Reimagining Public Infrastructure
Improving the Livelihoods of Informal Construction Workers

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The guiding question in this report has been: how can infrastructure development be interconnected with workforce development in Bangalore, India? As urban planners, our response has been holistic and directed towards recommendations that would benefit the lives of infrastructure workers at a greater scale by pushing for equitable infrastructure development, worker empowerment and social status mobility.

India is at a crucial moment in its developmental trajectory, facing tremendous challenges as well as opportunities for growth and change. Rapid population growth places a strain on natural resources and delivery of services, while at the same time a large youth population provides an able labor force. Foreign investment in business and infrastructure present opportunities for improvement of basic services to all sectors of the population. However, to fully reap these benefits, we begin with the perspective that policies and plans must be put into place that support equitable growth, such as improved education, strengthened social protections, and basic services for all.

According to the 2009 report "Skill Gap Analysis of Building, Construction and Real Estate Services" by the NSDC, the construction sector in India is the second largest economic activity after agriculture. Infrastructure development has a prominent role in the construction sector and makes up 76% of the construction GDP in India. It is also the most significant economic activity occurring in urban areas. However, despite the high levels of investment and growth in infrastructure, the quality of services continues to degenerate. We suggest that our client LabourNet play a bridging role between these two trends.

The focus of our recommendations is around planning for better workforce development through public infrastructure investments. LabourNet aims to address many of the challenges resulting from India’s growth and occupies a position at the intersection of policy makers, corporate entities, not-for-profit organizations and workers themselves, to address a diverse range of issues including training and social protections. LabourNet aims to expand its operations across India and extend its reach to half a million workers. In order to help them expand their training, our studio was asked to research apprenticeship and training systems in various countries, if a relationship exists between skills, productivity and wage, and the impact of skill requirements through certification in the construction sector.

The following sections of this report will address the original questions asked by our client of a productivity-wage relationship and several of the challenges we believe to be unresolved through LabourNet’s current structure. It will make a case for LabourNet to work solely with public infrastructure projects, and within this strategic repositioning, adapt and use their training-model to ensure wage increases for their infrastructure workers. Several of our recommendations are organizational and skills training tactics that address the symptoms of an inefficient value chain caused by rigid labour laws; however it is not until labour law reform occurs and awareness is brought to these issues, that these value chains can be shortened that LabourNet can fully guarantee “sustainable livelihoods” through “sustainable education, employability and [an] employment ecosystem” (LabourNet, n.d.).

This report considers LabourNet’s many organizational strengths and builds upon their existing framework to increase the level of impact on the quality of life and economic stability of the informal construction worker. We recommend that to alter the workers’ social and economic status, LabourNet needs to:

- Reorient Training for Specialized Skills
- Become a Labour Contractor
- Train Workers to Become Contractors
- Advocate for Labour Law Reform
- Develop Social Media Campaign

Some of these changes are already underway at the organization. We recognize the challenges involved in expanding some of these changes beyond a few trial projects. However, based on our observations and research we believe that changing the core organizational strategy to reflect these changes would have the maximum impact in improving workers’ lives. We suggest specific opportunities that can both assist workers and help the public. As a planning studio, our concerns are with planning in the public interest and specifying whose interests are best served by public and private infrastructure projects. Through various data and arguments, we demonstrate what opportunities we see for the organization to (where possible) simultaneously serve its under-privileged worker client base as well as serve the public. Some of our recommendations are therefore organization-specific; all have a wider planning purpose in mind, but with the concerns of better opportunities for low-income informal construction workers and urban public improvements at their heart.
LabourNet’s current training for construction workers is premised on the idea that upgrading skills improves productivity, which will result in a wage increase. Skill upgradation and specialization through training also lead to wage increases. However, even with their success as a training agency, many of LabourNet’s construction workers have not consistently received an increase in wage from third parties after completing training. To resolve this challenge, LabourNet asked us to provide a case study analysis of international apprenticeship and training systems that might provide some ways to improve LabourNet’s operations and examples of worker productivity benchmarks to support wage increases. This is where we began our research. In our analysis we found that in some developing countries, for example, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Ghana, that an increase in skills and productivity does reduce uncertainty and improve the quality of construction projects, which could be used to demand better wages.

Despite this, our brief qualitative research with project developers in Bangalore was consistent with our own assessments, in that an increase in wage due to productivity is difficult to implement due to the construction and labour market in India. In reality, productivity is one of several factors determining workers’ wages; others include labour market power and the value chain pipeline as elaborated below.

