

## Part I

### Summary of the Report

The workshop on '**Promoting work and networks: women in the urban informal economy**', was organised on 9 July 2004, at the Federation of Karnataka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Bangalore. The daylong workshop intended to arrive at a future plan of action for further developing the 'Decent Employment' programme for the city of Bangalore. The programme was initiated by the International Labour Office (ILO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, two years ago. The programme is currently underway in the two metropolitan cities of New Delhi and Bangalore in India.

The five sessions of the workshop focused on the current emerging issues in relation to the informal sector women workers in Bangalore. The first session began with reflections on the review of the decent employment programme in the two cities. A background paper presentation emphasised a better understanding of who the women in the urban informal economy are and how the locational and physical characteristics of their surroundings contribute to their economic position and sustenance. The next session focused on skill and training. The Directorate of Employment and Training, Ministry of Labour, GOI, dwelled on the various institutions and systems in place that support vocational training and work towards generating a flow of trained craftsmen into the job market. They also emphasised their role as implementing partners of the 'Decent Employment' programme. The need for realising and maximising the full potential of a market oriented approach was the focus of the third session, where both presentations gave priority to markets as a necessary tool to build more able entrepreneurs. The fourth session focused on urban participatory governance and its impact on livelihood for the urban poor. Here the example of the reworked *Swarna Jayanti Shehari Rozgar Yojana* (SJSRY) was narrated to demonstrate that integrating the poor into participatory governance efforts enables them to achieve a more holistic progression towards their overall economic sustenance.

The last session was devoted to recommendations from the participants on taking this programme forward in the city of Bangalore. The workshop concluded on the note that a single track focus on marketing, skill training, placement or networking alone is not sufficient to help informal sector women workers enjoy a decent work environment and a decent standard of living. The work and lives of women in the low skilled unorganised sector are not easily separable – in fact they are closely knit and shaped by the environment they live in. Efforts must be put into place to ensure a multi-dimensional approach to skill development and training, which also incorporates an understanding of the living environment of these women.

## Proceedings of the Workshop

The International Labour Office (ILO) in collaboration with the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) organised a daylong workshop on the subject '**Promoting work and networks: women in the urban informal economy**'. The workshop was organised as part of ILO's Decent employment for women in India programme which was initiated two years ago. The workshop was held at the Conference Hall, Federation of Karnataka Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Bangalore on 9 July, 2004. The aim of the workshop was to arrive at a future plan of action for the city of Bangalore.

### Session I: Background and Context

The workshop was inaugurated by **Mr. Herman van der Laan**, Director ILO SRO, New Delhi, who chaired the first session. In his comments, Mr van der Laan said that the overall agenda of the ILO's work is the promotion of 'Decent work for all', and in that agenda the theme of the present workshop has an important place. It is also a concern of the present government, as expressed in the Common Minimum Programme. The question before the workshop was how best one could help women in the informal economy to create a better livelihood for themselves and their families. The pilot project that has been started in Delhi and Bangalore is supported by the United States Department of Labour, and implemented by the ILO in partnership with the Ministry of Labour. Mr van der Laan noted that the participants included representatives of the Labour Ministry, Vocational Training Institutes, workers organizations and employers' organizations, civil society and academia, and this representation by various stakeholders would help in ensuring that all perspectives would be represented in the discussions.



This first session was directed at getting a better understanding of who are the women in informal employment, are they poor, what do they represent, what is the dynamics of reaching out to them, and how do they react to interventions that aid them with becoming part

of the overall economy – the mainstream economy. Mr. Van der Laan remarked that economic growth in India has left almost one third of its population untouched – and

that women workers of the urban informal economy form a significant part of this group.

**Ms. Adarsh Sarvaria**, National Project Co-ordinator, ILO introduced the Decent Employment for Women in India programme. She put forward a crisp and clear definition of the programme –

*Decent employment for women in India seeks to identify strategies to allow women in the urban informal economy to create better livelihoods for themselves and their families. The basic approach is to improve access to skill training and provide the necessary support structures to translate this training into new work opportunities.*

The object of the present workshop was to review the progress achieved, and to examine what would be the recommended future directions for the intervention. The critical challenge for the project is how to reach out to these poor women and to come up with programmes that are really meaningful for them; help them to overcome their constraints and provide them links to the formal economy. The project hopes to develop at least some insights and some practical models that can be taken up on a much larger scale.

The session continued with a brief presentation by **Ms Suchi Pande**, Institute of Social Studies Trust, based on the findings of an impact assessment study of the programme in Delhi and Bangalore conducted by ISST in 2003. This was followed by a presentation by **Dr. Murlidharan**, on behalf of the team from the Mount Carmel Institute of Management which had conducted a training needs assessment for the project in Bangalore. Among the achievements of the project is the creation of a holistic intervention that includes within its scope skill training as well as supportive interventions like child care, soft skills development, marketing linkages. One of the challenges that emerged from these presentations was the various aspects of further strengthening the linkage between training and work opportunities.

