



A PROJECT FUNDED
BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

Nirmanshree

Empowering Women through Social Enterprise



Habitat
for Humanity®
India

WINGS OF EMPOWERMENT

A Project Nirmanshree Newsletter

Building Dreams:
Unveiling Community Transformations





FROM THE NATIONAL DIRECTOR'S DESK



Dear friends,

Housing is unequivocally a fundamental right, a cornerstone essential for the well-being and dignity of individuals. Recognised globally, this right encompasses not merely the provision of shelter but extends to the assurance of a safe, secure, and adequate living environment. Stable housing provides a sense of security, allowing individuals to invest in their futures, pursue education, and build strong, interconnected networks. All individuals have an inherent right to live a life where they are flourishing. Intrinsic to this notion is the right to safe housing.

At Habitat for Humanity India, we are dedicated to forging partnerships with communities worldwide to develop comprehensive, sustainable, and inclusive

housing strategies that foster enduring economic and social development. Project Nirmanshree, funded by the European Union, exemplifies this commitment, seeking to establish a partnership with women in Maharashtra and Odisha to empower them in building stable lives. Envisioned as a catalyst for a gender-just society, the project has actively engaged with participants and stakeholders, providing training to over 3,000 women in Maharashtra's Beed and Osmanabad districts, as well as Odisha's Dhenkanal and Jajpur, through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Entrepreneurship Development Programme. This initiative has resulted in the establishment of around 50 social enterprises, either as independent businesses or collectives.

The foundation laid by Project Nirmanshree stands on the relentless efforts of our teams in Maharashtra and Odisha. Operating within various constraints, they've shown unwavering dedication, embracing innovative methods to ensure the project profoundly impacts women's lives. Our immense gratitude extends to the European Union for turning this project into reality and their unwavering support. Project Nirmanshree strives to empower women at the grassroots, offering them the strength, stability, and self-reliance essential for building a brighter future for themselves, their families, and their communities.

In partnership,

James Samuel
National Director (Interim)
Habitat for Humanity India

PROJECT IN BRIEF

Habitat for Humanity India, in partnership with the European Union, is implementing Project Nirmanshree in Maharashtra's Beed and Osmanabad districts, and Dhenkanal and Jajpur districts in Odisha.

The project aims to facilitate the entry of a well-trained women workforce into an otherwise male-dominated construction sector. This opens the door to better livelihood opportunities for women and allows for the gradual transformation of the housing eco-system. Habitat India is bringing women together by collaborating with women federations and self-help groups.

Project Nirmanshree set out with the aim to provide technical and entrepreneurial skills to 3,000 women and establish around 50 social enterprises.

The term 'Nirmanshree' is an amalgamation of two words. 'Nirman' comes from Hindi and means 'construction', while 'Shree' finds its roots in Sanskrit and represents the 'female gender'. When brought together, 'Nirmanshree' means 'building women'.

Participants in the project have received training and support in the following areas:

Construction Skill Building: 3,007 women participants have undergone Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) training, which is recognised by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) under the Government of India. Out of the 3,007 participants, around 2,956 women have received their pass certificates issued by the NSDC.

Entrepreneurship Development Programme: Habitat India has also trained

3,256 women in technical and entrepreneurial skills under Project Nirmanshree.

Backward and Forward Linkages through government schemes: Participants are also made aware of the various schemes and subsidies established by the government and how they can explore different linkages of financial support. They are also given the handholding support needed to apply and access these schemes, an example of which is the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP).



WOMEN'S COLLECTIVES: APPROACH

Introduction

One of the key components of Project Nirmanshree is to formulate and establish four district-level women's collectives for strengthening women's capacities in advocating for their involvement in the construction sector. A women's collective is a group of women who meet regularly to work towards the socio-economic empowerment of women. A district-level collective would represent all the women members of that respective district with the following objectives:

- **Strengthening women's capacities in advocating for the involvement of women in the construction sector.**
- **Increasing the bargaining power of women to employers.**
- **Persuade and motivate its members to access various social entitlement schemes.**
- **Increase women's access to resources such as credit, training, public services, etc., on an equal basis with men.**
- **Involvement of women in decision-making at the grassroots level.**



Structure of Women's Collectives

**DISTRICT-LEVEL COLLECTIVE
WITH 9 TO 11 WOMEN
REPRESENTATIVES.**



**BLOCK-LEVEL COLLECTIVES
WITH 2 TO 3 SELECTED
WOMEN FROM THE GPLC.**



**GP-LEVEL COLLECTIVES (GPLC)
WITH 5 TO 6 SELECTED WOMEN
FROM THE GP.**



WOMEN CONSTRUCTION WORKERS.

Advocacy Workshop in Bhubaneswar



A state-level workshop on 'Women in the Construction Sector' was organised in collaboration with the Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Result-based Management and Social Innovation under the Gopabandhu Academy of Administration (GAA) at Bhubaneswar in Odisha on 28th June 2023. The workshop included the launch of a study that provided policy recommendations that would benefit women in the construction sector. The objective of the study was to map the problems faced by women construction workers,





identify the gaps that lead to gender discrimination and recommend measures to the government to bridge those gaps.

