

ECONOMIC REHABILITATION

There has been hardly any effort to systematically document the economic and social impacts of the continuing disaster in gas and contamination affected areas of Bhopal. Over 70% of the exposed population has been in the unorganized sector -- mostly people earning subsistence wages through hard physical labour. A large number of men and women who pushed hand carts, carried loads, dug soil, repaired cars, and did other jobs can no longer pursue their trades after being exposed to the gas leak and continuing water contamination.

Given the complete inadequacy of official rehabilitation efforts the loss of regular income has driven tens of thousands of families to chronic starvation conditions. Compounding the problem, loss of income also makes people borrow money from local money lenders who charge up to 200% interest so that chances of paying back are low and debts keep growing.

The government programmes for economic rehabilitation have been badly designed and only a few have been implemented. **While an estimated population of 50,000 is in need of alternative employment, currently less than 100 gas victims have found regular jobs under the government's scheme.**

Miserably Failed Attempts

Soon after the disaster the government of Madhya Pradesh set up 50 training and production centers to train gas-affected women in a variety of trades such as sewing, embroidery, and stationery manufacturing. Today there are only two -- the rest closed within four years. Only 90 women are currently employed in those two. The government also closed down the stitching centres, where over two thousand gas survivors had been employed.

Three years after the disaster, in 1987, a special industrial area for training and employment of over 10,000 survivors was inaugurated and 152 work sheds were constructed at a cost of Rs. 8 crores. Construction of the sheds was completed in 1991. The results, however, have been dismal: Of the 152 sheds, 55 were given out to private entrepreneurs, 52 were occupied by the Rapid Action Force police division, and the rest remain vacant. Of the 55 sheds taken by entrepreneurs, industries were launched in only 20 sheds. **From a total expenditure of Rs 8.19 crores (US \$1.78 million), only 243 gas-affected people found employment.** (Source: *Clouds of Injustice*, Amnesty International, 2004.)

A programme offering women survivors tailoring jobs ran successfully from 1986 to 1992 employing 2300 women and made a yearly profit of Rs. 1 crore. The rehabilitation centres where these jobs were offered were also places where women survivors could gather, share their concerns, and organize themselves. However, this programme was terminated without any reason in July 1992.



"I used to carry loads in the vegetable market. After the disaster, I could work for 2 days at a time only, then for the next 8 days I would be sick. Since the disaster I have never been able to work enough to support my family."

- Chhote Khan, gas survivor from Rajgarh Colony

One obstacle to the success of employment programmes is the insensitivity of the government to the fact that many of the survivors who are willing and able to work simply have special needs and limitations. Many, for instance, can only work for a few continuous hours at a time. The Fact Finding Mission on Bhopal recently found that out of their study sample, 58.7 percent could not to continuous work without rest for more than four hours. 75.7 percent could do no more than six hours at a time. Only 6.8 percent of the total sample could work for more than six hours.



Gas exposed people who work in textile and paper mills are more sensitive to the occupational hazards specific to those work environments (bad air quality) and are often absent from work as much as 15 days a month due to illness.

Simple sensitivity to special needs like frequent breaks and clean air is all many gas and contamination affected people need to be able maintain employment. The survivors have always sought jobs and not dole -- jobs in accordance with their health condition. **How is it that the government has spent more than 70 crore rupees on rehabilitation schemes, yet only about a hundred gas survivors have found solid employment?**

What We Need: First, information needs to be gathered to determine exactly how many people are unemployed as a direct or indirect result of gas and ground water poisoning. Each individual must be evaluated for abilities and limitations and then provided with guaranteed employment in jobs and work environments that fit their needs. Also needed are free education and training programmes and facilities so that economic rehabilitation is thorough and long term.

Who Must Provide It: The central government of India and its Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers is responsible for the welfare of gas and contamination affected people in Bhopal. It is they who must provide the funding and resources for a National Commission on Bhopal that can appropriately and thoroughly address the economic problems of this community.

WE DEMAND that the central government set up a National Commission on Bhopal with the necessary authority and funds to provide training and jobs to people poisoned by Union Carbide / Dow Chemical according to their individual health and abilities. This commission must have active participation of non-government organisations and representatives of survivor's organisations.

**This padyatra is our march for justice and dignity. We shall struggle until our last breath.
21 years is enough!**

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