. The sari, as shown below, was used by women domestic workers who stitched their experiences of sexual harassment at workplace on the traditional Indian garment. You can learn more about this art-based project [here](#).
2. Our Kadam Badhate Chalo leaders listed down their aspirations and resolutions for the program, on a canvas to highlight their work in leading change through this program.



# Adolescent Presentations

## Nukkad Natak



Adolescent leaders, partnered with MFF, performed a street play (nukkad natak) on themes of gender-based violence. The script as well as the performance was led and executed entirely by the youth leaders.

## Dance Installation



Under the guidance of Feisal Alkazi's theatre group, adolescent leaders performed a dance installation on themes of sexual and gender-based violence depicting the role that patriarchy plays in the lives of young girls and boys.



# Focus Group Discussions

In January 2023, MFF set up a walking poll on the theme of gender-based violence. The questions included in the poll were on public perceptions of gender norms and stereotypes. The survey received a total of 470 responses from individuals across various communities and sectors of work.

It is the findings of this poll that guided the focus group discussions among participants on the 4th of February. Each group had diverse stakeholders; individuals from civil society organisations, corporates, adolescents, women domestic workers and academicians. Participants were divided into groups based on areas of work - higher educational institutions, formal workplaces, informal workplaces and working with adolescents.

The focus group discussions were guided by two questions given to all groups:

- **What needs to change to end sexual and gender based violence in light of the findings from the poll?**
- **How do we as individuals and organisations use learning as an approach to end sexual and gender based violence in higher educational institutions / formal workplaces / informal workplaces / with adolescents?**



# Reflections & Observations

The afternoon of reflections paved way for very interesting discussions around countering sexual and gender-based violence. Groups consisting of members from civil society organisations, academic institutions, informal workplaces and the corporate sector presented their findings, as listed below:

## HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- Introducing sessions on inclusion, diversity and consent in higher education institutes to further build awareness among youth and children. These sessions are also expected to increase sensitivity towards children of different social, cultural and economic backgrounds, further promoting a culture of acceptance in higher education institutions.
- Building a curriculum on sex education and integrating that into the education system to address curiosity and promote sensitivity among the youth.
- Promoting co-education to increase comfort and interaction between adolescents from all genders.
- Enhancing awareness through the use of social media platforms to reach out to youth and children.
- There is a need for representation of women in leadership positions in educational institutions. While the female enrollment in higher education is ascending, there is a lack of equitable career opportunities for women in senior positions.
- Institutions need to start creating and integrating gender-inclusive curricula. The internal Prevention of Sexual Harassment committees at universities should be provided with gender sensitisation trainings to be able to cater to the needs of students from all gender and sexual identities.
- It is imperative to involve the community and family in the process of gender sensitization to increase awareness and create a supportive environment for young adults in higher educational institutions.
- Gender inclusive architectural design such as gender-neutral washrooms in public places, such as schools and universities, is one step in countering gender-based violence. It would aid in creating a more inclusive environment for students and faculty from marginalised sexual and gender identities.

# FORMAL WORKPLACES

- Internal Committees for the prevention of sexual harassment at the workplace should be set up and functioning appropriately to foster a safe and equal workplace. Participants also noted how it is important for organisations to allocate adequate budgets for the capacity building and functioning of the committee.
- Increased representation and participation of women in leadership positions by providing adequate opportunities and equitable pay.
- Although hierarchy is important for the functioning of any organisation, the workplace should be a safe and harassment free space so that employees are comfortable in sharing their concerns, with leadership, without fear. Institutional commitment towards safety and equity must be top-down in organisations. Only when the highest authority in the organisation is committed will it percolate.
- A reward system can be put in place for gender-positive behaviours to encourage horizontal participation; for instance, acts that promote minority leadership, enable equitable and safe spaces.
- Gender training is a one-time activity, but it should not limit conversations and actions. Speaking about gender should also be an ongoing effort by leadership, a new term was used "nudge the conversation" at every level. This also requires that leadership training is given equal focus as employee training, but the reality of today is that leadership believes they do not need it.
- Taking into account the dynamic nature of workplaces with the changing age demography of the workforce, trainings for employees should be designed in a way that keeps these considerations in mind.