The purpose of the workshop was to disseminate the study findings, and explore and collate the perspectives of various stakeholders in the sector towards initiating dialogue on reviewing the policies and guidelines for women construction workers.

The workshop was attended by senior bureaucrats, including Ms. Usha Padhee, IAS, Principal Secretary, Skill Development and Technical Education Department; Mr. Santhanagopalan R., IAS, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Labour and





Employee State Insurance Department; Dr N. Thirumala Naik, IAS, Labour Commissioner, Odisha; and Mr. Manish Agarwal, IAS, Additional Director-General of Gopabandhu Academy of Administration. Officials from the Odisha government, along with members of the Nirmanshree Women's Collectives, were also present.



Undertaken as part of Habitat India's Project Nirmanshree, the objective of the study was to map the problems faced by women construction workers, identify the gaps that led to gender discrimination, and recommend measures to the government to bridge those gaps. One of the key recommendations of the policy study was the formation of women's collectives on the lines of self-help groups, which would comprise women construction workers. This could have the potential to enhance the socio-economic



conditions of women. Other recommendations included the need for the representation of women masons in government construction work, maternity benefits, access to anganwadi centres near work sites for the children of women construction workers,

sanitation facilities, workplace safety, training, skilling, and capacity-building measures.

"This workshop is a reminder that by addressing the unique challenges faced by women construction workers, we can create an inclusive and equitable society, where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to nation-building," said a senior bureaucrat from the Government of Odisha who attended the workshop.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Interview with Nirmanshree staff

In this edition of our newsletter, we engage in a conversation with Balasaheb Suvarnakar, the State Programme Manager for Project Nirmanshree in Maharashtra, to gain insights into his perspective on the impactful work undertaken at Beed and Osmanabad.



1. Tell us about your role in Project Nirmanshree.

I work as a State Programme Manager for Project Nirmanshree in Maharashtra. I joined Habitat India as a District Coordinator for the project on 7th July 2021. I was eventually promoted to State Programme Manager. When I first joined the project, we were training women to obtain RPL certification and access government schemes.

2. What motivated you to join Project Nirmanshree and Habitat for Humanity India?

I am from Maharashtra and Project Nirmanshree happened to be located in the areas where I was raised. I have also worked with a lot of communities. The work done under Project Nirmanshree was very different from the work I had done till now. I haven't seen such interventions focused on women in the construction sector. I knew of the trouble and discrimination women construction workers face. I thought that this was good work being done for women construction workers and that became one of the reasons I decided to join the project.

3. You have worked with the project for a while now. Do you have any memorable experiences or an incident you would like to share about your time working on the field?

There is a village called Sukhli at Khed in Beed district. There are many women there who work in the construction

sector as labourers. They work very hard to make ends meet. We helped them register with the Maharashtra Building and Other Construction Worker's Welfare Board (BOCW). This helped them obtain the BOCW kits and registration cards given by the government. We also helped their children obtain scholarships provided by the government under the scheme. They were grateful with the work Habitat India was doing with their community. And they did their part in spreading the word about the work we were doing. Now, when we go to that area, many women have already heard about Project Nirmanshree and they have a positive response to the work that we do. As a part of the BOCW scheme, lunch is provided to the women construction workers during their work hours.

4. What are some of the challenges you have faced while working for Project Nirmanshree?

In the beginning, our team had a hard time trying to

convince the women to speak to us. Eventually, they started joining us. And when the community saw the work that we were doing, they also started convincing the women in their families to join us. Women started taking the lead and they supported our team in motivating others to join us. When we found it difficult to breakthrough into a community, we reached out to women who had leadership qualities for their help. Many have urged us to extend the duration of the project to help them stand steadily on their own feet. There are women who want to directly work with contractors at the village level. They now realise that they too can become assistant masons or masons. They come to us when they do not receive work. We are also in touch with contractors over WhatsApp groups and talk to them directly in case the women face any difficulties.

5. Have your views on women empowerment changed after you started working with Project Nirmanshree?

Yes. The goal of Project Nirmanshree is women empowerment. We do our work with the objective of envisioning a gender-just society. We faced problems



in the beginning. We did not know how to approach contractors, how to work on constructions sites, and how to communicate our message with the community. Finally, it was the women who came to our rescue. Personally, I have learnt a lot from the women I have worked with. They do all they can to better their own lives and the lives of their families. I admire their dedication to work towards the goals envisioned under Project Nirmanshree. They see a better life for themselves with the guidance that we are providing.

6. Would you like to keep working for women empowerment within the social sector even after the completion of Project Nirmanshree?

Yes. At the end of the day, if

we are to bring changes within communities, we must work in tandem with women. This is not something that can be done in a year or two. We have to keep working towards a gender-just society. Women are not truly free yet. One must work at sensitising families and communities. Women should be at the forefront of this fight towards equality.

7. Do you have any recommendations going ahead?

Going forward, if we focus on the women's collectives, we will be able to reach more women. It is important that we try to scale up the work done under Project Nirmanshree. When we collaborate with the collectives and its members at the district level, our work will be more effective.



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