

ILO's Pilot Action Project for Beedi Women Workers in India

[INT/02/M57/NET]



Final Report of the Project

**Project Title: Improving Working Conditions and Employment
Opportunities for Women Beedi Workers in India**

**Project Sites: Mangalore (Karnataka), Sagar (Madhya Pradesh),
Vellore & Gudiyattam (Tamil Nadu).**



ILO's Pilot Action Project for Beedi Women Workers in India

The ILO Sub Regional Office, New Delhi, in collaboration with the Gender Promotion Programme (GENPROM) at the International Labour Office, Geneva, has been implementing a pilot action programme (financed by the Netherlands Government) to promote Decent Work opportunities for women workers in the beedi industry in India. The ILO initiative was aimed at improving the working and living conditions of beedi rolling women and promoting supplemental means of income for women who are facing declining work in the beedi industry. The project was initiated in 2000; field activities were launched in August 2001 and ended in December 2003.

Presented below is a summary report of project – focusing on the background of the project, the approach, activities, achievements, difficulties, impact, lessons learnt and future steps that are needed. The Annexures to this report contain details of the activities and achievements in the three pilot areas. Also enclosed separately is the report of the independent evaluation that was carried out in November 2003.

I. Project Background:

Beedi manufacturing is a traditional agro-forest based industry, spread over almost all major states of India. It accounts for over half of the tobacco consumed in India. Within the unorganised household industries, beedi sector ranks as the top most employers. There are about 300 major manufacturers of branded beedis and thousands of small-scale manufacturers cum contractors who account for the bulk of the beedi production¹. It predominantly employs poor women who hand roll *beedis* at homes to earn meager but crucial subsistence level incomes. The government estimates the total number of beedi workers at about 4.5 million². Unofficially however, the trade unions and NGOs say the actual number of beedi rollers could be much higher since most beedi workers do not have identity cards.



Being in the informal-home based sector, it has been very difficult to organise the workers, with the result that the majority of beedi women work and live in extremely vulnerable conditions. A rising concern is also the involvement of children, particularly girls, in the process of beedi rolling. It appears that the home based nature of work and piece rate system of payment creates conditions for the involvement of family labour, including that of children. The poverty, indebtedness, landlessness, the lack of alternative skills, little or no access to credit and other means of livelihood force many women to persist in this occupation.

Over the years, many efforts have been made to organise and improve the working conditions of workers in the beedi industry. The five major Central Trade Unions (viz. BMS, INTUC, CITU, HMS and AITUC) and a number of other independent trade union organisations and NGOs (such as SEWA, WWF, among others) have been organising beedi workers for many years. These efforts have led to the revision of minimum wages and coverage of many beedi workers for social security under the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund (BWFF). Besides the general labour laws applicable (such as Minimum Wages Act and the Provident Funds Act), the Government of India has also enacted two major laws specifically for the beedi sector workers –

¹ S.K. Das, former DGLW, Min. of Labour in his report – A Better Deal for Beedi Workers.

² Ministry of Labour, Annual Report 1999-2000, page 109.

- Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966 - to regulate the conditions of service of the beedi workers, and
- Beedi Workers Welfare Fund Act, 1976 – to provide for welfare schemes for the beedi workers and their families, relating to health, education, maternity benefits, group insurance, recreation, housing assistance etc. Under the fund, there are also special schemes to encourage education of children of beedi workers, especially for the girl child.

About 3.9 million workers are currently covered under the BWWF. However, this leaves uncovered a large number of beedi workers who have no social protection, a problem recognised by the authorities.

Despite the efforts made by various social partners, the coverage of welfare policies and the degree of organisation are still weak (about 10% of the beedi workers are organised). The trade unions say that the shift from factory-based production to home-based beedi rolling (which started in a large way after the beedi workers laws came into being) adversely affected the organising process. The identification of workers, the implementation of minimum wages, dearness allowance and other regulatory provisions of the beedi workers law have also been a major problem in the home based work. The average actual earnings in the beedi rolling work vary widely from state to state (from Rs. 25 to 45 for rolling 1000 beedis) and even within the state. Even the official minimum wages vary significantly from state to state (from Rs. 29 to Rs. 64.80)³. The low fixed capital required and the high wage sensitivity of the beedi industry has also meant that beedi manufacturers have been able to quickly shift production when ever workers became too well organised or enforcement machinery became too strict.

