



Issue 34, December 2010

# Alliance News



## Principle and Practice

GAATW-IS Reflections on Feminist Participatory Action Research



Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women





**Editor's Note**

Articles contained in this issue of the GAATW newsletter represent the views of the respective authors and not necessarily those of the entire GAATW network. The editorial team has edited all articles as much as possible with the authors' approval before publication. However, the authenticity of the authors' voices is maintained and the authors' rights are respected in cases where the author feels strongly about keeping certain texts and/or style considerations intact.

**Editorial Team**

Caitlin Grover  
Julie Ham  
Rebecca Napier-Moore

**Design and Lay out**

Alfie Gordo  
Suphattra Poonneam

**Cover Photo**

Photos from FPAR Research Reports

For more information on the stories in this newsletter, or any aspect of GAATW and our work, please contact the Secretariat.

P.O. BOX 36  
Bangkok Noi Post Office  
Bangkok 10700 Thailand  
Tel: (662)864-1427/8  
Fax: (662)864-1637  
E-mail: [gaatw@gaatw.org](mailto:gaatw@gaatw.org)  
Website: [www.gaatw.org](http://www.gaatw.org)

# Principle and Practice

## GAATW-IS Reflections on Feminist Participatory Action Research

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>Editorial</b>   | 3  |
| <b>Introduction</b>  |    |
| GAATW's Feminist Participatory Action Research Initiative                  | 5  |
| <b>Feminist</b>  |    |
| The 'F' Word: Resisting Feminism in Feminist Participatory Action Research | 8  |
| by Caitlin Grover  |    |
| RIGHTS!ART!ACTION!: The Ethics of Visual Representation                    | 11 |
| by Alfie Gordo   |    |
| <b>Participatory</b>   |    |
| The 'P' Word: How Participatory is FPAR?                                   | 13 |
| by Nerea Bilbatua  |    |
| "We have to be Conscious of our own Power":                                |    |
| GAATW-IS Reflections on its Power in FPAR Processes                        | 17 |
| by Julie Ham   |    |
| 'We Want to Move onto the Power Part'                                      |    |
| Returnee Migrant Women Resisting Categorisation through FPAR               | 23 |
| An Interview with Jiraporn (June) Saetang                                  |    |
| <b>Action</b>  |    |
| Research into Action   | 26 |
| by Rebecca Napier-Moore  |    |
| Balancing NGO & Local Needs in FPAR  | 30 |
| by Rebecca Napier-Moore and Julie Ham                                      |    |
| Complicating Agency: Immigrant Women and Sex Work                          | 32 |
| by Noushin K   |    |
| Giving Voice and Promoting Change: Sharing Two Experiences                 |    |
| with FPAR with Migrant Women   | 35 |
| by Helga Flamtermesky  |    |
| Women Organising from the Informal Sector: The Jitahidi                    |    |
| Women's Group and the Good Hope Women's Group in                           |    |
| Nairobi, Kenya   | 38 |
| by Alice Maranga   |    |
| <b>Research</b>  |    |
| Participant Safety in FPAR   | 40 |
| by Julie Ham and Rebecca Napier-Moore                                      |    |
| Perceptions of Privilege and Guilt in FPAR                                 | 44 |
| by Nkirote Laiboni   |    |
| <b>Updates from the Secretariat</b>  | 46 |
| <b>Resources</b>   | 55 |



Dear Friends

Welcome to the 34th issue of the Alliance News. In this issue, we reflect on our experiences of using the feminist participatory action research (FPAR) methodology in GAATW's recent FPAR initiative, A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience1. GAATW had first used the FPAR methodology in the early 1990s and the findings from this research were instrumental in GAATW's advocacy towards an expanded definition of trafficking in the UN Human Trafficking Protocol.

Almost ten years later, we wanted to use the FPAR methodology again to assess how changes in globalised migration, labour and anti-trafficking contexts were impacting women at the grassroots level and to see where women and communities identified the need for change and action.

In 2009-2010, GAATW coordinated an FPAR initiative among 11 member and ally organisations which GAATW's newest staff member, Communication Officer Caitlin Grover, details on page 5. We began this initiative with a strong belief in the principles that underpin feminist participatory action research:

As part of the research, the participants name their priorities. Together the group analyses the problems and investigates the complex social reality in which they live. Those involved in the production of knowledge should be involved in the decision making at every level, therefore the group decides what data should be collected and how this is to be done.2

We quickly realised that FPAR is a very rigorous and demanding methodology that requires shifting power, attention to detail, and a genuine adaptation to specific contexts. Throughout the FPAR process, GAATW IS staff grappled with how to put principle into practice in varying contexts.

After the FPAR reports were launched at GAATW's International Members Congress and Conference in July 20103, IS staff felt that the many lessons learned and challenges of the FPAR process should be reflected on and documented. We hoped that this reflection would aid others interested in using FPAR and would contribute to the still minimal literature on researchers' narratives in anti-trafficking research.

We also wanted to explore some of these methodological issues from our unique perspective as an international

network secretariat. Since we've asked FPAR partner organisations to share their process reflections in their reports4, this issue will mainly contain reflections from GAATW International Secretariat (IS) staff and a few contributions from FPAR partner researchers and other researchers who have used the FPAR methodology.

Is it FPAR?

One of the issues that IS staff continuously discussed was how 'pure' or 'flawed' our use of FPAR was. Staff were aware of how easily co-opted FPAR can become and so wanted to be critically aware about the type of research we were doing. It was interesting to note that while FPAR is a methodology that is supposed to be responsive to diverse realities, staff felt that when we needed to adjust our research processes to certain realities, we felt this moved us away from the 'essence' of FPAR.

For instance, Caitlin talks about how women in several of the research communities grappled with or resisted the concept of 'feminism' (page 8). In these projects, researchers used various strategies of broaching the topic with research participants, while respecting women's resistance as part of their self-definition and participation.

It may be that, throughout the process, the IS's assumptions and definitions of FPAR focused more on the communities involved in the research, and less on the shifts we would need to make or the assumptions we would need to examine. Despite our solidarity with communities' research goals and action plans, we pushed to ensure that projects still adhered to a typical 'NGO frame', involving deadlines, output production, and NGO terminology.

In the end, the projects differed in how 'feminist', 'participatory', 'action-oriented' or 'research' they were. For now, we have decided to keep the FPAR label to describe these projects - to assist with our own reflection and development in FPAR, to distinguish these projects from other research initiatives, and to recognise the principles underlying these projects to contribute a grounded knowledge base and advance communities' social justice aims. However, we also continue to welcome discussion on these distinctions and challenges.

"P and R are easier than A and F" (comment from IS staff)

As shown by the articles in this issue, GAATW IS staff and research partners had different ideas of what characteristics defined FPAR.

We've grouped these reflections around each of the main elements of FPAR: Feminism, Participation, Action, and Research. The two articles under 'feminism' explore how women are represented, whether it's research communities resisting the concept of feminism (page 8) or critiquing

how trafficked women are represented in mainstream anti-trafficking discourses (page 11).

Under 'participation', we try to unpack what we mean by 'power' (page 17) and examine some of the elements that impact meaningful participation in research (page 13).

In the section on 'action', we describe some of the action plans that emerged from FPAR projects, ranging from the formation of 'self-organised groups'<sup>5</sup>, lobbying media and international decision-makers, developing information resources for migrants, and changing how trafficked persons are represented (page 26). We also consider restraints on action. In some of the projects, the intense criminalisation and/or stigmatisation of research communities prevented any visible, collective action. Noushin K (an FPAR researcher) talks about the complexities of women's agency in highly criminalised contexts (page 32). On page 35, Helga Flamtermesky acknowledges some of the emotional and physical costs of FPAR on researchers.

The articles about 'research' take a look at the main ethical issues that arose, particularly concerns about the social, physical and emotional safety of participant communities, many of whom were geographically and/or socially isolated (page 40). And former GAATW IS staff and FPAR research facilitator, Nkirote Laiboni, provides an honest reflection on some of the ethical dilemmas and emotional discomfort researchers can experience when interacting with communities very removed from their own (page 44).

### From an international secretariat's perspective

We ultimately wanted to document how our position as a network organisation shaped the roles GAATW IS staff played in the research, and how human rights networks can utilise FPAR (and where their limitations lie). As a Bangkok-based network secretariat working with researchers in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America, adapting to diverse communication styles, rhythms and tools was a large part of the work. Communication was an intensive effort due to availability, time differences, technological differences, preferences and sensitivity around some issues.

From the Secretariat's perspective, what worked best included: ongoing visits to establish communities' trust; field visits to research sites and face to face meetings with researchers; regular check-ins and meetings between researchers and IS research facilitators; providing researchers with checklists of research considerations; and using different modes of communication. For like-minded organisations considering using FPAR methodology, we would also share the following recommendations:

- Repeated methodological training and conceptual clarity sessions throughout the process
- Sound contextual understanding of the community

and the project amongst all research partners

- Building trust and meeting researchers in person before starting the research
- Having a common language to communicate between facilitators & researchers, and researchers & participants
- Adequate timelines (the projects described in this issue took place over 1 year, which many felt was too short)
- Creativity and willingness to improvise when going to the field to meet with the participants
- Adequate support for research communities and FPAR researchers, as defined by them
- Being strategic and flexible in managing changes and differences in language, priorities, cultures and time.

We hope this issue encourages people to think about the effort involved in making research processes more participatory, reciprocal and equitable. We also encourage researchers to reflect and share the emotional and practical complexities that arise when researching trafficked persons, traffickers and other directly affected groups. We ultimately hope to encourage an anti-trafficking knowledge base that reflects the priorities and perspectives of migrants and other affected communities - by recognising the role trafficked persons, migrant communities and other directly affected groups play in creating knowledge, and the structures that need to shift in order to support meaningful participation.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue. As always, we welcome your feedback.

*Sincerely,*

**Julie Ham, Programme Coordinator**  
For the GAATW Team

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> CD series. For more information, contact [gaatw@gaatw.org](mailto:gaatw@gaatw.org)

<sup>2</sup> Prasad, N. (2000). Can one do feminist participatory action research in countries of destination? *Alliance News*, 15, 33-36.

<sup>3</sup> A full report of the event can be found at GAATW's website: [http://www.gaatw.org/publications/IMCC2010\\_Report.pdf](http://www.gaatw.org/publications/IMCC2010_Report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Available on the *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience* CD.

<sup>5</sup> i.e. peer-led or self-help groups, groups comprising women with direct experience of the issue they're working on, such as organisations led by trafficking survivors, sex workers, and domestic workers.

# GAATW's Feminist Participatory Action Research Initiative

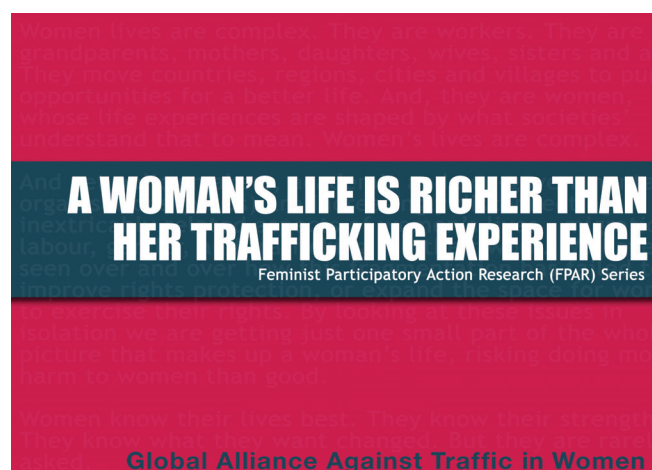
In 2009-2010, GAATW undertook a series of feminist participatory action research (FPAR) projects with 10 member and allied organisations from Asia, Latin America, North America, Europe and Africa.

We chose FPAR because we needed a methodology that could counter tendencies in anti-trafficking to assume what women's vulnerabilities, experiences and limitations are. We needed a framework that could capture women's holistic experiences and the meaning women made of their own and their community's experiences. As a feminist network, FPAR methodologies also reflect the principles that guide our everyday work, including:

- the importance of carrying forward research into concrete action
- research processes that are guided by and respectful of women's priorities, aspirations and concerns
- processes that allow sharing of power amongst all involved in the research
- centring the voices of trafficked and migrant women in any activities involving them
- knowledge production that is guided by the research participants rather than the researcher.

Research projects from *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series* explore the migration and labour struggles and strengths of Middle Eastern immigrant women in Vancouver, Canada; migrant women in the informal sector in Nairobi, Kenya (FIDA Kenya); rural returnee migrant women workers in Moldova (La Strada Moldova); Filipino migrant worker activists in Europe (RESPECT); returnee migrant women of SEPOM speak about their experiences in Japan (SEPOM); African asylum-seekers in Ireland (AkiDWA); rural returnee migrant women in Indonesia (ATKI and LRC-KJHAM); sex workers and migrants in the Dominican Republic (MODEMU and CEAPA); and migrant women in Brazil (Sodireitos and CLD).

Some of the research was undertaken by women with experiences of exploitative migration and trafficking who



have organised themselves. Some research projects were carried out by activist researchers working closely with migrant and trafficked women in their communities.

Many of the projects explored the intersect between women's familial roles and their roles as migrant workers in the global economy, the social as well as the economic consequences of migration in their home communities, the impact of women's migration status on their ability to exercise agency, and the diverse livelihood and activist strategies women used in countries of origin and destination.

The articles in this issue refer to the FPAR projects below:

**Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia - Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers (ATKI)**

**The Impact of Excessive Placement Fees on Indonesian Migrant Workers and Their Families**

Participants cited family financial necessity linked to local unemployment as the primary reason for working overseas. Women rather than men became migrant workers because the most accessible and available work was domestic, a sector typically associated with women. The most crucial problem women migrant workers faced was financial exploitation at the hands of recruitment agencies and brokers. Although remittances



are the second largest source of revenue for the Indonesian government, government migration policies protect the interests of recruitment agencies and brokers at the expense of the rights of migrant workers.

**Untuk Kaedilan Jender Dan Hak Asasi Manusia - Semarang - Legal Resources Center for Gender Justice and Human Rights (LRC-KHJAM) and the Rowoberanten Women Migrant Workers Group**

**Linkages Between Migration, Labour, Gender and Trafficking Among Women Migrant Workers**

This research uncovered numerous incidences of exploitation and abuse by brokers and agencies, as well as employers. The significant economic contribution of women migrant workers to their family's security and to local and national economies is not reflected in the status of women in Rowoberanten Village or government policy. As a result of this project, the women established the *Rowoberanten Women Migrant Workers Group* to act as an information centre to prevent trafficking and a credit union for women migrant workers.

**The Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya**

**The Realities and Agency of Informal Sector Workers: The account of migrant women workers in Nairobi by Alice Maranga and Nkirote Laiboni**



Although the informal labour market represents 76.5% of Kenya's workforce, there are no safeguards to prevent exploitation, leaving migrant workers particularly vulnerable. Discrimination and marginalisation in the form of sporadic arrests and confiscation of

goods, lack of access to infrastructure and services, over-taxation, physical and sexual abuse and no legal protection were the complex issues women migrant workers in Nairobi face.

**Akina Dada Wa Africa (AKiDwa)**

**'Am only saying it now': Experiences of women seeking asylum in Ireland by Salome Mbugua**



Asylum seekers in Ireland must remain in direct provision accommodation while their applications are processed and do not have the right to work or to attend

full-time third-level education or training. Women endured poor conditions in the centres, with inadequate heating, overcrowding, unhygienic bathrooms, as well as discriminatory treatment by staff. The issue of raising children in such an environment was a significant concern for most women, as was interacting with the community at large with several women voicing experiences of racism.



**Understanding Needs, Recognising Rights: The stories, perspectives and priorities of immigrant Iranian women in Vancouver, Canada by Noushin K. and Fereshteh**

The considerable divide between the experiences of Iranian migrant women and men in Canada, primarily due to cultural constructs of gender, proscribed behaviour and norms, is troubling. Loneliness and social isolation were consistently raised by participants as a defining factor in their migration experience. While men could engage in Canadian society, women were largely prohibited due to limited access to economic, cultural, social and political resources. In addition to separation from family, the women who lived with their husbands in Canada reported high incidences of violence and domineering behaviour that further restricted their ability to engage with the community.

**La Strada International Moldova (LSI Moldova)**

**A Look at the Linkages: How does gender, migration, labour and trafficking intersect in women's lives? by Viorelia Rusu**



With 68% of Moldova's unemployed women and those employed in predominantly lower-paying jobs than men, financial necessity is cited by the majority as the reason for migrating, most commonly to Russia. Employment registration in Russia is the responsibility of employers, however registration is rare because undocumented workers are much cheaper to hire. With strong competition for jobs and no legal recourse or safeguards, women migrant workers were susceptible to the exploitative practices of employers.

**Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM), Thailand**

**'Trafficked' Identities as a Barrier to Community Reintegration: Five stories of women re-building lives and resisting categorisation**



The returnee migrant women of SEPOM speak about their experiences in Japan, the burden of becoming the family's breadwinner, the stigma linked to migration and sex work, and their difficulties upon return in Thailand, while also celebrating their strength and generosity in the face of discrimination.

**Centro De Apoya Aquelarre (CEAPA), Dominican Republic**

**Migration and Labour: Haitian Women in Los Alcarrizos, Dominican Republic (report only available in Spanish)**

International Organisation for Migration (IOM) statistics





## ALLIANCE NEWS - INTRODUCTION



shows 75% of Haitian migrant workers in the Dominican Republic are women and yet no research on migrant workers has specifically explored the experiences of migrant women. CEAPA's research shows how the migration process is defined not by the woman but by her circumstances, including political and economic instability in Haiti, a lack of employment opportunities for women and incidences of domestic violence.

### Movement of United Women (MODEMU), Dominican Republic

#### Power Through Work: FPAR on gender, migration, labour and trafficking in the Dominican Republic by Fatima Pena and Miriam Gonzalez (report only available in Spanish)



As consistently established across the FPAR projects, this report highlights how social class, high levels of unemployment and gender are inextricably linked to trafficking and forced prostitution, both internally and abroad. It also illustrates how women who are defined by their trafficking experiences face systemic disadvantage beyond the fact of their trafficking, which was but one aspect of their complex realities.

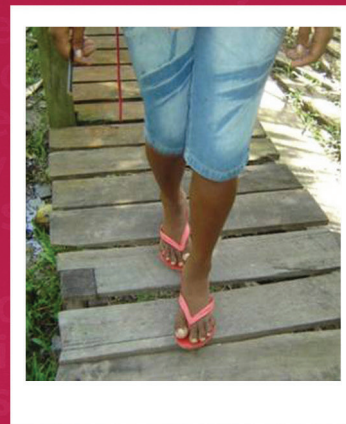
### RESPECT Netherlands, TRUSTED Migrants, and Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers, Netherlands



#### Labour Migration from a Human Rights Perspective: The story of migrant domestic workers in the Netherlands

Undocumented Filipino migrants in the Netherlands in RESPECT's community highlight the financial benefits of their work abroad for their family and community, and reflect on their attempts to cooperate with a labour union to protect their rights at the workplace.

For more information, contact [gaatw@gaatw.org](mailto:gaatw@gaatw.org)



# The 'F' Word: Resisting Feminism in Feminist Participatory Action Research

By Caitlin Grover

## Why feminist research?

GAATW first undertook Feminist Participatory Action Research in 1997-2000, to shape our understanding of the realities of women who migrate for work and to take sustainable community-led actions where appropriate. Ten years later, we felt it was time to take stock of changes in migration patterns, global economic circumstances and developments by the anti-trafficking movement, as experienced by affected women themselves.

But why conduct FPAR rather than conventional research? The principles underpinning FPAR reflect those that lie at the heart of GAATW-IS and member organisations. FPAR is inclusive, participatory and collaborative. It aims to have women articulate and share their experiences to develop an understanding of the complex factors shaping these varied realities and, ultimately, to address social injustices through collective action.

*Women know their lives best. They know what they know what they want changed...women research issues that affect their own lives in order to bring about needed change. As a community, they analyse their stories and talk about what actions they will take and what needs to be changed.*

## What does feminism mean?

In May 2009, representatives of various member and ally organisations attended GAATW's Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) learning workshop in Chiang Mai, the first step to conducting FPAR in their communities. The diversity of workshop participants reflected the diversity of our member organisations and the varied lives of the women they represent or work with.

To ensure a sense of cohesion between FPAR projects, it was important to establish a working definition of feminism that could be reflected in each project, allowing for adaption where necessary.

Each workshop participant brought a unique perspective of feminism (or for some, a resistance to feminism), shaped by nationality, ethnicity, class, religion and their experience of gender within these frameworks. Discussions on the concept of feminism demonstrated just how diverse the group was, with a broad range of contrasting perspectives articulated.

In her opening remarks, Bandana, GAATW International Coordinator, introduced feminism as a sisterhood that acknowledges and respects differences among women. *"Feminist research believes that women can steer social change. It listens to and values women's lived experiences and it highlights the resilience of women in the face of disempowering experiences,"* she said.

June from SEPOM<sup>1</sup> (Thailand) and Joluzia, of Coletivo Leila Diniz in Brazil<sup>2</sup>, expressed a profound belief in feminism and its capacity to address inequities experienced by women throughout the world.

This contrasted with others who hesitated to identify as feminists because feminism, to them, was exclusive, marginal or heavily stigmatised. Several participants considered feminism a Western concept that doesn't account for the lives of women in the developing world. Similarly, Alice from FIDA Kenya<sup>3</sup> mentioned that in Kenya, feminism is an elitist word that rural women don't identify with.

In Moldova, Viorelia from La Strada Moldova<sup>4</sup> said feminism is associated with radicals on the fringe and isn't a concept most women identify with. Liyana from GAATW-IS explained that in the Dominican Republic being a feminist means you are 'easy' (i.e. sexually promiscuous).

Understanding how feminism is culturally constructed was important in order to articulate an inclusive definition of feminism that would underpin the FPAR projects. The working definition of the previous GAATW FPAR projects was put forward, discussed in small groups and redefined until consensus was reached.





Together, everyone established that at the heart of feminism are the perspectives and experiences of women, which are also shaped by race, ethnicity, religion and class, amongst other factors. A truly inclusive feminism accounts for the differing layers of discrimination women throughout the world face as a result of interaction between these factors.

*Feminism is a philosophy, a process and a movement, centred on women’s diverse perspectives, that challenges all forms of inequality and discrimination based on sex and gender (and their intersections with class, race, ethnicity, age, religion and other markers of difference) to achieve social change and policies which recognise women as political subjects and which create a rights-enhancing environment.*

Everyone also came to recognise the importance of reclaiming and reframing feminism so it encapsulates common principles and ideals of member organisations and GAATW-IS -i.e. inclusive, anti-discriminatory, human rights focused, and in support of equitable access to political, social, economic and legal rights.

This definition of feminism was the ideal foundation for FPAR, a research approach that believes women can steer change and embraces the complexity of women’s lived experiences, highlighting the strength and resourcefulness of women in the face of disempowering and discriminatory practices.

