

Campaign for Construction Workers

Construction industry is the second largest industry providing livelihood to workers. Construction, which was one of the worst-hit sectors during the pandemic, is also one of the key sectors in which India's migrant workforce find employment. The NSSO (2016-17) puts the number of construction workers in the country at **over 74 million**. This is because due to current trend of contracts and job works in the construction work in the construction industry, the women workers cannot stand in the market individually.

The vast majority of women employed at present in the construction sector work as unskilled laborers in manually excavating earthworks, carrying head-loads of construction materials, etc. The wages in these trades are very low though the work is very hard. The women mostly belong to the very poor urban or rural households and in many cases are also migratory workers. Construction industry is one of the major industries who faced changes in the recent years due to globalization which gravely shifted the work and income opportunities especially of women construction workers. **According to one survey done by SEWA , globalization would lead to an annual reduction in employment of 15 lakhs workers in this sector, mainly because most of them are unskilled workers, especially women construction workers, 98 per cent of whom are unskilled.** In addition, these women workers have to contend with lack of proper safety measures and health facilities at the worksites, which often leads to accidents, some of them fatal. Survey also highlighted the fact that while the wages went down, the number of days when they got employment also went down to merely 10-12 in a month. This is because due to current trend of contracts and job works in the construction work in the construction industry, the women workers cannot stand in the market individually.

The availability of work also differs in relation to gender in that while nine per cent of the males get more than 20 days of work per month, only 3 per cent of the female workers do so. The end result is that do not get sufficient work to sustain themselves and their families and they get meagre wages. This is mainly because there is a dire need to organize women workers, build up their collective strength and improve their skills and link them with safe, secure and decent livelihood. This is due current trend of contracts and job works in the construction work in the construction industry, the women workers cannot stand in the market individually.

SEWA's organising efforts brought many benefits to the workers. SEWA pioneered in enactment and implementation of the building and other Construction Workers Acts in India. At the State level, Government in participatory process with SEWA framed the state rules. In many states, SEWA initiated the constitution of Building and other Construction Workers Welfare Board and advocated successfully for its smooth function

System Gaps:

Despite of the efforts SEWA put in Construction do face problems in accessing decent work and social security because of System Gaps that are as follows

1. Women construction workers of the informal sector are not mobilized and do not have collective strength.
2. Construction being a male dominated industry, the women have now and again had to prove them. Women workers lack capacity for it.

3. Women construction workers lack skills and requisite tools and equipment necessary for the trade.
4. According to the changing method of work, the construction work is given on contracts. The women construction workers lack skills to fill construction tenders (calculate measurement and make estimation of material and days required) managerial and supervisory skills to undertake contracts. Also, they do not have specialized groups of skilled workers to take up the contract.
5. Women workers are paid less wages compared to male counter parts for the same work.
6. Women workers face sexual harassment at the work place
7. Children accompany the mothers at work and their education suffers.
8. Women construction workers also face difficulties in getting registered with the building and other Construction Workers Welfare Board and accessing social security benefits
 - There is a provision that the worker to register in the board needs to produce a certificate signed by the employer that she/he has worked at a construction industry for 90 days in the prior year. Now according to the custom, the worker stands on construction cross roads in the cities and the contractors /employers hire them. The employers/contractors to avoid the liability under labour act refuse to give workers the certificate.
 - The registration and accessing the social security are online which makes it difficult for the semiliterate and illiterate workers. Furthermore, the workers do not have smart phone and computers.
 - The workers lack requisite documents like identification and domicile cards needed for registration.
 - Many times, the Officials refuses a registration and social security of the women construction worker seeing that they are well groomed. They infer that she is not doing the work simply because she has clean cut nails and she is wearing good clothes.
 - The State Government sees lot of cess amount (tax 1% of the Building cost in India is to be paid in the State Building and other Construction Board) in the State Building and other Construction workers welfare board and utilize the funds to other Scheme/uses then that of construction workers. It serves infringes the rights of poor and vulnerable workers

Campaign

Short term Campaigns

1. Organising and developing Collective strength
2. Developing skills of the Construction Workers
3. Linking women workers to Decent livelihood through strengthening their cooperatives through formation of skilled groups of workers, working capital
4. Forming the tools library to get access to requisite tools and equipment on rent.

Long term Campaigns

5. Advocate for equal and adequate wages at the work place with stakeholders
6. Advocate for better functioning of Building and other construction workers' welfare board

7. Creating Awareness regarding registration and Welfare benefits of the workers and hand holding them in the whole process of online registration and social security and further helping them to get requisite documents.
8. Representation of women construction workers and their unions in National /State Building and other Construction Workers Welfare board.