Against this background, the beedi industry itself has come under pressure in recent years following the economic liberalization policies. The entry of tobacco multi-nationals, changing consumer preferences towards cigarettes and other non-beedi tobacco products and the growing competition from small scale beedi manufacturers in the informal sector is forcing the main beedi manufacturers to shift from the relatively organised sector to more backward and poverty-ridden areas in search of unorganised and cheaper labour. All this is contributing towards the decline in the availability of work and incomes to women in traditional beedi rolling areas. Most beedi women say that they have barely enough work for 2-3 days a week, sometimes even less.

The future prospects of the beedi industry appear grim also due to a number of tobacco control initiatives being taken at national and international levels on account of public health concerns [*such as banning of smoking in public places, the proposed Cigarettes and other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Bill, 2001⁴, WHO's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control⁵*]. The trade unions apprehend that the decline of the beedi industry will render a large number of women out of jobs and lead to economic crisis in beedi workers households since there are at present no income alternatives for these poor women. While demanding protection of this industry, they have also been urging the government to formulate policies and measures aimed at assisting beedi workers to shift to alternative livelihoods⁶.

The ILO's pilot project was launched against this background. It is a small but important intervention towards addressing some of the problems being faced by the beedi women in

³ Source: Report by Mr. S.K. Das, DG, Labour Welfare, Ministry of Labour, report prepared for ILO, October 2000.

⁴ Bill introduced in Rajya Sabha on 7th March 2001 – will ban advertisements of tobacco products and sponsorships by tobacco companies.

⁵ India is a party to this convention.

⁶ See Annexure 1 for more detailed note on beedi industry and its problems.

India. It could also serve as an important example for other countries, such as Bangladesh and Indonesia, which also have large tobacco rolling industries. The lessons learnt, including the good practices, could be helpful to other countries concerned with the need to protect the employment, livelihoods, security and health of workers in industries undergoing major upheavals or contraction.

II. Promoting Decent Work Opportunities for Women Beedi Workers

The ILO's pilot action project was launched in August 2000. The project aimed to prepare the beedi women in the pilot areas to face the declining employment prospects of beedi rolling through providing them with the knowledge, confidence and skills which would enable them to undertake supplemental and/or alternative income earning opportunities, improving in the process their lives and those of their families.

The field visits and meetings with the social partners pointed to the need for –

- Promoting dialogue among social partners to address the various issues facing the beedi workers and the industry;
- Programme for skills diversification and supplemental income generation for the home-based beedi women workers in view of declining income prospects in the beedi sector.

After consultations with the social partners (the Ministry of Labour, the Departments of Labour in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, trade unions, the employers and the NGOs), two areas were chosen for implementing the pilot project – Mangalore (Karnataka) and Sagar (Madhya Pradesh). These are among the traditional beedi rolling areas.



[Later the project also included the Working Women Forum's proposal for beedi women in Vellore (Tamil Nadu). The report on the activities undertaken under the Vellore Action Plan is attached separately as Annexure to this report. This report is based mainly on Mangalore and Sagar pilot projects].

III. Partners in the pilot areas

In the field, the pilot project was implemented in partnership with the local organisations of the beedi women in the pilot areas.

The co-operating organisations at local level were: five local NGOs in Mangalore [Bethany Social Service Trust (SAHODAYA), Development Education Service (DEEDS), Development Initiatives for Sustainable Human Advancement (DISHA TRUST), Agency for Development Awakening and Rural Self Help Associations (ADARSHA), and Karnataka State Trainers Collective (CHOWKI)]. The project also worked with Indian National Trades Union Congress (INTUC, Karnataka) for promoting social dialogue among the workers organisations and for awareness raising and organising through workers education. In Sagar, Self Employed Women's Association, Madhya Pradesh (the only organisation that had some base among the beedi women at that time) and the Working Women's Forum in Vellore in Tamil Nadu.

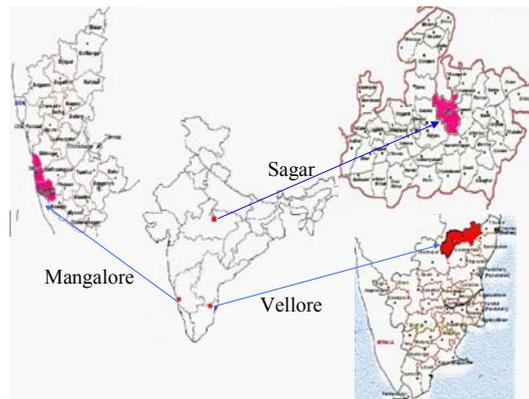
Besides these, a number of resource organisations and individuals (governmental and non-governmental) have also been associated in the implementation of the project activities, both in background research, field surveys as also in the training activities. Among these are – former Director General, Labour Welfare Organisation (who prepared a report on the status of the beedi

