

Meeting:

SEWA-UN Women-Government of Jodhpur Tripartite Meeting on Issues and Concerns in the Tie and Dye Industry

Date: **13 May 2014**

Meeting background:

SEWA Bharat with support from UN Women is working towards empowering women in rural and informal settings through capacity development. In Jodhpur, SEWA has reached 1,000 women tie and dye workers and is working towards organizing the women workers to enable them to come forward and advocate for their rights and claim entitlements.

As part of this effort, SEWA organized a tripartite meeting between tie and dye workers, contractors and government officials as a platform for multi-stakeholder interaction and for women tie and dye workers to voice their issues and negotiate for their entitlements. The meeting was an opportunity for poor women workers to voice their concerns and questions directly to government officials and contractors in the industry.

I. Opening: Dr. Sanjay Kumar, Director, SEWA Bharat

- Sanjay bhai, Director, SEWA Bharat, began the session, saying, “Businessmen contractors and laborers (women workers) are all equally important to the tie and dye industry. The point of today’s meeting is to ensure that everyone in the supply chain is benefitting. We have called everyone together to listen to and attempt to understand the issues of each party and work towards a collaborative solution.”
- Sanjay noted that, “Each role and relationship within the supply chain is uniquely importantly.”
- He clarified the industry structure saying, “There are big contracts and businesses at the top, middlemen (becholia) in the middle, and tie and dye workers (home-based women workers) at the bottom. If one person does not play their role – the entire chain collapses. What our artisans do, those in the middle cannot do. Likewise, the running from worker to worker all across the city and negotiating with big business is not something that bandhej artisans can do, and big business people need to be focused on the changes in the market. These capacities and roles are different, and cannot be filled in or replaced by one another. This production chain has naturally formed as a practical method of achieving large-scale bandhej production. Therefore, the need is to understand all the parties involved and their concerns in order to ensure that each is fairly benefitting, rather than change the structure. “

II. Arpita, SEWA District Coordinator, Jodhpur presentation on survey results

The major findings of the study were presented and are written below, additional information can be found in the “Survey Report Jodhpur.docx”.

Major findings of the study

- The study shows that majority of the women interviewed are in the age category of 18-35years and nearly all of them are Muslims.
- Majority of these women are illiterate and those who have gone to school have dropped out at an early stage.
- The primary occupation of these women is bandhej and majority of them earn less than Rs1000 a month. Only a small percentage of the women are involved in a secondary occupation.
- The family income of the majority of women is between Rs3000-Rs5000 while the family expenditure varies between Rs4000-Rs6000. This signifies that many of these families have to depend on loans to meet their monthly expenditure.
- Children often help in the bandhej work with a larger number of girls involved in it than boys.
- The majority of women get paid on a weekly basis or on a fortnightly basis. However, an overwhelming majority of the women stated that they did not have a passbook which made it difficult for them to maintain a record of their payments.
- It is significant to note that nearly all the women interviewed had not received any training for the bandhej work but were keen to undergo training if given an opportunity.
- While a large percentage of the women know the contractor, a significant percentage of them do not. The majority of the women did not receive any advance or gifts during festivals from the contractor.
- There is a long chain of middlemen between the contractors and the women bandhej workers, thus resulting in lack of direct interaction between them. This has serious consequences for the rights of the workers. The overwhelming majority of women are dependent on contractors for work.
- Majority of the women live in small houses of their own with water, toilet and electricity facility.
- Majority of the women go to the government hospital for treatment of illnesses. However, most of the women did not have any insurance thus increasing the burden on them during times of illness.
- Women's access to government schemes is low. Even though a little over half the women interviewed received benefits under one or the other government scheme, a significant percentage of them did not. Further, even though most of the women stated that there was an anganwadi center in the area, a large percentage of them did not use it.
- Nearly all the women did not have a bank account. While many of the women manage to save, a large number of them are not able to do so. This supplements the data which shows that in many cases the family expenditure is more than the family income, thus forcing the women to depend on loans to meet their expenses.
- Currently the women are not associated with any SHGs, but majority of them expressed a desire to be associated with one. Further, an overwhelming majority of the women did not have an artisan card due to which they are not eligible for many benefits, which would otherwise accrue to them.