In order to understand why this occurs in India, we conducted an analysis of the construction value chain as it currently exists and the various challenges to improving the wage of the informal worker. This analysis is a way to measure the value added by each step in the production process as well as the transfer of money through the actors. Figure 1 shows the various levels of government and private entities involved with the construction of a large infrastructure project such as the Bangalore Metro.

The unskilled informal worker is removed from the project manager and general contractor by several layers of subcontractors. Market forces and labour policies push subcontracting further out as a way to cut fixed costs and reduce the number of workers that large contractors are directly responsible for. As the workers are ‘shifted down’ the value chain, the trickle of money and power of individual workers is increasingly difficult to track. In addition, because workers function in teams on worksites, this means the value added by the individual worker is difficult to quantify in overall outcomes.

Through our research — including visits to construction sites and conversations with LabourNet, developers and contractors — we formed a clearer picture of who the construction workers are and the specific challenges they face. The majority of workers are subcontracted, and part of the informal economy. Nationally, fewer than 5% of infrastructure construction workers have any formal education or certification; many dropped out of school before the 5th standard (Source: Construction site interviews). Additional challenges are faced by informal workers who are women, or members of certain castes or religious groups. Many are migrant workers from other states who moved to large cities such as Bangalore in search of jobs. These workers lack social support networks, and generally live in on-site housing facilities provided by the developer.

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Workers are generally paid by the amount of work completed, referred to as a piece rate wage. After training, they are able to work more efficiently and quickly, which means that their daily wage increases. However, the piece rate wage remains constant. (See Fig 2) In order to increase overall earnings, workers must find employment in more projects. In a labour market with a large supply of informal and casual wage workers, this structure makes it difficult for workers to find jobs that recognize the benefits from training. Therefore, while developers and contractors see monetary gains from faster project completion, this benefit is not passed on to the worker. Furthermore, the status of the construction worker in society is one of the primary barriers to earning higher wages. As long as people higher up the value chain view construction workers as uneducated and unworthy of respect, it is difficult to make a difference in the workers’ lives through training alone.

In light of these findings, we concluded that rather than working to develop LabourNet’s training model, it would be more advantageous to find alternative methods that complement their training model which more directly improve the quality of life of workers and make explicit the connection between productivity and wage. Our recommendations provide multiple ways to work around the many social and policy barriers that currently exist in the construction labour market and labour policy reform. First, by focusing on public infrastructure projects that directly address quality of life issues in the city, LabourNet can bring the issues faced by construction workers to public awareness through social media and partnerships with other organizations. By slightly shifting LabourNet’s training and outreach priorities, we believe it is possible to create a more direct link between training and workers’ wages. Training workers to a higher level of skills, and taking on the role of a contractor are ways to shorten the value chain to increase the benefits passed on to the worker. Finally, these strategies can be used to build momentum toward addressing the root causes of informality and lack of training through policy reform on the local, state and national levels.

In our recommendations, we do not explicitly address the disparate effects of training on various subgroups of construction workers, something that was neither in our mandate nor easily accomplished with limited fieldwork. However, it is important to ensure that the work done by LabourNet helps underprivileged groups. In order to highlight how this could be done, we have provided many case studies and examples throughout this report that focus on working with women, youth, and marginalized populations.

For more about our methodology, refer to Appendix A.
Recommendation Prerequisite

0_Reimagine Public Infrastructure

LabourNet’s mission statement of ‘creating sustainable livelihoods’ is emphasized throughout each recommendation. Our strategies, however, are building on the important conclusion that LabourNet should absorb actors that are actively seeking out public infrastructure investment into its network in order to link skills training and employment with infrastructure projects. These projects, unlike their private counterparts, can give members access to large employment opportunities and have the advantage of being highly visible in the media during all stages of planning and operations, providing a platform for labour issues to be brought to the forefront of public awareness. Private infrastructure projects, however, also play an important role in bridging between private construction projects and public benefits that may also serve our clients’ goals.

However, besides the hard-lined assertion in favor of public infrastructure, we must clarify that not all development can equally achieve the goal of ‘sustainable livelihoods.’ Getting involved in large public development does not necessarily translate into an equitable delivery of infrastructure. In fact, we find that some ‘public’ projects do not extend in reach to benefit the populations of the city that need it the most. The time is right to push for alternative infrastructure projects, as a number of public organizations and civic groups have been expressing opposition to large-scale development such as the metro.