So how was this concept of feminism then applied by researchers in their respective communities?

With a range of diverse organisations working in diverse communities throughout the world, differing approaches to how projects incorporated feminism were anticipated, particularly in light of discussions at the workshop. In the respect that each project centred on women’s experiences and the various factors that shape them, while recognising women as empowered agents of social change, feminism was the fundamental principle underpinning all projects. However, it was up to researcher’s discretion whether or not the concept of feminism was raised and discussed with groups.

### The Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya

#### The Realities and Agency of Informal Sector Workers: The Account of Migrant Women Workers in Nairobi

Former GAATW-IS staff and FPAR research facilitator, Nkirote Laiboni, explained that using the term would be counter-productive as most participants with little to no formal education would be intimidated by such a theoretical discussion and unreceptive due to its association with

elites. Prevailing negative connotations of ‘feminism’ in Kenya - that it pits men against women, that feminists hate men and are unhappy divorcees and single women - would only further complicate the process and inhibit participation. Importantly, as a concept introduced by Western women to African women, Nkirote pointed out the intrinsic cultural imperialism and the need for African women to distinguish and apply their own concepts.

Although the term ‘feminism’ wasn’t addressed in FIDA Kenya’s group discussions, the project still espoused feminist values and explored the ways in which women’s experiences of migration and labour were gendered. The report highlights the patriarchal nature of Kenyan society, with the widespread perception that women are submissive, second-class citizens reflected in structural norms such as restricted access to education and the formal labour market. And yet participants managed to be small-scale entrepreneurs and wage workers, many while raising children, gaining financial independence from their husbands and the freedom to provide for the basic needs of their families.

FIDA Kenya’s FPAR acted as a catalyst for the formation of groups in which women could unionise to collectively bargain for labour rights and welfare needs, as well as enjoy a space to share their experiences and support each other. Through the creation of a rights-enhancing environment, in which women are political subjects, the activities of this project challenge the inequality and discrimination these women face. And so without even mentioning the word ‘feminism’, the project achieved feminist outcomes.

### Legal Resources Center - Untuk Kaedilan Jender Dan Hak Asasi Manusia - Semarang (LRC-KHJAM)

#### Linkages Between Migration, Labour, Gender and Trafficking among Women Migrant Workers

Much like FIDA-Kenya and most other research groups, LRC-KJHAM ensured its FPAR was implicitly feminist without explicit discussion of the term. The unique lens of FPAR enabled LRC-KJHAM to address shortfalls in previous empowerment activities and research that failed to enact real change in the lives of vulnerable and marginal groups of women in Indonesia.

*“Some groups of women have been seen as powerless and without potential. Others have not considered imbalances in positions, roles, power, decision-making and access to resources of women to be problems for marginalised women. Women’s voices, experiences, interests, and potential are not always actualised in empowerment activities created for women. Often, it is the interpretation and assumptions from outsiders that have dominated and controlled local women’s groups.*

*Subordination and other form of discriminations can also be present in empowerment activities created for women.”<sup>5</sup>*

*“To achieve women’s freedom from discrimination in Indonesia (especially in Central Java), vulnerable and marginal groups of women have to be recognised as subjects in the gender equality movement. In order to incorporate women’s experiences, voices, perspectives, and activities into the women’s movement, LRC-KJHAM conducted feminist participatory action research (FPAR) as part of our advocacy strategy which is based on organising and legal reform. Our slogan is “working with women” instead of “working for women”.”<sup>6</sup>*

As this excerpt illustrates, FPAR projects can retain a strong sense of feminism and strive for the empowerment of women without discussion of what it means to be feminist.

### Asosiasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia - Association of Indonesian Migrant Workers (ATKI)

#### The Impact of Excessive Placement Fees on Indonesian Migrant Workers and Their Families

In Limbangan, a village in Brebes, Indonesia, 75% of

Initial discussions of feminism were difficult as the term was previously unknown to participants, but this was also advantageous in that there was no pre-existing stigma or negative connotations to overcome. As research teams explored the history of women’s experiences in village life, they came to realise that women’s contributions to family life extended beyond the domestic realm. With this realisation came the understanding that gender shouldn’t be a barrier to participating in any aspect of life. Participating in this FPAR project enabled the women to articulate their own idea of feminism - that it is an effort to raise women’s position in the family and the community. This tangible definition underpinned subsequent activities undertaken by participants.

Nkirote’s concern that engaging with the concept of feminism can be counter-productive to the aim of achieving feminist outcomes highlights why it is important that FPAR projects reflect the unique circumstances and experiences of each participants and the context, community and country in which she lives. In generating a sense of solidarity, sharing information and experiences and working together to lobby for social and political change, each project reflected the definition of feminism arrived at during the workshop in unique ways. Talking about feminism is important, where possible, however, taking feminist action to empower women is more important.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> An organisation led by returnee migrant women in northern Thailand. For more information, see [http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=462:sepom&catid=127:Asia&Itemid=5](http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=462:sepom&catid=127:Asia&Itemid=5)

<sup>2</sup> A civil society organisation focusing on gender equality and social justice. For more information, see [http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=518:colectivo-leila-diniz&catid=124:Latin%20American%20Countries&Itemid=5](http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=518:colectivo-leila-diniz&catid=124:Latin%20American%20Countries&Itemid=5)

<sup>3</sup> A women’s rights organisation. For more information, visit [http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=459:fida-kenya&catid=126:Africa&Itemid=5](http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=459:fida-kenya&catid=126:Africa&Itemid=5)

<sup>4</sup> An anti-trafficking organisation. For more information, visit [http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=490:la-strada-moldova&catid=125:Europe&Itemid=5](http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=490:la-strada-moldova&catid=125:Europe&Itemid=5)

<sup>5</sup> Legal Resources Center for Gender Justice and Human Rights (LRC-KJHAM) and the Rowoberanten Women Migrant Workers Group. (2010). The linkages between migration, labour, gender and trafficking among women migrant workers: Feminist participatory action research (FPAR) in Rowoberanten Village [Indonesia], p.5. *A Woman’s Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series*. Bangkok, Thailand: GAATW.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



**Caitlin Grover**  
is a Communications Officer at the  
GAATW International Secretariat



registered migrant workers as of June 2009 were women. While participants cited family financial necessity linked to local unemployment as the primary reason for working overseas, women rather than men became migrant workers because the most accessible and available work was domestic, a sector typically associated with women.

Despite this significant contribution to family livelihood, women felt an imbalance of power and decision-making with their husbands. To address this imbalance, research groups sought to create a definition of feminism that reflected these women’s realities and recognised their capacity as political subjects to achieve social change.

# RIGHTS!ART!ACTION!:

## The ethics of visual representation

By Alfie Gordo

GAATW's Rights! Art! Action! competition invited GAATW member organisations, friends and the general public to submit their creative works which depict the often overlooked strength and resilience women demonstrate through their labour, migration and trafficking struggles.

Over the years, GAATW has become concerned about the use of exploitative and victimising imagery in anti-trafficking materials and campaigns to draw attention to the issue. Often times the graphic nature of these images encourages voyeurism and reinforces negative stereotypes of women as vulnerable, voiceless, helpless victims. Numerous campaigns, initiatives and actors have put anti-trafficking on the global agenda, however, the use of disempowering images popularises disempowering ideas of women, diminishing their sense of agency and capacity to assert their rights. These kinds of images do not capture the overall experiences of trafficking survivors and indeed, contradict our experience of women's strength and resilience as they seek justice, assistance, regain their identities and integrate into their communities. Being represented in a rights-affirming way is of critical importance to many trafficked persons we meet in our work.

*Rights! Art! Action!*, an arts-based competition, was launched by GAATW International Secretariat in early December 2009 with the goal of moving beyond images of women's victimhood and vulnerability in anti-trafficking campaigns to present images of strength and autonomy.

*At GAATW we want to move beyond images of women's victimhood and vulnerability to present images of strength and autonomy (qualities we see in trafficking survivors we have met and worked with) and to encourage others to do the same.*

With the use of arts-based representations, GAATW sought to encourage the public and others to think of anti-trafficking from a rights-based approach rather than a traditional charity model that depends on 'victim' and 'saviour' roles. In GAATW's *Respect and Relevance: Supporting Self-Organising as a Strategy for Empowerment and Social Change*, participants talked about how a rights-based approach empowered women in determining their

own route to recovery. This is a substantial shift from the traditional charity model that is shaped by donor assumptions of what women need rather than listening to survivors define their own needs.

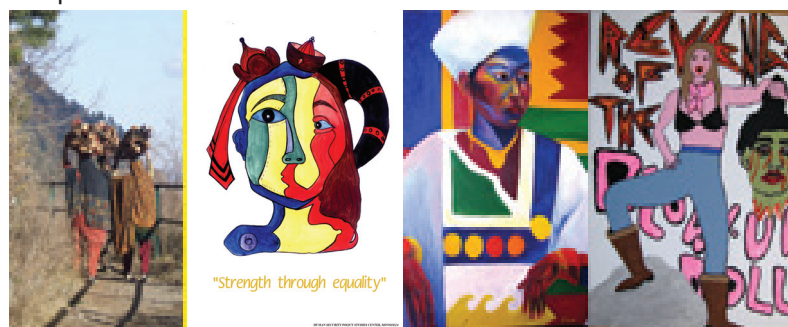


The *Rights! Art! Action!* competition also challenged this model by forcing people to think critically about the exploitative representations of trafficked women in mainstream anti-

trafficking campaigns. It created a space for participants to create positive, rights-affirming representations of trafficked persons and migrant workers.

In using an arts-based competition to address this issue, we wanted to provoke a shift in how trafficked persons are visually represented towards more empowering imagery that reflects women's strength and autonomy rather than glorifying their victimisation and vulnerability. We also hoped to stir up discussion about anti-trafficking and gauge public awareness on the issue.

We received a range of interesting and diverse submissions from Egypt, Mongolia, Canada, America, Pakistan, Singapore, New Zealand and Latin America. Photos, paintings, drawings and graphic designs showed women in movement, women working together, strong and defiant women staring down the viewer, depictions of solidarity and a poem that spoke of women's aspirations.





L-Top: Aly Mgady Hazzaa, Egypt  
Title: "Moving"  
L-Bottom: Sha Najak  
Title: "Waxing Lyrical"  
Right: Kay Chernush, United States  
Title: "I reverse the voodoo onto my trafficker. I am not afraid anymore."



There was  
once a  
**woman**  
With the  
world in  
her mind

Adventures  
she loved  
Living high  
with might

I love to share with you my words, worlds, worms.  
I'd stay with you and listen to your words, worlds and worms.  
I reflect on the day where I listened to words, worlds and saw worms.  
I'll write to you and we continue to make words, worlds and grow worms.

Kay Chernush was the winning artist with her piece *Voodoo Inverso*. Kay explained, "With this picture, I reverse the voodoo onto my trafficker. I am not afraid anymore." While this image was inspired by the narratives of trafficked persons, she said, the process aimed to deconstruct and transform their victimhood through exploring issues of self-image, perceived image and projected image.

One of the judges, Jackie Pollock from MAP Foundation (Thailand), said, "*The image provides a strong profile of a woman, but with dangers lurking in the background. However, despite the evident threats, the woman remains strong and refuses to be consumed by these dangers.*"

To view Rights! Art! Action! submissions go to:

<http://www.gaatw.org/>

[index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=623:raa-submissions&catid=84:Other%20Materials](http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=623:raa-submissions&catid=84:Other%20Materials)

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Available online at [www.gaatw.org](http://www.gaatw.org)



**Alfie Gordo**  
is a Communications and Production  
Officer at the GAATW International  
Secretariat

# The 'P' Word: How Participatory is FPAR?

*Nerea Bilbatúa (GAATW-IS). Thanks to Alice Maranga (FIDA-Kenya), Noushin K (Canada), Fátima Peña and Miriam González (MODEMU-Dominican Republic), and Lúcia Isabel Silva (Sodireitos-Brazil) for their contributions.*

Participation of the researched community is central to Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR). FPAR acknowledges that knowledge, analysis, information and capacity for change lie within the respective community, rather than primarily with the researcher. As such, participants in FPAR are not just sources of information - they are the primary actors shaping the research, or at least that is the aim.

This article analyses what participation looked like in practice in GAATW's FPAR initiative, and what factors mediated it. Power dynamics, gender relations and in a few cases the agricultural season played a part in shaping research participants' involvement in different parts of the FPAR process.

The FPAR projects in GAATW's programme all had 'ally researchers' from NGOs who approached women in varying communities asking if they could collaborate as 'research participants'. In some projects, ally researchers knew some of them well, others less well or not at all. In most cases research participants' were consulted by researchers about the research process in meeting previous to the commencement of the projects themselves, but in one case (Noushin's K and Feresheteh's) this was not feasible due to security and confidentiality concerns; in that specific case the interview guide was made available to the interviewees and the interview process was left open-ended to allow for greater participation. Research participants' involvement varied from project to project: some conducted interviews themselves, while others were interviewed; some hosted focus groups at their houses and some shaped focus group discussions to be about issues they thought most important; some participated in group analysis or lobbying, while others were unable to do so because of safety issues, timing, interest or lack of childcare. Very few were part of report-writing, though some wrote stories that were included in the research and all gave interviews, words which were part of the reports' text.

The variables intrinsic to such participatory research require flexibility and the capacity to accommodate unforeseen changes to proposals and analysis. Unlike traditional

research, FPAR does not assume that the researcher is disengaged and objective with more authority to determine the meaning of research participants' experiences. Rather, it demands that s/he is *"an empathetic listener who knows when to act as a catalyst, when to be a fellow traveller in solidarity and when to encourage the women to analyse the patriarchal basis of some of their assumptions"*.<sup>1</sup>

And yet the concept of participation raises several questions. How is participation achieved? And how is it defined? Who participates and how? Is there a single and unique way of participating? What are the necessary conditions for participation?

*"Without these women [FPAR participants] trusting her [the researcher], there would be no participation"*.<sup>2</sup>

Participation of the researched community was central to all the FPAR projects carried out for GAATW's FPAR initiative. Returnee migrant women in Indonesia, Thailand or Moldova, sex workers in the Dominican Republic, women working in the informal labour market in the Dominican Republic and Kenya, migrant domestic workers in the Netherlands, Middle Eastern women working in Canada and African women living in direct provision in Ireland were among the diverse participants.

The nature of participation was largely shaped by how researchers, including Non-Government Organisation (NGO) staff, activists and advocates, entered the community. However, there were universal elements - all researchers achieved the community's trust, and participation was based on information, dialogue and respect. The process of obtaining access to communities varied. In several instances, the researchers themselves were members of the community they were researching, i.e. returnee migrants or sex workers. Pre-existing relationships through prior engagement with communities eased the bridging process, as did community facilitators or 'insiders'. In one case, a well-known advocate from the community who was part of the research team was instrumental in fostering cooperation and creating a safe environment for the women.

Developing alliances with local authorities was another effective method of engaging communities, with village mayors or leaders essentially vouching for researchers, according trust by proxy. As one researcher said, “The relationship between the external researcher and the women in the community was based on an important trust between the village authority and the women themselves.”<sup>3</sup>

**Enhancing women’s voices is part of the methodology and politics of FPAR.<sup>4</sup>**

On the whole, the planning process for each FPAR project was developed in a participatory way - what to explore, how to explore it and the way forward was openly discussed and agreed upon.

Each group selected techniques for participation that complemented the project and the organisation but most specifically the community. Safety concerns and confidentiality were pivotal such as when collective methods such as focus group discussions would expose participants to unnecessary risk

The research environment and the nature of the ‘community’ determined the methodologies used to a great extent. In one case, for example, safety concerns played a central role, and ensuring safety and confidentiality of those women participating become a defining element of the FPAR. In this specific case, collective methods, like focus group discussions, or actions were not possible as it would have exposed participants to unnecessary risk (e.g. arrest, deportation).<sup>5</sup> This shows how the research context can sometimes affect the FPAR methodology in regards to participation, and how researchers have to adapt to the context.

**Research techniques used**

| Focus group discussions | In-depth one-on-one interviews | Personal story writing | Semi-structured interviews | Direct observation | Living in community |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| AkiDwa                  | CEAPA                          | ATKI                   | RESPECT                    | La Strada Moldova  | LRC-KJHAM           |
| ATKI                    | FIDA-Kenya                     | LRC-KJHAM              |                            | CEAPA              |                     |
| MODEMU                  | La Strada Moldova              | SEPOM                  |                            |                    |                     |
| FIDA-Kenya              | LRC-KJHAM                      | RESPECT                |                            |                    |                     |
| LRC-KJHAM               | MODEMU                         |                        |                            |                    |                     |
| SEPOM                   | Noushin K and Fereshteh        |                        |                            |                    |                     |
| La Strada Moldova       | SEPOM                          |                        |                            |                    |                     |
| RESPECT                 | Sodireitos                     |                        |                            |                    |                     |

Adaptation by the researchers to the women’s demands was also common; researchers perceived themselves as ‘facilitators’; as both insiders and outsiders, and therefore, as dynamisers:

*“The researcher played a difficult role; a moderator, ensuring every women’s participation and noticing things that women were reluctant to*

*...speak about in a group, so they could be discussed during the individual interviews...As a researcher, during some interviews I felt that women were the ones who chose the topics for discussion, who orchestrate the direction of interview - this made interviewees more confident women feeling the control of the discussion and feeling themselves as a designers and first-hand participants.”<sup>6</sup> Viorelia Rusu, La Strada Moldova*

Other researchers experienced a blurring in the boundary between researchers and researched, as Lúcia Isabel Silva from Sodireitos explains.

*“Since the very initial discussions about the FPAR process we were clear about the need to include a ‘participative structure’ as the fundamental element of our work; we had to develop a way of interacting between all of those involved -us researchers and them researched- with the certainty that this separation of roles would, at one point of the process, disappear and that all of us would become ‘researchers’ so decisions would be taken collectively.”<sup>7</sup>*

In some cases, this distinction remained or became more apparent, depending on the participants themselves, as Bernice Roldan from RESPECT indicates.

*“Using the FPAR methodology as much as possible was important in our context because of the close working relationship and long history of the NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) involved, and the fact that both are predominantly composed of migrant women sharing mutual lived realities in the host society. There were, however, limitations in maintaining the FPAR process when the lead researcher related with migrant women who were outside the network (the members of the church choir who responded to the questionnaire). In this case, there were clearer lines between researcher and researched.”<sup>8</sup>*

**CHALLENGES TO PARTICIPATION**

*“One thing to note is that not everything would go the way researchers anticipated because the issues affecting women in different areas were different.”<sup>9</sup> Alice Maranga, FIDA Kenya*

As mentioned, the safety of participants was a primary concern and affected how women could participate. Most researchers indicated that they had changed the names of participants to protect their identity. The issue of safety was of particular concern in the research carried out with Middle Eastern women living in Canada. Noushin explained:

*“Even though twenty-one women shared their*



*experiences, due to potential identification markers that are central to each woman's story and as a result of safety concerns, only 19 participant profiles were included as part of the final report. It was equally difficult to get the participants organised as a group since their occupation and current life situations made it impossible for them to have a 'regular' schedule within which to schedule interviews in advance. This impacted the action component of FPAR and it also determined the methodology used (mainly in-depth interviews rather than focus group discussions)."*<sup>10</sup>

Another common issue affecting participation was the need to adapt the research to the pace set by the community.

*"The researcher encountered some challenges in selecting appropriate days for organising focus groups and interviews with women due to the current agricultural season that demanded women's involvement. Because of this, there were two days where people were religiously prohibited from working, so women used these days to meet each other and the FPAR researcher."*<sup>11</sup>

A more complex problem was achieving a level of rapport with the community to allow their full and true participation throughout the entire research process so there would be less distinction between the researchers and researched.

*"It was only after a long and complicated interaction with the women so they would trust us, that we can say that the participation process became more effective, more authentic and the women felt part of the research team, as researchers themselves."*<sup>12</sup>

Social and cultural dynamics were also a challenge for researchers, especially in communities where social control is strong. This was evident in the research with migrant women in Moldova, where women reported mostly positive experiences in group discussions but less triumphant and more realistic versions would only arise in one-on-one interviews. Socio-cultural factors that shape the lives of Middle Eastern women living in Canada also shaped the nature of participation in the research process.

*"Not group dynamics; but socio-cultural dynamics within the larger Middle Eastern community impacted the research (i.e. the taboo nature of sex work, the sense of communal shame) and could impact honesty. However, I feel like the research process enabled each woman to really tell their stories without holding back - which is quite refreshing for a community that focuses a lot on keeping up appearances."*<sup>13</sup>

FPAR strives to defy traditional power dynamics within communities in regards to gender relations and leadership. Although all research was conducted by women with women, there were instances where men were involved, either as community leaders or in discussions with the research team. In one case a male community workers' involvement meant that women felt less comfortable participating. In another case, women were more vocal when men were present.

*"It was interesting to note the reactions of women where men were present during discussions. The women seemed to be more vocal about their experiences in a space with only women and this is indicative of the way that the gender imbalance in their day-to-day lives affects them. There were also power relations within the groups whereby in some instances, the groups had a clear power structure so that one woman controlled the tone of the discussions...The researcher realised and had to encourage the participants to share their experiences by themselves which worked in the following group discussions."*<sup>14</sup>

*"The research is called 'I am only saying it now', for many women who participated in the research, they felt that this was the first time that they could say the issues that they are facing."*<sup>15</sup> - Salome Mbugua, about AkiDwa's research with women asylum seekers in Ireland's direct provision centres

Women's priorities and voices are the crux of FPAR. It puts them in a position of power, emphasising their agency rather than their victimisation. This is achieved when power shifts to the women so that research is by local women for local women for the purpose of affecting real social, political and economic change.

Importantly, the FPAR projects demonstrate how strategic, strong and resilient women are. The simple process of creating space and listening to each other's stories showed that women have strong ideas of what they want and how to achieve it. Participation comes also as a strategy to break social stigma, whether it is associated to being undocumented migrants, sex workers, returnee migrants, minorities within the mainstream society etc. It provides a frame in which normally unheard voices raise and speak by themselves.

These projects reveal the role of FPAR in realising social transformation that stems from the community, for the community.

*"Women were more confident about their rights. They started looking for the missing information related to labour abroad, migration laws, gender and violence aspects - possibilities to get specialised help on these issues. The most*

*important issues that resulted from participation of the community in the research were that villagers themselves (not outsiders) are those who should change their lives to better, to make necessary efforts and to attract the necessary internal and external resources. Women understood that every change is possible when it is carefully planned. They learned from positive experiences of other migrant women, they want to meet each other to provide mutual emotional and informational support that may be also considered as an action part of FPAR, even if it has a long-term effect.*<sup>16</sup> - Viorelia Rusu, La Strada Moldova

*“Women then, were able to organize themselves into groups and mobilize other women to join them to lobby and advocate for their rights and share experiences...As individuals and groups, women benefited emotionally, economically and socially. The women were able to come up with solutions to their problems. They were empowered with human rights information and most importantly the collection and group formation was a success.”<sup>17</sup> - Alice Maranga, FIDA-Kenya*

<sup>10</sup> Noushin K in personal communication with the author for the preparation of this article (August 2010)

<sup>11</sup> Page 10, Rusu, V. for La Strada Moldova. (2010). *A Look at the Linkages: How Does Gender, Migration, Labour and Trafficking Intersect in Women's Lives? A Qualitative Research Based on Migration and Labour Experiences of Women from Ursoaia, Republic of Moldova. A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series.* Bangkok, Thailand: GAATW. See La Strada Moldova report.

