



Nirmanshree
Empowering Women through Social Enterprise



WINGS OF EMPOWERMENT

A Project Nirmanshree Newsletter

Transforming Communities





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.

Project Nirmanshree is aimed at empowering marginalised women in Odisha and Maharashtra by providing them with economic and social opportunities by primarily improving their access to housing-related government services, providing construction and entrepreneurial training, and the identification of policy gaps with key stakeholders for women in construction.

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 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'.

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).





Improving the habitat of 2,00,000 women: An update

Project Nirmanshree aims to enhance the living conditions of 2,00,000 families in Odisha and Maharashtra. The project envisions empowering 2,00,000 women to upgrade their living environments, benefiting not just themselves but their entire households. Habitat India has employed its cascade model to engage women by providing construction training to 3,007 women who have undergone the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programme. This model utilises these trained women to collaborate with 20,000 self-help groups (SHGs), ultimately assisting 2,00,000 women in improving their habitats by orienting them on the basics of construction and government funding schemes. The project operates under the assumption that each woman represents one household.

The orientations offered serve as a starting point for women to delve into more advanced construction-related learning and gain access to government funding schemes.

As on 30th September 2023, 1,09,108 women have been given an orientation by RPL-

trained women, with the help of women's self-help groups (SHGs), in Odisha's Dhenkanal and Jajpur districts. This surpasses the initial target of reaching out to 1,00,000

women in the state.

In Maharashtra, 61,370 women have been reached out to at different blocks in Beed and Osmanabad districts.



POLICY BRIEF

Policy Brief: National Advocacy Workshop

Ensuring women's participation in the construction sector is a complex and multi-faceted challenge that involves addressing gender-based discrimination, improving working conditions, and promoting equal opportunities in the workplace. While the construction sector in India remains male-dominated, a substantial number of women are actively engaged in the industry.

Keeping this in mind, Habitat India has undertaken a research study based on evidence in the districts of Beed and Osmanabad in Maharashtra, as well as Dhenkanal and Jajpur in Odisha. The purpose of this study is to assess the socio-economic vulnerabilities faced by women in the construction sector. The study involves compiling and analysing existing schemes, programmes, and policies for unorganised women workers, incorporating feedback and recommendations from diverse stakeholders. The ultimate goal is to initiate a dialogue for potential policy and programme interventions.

A national level workshop was

organised on 26th September 2023 in New Delhi, by Habitat India, with an objective of releasing the draft policy paper that was compiled based on the research study. This workshop helped to disseminate the findings of the evidence-based study with various stakeholders to continue a dialogue on re-examining the policies, guidelines, and programmes for women construction workers. The purpose of the workshop was to share evolving perspectives, based on which various stakeholders in the sector could explore, collate, and analyse issues of concern in the sector. Mr. Rahul Kapoor, Joint Secretary and Mission Director, Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-

National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) and PM Street Vendor's Atmanirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi), Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India; Dr Shashank Grahacharjya, Director, Centre for Good Governance, Odisha, (CGGO), Gopabandhu Academy of Administration, Bhubaneswar; and Dr Arundhati Patil, Professor, Manavlok College of Social Work, Ambajogai, Maharashtra, were some of the dignitaries who graced the workshop and contributed to the discussion. Others who participated at the workshop included designated officials from relevant organisations, NGOs, and representatives from Habitat India.







Insights from the Workshop:

Dr Grahacharjya set the tone by highlighting the need for a multipronged approach to dismantle gender disparities. He spotlighted the Government of Odisha's commendable initiatives, such as Mukhya Mantri Karma Tatpar Abhiyan (MUKTA) for urban employment and expanded social security schemes benefiting women construction workers. The state's efforts cover diverse aspects, including health coverage, safety for migrant workers, and support for millet cultivation, exemplifying a holistic approach to empower the workforce.

In his keynote address, Mr. Kapoor emphasised the pivotal role of women in the construction workforce, highlighting the need for

comprehensive training programmes. His address underscored the urgency of addressing skill gaps to empower women for higher-skilled positions, contributing significantly to the industry's growth.

The workshop featured enlightening technical sessions, each tackling a crucial facet. The first session dissected deeply ingrained gender stereotypes, biases, and the persistent gender pay gap. This discussion aimed to illuminate the path toward dismantling systemic inequalities through policy reforms and a cultural shift within the industry.

The second session explored skilling and opportunities for women in the construction

sector. Panellists Major Vivek Singh (Retd), Ms. Minakshi Goyal, and Ms. Diksha Lath navigated discussions around tailored training programmes, mentorship initiatives, and policy frameworks, all designed to empower women and break down barriers in traditionally male-dominated roles.