**Dr. Solomon Benjamin**, Urban Research Centre, Bangalore, next presented the background paper prepared for the workshop, titled '*Women in the informal economy in Bangalore: A Consideration of Household, Neighbourhood, and City wide factors.*'<sup>1</sup>

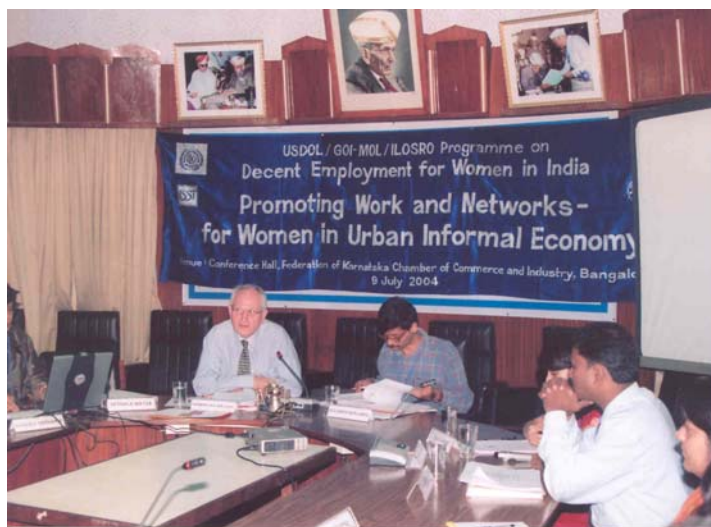
This paper seeks to illustrate the context in which the ILO programme has been introduced, and to throw some light on the characteristics of women in informal employment in Bangalore, including the nature of work they are currently engaged in. Dr. Benjamin began by observing that Bangalore is the IT capital but also a city of great divides. He pointed out that the difference in income in 1991 was 1:5 between the lowest 20 per cent and the highest 20 per cent of the urban population. The divide in 2001 was 1:50, and might even exceed this if migrant groups and particularly women from these groups are included in the comparison. Economic

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is jointly written by Dr. Solomon Benjamin and R. Bhuvanewari from the Urban Research Centre, Bangalore.

growth in Bangalore has thus greatly benefited some groups but has not affected the population evenly. Thus, the paper is really talking about women in a city of great divides and a city of great heterogeneity.

At the outset, Dr Benjamin explained that the paper is based on the experiences of women in two different economic and political settings of the city – Srirampuram, a city central ward dominated by low and lower middleclass income groups and Jayanagar in South Bangalore, dominated by middle and upper middle income groups. He suggested that in order to



improve women's participation and incomes, strategies need to be grounded in the specific characteristics of localities, and the specific situations of particular poor groups. The authors argued that location is central to the women's economic position in the urban informal economy of Bangalore- because small firm economies provide employment to different types of poor who have different levels of claims on these jobs. Links were also made between women's economic position and several factors such as individual health, household circumstances, neighbourhood characteristics, micro-credit, city level interventions and new employment skills.

The research presents an interesting analysis of the relationship between the types of women and the variety of locations they are situated in and its impact on their livelihood. Different wards in the city of Bangalore are situated in very different poverty levels. Incomes are also varied with different players in an economy of a slum area and it is critical to understand where the women fit into this. The economy tends to be hierarchical, with the *marwari* finance agents right at the top and right at the bottom would be the *agarbatti* makers. These workers can be further divided into three categories (discussed below). However, if we look at the circumstances of these women in the *agarbatti* business, for example, the so called touts and middlemen form a "critically important support system". The system might appear to be an exploitative one. However, for women who find themselves in a sort of vacuum, for example where a woman has been abandoned by her husband or where the spouse is very sick, it is critical to their survival.

The paper identifies three different categories of poor women<sup>2</sup> - chronic poor, poor and the better off among the poor. It explores how women in each of these categories are able, or unable, to create opportunities for work and income generation based on

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<sup>2</sup> The paper includes both married and single women.

the prevalent circumstances of their neighbourhoods within the context of the city as a whole. The discussion includes specific issues that impact on different categories of women and their economic situation - issues such as financial options, support (family/friends), health, housing/tenure, household circumstances, seasonal work patterns and city level interventions towards 'urban renewal' in central city locations that directly impact on the income and earning capacities of women.

In the case of the chronic poor women, it is noted that these women come from very poor families that are unable to satisfy their very basic needs for food and water. They survive on one meal a day and the variety of factors mentioned above "reinforces their poverty situation, making it difficult for them to move out of it". These women find it hard to take up jobs like hawking or domestic work that require leaving the house, due to household circumstances. With limited mobility they are concentrated around home-based work like *agarbatti* or *beedi* making. "The city has a range of local economies and the ability of the women to plug into either one of the economies also varies." These women are not part of any *sanga* (self-help-group) run savings programmes. These very poor women find it difficult to pay up; groups are also often unwilling to accommodate the poorest women. As a result these women often are unable to move beyond "their immediate circle – parent and neighbour and are living in isolation".