workers welfare fund), Dr. Rajashekhar from Bangalore, Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Karnataka (AWAKE), officials of Beedi Workers Welfare Fund, Central Food Technology Research Institute, Mysore, Small Industries Services Institute (SISI), District Industries Centre in Mangalore, Centre for Entrepreneurship Development, M.P., SANKET, Bhopal, India Development Services, Dharwad, Best Practices Foundation, Bangalore, Dr. Subhas Managuli from Kousalya Institute of Management, Karnataka University, Dharwad, and Udyogini, New Delhi.

The project has had the support and the cooperation of the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund, the Ministry of Labour, the State level Departments of Labour in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh and the trade unions.

IV. The Environment in the pilot areas

Beedi rolling areas present a uniquely difficult environment for promotion of economic activities for the women. In fact, the very existence of beedi rolling activities implies poverty, underdevelopment, desperation and lack of alternatives for the population (the reason why the beedi contractor comes to these areas). These were the characteristics of the pilot areas too.



Mangalore Pilot Area:

- The geography is mountainous, land scarce and the soil is sandy. Despite heavy rainfall in this area, there is shortage of irrigation facilities as most of the water runs out into the sea. Therefore most of the land based economic activities that are typically adopted in other areas are not feasible here;
- Majority of the beedi women are landless and for this reason too the agriculture based economic options for women are severely limited;
- Not much industrial activity and other sectors that have traditionally employed women are also on the decline (such as cashew processing units, tile factories, fisheries and areca plantations);
- Scattered, unorganised, socially disadvantaged, uni-skilled target group;
- There was no experience among the NGOs of promoting income generation activities with self-help groups (SHGs);
- The NGOs and the beedi women do not have the entrepreneurial skills or the infrastructure needed for income generation such as work sheds, transport, credit linkages or access to banks for women or linkages to government schemes;
- NGOs were concerned about failure due to fear of markets and inexperience. Despite the pressure from below to create economic alternatives, the stakes in failure for them were high and their legitimacy with the beedi women workers was of concern to them.

Sagar Pilot Area:

Sagar is a tough district from the point of view of organising of workers and generation of employment opportunities. This is mainly on account of –

- Lack of industrialisation or any significant secondary sector activities;
- Besides beedi rolling, agriculture and trading, no other major economic activity;
- Highly feudal and castiest atmosphere;
- Fear of violence from the contractors/employers;

- Very poor infrastructure – dilapidated roads and transport facilities, severe power shortage, little or no irrigation facilities, low land productivity;
- No major markets for goods or services nearby;
- Lack of organisations/NGOs with any professional experience in income generation activities;
- One of the lowest literacy rates in the country; [very high adult female illiteracy (83.6%); over 40% of girl children (age 6-14 years) illiterate and less than 10% have studied beyond primary school];
- Landlessness and high indebtedness among beedi workers to contractors and other local money lenders;
- Very low level of awareness and lack of marketable skills among the beedi women;
- Little or no organisation among home based beedi workers;
- No history or experience of self-help groups.



Vellore district:

- While neither tobacco nor tendu leaves are grown in T.N., the State is among the leading manufacturers of beedi. Weather is hot and dry for most parts of the year (which is very conducive to beedi rolling) and labour is cheap, unorganised and skilled.
- Substantial section of the population poor and vulnerable. Female and child employment high (reflection of distress employment and survival strategy).
- Dry area. The poorer sections among peasantry vulnerable to the failure of the monsoon that is a recurrent phenomenon.
- Handlooms are a dominant household industry (silk weaving), besides beedi rolling.
- Gender discrimination high (female foeticide).
- Gender discrimination in labour markets too. Certain occupations (such as domestic work and beedi rolling) are not considered worthy for males to pursue them and are relegated to women and children, female children in particular.

V. The Approach of the Project

In the light of the above-mentioned factors, before any economic activities could be initiated, there was a need to start with organising and capacity building for the NGOs and the beedi women themselves. Initial exposure visits and interaction with SHGs and resource NGOs conducting income generation were also planned to provide the beedi women and their organisations with the necessary perspective and exposure to better assess costs, training and other needs, as well as build the confidence that creating economic alternatives were not as impossible as was initially envisioned. Moreover, it was felt that forging a cooperative relationship with the resource NGOs (like India Development Services [IDS] in Dharwad, Bangalore based AWAKE [Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Karnataka] and UDYOGINI [based in Delhi but working in different states including Madhya Pradesh] would provide the local NGOs with an invaluable resource for technical help for future after the project ended.

