

SWAN FELLOWSHIP

The migrant crisis 2020 triggered by the unplanned lockdown has resulted in a humanitarian crisis but it has also brought attention to long-standing issues that affect the lives of migrant workers in the country. This crisis made us realise that voices of migrants and their rights have been largely invisible in public and political discourse and imagination. During the migrant crisis, several initiatives and platforms that raised their concerns, including webinars that featured the voices of migrant workers themselves, emerged but these efforts need to be sustained because the crisis- social and economic- is far from over. And this 8 crore strong community remains under-represented and unheard in public discourse.

In this context, the Stranded Workers Action Network is announcing a 'SWAN fellowship' which will provide an opportunity to migrant workers to document their experiences on their own terms, in their own voices and communicate this to a larger audience.

SWAN started a helpline to address the needs of stranded migrant workers since the lockdown was announced on March 24th, 2020. SWAN coordinated relief efforts such as arranging for rations, transferring money directly to the workers' accounts through crowdsourced funds, coordinating shelter for evicted migrants and assisting in travel back home from places where they were stranded. In the process, SWAN documented the distress induced by severe food insecurity and cash availability and the woefully inadequate government and judicial response to the crisis.

Objectives of the fellowship

- Promote local leadership of workers in building a community of support and advocacy
- Facilitating the creation of a migrant worker-centric platform for advocacy around migrant worker rights
- To document the experiences, opinions and realities of workers from their perspective while they continue their regular work.
- To provide basic skills training in writing, video-editing, data collection, community organizing
- To provide limited financial assistance in the form of a fellowship stipend

Structure and Nature of fellowship

- The SWAN fellowship will initially provide an opportunity for 5 workers from high migrant-sending states (Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, UP)
- The duration of the fellowship will be for 3 months to start with
- There will be two aspects to the work that they do
 - a. assist migrant workers (who have returned) in accessing government services and
 - b. produce content as "citizen journalists" on the conditions and demands of migrant workers which can be used for advocacy.

- After the identification of fellows, based on the plan that they develop and the medium they choose (writing, rapping, video, podcast) workers would be trained by experts in the field and local organisations. These workshops will be facilitated by SWAN volunteers.

Expected outputs

- Fellows would be expected to share 2 outputs every month with a focus on a specific issue or their experience. This could be in the form of a video, poem, song, piece of writing which could focus on a range of issues from problems in registering for MGNREGA work in their villages and conversations with family members about the experience of working and living away from home to video diaries of their experience at a construction site and access basic service like school for their children in the city.
- The workers will have an opportunity to meet each other online every month and learn from each other too

Selection of fellows

SWAN has been in touch with 420 groups of migrants and 36000 workers directly. Among these workers, there have been workers who have demonstrated consistent leadership, commitment and compassion to reach out to other workers. Priority will be given to workers who are vocal about their own issues and have the ability to connect it with bigger systemic issues. These workers will be nominated by SWAN volunteers and the final decision will be taken by the selection committee or SWAN steering committee based on the following criteria:

- We hope to find a mix of fellows from rural and urban areas (returned migrants and migrants still in/returned to cities)
- Should be or have been a migrant worker in the last one year
- Commits to the entire duration of SWAN fellowship (3 months)
- Would be willing to commit 8 hours every week
- Have previously participated in SWAN webinars or discussions through SWAN or led relief efforts within their group.
- Has a smartphone or knows someone who has a smartphone
- Commit to attending training workshops during the first week of the fellowship

Remuneration and budget

Each fellow will receive a stipend of Rs 4000/month for a period of 3 months.

Total budget: 5 fellows*Rs 4000*3 months= Rs 60,000

Mentorship by SWAN volunteers

These SWAN fellows will be attached with 4 SWAN volunteers with a background in media or writing who would be in constant touch with the fellows and provide the required help in brainstorming, conceptualising and delivery of final output.

Scaling up

Depending on the final output, SWAN will use its network to disperse and circulate the output among the workers and public audience too.

The fellowship could be reviewed after 3 months and SWAN will decide on continuity based on the availability of funds and resources.