<sup>12</sup> Lucia Isabel Silva, from Sodireitos, in personal communication with the author for the preparation of this article (August 2010)

<sup>13</sup> Noushin K in personal communication with the author for the preparation of this article (August 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Alice Maranga, from FIDA-Kenya, in personal communication with the author for the preparation of this article (August 2010)

<sup>15</sup> Comment from GAATW's Roundtable III: *Bringing together 'linkages' topics in feminist participatory action research and GAATW Working Papers*, 10-14 March 2010, Bangkok, Thailand. Salome Mbugua (AKIDWA) at the GAATW Roundtable 3.

<sup>16</sup> Viorelia Rusu, from La Strada Moldova, in personal communication with the author for the preparation of this article (August 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Alice Maranga, from FIDA-Kenya, in personal communication with the author for the preparation of this article (August 2010).

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> GAATW FPAR Learning Workshop report, May 2009 (page 4).

<sup>2</sup> Noushin K talking about the role played by her co-researcher (a well known activist by the researched community participants) in fostering participation (personal communication with the author during the preparation of this article (August 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Page 10, Rusu, V. for La Strada Moldova. (2010). *A Look at the Linkages: How Does Gender, Migration, Labour and Trafficking Intersect in Women's Lives? A Qualitative Research Based on Migration and Labour Experiences of Women from Ursoaia, Republic of Moldova. A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series.* Bangkok, Thailand: GAATW. See La Strada Moldova report.

<sup>4</sup> GAATW FPAR Learning Workshop report, May 2009 (page 16).

<sup>5</sup> Noushin K. and Fereshteh. (2010). Understanding needs, recognising rights: The stories, perspectives, and priorities of immigrant Iranian women in Vancouver, Canada. *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series.* Bangkok, Thailand: GAATW.

<sup>6</sup> Viorelia Rusu, from La Strada Moldova, in personal communication with the author for the preparation of this article (August 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Lucia Isabel Silva, from Sodireitos, in personal communication with the author for the preparation of this article (August 2010)

<sup>8</sup> Comment by Bernice Roldan (RESPECT) at the GAATW Roundtable III: *Bringing together 'linkages' topics in feminist participatory action research and GAATW Working Papers*, 10-14 March 2010, Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>9</sup> Alice Maranga, from FIDA-Kenya in personal communication with the author for the preparation of this article (August 2010)



**Nerea Bilbatua**  
is a Programme Officer at the GAATW  
International Secretariat



# “We have to be conscious of our own power”: GAATW-IS reflections on its power in FPAR processes

By Julie Ham

## Power and research

*Knowledge production is a monopolised industry. Ordinary people are excluded. They may understand the concepts well through their own experience but lack the terminology that confers power.<sup>1</sup>*

Equalising power relations in research is a defining characteristic of Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR), in part to address past histories of exploitation and marginalisation perpetuated by traditional or mainstream research methodologies<sup>2</sup>. ‘Traditional’ or ‘mainstream’ research methodologies typically afford little or no power to research participants. For instance, researchers often have more power in determining research questions, determining meaning from participants’ responses and determining ownership and use of the data collected. This can result in research that benefits researchers but not participants.

FPAR methodologies turn research into action for the benefit of researched marginalised communities and counter inequitable power relations by increasing the power of researcher participants. By centring research participants in meaning-making, FPAR can also develop alternative or counter-hegemonic discourses. One research facilitator noted that the voices that emerge in research are influenced by power relations within communities, and between women, researchers and the State: *“If we don’t encourage women’s voices, only a few will be reflected in the reports.”*<sup>3</sup> Another staff noted how framing a woman’s trafficking experience as an isolated event entrenched women’s powerlessness: *“I think a woman’s life is richer than their trafficking experience, which is just one chapter in their migration and labour history. This develops global theatre which doesn’t give women power in exchange for giving us responsibilities.”*<sup>4</sup>

Within the International Secretariat (IS), GAATW staff discussed issues of power throughout GAATW’s 2009-2010 FPAR initiative. Women’s power was a core focus of the FPAR projects. One of the main research questions was *“In what ways are women experiencing power relations and exercising power and autonomy*

*to claim rights?”* However, staff were also aware of how power relations might play out between researchers and throughout research processes. All staff strongly supported the notion of shifting power relations as an important part of FPAR but discussions showed that we had many questions and opinions on what that meant in daily practice. This article outlines some questions and perspectives that arose throughout the FPAR process and identifies areas for strengthening our own analysis around power in research.

## Power as an ethical issue

From the beginning of GAATW’s FPAR initiative, power was defined as an ethical issue. In May 2009, GAATW organised a learning workshop for FPAR partner organisations. One of the sessions focused on power and ethics, discussing ‘power over’, ‘power with’, and ‘power within’. In this session, acting ethically was described as recognising and respecting research participants’ role in determining the meaning of their experiences and respecting boundaries (e.g. confidentiality and support required). Being ethical about power also meant keeping a ‘humble attitude’ and being aware of how modestly one demonstrated one’s power in research processes. It was also described as having participants determine the course, process and outcomes of the research.

## Power between GAATW-IS and FPAR partner organisations<sup>5</sup>

At GAATW’s FPAR learning workshop in May 2009, presenters from the IS said: *“We have to be conscious of our own power.”* But what are we trying to be aware of? Our ideas, our money, our plans, our deadlines? To aid this reflection, I’ll present a few example scenarios where IS staff felt a power dynamic between themselves and the partner organisations involved in the FPAR initiative and a few example scenarios where IS staff felt or observed power dynamics between FPAR partner organisations and research participants. I will use these scenarios to try to clarify how power was

constructed or perceived by the IS in everyday practice.

In an FPAR project evaluation meeting in July 2010, IS research facilitators identified power issues as one of the top three methodological issues they encountered during the FPAR initiative. At various points, IS research facilitators wondered if GAATW staff were imposing the IS's positions and needs on FPAR partners and where the boundaries for involvement lie. In some projects, definitions of what constituted 'participation', 'feminist', and 'action' differed between FPAR partner organisations, research participants and the IS. For instance, the term 'feminist' was very challenging for numerous research participants to accept or grasp.<sup>6</sup> Some participants did not feel the term resonated with their issues as women, while others were confused about the term's meaning.

IS facilitators were very aware of their own power and careful about how they asserted it, mainly by providing suggestions and guidance when they felt it would help illuminate or clarify project progress. But staff also wondered how FPAR partner organisations perceived power dynamics between them and the IS. At other times, IS staff wondered whether they were being too forceful or too 'pushy' in coaxing research processes to adhere to a timeline determined by the IS or to follow a particular process: *"My role as facilitator was challenging because it's hard to find a balance in what we want as IS and what groups want? Where do you draw the limit?"*<sup>7</sup>. Staff were also aware that FPAR processes are meant to work in and respect local priorities and timelines.

In one instance, two staff facilitators disagreed with the researcher's decision to initiate community contact through local officials but eventually acquiesced based on the fact that the researcher, as a citizen of the same country as the community, had greater knowledge of the cultural norms that would affect research access and process. The link between knowledge and power was also affirmed by IS staff working with groups in Indonesia. One facilitator commented on the need to be aware of the possible consequences of participation and empowerment: *"As a facilitator, I am concerned with advocacy so I did push the women to do some collective action. But we must reflect if such actions are in the women's best interest. If we're not careful about involving the community, then the community would be against the women being heard. The group and the researchers might be ready to protect the women from violence, e.g. domestic violence, but if regulations are not in place this would not be viable so involving the community in general is important."*<sup>8</sup>

IS staff also spoke at length about confronting their own expectations about women's realities and research outcomes.

For instance, GAATW has always supported the organising efforts of marginalised groups (such as women in the informal sector, trafficked persons, etc.) and saw collective organising as a natural outcome of FPAR processes. However, women informal sector workers from one FPAR project challenged these expectations. As daily subsistence workers, women stressed that earning income is a daily priority which determines how they spend their time each day. They asserted that they wanted to work collectively to lift themselves economically rather than on 'women's rights'.

Some IS staff wondered whether they were too involved in the process. IS staff were originally assigned to catalyse and facilitate research processes but were not assigned to do the bulk of the research tasks themselves (e.g. liaising with the community, data collection, data analysis, developing research products). However, in approximately half of the research projects, IS staff shifted from being research facilitators to researchers and took on fieldwork, data collection and community liaison: *"In terms of the participation aspect, it is important to keep in mind that the relationship was initiated by the researcher and so ultimately the researchers decided the way the discussions are moderated and in what forums the issues are discussed (be it through a focus group discussion, community mapping, interviews, etc). This is unavoidable in research and in some of the groups such as Kiamaike, there needed to be more moderation than in the other communities because of the dynamic between the different women."* (page 38)<sup>9</sup>

Strangely, IS staff did not discuss their power extensively in the beginning phase. GAATW had started the FPAR initiative by sending out a call to member organisations. In total, 22 organisations responded. From these applications, GAATW IS selected 15 organisations to participate. Selections were based on such factors as whether the organisation was a member of the GAATW network, whether they were a self-organised group, assessments of IS and applicants' capacity, the strength of partners' links to communities, geographical representation, and how their proposal reflected the research questions GAATW IS wanted to explore<sup>10</sup>. Although organisations were not funded for the project, they still received resources, support and opportunities through trainings and technical support from IS staff.

A few months after the FPAR projects were launched, a research consultant (contracted by the IS) shared her concerns about resource allocation and her perceptions that some groups received more support from GAATW IS than others: *"I didn't understand that process, what made GAATW decide what groups to support."* She went on to argue that GAATW should have built in more support for the participation of self-organised groups (SOGs), particularly given GAATW's reliance on their information and knowledge:

*“Speaking from an SOG perspective, I think GAATW has to consider the ratio of support (for groups) and GAATW’s expectations for the group involved. GAATW depends on the voices of self-organised groups in many ways (e.g. meetings, photo exhibits, reports) but does it invest enough in strengthening self-organised groups to fulfil those roles? GAATW had a lot of expectations for the women involved in FPAR, but did women receive enough resources or support to realise those expectations?...A lot came out of SEPOM’s research (like the report and the photo exhibit), but that wasn’t necessarily because of the project structure, but due more to opportunities, luck and chance....If we really want to encourage SOGs to participate in FPAR, if we really want to generate empowerment, GAATW has to improve project structures and resource allocation much better.”*

This was one of the most important lessons learned for the IS. These concerns had also been raised by another IS staff after the initial FPAR learning workshop, who felt keenly aware that the self-organised groups at the workshop had not received a thorough enough training. The learning workshop had also been geared towards more established and traditional NGOs, in terms of the language used and training methods taught. In contrast, the self-organised groups present would need more ongoing support if their participation was to be meaningful. Over the next few months after the learning workshop, two of the six original self-organised group participants decided to drop out. They stated that they needed greater capacity; one lacked enough staff and another identified other priorities as more urgent. In the end, GAATW IS staff and research consultants were able to provide in-depth, hands-on support to three of the self-organised groups in the FPAR initiative. This demonstrated that facilitating participation requires more than a desire to be inclusive; it also requires tangible commitment of practical resources and a readiness to shift one’s own language, position and ‘comfort zones’.

### Power between FPAR partner organisations and participant communities

Power dynamics between FPAR partner organisations and researched communities were not described in most of the FPAR reports featured in *A Woman’s Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience* [FPAR CD series]. Some of the projects involved members of the researched communities as researchers, others involved developing new relationships between the researched communities and the researchers (in these cases, researchers were NGO staff, GAATW IS staff and/or students).

In a couple of the projects, IS staff were concerned that the NGO researchers were directing a particular analysis among research participants rather than facilitating meaning-making among participants themselves. One research facilitator noted that the NGO researchers were great community organisers but felt they did most of the analysis rather than letting the women do it in the focus group discussion.<sup>11</sup> One rare example

where power dynamics were acknowledged between research participants and NGO researchers was noted in FIDA’s FPAR with women workers in the informal sector in Nairobi, Kenya:

*“Of interest was the change in the dynamic when there were no men present during discussions (the community mobiliser was male, and there were situations where interviews were carried out in the women’s homes or places of work in the presence of male relatives or customers). The women seemed to be more vocal about their experiences in a space with only women and this is indicative of the way that the gender imbalance in their day to day lives affects them. There were also power relations within the groups whereby in some instances, the groups had a clear power structure so that one woman controlled the tone of the discussions. However, other women were encouraged to share their points of view and in subsequent focus group discussions and discussions, they opened up.” (page 38)<sup>12</sup>*

### How was power defined? Who defines it?

Analysing power in research processes includes analysing who has the power to shape stories, define women’s identities, determine what stories are told or what themes are emphasised. Discussions with IS staff about the IS’s power in this FPAR initiative tended to focus on how power played out in interactions and communication between the IS and FPAR partners and/or between FPAR partner organisations and the communities targeted for research. Less acknowledged by staff was how power might have influenced how material resources or technical support was allocated (e.g. choosing which organisations would participate).

In discussions at the initial FPAR learning workshop about the three types of power - ‘power over’, ‘power with’ and ‘power within’ - staff indicated they were most concerned about ‘power over’. Throughout the research process, there was less overt recognition or acknowledgement of power as a positive, ‘power with’ resource, although staff demonstrated this in their communication and interactions with researchers.

*One concern about perceiving power mainly as ‘power over’ is the risk of seeing power as a static entity rather than as a practice or action. If ‘power over’ is the most familiar way of defining power, it may be easier to treat power as something to be handed to another person or as a simple plus/minus equation, i.e. we increase another’s power by decreasing our own. Although this may be the case in certain situations, it may not be sufficient for most action research partnerships.*

For example, IS staff internally debated how much the final FPAR reports should be edited. Some IS staff felt very concerned about FPAR partners’ ownership over final research products and were worried that extensive editing might be perceived by report authors as a threat to their ownership. Other IS staff felt that editing the final reports

would not threaten author's ownership but increase accessibility of the final products (particularly around language and English translations): *"To me most of these things are about reader accessibility rather than us imposing on researchers....I just don't want our sense of what author ownership is to shut down any possibility of back and forth with researchers (even with limited time frames). As long as we state that she has final say over the presentation, I think we're being ethical."*<sup>13</sup> Reports were eventually edited for language clarity, text flow (e.g. re-ordering certain sections) and consistency in formats (e.g. including organisational information, table of contents, etc.) but internal staff discussions raised some interesting assumptions over how different people defined ownership, who assessed what FPAR authors would perceive as too directive, and distinctions between feedback and asserting power. One staff talked about the challenges finding the right balance between feedback and respecting ownership: *"Your thinking around facilitating readers' accessibility vs. ownership, it is true. It is more an issue of finding a balance between this and something different like swapping/adding/deleting...but over-protectiveness is not positive either."*<sup>14</sup>

This highlights another aspect that emerged in staff discussions on power: the implied links between power and participation. Participation and power can be closely linked, as when participatory research methodologies are used as a strategy to increase power for marginalised groups. However, IS staff discussions appeared, at times, to equate power with participation. For example, when IS staff had to step in and take a more direct role in research tasks<sup>15</sup>, they expressed concern that they had too much involvement or too much power directing research processes.

However, this assessment of power from IS participation might differ from FPAR partners' perspective. Participatory research methodologies are meant to provide participants with more control over what they contribute in research. All of the FPAR partner organisations were national level or community based organisations, all with demanding workloads and competing attentions. It may be that greater involvement in the process by IS staff was an example of partners determining how much they could contribute, defining the scope and limits of their involvement, and asserting how much support they needed from the IS.

Although power is closely linked with participation, we need to clarify how the two intersect and how to balance power and involvement. What are the implications of participation without power? One FPAR partner, SEPOM, had talked to us about their past experiences being 'used' by other researchers to collect data without sufficient power to determine how the information would be used. What is power without participation? This can result in silence or

inaction. This can also reflect traditional research processes where those with resources (financial, technical) can direct research agendas without having to invest time and commitment to a community's social justice goals.

### Did we have power?

Internal staff discussions on power throughout the research process revealed staff assumptions that the IS was in a position of power in the research process and that we had to be careful about how we used our power. But did we have power? Power is also about being able to determine who does what. GAATW IS staff tried very hard in this aspect to determine who would do what, by setting out roles. GAATW IS had initiated the FPAR projects, organised a multi-day training, kept in regular communication with researchers, and developed the final research products. IS staff felt emphatic that IS should take a facilitating role but that FPAR partners should take on the bulk of research tasks including community organising, data collection, data analysis, report writing and following up on action plans that emerged from the research. When IS took on a larger role than expected in some of the projects, staff assumed this affected power dynamics. When some research participants did not fulfill their roles (as outlined by the IS), IS staff wondered whether participation was inhibited due to a particular power dynamic.

Power can also be defined as who is best positioned to impact outcomes and products. In about half of the projects, IS staff also became involved in research activities on a day-to-day basis. The other half of projects consisted of very autonomous researchers undertaking activities in their communities. IS staff were most likely to shape research processes in projects where they were involved on a day-to-day basis. One staff noted of other, more autonomous projects: *"The 'control' was very limited. We had very little information about the progress of their report and the process. It was only until two weeks ago that we received their write ups."*<sup>16</sup> One phase where IS did assert their needs more directly was in the development of final research products. Our own activity cycle dictated that we needed to produce these products before GAATW's International Members Congress and Conference in July 2010.

Where did the IS's assessment of their power stem from? Was the IS's perception of their power based more on an awareness of their privilege rather than their ability to determine research outcomes? From the beginning, the IS had explained that there would be minimal financial support for FPAR projects and that most of the support would be technical (e.g. knowledge of research processes, production of research products). This actually contradicted some FPAR partners' expectations of more substantive material resources from GAATW IS. One staff commented: *"Some*



thought we were a grant organisation and were very disappointed when they found out how little money we had for this project, as we expected them to incorporate it into their NGO work/regular interaction with the community.”<sup>17</sup> As a result, a few groups decided they could only do a smaller FPAR project without funding support.

Power as a target in FPAR

One common objective of feminist participatory action research is to shift the power of ‘the researched’. This objective was achieved in many of the projects. Several of the projects resulted in the formation of new women’s groups, or the strengthening on ongoing collective action efforts. Women were empowered after hearing that other women had similar experiences, priorities and concerns. For example:

“Many of the women surveyed expressed great relief at finally being able to talk about their experiences, and some reported feeling empowered by the process.” (page 15)<sup>18</sup>

“By being based on real-life experiences rather than theories or assumptions, and by providing an analysis of issues based on descriptions of how women actually experienced those issues, the FPAR empowered local women to seek information and support and to develop strategies for change.” (page 36)<sup>19</sup>

“Research participants felt that, even at the beginning phases of group formation, organising was giving them more power. They observed that the organising allows them to have a common voice, which enables them to access their rights. They also feel more empowered and courageous enough to defend themselves against the City Council.” (page 35)<sup>20</sup>

Another common objective of FPAR is to increase the awareness of all those involved of their own power, including power over, power with, and power within. This is still a challenge for the IS as we analyse our own assumptions about our power and the power of those we work with, how we exercise or don’t exercise our power with or without our partners, and the power local and national NGOs have in anti-trafficking discourses.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Prasad, N. (2000). Can one do feminist participatory action research in countries of destination? Alliance News, 15, 33-36.

<sup>2</sup> Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples by Linda Tuhiwai Smith provides a good history and overview of the exploitative histories of research.

<sup>3</sup> Comment from GAATW’s Roundtable III: Bringing together ‘linkages’ topics in feminist participatory action research and GAATW Working Papers, 10-14 March 2010, Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>4</sup> Comment from GAATW’s Roundtable III: Bringing together ‘linkages’ topics in feminist participatory action research and GAATW Working Papers, 10-14 March 2010, Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>5</sup> These included both member organisations and new allies.

<sup>6</sup> See The ‘F’ word: Resisting Feminism in Feminist Participatory Action Research on page 8

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication, March 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Comment from GAATW’s Roundtable III: Bringing together ‘linkages’ topics in feminist participatory action research and GAATW Working Papers, 10-14 March 2010, Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>9</sup> Maranga, A. & Laiboni, N. (2010). The realities and agency of informal sector workers: The account of migrant women workers in Nairobi. From A Woman’s Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience [FPAR Series]. Bangkok, Thailand and Nairobi, Kenya: GAATW and FIDA Kenya.

<sup>10</sup> Research questions focused on women’s interaction with the law and formal systems, women’s realities in migration, and women’s realities in work.

<sup>11</sup> Personal communication, 29 January 2010

<sup>12</sup> Maranga, A. & Laiboni, N. (2010). The realities and agency of informal sector workers: The account of migrant women workers in Nairobi. From A Woman’s Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience [FPAR Series]. Bangkok, Thailand and Nairobi, Kenya: GAATW and FIDA Kenya.

<sup>13</sup> Personal communication, 12 May 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication, 12 May 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Approximately half of the projects had intensive input and support from IS staff.

<sup>16</sup> Personal communication, March 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Personal communication, 13 July 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Mbugua, S. for AkiDWA. (2010). ‘Am only saying it now’: Experiences of women seeking asylum in Ireland. A Woman’s Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series. Bangkok, Thailand and Dublin, Ireland: GAATW and AkiDWA.

<sup>19</sup> Rusu, V. for La Strada Moldova. (2010). A Look at the Linkages : How Does Gender, Migration, Labour and Trafficking Intersect in Women’s Lives? A Qualitative Research Based on Migration and Labour Experiences of Women from Ursoaia, Republic of Moldova. A Woman’s Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series. Bangkok, Thailand: GAATW.

<sup>20</sup> Maranga, A. & Laiboni, N. (2010). The realities and agency of informal sector workers: The account of migrant women workers in Nairobi. From A Woman’s Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience [FPAR Series]. Bangkok, Thailand and Nairobi, Kenya: GAATW and FIDA Kenya.



Julie Ham is the Programme Coordinator at the GAATW International Secretariat



SEPOM Photo Exhibit  
Photos by Yoonki Kim



# 'We want to move onto the power part' Returnee migrant women resisting categorisation through FPAR

An interview with Jiraporn (June) Saetang

Jiraporn (June) Saetang is a former GAATW colleague and a current Board Member of SEPOM or the Self Empowerment Program for Migrant Women<sup>1</sup>. In 2009-2010, she facilitated SEPOM's involvement in GAATW's FPAR initiative. Five women from SEPOM shared their stories in the FPAR report '*Trafficked Identities as a Barrier to Community Reintegration: Five Stories of Women Re-building Lives and Resisting Categorisation*. As an organisation in northern Thailand led by returnee migrant women, (including women who have been trafficked), SEPOM has had numerous experiences with researchers. Julie Ham had a chance to interview June after the report was finished to discuss SEPOM's views on feminist participatory action research and other research methodologies.