Through our work and living situations are closely linked; an improvement in living conditions can provide improved access to jobs and support existing informal self-employment. LabourNet can begin to use political leverage in order to develop momentum behind these developments.

The study considered two types of model projects that exhibit the potential that can come out of a reimagined infrastructure: slum upgrading and lake restoration.

Slum upgrading has been developed as a delivery method for urban infrastructure projects in several countries throughout the world as a means to addressing issues of energy, water and sanitation, transportation, and other sectors. The case study we considered, Slum Upgrading in Nouakchott, Mauritania (CrS.0), created sustainable jobs, addressed the crucial element of sanitation and water provision, and incorporated skills that can be transferred to other development projects - elements which lower the cost of living for slum dwellers. A similar project should be introduced into Bangalore through the 2012 National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM), an initiative which details the need for several city-wide projects, including the upgrading of Bangalore’s near 450 slums wherein 20% of Bangalore’s population resides (World Bank Group, 2012).

Another opportunity exists in training and advocating for the city’s lake restoration projects, infrastructure identified by numerous public institutions in Bangalore as an immediate need. Bangalore is a city that has seen over one hundred lakes vanish due to encroachment and construction activity for urban expansion. Furthermore, of the lakes that remain, several are used for the disposal of untreated and partially treated sewage due to the lack of network capacity for the city’s rate of growth (Sandaresan, 2011). Communities that occupy dry up lake beds, most of whom work in the informal service sectors as traders, household helpers, and construction labour, are the most vulnerable to flooding and are often of lower socioeconomic status. Slum dwellers have no access work and living situations are closely linked; an improvement in living conditions can provide improved access to jobs and support existing informal self-employment. LabourNet can begin to use political leverage in order to develop momentum behind these developments.

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Attachment 1 in Appendix C takes these broad categories and details them in the form of a scorecard system that can then be adopted into the process of decision making. Sample subsections were originally taken from Cokanovic (2009) on Sustainable Social Urban Regeneration in Europe, then added to and amended following a series of interviews with local actors. The preliminary list was revised as necessary for the trajectory of LabourNet’s mission, and asserts the prioritization of infrastructure requirements. It poses the question of ‘who benefits most from large infrastructure investments?’ and attempts to decentralize the power of planning. By focusing on projects that create a more direct relationship between the worker and product or service that is being provided, an alternative livelihood can be imagined for the worker. This prerequisite highlights the need for a more thorough assessment of infrastructure projects before initiation, during construction, and after their completion.

Re-emphasizing ‘Public’ in Public Infrastructure

Issues of gender, caste, religion, and worker respect are embedded within the Indian society and restrict marginalized populations from breaking out of the cycle of poverty, especially considering the effects they have on education levels, occupational skills, and economic ownerships (Thurat, 2010). Our strategy asks our client to shift to urban projects which create a more direct potential benefit between the worker and the product or service being provided. Certain types of public infrastructure projects have the capability of supporting both human and labour improvements by incorporating them as conditions for construction: these are the developments that should be considered. By investing in projects that will improve the quality of life for the entire city population, LabourNet can lower the cost of living for the disadvantaged populations they are targeting. Especially when considering the informal labour force,

1. Quality of Infrastructure and Services
2. Empowerment and Participation
3. Jobs and Skill Creation
4. Context Specific Development
Contextual infrastructure development focuses on human-scale elements which are accessible to all residents, such as streetscape, roads, and sidewalks.

Unfortunately, we recognize that projects like these have been pushed further back on the agenda because they are not as economically profitable as the large-scale and global projects that have been prioritized by the state and national government. However, given that numerous civic groups have publicly voiced their opposition against large infrastructure, LabourNet has an opportunity here to politically leverage these voices and push for the recognition and construction of smaller scale, community development projects.

**Strengthened Network**

Several public organizations, from the national government to community organizations, form the ecosystem necessary for this condition. The National Urban Livelihood Mission is a tool that should be utilized when advocating for different infrastructure projects, and the National Skills Development Council is one of the ways of incorporating a skills component to current large projects, where the partnerships already exist. However, it is critical that, besides government initiatives, civic groups be utilized. Allying with organizations that are already raising awareness about labour issues is one way of gaining political agency in an attempt at furthering this mission.

**Recommendation Prerequisite**
A case study in Dar el-Beida in Mauritania depicts the multidimensional benefits which should be integrated into a slum upgrading infrastructure project. In 1999, the Mauritanian central and local government, with funding from the World Bank and other international organizations, launched a $640,000 programme which provided vocational training as a component to improve income and living conditions. The project considered multiple participatory levels of intervention, including improvement of sanitation, water supply, electricity, and housing refuse infrastructure (World Bank, 2001).