The second group of women – poor women - are those who are able to fulfil their basic food needs and are trying to improve their economic status by amassing surplus, but are nonetheless vulnerable. The differentiating factor between these women and the chronic poor women is their ability to "plug into diverse financial and economic circuits for raising capital, critical for accumulating surplus for the poor." These women are also characterised by irregular work. However they are situated in neighbourhoods that provide them with multiple options of generating cash income, and having an asset helps them to accumulate surplus. Access to land has aided these women to invest in economic activities to generate income. Organising of chits is also crucial to this group of women. The density of low and lower middle-income residents in such localities also 'allow for emergence of different types of chits.' Here women are one of the main chit organisers.

The third category of women – the better off – consists of those who are seeking to move out of poverty. These are women who have managed to accumulate surplus. These women are located in the planned city wards dominated by rich and upper middle-income groups. Women in this group are able to access loans from a variety of sources. However, their ability to generate cash cannot change the fact that they are "embedded in complex circuits". Any adverse impact on any of these circuits, for instance the impact of anti-hawking drives or urban renewal projects, can push these women into 'severe poverty situation.'

In conclusion, the paper presents a strong case for "recognising the complex urban influences of how various parts of a city like Bangalore open or close opportunities for particular types of women." Dr. Benjamin emphasised the need to take a wider view with regard to providing employment training and opportunities. For the

chronic poor women, what are most needed are interventions that can improve nutrition and health for women and children, emphasis on infrastructure provisions and an emergency fund for upgrading housing. The paper also discusses some critical issues related to the 'city structures and the threats that emerge from this wide arena' that need to be considered if decent employment is to be effectively promoted. The authors argue that 'middle-class activism' that attempts to contain the expansion of slums and encourage the promotion of open, clean and green spaces, in effect adds to the threat of eviction that all squatter settlements live with. Globalisation and its impact on the city that give rise to mega infrastructure projects are proving to be direct threats to the hawkers as it reduces their hawking space. Thus "attempts to clean up the central city trade economies and upscale them are likely to have wider multiplier effects". It is also necessary to understand functional democracy at the grass root level. The poor make use of the local governing representatives and bodies to "make claims on the system" and any attempt to dilute these elected bodies would seriously impact the poorest. The authors in their summing up argument suggest that in order to "secure decent employment and economy for women, one needs to focus on a range of fundamental economic and locational attributes of the city besides the technical training alone".

In the discussion that followed, comments made included

- In thinking of outcomes from the project, 'work opportunities' need to be understood as any economically gainful activity; it can take the form of self-employment, or home-based work. The narrow concept of 'employment' for an 'employer' has very limited application
- It will also be important to examine how critical are economically gainful activities in bringing the poorest women into the mainstream economy or giving them better chance of growth in their income. It could be that health and housing are possibly more critical elements than skill development and training for the chronic poor. The paper suggests that women can be grouped into three categories according to the degree of poverty. For the poorest women, health is a key issue and need. The extent to which new skills and new work opportunities can be accessed by this group is questionable as they are usually unable to move out of the home for work and are dependent on *beedi/ agarbatti* contractors for work. The interventions recommended for improving the well being of this group include nutrition, crèche facilities, infrastructure and housing up gradation.
- A related question was to understand better which groups of women has the project been able to work with.
- The analysis presented in the paper also has implications for the roles that organisations like the ILO, departments of labour, workers, employers and NGOs can play in trying to reach different groups of people both to improve their welfare in general but also for income generating activities.
- A more holistic approach to address urban poverty could be developed whereby an outreach programme is introduced and people can avail of urban basic services irrespective of tenure (notified/un notified slum).
- In terms of education a complicated set of issues emerge – mid-day-meals might be an attraction for the children to be sent to school. But for the poorest of the

poor the economic crisis is at times so stark that sometimes the parents take the child out of school so as to be able to complement their income till the crisis passes. The slightly better off are able to borrow money from their employers.

- In the case of both health and education, it is clear that the poor use private services except when a crisis situation occurs when they turn to government services. The poorest of the poor however are unable to access private services. Is it the case that structure of government programmes is such that they are not enabling of access – standardized programmes do not serve the poorest? How do we develop specific needs based programmes for the poor?
- Lack of secure tenure leaves the poor in constant fear of eviction.
- The constant endeavour for the project has been establishing linkages with various government agencies besides agencies directly related to employment and training. For instance the department of women and child development and education is a partner of the programme committee and the interaction between them is a continuous one.
- One of the notions that is very strong in the ILO decent work agenda when talking about housing, health, improved water management, improved infrastructures is the understanding that all these elements mean 'work' and thus need to be included in the overall context. This is a challenge but it raises the potential benefits of this kind of project activity to a level where we would like it to go.
- The learnings of the project would allow us to reach out on a larger scale and also to influence relevant government programmes such as the employment guarantee schemes

## Session II: Skills and Training

**Mrs. Vatsala Watsa**, Principal Secretary (Labour), Govt. of Karnataka chaired the second session, which was focused on Skills and Training.