**Julie: I had heard that the women participating in SEPOM's FPAR were really changed by the FPAR process. What changed and what aspects of FPAR catalysed those changes?**

June: The way the methodology was implemented really encouraged thinking for the women. Like with the idea of feminism, women didn't use the same word. But when we talk about discrimination, access to citizenship, exploitation as women - this discussion influenced a lot of the women's thinking, that this is something women can't accept and that SEPOM can change.

When we were just starting the FPAR in the planning process, the way we introduced research helped them think about the whole issue rather than just focusing on problems. They started to think beyond problems and identity, to think about their experiences with migration, which is what feminism is, being able to look broadly. Under feminism, we believe everything matters, not just this part or that part. So when we were introducing the methodology to them, we encouraged them to look at their whole life.

For the women, it may have been years after they returned home, and they've participated in so many interviews. In those "thousand million" interviews, they gathered from interviewers that being trafficked is the only focal point in their life, emphasising the failure and sadness, and so they tend to follow that thinking. But FPAR gave them more space to think about their life. Everything matters, so the way women's lives are presented in this project is more powerful: everything in my life matters, not just the fact that I was trafficked.

The topic we chose is their own agenda, their own life, so it all came very easily. We wanted to use this FPAR methodology to get good information and also to really enhance women's lives. Everyone who participated in this research, grew in thinking and learned a lot. A strength of the SEPOM FPAR is that we [GAATW IS] didn't decide topic ourselves; we just talked about FPAR and discussed what women needed to consider in choosing a topic, such as making sure it's realistic. If we [GAATW IS] had chosen the topic, it might've limited the project's potential to find information and develop women's awareness.

But using this kind of process with self-organised groups<sup>2</sup>, we have to make sure we have the kind of facilitator that understands these issues and is able to stimulate discussion. Because if women are used to a particular kind of research (e.g. driven by researchers' agendas), they might just stick with narrow topics. A good facilitator is needed to encourage discussion and to get women thinking beyond 'the problem'.

I also just want to say that this was a very small FPAR with 5 women, very small scale. We can't say 'all women are enlightened'; I'm not talking about all women in SEPOM, only about the women who participated in the research. We only involved 5 women because of limited time. We were lucky because we contacted women who already have experience or a relationship with us and who have experience talking in a group.

**Did you, as a research facilitator, have any concerns or questions about this project before getting involved?**

I came to this project as an ex-colleague of GAATW. I believe this FPAR methodology serves reality and people at the grassroots. It's not just about finding out about something, the process is about change, if we implement it carefully. My concern was how a self-organised group can implement research themselves. If GAATW facilitates at the international level, how can self-organised groups like SEPOM participate at the grassroots level without any kind of support? My concerns were about how GAATW could realistically be involved with that kind of group, it wasn't a question about the methodology or its use. FPAR is not just a research methodology, but it's also a process of empowerment - the important issue is how to implement it at this level.

### How was the work divided between you and women from SEPOM?

I provided back-up support, and women from SEPOM interviewed women. Others helped in writing, so SEPOM staff could also learn about the FPAR process. I didn't do any interviews myself, but supported SEPOM staff and provided feedback. In the short amount of time that we had, I felt capacity building on FPAR wasn't done enough. We were learning by doing in a very short time, so we can't say that they're trained as researchers, but they were trying every step. Building the capacity of self-organised groups to do FPAR is possible, but it needs coaching, a good process and *time*. Women may have limitations in writing, but also in thinking about their experiences. We need to back them up with support if we want them to do FPAR and if we want to encourage the use of FPAR as an empowerment tool.

### Did any power issues arise between you as a facilitator and the researcher participants?

I didn't see it, maybe because of the way we started the process. I provided some conceptual clarity, and talked about the way they talk to women. GAATW's support was open and free. This wasn't a compulsory activity - we knew them before, we're close to them. I do have to keep in mind this gap between me and them especially when I provide coaching to staff interviewing other women. As a supporter, I have to be aware of any questions that might make women nervous. But I'm usually very careful about power, and I didn't feel any problems during this process.

### As a research facilitator, how did you determine when to be more active and when to be more supportive?

I'm quite familiar with these issues and with SEPOM so by now it seems natural. I asked them, 'let's talk about this,' and explained first what feminism is and how broad it is - it's not just the problems. We talked about trafficking, migration, feminism and how it's all linked. And I encouraged a broader understanding of what we can look at - it's not about just "this part", because everything matters in women's lives. So within this big scope, I asked them, "what is your big concern?". The role of the facilitator is to make them understand that they can think beyond what they were told. As ordinary women in the community, they don't explore much about life, they don't believe they can. Like talking about gender bias, they know it's unfair, but they may not know they can challenge it. Now they know it matters, and they can do something about it. So they ask "can we make it sound louder", so that it's not just about a personal problem. It gives them some belief, that everything in their life matters.

### How did SEPOM's experience with FPAR compare with their other experiences with researchers?

In other research experiences, they were limited by the question. Somehow they registered that people only talk to them about what happened to them in Japan [i.e. experiences of trafficking and/or exploitation]. They think, 'people come to my house with books and things, I have to be prepared to respond to the questions they ask'. Some women will only respond as much as

they want, but some women are so honest they will respond to any questions, even if it makes them uncomfortable, even if it brings back feelings. They're nervous that people will hear in the halls. Their lives have been targeted and controlled by the people who come [to research them]. For instance, if media want to talk about the children, they respond with what they have.

The way we talked with them, when it was SEPOM women interviewing other women - it's more thoughtful, it's the same pain but with different feelings. One woman was crying about something that happened to her, but this time it was different - she said she was crying because she wanted to cry. With other researchers, she said she cried because she felt the pain, but this time [with SEPOM interviewers], it felt more like release.

Some women resisted talking with us; they didn't want to participate at first. But we proved to her after a few times, that this research is more 'friendly' than other interviews. And the difference is after the interview, we tell them what we think their strengths are from what we've heard and encourage them to feel proud about themselves after the interviews and to do something with it. We collectively talk about action plans. We reflect their strength back to them. Women know their own strengths, but it feels good to hear it from others and it can encourage some kind of action.

### Given SEPOM's many interactions with researchers, how do they assert their rights in research processes?

We have official letters that make sure research doesn't go beyond its defined scope. We try to ensure women don't waste time talking about this. Researchers have to cover loss of expenses, income. We developed these a few years ago after so many people came to the office. But this FPAR research didn't have this. They asked 'what is this for?' We said it was for our own understanding. After they participated in process, they realised that this is about a positive thing, it's not about something to hide. In the photo exhibit we did<sup>3</sup>, we talk about the same suffering but talk about it in more positive terms because that's allowed. In the beginning, the women tested us, asked us to explain what confidentiality means. By the time Yoonki [the photographer] came to work on the photo exhibit, we had trust. Trust wasn't automatic, women still had to assess at what level they could trust us. And then we built on that trust and confidentiality. If we broke that somewhere, it would've ruined the whole thing. We had to hold it carefully and build it onto something else. Confidentiality is not a question. And it's not just about the name and photo - confidentiality is more than that, trust building is a process.

### Were there any other responses to their FPAR?

Everyone agreed that discrimination is there, that this is in my life. People talk about trafficking, but life moves on, and no one pays attention to the part about life moving on. When women talked together, they said 'we want to move onto the power part,' they didn't want to be stuck in the suffering part.





Photo by Yoonki Kim

For example, a woman may have been trafficked 10 years ago but then she came home, and people were stuck on trafficking part endlessly. But from now on, women want to talk about what happened but talk about it with power. If someone wants to research the trafficking part of their experience, we can cooperate, but we will also encourage them to see what happens after, what's really needed to make life back to normal.

### Do you have any plans for any products that came out of this FPAR?

We have the report in Thai, but that's not published. It'll make a very good report. GAATW's idea for an exhibition based on SEPOM's report was a very good idea and to exhibit it internationally was a very good idea. We also want to exhibit this in the community, but just to translate what GAATW has already done. We're talking to all of the SEPOM women about this, we conducted the sharing session with SEPOM in May.

### Were there any other lessons learned for you during the FPAR process?

As a pilot project, this was okay but if we [GAATW IS] wants to scale up the FPAR, we should...I felt, even with support designed into the project, the budget was very minimal even though we [GAATW IS] expect quite a lot of work. When we design a project like this, we have to consider how much we need to invest in a group and what results or outcomes we're really hoping to achieve. I'm not sure if we really did that as well as we should've. FPAR is actually a very detailed and difficult process. If we're serious about involving self-organised groups in FPAR, we really need to be able to provide the type and amount of support they need to participate. In research, people focus more on end products and celebrate findings, but in FPAR, the importance is the process, the change that occurs throughout the process, not

the end product.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> SEPOM's main objective is to empower and provide support for Thai women returnees from Japan. SEPOM outreaches to community members to identify returnee migrant workers and trafficked women, offers direct assistance (through home visits, self-help groups, counselling and legal aid, and an HIV/AIDS fund), co-ordinates care and treatment with the hospital and provides skill development training. SEPOM has also completed extensive work in seeking citizenship for the Thai-Japanese children of returnee women and in supporting the well-being and development of Thai-Japanese children through scholarships, educational and recreation activities. They have also developed income generation opportunities for women through seed funds, a cattle bank, a savings group and employment through the organisation. For more information about SEPOM, visit [http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=462:sepom&catid=127:Asia&Itemid=5](http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=462:sepom&catid=127:Asia&Itemid=5)

<sup>2</sup> 'Self-organised group' refers to any group comprising women with direct experience of the issue they're working on, e.g. organisations headed by returnee migrant women, trafficking survivors, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Stories of Trafficked and Returnee Migrant Women: A Photo Essay, which was based on SEPOM's FPAR report, 'Trafficked' Identities as a Barrier to Community Reintegration: Five Stories of Women Re-building Lives and Resisting Categorisation



**Jiraporn 'June' Saetang**  
is a Board Member of Self-Empowerment Program of Migrant Women (SEPOM)



**Julie Ham**  
is the Programme Coordinator at the GAATW International Secretariat

# Research into Action

By Rebecca Napier-Moore

Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) differs from traditional research in many ways, one of which is that the research is used to create change, not just sit on a shelf. The cycle is underpinned by how a community operates, from planning, to reflection and research, to more action and change based on research findings.

*Feminist participatory action* means that the women who research their own community often also participate in the follow-up actions. This often contrasts with traditional research in which information is extracted and often not used enough to implement change in the researched community, either because it is not intended to enact change or because the change enacted occurs in different communities (i.e. lessons learned from a project in one community are applied to a project in another community).

Action based on research evidence is particularly strong because it is based on a community's determination and identification of their concerns and solutions.

GAATW's 2009-10 FPAR initiative leaned more towards research than action because we had requirements for research reporting to take place within a certain timeframe, yet most participating groups have subsequently worked for change within their communities. At GAATW's 3<sup>rd</sup> FPAR Roundtable, participants emphasised that action would not end after reports were produced, but would continue in their communities. The GAATW-IS has also been involved in an action phase from the FPAR, taking FPAR messages to international fora. Below are some examples of the actions that have been carried forward.

## FPAR to form support groups 10 years ago and now - LRC-KJHAM in Indonesia

FPAR facilitated by LRC-KJHAM in Wedoro Village, Indonesia, ten years ago, resulted in the establishment of a self-organised group (SOG) to provide people in the village with information about migration. The group of returnee migrant women set up an information centre in a local shop which continues to operate and created a series of booklets about migration based on their experiences both in transit and in destination countries.

In the 2009-2010 FPAR cycle, LRC-KJHAM incorporated methodological tools and learnings from the first cycle in their new research in Rowoberanten Village, Indonesia. After initial research in 2009, researcher participants and LRC-KJHAM developed an action plan and transformed their focus group into the *Rowoberanten Women Migrant Workers Group*. The group is planning to recruit more women into the group, participate in the local Development Plan Meeting (*Musyawah Rencana Pembangunan/Musrenbang*), and lobby village, sub-district and district officials based on research findings and recommendations. There are plans to create a credit union as well as another FPAR phase focusing on migrant worker health, which emerged as an issue of concern.

## Organising for labour rights and HIV/AIDS support - FIDA Kenya in Nairobi slums

FIDA Kenya's FPAR with women migrant workers resulted in the formation of three groups in Nairobi slums - Kawangware, Kangemi and Kiamaiko - to address social and economic challenges the women face.

While the groups have created a space for women to share their experiences and provide support for each other, the women indicated that their priority is to improve their livelihoods through business expansion. As such, the Kawangware and Kangemi groups both have rotating kitties, in which each member contributes the same amount of money at each meeting and one member takes the whole sum at once. This access to larger sums of money than the women would otherwise have increases their opportunities for business expansion.

The Kiamaiko group has focused its activities on a partnership with Bunge la Wananchi (People's Parliament), a non-governmental organisation that helps grassroots communities raise their voices in advocacy. Kiamaiko women have held a series of activities, mobilising women to participate in forums and meetings to lobby for their rights.

The Kangemi Group has also reached out to HIV positive women, providing support to the heavily stigmatised community.



## ALLIANCE NEWS - ACTION

The groups act as an important channel for women not only to access and share information, but to feel empowered to fight for their rights as women and informal sector workers through collective action.

*“Yes the group is working and it gives me a platform to raise my concerns and those of other members openly. All we need is support and we can reach great heights.”*

There are concerns about sustainability, with time spent at the collectives equating with time away from work and loss of potential earnings. However FIDA Kenya is in discussions with several development organisations in the hope of creating partnerships that will strengthen the collectives.

### Awareness and assistance campaign - La Strada Moldova

*“The real action and changes in the lives of women starts with acting on insight.”*

*per month, to discuss something, to tell something, to share good and bad practices...”*

*“It is important just to talk, not just store up bitterness”*

*“Who better knows women’s problems? And who knows the best solutions?...Yes...women... we should support each other.”*

### Collectively creating knowledge with migrants - ATKI in Limbangan village, Indonesia

The FPAR undertaken by ATKI in Limbangan Village, Indonesia explored the systemic problems affecting women migrant workers. It demonstrated the potential benefits of collective action and acted as a catalyst in the formation of ATKI Limbangan, a group formed to continue the collective organising. The group plans to continue organising monthly meetings to discuss issues, develop a migration information centre for prospective migrants, and expand FPAR to other migrant worker communities in Indonesia.



The research conducted by La Strada Moldova and women in Ursoaia Village, Moldova, led to the formation of a women’s group to address issues surrounding migration and formed the basis of an awareness-raising campaign and extension of services to the village. An awareness and assistance campaign was launched in Ursoaia in mid-September 2009. Assistance providers and government representatives gave speeches on migrant rights and safe migration and La Strada Moldova’s toll-free hotline was advertised as a way for women to get information about migration. Counselling services by La Strada Moldova, including a psychologist, a social worker and a lawyer, were also made available to women who are now aware of resources they can access.

*“I want women in our village to meet at least once*

Women in Limbangan said:

*“I think it’s good if we continue our rendezvous in the future to collect our problems that are usually faced during migration and try to solve them together.”*

### Meeting immediate needs in Vancouver, Canada

Noushin and Fereshteh worked with Middle Eastern immigrant and refugee women living in Vancouver, Canada. Due to security and ethical concerns related to the women’s socio-cultural context as immigrants (See article on *Participant Safety in FPAR* in this Alliance News), no collective action could be carried out. The research revealed that the women were most concerned

about very basic needs, such as securing a bank loan or mortgage and assistance in returning to school, as well as advocacy to improve their status. The action component involved providing support and services to the women as they sought it out.

### Reforming Asylum Systems - AkiDwa in Ireland

AkiDwa partnered with African migrant women in Ireland and used FPAR to explore women's lives in Ireland's direct provision accommodation as they await decisions on their asylum, protection and leave to remain cases. With the aim of reforming the asylum and accommodation systems, AkiDwa launched its FPAR report on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the direct provision system in Ireland. On the day of the launch, the report was breaking news<sup>5</sup>, and supported by other groups calling for reform. An original print of 1000 copies had to be followed by 1500 more due to demand for them!

AkiDwa representatives, along with others in a new working group, met with a range of people to discuss the report's recommendations in advocating for improvements to the asylum system. These included government ministers, departmental representatives, the Human Rights Commissioner, the Equality Authority and the Minister for Equality and Integration. Importantly, representatives of the reception centres agreed to work with AkiDwa in developing gender guidelines and AkiDwa gave a presentation to members of the Women, Health and Justice Committee.

The working group is still engaged with the women who participated in the research, although most of the women cannot publicly advocate due to their precarious migration status. However, their experiences and realities continue to be the foundation of lobbying efforts.

### Making campaigns better - RESPECT in the Netherlands

To develop an understanding of the lives of Filipino migrant domestic workers in Amsterdam, RESPECT used FPAR in partnership with migrant community-based organisations (CBOs) in the Netherlands (TRUSTED Migrants, Koop Natin), support organisations (Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers in Amsterdam, Unlad Kabayan and Migrant Services Foundation in the Philippines) and Dutch trade unions (Abvakabo FNV and FNV Bondgenoten).

The FPAR created an opportunity to reflect on and improve the campaign for domestic workers' rights and local development initiatives the migrant community supports in the Philippines, ensuring they reflect the voices of these women. Mobilising the women in advocacy efforts is difficult because most do not have the necessary paperwork and exposure would put them at risk of deportation. Nonetheless, the research outcomes continue to feed into RESPECT's advocacy work and a representative of the women migrant domestic workers recently joined the organisation at the Asia-Europe People's Forum in Brussels.

### New narratives to overcome stigma - SEPOM's work locally, and in partnership with GAATW-IS advocacy internationally

Whilst participating in the anti-trafficking sector, the women of SEPOM (Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women, in Thailand) are also dealing with rebuilding their lives and all that this entails - building houses, finding work, and gaining recognition and respect in their communities. This FPAR project found that a near exclusive identification as a 'trafficked person' increased obstacles to reintegration.

The research and action phases of this FPAR were about redefining social ideas of trafficked persons, including what trafficked persons needed and what trafficked persons are capable of. Women from SEPOM, including returnee migrant women and women who had been trafficked conducted interviews themselves, collected stories for analysis and worked with a photographer, Yoonki Kim, to create a photo essay and exhibit, in which empowering images of the women were placed next to their stories and where women of SEPOM determined how they wanted to be represented.

The exhibit was presented and discussed at GAATW's 2010 International Members Conference and Congress, the 14<sup>th</sup> UN Human Rights Council session and the UNTOC Conference of Parties<sup>6</sup>.



Ms Jiraporn (June) Saetang launching SEPOM's exhibit at the UN 14<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council (joint with the Thai Government), and discussing the importance of self-organised groups in providing information, strengthening assistance and empowerment systems in addressing trafficking and its consequences.

SEPOM researchers plan to expand the FPAR locally and continue collecting stories as part of their outreach activities to "highlight women's strengths in overcoming social stigma and gender inequity and their efforts to gain recognition from society."<sup>7</sup>



### In sum

The FPAR projects have led to various types of action. In several instances, establishing a group has been the central activity (Indonesia, Kenya, Moldova). Organised collectives are a potentially sustainable method of ongoing action and in some cases research, but as FIDA Kenya's research points out, groups require capacity to survive, let alone thrive.

The 2000 GAATW FPAR process resulted in group formation in Wedoro, Indonesia, where the group still meets today. More recently, in the Netherlands, FPAR was a chance to strengthen an existing group's campaign, by reflecting on the groups' capacity, leadership and the context in which they are organising for change. Likewise, the FPAR in Ireland fed directly into advocacy, producing evidence-based research which could be used to lobby government officials and attract media attention. In a different direction, some groups have used the FPAR to identify how to meet people's immediate needs through direct assistance (Canada, Moldova). Finally, one group in Thailand used the FPAR to shape the anti-trafficking discourse around victimhood and labels imposed on women who have been trafficked. GAATW-International Secretariat has done its own advocacy/action as well, after identifying what we could best take to international fora: We have been able to highlight the need to shift discourses, legislation and services beyond victimisation by partnering with SEPOM in Thailand, and are highlighting the need for a more complex awareness of trafficking and its broader contexts, based on the complex stories and pictures painted in this group of research projects.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Maranga, A. & Laiboni, N. (2010). *The realities and agency of informal sector workers: The account of migrant women workers in Nairobi*. From *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience [FPAR Series]*. Bangkok, Thailand and Nairobi, Kenya: GAATW and FIDA Kenya, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Rusu, V. for La Strada Moldova. (2010). *A Look at the Linkages: How Does Gender, Migration, Labour and Trafficking Intersect in*

*Women's Lives? A Qualitative Research Based on Migration and Labour Experiences of Women from Ursoaia, Republic of Moldova*. From *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series*. Bangkok, Thailand: GAATW.

<sup>3</sup> Rusu, V. for La Strada Moldova. (2010), p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> ATKI (2010). *The Impact of Excessive Placement Fees on Indonesian Migrant Workers (IWMs) and Their Families*. From *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience [FPAR Series]*. Bangkok, Thailand: GAATW p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance press coverage and reviews such as McKay, S. (25 May 2010) "Why are we locking female asylum seekers into limbo?" *Irish Times*, Available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2010/0325/1224267012504.html>

<sup>6</sup> See coverage for instance "Permanent Mission of Thailand in Vienna sponsored the launching of a Photo Exhibition", *Siam Daily News*, Available at <http://www.siamdailynews.com/2010/11/15/permanent-mission-of-thailand-in-vienna-sponsored-the-launching-of-a-photo-exhibition/>

<sup>7</sup> Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM). (2010). 'Trafficked' Identities as a Barrier to Community Reintegration: Five Stories of Women Re-building Lives and Resisting Categorisation. *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series*. Bangkok, Thailand: GAATW, p. 6.



**Rebecca Napier-Moore** is the Research and Training Programme Officer at the GAATW International Secretariat



# Balancing NGO & Local Needs in FPAR

By Rebecca Napier-Moore and Julie Ham

GAATW's Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) project was a balancing act. Many actors took part, all with differing needs and expectations. The project had three main layers of actors:

- researcher participants in local communities
- researcher allies, such as staff or volunteers of Non-Government-Organisations (NGOs) or Self-Organised Groups (SOGs)
- research facilitators (GAATW International Secretariat staff)

## Researcher Participants

Researcher participants came from various locations - from rural Moldova and Indonesia, to urban Kenya and Dominican Republic, as well as migrant centres throughout Ireland. Initial expectations ranged from the receiving aid, uncertainty about a different framework, to hopes for something genuinely transformational. There were certain boundaries to projects as well, with several communities not wanting FPAR to expose identities of members for fear of compromising their migration status. In some instances there were time constraints due to harvest cycles, cultural events and holidays. (See box 1 below) Other needs included technical assistance in setting up associations, respect for self-definition and the right to reject classifications such as 'migrant' or 'trafficked person'.

