

Tough Times for Construction Workers

By Samuben Bhanjibhai Makwana
(From Construction Work)



I have been a construction worker all through. I started working with mud at the age of 14, and was later engaged in the lifting and carrying of loads; digging work: mixing cement, sand and water, at various construction sites. Now, I am 57 years old and continue to work.

Initially, I use to earn Rs20 (USD 0.41)¹ as daily wages for the work done on construction sites. As time progressed, my daily wages increased to around

¹ <http://www.rbi.org.in/home.aspx#>

Exchange rate, RBI reference rate – INR/1USD; 48.3500

Rs150 (USD 3.10). Those days were really good for us!! My husband and I were able to get our elder daughter married. Our eldest son became a teacher and my younger son completed his college.

And then came the financial crisis

My husband too is a construction worker. However he has not been working for the last 5 years as he is ridden with arthritis. I have two sons who are 32 and 18 years old and two daughters who are 40 and 38 years old. Arrival of the present financial crisis has disturbed the entire construction work. My family situation has also turned bad. We cannot afford to spend money on my husband's treatment. His arthritis is aggravating. Our younger son wanted to study law (LLB). Since we did not have the money to pay for his education, I had to pledge my ornaments for Rs3000 so that he could pursue the course.

The work situation is very bad. The contractors who come in search of workforce at crossroads or junctions (where the construction workers assemble and wait for the allotment of work), require only 2 women out of 200 women who are eagerly waiting to get work. Earlier, the situation was very different: there used to be a demand for 10 workers, but only 5 would be available. The rest of them would already be engaged on various construction sites. We wait at crossroads up to 11-00 A.M, but face regular disappointments as the contractors do not come in search of labour. We return home, feeling discouraged and frustrated.

The situation in construction industry is very bad. Costs of inputs such as iron and steel, cement have increased considerably. New construction work has virtually stopped.

As we are unable to afford proper food and ensure balanced diet, our health is getting affected. Our children are becoming frail and sickly. We are unable to meet the expense of our children's education.

Day to day items are becoming very costly and are getting out of reach.

Thousands of construction workers are going through a very bad phase.