In Mangalore, since the project proposed to work with five small NGOs, it was felt that a collective body of these NGOs should be promoted so as to create a supportive environment where barriers and problems could be collectively solved. Also, this would help in future to jointly negotiate with banks and government institutions for linkages and access to their schemes.

It must also be noted that while the pilot areas situation was a difficult one, it is also in many ways typical as most NGOs in India are both small and inexperienced in income generation. The pilot project therefore provided a critical learning and capacity building contribution, which could benefit not only the beedi women but also the NGOs who wish to undertake this route and do not know exactly how.

The ILO project therefore started with the capacity building measures, aimed at:

- Enabling the organising of the unorganised home based beedi women and supporting education and training activities – on social, legal and gender issues as also on the rights of beedi workers under the labour laws;
- Improving women’s awareness of employment opportunities and widening occupational choices through entrepreneurial development programmes (EDP) and participatory rapid appraisal (PRAs) exercises;
- Promotion of social dialogue to discuss the beedi workers problems and to promote fundamental principles and rights at work, including expanding social security coverage;

These were followed up in late 2002-2003 with promotion of non-beedi income generation activities through skills training, micro-credit and handholding and guidance in income generation programmes to ensure success of economic activities and improve living standards of the beedi rolling households.

The project adopted a participatory approach and strategy included the following:

- Rights based focus through training on women workers rights and awareness raising;
- Outreach empowerment and representation through women’s improved self-confidence and increased ‘voice’ in family and community based on the successes of the self help groups;
- Creation of supportive environment for employment and social protection through establishing linkages with the other institutions and government programmes for access to welfare and anti-poverty schemes, including the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund of the Ministry of Labour;



VI. The Activities

A. Start up activities:

1. The ILO commissioned two studies on the state of the beedi industry, the workers situation and the question of alternative/supplemental employment opportunities for the workers in this sector - which provided impetus and the inputs for the pilot project.
2. Meetings were held in the months of August-September 2000 with the Union Labour Ministry, the State Labour Departments as also the Chief Ministers of Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh to apprise them of the proposed ILO initiative and get their support for the project.
3. Consultation meetings were also held with the Central Trade Unions and their unions and the employers in the beedi sector in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh to get inputs for the pilot action programme.
4. Field visits to selected beedi rolling areas were undertaken to discuss the beedi workers situation, their needs and identify potential partners for collaboration.

5. The project also commissioned studies/surveys on the -
 - Working of the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund and Social Security measures for the Beedi Workers;
 - Identification of Employment Opportunities in the proposed pilot areas;
 - Survey on Women's Employment and Household Dynamics in the pilot areas.
6. Local tripartite consultation meetings were held with stake holders in Sagar (M.P.) and Mangalore (Karnataka) in the year 2000-2001; later a state level tripartite workshop was held in Mangalore on beedi industry in February 2001 in cooperation with the Labour Department – to finalise the pilot action project.

The project proposals for the pilot areas were prepared based on these start up activities and thereafter the pilot projects were launched in August 2001 in Sagar district of Madhya Pradesh, in Mangalore (Karnataka) and Vellore in Tamil Nadu in cooperation with the local organisations.

B. The nature of activities undertaken to implement the project in the field:

- Organising beedi women into self-help groups (SHGs).
- Training on self-help group dynamics, interpersonal skills, group management, participatory and leadership skills for women beedi workers.
- Conducting awareness programmes on social, legal and gender issues.
- Entrepreneurial Development Programmes (EDP).
- PRA (Participatory Rapid Appraisals) with women's SHGs to identify local economic activities, resources, needs and related inputs, involving local exposure visits for women beedi workers.
- Training of core team of women trainers (training of trainers).
- Promotion of dialogue between social partners on problems in the beedi industry with the aim of improving the conditions of work and welfare of the workers, particularly that of women beedi rollers.
- Identifying income generation activities and promoting skills training for beedi women workers to undertake income generation activities.
- Setting up of revolving funds in the pilot areas to provide micro-credit to the beedi women.
- Facilitate exposure visits of the beedi women to other NGOs, markets, government offices, and banks.
- Promotion of market linkages for marketing of the product(s).
- Promotion of a collective reflection process among the implementing partners to identify barriers and to search for solutions at local level, involving resource institution(s) to brainstorm possible solutions and to assist in income generation activities.
- Training of SHGs on government and banking procedures and applications.
- Seek the cooperation and involvement of the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund and other government departments in the States for linking up for welfare, training and employment schemes for women.