### Box1: RESPECTING COMMUNITY RHYTHMS<sup>1</sup>

A community's calendar and timetable were pivotal in shaping research methods and timelines. Research in Ursoaia village (Moldova), Rowoberanten village (Indonesia), and Limbangan village (Indonesia) required accommodating village agricultural planting and harvest schedules, religious holidays and ritual events.

*"For example, focus groups were not held from August-October 2009 due to the tobacco harvest, Ramadan (fasting month), and Idul Fitri. During the tobacco harvest, men and women went to work on the farm from 5am until 10am. Afterwards, they still worked in the house, by doing 'krowei' (arranging and tightening the tobacco leaves) so the tobacco could be kept until the afternoon. At night, men did 'ngrajang' (cutting the leaves of the tobacco) while women did 'nganjang' (arranging the cut of tobacco leaves in the drying area). This activity was usually done until midnight." (p. 10)<sup>2</sup>*

## Researcher Allies

Researcher allies were those who facilitated FPAR interviews, focus groups and analysis and action, and played the prominent role in report writing. They had the difficult task of balancing the needs of and negotiating between researcher participants and GAATW-IS (See box 2 below). Further they needed to meet the needs of their own organization. Some wanted to use the FPAR to lobby local governments for immediate short-term objectives, others wanted to streamline their research into a national lobbying effort (See box 3 below). Several NGOs used their engagement with the community as an opportunity to expand the beneficiary reach of other programmatic work. Researcher allies proved to be innovative in reaching solutions to what GAATW-IS wanted and what was possible in the local context. For example, while GAATW-IS pushed for each project to explore feminism within communities, some researcher allies knew that mentioning the word 'feminism' would discredit them. In such situations, most changed the phrasing of questions to avoid using the term 'feminism', while still incorporating feminist concepts.

Researcher allies also had time constraints due to other work responsibilities. Further, for some NGOs Action got in the way of Research. The immediate needs to take action on an identified problem in a few cases stalled the reflective process.

### Box2: "WISE ENTRANCE": DIFFERENT IDEAS OF FEMINIST RESEARCH<sup>3</sup>

At times, adapting to community norms challenged GAATW-IS's ideas of what constituted feminist practice or FPAR ideals. For qualitative research with returnee migrant women in Ursoaia village, Moldova, researchers first sought permission from the Mayor's office.

*"The Centre's Director called the Mayor of Ursoaia village and told him about the La Strada Moldova initiative and asked about the availability and willingness of the local administration to cooperate with FPAR activities in Moldova. The mayor was open to cooperating and supporting local women. The mayor was then contacted by the FPAR researcher who provided more details on the research described in the official letter."<sup>4</sup>*

GAATW-IS staff were concerned at first about the ethical considerations of coordinating FPAR through the mayor's office. IS staff suspected that women might feel pressured to participate if the mayor's office was involved, or, conversely, they might not feel entirely comfortable sharing their stories in a project endorsed by local authorities. However, local researchers knew the power dynamics within Ursoaia and told GAATW staff that the mayor's support would lend the project legitimacy and reassure local residents. The mayor delegated his secretary to assist the project, "a reputable woman who knew the problems of local women intimately. She later on provided important logistical support in identifying women for focus groups and interviews and also facilitated women's movement and their actions in the village. In this way, the relationship between the external researcher and the women in the community women was set, based on an important trust between the village authority and the women themselves."<sup>5</sup>

- stories or case studies that exemplified the complexity of women's lives - that there was more to their lives than a negative migration/work experience or experience of trafficking

Boundaries that limited the project for GAATW IS included a timeframe designed to fit in with our three-year programme cycle and, unfortunately, limited funding support. This impacted on the groups' ability to complete an FPAR through to both research and action phases, or to complete the work in as thorough a way as they would have liked. Due to the funding limits, some groups were not able to do very much at all. The three groups of people involved in the FPAR - researcher participants, allies and facilitators - all had differing goals and interests in the project. The act of balancing to respect and work with each other's needs was laudable. In some cases it meant one group acceding to another's opinion or way of working (for instance in working with a mayor's office as in box 2 above). In other cases, it meant not working at all (where funding was the limiting factor for instance). And in other cases, it meant creativity to change the methodology (for instance talking about feminism without using the word 'feminism').

**Box3: USING FPAR TO STRENGTHEN CREDIBILITY FOR ADVOCACY**

AkiDwa, a network of African and migrant women in Ireland, is deeply committed to seeing systemic changes to Ireland's migrant reception and asylum system. The AkiDwa researcher ally knew a widespread consultation of women in this system would enhance advocacy efforts with government officials. This broad approach differed from most FPAR projects in which a small but in-depth approach focused on community building. However, with different objectives, the AkiDwa researcher ally instead consulted 121 women, all of whom were living in direct provision accommodation awaiting decisions on their asylum, protection and leave to remain cases.

AkiDwa facilitated 6 focus groups, including women from ten accommodation centres. The subsequent report was based on the women's voices, integrated with recommendations for change. The launch of the report was backed by other organisations and made breaking news<sup>6</sup> in Ireland where intense lobbying efforts followed (see Alliance News article in this issue 'Research into Action' for more information).

**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Text originally in Ham, J. and R. Napier-Moore. (2010). Ethical concerns in feminist participatory action research with geographically and socially isolated groups. Presented at *Forcing Issues: Re-thinking and Re-scaling Human Trafficking in the Asia-Pacific Region*, 4-5 October 2010, National University of Singapore. GAATW.

<sup>2</sup> Legal Resources Center for Gender Justice and Human Rights (LRC-KJHAM) and the Rowoberanten Women Migrant Workers Group. (2010). The linkages between migration, labour, gender and trafficking among women migrant workers: Feminist participatory action research (FPAR) in Rowoberanten Village [Indonesia]. *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series*. Bangkok, Thailand: GAATW.

<sup>3</sup> Text originally in Ham, J. and R. Napier-Moore. (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Rusu, V. for La Strada Moldova. (2010). A Look at the Linkages : How Does Gender, Migration, Labour and Trafficking Intersect in Women's Lives? A Qualitative Research Based on Migration and Labour, p.10 Experiences of Women from Ursoaia, Republic of Moldova. *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series*. Bangkok, Thailand: GAATW, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>Rusu, V. for La Strada Moldova. (2010), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance press coverage and reviews such as McKay, S. (25 May 2010) "Why are we locking female asylum seekers into limbo?" Irish Times, Available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/opinion/2010/0325/1224267012504.html>

**Research Facilitators**

GAATW-IS, as research facilitators, had international advocacy needs in mind, as well as trying to ensure some semblance of harmony amongst the findings of a dozen researching groups. In the past, FPAR had produced such disparate findings that did not lend to effective international lobbying. In the 2009-2010 FPAR initiative, IS staff sought to minimise the risks of this recurring by asking researcher allies for several elements to be present in each project, including:

- depictions of agency rather than victimisation and powerlessness
- examination of feminism where possible or the use of a gender lens otherwise



## Complicating Agency: Immigrant women and sex work

By Noushin K

It was in 2003, on a quiet winter evening, when I first watched *Chandni Bar*<sup>1</sup>. I stumbled upon it while flipping mindlessly through a stream of late-night TV infomercials. *Chandni Bar* is the story of Mumtaz, a young woman who arrives in Bombay after being orphaned by communal riots in her village. Raped by her uncle and forced into the sordid world of bar dancing, Mumtaz finally catches a break when she marries a hot-headed gangster, Pothya. However, when Pothya is gunned down in a fake police encounter, Mumtaz must re-enter the shady world of bar dancing and prostitution to save her son, who is falsely implicated in an extortion case. Her efforts at sheltering her children are in vain - in the end, her son becomes a killer and her daughter a bar dancer. In the movie's closing scene, Mumtaz hauntingly recounts: *"I wanted to see my future in my children, but I saw only my past."*

As a great lover of Bollywood movies and an avid supporter of independent films, I had been surprisingly unmotivated to watch this two-year-old movie in theatres. Yet as I began to see Mumtaz's life unfold, I was gripped with an urgent sense of interest. Uncaring and oblivious to the time of night, I rushed to call my friend.

*"Hey, you have to watch this movie - it's called Chandni Bar. Hurry, it's on TV."*

My friend, it turned out, had already seen the movie and we didn't see eye-to-eye about its content.

*"Arey, it's a good movie, powerful and all, but it's pointless. I mean, what do you expect? I feel bad for Tabu [the actress portraying Mumtaz], but she asked for it."*

I was ready to forgive my friend's lack of enthusiasm. After all, at the level of celluloid entertainment, *Chandni Bar* steers clear of preachy, overtly sentimental rhetoric. It fails to radiate unflinching hope and avoids the simplistic cliché of good overcoming evil. As a result, it is not comforting, and in this sense, not entertaining.

But to say Mumtaz deserved her fate?

"Surely she didn't. I mean, look at her strength in the face of everything. How hard she fought, what she accomplished despite how everything kept working against her."

*"Well, I know she didn't choose it in the beginning, but why go back to it? She could have chosen something else but instead she chose to go back to being a bar dancer. Like I said, what do you expect? If you do bad things, bad things happen."*

Our exchange did not last long, but I was reminded of its lasting impact on me when Fereshteh and I began our GAATW Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) project documenting the stories of immigrant and refugee Iranian women in Canada, all of whom had engaged in sex work post-migration<sup>2</sup>. Through our research, we hoped to provide a forum for each woman to describe the impact of immigration on their lives, create a supportive environment within which they could discuss their priorities, concerns, challenges and successes, and an avenue within which to reflect upon the actions they identify as being important in improving their lives. Like Mumtaz, each woman demonstrates commendable resilience in the face of continued struggle and social exclusion and like Mumtaz, each woman's engagement in sex work renders them vulnerable to assumptions about their personal agency or the lack thereof, and judgments about the 'obvious' consequences of personal choice.

In total, we interviewed twenty-one women and transwomen of primarily Iranian descent. To our knowledge, this project is the first English-language examination of the struggles of Middle Eastern women in Canada who have engaged in sex work at some point post-migration due to severe financial constraints. The taboo nature of sex work in general, as well as severe communal repercussions for engaging in sex work, made it difficult to bring together such a hidden, invisible community under the FPAR mandate.

Furthermore, as immigrants and migrants, there were additional challenges in trying to ensure the safety, security and comfort of every woman who feared the project would negatively impact their immigration status. Nonetheless, and





as a result of long-standing trust between a local advocate and the researchers, each woman decided, on their own terms, that they wanted to contribute to the project in order to share their stories, especially if they could lend support to other women in difficult situations. In this brief article, I hope to add to the discussion about agency using the findings of our FPAR research. Specifically, by summarising the tensions and subtleties experienced by the women we interviewed, I hope to complicate the assumptions of agency that are often made at a broader social and economic level.

### Locating Agency in the Sex Work Framework

In academia, the concept of ‘agency’ has been fiercely debated by feminists, sociologists and Marxists for over two decades. Here, much like the discourse on the subject, I define ‘agency’ as an individual’s capacity to act in spite of social, economic, cultural and other structural restraints.

The issue of sex workers as agented beings is hotly debated. The core of this debate is whether female sex workers have choice and self-determination or whether they are disempowered victims of a ruthless and gendered society. Within this sex work framework, agency is often described as the capacity for sex workers to set rules and boundaries with clients, specifically in relation to whom, how, when and where they are able to engage in sex work. For some groups, the very nature of sex work renders capacity or personal choice non-existent. For others, the failure to recognise how each person negotiates their life circumstances is to deny sex workers various paths to self-determination. Such polarised debates are especially evident in Vancouver, Canada, where our study is based. However, as our research and the rest of the FPAR series demonstrates, the realities of women’s lives are much more nuanced.

### Complicating Agency

There is a surprising dearth of well-rounded ethnographic work considering the lives and challenges faced by immigrant women who take up sex work as a means of income and financial security. It is our belief that a true and balanced examination of personal agency must move beyond sex work trajectories in order to incorporate a wholesome view of the structural challenges each individual faces, while appreciating the actions taken to engage such challenges.

With the exception of one woman who mentioned sex work, no woman overtly identified as a sex worker in our study. Instead, discussions generally focused on “*working to make ends meet*” and the challenges each woman faced as an immigrant in a gendered labour market. In this sense, every woman made meaning from the ways they chose to speak about their experiences, allowing us to fully consider and interpret their capacities for agency and the common structural challenges they faced.

As a result of these discussions, we came to understand agency as an organic process of navigating different circumstances and meanings rather than a specific outcome or sense of being. In this regard, we argue that agency is a gendered concept with added implications for immigrants and migrants.

Firstly, women experience occupational segregation, low-paying jobs and lower wages for similar jobs when compared to men. Transwomen experience even more discrimination in the labour market due to hiring managers’ discomfort with their gender-related self-identification. As immigrants, women face even bigger constraints due to language barriers, lack of recognition for foreign credentials and job experience, social discrimination, and a Canadian immigration sponsorship system that renders women vulnerable if they choose to leave their husbands while still under their sponsorship.

Nearly all of the women we spoke to who had come to Canada under their husband’s sponsorship experienced abusive relationships at their final destination. In order to improve their lives and the lives of their children, they actively chose to leave their abusers, leaving them particularly vulnerable to threats of deportation, criminalisation, communal exile and the potential loss of child custody.

Secondly, as women are responsible for raising their children, mothers suffer further limitations when it comes to their social, economic and financial options. For the women we interviewed, traditional work options failed to incorporate childcare considerations while ensuring a stable, albeit minimal, financial security. For the women we interviewed, indoor-based sex work became a viable option after struggling to find decent work in a gendered and immigrant-biased labour market. Some women continue to engage in sex work, acknowledging that it is the only way they are able to survive and provide for their children in Vancouver, one of the world’s most expensive cities. Some women who were not content as indoor sex workers were able to find more suitable work arrangements after serious struggle, while others are actively pursuing alternative options in order to exit the sex industry. However, decisions about whether to remain in indoor sex work often revolve around being able to effectively raise one’s children and provide for their upbringing. One woman suggested that those without children should use their spare time to educate themselves in Canadian institutions to maximise their opportunities.

Thirdly, each woman’s engagement in sex work renders them extremely vulnerable to several structural challenges. Although FPAR traditionally supports focus group and collective action in order to improve the lives of women, we could only conduct one-on-one interviews with each woman in order to ensure their safety and security. Many

women did not want to get to know each other due to fears of being outed in the community or to authorities. This fear stemmed from previous episodes where women have been arrested on suspicion of sex work and threatened with removal of their children unless they informed authorities about other women for potential capture. The anxiety of capture and of losing one's children is further compounded by the fact that most women would not report violence or rape because they are themselves criminalised. These women are also uncomfortable reaching out for assistance for fear of being asked too many questions. They also fear being used to further the agendas of local activists and advocates who may have anti-prostitution agendas, who are moving up in their careers or who had a short-sighted view of women's needs.

Finally, for each woman who has yet to receive independent Canadian residency, immigration status can represent a very serious structural barrier. For undocumented women, opportunities in the formal labour market are barely-existent at best. In order to avoid deportation and survive financially, sex work is accepted as the most feasible short-or long-term employment strategy. For women whose immigration status is undetermined or being processed, staying 'off the radar' is imperative to the success of their applications. In both situations, these women must remain invisible in order to continue staying in Canada, regardless of the challenges and struggles they face.

### Acknowledging Agency

Despite these challenges, every woman we spoke to demonstrated incredible resilience in the face of such difficulties. Abused women made the difficult choice to leave their abusers despite financial, social, legal and emotional costs. Refugee women, most of whom have endured incredibly difficult journeys to get to Canada, continue to seek options to improve their lives, mothers soldier on to provide better opportunities for their children and transwomen continue to seize opportunities in spite of the social, biological, and economical challenges imposed on them. Above all, every woman we spoke demonstrated an unbreakable resolve to play each card they are dealt with and pay their successes forward.

In this manner, and as demonstrated by the diverse range of the GAATW FPAR studies, women's lives, as detailed from their perspectives and circumstances, give us insight into the multifaceted paths of human agency. Agency cannot be considered without recognising the financial challenges that women inherently face, as well as the added risks of societal and legal backlash when it comes to immigrant women in sex work.

As such, discussions around agency cannot be simplified as the capacity to act without considering gender, migration status and the nature of sex work being engaged in.

Nonetheless, failure to recognise and appreciate that individuals are agentic beings capable of constantly navigating their own path to self-determination is lacking and short-sighted.

The realities of women's lives - be they labelled immigrant, migrant, sex workers, trafficked persons, refugees, asylum seekers and so forth - is that each person struggles and succeeds at different times of their lives in different places and under different circumstances. As our research demonstrates, improving access to social and economic rights is all that is required for these women to successfully integrate into Canadian society.

As researchers and advocates, it is our duty to create spaces and structures that enable women to reclaim their narratives and, consequently, their lives. This approach holds immense potential for enhancing the lives of immigrant and trafficked women who continue to display commendable courage and determination to succeed in the face of constant marginalisation and exclusion.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Chandni Bar* (2001) is a Bollywood film directed by Madhur Bhandarkar.

<sup>2</sup> Noushin K. and Fereshteh. (2010). Understanding needs, recognising rights: The stories, perspectives, and priorities of immigrant Iranian women in Vancouver, Canada. *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series*. Bangkok, Thailand: GAATW.

# Giving Voice and Promoting Change: sharing two experiences with FPAR with migrant women

By Helga Flamtermesky (GMISC) as told to Nerea Bilbatua (GAATW-IS)

The Group of Immigrant Women in Sant Cugat (GMISC) was created in 2002 in Sant Cugat, a middle-high class city near Barcelona (Spain) with a large migrant population. The GMISC was formed by migrant women working in areas such as domestic work, caregiving, intercultural mediation and social work. GMISC's departure point is to boost positive and dynamic ways of looking at migrant women and to accompany them in their migratory processes.

Helga is a Colombian migrant living in Barcelona. She describes herself as an activist and social researcher specialising in gender and migration. Helga has been active in the creation of different social organisations working with migrant women and doing social research. Her main objectives as a feminist migrant is to work towards migrant women's empowerment, and as an academic, to develop methodologies that allows social activism in research. She invites us to explore the concepts around 'border thinking' [Su principal objetivo como inmigrante feminista es trabajar por el empoderamiento de mujeres inmigrantes, y su objetivo como académica es desarrollar metodologías que permitan el activismo social y la investigación. Nos invita a explorar el Pensamiento Fronterizo].

This article provides Helga's firsthand analysis of two experiences using the FPAR methodology with migrant women.<sup>1</sup> In the first part, she guides us through the FPAR carried out by the GMISC about the profiles, challenges and proposals of migrant women from Morocco and Bolivia living in Sant Cugat (2006). In the second part, Helga shares her experiences using FPAR on the topic of assistance to trafficked women in four countries (Spain, Colombia, Philippines and USA), which she carried out between 2007 and 2010 with the support of the Universidad Autónoma (Barcelona).

## The voices of Moroccan and Bolivian women in Sant Cugat

In 2006, a number of Bolivian women started to come to Sant Cugat and to join the GMISC. In contrast with Moroccan women, who had been living in Sant Cugat for more than 15 years already, Bolivians had been a minority until that moment. However, the number of migrants from Bolivia increased in 2006 because, at that time, Bolivians did not need a visa to enter Spain. In spite of the differences between both groups there were also common experiences that linked them together.

The idea of starting an FPAR project with both groups of women arose because we, at the GMISC, wanted to do an activity in which us, migrants, would be the ones observing, talking and making proposals around our own reality. We were tired of being constantly interviewed by different institutions, universities and politicians as if we were just objects of an investigation, so we decided to undertake a research about our own reality, which would be done by ourselves and without external resources since, we believed, we could show how things could be done without money when a real interest exists. We felt tired of seeing the Sant Cugat City Hall spending thousands of Euros so that 'other people' could analyse migrants without this analysis having actually any real impact on us. Another objective of our research was to empower and make visible four specific Bolivian and Moroccan women within the GMISC who have a great potential for action but that were only asked to be interviewed or to appear in the 'institutional picture' by the City Hall.

The research was carried out by women from Bolivia, Morocco, Colombia and Spain. There was not a previous formal training in FPAR, although for us, this methodology felt natural since we aimed at making both the researched and the researchers visible and to give value to our voices. In this specific research, FPAR gave a methodological name to a practice we were already using. But NAMING was the first step to recognise that what we were doing was, indeed, research, and not only a simple activity to 'sensitize', which is how most of the activities carried out by women's organisations in Spain are described.

When we wrote to the immigration department within the Sant Cugat City Hall, we explained that we were planning to use FPAR as the methodology. They were expecting us to apply for something simple, like 'formal meetings', and replied back in a not very nice way asking "what is FPAR". We felt that they were not able to recognise that we could come up with ideas that were not the ones they were expecting from a group formed by migrant women; something not 'simple', or 'easy', or 'typical'. Asserting this made us feel even more secure about working with FPAR. The fact that it was us having to explain this methodology to them, put us in a position of power, in a different type of dialogue; a methodological one.

The participative aspect of the research was key. An important outcome of the process was that the women in the group got to do things that they normally did not do, like liaising with the City Hall, asking for permits, transcribing interviews, etc. One objective of the process was that those within the GMISC who were more familiar with FPAR, or who were very visible within the group, had a low profile of participation. The reasoning behind this was not denying their merits, but prompting the participation of those with less experience in conducting research. Adding up, rather than subtracting. In this regards, all those who participated felt like researchers themselves.

Closeness within the team was also generated by the fact of sharing everyday life and by finding our similarities as migrant women. Every woman participated in the way she chose to.

**Everyone contributed with whatever they had, or wanted. And contributing also meant bringing doubts, silences....**

Participating was not 'attending something' but thinking, listening and talking, as well as helping to make coffee... participating was perhaps talking little but giving trust and love, so that others could talk. Most of the women did not speak good Spanish or Catalán<sup>2</sup>, or expressed themselves with few words but many gestures, like Bolivians.

The main challenge was language, and to manage a common understanding of words defining complex situations that did not easily correspond with different researchers' languages or background. Another challenge was finding times to meet and discuss that were suitable to all the members of the research team. We solved it by acknowledging that we did not have to feel pressure so that all of us would always participate at the meetings, but instead trusting the team to take decisions, even if we were not present when they were taken.

The concepts of gender and feminism were not introduced in the research in an explicit manner since 'gender' tended to create confusion among women who had limited knowledge of Spanish or that were not familiar with the concept. Likewise, many of the women within the group felt uneasy with the term 'feminism' and therefore, the feminist within the group decided not to impose anything but to introduce it subtly to the group through informal discussions.

Another challenge was to be up to the expectations raised by the research within the GMISC, specially regarding its follow up and the desire it prompted to continue using this methodology in the future.

Although long-term responses are not very realistic given the informal nature of the group and the limited availability of time among its members, we developed small actions that were taken alongside the research itself, like providing health and legal information when questions were asked.

