SKILLS, EMPLOYABILITY, AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: WOMEN IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Marty Chen
Harvard University
WIEGO Network
REMARKS

• **Context and Challenge**
  – construction industry
  – women in construction

• **Case Study**
  – construction industry in India
  – training of women in construction industry/SEWA

• **Lessons**
CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY: GLOBAL SCENARIO

• **Trends**
  – urbanization
  – mechanization
  – informalization
  – liberalization
  – WTO global tendering requirements

• **Impact**
  – reduction in overall employment
  – decreased demand for unskilled labor
  – increased demand for skilled labor
  – decreased skills training by employers
WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

- **Worldwide**
  - segmentation of construction labour market by sex → women concentrated in low-skilled and low-paid jobs
  - skepticism about ability of women to undertake skilled construction work

- **Regional differences** (*ILO Yearbook of Statistics*, various years)
  - % of all women paid workers who are in construction
    - Africa: 5.5%
    - Latin America: 5.5%
    - Western Europe: 7.5%
    - North America: 11.7%
    - Asia: 14.6%
  - % of all construction workers who are women
    - Africa: NA
    - Latin America: 0.5%
    - Western Europe: 1 %
    - North America: 2 %
    - Asia: 7.5%
CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY: INDIA

- **Construction industry**
  - second largest and fast growing sector
  - TNCs competing in construction industry since mid-1990s:
    - large public-sector infrastructure projects
    - private sector industrial projects

- **Construction labor force**
  - estimated at 30 million: of which about half are women
  - reduction of demand for unskilled labor since mid-1990s
  - one estimate of jobs lost: 1.5 million per year

*Source: Jhabvala and Kanbur 2002*
WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION: INDIA

• half (51%) of total construction labor force

• almost exclusively unskilled, casual, manual laborers:
  – head-loaders: carrying bricks, cement, sand, and water
  – other unskilled jobs: digging earth, mixing cement, breaking stones

• rarely in male-dominated skilled trades: carpentry, masonry, plumbing, electrical wiring

Source: Jhabvala and Kanbur 2002
CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY: AHMEDABAD, INDIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% skilled workers</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>workers at two largest recruitment corners</td>
<td>200 per day</td>
<td>500-1,000 per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>days of work – women</td>
<td>16 per month</td>
<td>11 per month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wages - skilled workers</td>
<td></td>
<td>30-50 % increase in real terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wages – unskilled workers</td>
<td></td>
<td>same or slight decrease in real terms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SEWA Academy 2000 and 2003
ORGANIZING WOMEN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS: SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN’S ASSOCIATION (SEWA)

- identification cards

- state-level implementation of Construction Workers Protection and Welfare Act (1996)

- accident insurance scheme

- child care creches at construction sites

- skills training and job placement
KARMIKA SCHOOL
FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKERS: SEWA

Goal: To provide skills training for various trades in the construction industry to all workers with a focus on women workers

Means:
– providing training in:
  ▪ basic functional literacy
  ▪ relevant skills: using customized audio-visual training modules and materials
– providing testing and certification of skilled construction workers
– offering refresher courses and distant learning courses
– collaborating with other vocational training centers:
  ▪ providing technical input and supervision
  ▪ monitoring and facilitating training courses
KARMIKA SCHOOL
FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKERS:
SEWA

• **3-month training modules:** masonry, painting, plastering, plumbing, electrical wiring, carpentry, welding, mechanics, tiling, operating equipment (rollers, excavators)

• **key partnerships:**
  – **training and job placement:** private construction firms
    e.g. Larsen and Tubro – hiring of SEWA trainees + joint training
  – **testing and certification:** Construction Industry Development Council
  – **distance learning courses:** Indira Gandhi National Open University
  – **financial support and capacity building:** Care India
KARMIKA SCHOOL
FOR CONSTRUCTION WORKERS:
SEWA

• **numbers trained**: 5,000 people trained in 3 years (2003-2006)

• **impact of training**: survey of 193 trained women
  – **more working days**: 14%
  – **higher daily incomes**: by 10-50 rupees per day
  – **increased skills**: able to do -
    • new type of work (45%)
    • better quality/more efficient work (18%)
    • plastering and masonry (25%)
  – **skilled jobs**: hired as masons (20%) and masonry assistants (30%)

*Source: SEWA Mahila Housing Trust 2006*
FUTURE PLANS:
SEWA

- **advanced training** for women: operating heavy equipment + surveying + management

- **policy support:**
  - **targeted training** for women, especially illiterate women
  - **stipends** to women trainees
  - **financial and technical support** to vocational training schemes that target women
  - **preferential allocation** of public housing + infrastructure projects to women’s organizations (e.g. Kerala state)
  - **preferential placements** of certified skilled women workers in public housing + infrastructure projects
  - **tax exemptions** to construction companies that hire certified skilled women workers
LESSONS

• skills training needs to be **targeted** to:
  – those already employed + those entering labor market
  – those who have little or no formal education
  – women in these groups + women in non-traditional skill areas
• **targeted training** requires:
  – inclusive eligibility requirements
  – preferential recruitment
  – special training modules/materials
• skills training needs to be **sector-specific + future-oriented**
  – new technologies + skills within existing trades
  – new trades and opportunities
  skills training needs to accompanied by **job placement**
• **comprehensive and inclusive** skills training + job placement requires:
  – **innovative institutional arrangements**: public-private sector-civil society partnerships
  – **supportive policies and regulations**