

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF INFORMAL WOMEN
LABORERS IN CONSTRUCTION SECTOR - AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN
MANDYA DISTRICT**

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DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2020.v05i12.012 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2020.v05i12.012>

ABSTRACT

The construction industry is the backbone of a country as it creates the infrastructure necessary for economic growth. In India, about 340 million (92%) workers are involved in the informal sector. The female labour force participation has had a decadal fall from 36.7 per cent in 2005 to 26 per cent in 2018, with 95% (195 million) women employed in the unorganized sector and also in unpaid work. However, the socio-economic deprivation is the common phenomenon of the informal sector particularly women laborers in the study area i.e., Mandya district. The main intention of the article is to analyze the socio-economic conditions of women laborers in the construction industry. For the purpose, a primary study is conducted for 119 sample respondents by using the interview method of the field study. The study used multiple regression and simple frequency tables to analyze the data. It is concluded that insecurity about the job, low wages, poor implementation of labour laws, and absence of minimal amenities for the women laborers at the construction sites are some serious issues experienced by the women construction laborers in the study area. Hence, the Government of Karnataka need to implement the labour acts in a proper way to address the needs of women labour in the construction industry, apart from ensuring job security.

Key Words: Women, Workers, Construction, Laborers, Sample Respondents.

Introduction

The construction industry is the backbone of a country as it creates the infrastructure necessary for economic and industrial growth. This is a distinct sector of the economy which makes a significant contribution to economic growth like all the other sectors such as agriculture,

manufacturing, and services. It also provides the basis upon which the other sectors flourish, by constructing the physical facilities required for the production and distribution of goods and services. This industry has great employment-generation potential as labor-intensive technologies are economically viable for most processes of construction work. The construction industry has also the potential for generating both backward and forward employment linkages with other sectors of the economy such as manufacturing, transport, commerce, and financial services owing to its inter-linkages with other sectors.

The construction sector belongs to the tertiary sector of an economy and assumes growing importance as the economic development of the country takes place. In India about 340 million (92%) workers are involved in the informal sector. The construction sector is a major segment of informal sector of an economy. It is one of the fastest-growing sectors with an annual growth rate of 10%. India's construction sector contributed over 2.5 trillion Indian rupees to the country's GDP, accounting for 8.2% of GDP, which includes housing construction as well employing about 12 % of the total workforce according to (Central Statistics Office, 2018-19). The construction industry in India has grown rapidly over recent decades and approximately one in every ten workers, is working in this sector.

Concept of Informal Sector

The informal sector encompasses largely unrecognized, unrecorded and unregulated small scale activities including small enterprises, household enterprises, self-employed sectors such as street vendors, cleaners, shoe shiners, hawkers etc. ILO (2004), Srinivas (2004), and Sethuraman (1997) have defined the informal sector, as essentially covering the unorganized spectrum of economic activities in commerce, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, transportation and services which absorbs as much as 60 % of the labour force in urban areas of developing countries. The informal sector of an economy can thus be defined in terms of lack of governmental regulation or lack of institutions that provide job security and benefits.

In the Indian context the unorganized sector consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS)).

Concept of Construction labour

Construction workers are one of the most numerous and vulnerable segments of the unorganized sector in India. The building and other construction works are characterized by their inherent risk to the life and limb of the workers. The work is also characterized by its casual nature, the temporary relationship between employer and employee, uncertain working hours, lack of basic

amenities and inadequate welfare facilities. There is no discernible and permanent employer-employee relationship in the construction sector due to the migratory nature of the labour, short duration of projects, and the presence of numerous sub-contractors (Suchitra and Rajasekhar, 2006). Usually, the principal employer never knows who is actually working for him nor does the worker know for whom he is working. These characteristics also influence the practice of gender discrimination, working conditions, social security, health and safety of the workers especially the women in this industry. Even though construction is considered to be one of the principal industries in the country, the workers in the industry still remain unskilled, exploited and discriminated (Mathew, 2005).

In Karnataka, the construction sector plays a vital role and it constitutes nearly 5.9 % of total GSDP at the current price. The number of construction workers in Karnataka registered with the construction welfare board is 19,54,440 workers of which 14,29,177 male and 5,25,263 are female workers respectively (Economic survey of Karnataka, 2018-19). Construction sector in Mandya District had a contribution of over 71007 lakh Indian rupees to the Karnataka states' Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), highest is from Krishnarajpet taluk i.e. 18397 lakh and least from Nagamangala taluk consisting of Rs 4890 lakhs. The construction industry in Mandya district constitutes more than half (55.35%) of the Secondary Sector, District Domestic Product (DDP) in the district, and the construction sub-sector accounts for over 70% of the secondary sector, Taluk Domestic Product (TDP's) of Krishnarajpet, Malavalli, and Pandavapura taluks (HDI, 2014).