**Mr. Raghupati**, Deputy Director (Employment and Training), Directorate General of Employment and Training (DGE&T), representing the training wing gave a brief account of their involvement in the Decent Employment programme. The training wing is directly responsible for implementing schemes under the policy guidelines and curriculum laid down by the DGE&T. Talking about the craftsman training scheme, he said that training is being implemented through a network of private and government-run Industrial Training Institutes (ITI's). Out of the 104 government run ITI's 17 are exclusively for women training 1,816 women trainees and out of the 360 private affiliated ITI's 2 are exclusively for women in the state of Karnataka. A total of 18,128 trainees are undergoing training in government ITI's, whereas in case of private ITI's 23,126 trainees are currently being trained. Since the past four years 1/3 rd reservations for women candidates in special component ITI's has been implemented. The monitoring agency in Karnataka, the *Karnatak Mahila Avirudhi Yojana* meets once a month to review and monitor the financial and physical targets

that have been fixed. The Women and Child Welfare Department also conducts reviews to make sure that a third of all allocations are for women.

As far as other schemes are concerned, the Government of Karnataka has a Special Component Plan which caters to Scheduled Caste (SC) candidates and likewise one for Scheduled Tribes (ST). Out of the 4,000 candidates in the Special Component Plan scheme more than 2000 are women candidates. Under the tribal project, there are 6 formal training centres exclusively for tribals.

Apart from formal training Mr. Raghupati also mentioned a few special training programmes such as a motor driving school, advanced vocational training system taking care of training for industrial workers as well as high tech training programmes for industrial workers. Apprenticeship training is provided under the Apprenticeship Training Act 1971; it is a statutory requirement for all industries in Karnataka to take a minimum number of apprentices, as fixed by the Government of Karnataka based on the infrastructure availability and skilled manpower.

Mr. Raghupati mentioned that girls recently have made an entry into non-conventional trades in electronic, mechanic and recently in fitter and turner trades. It is very encouraging but the problem is no industry is willing to offer them apprenticeship training.

He briefly mentioned the new programmes. Institute Management Committees (IMC) have been set up for monitoring purposes. Short-term training courses have been started at district level in motor rewinding, electrical gadgets repairing and house wiring. He also spoke of the State Council of Vocational Training (SCVT) which is still in its conception stage, and will undertake the responsibility of short-term training programmes for the lesser-qualified candidates with an emphasis on self-employment trades. He also emphasised the importance of placement cells, since the training goes waste unless the trainees are properly placed. The ITI's already have placement officers. Due to the apprenticeship training scheme regular interaction with industries is assured. Post training placement is critical for both industry and self employment.

**Mr. B. S Raviprasad**, Principal, Regional Vocational Training Institute (RVTI), Bangalore, made the second presentation. A report published by the GOI in 1974 on training of women with regard to their socio-economic conditions emphasised the need to train women so that they can be placed in the society at par with all others. This also appeared in the 20 point programme of the late Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. And thus, RVTI was set up in 1977. Currently RVTI offers formal training courses in three stages – basic skills courses in both engineering and non-engineering trades; advanced skill courses and post advanced skill courses.



RVTI has a placement cell which facilitates on-campus interviews, on the job training and apprenticeship training. All those trained in architecture and secretarial practices are employed.

The RVTI co-ordinates various schemes - training directorate, training project, apprenticeship training and women occupation training (WOT). Under the training directorate RVTI has 6 advanced training institutes and 2 specialised training institutes in electronics and process instrumentation. They also have Foremen Training Institutes, Model Training Institutes and National Instructional Training Institute which prepares all the instructional material for the ITI's. The World Bank assisted training project has set up the Apex Training Institute, a pioneering training institute in hi-tech areas. There are 6 advanced and 10 Industrial Training Institutes which are set up under the hi-tech scheme. Under the Apex institute 40 hi-tech labs have been set up one of which is in Bangalore.



The roles and functions of the Institute for the Decent Employment Project have included training of trainers, developing training material, and model training programmes, soft skills on personality development and gender equality and legal rights.