# INFORMAL WORKPLACES

- One of the key observations made during the discussion was the need for more mobilization for women through self-help groups. It was noted that these groups have demonstrated the ability to make positive improvements/impact in places where they are active.
- Informational and educational material, in the form of posters and banners, should be put up in public spaces to create awareness and inform women and other individuals of their rights. Audio-visual material can also be used as an effective tool for information dissemination in public places.
- Many participants pointed out that there is scarce knowledge of gender-based rights and gender-based violence in informal workplaces which should be addressed. Information should be made easily accessible.
- In terms of redressal mechanisms, participants pointed out that though it is mandated by law to constitute local committees at the district level, in many districts, such committees are not created. Local committees need to be functioning and trained in order to provide adequate support to anyone wishing to file a complaint of sexual harassment.
- Some participants also pointed out that in some states, districts are extremely large in area that these committees are not accessible to most local people. Hence, many participants suggested that every panchayat or municipality should have its own local committee.
- An observation was made to note that if women working in the informal sector speak up, they are let go from their jobs. Hence, many participants suggested that contractors and employers should be sensitized as in most cases, they are the ones who inflict gender-based violence.



## WITH ADOLESCENTS

- In order to counter sexual and gender based violence, conversations, interaction, and engagement with adolescents from all genders should be normalised from an early age.
- While raising awareness and having discussions around gender norms and stereotypes with adolescents, mental health support should also be provided for youth communities. The reasoning behind this was that since there is a certain amount of unlearning involved, it may lead to individuals questioning generational notions and norms that would require support.
- In the post-COVID context, the importance of a safe space has emerged critical for adolescents to learn and grow, without gender bias and gender-based violence. Adolescents have found themselves cramped in their homes, often with their abusers, which has shattered confidence thereby making the need for safe spaces critical.
- Information and awareness around sexual and gender-based violence can be shared with adolescents through innovative and immersive methods such as comic strips, animated videos, music, rap, sport, etc.
- Apart from non-formal methods of awareness such as conversations and sessions, schooling systems should include course material on sexual and gender-based violence and sex education in the curricula.
- Young adolescent boys and men should be provided with the space to be vulnerable and conversations should be initiated with them from a young age on issues of gender and violence.
- When working with adolescents, it is important to engage with the family as well, one method being through parent-teacher conversations in schools, to ensure holistic support for the adolescent.



# Learnings & Takeaways

The focused group discussions brought forward many interesting reflections from the participants. Individuals shared their own experiences working on the issue of sexual and gender-based violence as well as their observations and thoughts on the way forward to counter SGBV. Some of the common discussion points among the groups were:

- Gender is one area where you're never too old or too young to learn, and learn from. Each focus group discussion drew participation in equal measure from adolescents, young people starting their careers, as well as established academicians, civil society practitioners and private sector professionals. Each one contributed, and each one learned from the other in the discussions, as was evident in the presentations.
- Workplaces should be more diverse, inclusive and have meaningful representation in order to foster a safe, harassment-free and accountable workplace for all.
- Based on the results of the walking poll, participants discussed how change is possible and we must work together to make sure that the numbers improve.
- A common discussion point among all groups was the need to work at a family level. Family structures are the foundation for learning and building an understanding on gender so intervention should be taken at this stage to make sure that families are sensitised on issues of SGBV.
- This event is a culmination of all that the Foundation has achieved in Dr. Farrell's name over the last seven years, because it represents in every way the work that we do - we believe in collaborations, we learn everyday and build on those learnings, we provide a platform connecting different stakeholders. That safe space to fail and try again is the reason our methodology is successful.



# Panel Discussion

The focus group discussions ended with a panel discussion to reflect on the conversations that took place among participants. Some of the key quotes to emerge from these discussions:



"Creative, participatory methodologies of training such as dance and theatre provide a strong foundation for learning for individuals and communities"

**Dr. Namrata Jaitli, Save the Children**

We underestimate the power of informal learning - there is so much in our languages, our images, our stories that higher educational institutions and schools find so hard to compete with"

**Dr. Darlene Clover, Feminist Professor of Adult Education**



"I have immense confidence and faith in our younger generations. They prioritise inclusivity and have the potential to be transformative."

