

ILO's tripartite partners in India -- the Government, employers and workers -- formally adopted a Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) for India. The new programme will focus on enhanced opportunities for productive work for women and men, particularly for youth and vulnerable groups. The experience of a worker in Madhya Pradesh Province illustrates what the Decent Work Agenda can mean for workers in this vast country.

New Delhi - Like most landless labourers in a small village in Madhya Pradesh Province of central India, Sitabai and her husband faced daily struggle for survival. Work was scarce and paid little. Keeping their children in school was a challenge. Then a meeting with Bharatkumar, an ILO field worker changed their lives.

A group called the Srujan Mahila Vikas Association (SRUJAN) was helping disadvantaged women like her to find decent work opportunities by giving them appropriate skills training. At the Workers Information Centre (WIC) run by the union, she learned about various training programmes and opted for a course in tailoring. At the same time, she developed a keen interest in other activities of the trade union and enrolled in a self-help group.

Soon she gained enough confidence to start her own business. With a loan of INR 5,000 (USD 110) from the self-help group, she bought a sewing machine. Her business grew; she learned accounting and customer relations and paid off the loan amount before its due date.

SRUJAN partnered with the ILO Bureau of Workers' Activities in the project Organizing and Empowering Women Workers in the Informal Economy to address unorganized women workers' issues and raise awareness about their rights. The project, supported by the Government of Norway, provides women with skills training, and helps them develop income-generating activities and access government employment schemes, thereby promoting the ILO's Decent Work Agenda in remote villages.

Promoting enhanced opportunities for productive work for women and men, and particularly for youth and vulnerable groups, through skills development are among the top priorities of the Decent Work Country Programme for India. The DWCP translates the specific needs of individual countries identified by the tripartite constituents and the ILO into operational activities at the country level.

Decent Work Country Programme for India is by far the biggest and most widespread DWCP to be launched by the ILO and country social partners so far. With a population of more than one billion people, India is the world's largest democracy and one of its largest economies. However, while India is on the path to becoming a key player in the world economy over the next two decades, it still faces challenges: of the country's more than 450 million workers, for example, nearly 28 per cent still live below poverty line, many in rural areas.

The Decent Work Agenda in India covers a five-year period and is aligned to India's 11th 5-Year Plan. It is time-bound, results-based and focused. The joint programme will place ILO knowledge and instruments at the service of the constituents, policy-makers and other stakeholders in order to advance India's vision of faster and inclusive growth. The plan recognizes women as both equal citizens and also agents of economic and social development, with decision-making autonomy. The DWCP is to be implemented through partnership between the social partners.

The ILO's current technical cooperation portfolio in India centres around a wide range of issues--from employment to skills development and social security to reducing child labour, HIV/AIDS and family indebtedness. The portfolio has a special focus on the informal economy, women and vulnerable groups, sectors which require rejuvenation and/or have employment potential and tripartism. With the availability of national resources at all levels, the portfolio fosters partnership mechanisms and promotes ILO's role as a catalyst, facilitator and knowledge broker for mutual inter and intra-country learning. Decent work is at the heart of ILO's strategies for economic and social progress, central to efforts to reduce poverty and a means to achieve equitable, inclusive and sustainable development.

The Indian economy is now at a point when it can achieve sustained economic expansion with potential for significant improvements in the lives of the people such as Sitabai.

Sitabai's family has come a long way from the days of penury. Enhanced income has raised the family's standard of living. Her children now go to a good public school. After paying for day to day expenses, she manages to save a small sum for their future needs.

“Thanks to the SRUJAN and ILO Project, we are doing well and my children are able to get a good education”, Sitabai says. Andre Bogui, Director a.i., ILO Subregional Office for South Asia, adds: “The Decent Work Country Programme will strengthen our partnerships and impact people’s lives, especially those who are the most disadvantaged”.