Within the first year of the launch of the pilot programme, the slum upgrading initiative yielded over 150 long-term sustainable jobs in the Dar el-Beida district alone. Within ten years, the programme led to the creation of 40,000 jobs in the city of Nouakchott, with community members gaining skills in masonry, painting, plumbing, electrical wiring, road paving, and other such jobs. Following the development of these skills and the completion of the vocational training, a programme known as TWIZE was introduced in order to facilitate further income-generating activities in order to create sustainable jobs for the workers that have just received the training. This came about in several ways. The first was by setting up a community system of management for the improvement and provision of services such as water and sanitation. The second was creating networks of employment in neighboring cities whereby trained workers can now gain access to jobs by linking to small scale or large scale facilitating infrastructure projects in the city - be it in construction, road works, or sanitation. The conversation is thus about directly linking skills training and jobs with improving the living conditions of workers (UN HABITAT, 2008).
Recommendations

1. Reorient Training for Specialized Skills

LabourNet representatives have repeatedly spoken about limited opportunities available to those who drop out of school and don’t take the traditional path to higher education. Individuals with low educational attainment lack avenues which allow them to move into higher positions such as contractor or engineer. LabourNet’s current training model attempts to bring formalized training and certification to unskilled workers, yet it stops short of this goal of upskilling for social mobility. In order to work around existing cultural and economic barriers workers need a tangible increase in skills to put them in a stronger position for higher wages. Focusing on specialized skills that have high value in the market is a necessary step toward securing better employability for the worker. Currently, about half of LabourNet’s training programs focus on specialized skills, such as heavy equipment operating, mechanized masonry and mechanized bar bending, however, in order to achieve their goal of social mobility for workers, all of LabourNet’s trainings should focus on high valued skills in the market.

After transitioning to equitable infrastructure projects, LabourNet’s on-site training should be reoriented to projects that are more amenable to recognizing improvements in skills. Focusing on skills for project types will provide opportunities for apprenticeships and other ways to create multi-tiered trainings that can lead an unskilled worker to gaining specialized skills for a specific task.

For example, many of LabourNet’s skills training of masons on private home constructions incorporates workers from different levels of formal education and various construction backgrounds (Fig 5). (Source: Interviews with LabourNet and site visits). In some instances, LabourNet is able to resolve this by having separate classrooms for the various levels; however, in many training sites workers are grouped together. Support is only provided to workers with less experience through additional teaching materials. This structure makes it more difficult for teachers and workers and stalls the upgrading of skills. By expanding all trainings into the multi-tiered training programme that LabourNet has on some training sites, ranging from novice (unskilled) to intermediate (semi-skilled) to expert (skilled), there are more opportunities for workers’ previous skills to be recognized, and for the worker to gain new skills in specialized areas (Fig 6). The NSDC’s Skills Gap Analysis Report for the Building, Construction, and Real Estate (2009) has projections for labour needs in the construction industry organized by trade and skill level. While these numbers have been contested and must be taken with caution, it is important to note that multiple trades have significantly higher requirements for skilled workers than for semi-skilled, which can both highlight skill areas where specialized skills programs should be developed, and is an additional reason for providing opportunities for workers to access these skilled jobs.

Another avenue through which LabourNet could focus training on specialized skills is with construction of large private campuses of firms in Special Economic Zones and other large tech parks. Infosys, for example has been investing in the construction of greens building on their new campuses throughout India, and the company has found the need to train workers in specialized skills for installation of radiant flooring. This is an example of a specialized skill that is highly valued in the market, that has increased demand due to Infosys’ construction activities, and where LabourNet is well positioned to deliver training. LabourNet already works with many large companies as a CSR partner. They could leverage this position to make the transition to working as partners in construction activities. This will create new opportunities for workers in new skills that are high in demand and offer better pay rather using marginal increases in productivity to improve wage.

The challenges to this strategy are in narrowing down the number of workers, and choosing those who have the interest and potential to acquire a higher level of skills. Most workers are unable to leave their jobs, so LabourNet needs to create incentives for them to participate in longer, more intensive training. Working as a contractor on specific infrastructure projects within the construction value chain is the next component of this strategy which could also help overcome this challenge.

