



**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

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

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 opportunitiesskills training needs to be 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**