The discussions at the end of the session reflected on the question of how far the needs for skill training and placement are being met. Comments included

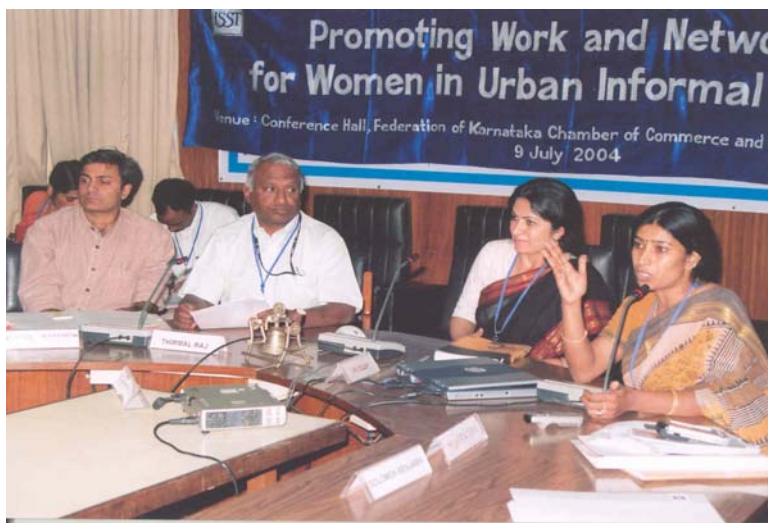
- Linking up this discussion with the previous session, we need to understand to what extent are these various training programmes able to reach poor women – the poorest, the poor and the better off among the poor.
- Placement is an area calling for more attention. Women who have received training and excelled in a particular trade face the inevitable challenge of finding sensitised employers to avail of employment opportunities.
- Motivation - It was pointed out that motivation for skill training should not ignore the socio-economic problems of the women trainees.
- Access - That training programmes must also determine the ability of women to access skill training and their ability to upgrade their skills further.
- Skill Training – In addition to understanding the supply side, we need also to understand the reactions of women in the informal sector towards interventions like the 'decent employment' programme or other state run training programmes.

- Sustainability - And most importantly attention must be drawn to the measure of sustainability that such skill training programmes provide with regard to generating employment and keeping it.
- To what extent are the training institutions being able to react to and keep up with changes in the market? The time frame and reaction attributes of private training institutes, as well as their strategies and methodology, is said to be better than that of the government training institutes. This area needs to be given more attention.
- Once the training is completed, institutions do not have a monitoring mechanism to see how many trainees of such programmes are actually employed on a sustained basis.
- There is an information gap about work and employment opportunities that needs to be filled.
- Another point made in regard to the government training institutes was that there is a structure that these training institutes are expected to follow. This structure cannot be changed overnight so as to make the institutes more responsive to marginalised sections of society.
- Informal courses catering to the needs of the marginalised do exist, however there is a process by which these can be formalised. Once these courses are popularised, they will slowly be inducted into the formal stream.
- At the end, official representatives reiterated that the government institutions and programmes are flexible and open to change.

### **Session III: Markets and linkages**

Mr. Thirimal Raj, Deputy General Manager (Marketing), MICO, Bangalore chaired the third session, which focused on the importance of markets and the need for an integrated approach towards market oriented training and building market linkages for employment generation.

Ms. Uma Reddy, President, AWAKE presented a paper titled 'Free markets vs. created opportunities – developing market linkages – an AWAKE experience'. The presentation stressed the need to place the customer as the focus of all marketing activities. She observed that "marketing is not selling". In selling, one concentrates on the product, whereas in marketing the focus is on the customer. The very choice of the product and the technology is governed by what the market wants, as much as by the resources of the entrepreneur. "Marketing is defined as a process of exchange between buyers and sellers in which the seller meets the needs of the buyer".



AWAKE achieves its objectives through its various activities that fall under the categories of *Stimulus*, *Start-up*, *Sustenance*, and *Support*. “Stimulus programs which include Business counseling & Awareness Programs are aimed at motivating women to take up entrepreneurship. Start-up programs focus on

capacity building and information support for aspiring women entrepreneurs through its entrepreneurship development training programs. Sustenance programs are for existing women entrepreneurs and focus on marketing, conducting exhibitions, management programs, technical up-gradation etc. Support programs are for established entrepreneurs and for organization and aims at providing information and state of the art technology support for growth and expansion. This includes a monthly newsletter *Awakener* providing information on the various activities of the organization circulated among AWAKE’s members & its network, thus facilitating business-to-business linkages”.

Ms Reddy pointed out that women today enjoy better opportunities as entrepreneurs. The traditional notions that women owned business are found only in the service and retail trade, and cannot provide the full range of products and services required to meet the needs of most market sectors has seen a significant alteration. She pointed out that markets which were traditionally difficult for women business owners to enter have become more “pro-active in reaching out to women both as suppliers and customers”.