Further, the construction industry as one of the key segments of the informal economy employs a major bulk of the workers wherein women workers constitute 1/4th of the total labour force. In a male-dominated workplace, the most commonly vulnerable segment of the labour class is women laborers in terms of factors like wage, working hours, nature of work, leisure, and social security. The same phenomenon is also noticed among women laborers of the construction industry of Mandya district. In the view of the above discussion, the present research article based on primary data tries to understand the livelihood status and socio-economic conditions of women construction workers in Mandya district.

Objective of the present research article is, to analyze the socio-economic status of the women construction laborers in Mandya District.

Hypotheses

- 1) The saving habit of the sample respondents is not influenced by the nature of employment.

- 2) There is no significant correlation between Socio-economic condition and working condition of women construction laborers

Methodology

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It is an empirical study based on primary and secondary data. The data are collected from various reports of the Government of India and Karnataka viz., Central Statistics Office reports, Economic Survey of Karnataka report, HDI report, Reports of Periodic Labour Force Survey (NSO), and Reports of labour department. The present study covers the seven taluks in Mandya district viz., Krishnarajapete, Maddur, Malavalli, Mandya, Nagamangala, Pandavapura, and Srirangapatna. Random sampling method is followed.

Primary data is collected from the women construction workers at construction sites and labour colonies in the respective taluks through the interview method. The total sample size is 119 which are derived from the total construction workers’ population i.e., 8258 at a 95% confidence level. Multiple Regression Analysis, Pearson’s Correlation, and simple frequency tables are used to interpret the data.

The status of construction laborers in India

Table 1: %age share of construction laborers in India during 1977-78 to 2017-18. (In %age)

NSS Rounds	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
32 nd (1977-1978)	1.7	0.6	4.2	2.2
38 th (1983-1984)	2.2	0.7	5.1	3.1
43 rd (1987-1988)	3.7	2.7	5.8	3.7
50 th (1993-1994)	3.2	0.9	6.9	4.1
55 th (1999-2000)	4.5	1.1	8.7	4.8
61 st (2004-2005)	6.8	1.5	9.2	3.8
66 th (2009-2010)	11.3	5.2	11.4	4.7
68 th (2011-2012)	13.0	6.6	10.7	4.0
PLFS (2017-2018)	14.5	5.3	11.7	4.1

Source: Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), NSO, July 2017-June 2018.

The data in Table no. 1, shows that in rural and urban areas, both male and female construction laborers has shown an increasing trend from 32nd round of NSS (1977-78) to PLFS (2017-18). Where as in, the rural areas the male construction laborers were 1.7% in 1977-78 but increased to

14.5% in 2017-18, and in case of female construction laborers, they constituted 0.6% in 1977-78 that increased to 5.3% in 2017-18. Moreover in urban areas, the share of male construction workers was 4.2% in 1977-78 and has substantially increased to 11.7 in 2017-18 and in case of urban female construction laborers constituted 2.2% in 1977-78 and has increased to 4.1% in the 2017-18. In fact, the share of rural workforce both male and female labors engaged in construction industry has surpassed that of the urban workforce.

Construction laborers in Mandya district

Mandya district is popularly known as ‘Land of Sugar’ and is located in the South East of Karnataka State and shares its borders with the districts of Mysore, Hassan, Tumkur, and Bangalore. The district consists of 7 revenue blocks. In recent days Mandya district has developed quite a lot in terms of its income and employment growth. Different construction activities like residential houses, schools, roads, and hospitals have been undertaken, in a big way. In fact, Mandya district has become the first district in the state to reach the target in the construction of toilets under "Swachh Bharath Abhiyan" under clean India campaign.

Table 2: Construction laborers in Mandya district.

Sl. No.	Name of the Taluks	Male	Female	Total
1	Krishnarajapete	2565	1315	3880
2	Maddur	3437	1023	4460
3	Malavalli	3651	1735	5386
4	Mandya	6788	2138	8926
5	Nagamangala	720	247	967
6	Pandavapura	2628	1184	3812
7	Srirangapatna	2816	610	3426
Total		22605	8252	30857

Source: Department of District Laborers, Mandya, Sub-division 1 and 2, from 2007 up to 28-2-2018.

In Mandya district, there are 30857 construction workers, among them 22605 workers are male and only 8252 are female. Mandya taluk has the highest number of construction workers i.e., 8926 whereas; Nagamangala taluk is in the least position with 967 construction workers. The %age of women construction workers in Mandya district is 26.7% of the total construction workers in the district.

Social Profile of the construction women labour

The profile of the 119 sample respondents in terms of demographic features like the composition of age, education level, marital status, size of the family, type of ration card, migration, reasons for migration, the reason for taking this job, etc. are given in table 3.

Table 3: Profile of the women construction laborers.