VII. Achievements

Since the project was launched in the field in August 2001, the project has covered about 4500 beedi women for education and training activities (about 3000 beedi women in Vellore and Gudiyattam, about 1000 beedi women in Mangalore and 500 in Sagar). About 30% of the women (in Mangalore and Vellore) had been initiated into supplemental/alternative income generation activities by 2003.

The types of economic activities initiated by the beedi women after training –

Jackfruit and other pappad making, tailoring, garments trade, pickles, phenyl, detergents, bleaching powder, fruit squash, vegetables selling, bakery items, poultry, cattle rearing, Jasmine cultivation, petty shops (for grocery and eatables, meat, etc), jewelry business, vermi-compost, paper bags, screen printing and trading activities.

Given the background, the skills and the domestic responsibilities of the beedi women, they are more comfortable with taking up these small scale traditional home based self-employment activities, rather than setting up any formal enterprises. As a result of these non-beedi income generation activities, the income levels of most of these beedi women have gone up. Non-beedi work is giving them 3-4 times more income and they are keen to expand their activities; others are also keen to follow.

Some of the other achievements of the project so far are –

- Home based beedi women organised and trained to manage their own self-help groups;
- Awareness, enthusiasm and confidence of beedi women has been raised and they are keen to take up non-beedi income earning opportunities (unlike their previous position – no alternative to beedi is possible);
- Beedi women have an identity in their community due to their being organised under SHGs which has give them a recognition in the community and facilitated their participation in the community/political meetings as also access to authorities;
- Most beedi women covered under the project in Mangalore and Sagar have been enabled to get ID cards, which facilitates access to the services of the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund.
- Importance of education of children recognised; some women have also taken loans from their SHGs for the education of their girl children. Most beedi women see education of their girl child as a way out from the beedi work.
- Position in family and family support improved as their abilities to raise funds for family needs has gone up (due to SHG savings);
- Indebtedness to private moneylenders has gone down as alternative means of credit through the SHG savings got created.
- A core group of beedi women have been trained to provide training support to other beedi women.
- Initiative towards social security through the insurance scheme has been started.
- Awareness among the beedi women on government's schemes raised.
- Capacity has been created among the beedi women's organisations for education and training for initiation of income generation activities.
- The state government of Karnataka now proposes to take up statewide action plan in support of the beedi women. Government motivated to commission a statewide study of the beedi sector.
- Consensus among the trade unions in the beedi sector as regards measures needed in the beedi sector achieved.
- A joint organisation of partner NGOs formed to carry forward the work

The project has sought to and succeeded in making contribution towards building capacities at the local level among the beedi women and their organisations for promotion of income generation activities.

VIII. Impact Assessment

Effectiveness

The project has been in the field since August 2001 and during this short period, it has made reasonably good progress if one goes by the achievements in organising the home-based beedi women and building capacities for undertaking income generation activities. The framework

for income generation activities is in place and about 30% of the beedi women are already undertaking non-beedi income generation activities (IGAs). More will be covered in times ahead by the local partners. Ideally, these initiatives should have been supported for another two years to upscale and standardize production activities and help in developing marketing channels.

The women covered under the project are today articulate, confident and aware of their rights and opportunities; Women have the capacities and the confidence that they will survive the demise of the beedi industry. What is also important, awareness on education of the girl child as a means to escape life as a beedi worker has also gone up among the women covered under the project.



The project implementation process was participative and that means that the local organisations and the beedi women feel the ownership over the initiatives in the field and will carry on even though the project has ended.

Relevance

The project activities have met the needs expressed by the beedi women, that is, met their needs for –

- New vocational skills and supplemental means of income in view of declining work and incomes from the beedi industry.
- Access to welfare facilities under the schemes of the government.
- Bringing their problems to the notice of the government

To meet these needs, the project has focused on capacity building education and skills training, trained a core group of local women trainers from among the beedi women, set up revolving fund for providing micro-credit to women to enable them to take up income generation activities and built links with government agencies and their schemes, including social protection under the insurance schemes. The project has also promoted dialogue among the social partners on beedi workers problems.