Based on AWAKE’s feedback from its activities such as business counselling, training and membership programmes ‘marketing’ has emerged as the key need to initiate as well as build on the growth of women entrepreneurs. She emphasised that with adequate exposure and continuous learning women are enabled to participate in both the traditional and non-traditional sectors and excel in their respective trades. Ms. Reddy suggested that there is tremendous opportunity for those women who have the capacity, expertise and desire to create a new niche market enterprise or enhance their existing business in relation to market trends. To be competitive she observed “micro and small enterprises need access to information and markets, in addition to financing. A market linkage is essential to every entrepreneur”.

In light of keeping an overall focus towards building and sustaining an enterprise she spoke about two such major networking initiatives at AWAKE for forming business-to-business linkages in the context of market competition. These include AWAKE’s Enterprise and Learning Network (ELN) for the garment sector, which assists with

design, technology, access to raw materials, and market price information. Similarly, the European Union – Economic Cross Cultural Programme which aims at enhancing the networking between the Business Associations in India, Denmark and Germany.

In conclusion she argued that “economic development is fundamental to strengthening businesses”. At AWAKE by providing “increased access to markets, these businesses are being provided with the revenue stream essential for growth and prosperity”. The need to look at enterprise development holistically is essential and “organisations need to support not just training and counselling but also accessing information and finance in order for the enterprise to succeed”.

This was followed by a brief presentation by **Ms. Munira Sen**, Executive Director, Madhyam titled ‘Cultural Entrepreneurship: The Kala Madhyam Experience.’

The presentation by Ms. Sen was an attempt to understand the market and Cultural Enterprises in the context of globalisation. Ms. Sen began by attempting to define globalisation. She observed, “the faceless phenomenon of globalization is assuming a distinct character in the Indian subcontinent as in every region of the world, further marginalizing already marginalized communities”. Commenting on the ‘loss of tradition’ as a result of technology and innovation she observed how “the present or future is swiftly replacing the past”.

Global shoemaking chains like Reebok, Nike and others have pushed out over ‘200 leather tanneries’ in Tamil Nadu. Chinese goods are threatening our crafts markets. “While the response to globalization is likely to include protesting India’s economic “liberalization” policies on street corners, that is not likely to result in sufficient change”.

The challenge is to use globalization ‘to benefit the most people while inflicting the least pain’. As a direct outcome of their work towards securing social empowerment - Madhyam began to see the ‘potential’ in the folk paintings and handicrafts of the villages as a possible “alternative basis for economic growth in response to the felt need of the people for economic empowerment and livelihood”.

An example is the initiative by Madhyam to position folk art and give it status. In indigenous communities, folk art is passed on from generation to generation, either orally or through imitation. Madhyam’s interventions are “intended to give visibility to folk arts and artists, helping to reclaim space for folk art”: and to stimulate development from within the culture, by creating income generating opportunities for artists.

This model of cultural entrepreneurship according to Madhayam is one which is, “self sufficient, sustainable and culturally appropriate, as it doesn’t change or impose upon the lifestyles of the people. As conceived, its special strengths include involving people’s participation at every level, so that the participants are the owners

and stakeholders. It supports individual entrepreneurship and yet it is collective in nature”.

The comments at the end of the session included

- How can one link grass root level women with enterprise development programmes? One way would be the entrepreneurship development module, which is AWAKE’s approach to introducing the women to take a more comprehensive approach towards their products with specific reference to the market. This particular training introduces them to various concepts of marketing, finance and communication through the use of small (Rs. 5,000) projects to enable them to think of their products more holistically.
- The presentations emphasised the need for training and awareness generation on marketing, finance and communication skills in addition to skill development.
- What women particularly need is an orientation to sell their products or services in the appropriate ‘market space’ – if necessary carve out their own niche. Applying the suitable marketing strategy and positioning their products is the key to developing enterprises.
- There are several state run programmes promoting training for women to set up enterprises – but these programmes are ailing. AWAKE should make recommendations to these state programmes to increase adeptness and effectiveness of similar state run programmes.
- The state run enterprise development programmes could be made more flexible to suit the needs of the women; the skill and products could be kept in mind rather than the amount being sanctioned for a loan.

## Session IV: The Urban Environment

**Mrs. Vatsala Watsa**, Principal Secretary (Labour), Govt. of Karnataka chaired the fourth session on initiatives in improving employment and the urban environment, with focus on low income areas.

**Mr. Ramesh Ramanathan** from Janaagraha presented their approach to participatory governance and its impact on livelihood for the urban poor. The paper was titled ‘Public Governance & its impact on livelihood opportunities for urban poor.’

Janaagraha’s approach to integrating the poor into public governance is based on the idea that participatory democracy is meant for all citizens, irrespective of their social standing. One has to provide the poor with the opportunity to participate by disregarding any form of separation between the middle class and the poor, by appealing to the goodness of people, and by creating spaces for citizen participation that encourage participation by all citizens and not any particular class or group.