Strengthened Network

Partnerships that support this type of work range across public, private, and non-governmental organizations. LabourNet’s existing role within the National Skills Development Corporation could be used to identify and work within areas of growing skill demand. Large private companies that are based in Bangalore are involved in the construction of high-tech campuses, employing large numbers of construction workers and presenting opportunities for training. Further, many NGOs are advocating for smaller scale public projects to improve pedestrian and bicycle access around cities, restore watersheds, and improve living conditions. As mentioned in the previous section, these are opportunities for LabourNet to get involved in a different scale of infrastructure projects, while also expanding the types of on-site training that are provided.

![Image of Construction workers installing radiant floor technology, which requires niche skills not readily found in India.](image-source: Southern Exposure)
An example of how to train workers in specialized skills comes from Barefoot College. Started in 1972, this nonprofit works with people from poor rural communities, primarily women, to improve their livelihoods through skills training and empowerment. They provide a model of how to work with people who are marginalized and overlooked by most traditional institutions in order to help them gain skills that better their quality of life. The majority of students are illiterate or semi-literate, and lack skills for traditional wage employment. The training model focuses on hands-on learning and emphasizes recognition of indigenous knowledge and skills.

The skills developed at Barefoot College focus on areas that address explicit needs of rural communities, such as water, education, alternative energy, and environment. These areas are similar to the types of infrastructure we believe that LabourNet should focus skills training around. Barefoot advocates for community-managed, low-tech, inexpensive ways to address these quality-of-life enhancing infrastructures, such as rainwater harvesting and passive solar energy. Skills taught include installation, maintenance and repair of solar electric systems, water systems, building and construction, and teaching. Gender and women's empowerment is addressed through the types of infrastructure, and through working with women's self-help groups.

Sources: www.barefootcollege.org; Roy and Hartigan (2008)
Recommendations

2_Train Workers to Become Contractors

After becoming a contractor and creating multi-tiered training programs, LabourNet will have the opportunity to train their informal workers to bid for contracts. While our previous recommendation described the benefits that infrastructure workers would receive if LabourNet becomes a labour contractor, this section builds from that strategy to highlight that LabourNet’s position as a labour contractor can also be used to prepare expert-level construction workers to become contractors in their specialized skills as well.

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure improvements in livelihood and wage created from previous recommendations will be long-term, thereby achieving LabourNet’s mission of creating sustainable livelihoods and employment for informal workers. The previous recommendations are crucial to addressing a skill-productivity and wage relationship however they require LabourNet’s future involvement with the construction worker for this relationship to continue. Through training skilled and expert-level workers to become contractors and submit bids on infrastructure projects, LabourNet will ensure that these workers will move higher along the value chain, receive a greater wage directly from a general contractor, and ultimately, challenge their perceived social status as a construction worker.

There have been several organizations and labour unions that have used this strategy to provide informal workers with higher wage and improved benefits, including the Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group in Delhi, a nonprofit focused on environmental and social justice. While waste collection is different than public infrastructure work the value chain is similar to the construction industry, where there are multiple levels of subcontracting causing poor safety conditions, low skills, and low pay and benefits to the workers (Chintan, 2005). Through an initiative called Scavengers to Managers, they educated and supported informal waste pickers to “build green businesses” by becoming contractual workers in privatized waste collection and management. Chintan has been successful in securing contracts between the New Delhi Municipal Council and their workers, in addition to securing them better worksite conditions, wages and benefits (Chintan, n.d.).

Once a multi-tiered training structure is in place, LabourNet will use its position as a contractor to train expert workers on the knowledge and skills necessary to start contracting in their specialized skills. After completing training, these expert workers would use the network of informal construction workers that LabourNet has established to hire unskilled, semiskilled and skilled workers. (Fig 7) The informal workers on each contracting team would continue to receive training until they also reach expert-level and would be incentivized to travel and work together on multiple construction projects. Chintan and the Rachaita Construction Workers’ Cooperative (refer to CS.2) can provide strategies for helping and incentivizing workers as Chintan incentivized by covering the capital costs for workers becoming established contractors and the Rachaita Cooperative allowed members to rent tools to help them access more jobs (Chintan, n.d., Ranicki, n.d.). While this approach has been used by unions, the intention of this component is for LabourNet to borrow from labour union strategies while remaining a social enterprise, as LabourNet is funded through CSR initiatives and several components of their organization could not be supported by a union structure. However, labour unions are able to empower workers to advocate for increased wage opportunities and are an example of how LabourNet can do so as well.

