

## **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 Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM), with the support of ANANDI, SAHAJ, and SOPPECOM 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 MAKAAM were the speakers on this panel - Seema Kulkarni from SOPPECOM, S. Ashalatha from Rythu Swaraj Vedita, and Sejal Dand from ANANDI. The panel was moderated by Amita Pitre.

Seema Kulkarni spoke about the rationale and key findings of the study. The study unpacks the everyday violence faced by rural women in spaces such as farms, markets, and other agricultural worksites. It was conducted in seven districts across three states in India: Gujarat, 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 awareness 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. Ashalatha discussed the plight of women from farm suicide-affected families in Maharashtra and Telangana. Majority of farmer suicides were committed by men aged 25 to 45, leaving women vulnerable to economic hardships, workplace mistreatment, and sexual harassment. They faced violence within their natal 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.

Sejal Dand highlighted caste-related violence against Dalit and Adivasi women in agriculture, emphasizing the need to challenge these atrocities. She proposed legal reforms, enforcement of the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act, and allocation of separate budgets to address workplace violence. The study recommends involving women's groups, village councils, and establishing social justice committees to create safer workplaces.

The speakers in the second panel were Dr. Navsharan Singh, a researcher and feminist activist; Preeti Oza, an advocate for unorganized sector workers; and Kavita Singh, a long-time advocate for the rights of Asha and Anganwadi workers.

Dr. Navsharan Singh discussed the plight of women farmers in Punjab, highlighting the impact of the Green Revolution on landless Dalit women who faced violence and exploitation. She emphasized the importance of land access for livelihoods and dignity.

Preeti Oza shared her experience working with unorganized and migrant labor, focusing on the challenges faced by informal sector workers and the need for comprehensive support from unions. She highlighted cases of violence in BT cotton seed farming and the union's efforts to address them. Suneeta appreciated the union's commitment to supporting redress mechanisms and emphasized the importance of organizing and unionizing as a platform for women.

Kavita Singh explored violence against women, highlighting its various forms and emphasizing its structural nature. She discussed the exploitation faced by scheme workers (Anganwadi and Asha workers), predominantly women, as an example of systemic violence and inequality. Kavita underscored the importance of challenging societal norms and power structures perpetuating violence, considering historical and cultural factors. She also addressed the impact of changes in the production system on women's labor and the struggles women face in gaining independence.

There was also a round of questions and answers after each panel. Kindly refer to the [summary note](#) for more details.

MAKAAM is pleased to announce its ongoing large-scale study on violence, focusing on resource denial, non-recognition of workers, and the detrimental impact of harassment and violence faced by women in agriculture. FPC and MAKAAM together hope to take this study forward through a series of similar conversations in the future and advocacy efforts with state mechanisms.

Policy brief for “Everyday Violence Against Women In Agriculture” -  
<http://www.feministpolicyindia.org/analysis-insights.php?action=details&id=239&page=1>

FPC-MAKAAM study report -  
<https://makaam.in/fpc-makaam-study-report/>



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About [Feminist Policy Collective \(FPC\)](#):

*The Feminist Policy Collective (FPC), formally set up in February 2019 is an independent network of feminist organisations, individual researchers, academicians and policy advocates who are committed to strengthening gender transformative policies, plans, and budgets in India. FPC's vision is of transforming the policy and financing agenda to achieve women's rights and gender equality. It seeks to achieve this through its mission of:*

- *Establishing platforms for dialogue and learning to strengthen linkages between activism, advocacy, administration and academia to influence local, national and global policymaking priorities*
- *Creating knowledge for informing policy formulation, implementation and monitoring, centering women's voices from the ground*
- *Taking forward key policy recommendations with the State for advancing women's constitutional rights in the context of the above*
- *Building partnerships with like-minded organisations and networks, including with International and UN Agencies*

About [Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch \(MAKAAM\)](#):

*MAKAAM, or Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (Forum For Women Farmers' Rights) is a nationwide informal alliance of various individuals and organisations of farming women, of women farmers' collectives, civil society organisations, researchers and activists, to secure due recognition and rights of women farmers in India. MAKAAM has an active presence in 12-14 states across India.*

*The Mission of MAKAAM is to visibilise women farmers – especially smallholder marginalized women, with a development vision led by social justice, plurality of knowledge systems and sustainability driven by ecological approaches – and to create and secure rights over productive livelihood resources (land in particular) as well as entitlements over a variety of support systems, with equal participation of these women in decision-making in various institutions starting family upwards, to ensure empowered, self-reliant, sustainable women's livelihoods.*

About [SOPPECOM](#):

*Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM) is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation working in the area of Natural Resource Management (NRM) primarily in the rural areas. It is committed to the principles of sustainable and rational use of natural resources, equity and social justice in the distribution of benefits especially to the disadvantaged sections like dalits, landless, women, democratic and decentralised governance of these resources.*

4About [ANANDI](#):

*Area Networking and Development Initiatives, is a feminist organisation based in Gujarat working to strengthen rural women's collectives from marginalised communities to realise women's human rights. ANANDI undertakes action research projects to create a bridge between feminist praxis and theory that draw lessons and reflections from our field based work for building evidence towards gender transformative law and policy.*

About [SAHAJ](#):

*Society for Health Alternatives—works with communities by educating them on their rights and empowering them to claim their entitlements in the Health and Education sectors. Their interventions involve direct action in the communities, action research, promoting social accountability and influencing policies. They have developed thematic interventions in the key areas of Child Rights, Adolescent Rights and Maternal Health by emphasising social accountability, working with stakeholders to ensure access to public services and improve the quality of the same. They also concentrate on policy advocacy and networking with entities with common goals.*

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