One of the focal points of Janaagraha’s work has been the revival of the *Swarna Jayanthi Shahari Rozgar Yojana* (SJSRY). The programme was initiated in 1998 by

the Central Government of India and is implemented by Directorate for Municipal Administration (DMA) in Karnataka.

The programme identified community groups at the grass roots, neighbourhood groups of 20 women each representing one family and Community Development Societies (CDS). It was designed to facilitate access to bank loans for individuals belonging to neighbourhood groups, for setting up small businesses such as flower stalls or tailor shops. However, the inability of these groups to demonstrate their financial accountability and staying capacity resulted in refusal of the banks to co-operate. In 2002, the programme covered 1,00,000 families clustered into 4,000 neighbourhood groups. In the 5 years since inception, 952 micro-enterprise loans had been given from 650 bank branches with an average of 1.5 loans over a period of 5 years for any bank branch, to these 1 lakh families with a recovery rate of less than 20 per cent. Janaagraha visited the state level banking committee and the lead district managers with a possibility for intervention to rethink the programme. The standard response at the banks was 'we do not want to deal with this – its classic priority sector lending and we have no recoveries'.

It took Janaagraha 7 months to facilitate the coming together of four stakeholder groups – the urban poor, the banks, the non-governmental organisations and the government to revive the SJSRY programme. A six month goal was put forward to create 200 Thrift and Credit Groups (TCGs) and secure 450 micro-credit loans. A nodal branch was created with a standardised application form for micro-enterprise loans under SJSRY. The next step was to differentiate the approval stage and the disbursement stage for a micro-enterprise loan. In the waiting period the applicants would undergo training in entrepreneurial development programme. This was an attempt to assure the banks that the loan would get repaid. The six month goal was achieved and in the initial three months the progress equalled half that of the previous five years of SJSRY in Bangalore.

The reason behind this success was the integration of SJSRY communities into public governance. Central to the design of the SJSRY was a structure of people's institutions. The design of the reworked programme ensured the involvement of the poor in the decision-making and planning process related to the SJSRY activities. In addition to the benefits of the SJSRY programme, Janaagraha saw the involvement of poor women into the larger governance conversation as crucial. Many members of the urban poor participated in several SHG meetings and gained qualities of leadership, financial and infrastructure knowledge and experience in presenting their problems to the government.

The revival of SJSRY had both direct and indirect implications for livelihood of the urban poor. Firstly, the group benefited directly from Thrift and Credit groups and micro-enterprise loans. Financial independence produced a 'strong sense of self-worth and peace of mind.' Success in improved service delivery for basic services like ration cards, and adequate water supply aided the groups to seek better employment opportunities.



Janaagraha believes any improvement in the quality of public governance will eventually consider the demands of the urban poor to reflect in the budgetary allocations of the government and in turn support livelihood activities of the poor. The Janaagraha model of 'constructive engagement' is a holistic approach to address systemic level

changes that have critical repercussions for people at the ground level. Increased levels of participation allow for downward flow of information and enable people to make informed choices and take responsibility for change which is self-directed.

### Session V: Towards an Action Plan for Bangalore

The last session was chaired by **Dr Devaki Jain**, Trustee, Institute of Social Studies Trust.

**Ms. Ratna Sudarshan** Director ISST summed up the days' discussions with the following points:

- The project has tried to make the critical intervention of access to skill training and a translation of this access into work opportunity.
- The needs assessment and impact assessment reports both suggest that the project has had several successes. However, a challenge faced by the project is the need to further strengthen the link between training and work, so that the work opportunities open to people are such as to effectively use the training received. This is especially so since the project is trying to help people to develop non-traditional skills.
- Greater focus could be given to make the trainees aware of opportunities for self employment. Where there is a high dependence on contractors women tend to accept whatever work is being offered by the contractors. Dr. Benjamin's paper suggests that this would be most relevant to the group of chronic poor women.
- Dr. Benjamin has identified three categories of poor women. Taking into account the various elements of nutrition, health, improved infrastructure, local economies, and the role of local level politicians his analysis suggests that we need to develop different strategies for the different groups of women.
- The presentation made by AWAKE emphasising that markets come first could be useful in developing further strategies of market linkage for the project.

- It was queried whether the project seeks to address individual development or development through groups – the best strategies would be different depending on which approach is seen as most desirable.
- It was also pointed out in the discussion that the current formal training structure was designed to meet the needs of the formal economy. It had not been designed keeping the informal sector in mind. Through the pilot project linkages are being developed to meet this demand and a few successful modules have been developed. The question therefore is do we need to think in terms of new structures of training, or can the existing structures be suitably modified and adapted.
- Finally, from the discussions it is clear that different levels of interventions are needed for any significant impact upon livelihoods. Better governance, better environmental health have significant implications for a sustainable approach to achieving decent employment.