The FPAR had a strong impact at local level. It was moving to see the women themselves presenting the research results to the local media, the political parties and the NGOs, since these were shy women who were strongly explaining and defending the research. The City Hall was upset by the comments made regarding its immigration policies. We also wanted to see if our research would be valued by academia and therefore also presented it at the university. Seeing the way academics valued our work gave it legitimacy.

**Trafficking of women: a proposal to intervene from the women who have lived it**

I started this research in 2007. I had been working with, and researching on, migrant women for more than 10 years and trafficking was something that was regularly coming up, in spite of it being somehow unclear and difficult to identify. That's why I thought this was something I needed to go deeper into. This FPAR provided answers to very specific needs: One was the need to explore methodologies for research and action that migrant women would feel comfortable with and that would have an impact on them. The other need was to tackle the issue of trafficking, especially in Barcelona where I thought the complexity of trafficking (which I was seeing by encountering trafficked women myself) was unknown.

However, this research looks at trafficking in women as a transnational issue; that's why it's been carried out in Spain, USA, Colombia and the Philippines. The research reviews, from a feminist perspective, social interventions (handbooks) and policies (protocols) aiming at assisting trafficked women and at preventing trafficking, and aims at reflecting about how FPAR can be applied in a transnational context with trafficked women.

There are numerous differences among these four places regarding an understanding of trafficking, its causes, its invisibility and the way 'victims' are assisted. The FPAR has not just made these differences visible but it has also allowed working on the issue of trafficking in different ways and with different methodologies at the same time. The most important feature of FPAR as methodology is that it allows the researched, the trafficked women in this case, to play the leading role in the research process



and that gives a special value to their experiences. FPAR has allowed the visualisation of them as women who have undergone transformations, and not just as 'victims'.

As with the GMISC research, it was key that the word 'feminism' did not appear when starting my contact with the women, but that they discovered it throughout our daily work. This was instrumental in them not feeling that they were being indoctrinated about feminism, or that they were asked to position themselves as feminists. As time passed we started discussing feminism and after the research they did not feel it as something distant, stigmatised or obscure.

My role has been that of a dynamizer, but the fact that I am a migrant woman myself allowed me to participate by sharing my experiences. As in the case of the research with Bolivian and Moroccan women, it was clear that participating was NOT just about attending meetings, responding to questions, or doing 'homework'. Women also participated with their silence, their company and right words at a given moment, and their affection. Participation was not only through words, and all of them participated according to their own wishes and availability. The research, communities, and even each women's rhythms are different; that's why it is so important to avoid imposing rhythms that would FORCE the results or the processes.

There were numerous challenges throughout this FPAR that were solved by working together. Language was the main one, and the fact that the research was carried out without economic support. Addressing these challenges together brought us closer, which had very positive effects on helping dialogue and affection flow among ourselves without difficulty.

FPAR is a lived experience involving all of those taking part in it.

**Using this methodology in such a harsh context as trafficking has a strong effect on researchers. I got sick and lived very complex situations, both at physical and spiritual levels. But at the same time, this situation also brought me closer to the women. All of them talked about my condition and I can say that they also healed me.**

This experience made me change the focus of the research. Rather than looking at the specific situation of trafficking, we started looking at the strategies used by the women to cope with trafficking and to overcome it. As a form of therapy I turned their experiences into tales that I worked on those with them afterwards. This led us to use music, images,

drawings, literature, cinema... At the end, those who have experienced trafficking realised that those who have assisted and accompanied them have also been affected by it, and I find this very interesting.

The process has been very beautiful. A number of activities have been carried out so far, and there have been many results, some of which are:

- We have designed an assistance handbook that can be used in different contexts and which includes all the proposals made by the women themselves.
- Development of a website called "border woman" in three languages (Spanish, Catalán and English) designed as a meeting space bringing together to women in different places.
- Training in intercultural mediation for women who have been trafficked to Catalonia in cooperation with the Autónoma University in Barcelona, which provided an official academic title [i.e. intercultural mediators] and contributed a classroom and other support. This has been to me, the most special outcome.

Future plans include getting funds to complete some of the projects proposed by the women during the FPAR, such as publishing a FPAR handbook, and a book compiling all the stories in this project, to name a few. At the same time, we still need to undertake the training on intercultural mediation with the trafficked women who participated in the FPAR in Colombia, USA and Philippines.

**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> To get more information about this research please contact Helga at helgaefr@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Catalanian (where Sant Cugat is located) regional language.



**Helga Flamtermesky**  
She's currently finishing her PhD in Social Psychology at Barcelona's Universidad Autonoma.



**Nerea Bilbatua**  
is a Programme Officer at the GAATW International Secretariat

# Women organising from the informal sector: The Jitahidi Women's Group and the Good Hope Women's Group in Nairobi, Kenya

by Alice Maranga, FIDA Kenya<sup>1</sup>

The Feminist Participatory Action Research “*The Realities and Agency of Informal Sector Workers*” was conducted with women workers from the informal sector in Nairobi, Kenya (Kangemi, Kagwakware and Kiamaiko). Women in Kenya are time poor as they labour 12.9 hours in a day as compared to 8.2 hours a day for men<sup>2</sup>. Kenyan women are enormous contributors to the economy and women form 29% of the workforce in the formal sector<sup>3</sup>. The enterprises owned by women are of less capital as compared to the male counterparts<sup>4</sup>. Kenyan women do not own property, have access or control over financial resources.

Women workers in the informal sector were not aware of the financial institutions that could offer them capital to improve their businesses. Their living environments are not safe and very poor, i.e. living in compounds of 30 housing units with one toilet and bathroom to be shared, yet they conduct their business from home at their door steps.

The research found that women workers in the informal sector are more vulnerable to Gender Based Violence (GBV) than men. For example, women were harassed by city policemen who pretended to be customers.

In October 2010, FIDA Kenya met with two women's groups that had formed during FIDA Kenya's FPAR with informal sector workers in Nairobi, Kenya. FIDA Kenya organised a consultation with the Jitahidi Women's Group and the Good Hope Women's Group to discuss the FPAR findings, to inform other stakeholders about the research, and to check in with groups on their work and plans since the FPAR completed.

## Jitahidi Women's Group

This group formed in 2009 after a training by FIDA Kenya and GAATW. The group operates from Kawangware, one of the FPAR sites, in Nairobi's West District. At the initial stage of the group's formation and collection, the members were six. The group has now grown to a total of 18 members.

The group's objectives are to empower and equip other women on their rights, visit the needy in the community,

and to assist one another psychologically, financially and socially in times of violence and economic constraints. The gender based violence in their families has also reduced because the women can bring home some income to assist with family budgets.

Some of the activities they undertake in order to fulfill their objectives are:

- They have opened a bank account to keep their money and are operating a micro credit 'merry go round' where they each contribute five hundred shillings per week to the saving account and offer credit facilities to members who return the money with interest.
- They build the capacity of other women on human rights and labour rights in forums which help them network with other women groups and learn best practices.
- They carry out advocacy work on human rights, especially after attending human rights trainings.

Challenges they have experienced since inception include:

- Paying for venues where they can hold their meetings.
- Lack of organisational skills such as bookkeeping and project management.
- Hurdles in registering the group due to the lack of support by the provincial administration office.
- Fraud. In some cases, if a member manages to secure a stall to conduct their businesses, they have discovered that the same stall is sold to many women by the caretakers and their money is never refunded back.
- A lot of corruption in issuance of the funds by financial institutions, when trying to access devolved funds.

The women are optimistic that some of the challenges can be overcome with more training, especially in information technology. They also have plans to open a gift shop for



members. Officers from the provincial administration office are new and are looking forward to start the registration process afresh.

### Good Hope Women's Group

This group has witnessed a transformation of the members that took part in the training and research. After the training, they prepared a constitution and held meetings on member collection and group formation. They formed the 'Kangemi Good Hope' group as a way to access devolved funds, especially recent HIV/AIDS funds.

The skills development provided by FIDA Kenya empowered women to strive for self sustenance. They now contribute five hundred Kenya shillings monthly which is not spent on luxury shopping but is mostly ploughed back into the businesses.

Their lives have changed because of the businesses they are managing. In the spirit of realizing their rights, the group has empowered other women by letting them know about their rights. They have been able to form a collection with other women who have skills, such as a trained children officer who has assisted them in acquiring alimony and maintenance from men who are not willing to support their own children.

Their main challenges involve the many community members who are affected by HIV and AIDS. In attending to their community responsibilities, most of their time is consumed in offering them humanitarian services. Another challenge that remains is the need for more time to enhance their businesses.

### The way forward

In conclusion, there is much improvement in the lives of the women who are happy with the FPAR process. Initially the groups had asked for funds, but in realizing the potential in them, they were able to conduct their businesses without financial assistance from FIDA Kenya and GAATW.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> For more information about the organisation, visit [www.fidakenya.org](http://www.fidakenya.org)

<sup>2</sup> Ellis, Amanda, Jozefina Cutura, Nouma Dione, Ian Gillson, Clare Manuel, and Judy Thongori. (2007) "Overview." Foreword to *Gender and Economic Growth in Kenya; Unleashing the power of women*, xxiii. Washington DC: The World Bank.

<sup>3</sup> Macharia, K. (2003). *Migration in Kenya and Its Impact on the Labour Market*. Paper prepared for Conference on African Migration in Comparative Perspective, Johannesburg, South Africa, 4-7 June, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Ellis, Amanda, Jozefina Cutura, Nouma Dione, Ian Gillson, Clare Manuel, and Judy Thongori. (2007) "Overview." Foreword to *Gender and Economic Growth in Kenya; Unleashing the power of women*, xxiii. Washington DC: The World Bank.



**Alice Maranga**  
is the Programme Officer for Civic Engagement at the Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya (FIDA-K)

# Participant Safety in FPAR<sup>1</sup>

By Julie Ham and Rebecca Napier-Moore

## SOCIAL, PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SAFETY ETHICS

Ethics affects almost every part of the Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) process, from how communities are involved, how power is shared, how participants are treated, who owns the data or knowledge, and the responsibilities of all involved to put research into action. Ethical issues were an ongoing concern and practice for almost everyone involved in GAATW's 2009-2010 FPAR initiative, including researchers, facilitators, and participants. This was evident in the field notes that were shared between researchers/facilitators in the field and the GAATW International Secretariat. This was also demonstrated in researchers' final reports, in follow-up communication with researchers after the reports were completed, internal GAATW evaluation meetings, and during discussions at GAATW's 3<sup>rd</sup> Feminist Roundtable, 10-14 March 2009 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Among the ethical issues that arose during the projects, the issue of ensuring participants' and researchers' social, physical, and emotional safety came up repeatedly. This was partly due to the nature of the groups that were involved: Most of the groups involved are highly socially or geographically isolated groups. The social isolation of some groups was the result of intense stigmatisation or criminalisation. The rural villages that participated were typically geographically isolated, small communities where women were concerned about the social consequences of disclosing certain experiences. In these contexts, participating in research posed risks for many women who nevertheless wanted to share their stories and experiences with other women.

## SAFETY NEEDS OF MIGRANTS IN FPAR PROCESSES

### CRIMINALISATION

Criminalisation was seen as a risk of the research process in research projects with immigrant and migrant women in destination countries. In these projects, the migrant categories imposed on women by the government (e.g. trafficked person, undocumented migrant, asylum-seeker,

refugee) often meant severe restrictions on women's agency. Migrant status severely limited women's livelihood options and access to legal protection which increased women's vulnerability to economic and sexual exploitation by authorities. Participants in these projects had concerns that disclosing their experiences in research would leave them vulnerable to harassment, abuse, or criminalisation by police and other authorities. Women were concerned about their personal physical safety, the safety of their families (e.g. removal of one's children by authorities), and about their security or actual presence in a country (e.g. fears about deportation).

In *Understanding Needs, Recognising Rights: The Stories, Perspectives, and Priorities of Immigrant Iranian Women in Vancouver, Canada*, two local advocates talked to Middle Eastern women who had at some point engaged in sex work: "This sample of informants is unique, and to our knowledge, includes the only known examination of the struggles of Iranian women in Canada whom have engaged in sex work at some point post-migration due to severe financial constraints. The taboo nature of sex work in general coupled with the severe communal repercussions of engaging in sex work<sup>2</sup> pose significant challenges to accessing such a hidden, invisible community. (p.9)" Participants had intense fears about being criminalised in Canada - as women in sex work, as migrants, as persons of Middle Eastern origin. Although they wanted to help others by sharing their experiences, talking to anyone about their experiences still posed a tremendous risk to their personal safety, social reputation, and families (risk of child apprehension).

## SAFETY STRATEGIES FOR MIGRANTS IN FPAR PROCESSES

### BUILDING TRUST, ESTABLISHING RECIPROCITY

In the project above, respect and trust had been established based on already existing relationships between the target groups and researchers/facilitators. Patterns of reciprocity and solidarity had already been established by partner organisations who had provided services, advocacy, awareness raising activities, trainings, and solidarity with these communities over time.





*“In our context, conducting this kind of research would have been virtually impossible had it not been for the local advocate who could vouch for the sincerity of the research methodology being used.”<sup>3</sup> (p. 24)*

In projects that drew on established relationships, a lot of discussion, information sharing (and repeating information a number of times) and consultation was required by women before deciding to participate. In another project, the research facilitator noted: *“There was suspicion and fighting, suspicion that someone is going to gain from this but it won’t be us. We [the community researchers and facilitators] went back to resolve that tension. (researcher’s personal communication, March 2010)”*

### ETHICAL REPRESENTATION

Labels for different categories of migrants tangibly impact people’s lives. The migrant label, once assigned (e.g. refugee, trafficked person, undocumented, migrant worker, immigrant), often determines what services a person is entitled to, what a person is allowed to do, how a person is allowed to move, and what rights they can access<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of the women participating in the research were adamant about determining how they would be represented throughout the research process.

In one low-income or ‘slum’ community in Nairobi (Kenya), participants initially emphasised that they were Kenyan citizens and claimed to have Kenyan national identity cards. However, after some time, they disclosed that they were Somali or Ethiopian migrants and had not been born in Kenya: *“It is clear that they were originally not comfortable disclosing the fact that they are migrants, perhaps because the law forbids refugees to live in urban areas, and also because of fear of harassment. (p.23)<sup>5</sup>”* Participants were emphatic that they were not participating in this project as *migrant* women. In one focus group discussion, one of the community facilitators emphasised that they had been included in the research project because they were migrant women. The women were furious and contacted GAATW - asking us what we were trying to do, arguing that this would only stir up trouble for them. The other research facilitators promptly responded, suggesting that particular community organiser no longer be involved in FPAR work with that community, and worked out other ways of engagement.

In Noushin’s and Fereshteh’s work with Middle Eastern immigrant women in Canada, the women interviewed had engaged in sex work at some point post migration. However, the women did not identify themselves as sex workers but instead referred to sex work obliquely as something they did ‘to make ends meet’: *“When a portion*

*of the unfolding story was unclear, care was taken to clarify details while reassuring participants that they were free to disclose only as much information as they were comfortable to. In particular, neither the researchers nor the participants made any formal acknowledgement of sex work as one of the types of work the women engaged in, especially given the privacy and cultural-taboo around the issue. (p. 10)”*

### REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS ABOUT ACTION

At times, participants’ safety concerns had to take precedence over participants’ and researchers’ aspirations to advance FPAR activities with organising efforts amongst the women. In Noushin and Fereshteh’s work with Middle Eastern women, women stated that they wanted to help other women by sharing their experiences. But intense police scrutiny towards this particular group of racialised women meant that participants could not meet with each other for collective or supportive action. For instance, police had threatened women with child apprehension unless women divulged the names of other women engaging in sex work:

*“Participation and collaboration among research participants was not pursued to ensure the safety and security of the women involved.... Specifically, and as a result of police raids in the past, it was not safe for us to bring the group together at this time. In previous occasions when networks were formed, women were able to give up names of others who solicited sex out of their apartments for survival under the legal threat of having their children removed from their home. (p.24)”*

This meant that some methods typically associated with FPAR - such as focus groups, collective analysis, action plans, etc. - could not be used in this particular context. The women interviewed said they required anonymity to help protect the safety of others who may be in trouble with the law.<sup>6</sup>

In AKIDWA’s research with women asylum seekers in Ireland, women discussed how strategic and careful they needed to be about asserting their rights. Within Ireland’s direct provision accommodation system (i.e. refugee shelters where refugee movements are strictly monitored and controlled), women argued that asserting their rights carried a great risk of backlash or punishment from centre staff. Speaking up about abuses and human rights violations within the direct provision accommodation system could threaten a woman’s case for asylum within Ireland.

*“Women from two regions said that some centre staff used the fear of deportation as a threat to intimidate residents when they complained. This contributed to a feeling of hopelessness amongst*

*the women that they could actually do anything to change their situation for the better. 'The management have no respect for us at all, and they always show you they are in power. If you take food back that is raw, or question anything, then you are threatened with transfer. You are seen as a troublemaker. You can hardly challenge anything, due to fear of jeopardising your case'" (p.22).*

### SAFETY NEEDS OF RETURNEE MIGRANTS IN FPAR PROCESSES

#### SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

The small size of the villages, the relationships between residents and changing social norms around migration meant that many women felt they had to take great care in how they described and shared their labour migration experiences. Disclosing negative migration experiences within a small community could result in negative social and economic consequences. In La Strada Moldova's research with returnee migrant women, women described residents in one Moldovan village as being "cruel" to those who had negative labour migration experiences:

*"Upon return I told about our [husband and wife's] negative migration experience to my old parents... they were of course unhappy but asked me not to tell anyone in the village about our experience. They were afraid that villagers would laugh at our family...like we spent so much time working abroad, and did not even earn enough to mend our roof..." (p.19)*

In another FPAR, returnee migrant women (some of whom had been trafficked) in Northern Thailand had encountered many researchers interested in researching them or using their connections to collect data from other trafficked women. SEPOM (or Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women), an organisation led by returnee migrant women in northern Thailand, saw FPAR as a chance to determine how their own stories would be told as a way to counter the intense stigma created by current anti-trafficking discourses. The stigma around "trafficked" persons in their home communities often meant that any Thai women who had returned from working in Japan (particularly those with Thai-Japanese children) were assumed to be former sex workers and trafficked women, although this was not necessarily true for all women. Women had returned to Thailand to re-build their lives, provide for their families, achieve economic security and find new roles for themselves in their communities. Yet, these efforts were often hampered by the stigma attached to them as returnee migrant or trafficked women. Women talked about how this stigma threatened their relationships with their families and with others in their communities. Women also spoke at length about their determination that community gossip and stigma would not affect their children's perceptions of their self-

worth or their pride about their mother. One woman said:

*"When it's time, when they've finished their studies, if they [my children] ask me I will tell them about it. I think I'm ready to do it...And I have done so much social work that the community accepts me now. My children should understand because when they learn about my past, they will still see all the good I've done for society, for my children, and for my family." (p.16)*

### SAFETY STRATEGIES FOR RETURNEE MIGRANTS IN FPAR PROCESSES

#### SAFETY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

In projects where risks of social consequences were higher, women often shared very different information in individual interviews than they did in focus group discussions. Some women felt much safer to disclose negative labour migration experiences in individual interviews and felt more comfortable only sharing positive experiences within focus group discussions. Individual interviews provided a safer space to share negative, complicated or ambivalent feelings and experiences. This was particularly salient for women who felt shame or embarrassment about negative or unsuccessful labour migration experiences such as exploitation or returning home without any savings.

*"Women had to frame their labour migration experiences very carefully once they returned to the village. Women described the village community as being 'cruel' to those who had experienced exploitation or negative migration experiences. As such, women only dared to share their negative experiences in individual interviews (women mostly shared positive experiences in focus groups)." (p.4)<sup>7</sup>*

Women's concerns about the social consequences of disclosing negative migration experiences meant that focus groups alone would not capture the depth and complexities of women's experiences. However, focus groups still provided a valuable space for women to share positive migration experiences, strengthen common values, share lessons learned from migration, and promote general discussions about migration as a broader social issue. Focus group facilitators took care not to publicly expose anyone's stories of pain, exploitation, or other negative experiences: *"During the focus groups, the researcher's unspoken tasks were to build a sense of togetherness among the women, to encourage them to see migration-related problems from another angle, to accent the positive things in their lives and to help them feel powerful enough to act."* (p.11)<sup>8</sup>



## ANTI-TRAFFICKING RESEARCHERS' ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Allied researchers need to identify with the norms and values of the community they are working with, being as aware as possible of the consequences of particular social labels. Socially and/or geographically isolated groups face particular barriers to research participation such as stigmatisation and criminalisation. Sharing experiences in these contexts can risk participants' physical, social and emotional safety.

Researchers interested in working ethically with trafficked persons and other target groups must anticipate and address any safety risks to ensure that research processes or research outcomes do not jeopardise participants. Participant researchers may have a greater understanding of their safety needs (e.g. anonymity) while ally researchers (who are not part of the target community) may have more knowledge about how those safety needs can be met throughout the research process (e.g. what methods to use, lessons learned from other research done with target groups, risks of disclosure in various fora). In some cases, this may mean that allied researchers have to limit or restrict research outputs or dissemination, such as by not documenting a certain issue.

Another ethical responsibility involves ensuring that people are represented ethically in research. Current anti-trafficking discourses rely heavily on victimising ideas about trafficked persons and these assumptions can pose a serious barrier for trafficked persons' reintegration efforts. Researchers can help trafficked persons' efforts to re-claim control over their identities and their personal narratives. Through this, researchers can also help to shift anti-trafficking discourses towards a more empowering, human rights based approach that is embedded in a broader understanding of gendered labour and migration contexts.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> This article draws from a paper, *Ethical Concerns in Feminist Participatory Action Research with Geographically and Socially Isolated Groups*, presented at an international conference, *Forcing Issues: Rethinking and Rescaling Human Trafficking in the Asia-Pacific Region*.

<sup>2</sup> The type of sex work described here refers specifically to indoor-based sex work with a few select and regular clients.

<sup>3</sup> Noushin K. and Fereshteh. (2010). Understanding needs, recognising rights: The stories, perspectives, and priorities of immigrant Iranian women in Vancouver, Canada. *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series*. Bangkok, Thailand: GAATW.

<sup>4</sup> Pollock, J. (2010). The migrant worker, the refugee, and the trafficked person: What's in a label? *Alliance News*, 33 (July 2010), 19-22. Available online at [http://www.gaatw.org/publications/Alliance%20News/Alliance\\_News\\_July\\_2010.pdf](http://www.gaatw.org/publications/Alliance%20News/Alliance_News_July_2010.pdf)

Kneebone, S. (2010). The trafficking-refugee nexus: When return and reintegration becomes *refoulement*. *Alliance News*, 33 (July 2010), 19-22. Available online at [http://www.gaatw.org/publications/Alliance%20News/Alliance\\_News\\_July\\_2010.pdf](http://www.gaatw.org/publications/Alliance%20News/Alliance_News_July_2010.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Maranga, A. & Laiboni, N. (2010). *The realities and agency of informal sector workers: The account of migrant women workers in Nairobi*. From *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience [FPAR Series]*. Bangkok, Thailand and Nairobi, Kenya: GAATW and FIDA Kenya.