Strengthened Network

LabourNet has established a network of developers and general contractors within the construction industry that trust LabourNet’s brand as a training organization and could be partners through awarding contracts to LabourNet trained contractors and workers. However, to accomplish the other aspects of this component, they will need to expand their reach to other NGOs and labour unions like the Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group, SEWA, and the Rachaita Construction Workers’ Cooperative, to learn aspects of site supervision training modules as LabourNet creates their own.
The Rachaita Construction Workers’ Cooperative promoted by the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), a women’s labour union, empowers informal female construction workers to become contractors in Ahmedabad. The Rachaita Cooperative, created in 2005, recognizes that training is important for workers to receive increased income, however, because workers are not guaranteed increased employment opportunities and are often “exploited in terms of daily wages (Rachaita, n.d.),” they use the strength of a women’s collective to position themselves within the construction industry. Women construction workers are often disadvantaged compared to male workers in their roles on construction projects and wage, and are hired for menial tasks with no means of receiving additional responsibility or pay. The Rachaita Cooperative has trained and organized more than three hundred women construction workers and helped them gain employment through receiving construction contracts. These women workers have been trained in traditionally male-dominated construction roles – including masonry, plastering, china mosaic, bathroom tiling, other flooring and site supervision – and formed into groups based on their specialized skills. As a collective group, these workers have been awarded contracts on small and large private and public sector projects, and their daily wage has increased from 170 rupees to 350 rupees since the start of the Rachaita Cooperative (Ranicki, n.d.).

Ramila Parmar, Rachaita’s president, stated in 2012, that although they struggled to establish themselves in the beginning and had to improve training for women who were not used to performing heavy-duty work that now “women have lifted 22kg bricks to make walls and have bent rods. The team has 10-odd highly skilled masons and an equal number of women who have graduated to be site-supervisors called ‘barefoot engineers’ among the women! They earn Rs 180-500 daily depending on their skills (Inclusive Cities, 2012).”
Recommendations

3_Advocate for Labour Law Evaluation & Reform

While our previous recommendations include organizational and training strategies that address the symptoms of an efficient but not necessarily equitable sector value chain – one being the lack of a skill-productivity and wage relationship for workers – this recommendation is a long-term strategy that addresses the root of the problem through labour law evaluation and reform. We do not determine what position is the best for LabourNet to take, but recommend that they continue their active role in the debate to ensure the long-term interests of their workers are written into national and state legislation, but especially into the employment dimensions of public infrastructure investments.

We have described some of the discussions around employment laws to allow LabourNet to decide where they can best position themselves.

There is no argument labour law changes are necessary to protect workers from exploitation and marginalization. They provide "a floor of labour standards" to prevent firms from competing in a low wage and low productivity market, and they encourage firms to move toward innovation, productivity, and higher wages (Sharma, 2006, p. 2078). There has been significant debate in India regarding the effectiveness of employment laws and their ability to reach all workers in the economy.

Much of the debate has been about the rigidity of employment laws, including the Industrial Disputes Acts of 1947 and 1982, which prevent firms of 100 or more employees from hiring and firing without government permission. Many believe that because of this, firms are reluctant to increase the number of employees and choose to invest in technology or contract work to smaller firms (Sharma, 2006). It has also been argued that these amendments have played a role in stalling economic growth and encouraging employment decline, urban poverty, and an increasing informal economy (Ojankov & Ramalho, 2008). However, other research has found that the connection of employment decline and an increasing informal economy is not likely, including a 2009 report by the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS). It is important for LabourNet to choose a position in this debate as the results of an expanded value chain due to subcontracting has caused many challenges for informal infrastructure workers.

Another consideration is the need for an expansion of employment laws to the informal economy and to investment decisions, which have been brought to light by the NCEUS report as well. While there is still debate about the effectiveness of workers’ protections for the formal economy, there are few protections for the informal or unorganized economy. The NCEUS states that, “overall, the unorganized sector workers are covered in a piecemeal fashion in various legislations and lack comprehensive protection of the minimum conditions of work (p. 180). The NCEUS believes that there is a need for a comprehensive legislation that considers the needs of all workers, including workers of the informal sector. In addition, where regulations did exist, they were not strongly enforced and poorly implemented. The report stated that one of the main constraints to effective implementation included “lack of voice for the unorganized workers and no participation of their representatives in ensuring effective implementation (p. 181).”