The study highlights the fact that a large number of women do not have access to social security schemes and many of them live under debt, as their current income is unable to meet their expenses. Thus, they continue to remain socially and economically weak and struggle to make ends meet.

III. Testimonies and experience sharing

This session featured tie and dye workers who shared their experiences of work and life in order to help other stakeholders understand their perspective. While the session originally called for engagement from both workers and contractors, the latter had left the meeting before this session began.

1. Rezwanaben, SEWA aagewan and middle woman

- Rezwanaben, SEWA aagewan and middle woman, highlighted that one of her biggest issues was basic transportation, noting that the costs accrued exceed the commission she receives on her work.”
- Rezwana said, “I am a bandej worker and I began to get more orders than I could do. This is how I started giving out work to my neighbors, but I do not get enough orders to balance out my transportation costs for pick-up and drop off of materials to other ladies.”

2. Sayraben, SEWA member and bandhej worker

- Sayraben, “During monsoons we are unable to do the tying work because the dying work doesn’t happen during this time. This is a whole season that we are left without work. Life very difficult for us as daily wage earners. This [lack of consistent work] forces us to borrow money – sometimes from family but also from money lenders.”

3. Parveenben, SEWA member and bandhej worker

- Parveenben said, “ Our economic status is very weak because we do not get sufficient amount to run the house from this work. On top of this my husband is in the hospital which makes life more difficult.”

IV. Open Discussion on Minimum wage

This session featured a discussion from two government and industry representatives on the various ways that women can promote their business.

4. Sree. Dubey, Department of Industries (DIC)

- “Women are capable of doing much work better than men. They take up small tasks and work to contribute to their families’ household income. The art of dying and tying is a really old one and over time it has improved, however, the entire process of dying has become quite polluting. Most of the dyes used now are chemicals and they in small factories there is no proper drainage system to deal with this. The department of industries has stopped registering these small factories because they would be charged if they are found operating without the right pollution checks. This means that artisans cannot

benefit from the industry. There is a need to go back to natural dyes also because the consumer has become concerned about how the product is being made.”

- “What we could now have is a community dyeing center with the proper facilities and proper drainage systems. He suggested that women could form Self Help Groups so that there could be savings to fund these small dyeing centers. “

5. Raviveer Choudhary, Development Commissioner, Handicrafts Promotion Officer

- Mr. Choudhary, Ministry of textiles explained about the various schemes that are available for artisan workers, including the artisan cards, the benefits, and the application process. Additionally, he encouraged women to go out and explore the market, find business for themselves in order to get a larger share out of the supply chain. He explained that the loan facility through the artisan card is given through the bank after women have started and registered their self-help groups. The loans are given to initiate and expand their business. Mr. Choudhary explained about the various insurance policies that they are entitled to apply to once they have secured artisan cards for themselves. He also mentioned that there are various fairs held by the government for women artisan cardholders to showcase and sell their products. Mr. Choudhary noted the various trainings that are available to women artisans – these come on website and SEWA team can check and connect women to this. He also asked all the women present to either themselves or through SEWA and after that apply for the various schemes that they are entitled to.

V. Closing remarks: Jaya Jha, program coordinator, SEWA Bharat

- Jaya Jha said that for women to understand the market and the value of their work they need to be sure of how many hours they give to creating a product in order to calculate how much they should earn. For this women need to come together in order to decide on a fair piece rate as per the number of hours they spend on a particular product, the state minimum wage and the market rate of the product. It is very important for women to have a collective voice so they can be heard. This is to avoid the constant fear that if they as individuals do not take the work for such a low rate, that some one else will.
- What we need to do is for women who are participating in the session to be part of this movement and hold regular meetings with support from SEWA. Women should strengthen their local area trade committees in order to help women bargain for fairer wages.