

Breaking the Silence, Webinar Addresses Structural Violence Against Rural Women

A webinar on "Structural Violence on Rural Women Workers" was organized by the Feminist Policy Collective (FPC) and Mahila Kisan Adhikari Manch (MKAAAM), with the support of ANANDI, SARAJ, and SOPPCCOM in the month of June, 2023. The primary objective of the webinar was to launch the research study "Everyday Violence Against Women in Agriculture" which was published in December, 2022. It also aimed to address the challenges faced by women farmers and workers in the agricultural sector.

The first panel of the webinar discussed the study "Everyday Violence against Women in Agriculture", presenting key findings and recommendations from the study report. Three members from MKAAAM were the speakers on this panel - Sarita Kulkarni from SOPPCCOM, S. Ashobala from Rythu Swarg Yedha, and Sujal Dhad from ANANDI. The panel was moderated by Anita Puri.

Sarita Kulkarni spoke about the rationale and key findings of the study. The study explores the everyday violence faced by rural women in spaces such as farms, markets, and other agricultural localities. It was conducted in seven districts across three states in India: Odisha, Maharashtra, and Telangana.

The study defines violence in a broader sense, encompassing everyday harassment that hindered women from engaging in agricultural tasks and living a dignified life. It revealed several forms of violence and harassment faced by women in various agricultural contexts.

This study also highlights challenges before women such as limited access to resources, discrimination, and the lack of processes and legal redressal mechanisms. It emphasizes the broader context of agrarian distress, characterized by dispossession, denial of rights over resources, and a decline in paid employment opportunities.

Furthermore, the study identifies issues related to the organization of work, living and working conditions, the political economy of the sugar cane industry, the continuum of violence, health issues and risks, and vulnerability to disasters among women workers in agriculture.

S. Ashobala discussed the plight of women from farm vehicle-affected families in Maharashtra and Telangana. Majority of farmer families were constituted by men aged 27 to 49, leaving women vulnerable to economic hardships, workplace mistreatment, and sexual harassment. They faced violence within their rural families, denial of land rights, and harassment from male farmers, money lenders, and officials. Despite the challenges, these women formed support groups, fought for their rights, and mobilized for collective efforts.