The project is of relevance to the national development priorities for the informal sector workers and employment promotion needs. The project also promoted the self-help approach which has been identified by government and other social partners as an effective mechanism for promoting improvements in the living standards of the home based and other workers in the unorganised sector.

The original objectives of the project remain valid since the future of beedi work is grim in view of anti-tobacco policies on the anvil and declining beedi industry. The project has moved in the right direction and progress has been made. As a pilot project, it has contributed much to the learning process as well as creating capacities to face the emerging crisis of livelihoods for these home based workers in the beedi sector. In the words of some of the beedi women – *“project has helped them to come out of their homes, given them a sense of security, unity, confidence to face the uncertain future in the beedi industry and exposed them to new ideas and new information”*.

Efficiency

The project managed to overcome many difficult constraints (environmental, logistical and capabilities related) in a relatively short period. For this, the NPC wishes to acknowledge the

commitment of local partners to the project objectives as also the efficient support of SRO New Delhi which helped immensely in resolving difficulties and finding solutions.

As for utilisation of project resources, bulk of the project funds have been spent on education and training activities in the field rather than on administrative expenses of the implementing partners. Wherever possible, the project has tried to use local resource persons, rather than bringing people from outside. The training has been provided mostly at local level rather than sending the women covered under the project to far off places. However, on need basis, the project has also funded both local and non-local exposure visits for beedi women to learn from other groups doing income generation activities.

Sustainability of results

The project has enabled –

- Creation of capacity in the pilot areas among the selected beedi women and their organisations – for organising for self-help and to promote income generation activities,
- Awareness among the authorities to develop interventions in support of the beedi women and
- Supplemental income generation ventures by the beedi women.

These capacities (organisational, credit and skills) will be useful for many other beedi women even after the project ends. The beedi women who have been initiated into new economic activities are earning additional incomes and there is no reason to suppose that these women would stop their non-beedi income earning activities after the project ends. The successful shift of some of these beedi women to non-beedi work has encouraged other beedi women in the villages to diversify. The local implementing partners would also use the experience gained from the pilot project to cover other poor women, including beedi workers, as that would help them to increase their membership base. In view of the large number of beedi women facing a bleak future in beedi industry, the project is a demonstration for other organisations dealing with the beedi women, including the authorities, to replicate. The State government of Karnataka has already proposed to take up a statewide action plan for the beedi women in 2004.

The local partners have already drawn up plans and made arrangements to carry on the activities. SEWA has tied up the project with funding from other government schemes; WWF has integrated the project activities with its own going organisational and educational work and will continue. In Mangalore, the five local partners have formed a joint organisation to carry forward the activities. The fact that in each of these places the project has not only left behind skills but also revolving funds will ensure that the local organisations have the means to continue with the activities. It is however quite possible that the pace of activities may slow down.

IX. The Difficulties and Challenges Ahead

The beedi rolling has been a part of local culture for nearly a century in these areas and promoting employment alternatives in areas (where unemployment is already high) is a challenge. ‘*Beedi rolling*’ in India is a symbol of poverty and desperation in an area. Beedi work is done because there is no other work. If there were other viable economic activities that people were engaged in, the beedi contractor would not have come into these areas. Creating means of income/employment where there are no other readily available alternatives or infrastructure is therefore a major challenge.

Moreover, the beedi women are poor, illiterate (mostly), with little or no skills, socially disadvantaged, with debts and low asset base. The fact that the target group is home based women, it involves overcoming additional considerations of gender discrimination or

subjugation within families and restrictive societal attitudes in general which curtail their mobility and the choices open to them. Needless to say, bringing about changes in this kind of environment will take time. Getting women to even attend meetings outside their homes on a regular basis was a problem initially. The project also had to address the issue of absence of capacities of the local organisations and build the same.

All this implies that the capacity building activities need a lot more time. One cannot adopt an approach that first year one would do capacity building and then go on to other things. It needs to be a continuous and an integral part of promoting income generation activities. To create supportive environment, what is also needed are interventions to change the attitude of the family, male members, community and local government officials. There is a tendency to be apathetic towards the women in general among the officialdom. Changing these attitudes needs time and lot more attention than what has been possible to give during the course of the pilot project. The time available did not permit sufficient attention to this aspect although the project involved other social partners in discussions to sensitise them to the needs of the beedi women.