Dr Spandita Kar, Gender, Policy and Research Specialist, Habitat India, presented the draft policy paper, outlining findings from evidence-based research in Odisha and Maharashtra. The paper encapsulated recommendations from consultations with diverse stakeholders, providing a comprehensive roadmap for policy customisation to benefit women construction workers.

Fostering Inclusivity and Equality:

The workshop served as a catalyst for collaborative efforts, acknowledging that gender equality is not just an objective but a fundamental human right. It underscored the imperative of ensuring women's equal access to opportunities, fair wages, safe

working conditions, and social protection.

In conclusion, the workshop emphasised the creation of a more inclusive and equitable society, where every individual, regardless of gender, has the opportunity to thrive

and contribute meaningfully to the nation. The journey toward empowering women in the construction sector continues, guided by collective efforts, policy advocacy, and a commitment to fostering lasting change.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD



In this edition of our newsletter, we engage in a conversation with Prabodha Moharana, the State Programme Manager for Project Nirmanshree in Odisha, to gain insights into his perspective on the impactful work undertaken at Dhenkanal and Jajpur.

Tell us about your role in Project Nirmanshree.

As the State Programme Manager, my initial responsibilities included overseeing the team, identifying clusters, and ensuring effective programme implementation in Odisha. It is my duty to assess the growth of the social enterprises we support, ensuring they receive proper guidance and evaluating the impact of our RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) training.

Additionally, I collaborate with government agencies and other promotional entities to facilitate convergence between programmes and agencies.

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

This project is particularly challenging as there has been minimal focus on women in the construction sector. On a personal level, I am committed to addressing this gap and striving to integrate women in the construction sector into formal training programmes. My aim is to ensure they fully benefit from the initiatives offered by government, non-government, and para-government agencies.

Do you have any memorable experiences to share about

your time working on the field?

Upon initiating mobilisation and conducting needs assessment studies at the ground level, we encountered reluctance from women to share their information. Mobility was also a significant challenge for them, preventing them from moving to other locations. Moreover, there was a prevailing disbelief among the women within the construction sector regarding the availability of formal training opportunities. To address these barriers, we conducted awareness programmes, created videos, posters, and brochures. Gradually, as a result of our efforts, women started approaching us, overcoming their initial hesitation, and willingly enrolled themselves to receive training based on our appeal. This marked a significant and impactful development in our project.

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

The primary challenge we faced was engaging with the target groups, predominantly comprised of labour groups and female construction workers. Supporting them required multiple interactions, and due to their daytime work

schedules, we had to find ways to schedule our meetings with them. Additionally, the geographical distance of these communities presented a logistical challenge. Moreover, our project coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which imposed restrictions on movement and hindered regular interactions with the women and the communities. This situation significantly impacted the progress of our project, but we kept marching forward despite all the challenges.

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

Certainly, my perspective has evolved. Initially, I held the belief that women were primarily suited for less physically demanding jobs. However, as we progressed through this project, we observed women actively engaged in more strenuous tasks within the construction sector, such as moving bricks and mixing sand — activities that demand physical labour. This experience has completely altered my previous perception, as I now recognise the capability of women to excel in physically demanding roles, particularly within the construction sector.

Would you like to keep working for women empowerment within the social sector?

As of now, we have successfully trained around 3,007 women in Orissa and Maharashtra. Our efforts have led to the promotion of 50 social enterprises in both the states. On a personal level, I would like to collaborate and engage with various entities, including government agencies and other community-based organisations, to advocate for the replication and scaling up of the successful initiatives implemented in this project to benefit other regions as well.

Do you have any recommendations going ahead?

In Odisha, we have facilitated the establishment of 25 social enterprises. However, these enterprises do require further support and guidance to ensure their sustained growth and expansion. It is essential to secure financial benefits by establishing linkages with other agencies. This includes crucial support for market linkages, encompassing digital marketing, advertising, and other connections both forward and backward in the supply chain. Additionally, there is a requirement for heightened awareness and

knowledge on digitisation. There should also be collaboration and convergence with parallel agencies to enhance programme expansion. Moving forward, these two major initiatives should be prioritised and advanced.

How does women empowerment help communities build stronger communities?

Even a decade ago, women refrained from relying on public transportation and were hesitant to engage in public discussions or attend meetings. In present times, however, women have become more assertive, actively seeking to have their voices heard. They are now advocating for their rights. Furthermore, women are actively pursuing additional income opportunities to secure both financial and social benefits for their families. They play an equal role in contributing to the development of their families. Although there are still some milestones to achieve, the overall situation for women has significantly improved, surpassing the conditions of the past. This illustrates the capacity of women's empowerment to foster more resilient and robust communities.



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