**Dr. Jyoti Chandiramani, Symbiosis School of Economics**



"To address gender-based violence and bring real change, we must introspect and start with ourselves, our own family structures."

**Suman Verma, SEWA Delhi**



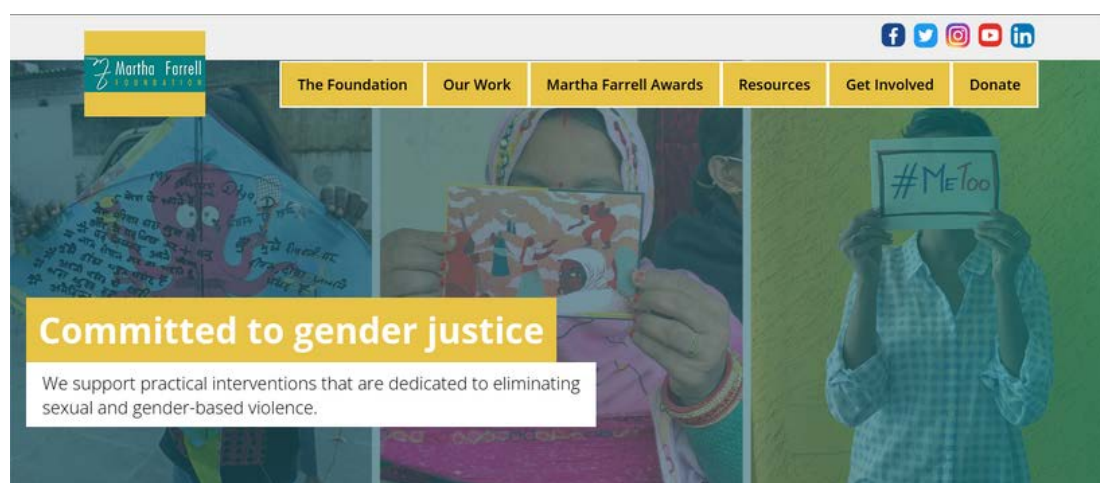
" Education is the first step in working towards countering any form of inequality or discrimination. "

**Shilpa Karia, DSP Investment Managers Pvt. Ltd.**



# Launch of Website

On the occasion of MFF's 7th anniversary, we also launched our new website. The website highlights the work that MFF has done over the last 7 years, including details on our programs, learning documents and reports and Dr. Martha's work and legacy, among others. The website is designed to be an accessible and easy-to-navigate resource centre to document the work of the Foundation as well as upcoming updates of our projects and collaboration details.



We had the honour of having MFF board members launch the website during the anniversary celebrations. Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Suheil Farrell Tandon and Tariqa Farrell Tandon introduced the new website to attendees.

The link to MFF's new website can be found here:

[www.marthafarrellfoundation.org](http://www.marthafarrellfoundation.org)



# Cultural Evening

What celebration is complete without a dash of culture? From poetry recitation to dance and music, to a band performance, the night closed on a wonderful note. Key moments captured below:



Bharat Bhushan, accepting Dr. Farrell's PhD thesis as a token of gratitude and well wishes on the occasion of MFF's 7th anniversary.



Gopal Bhai performing a musical production.



Prof. Budd Hall sharing a poem written about Nita Barrow, an early feminist and former President of the International Council for Adult Education.



Musical group Manzil Mystics.

# Words From Leadership



We believe strongly that the work that MFF does cannot be done alone. There has to be more of us doing this, together. The world is so different than it was 7 years ago, but many things remain the same. It is time for us to sit and reflect on the work that we're doing and understand what it is that we can do better.

**Nandita Bhatt, Director at MFF**

The focus of the Martha Farrell Foundation is rooted in the learning and changing of gender stereotypes and norms with its core value being preventing violence against women and girls at home and in workplaces.

**Dr. Rajesh Tandon,  
Founder-Chairperson, MFF**





## **MFF 7TH ANNIVERSARY REPORT**

**AUTHORED BY MARTHA FARRELL FOUNDATION**