

Campaign on social security

We as a central trade union of women workers of unorganised sector having an experience of 49 years constantly ponder on the ways through which the workers can come out of the pandemic. For us Work Security, Social Security (at least health care, child care and Insurance) and Food Security are the most important.

In the current pandemic situation it clearly came out how important the social protection is for the informal sector. According to one survey done by us in the pandemic times only 33 % of the workers got benefit to the Govt cash transfer and free ration. 67% were without any social protection benefit and their condition became precarious and incurred huge amount of debts.

We, at SEWA strongly believe that to improve the quality of life of all the workers and to reduce poverty all the workers should have access to the safety nets /social protection at the door step. The workers should receive all the three basic necessities food, cloth and shelter and three basic services health, education and banking together and not one by one.

SEWA has been struggling from the inception for the universal social protection for the informal workers. As a result, "The Unorganised Workers Social Security Act, 2008" was enacted. But it could not be implemented well as both the State as well as Central Govt. did not put adequate funds in the welfare boards. Furthermore, most of the states have formed the welfare boards but most of them are not active because funds were not allocated to the Boards.

The Govt. is currently repealing the Welfare Acts and bringing in the Code on Social Security.

System Gaps

- Social protection to the vulnerable workers requires the long-term financial commitment. Sadly, the Central and State Governments refrain from allocating funds in the social security.
- The Code on the Social Security and Rules also does not contain any financial commitment, it only suggests that schemes shall be funded from Government, employers, beneficiaries, corporate social responsibility or any other sources. We suggest that a provision should be made regarding budgetary allocation for social security schemes for the unorganised sector every year by the State and Central Government should be provided for in the state rules
- Secondly many State Governments have already stopped the existing welfare boards for the unorganised sector and the code is yet not implemented. These welfare boards have started after much struggle. This has seriously jeopardised the social protection of these workers. These welfare boards should be restarted and funds should be allotted for functioning.
- In the informal economy it is difficult to define the employer-employee relationship. The workers are also working under the multiple employers like the "Mathadi" headloaders working in the whole sale market. In Our experience it is that the Cess collection is the best method.
- Sharing the example of the beedi cess collection. The thousands of Beedi workers today cannot avail the benefits of the Beedi Welfare schemes though Beedi welfare schemes are the

best in our country and has gone long way in reducing the child labour. The reason being the Govt repealed the “Beedi Welfare Cess Act” with advent of GST without making alternative arrangements for registration, renewals and access to social security. The scholarship for the beedi workers children earlier lacs of scholarship were disbursed in the states have now been reduced to few thousands.

- The Govt has no database of the workers and hence the social security cannot reach them
- The social security us scheme based and the workers are not aware of the schemes
- Currently, in the current social security schemes and as per the Code of Social Security the registration, renewals and updating of the workers is to be done electronically. We welcome Digitalization. But many of the areas where the unorganized sector live has poor internet connectivity and large number of unorganized sector workers are illiterate or semiliterate, they will find it difficult to register electronically further many of the unorganized sector workers do not own smart phones or computers. Moreover, many a times the workers change their mobile number due to cheaper sim card and plan and they receive OTP on their registered mobile number which they do not have with them. Hence the workers do not receive social security benefit. We have experienced the same thing in The Building and other Construction Workers Welfare Cess Act. We have therefore suggested that along with electronic registration, manual/physical registration should be permitted. We further suggested that member-based organisation like us should work as workers facilitation centre as we know where our workers are.

Campaigns-

Long term

1. Inclusion of all the informal workers in the Social Security Schemes and subsequently Code on Social Security.
2. Ensuring Final commitment on the part of Govt in Social Protection of the informal workers.
3. Framing of the social security schemes as per the needs/ characteristics of informal workers and their trades
4. Social dialogues with Govt. for Developing Robust social protection delivery system in participatory process with the member based organisation of the informal workers like us .
5. Allowing physical/manual registration and filling of the social security scheme along with digitalization

Short term

1. Mobilizing and creating informal database
2. Creating awareness regarding social security schemes
3. Hand holding the workers for registration and accessing the social security schemes and begetting requisite documents for registration.
4. Supporting the workers in case of grievance in getting social security scheme