

Minutes of the Labnet Meeting
Held at Hotel Tamizhagam
On 18th August, 2005.

The meeting started with the welcome note by Mr. C. Chandrasekar, NCRC. He welcomed everyone on behalf of NCRC, American Indian Foundation (AIF) and Action Aid and called the chief dignitaries Mrs. Annie George, CEO, NCRC, Mr. Shankar, American Indian Foundation, Mr. Solomon, Maya, Bangalore, Mr. Pratab Singh, Action Aid to the dais.

More than 47 members representing from various NGOs participated in the workshop. After self-introduction of the participants, Mr. Shankar, AIF spoke on the overview of organizing the meeting. He thanked NCRC for organizing such a meet and said that since large scale of construction activities happening in Nagapattinam, we are exploring the possible avenues of linking the local labour communities in the construction process, and extend them to different level of skill upgradation and introducing new techniques in construction. He pointed out the success story of Maya, who had successfully implemented such a concept under the banner Labournet in Bangalore. Such intervention, he said would add value to the whole reconstruction process. He added that we are gathered here to discuss and how to include the local labour force in the construction and arrive at a conclusion at this workshop.

Mrs. Annie George, CEO, NCRC then made a PowerPoint presentation on the labour sector and shelter opportunities and concerns. She briefed about the labour sector like who they are, what they are doing, what are the units they are involved in and permanent shelter status in Nagapattinam. She pointed out that near about 17, 151 permanent shelter both comprising of Katcha and Pucca houses to be constructed in the district and what are the labour required per unit / house. Her presentation pointed out what it meant to an NGO and what does it mean to Nagapattinam and points like livelihood opportunities for people, skill upgradation for them and transition from unorganized to organized sector were elaborated. She gave some points to consideration through her presentation like

- Low availability of labour in Nagapattinam due to migration of workforce
- Scale and pace of construction forcing importing of labour –cost an important parameter.
- Familiarity with RCC Construction.
- Quality Vs Cost.
- Local cost effective technology getting lost
- Continued maintenance and extension difficult
- Impact on sustainability

Finally, through her presentation she called for a collective effort to employ local labours for housing reconstruction.

Mr. Sharad, Maya, Bangalore made a presentation on Labnet's concept and experience. He elaborated on the activities of Labnet like:

- Builds collectives of informal sector workers
- Provides institutional support in marketing and new product development presently working in the sectors of garments, lacware toy artisans and construction.
- Primary focus on construction workers, especially in the building services sector where short term nature of construction projects and state of disorganization impede formation of collectives.
- A broad based development approach with focus on enrolling all stakeholders in the sector.
- Seeks to centralize all labour intensive operations in the sector through a single formal interface.
- **Labnet's Primary Approaches**
- Establishing an information exchange that centralizes information flow on availability of work.
- **Information –exchange in function**
- The register workers of all traders across the city into a database
- Publicizes the database with all builders and contractors
- **In function**
- All operations centralized through a co-ordination centre with a basic call centre and database facilities –receives call for workers from clients, prioritizes and sends workers based on defined criterion and requirements.
- Captures information of work orders executed through the system, operationalizes monitoring and skills development initiatives through the exchange to grade their skills.
- **Other specific functions**
- Monitoring existing and upcoming construction projects in the city
- Establishing contacts with all key projects personnel of construction firms
- Capturing information on existing rates to stabilize labour wages
- Registering captive labour gangs
- Skill upgradation – initiating onsite training initiatives through construction firms and through labour team leaders /mastris / labour co-ordinators
- Encouraging construction firms to invest in training and safety in order to professionalize themselves and providing technical consultancy for the same.
- **Implications**

- A centralized facility where all workers are registered providing an interface to reach out all benefits, be it information on work, social security, opportunities for skill enhancement
- Begins to formalize informal sector workforce.

Pratab Singh, Action Aid, when speaking on the occasion said there is a large movement going on labour force, it is high time we should tap such opportunities, we had come here to look at the increasing responsibility of such sector, and it would be nice if we come to a solution on this.

Mr. Solomon, Maya Bangalore then throwed some questions to the audience like:

- Is it worthwhile to have a centralized pool of labour workforce?
- Value –addition through skill upgradation for the labour force in the unorganized sector (Skill and proper training is a must)
- Is skill is a useful element?
- Is the kind of investment really useful?
- Long-term viability if such a structure like Lab net essential?

There was a mixed response to his questions from the gathering. Most voiced against the implementation of Labnet here, they pointed out that Bangalore begin an urban area such organized activities can be worked out but not in Nagapattinam. Mr. Karuppaiya, local construction labour leader said that they have more than 3500 registered labourers in their organization and the district has near about 6000 workers, none of the NGOs approached us for labour.

Mrs. Annie George, CEO, NCRC while commenting on the utilization of local labour force said that INGOs and NGOs who are involved in the construction process should involve the locals. She said that we are here to rebuild their lives; it would be an honour if we use the local labour. She asked the local construction labour leader, if labour forces need any skill upgradation training; NCRC is ready to help them. She asked the NGOs to collect a data bank of labours available in their working areas and submit it to NCRC. The NGO co-ordination centre in turn would use the labour force in an appropriate way.