Finding sustainable alternatives that provide income atleast equal to that provided by the beedi rolling in these areas is not easy. Moreover, the viability of many of the small-scale economic activities itself comes under pressure due to declining purchasing powers in the pilot areas on account of the decline of the beedi industry. Some of the alternatives need investments and involve gestation periods, which these workers are not be able to withstand, unless credit and sustained survival support is extended. The project has in limited ways overcome these problems due to the support extended through skills training, hand holding, provision of micro-credit through the revolving funds and the motivation and support provided by the beedi women's self-help groups.

Other challenges before the project are - need to provide follow-up support to the women who are undertaking supplemental income generation activities. Being new entrepreneurs, most beedi women are facing the problems of marketing, seasonality of economic activities, issues concerning standardization of products and sustainability of economic activities. The project has tried to overcome these challenges through the provision of business development services to the women and building linkages with other institutions that support income generation activities by the poor women. It is would have been desirable to explore the possibility of setting up a cooperative marketing structure for marketing the products of the poor home based women in the long run. However, the project has not managed to get the second phase funding which would have enabled this. The project also did not get the time to build institutional linkages between the self-help groups (SHGs) of beedi women and other institutions and programmes of the government for women towards the goal of self-sustenance. There is also a need to introduce social security initiatives. All these activities need time frame of 2-3 years, beyond 2003, which is not available.



While the project in Mangalore and Vellore has made good progress, it is felt that the size of the problem is such that it needs a major intervention on the part of the state governments. In Karnataka, the State government has been motivated to think of a statewide action plan in support of the beedi women. ILO, in October 2003, held a high level state meeting in Bangalore in cooperation with the Department of Labour, Karnataka to advocate for a statewide programme to promote skills diversification and livelihood options for workers dependent on beedi industry. As a follow up, the Minister for Labour is taking an initiative to plan for an interdepartmental action (in cooperation with the Department of Women & Child Development and Industries). ILO has been requested to contribute towards the development of the state policy in this regard.

X. Lessons learnt and future steps

Prior to the promotion of income generation activities, there needs to be a programme for organising and capacity building of the beedi women and of the organisations working with them. Without basic capacity building, the provision of micro-credit and promotion of micro-enterprises may lead to business failures, loss of confidence, greater indebtedness of the beneficiary as also her family and increased domestic pressure on the women – a situation that needs to be avoided. In fact, the capacity building component needs to be integral part over the entire project cycle and not a one off activity.

Sustainable and socially empowering intervention needs focusing not only on livelihoods through skills training and micro-credit, but also on –

- Providing market linkages for the women;
- Assistance in economic opportunity identification in their local areas as also at the state level;
- Interventions in support of the beedi women also need to focus at improving habitat, awareness, education levels, health care, childcare, changing attitudes towards women and organisation building.

In regard to the market linkages, the problem is not only of marketing but staying in the market. The consumer needs and the markets keep changing and the women will need to keep making innovations or new products to cater to the markets. Given that even the business ventures of highly educated and business trained people fail, there are slim chances for the long run survival of small-scale business ventures of the women in the informal sector unless they are adequately supported. Also, the socio-economic background of the women put them in a disadvantageous situation to negotiate prices for their products in the market. There is no escaping the role for a marketing body for the products of the self-help groups of the women.

Given the large number of workers involved, it is necessary to develop and implement State-wide, district specific action plans to promote the livelihoods and protection for beedi women workers and their families. The community level interventions need to be complemented by a supportive policy framework and interventions at state level which would enable the beedi women to take up and sustain new livelihood options and also expand their access to social protection. This would also require strengthening the capacity of local and intermediary support institutions to improve delivery of appropriate social and business support services for alternative/supplemental employment opportunities for women beedi workers.

As may be obvious, such a programme needs a longer time horizon (5-8 years), government support and a participatory approach for building capacities and bringing about a change that can be sustainable.

In the case of beedi industry, there are nearly 5 million people whose livelihoods can get affected by anti-tobacco policies in the long run. To prevent crisis of livelihoods, there is a need for a programme for beedi women in India that will facilitate the following:

- Promotion of social dialogue to discuss the beedi workers problems;
- Enable the organising of the unorganised home based beedi women into self-help groups, community organisations and/or under their membership based organisations;
- Support education and training activities – on social, legal and gender issues as also on the rights of beedi workers under the labour laws – to be conducted through their organisations and also the Panchayat institutions;
- Improve women's awareness of employment opportunities and widen occupational choices through entrepreneurial development programmes and participatory rapid appraisal exercises at local level – to be conducted through their organisations;