Other observations and suggestions for the future included –

- The women participants are the focus of the programmes and she should be properly understood, including in respect to her physical fitness.
- Her economic engagements – part-time or full time must be also understood. Pulling her away from her current economic engagement results in a loss of a daily wage and the only means of sustenance.
- After acquiring training, jobs are not guaranteed. One of the primary reasons is illiteracy and non-acceptance by the community (society). A lot of effort needs to go into preparing women in terms of building their confidence as they will face a lot of competition from men and literates in being the first choice for a job and also preparing the community (society) to accept these ladies personally.
- Can self-employment for these women be supported by ILO or the state and central governments?
- The government representatives committed to conducting small one day programmes in confidence building, capacity building, opportunity awareness and life skills.
- One experience of the ILO project that was shared with participants concerned a group of women from a slum rehabilitation area who were able to identify ways to meet the needs of these 50, 000 households in the area and started their own catering kiosk.

**Dr Devaki Jain** made some suggestions for the consideration of the decent employment programme for the city of Bangalore. She reviewed the definition of decent employment as

*Decent employment is work that is seeking to alleviate poverty through social development, work where the perception of work and the workers are respected as capable individuals and the working conditions are 'decent'.*

She commented on the 'smartness' of the poor and the speed with which women grasp anything new that they are trained in – reflecting a keenness and desire to learn



and do something. There is no opportunity she won't grasp and bring to her home to earn a livelihood. And as Mr. Benjamin pointed out a deep understanding of relationships of power is needed. Basically, power relationships need to be changed in order to enable the poor to access abilities.

Mrs Jain argued that the state needs to play a more pronounced role in ensuring overall decent working and living conditions for informal sector workers. She pointed out that things are not geared to the poorest. Borrowing Dr. Benjamin's category 1 of women (poorest of poor), these are one-meal-a-day women, who may not have the capacity to participate or access any training or placement. Her life is surrounded by powerlessness and insecurity. The prior concern here must be to ensure that women have secure land and are free of vulnerability resulting from their immediate habitat. The deep health deprivation and lack of proper access to public services which leave poor women at risk from both internal as well as external influences needs to be addressed. She suggested that nutritional aid in the form of mid-day meals and social protection needs to be made available to these families to help them enhance their chances for better livelihood generation.

She remarked that government schemes are like 'boxes', which need to be opened! Elaborating on the point she said the state schemes are all wrapped up and one has to orient oneself to avail of the money – which often may not be what you 'want' or 'need' or can 'use' for that particular purpose. So the point she was making was that the schemes are not designed for women living in the slums. Could it be requested of the ILO that it develop a sub-section of this programme that might cater more directly to the poorest, in response to the day's discussions on the situation of poor women in the slums?

Mrs Jain further commented that the Fifth Five Year Plan had attempted to direct attention to occupations where women tend to be the predominant labour force – such as agarbatti, bidi making, tailoring, domestic work and forest produce in rural areas. Here there is a natural absorption of female labour. It was felt that these women most needed to be organised for collective bargaining as a way of improving their livelihoods. She hoped that with the passing of the 'Karnataka Domestic Workers Bill', the state will work towards a more sensitised approach to see that service reaches the person - whether it's the housewife in Malleshwaram or a slum dweller. The Janaagraha accountability-governance package speaks for itself.

A critical question relates to what a suitable market is. AWAKE's presentation stressed the ability to market products to the middle class. But poor women are able to sell to the less poor. This is "the circle which begins the economic empowerment" and we do not need always to target the middle class or export markets. Women in Karnataka are already doing this – for example selling 'laddos' for 10 paise which if put in 'dal' turns it into 'rasam' – illustrating that women in food processing have already learnt what the biggest market is. As she put it, 'a sustainable market is thus one which links you to those with whom you can relate'.

In conclusion Ms. Jain enquired whether is it skill, placement, networking, organising or decent employment that allows these women to maximise benefits? In future, attempts could be made to further strengthen methodologies and delivery of skill training to relate more closely to the reality of the lives of poor women workers.

### **Overall Conclusions –**

It was suggested that using the existing frameworks for training and employment, the decent employment project should address collective learning and facilitate the creation of alternative institutions. Simply depending on the market is not enough, it is also necessary that marketing training should be made part of the overall training components such that it allows women to make informed choices rather than simply reacting to markets. In conclusion it was re-iterated that the poorest of the poor must be included, and there is an urgency with which we must work towards developing appropriate workable models.

The workshop concluded on the note that a single track focus on marketing, skill training, placement or networking alone is not sufficient to help informal sector women workers enjoy a decent work environment and a decent standard of living. The work and lives of women in the low skilled unorganised sector are not easily separable – in fact they are closely knit and shaped by the environment they live in. Efforts must be put into place to ensure a multi-dimensional approach to skill development and training, which also incorporates an understanding of the living environment of these women.