<sup>6</sup> K., Noushin. (2010, July 6). *Self-identification, stigma, and safety: Challenges to sex work organisation*. Presentation delivered at GAATW's International Members Congress and Conference, *Beyond Borders: Trafficking in the Context of Migrant, Labour and Women's Rights*, Bangkok, Thailand.

<sup>7</sup> Rusu, V. for La Strada Moldova. (2010). A Look at the Linkages : How Does Gender, Migration, Labour and Trafficking intersect in Women's Lives? A Qualitative Research Based on Migration and Labour Experiences of Women from Ursoaia, Republic of Moldova. *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience: Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) Series*. Bangkok, Thailand: GAATW.

<sup>8</sup> Rusu, V. for La Strada Moldova. (2010).

# Perceptions of Privilege and Guilt in FPAR

By Nkirote Laiboni

Until recently, Kenya's Kibera slum was believed to be one of the biggest informal settlements in the world. It is not clear how the media and international organisations arrived at the figures of 800,000 to 2 million as the estimated population of Kibera. What is clear, however, is that Kibera attracted much international attention, particularly after the 2005 film *The Constant Gardener* was shot there, that tourists started paying as much as £20 to catch a "glimpse into the lives of the hundreds of thousands of people crammed into tiny rooms along dirt paths littered with excrement-filled plastic bags"<sup>1</sup>. One cannot help but wonder how the residents of Kibera, whose population the Kenyan government placed at 170,070 in the 2009 Population Census<sup>2</sup>, feel about foreigners gawping and taking photos at their lived realities. Embarrassed? Disrespected? Exploited? Patronised? Perhaps a sense that some good would come out of the attention?

While it is not disputable that the living conditions in Kibera, like other slums around the world, are dire, it is important for outsiders who visit or work in such places - be they tourists, artists, charity workers or researchers - to ensure that the dignity of the residents is maintained. I was quite conscious of this while conducting a Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) project in three of Kenya's informal settlements (Kangemi, Kiamaiko, Kawangware) in 2009. The research in question, whose research participants were migrant women living in the three low-income communities, explored and aimed to tackle restrictive and discriminatory labour and migration policies affecting female informal sector workers in Nairobi city<sup>3</sup>.

As a research method, FPAR demands some deliberation on the power relations underlying the research process. Unlike traditional research, FPAR entails democratization of the process so that research is undertaken together with research participants. The role of the researcher then, is not to conduct the research for or on the research participants, but to facilitate the research process and document and analyse findings. Of concern to me while reflecting on the research process, and indeed while undertaking the research, was whether power relationships

between middle-class researchers and low-income research participants could be equal. I was very much aware, while carrying out interviews and facilitating focus group discussions, of the privilege of my background. As a black, African woman I have experienced injustice and prejudice due to my skin colour, race, gender and sometimes even youth. I may not be from a wealthy background but I possess one thing that the informal sector workers who participated in the FPAR project don't: a good education and the choices that come with it. While the research participants and I had some things in common, being Kenyan women and living in a blatantly patriarchal society, it was hard not to feel on occasion like a distant observer who was removed from the women's social and economic experiences.

I found myself questioning my legitimacy. Who was I to document the lived realities that I rarely suffered? I, the research facilitator, was an educated non-profit worker and the research participants were poorly-educated informal sector workers whose daily lives were a struggle.

**How would I like it if someone came to my house and workplace to observe and document my day-to-day failures and triumphs? These feelings of intrusion and invalidity were exacerbated while undertaking individual interviews.**

One of the research participants, Mary<sup>4</sup>, invited me to interview her at her home in Kawangware. A single mother who barely scraped a living out of selling roast maize, Mary lived in very humble conditions. I felt obliged to rush through the interview as every hour she spent answering my questions translated to potential loss of her meagre earnings. Additionally, while questions about living and working conditions of research participants were pertinent to the research, it was difficult to bring up these issues, having seen how Mary lived.

There were also times when the research process would be affected by the research participants' day-to-day challenges. For instance, a research participant once came for a focus group discussion after being thrown out of her home without notice. Her landlord had found someone who



was willing to pay a larger amount of rent and as she was an underprivileged undocumented migrant from Somalia, living in Nairobi in contravention of the country's refugees' policies, she had no recourse to justice. The question I was faced with is whether or not to proceed with the focus group discussion with the knowledge that one of the research participants has nowhere to sleep that night.

As the above examples illustrate, an FPAR researcher is likely to be conscious of the privilege and difference she may represent, particularly if research is undertaken in disadvantaged communities. If not checked, these internal tensions and the feelings of guilt about one's privilege may immobilise a researcher and affect the research process.

Besides the research facilitator's perception of her position, there is also the question of how the research participants view her. Although the research project, together with my role as a research facilitator, was clearly explained to the research participants, some of them saw me as just another NGO worker. A large number of national and international NGOs operate in Nairobi, and many people who live in the city's underprivileged communities are either aware of or have benefited from these organisations' financial and technical support. NGO staff who go to these communities are thus, often viewed as 'short-term donors': outsiders who pay short visits to the communities and provide them with monetary and development support. So it was not surprising when one of the research participants requested that I assist with her daughter's education expenses. Having worked in community development in the past, I was aware, while undertaking the FPAR research, that it is easy to get personally involved and feel obligated to provide assistance to people who are less fortunate and with whom I regularly interact. Another example of how the research participants' perception of the research facilitator may impact on the research was a focus group discussion whose topic revolved around gender roles, relations and discrimination. While describing the social challenges she suffered as a working mother and married woman, one research participant said to me: "But you wouldn't understand, you are a young girl". The assumption, of course, was that I was both unmarried and childless and could no way comprehend the context.

How then, given such natural inclinations, does an FPAR facilitator negotiate these tensions and power dynamics during the research process? What helped me was to keep focused on the FPAR methodology, which involves research participants driving the analysis and owning the process, leading participants toward personal and social transformation. Keeping this in focus helped create trust that both the research facilitator and participants were working towards a common, long-term good. At the same time, perhaps it is important to accept that a researcher is naturally likely to feel guilty if she does or is perceived

to hold a higher economic, social, gender or racial position than the research participants. The key is to be conscious of these tensions and how they impact on the research we do and the relationships we form, to be open to continual reflection and discussion about these tensions and to critically assess where change can occur.

On a final note, it is worthwhile to remember that the FPAR research process is an opportunity for both the researcher and research participants to learn, as both are involved in the process of knowledge production.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Rice, X. (2009, September 25). Kenya's slums attract poverty tourism. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/25/slum-tourism-kenya-kibera-poverty>

<sup>2</sup> Karanja, M. (2010, September 3). Myth shattered: Kibera numbers fail to add up. *Daily Nation*. Retrieved from <http://www.nation.co.ke/News/Kibera%20numbers%20fail%20to%20add%20up/-/1056/1003404/-/13ga38xz/-/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> Maranga, A. & Laiboni, N. (2010). *The realities and agency of informal sector workers: The account of migrant women workers in Nairobi*. From *A Woman's Life is Richer Than Her Trafficking Experience [FPAR Series]*. Bangkok, Thailand and Nairobi, Kenya: GAATW and FIDA Kenya.

<sup>4</sup> Not her real name



**Nkirote Laiboni**  
is the former Africa Regional Officer at the GAATW International Secretariat

# UPDATES FROM THE SECRETARIAT

## Beyond Borders: Trafficking in the Context of Migrant, Labour and Women's Rights

### International Members Congress and Conference July 4-7 2010, Bangkok, Thailand

GAATW held its third triennial International Members Congress and Conference (IMCC), *Beyond Borders*, in July 2010. *Beyond Borders* was informed by the linkages work undertaken by GAATW over the past three years exploring the connection between trafficking and migration, labour, gender, globalisation and security, from a human rights perspective.

In celebration of GAATW's 16th year, the Members' Congress started with an informal and interactive conversation with participants sharing key moments in their histories with GAATW. Bandana Pattanaik, International Coordinator for GAATW International Secretariat (IS), then provided a brief overview of the IS's activities between 2008-2010, highlighting the emphasis on alliance-strengthening, advocacy and research activities. She concluded her overview by posing three questions for the Alliance to consider over the next three years:

- How will we deal with the question of 'demand'?
- What are the implications of broadening our work and linking up with other related movements?
- What can we do to ensure our own accountability?

### Regional Sessions

Four regional sessions were led by GAATW members representing Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia.

GAATW members from Africa presented an analysis of the anti-trafficking policies and advocacy challenges in Africa and discussed their experiences providing direct assistance to trafficked persons and migrant workers. Speakers from member organisations in Europe discussed trafficking for labour exploitation, recent legal cases and their implications for anti-trafficking work and conditional

assistance for trafficked persons. Members from Latin America and the Caribbean focused on their engagement with national, regional and international advocacy fora, and GAATW's global campaign on a review mechanism to the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and its Protocols (UNTOC). The session led by members in Asia explored the impact of anti-trafficking strategies and 'migrant and victim-friendly border management' on trafficked persons and migrants' realities in Japan, India and Nepal; as well as struggles in access to justice in Mongolia and Cambodia.

### Strengthening GAATW

Two sessions were held on strengthening GAATW's structure, led by the Working Group on Membership Issues and the Working Group on Decision-Making Processes. After a brief overview of working group activities over the past three years, participants voted on two membership issues: membership fees and a timeline for reviewing GAATW's membership. The Working Group on Decision Making Processes gained consensus on processes for decision making with regard to the International Board, Working Groups, Regional Chapters, the International Secretariat (IS) and GAATW's Statute. It was agreed that the IS would take the responsibility of finalising the Working Group documents and following up on next steps.

The Members Congress concluded with a discussion on GAATW's 2011-2013 strategic direction. Some common themes emerged as well as thoughts about how to utilise the Alliance's core methodologies of research, international advocacy, support for self-organising efforts and network-building over the next three years. Issues included:

- the lack of focus/research on labour exploitation
- the need to engage with the Middle East
- the accountability (or lack thereof) of anti-trafficking actors
- the importance of supporting the efforts of self-organised groups
- addressing and exploring people's lives after trafficking (e.g. reintegration, compensation)
- broader migration issues (e.g. abusive recruiters, children of migrant workers);



- network building
- smuggling

Discussions on GAATW's 2011-2013 strategic direction concluded with the IS committing to synthesise discussions and feed into a draft strategic direction document that was shared with members in September.

### The Conference

The **International Conference** began with a joint performance by Kolkata Sanved<sup>1</sup> (India) and Gabfai<sup>2</sup> (Thailand) that was inspired by the stories women shared in GAATW's FPAR project. This was followed by an opening plenary on *Understanding Trafficking and Human Rights in the Context of Migration, Labour, Gender and Globalisation*. Three speakers presented on the use of laws and human rights as tools of power as well as vehicles for freedom and the use of anti-trafficking discourses to entrench conservative agendas towards women's rights and migrant rights. This was followed by four concurrent sessions focusing on the practical implications of linking anti-trafficking efforts with broader rights movements and exploring approaches that could better capture women's holistic experiences and concerns. Most of these sessions featured findings from GAATW's 2009-2010 FPAR projects and the *Beyond Borders Working Paper Series*.

Sessions were held on:

- *Negotiating Rights at the Workplace*
- *The 'Victim Label'*
- *What's Next?: What do Linkages Mean for Our Work?*
- *Trade Policies and Impacts on Migrating Women.*

Two concurrent sessions with domestic workers' rights groups and sex workers' rights groups were held. Domestic workers' groups discussed the current opportunities for the domestic workers movement, particularly advocacy towards an International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention on Domestic Work and national and regional initiatives. Sex workers' groups discussed how to strengthen collaboration between sex workers' groups and anti-trafficking groups and the challenges of organising sex workers in the face of extreme criminalisation and stigmatisation.

The conference also included various spaces to discuss or take part in international advocacy. Mr. Vitit Muntabhorn, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in North Korea, presented at one of two sessions on how to raise individual complaints using UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies and the Special Procedures. The UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, Ms Joy Ezeilo, facilitated a lively and thought-provoking consultation on prevention. Participants emphasised the following points:

- the Special Rapporteur's role in advancing evidence gathered by civil society
- the importance of thinking critically about root causes and prevention campaigns for trafficking
- the need to dismantle xenophobia in destination countries
- the importance of trafficked persons and self-organised groups in furthering anti-trafficking efforts
- the need for a victim-centered monitoring mechanism to UNTOC<sup>3</sup>.

The IMCC generated many exciting ideas and suggestions for future work, marking the first of many more rich discussions as the GAATW-IS prepares the strategic direction and programme priorities for 2011-2013. We feel extremely grateful for spending four stimulating days with energetic and dedicated human rights advocates working in a broad range of fields relating to trafficking, women's rights, migration and labour issues.

For a complete report of the event, visit:  
[http://www.gaatw.org/publications/IMCC2010\\_Report.pdf](http://www.gaatw.org/publications/IMCC2010_Report.pdf)







### Australian Labour Union Countering Trafficking with Labour Advocacy

Keryn McWhinney and Leah Charlson from the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU, Australia) attended GAATW's International Members Congress and Conference (IMCC) in July as part of a GAATW cross-border alliances project, sponsored by the Australia-Thailand Institute of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. During their visit, the two labour union representatives also met with the Committee for Asian Women (CAW)<sup>4</sup>, the International Labour Organisation (ILO)<sup>5</sup>, Foundation for Women<sup>6</sup>, and the Try Arm factory<sup>7</sup> in Bangkok.

The CFMEU has successfully identified and handled trafficking cases for "non-traditional" trafficking victims using a labour rights framework, representing migrant Australians or non-residents who have been subjected to exploitation in the workplace. Keryn presented one extreme case at the IMCC:

*"In 2001 our union came across eight workers brought to Australia from India, to complete marble stonemasonry work on a Hindu temple in a remote location in the South of Sydney. This construction site was completely enclosed by high barbed-wire fencing. The gates on this compound were locked. The workers had been living on this building site for four years.*

*The workers were treated as slave labour - they worked long hours, seven days a week. They had no freedom and had to suffer, without medical treatment, through bouts of illness. They were held against their will and threatened if they complained. Their passports were confiscated by their employer and they were paid only \$10 a week. On finding these horrendous conditions, our union immediately freed the workers from their locked compound.*

*We instigated negotiations with the employer on the non-payment of wages. We then lodged legal documents in court for the recovery of unpaid wages. We also informed the Australian Government and demanded a change to the visa system to protect future S.457 visa workers.*

*To add further pressure - we investigated the temple owners and found that a Sydney-based doctor was the head of the temple's management committee. We then had the Indian stonemasons protest outside the doctor's surgery and invited the media to the protest - then took the media to the temple construction site to photograph the living conditions of the workers. After many weeks of this difficult dispute, we negotiated a settlement for each worker, the terms of which were confidential."*

In addition to handling cases of severe exploitation, the union has also striven to ensure that all workers receive all of the wages and benefits that they are entitled, particularly superannuation or retirement fund contributions: *"In the last six months alone our union has recovered over \$9.5 million in underpaid wages and entitlements for our members."* Leah explained how assisting migrant workers helped the union sustain its hard-won benefits for all workers: *"Because [some companies] are getting undocumented workers, lowering legal wage rates, a lot of the legal companies can't compete so they're leaving that sector - driving wages in the construction sector down. We don't care about the distinction between documented and undocumented, but we don't want to see wages drop so that's one reason why we make employers pay."*

Keryn and Leah stressed that the CFMEU does not distinguish between documented and undocumented workers in representing workers from countries such as India, Serbia, Korea





and China. An ongoing challenge was alleviating migrant workers' fears and misperceptions about unions and seeking assistance<sup>8</sup>. To communicate with ethnically diverse workers, they have a team of 10 migrant support workers (collectively speaking a total of 15 languages) and provide labour rights materials in a wide variety of languages.

Leah explains how the diversity of the Australian population assisted their labour advocacy efforts: *"Part of the reasons we've had success in persuading our union to assist non-members who have been exploited is that a great percentage of membership, 60-70%, are of migrant backgrounds, so we don't see the same distinctions that might be seen in northern European unions."*

During their visit, Keryn and Leah discussed and compared legal frameworks in Australia and Thailand, discussed strategies for handling migrant labour cases and stressed the need to inform migrants of their entitlements in countries of origin and destination. Keryn said: *"My pet project is try and get source countries to educate people coming to Australia. We're educating them when they arrive; our problem is that our government is not going to do that. We would very much like to see minimum explanation about destination countries before they arrive."*

For more information, please email Julie Ham at [julie@gatw.org](mailto:julie@gatw.org) or visit CFMEU's UNITY magazine at <http://www.cfmeu-construction-nsw.com.au/unitymagazine.htm>.

The August issue features their visit to Bangkok:  
[http://www.cfmeu-construction-nsw.com.au/Unity/Issue50/UNITY50web\\_pg23.pdf](http://www.cfmeu-construction-nsw.com.au/Unity/Issue50/UNITY50web_pg23.pdf).

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Kolkata Sanved uses dance movement as an alternative approach to recovery, healing and for the psychosocial rehabilitation of victims of violence and trafficking, domestic workers, mental health patients, people suffering from HIV/AIDS and mainstream school children. For more information, visit [www.kolkatasanved.org](http://www.kolkatasanved.org)

<sup>2</sup> GABFAI provides workshops, performance and skills training to educate and empower villagers about the issues related to trafficking, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence and other human rights issues. For more information, visit [http://gabfai.com/home\\_eng.html](http://gabfai.com/home_eng.html)

<sup>3</sup> For more information, visit [www.victimcenteredmechanism.com](http://www.victimcenteredmechanism.com)

<sup>4</sup> The Committee for Asian Women is a network of organisations working for the rights of women workers in Asia. For more information, visit [www.cawinfo.org](http://www.cawinfo.org)

<sup>5</sup> For more information, visit <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/mdtbangkok/index.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Foundation for Women (FFW) works on women's rights issues in Bangkok, including violence against women, domestic workers' rights and anti-trafficking. For more information, visit [www.womenthai.org](http://www.womenthai.org)

<sup>7</sup> The Try Arm brand originated in the protest camp occupied by Triumph International Thailand labour union workers engaged in a months-long struggle against their unlawful dismissal by their employer. For more information, visit <http://tryarm-eng.blogspot.com/>

<sup>8</sup> For example, a couple of months after their visit, CFMEU shared news of a undocumented worker who had contracted a severe respiratory illness after working on building sites around Sydney but had been too afraid to seek medical help because of his undocumented status:  
<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/dignified-end-to-a-life-of-hardship-20100923-15ovd.html>



ADVOCACY UPDATES

XV Session of the Human Rights Council

In September, GAATW-IS and members attended the XV Session of the Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, Switzerland. A key priority for GAATW at this session was addressing the issue of domestic workers employed by diplomatic personnel who are privileged with immunity, thereby leaving domestic workers with little recourse to justice in the face of exploitative employers.

GAATW IS, member organisation Ban-Ying (Germany), and allies Franciscans International and Anti-Slavery International, jointly hosted a side event *Home Alone: End Domestic Slavery* to deepen discussions on domestic servitude with regard to root causes and national and international measures to combat domestic servitude. The event was sponsored and chaired by the UK diplomatic mission to the HRC. Panelists included Ms Nivedita Prasad, of Ban Ying, who discussed the abuse of domestic workers by diplomats and Ms Gulnara Shahinian, Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, who presented her annual thematic report for the HRC<sup>1</sup>, which included recommendations on diplomatic immunity.

The same organisations also submitted a joint written statement calling on the Council to make space for discussions on protecting, respecting and upholding the human rights of all domestic workers. To read the joint statement, visit [www.gaatw.org](http://www.gaatw.org) and follow the links or visit: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/157/69/PDF/G1015769.pdf?OpenElement>

Also at this session, GAATW-IS member organisation the Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM) and the Thai permanent mission to the HRC partnered to launch the exhibition of a photo essay *Stories of Trafficked and Returnee Migrant Women*.

The exhibition tells the stories of four women who were trafficked from Thailand to Japan and their great efforts to re-build their lives after returning to Thailand. The stories highlight the importance of placing trafficked persons' input at the centre of anti-trafficking responses and the need to integrate trafficked persons' input at all stages of anti-trafficking responses including their design, implementation and review.

The Thai and Filipino ambassadors in Geneva and the Deputy Ambassador of Germany spoke at the launch, expressing their support for victim-centred anti-trafficking responses and the work of SEPOM. Ms Jiraporn Saetang, SEPOM board member, also spoke, detailing SEPOM's work and highlighting the importance of self-organised groups (i.e. groups led by trafficked persons and returnee migrants) in providing information, empowering communities, improving assistance systems, and addressing trafficking and its consequences.

Five Days of Action for a Monitoring Mechanism to UNTOC!

by Petra Krampfl and Caroline Sander<sup>2</sup>

In October, governments met at the UN to decide how countries' anti-trafficking efforts should be monitored and evaluated. The Conference of Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (UNTOC) and its Protocols took place in Vienna, Austria, October 18-22. GAATW-IS joined member organisations LEFÖ-IBF from Austria, Bonded Labour in the Netherlands (BlinN), Samen Sterk (a Dutch based self-organised group of women who have been trafficked), the Federation of Women Lawyers' Kenya (FIDA Kenya) and the Cambodian organisation Legal Support for Children and Women (LSCW)<sup>3</sup>.

GAATW's main objectives were to urge States to take active steps towards establishing a monitoring mechanism to UNTOC and to lobby States to recognise the importance of a victim-centred approach in all areas of anti-trafficking work, including in the guiding principles to any monitoring mechanism established.

To inform the week's discussions at the Conference of Parties, GAATW invited delegates to several side events based on the theme *Ask the Experts* or the importance of integrating trafficked persons' input into any anti-trafficking measures and policies that impact on their lives. The first such event, sponsored by the Canadian Government, featured Ms Sanne Kroon (BlinN), Ms Irini Biba (Samen Sterk), Ms Alice Maranga (FIDA Kenya), Ms Joy Ngozi Ezeilo (Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons) and Ms Vichuta Ly (LSCW). Ms Ezeilo urged States to adopt an effective and independent monitoring mechanism to UNTOC. Members from BLinN, FIDA Kenya



and LSCW gave insights into the ways they have partnered with their governments in their daily work, noting the centrality of civil society to implementation of the human trafficking protocol. All agreed that anti-trafficking measures can only be effective if implemented in coordination with the victims themselves.

On the second day of the Conference, some governments began to discuss the creation of an intergovernmental working group to draw up terms of reference for a review mechanism to UNTOC in 2011 and 2012, to encourage the full implementation of the Convention. Meanwhile, the majority of the States acknowledged the need for a review mechanism to UNTOC.