- Promotion of non-beedi income generation activities through economic opportunities identification, skills training, micro-credit support and promoting market linkages;
- The training infrastructure needs to reorient itself so as to provide vocational skills to the workers in the informal sector (which requires facilities for ‘in-field’ local community based training, relaxation of eligibility requirements and a training schedule that takes into account the time available and the domestic responsibilities of the women).
- As regard facilities for credit, the state policy needs to encourage the banks need to set aside funds for providing micro-loans to the women without stringent collateral requirements;
- Promoting market linkages through existing cooperative marketing networks and/or provision of marketing outlets in the city markets.
The beedi women can be trained to make products but can they sell them in the markets? Selling through exhibitions and fairs is not very sustainable over the long run. There is a need to extend the reach of the existing cooperative networks to buy and market the products made by the home-based women workers. OR, as in Andhra Pradesh, set up SHG *haats* – which the women’s groups can use to market their products in the local markets; or provide space/sheds in local markets to the self-help groups to sell their products.
- Promote access of beedi women to government’s welfare, employment and anti-poverty schemes through a single window approach at every district level;
- Provision of affordable, contributory, social insurance of the women workers, with an incentive component for encouraging education of the girl child (along the lines of the Jana Shree Bima Yojana of LIC);
- Need to involve the private sector industry in skills training and to promote alternative employment opportunities for women workers – through fiscal and monetary incentives such as for the development of garments industry in Mangalore, fish processing, herbal medicinal plants and food processing.
- Other major initiatives that can promote livelihoods is –
 - The participatory watershed development programmes; water harvesting structures will not only help improve irrigation potential for farm lands (and land based employment) but also help in promoting employment in dairying, horticulture and fisheries for home based women.
 - Under wastelands development scheme, the state government can give major fillip to the herbal medicinal plants farming and processing – which can involve large number of home based beedi women workers; For this, the beedi women’s self-help groups need to be given the lease rights to develop the waste lands.

XI. Concluding Remarks

The livelihoods of the workers dependent on tobacco related industries have been the concern of the Government of India. Speaking at WHO’s conference on tobacco control policies in Delhi in 2000, the Indian Prime Minister is reported to have remarked in his address -

... it would be unrealistic to view tobacco purely as health problem and ignore the economic and social fall-outs of tobacco control.....for tobacco control law to be successfully implemented, it must be accompanied by alternative modes of incomes for those dependent on tobacco and the community at large has to be fully informed and involved [Indian Prime Minister Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee at WHO’s Conference in Delhi on 7th January 2000].



It is clear that concern for reducing the health dangers related to tobacco production and consumption cannot focus only on the tobacco companies and the smokers. A tobacco control initiative can be effective only if at the same time there are appropriate policies and programmes to address the social protection and employment problems of the workers who have been adversely affected. For those who face losing their source of livelihood there must be opportunities for alternative employment and income generation. For those who continue to work in the beedi industry there must be improved working conditions and social protection. As such there is a need to address the immediate concerns of the women who are currently engaged in home based beedi work and simultaneously address the longer term policy issues resulting from anti-tobacco measures and globalization trends. Adopting this two pronged approach will also diminish the involvement of child workers and hence protect future generations of women from engaging in precarious home based work.

The ILO's pilot project has been a small but a critical contribution towards learning and capacity building of the beedi workers while trying to address the issue of livelihoods promotion for beedi women. In this endeavour, the project has received good support from the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund, Ministry of Labour and the State Departments of Labour.

It needs to be noted that the beedi women have so far been self-sustaining and have not really been dependent on the government. But this situation is likely to change in times ahead. On public health grounds, the State policy is likely to promote measures to curb the growth of tobacco-based industries. To prevent socio-economic distress among the tobacco dependent workers' families, as part of the national anti-tobacco policy, there is therefore, a necessity for a policy and measures for new economic opportunities and incomes for the poor people dependent on tobacco and tobacco related industries.

ak/16/03/04.

Note:

It may be noted that promotion of income generation activities and ensuring their sustainability needs time frame of atleast 5-6 years, which the project did not have. The time available to the project has been short and uncertain right from the very beginning due to the uncertainties produced by the biennium funding process of ILO. At no stage could the NPC assure the local partners of continued support. The need to show results in the limited time frame acted as an undue pressure and always affected the planning of the activities. Against these uncertainties, enlisting support and maintaining cooperation of the local partners (who felt that NPC's expectations of the results was unreasonable in the given time frame) was through out a challenge.