Based on our research of the challenges that LabourNet faces, continued advocacy on labour law and investment is a necessary step to ensure that legislation is expanded to the informal sector to ensure increases in wage and quality of life measures. Furthermore, because of LabourNet’s relationship with quasi-government agencies, such as the NSDC, KYSDC, and RSLDC, LabourNet has a legitimacy that can help push for policy changes and extend site-specific interventions to cross-urban scale. Through their existing relationships with quasi-government agencies, LabourNet has an outside perspective of the existing strengths and weaknesses of the current governmental systems and can push for targeted improvements.

Strengthened Network

Advocacy is a difficult goal that would require a long-term effort with many allies. LabourNet needs to build connections with other members of their network who may benefit from better public infrastructure, including member-based community groups that advocate for informal settlement upgrading, Resident Welfare Boards, NGOs, and private firms seeking better municipal and corporate infrastructure. They will need to develop a strong and public campaign strategy (see Recommendation 5 for social media recommendations) to increase public awareness and gain more allies in this political campaign. It is also important for LabourNet to reach out to unions in Karnataka and nationally, to include them in discussions.
China has recently evaluated and amended some employment regulations with voice from many stakeholders, with the most recent amendment being the Labour Contract Law of 2007. China’s primary labour law of 1994 standardized requirements for employment contracts, working hours and overtime, minimum wage and social insurance. It was strict in its allowance for employers to dismiss employees, although the law did not regulate limitations on the use of short-term labour contracts. The lack of enforcement by government, minimal consequences to employers and large supply of labour put workers at a strong disadvantage in comparison to firms. Employers were reluctant to hire formal employees and workers could lose their job if they advocated for a written contract or a change in contract terms.

For China, it was found that while labour laws were created in the interest of workers’ rights, they discouraged employers from investing in a strong workforce and therefore negatively impacted economic growth. The Labour Contract Law of 2007 was created and finalized by a variety of stakeholders, including employees, employers and labour unions, to increase the investment in workers and workforce development by providing increased protections to workers and fewer restrictions on employers. Some of the changes that were included in the new labour law are that employers are required to offer regular contracts to workers who have already finished two short-term contract terms to discourage the overuse of fixed-term contracts. It also requires employers to provide a severance pay to workers whose contract term ends without the option to renew. The interests of labour unions were incorporated in the new law and employers are required to discuss changes to contract terms with a workers’ congress or union.

Recommendations

4_Develop Social Media Campaign

While there are many ways to mobilize around a core issue, we suggest a social media campaign because LabourNet initially asked us to provide them with insight on how social media could best support the organization. Developing a strong social media campaign strategy will provide LabourNet with a reputation, more public support, and the ability to influence policies at a wider scale.

Currently, LabourNet’s social media campaign targets organizations who provide CSR funding through the use of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Youtube. LabourNet’s presence is minimal on these social media sites, therefore they need to increase their presence on these platforms before they are able to politically mobilize. We recommend LabourNet begin posting updates about their progress at training sites regularly, using easily relatable and personal stories mixed with images and content on topics, for example, how they are positively affecting the lives of workers, significant company milestones, and celebrations of small individual successes. They should connect with organizations in their existing network using social media, as well as, expand to other organizations with goals of bettering the lives of informal workers. Furthermore, LabourNet can use this space to acknowledge its corporate partners, so that partners can also benefit from the success of LabourNet. Once LabourNet has engaged and connected with citizens, workers, and organizations, LabourNet can create a dialogue about social issues and their goals. In order to sustain its followers on these social media platforms, regular, engaging and easily relatable updates are key.

This recommendation is focused on increased public awareness about the critical role of construction workers in a city's future and the quality of its public infrastructure. A social media campaign which is engaging and creative will gain more attention and can assist LabourNet in achieving our previous recommendations in this report.

Strengthened Network

There are many organizations currently running strong social media programs that can be examples for LabourNet including Janaagraha, WIEGO, IHS and Ugly Indian. Janaagraha, WIEGO, and IHS are active users of Twitter and Facebook. They have been regularly posting updates by sharing stories about the success of their initiatives, their partners’ initiatives, research, and engaging with other users on these platforms. Thus by gaining followers and supporters, these organizations have been able to coordinate projects among a wider network of actors. A strengthened network will be beneficial for the objective of advocacy, which was mentioned earlier, and consequently Labournet will receive more media attention surrounding its work.
The Ugly Indian is a website and Facebook page formed by an anonymous group who are interested in mobilizing people to care about clean streets in Bangalore. They engage citizens through provocative statements and the use of images which are easily relatable to show the effects of people not caring about the filth in the streets. Their campaign encourages citizens of Bangalore to work together to volunteer their time to make streets more walkable and accessible. The Ugly Indian website engages people through quizzes, shares success stories of the Ugly Indian's initiatives, and connects with supporters through Facebook (The Ugly Indian, n.d.).
Summary

We’ve come to recognize, through numerous meetings and interviews with various actors in the construction industry, the obstacles limiting LabourNet from reaching their goal of creating sustainable livelihoods for half a million youth in India (Labournet, n.d.). Though the organization has set itself apart with precise training modules and a place within governmental entities, the goal is bound by the current labour market and wage structures. However, given these limitations, our recommendations begin to address the quality of life of workers through non-wage and wage benefits.

