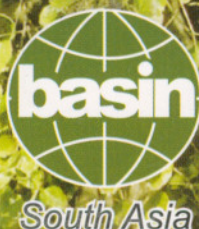


CSD -11



# Home Makers Turn Into Bread-Winners

An experience from Orissa

## *Summary*

After the 2000 super-cyclone in Orissa, massive reconstruction programmes were undertaken by several agencies. One of the challenges identified by most of them was unavailability of technically trained skilled workers, particularly masons. Appreciating this need, Orissa Development Technocrats' Forum (ODTF) trained unskilled labourers (including women) as masons, first in slums of Bhubaneswar and then in several districts across Orissa. The training included some of the poorest women without compromising on technical standards essential for such an intervention. The results have been impressive with as many as 380 trained women labourers along with a team of master masons. This has raised the overall quality of environmentally and technically sound construction technology and knowledge with special focus on construction of individual household latrines. The success of this initiative has led to further training sponsored by the Government of Orissa.





## ***Background***

---

Women in southern and western Orissa work as labourers for construction of roads and buildings. Even in coastal Orissa, women agricultural labourers work seasonally on construction sites.

Responding to the acute need for highly skilled construction workers that emerged after the super-cyclone in 2000, the Orissa Development Technocrats Forum (ODTF) saw tremendous possibility in developing the skills of semi skilled women labourers as highly skilled construction workers. ODTF believes that gender plays a vital role in habitat issues and women must be engaged in various stages of habitat development.

## ***Objectives and Strategies***

---

The focus of ODTF has been on capacity building of masons to facilitate a process where local people not only evolve from a "mazdoor" (labourer) status to that of a mason but also become self-reliant entrepreneurs in the construction industry. Having realized that a mason is a catalyst for technology transfer in the Indian rural housing scenario, capacity building of masons and construction labourers became the most important intervention of the programme.

Construction of foundation by women construction labourers during a training programme conducted in a Building Centre, Bhubaneswar



## ***Stakeholders and Roles***

---

- The primary stakeholders were 80 women construction labourers residing in the slums of Bhubaneswar who organized themselves into 4 Self Help Groups. These women construction labourers then underwent skill upgradation and training programme.
- Subsequently, witnessing the successful training of 225 women masons in 6 districts, the Directorate of Social Welfare, Government of Orissa further supported the training of additional 300 construction labourers across 8 districts of Orissa, i.e., Malkangiri, Boudh, Dhenkanal, Nuapada, Bhadrak, Puri, Gajapati and Deogarh. The training of 24 construction labourers have already being completed in Malkangiri.



Training of women in Dhenkanal district on concrete block making and sanitary mart



## *The Process*

As a first step, masons with negligible skills were imparted training to build a disaster-resistant and eco-friendly house using cost-effective technologies. Casual/ seasonal workers were selected and trained in masonry works. In March-April 2005, ODTF technically supported a training programme for skill-upgradation of 80 women construction labourers. They were organised into 4 Self Help Groups by ODTF. The training was started on the eve of International Women's Day supported by the Women and Child Development Department, Government of Orissa. The exercise was conducted in 2 batches - each batch consisting of 40 women were intensely trained in a month long training programme. During the process, ODTF short-listed 10 trainers, who could further be utilized to train several other construction labourers in different districts of Orissa. They are now successfully working as masons associated with different NGOs across the State.



Women at Saintal being trained in rat-trap bond walling systems

## *Impact*

- Many construction labourers and semi-skilled masons have graduated into skilled masons over time under constant guidance from the District Trainers.
- In many cases, women SHGs have set up construction related micro-enterprises for example, local brick production and sanitation products.
- Enhanced wages through skill upgradation.
- Employment of trained workers in construction sector is much more regular now. These workers are now employed for far greater number of days.
- The trained women have earned respect and self-confidence in a traditionally male dominated sector. This has contributed to increased physical mobility.
- Initial batch of trained women have further trained other women labourers.

### **Confident Sukhalata**

Sukhalata was part of the first group of labourers chosen from slums of Bhubaneswar for training in masonry. Now Sukhalata functions as a Master Trainer.

Sukhalata trained herself in the production of sanitary mart items like pans, well rings, trap, etc. This has not only helped to increase her income, but also helped her neighbours and the community to have access to low cost toilets, improving the health and hygiene conditions in her slum.

With her little savings, she now plans to construct her own house using cost-effective technologies she has learnt.



