

Win – Win Approach in Nepal Brick Industry

A Case Study



February 2006, Laxmi Gole and her husband Arjun were working hard in haste to meet up the usual target of green brick moulding, ignoring their 1.5 years old crying baby, Sangeeta. Laxmi has been facing difficulties with her double role of mother and family's breadwinner since she became a brick moulder. Every moulded green brick means a livelihood for them. Childcare is a major factor that reduces productivity for parents like her among other factors such as illness, household cores and festivals. Less productivity means less earning and less food for the family. The childcare centre (CCC) in the industry premise, which is managed by a joint management committee of her co-workers and employer, was closed for two working days in the month of February. The

eldest daughter who could take care of the crying baby is also expediting herself in the number of green bricks that she could add to the family's income. For an outsider, it appeared as a green brick making competition, however the reality was different. In fact, in these two days, they could make only 1900 green bricks in compare to 3200 pieces, which was their average moulding capacity during the other days. Their income went down to NRs 163 (40%) from NRs 400 per day. Sangeeta was not happy either to be away from her little friends and playing environment in the CCC. It has made similar differences in a day's activity to other 25 children of about 20 families working in a brick industry in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal.

Laxmi with her family migrates seasonally from Kavre, a conflict affected rural hill district, to work as moulder in Satya Narayan Brick Industry. She is among those 63'000 workers in 120 brick industries in the Kathmandu Valley who seasonally migrate in family. Satya Narayan Brick Industry is among the pioneer brick industries that have adopted VSBK technology in the Kathmandu Valley to improve environmental performance. It is also among those two brick industries that joined hands with VSBK Technology Transfer Programme funded by Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) to initiate and test actions and approaches that improve living and working conditions of brick workers and their families while improving relationship between workers and employers to create a win-win situation.

The VSBK entrepreneur is seasonally operating (6 months) a childcare centre within the industry premise since November 2003. Mangal Maharjan, the manager of the industry, has realised the benefits even against upfront investment of about NRs 100'000 for establishment and NRs 60'000 (10'000 per month for 6 months) for seasonal operation costs. According to his analysis, there is average 40% less production when the CCC was closed. Then he will require additional 11 moulder families to meet annual requirement of 8 million green bricks. He also sees indirect benefits of less management burden and associated responsibilities to provide basic facilities and services to additional 11 moulder families. With this he also minimise the risks associated to advance payment to workers.



Mangal is proud to present himself as a socially responsible entrepreneur doing small actions at practical ground to benefit both parties. He looks back and feels satisfied that he has changed his attitude that changes can be initiated with a careful process and a modest upfront investment. He happily shared that it has created a platform for discussions between him and workers for respective rights and responsibilities.

Parents like Laxmi are happy enough to pay NRs 5 per day to put their children in the CCC, which is used for running the CCC. It is not only easing parents' work but parents also see benefits of early childhood development and better care by trained caretakers. It has also reduced the risks of children falling into ditch.

The successes and benefits are validated for the VSBK Programme/Nepal when other brick entrepreneurs who are not adopting VSBK technology are requesting for technical and mobilisation support to operate CCC in their industrial premises. The approach will be considered successful and sustainable if this action and approach of CCC is taken as a part of the brick industry by 120 brick industries providing direct benefits to 10,000 children aged below 10 years.

The approach to involve workers in decision and management of CCC will also have value added impact on empowerment of these economically and socially poor workers. Hopefully they will acquire skills and confidence to deal with unique kind of deprivation due to seasonal migration pattern such as interrupted access to health, education services and participation in village level development activities.

Hopefully, it will also bring change in public perception about the brick industries since the income opportunities that are provided to poor workers are overshadowed by a stark image of the brick industries as the second largest polluters in the Kathmandu Valley.

The total production cost of 1.2 billion bricks, produced annually in the Kathmandu Valley alone, is about NRs 2.5 billion, out of which 35% is labour costs. 20% of the total earning by brick workers is taken back home, contributing to the economic linkages between urban and rural areas, injecting a large amount of cash to the respective villages of the country.

About the Organisation

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This case study has been prepared by the Programme team

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