Primarily, a critical contractual shift needs to occur where the client steps away from private infrastructure and focuses its effort primarily on public infrastructure where the connections to labour gains and the visibility can bear fruit. Where they continue with private infrastructure, the organization can assist in building bridges-literal and figurative-between private islands and public amenities, some of which benefit the workers’ own amenities as well. Furthermore, to begin affecting the quality of life of workers, public infrastructure choices must be made with some selective notions as well—especially because worker safety and work process quality seem to be quite closely correlated. By first choosing the right projects to contract out to, LabourNet can begin to provide support for workers through employment opportunities which can also improve their quality of life. Our next recommendations for LabourNet — to reorient training for specialized skills and train workers to become contractors — will lead LabourNet to create a fundamental shift in the lives of workers in the form of wage and promotional increases. This is something that LabourNet has been unable to guarantee for all workers that have completed training previously, and through these strategies as well as our ongoing recommendations of advocating for labour law reform and developing a social media campaign, LabourNet will be able to change the lives of their workers for the long-term.

Furthermore, as LabourNet expands and as they take on our recommendations, we believe they can extend their services to become a facilitator between the various entities they work with in order to maximize their impact and the number of people they reach. Currently, LabourNet is working on multiple levels: as a training organization, as a policy advocacy organization, a one-stop shop for worker identification, registration, and insurance, and, on a few occasions, as contractors who provide consulting services. While the organization continues to build their networks, they can begin providing a new service of facilitating between service providers in order to better connect workers and firms to each other, and to government programs. For a case study example of why this could be an important strategy for work for Labournet, refer to CS.5.

We deeply value LabourNet’s mission and efforts to build various approaches to induce workers’ mobility in the value chain and in society and we hope that through these recommendations, we have been able to expand upon LabourNet’s strengths as an organization, so that LabourNet’s workers will have wider access to employment, specialized skills, and a support system that will provide all construction workers with the opportunity for upward social and economic mobility.
While there are many differences between India and the United Kingdom, both their government structure and legal framework are similar, and there are similarities in their construction sectors with low investment in skill training, and a high percentage of casual and self-employed migrant workers in traditional trades (Dainty, 2004). Attempts to address labour market conditions in India are following a similar path as in the United Kingdom where there is a board similar to the NSDC which provides grants for skill training, as well as a Construction Skills Certification Scheme which formally recognizes skills through worker registration, and a voluntary standard for business investment in skills and training activities.

Through stakeholder focus groups it was found that there was an “initiative overload” for smaller firms so that many small firms couldn’t track available opportunities, and that there was a need for a regional organization which can engage employers and connect them to training and workforce development programmes. It was found that a bridge between firms and opportunities could have increased the impact of smaller firms to help them collect better industry metrics, which could be used to push for smarter regional policies and programmes through workforce development initiatives.
Appendix A_Methodology

Discussion with Smita Srinivas & Interviews with LabourNet

How can LabourNet provide wage increases for construction workers to improve their quality of life?

Appendix B_Resources

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LaborNet trains contractors


LIST OF ACRONYMS

- BATF: Bangalore Agency Task Force
- BAI: Builder’s Association of India
- BBMP: Greater Bangalore Municipal Corporation
- BDA: Bangalore Development Agency
- BMRC: Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited
- CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility
- IDF: Infrastructure Development Finance Corporation
- IHS: Indian Institute for Human Settlements
- ILO: International Labour Organization
- KUIDFC: Karnataka Urban Infrastructure Development and Finance Corporation
- KVTDC: Karnataka Vocational Training and Skill Development Corporation
- NCEUS: National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector
- NSDC: National Skills Development Council
- NULM: National Urban Livelihood Mission
- NGO: non-governmental organization
- RSLDC: Rajasthan Skill and Livelihoods Development Corporation
- SEWA: Self Employed Women’s Association
- WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing
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