Sukhalata training other women trainees on basic plan forms and good construction practices



## Potential

The upgradation of skill of women construction labourers through training, had a ripple effect. The trainees could be employed/ engaged as trainers for other women of their category in various districts of Orissa. Acquisition of basic skill provided them scope for further trainings so as to further upgrade their skills in toilet construction, water and sanitation and entrepreneurship development. The women trained by these Master Trainers could, in turn, train fellow women in their respective localities.

## Innovative Features

**Capacity building of Masons:** As a first step, masons with no skill or semi skills were imparted training to build a disaster-resistant and eco-friendly house using cost-effective technologies.

**Training women construction labourers:** The task was not confined to men-masons, only; the women workers in construction and other casual/ seasonal workers were selected and trained in masonry works.

**Focusing on Water & Sanitation:** Women were trained in construction of Individual Household Latrine equipment and installation along with construction activities within duration of 16 days. Few were selected as master trainers to carry out further training.



Training of women at a production centre in Rupkona, Rayagada district, Orissa.

## Learnings

- It has been noted that as compared to men, women are better at construction activities. For example, activities such as pointing, plastering, flooring, painting work, etc are of a better quality when done by an average woman mason.
- Women spend substantial time at home due to domestic responsibilities hence they understand the design and value of space better in construction activities.

Women are a huge untapped resource for the construction sector. This resource can be used effectively only through adequate training and skill upgradation. Along with little encouragement, trained masons women can emerge as responsible, reliable workforce.

### A home for Susama



Susama Kandi, a differentially abled mother of two children in village Sunder Khatiari, Puri district lost her self-confidence when her husband deserted her along with part of the money allotted to her through Indira Awas Yojana for her house. Her dream of having a safe shelter for her family became a distant dream. Her hopes soared when she saw a training of masons in cost-effective housing technologies, organized in her village by the National UN Volunteer Engineers. She approached the UNVs for technical support. Now Susama, her mother and the 2 children have a roof over their heads.



### **About the authors/contributors**

Amar Jeet Kaur is a development consultant. She has worked at various positions with development organisations like Oxfam GB, Swiss Intercooperation and Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation (SDC).

Shri N. P. Panigrahi is a Town and Country Planner from University College London. He worked as a UN Volunteer and is now functioning as the CEO of Orissa Development Technocrats' Forum.

---



### **South Asia**

#### **About basin-South Asia**

basin-South Asia (basin-SA) Regional Knowledge Platform, is "committed to developing knowledge systems and promoting collaborative action within South Asia to enable access by the poor to sustainable habitat and livelihoods." It targets habitat practitioners, researchers and policy makers from the government, donor community, INGOs and NGOs, private sector and research intuitions. With seed support from the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) and matching funds from other donors, the platform initiated in November 2004, intends to provide world-class products and services to habitat and livelihood practitioners. Products of the knowledge platform include: web based knowledge resources; quarterly newsletters; thematic overview papers, learning events and a Rural Habitat Observatory. It aspires to become a 'practice oriented' platform that works to enhance and accelerate quality and pace of rural habitat and livelihood initiatives for a larger number of people.

#### **About the organization**

Orissa Development Technocrats' Forum (ODTF) is a team of social engineers (around 30 architects, civil engineers and planners) with considerable experience in development sector. ODTF has been engaged with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as National United Nations Volunteers (NUNVs) since the year 2000 in various projects aimed at integrating technology transfer and livelihoods generation among the local communities. It works on a range of issues like housing, habitat, watershed development, infrastructure, renewable energy and environment with thrust on use of local resources and adoption of appropriate technologies.

## Facts

## Who?

- The initiative targeted 990 unskilled labourers (particularly women) for imparting masonry skills. They were initially selected from slums of Bhubaneswar followed by 8 Districts across Orissa.

## What?

- Selected unskilled labourers (particularly women) were imparted training on masonry skills as well as construction of individual household latrines. Masons with negligible or partial skills were imparted training to build disaster-resistant, gender sensitive and eco-friendly house, using cost-effective technologies.

## How?

- Through a series of carefully planned trainings supported by a number of agencies, especially Government of Orissa.

### *For Whom?*

- Poor unskilled men and women labourers who benefited from enhanced technical skills resulting in higher incomes.

The women labourers' dream is not confined to becoming a mason from a 'mazdoor' but to become a self-reliant entrepreneur in the construction industry.