In the evening delegates were invited to a cocktail reception sponsored by the Thai Government to launch GAATW's photo essay *Stories of Trafficked and Returnee Migrant Women* featuring the work of the Self-Empowerment Program for Migrant Women (SEPOM). Along with the Thai, Filipino and German ambassadors, GAATW's International Coordinator Ms Bandana Pattanaik formally opened the exhibition.

GAATW also hosted a panel *Filling gaps in implementation: Monitoring and evaluation of anti-trafficking responses*. Panellists included Ms Tichy-Fisslberger (Austrian National Coordinator on Trafficking), Mr Nicholas Le Coz (Vice President of the Council of Europe, Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings), Ms Pattanaik and Mr Abraham Stein (Deputy Secretary for Multidimensional Security, Organisation of American States), all of whom spoke of the need for high quality monitoring and evaluation processes.

An event co-sponsored by the Dutch government, Samen Sterk and BlinN was held to launch an abridged version of a film *Strong Women - Voices of human trafficking*<sup>4</sup>, which documents the creation and development of Samen Sterk, an organisation led by formerly trafficked women.



On the fourth day, GAATW invited national and international press to a breakfast briefing to launch the recently published report *Feeling Good about Feeling Bad: A Global Review of Evaluation in Anti-Trafficking Initiatives*<sup>5</sup>. Ms Pattanaik was joined by Ms Helga Konrad, Independent Consultant on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and former Austrian Women's Minister and Ms Evelyn Probst, Coordinator at LEFÖ-IBF. Media representatives from the main media

groups in Austria were present and widely reported on the issues raised.

During the week, many delegates spoke in favour of a review mechanism and support for victim-centred approaches to trafficking that involve civil society in the design, implementation and review of anti-trafficking policies. States also acknowledged that to be effective, the Convention needed appropriate monitoring and review. As a result of the 5<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties, a working group was created which will now draw up terms of reference for this important mechanism. While it was a busy and productive week, for GAATW the advocacy continues!

**This decision represents a historic opportunity for GAATW members to influence the development of an international instrument that will determine how anti-trafficking efforts are evaluated, how anti-trafficking resources are allocated, and how much power civil society will have in global anti-trafficking discussions.**

For more information on how your organisation can contribute to this campaign in 2011 and 2012, please contact Caroline Hames at [caroline@gaatw.org](mailto:caroline@gaatw.org).

For updates on developments over the next two years, please visit <http://www.victimcenteredmechanism.com/>



**Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Download report at [http://unog.ch/80256EDD006B9C2E/%28httpNewsByYear\\_en%29/36A48EC8B6CE1460C12577EB004DFFC0?OpenDocument](http://unog.ch/80256EDD006B9C2E/%28httpNewsByYear_en%29/36A48EC8B6CE1460C12577EB004DFFC0?OpenDocument)

<sup>2</sup> Petra and Caroline interned for GAATW's advocacy team during the 15th Human Rights Council session and the 5th Conference of Parties for UNTOC.

<sup>3</sup> More information about these organisations can be found at [www.gaatw.org](http://www.gaatw.org)

<sup>4</sup> View at [http://www.ungift.org/knowledgehub/multimedia.html?vf=/doc/knowledgehub/resource-centre/Multimedia/CSO\\_BlinN\\_Strong\\_Women.flv](http://www.ungift.org/knowledgehub/multimedia.html?vf=/doc/knowledgehub/resource-centre/Multimedia/CSO_BlinN_Strong_Women.flv)

<sup>5</sup> Available on GAATW's website at [http://www.gaatw.org/publications/GAATW\\_Global\\_Review.FeelingGood.AboutFeelingBad.pdf](http://www.gaatw.org/publications/GAATW_Global_Review.FeelingGood.AboutFeelingBad.pdf)



## ALLIANCE NEWS - UPDATES

### New European Representative to the GAATW International Board

Upon completion of Stana Buchowska's term GAATW European members have elected Sandra Claasen from BLinN (Bonded Labour in the Netherlands) as their representative on the Board.

The election process for the new European representative was collectively discussed and agreed upon by the European member organisations at a meeting during the July 2010 International Members Congress and Conference (IMCC) and discussions throughout September.

**Almost all GAATW European members showed their commitment to strengthening members' participation and representation within GAATW by casting their ballot, and an overwhelming majority of votes went to Sandra, who we would like to congratulate once again.**

Sandra is excellently qualified for the role, having worked in anti-trafficking since 1997 both in Latin America and the Caribbean (she worked for three years with Fundación Esperanza in Colombia) and upon her return to the Netherlands with BLinN<sup>1</sup> where she is responsible for the management of the organisation. BLinN aims to improve the position of trafficked persons in the Netherlands from an empowerment-perspective. It joined GAATW in 2005 and since then, Sandra has developed a close relationship with the GAATW IS through her extensive participation in different GAATW organised exchange programmes, meetings, consultations, and other activities.

As a member of the International Board, Sandra will support the IS on developing plans and strategies at the European level and contribute to general discussions on membership, decision-making and participation at the international level.

For us at the IS, this has been an important opportunity for GAATW members to practice the principles of representation, participation and we look forward to working with Sandra. We would also like to recognise the key role played by outgoing Board Member Stana Buchowska (La Strada Poland) since GAATW's inception in strengthening and shaping the Alliance and thank her for her continuous commitment and support.

### Countering Trafficking Through Women's Rights, Migrants' Rights and Labour Rights: GAATW Working Papers Series 2010

*We can combat trafficking through women's rights, migrants' rights and labour rights. To do so, we are reconnecting with those broader social movements and*

*refocusing our attention on trafficking's wider contexts, looking beyond the traditional borders of anti-trafficking.*

GAATW's July 2010 International Members Congress Conference was titled *Beyond Borders: Trafficking in the Context of Migrant, Labour and Women's Rights*. At the Conference, GAATW launched a series of Working Papers exploring the theme. The series of four papers looks at trafficking's interconnections with *gender, labour, migration, globalisation and security*. They can be downloaded at [www.gaatw.org](http://www.gaatw.org).

The rationale for these Working Papers is simple. The anti-trafficking framework has in many cases contributed to protecting the rights of trafficked persons. However, excessive focus on the issue of human trafficking over the last several years has resulted in less attention to related phenomena, such as experiences of migration and work. Consequently, anti-trafficking has become somewhat isolated as an issue and is now a highly specialised field.

We, like many others, recognise that tackling trafficking requires understanding the links between trafficking, migration and labour, in the broader contexts of gender, globalisation and security.<sup>2</sup>

We also recognise that life's complexities cannot be captured by one story or approach alone, whether it be anti-trafficking, women's rights, human rights, migrant rights, or labour rights. In other words, a person's life cannot be summarised as being merely that of a "trafficked person" or "migrant worker", as often happens. People show great courage, resourcefulness and resilience and negotiate complicated situations in spite of substantial barriers.

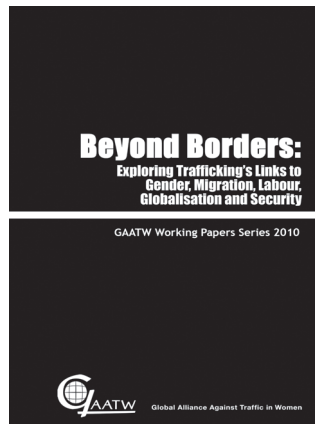
These Working Papers depict numerous examples of migrant women exercising agency and show that, because space for agency is determined by the systems a person must navigate, different frameworks (labour, migration, anti-trafficking, and so on) can be used at different moments to increase women's power over their own situations. The Working Papers outline where the anti-trafficking framework can strengthen other frameworks and vice versa, and where we as advocates can work together and establish joint strategies. The papers also identify tensions among the different frameworks and recognise the spaces for separate work.

We are taking the next step by examining these intersections in a series of informal dialogues with allies from diverse movements and audiences.

**We would love to hear your thoughts on the issues raised in the Working Papers. Email us at [gaatw@gaatw.org](mailto:gaatw@gaatw.org) or [rebecca@gaatw.org](mailto:rebecca@gaatw.org).**

The Working Papers can be downloaded at [www.gaatw.org](http://www.gaatw.org).

**BEYOND BORDERS:** Exploring Trafficking's Links to Gender, Migration, Labour, Globalisation and Security



- Exploring Links between Trafficking and Gender
- Exploring Links between Trafficking, Globalisation, and Security
- Exploring Links between Trafficking and Labour
- Exploring Links between Trafficking and Migration

### Presentations by GAATW- IS

In October, Julie Ham, IS Programme Coordinator and Rebecca Napier-Moore, IS Research & Training Officer, presented two papers at *Forcing Issues: Rethinking and Rescaling Human Trafficking in the Asia-Pacific Region*, a conference organised by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the National University of Singapore. The conference aimed to explore researchers' and NGOs' critical contributions to advancing understanding about human trafficking and the anti-human trafficking framework.

Ms Napier-Moore presented a paper on *Ethical Concerns in Feminist Participatory Research with Geographically and Socially Isolated Groups* as part of the panel on *Methodologies and Ethics in Human Trafficking Research*. Ms Ham presented a paper on *Shifting Public Anti-Trafficking Discourses in the Media* as part of the panel on *Media, Advocacy and the Popularisation of Human Trafficking*. Other panels focused on neglected forms of human trafficking, alternative approaches to 'sex' trafficking, victims outside the purview of anti-trafficking, the impact of anti-trafficking on non-trafficked migrants, and the anti-trafficking industry.

Bandana Pattanaik, GAATW IS International Coordinator, attended the *IV World Social Forum on Migrations* October 8-12 in Quito, Ecuador. The forum, with the slogan "People on the move, towards universal citizenship. Tearing down the model, building social actors," hopes to create a democratic space of debate amongst actors who are struggling to promote more humane migration policies.

The program featured 50 cultural activities for the national and international public, including photo exhibitions, theatre and dance performances, projections, the Festival Todos Somos Migrantes and the first simultaneous film festival *Cine de Fronteras* between Quito and Barcelona. The organising committee of the WSFM invited Ms Pattanaik to speak at the plenary session entitled *New Forms of Slavery, Servitude and Human Exploitation*.

GAATW-IS International Coordinator Bandana Pattanaik and Europe Programme Officer Nerea Bilbatua presented the GAATW Working Papers *Beyond Borders: Exploring trafficking's links to gender, migration, labour, globalisation and security*, at a seminar in Cairo, Egypt on October 27. The seminar, organised by the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies at the American University of Cairo, provided the opportunity to discuss the Working Papers with a wide audience. Download the Working Papers from [www.gaatw.org](http://www.gaatw.org) to learn more.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> For more information about BLinN, visit [www.blinn.nl](http://www.blinn.nl)

<sup>2</sup> For more information on linkages, download issue 23 of the Alliance News at [http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=10&Itemid=20](http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=10&Itemid=20)

# RESOURCES ON FEMINIST PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

## Continuing the Journey: Articulating Dimensions of Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR)

Reid, Colleen and Frisby, Wendy, 2007. In: Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. eds *Handbook for Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. London: Sage, pp.381-393.

Social movements such as feminism and the civil rights movement have produced new forms of activism, whereby the principles of social critique, equality and collective action have permeated through to academia, including approaches to research. Reid and Frisby look at how participatory action research, action research and feminist research aim to democratise the research process by emphasising lived experiences and deconstructing intricate and deeply embedded power relations around gender, class and race. They argue that these research approaches could be strengthened through exploring synergies and dialogue and addressing respective shortfalls.

To download go to: <http://www.whrn.ca/documents/ReidFrisbychapter.pdf>

## Feminist Discourses of (Dis)empowerment in an Action Research Project Involving Rural Women and Communication Technologies

Lennie, June, Hatcher, Caroline and Morgan, Wendy, 2003. *Action Research*, July, vol.1, pp.57-80.

Women's empowerment is the fundamental aim of feminist action research, however, the various contradictory discourses of empowerment have caused the concept of 'women's empowerment' to be contested. This article critically analyses the discourses evident in a feminist action research project in Australia involving rural women, academics and industry partners, drawing on post-structuralist theories of power/knowledge and subjectivity. The multiple, at times conflicting, positions of researchers and participants emphasises the contradictory effects of egalitarian and expert discourses. This analysis indicates how discourses of empowerment and disempowerment intersect and demonstrates some of the issues associated with feminist participatory action research.

For more information go to: <http://arj.sagepub.com/content/1/1/57.refs>

## From Voice to Knowledge: Participatory Action Research, Inclusive Debate and Feminism

Krumer-Nevo, Michael, 2009. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies*, vol.22, issue 3, June, pp.279-295.

This article explores the relationship between participatory action research and feminist research through the role of 'voice' in research and possibly replacing it with 'knowledge' and the potential for participatory action research to further social change. This concept is explored in a case study of a participatory action research project conducted in Israel, which was aimed at creating an inclusive debate between all actors: people living in poverty, policy-makers, activists, social practitioners and academics.

To download go to: <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content-db=all-content=a913028984-frm=titlelink>

## Advancing Women's Social Justice Agendas: A Feminist Action Research Framework

Reid, C.J. 2004, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, vol.3, issue 3, article 1.

Although feminist action research is a burgeoning, promising methodology for social change, it remains somewhat underdeveloped. This article seeks to articulate the foundations, principles, promises, dimensions and challenges involved in feminist action research.

To download go to: [http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3\\_3/html/reid.html](http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_3/html/reid.html)

## The Research and Action (RA) Project on Trafficking in Women in the Mekong Region (Cambodia and Vietnam)

An Analysis Report by Vatchararutai Boontinand and Mami Sato (2002), *Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women*

This report provides an overview of the process and outcome of the Research and Action Project on Trafficking in Women in the Mekong Region which was implemented

in Cambodia and Vietnam between 1997 and 2000. The project was divided into two phases: a research phase and an action phase. The project employed a Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) methodology, which from the previous research proved to be effective in giving women a voice and a chance to improve their conditions through taking action themselves.

To download go to: [http://gaatw.org/publications/RA\\_analysis\\_report.pdf](http://gaatw.org/publications/RA_analysis_report.pdf)

### **Ripples in the Water: External Evaluation of the Research and Action (RA) Project on Traffic in Women in the Mekong Region (Cambodia and Vietnam) 1997-2000**

**Siriporn Skrobanek and Nelleke van der Vleuten, 2002.**

The evaluation of the Research and Action Project on Traffic in Women in the Mekong Region, in short the RA-project, aims to jointly review the process and methodology and its findings and effects. This report intends to present lessons for all concerned, both implementing Agencies (IAs), GAATW acted as the Facilitating agency (FA) and the RNE, as well as (non-) governmental agencies that implement or plan to carry out similar projects in the region. An essential component was that these recommendations should be based on the methodology of feminist participatory action research (FPAR), as applied in a similar project in Thailand. Introducing and applying this methodology was therefore more than just a means.

To download evaluation report 1 go to:  
[http://gaatw.org/publications/Evaluation\\_RA\\_Mekong1.pdf](http://gaatw.org/publications/Evaluation_RA_Mekong1.pdf)

To download evaluation report 2 go to:  
[http://gaatw.org/publications/Evaluation\\_RA\\_Mekong2.pdf](http://gaatw.org/publications/Evaluation_RA_Mekong2.pdf)

### **Springs of Participation: Creating and Evolving Methods for Participatory Development**

**Brock, Karen and Pettit, Jethro, eds, 2008. Virginia: Practical Action Publishing.**

This book aims to demonstrate how academics and practitioners can develop effective and sustainable methods of participatory methodologies by collating the experiences and reflections of practitioners of the methodology operating in diverse contexts. Brock and Pettit use case studies in their discussion of participatory methods and issues, including constraints and limitations. Their reflections stem from the broad perspectives of independent development consultants and advisors on the one hand and researchers on the other.

For more information go to:  
[http://developmentbookshop.com/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=780](http://developmentbookshop.com/product_info.php?products_id=780)

### **Participatory Workshops: A Sourcebook of 21 Sets of Ideas and Activities**

**Chambers, Robert, 2002, London: Earthscan**

This sourcebook provides 21 sets of ideas and options for facilitators, trainers, teachers and anyone else who organises and manages workshops, courses, classes and other events for sharing and learning ideas. Topics covered include how to get started, organising seating arrangements, forming groups, how to manage large numbers, analysis and feedback, dealing with dominant personalities, evaluation and ending and common mistakes.

For more information go to: <http://www.earthscan.co.uk/?tabid=630>

### **Eldis Participation Resource Guide**

This Online Resource Centre provides free access to a collated group of materials on participation. It also features a list of participation related centres and websites and is a good starting point for learning about participatory research.

Available at: <http://www.eldis.org/go/topics/resource-guides/participation>

### **Developing and Sustaining Community-Based Participatory Research Partnerships: A Skill Building Curriculum**

**The Examining Community-Institutional Partnerships for Prevention Research Group (2006)**

This evidence-based curriculum is a tool for partnerships between communities and institutions seeking to or already using a community-based participatory research approach to improving health, but can also be applied to other areas of research.

To download go to: [www.cbprcurriculum.info](http://www.cbprcurriculum.info)

### **PowerCube: Understanding power for social change**

Powercube.net is a resource for understanding power relations in efforts to bring about social change. It includes practical and conceptual materials for responding to power relations with organisations and in broader social and political spaces.





## ALLIANCE NEWS - RESOURCES

For more information go to: <http://www.powercube.net/>

### La Investigación Acción Participativa (IAP) en los estudios de psicología política y de género (Participant Action Research and Political, Psychological and Gender Studies)

**O. Obando-Salazar, 2006, *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, vol. 7, no.4.**

This article focuses on participant action research as a useful qualitative methodology for examining social issues, including racism, gender-based violence and dislocation due to armed conflict. The three parts to this article include a historical background to the action research paradigm and evaluation criteria, a synthesis of trends in action research in the United States and Germany, including a discussion of feminist research, and a description of participant action research as a method of intervention, including features, models, aims and concepts.

To download go to: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/164>

### Participation.net: Information for Change

Participation.net is the Participation Resource Centre's online searchable database. Search the database of over 5,000 documents on participatory approaches to development in fields such as rights, governance and citizenship. The Centre particularly promotes participatory methodologies, sharing practical examples from development initiatives around the world in the form of case studies, guides and manuals.

For more information go to: <http://www.pnet.ids.ac.uk/>

### Praxis Institute for Participatory Practices

Praxis devises practices to enhance the participation of the community in all its endeavours as well as acknowledging that 'participation' is not a technical or a mechanical process that can be realised through the application of a set of universal tools and techniques, but rather a political process that requires challenging the prevailing power structure. Praxis sees the community as an agent of change, rather than an object.

For more information go to: <http://www.praxisindia.org/>

### Participatory Learning and Action

Participatory Learning and Action is an online journal on various methods and approaches to participatory learning and action. Aimed at newcomers and experienced

practitioners alike, the journal also provides a forum for those involved in participatory work to share experiences, reflections and innovations with others.

For more information go to: <http://www.planotes.org>

### Racing Research, Researching Race: Methodological Dilemmas in Critical Race Studies

**Winddance, France and Warren, Jonathan, 2000. New York: New York University Press**

This book explores how ideologies of race and racism intersect with nationality and gender in shaping the research experience. Despite critical work in race studies, the methodological dilemmas generating by intersections with nationality, gender and age have not been effectively addressed. By infusing critical race studies with more empirical work and examining how a critical race perspective may improve research methodologies, *Racing Research, Researching Race* seeks to address this shortfall.

For more information go to: [http://www.nyupress.org/books/Racing\\_Research\\_Researching\\_Race-products\\_id-2169.html](http://www.nyupress.org/books/Racing_Research_Researching_Race-products_id-2169.html)

### A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation

**VeneKlasen, Lisa and Miller, Valerie, 2007. London: Practical Action to Publishing.**

This guide is for people and organisations dealing with issues of power, politics and exclusion. It builds on the first generation of advocacy manuals, examining more closely questions of citizenship, social change, gender, accountability and constituency building.

For more information go to: <http://practicalactionpublishing.org/docs/publishing/Participation.pdf>

### Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples

**Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999. New Zealand: University of Otago Press**

This book critically examines the historical and philosophical basis of Western research and goes on to set an agenda for indigenous research which challenges dominant Western paradigms, academic traditions and methodologies that continue to position the indigenous as 'other'. In doing so, Tuhiwai Smith shows how a project is transformed when indigenous peoples become the researchers and not just the researched.

For more information go to  
<http://www.otago.ac.nz/press/booksauthors/2009/decolonizing.html>

### Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Implications for Participatory Research and Community

**Cochran, Patricia A.L. et al, 2008. *American Journal of Public Health*, vol.98, iss.1, pp.22-27.**

Despite the responsibility of researchers to cause no harm, this article explores how research of indigenous communities using inappropriate methods and practices does in fact cause harm. How researchers acquire knowledge in indigenous communities may be as critical as the social issue being examined. As such, researchers working with indigenous communities must continue trying to resolve conflict between the principles of academia and those of the community. Important considerations include appreciating the unique ways of knowing that exist in indigenous communities, as well as negotiating how to disseminate benefits of research findings when academic needs contrast with the need to protect indigenous knowledge.

To download go to: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2156045/>

### Your Rights in Research: A Guide for Women

**BC Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, the Women's Health Research Institute, the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria**

This leaflet lists the pros and cons for women thinking about whether to participate in a research study and issues to watch out for. Designed for past or current drug users, it can also be helpful for educating other groups about what participating in research entails.

To download go to:  
<http://www.bccewh.bc.ca/publications-resources/documents/YourRightsinResearchAGuideforWomen.pdf>

### Community Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH)

Founded in 1996, CCPH is a non-profit organisation promoting health through partnerships between communities and higher educational institutions. It is a network of over 2,000 communities and campuses collaborating to promote health through service-learning, community-based participatory research, broad coalitions and innovative partnership strategies.

For more information go to: <http://www.ccp.h.info/>

### A Little Room of Hope: Feminist Participatory Action Research with 'Homeless' Women

**Paradis, Emily Katherine, 2009. Ph.D. University of Toronto**

Emily Katherine Paradis's doctoral research explores the issue of women's homelessness in Toronto through Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) methodology. Throughout the research process, over 50 participants were engaged in exploring how women in Toronto experience homelessness, revealing that it is not only a material state, but rather a social process of disenfranchisement through harm, threat, control, surveillance and dehumanisation. Together with participants, Paradis explores how feminist participatory methodologies can contribute to the resistance of homeless women to the dominant social and economic order that seeks to define them.

To download go to: [https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/19158/6/Paradis\\_Emily\\_K\\_200911\\_PhD\\_thesis.pdf](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/19158/6/Paradis_Emily_K_200911_PhD_thesis.pdf)





# HUMAN RIGHTS

at home, abroad and on the way



## **Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women**

P.O. Box 36 Bangkok Noi Post Office

Bangkok 10700 Thailand

Tel: (662) 8641427 to 28 Fax: (662) 8641637

Email: [gaatw@gaatw.org](mailto:gaatw@gaatw.org)

Website: [www.gaatw.org](http://www.gaatw.org)