Variables	Categories	Frequency (N = 119)	% (100%)
Age	31 to 40	43	36.1
	41 to 50	64	53.8
	51 to 60	12	10.1
Education	Illiterates	43	36.1
	Primary Education	11	9.2
	Below Primary Education	1	0.8
	Middle	37	31.1
	Matriculation	27	22.7
Marital Status	Married	118	99.2
	Widowed	1	0.8
Structure of the Family	Nuclear family	54	45.3
	Joint family	65	54.62
Type of Ration Card	BPL	114	95.8
	AAY	5	4.2
Migration status	Non-Migrant	83	69.7
	Inter-District Migration	34	28.6
	Inter-State Migration	2	1.7
Reason for selecting this job	Prevention of Starvation	14	11.8
	Inadequacy of Husband's Income	23	19.3
	Better Facilities for Children	81	68.1
	Repayment of Loans	1	0.8

Source: Filed Survey

Table 3 shows the social profile of the women construction labour. While categorizing the women construction labors in age groups it is revealed that about 53.8% of them are in the age groups of 41 to 50 years.

It is generally considered that the informal labors are usually poor and illiterate. But this study reveals that 63.9% of the women construction labors are literates and the rest 36.1% of them are illiterates. It is interesting to note that 22.7% of women construction laborers had passed matriculation examination. The marital status of women construction labors shows that majority

99.2% of them are married. The type of family to which the sample respondent's belonged shows that 54.6% are living in Joint family structure and the rest 45.3% belonged to Nuclear family structure. Most of the women construction labors had BPL ration card (95.8%) and only 4.2% had AAY type of ration card.

Most of the women construction labors i.e., 69.7% are native residents and about 28.6% of the women construction labors are inter-district migrants. Better facilities like education for children is one of the major reasons for 68.1% of women construction workers to select this job and 19.3% responded that inadequacy of husband's income is the reason to opt for this job.

Economic profile of women construction laborers

The economic factors which are influencing the wellbeing of women laborers of the construction sector in Mandya district are discussed below.

Monthly Income of the Family

The earnings of women construction labors have a great significance in the determination of the standard of living of their family. The income earned from other members and other sources of the family along with the income from the main occupation of the household head constitute the household income. The following table shows the monthly income of the family of women construction laborers in Mandya district.

Table 4: Monthly Income wise Classification of Women Construction Laborers.

Income (Rs)	Frequency	%
Less than 10000	28	23.5
10001 to 15000	87	73.1
15001 and above	4	3.4
Total	119	100

Source: Filed Survey

The above table reveals that out of 119 women construction labors, 73.1% of laborers earn a monthly income between Rs. 10001 to Rs. 15000, 23.5% of labors earn a monthly income less than Rs. 10000 and 3.4% labors earn income above Rs. 15001 per month.

Saving Habits

Savings have greater importance in the economic life of an individual as well as economic development of a country. It is the main source of the capital formation. Saving is done in order

to meet the future unseen forces but the people who have low income, save less; hence, it depends upon one’s ability and willingness to save. However, workers of the informal sector usually earn on a day-to-day basis which is not even sufficient to meet their emergency needs. The following table shows the modes of savings of women construction laborers.

Table 5: Respondents’ savings mode.

Savings	Frequency	%
Banks	53	44.5
Post Office	13	10.9
Savings At Home	36	30.3
Chit Funds	2	1.7
No savings	15	12.6
Total	119	100

Source: Filed Survey

The above table exhibits that the women construction laborers deposited their savings at the bank, Post office, at their home or with local chit fund agencies. The majority of 44.5% of the women construction labour save in the banks, 30.3% of the laborers save at their home, 10.9% of them had habit of saving at post office and 1.7% of the laborers save with local chit fund agencies. However, as observed in the table, 12.6% of the women construction laborers are not in a position to save out of their earnings due to family commitments.

Indebtedness

Workers become indebted when their earnings are inadequate to meet their exigencies or unforeseen events of their life. It may be due to medical expenses, social or religious ceremony, or due to family maintenance, etc., the status of their indebtedness is shown in the following table.

Table 6: Indebtedness among respondents.

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	63	52.9
No	56	47.1
Total	119	100

Source: Filed Survey

It is inferred from the table that 52.9% of the women construction labors have debt and 47.1% do not have debt. The women construction labors have taken additional loans and advances to support their families during unforeseen events. Due to lower income or wasteful expenditures, poor financial inclusions, high cost of living they are unable to pay off their loans and hence they are in debt.

Nature of employment

The nature of employment in construction activity is seasonal and uncertain. The demand for construction workers depends upon the development of construction industry and construction industry depends upon the availability of raw materials and also on an economic development and changing government rules and regulations. If the economic growth is stable then the construction industry is in full swing, the demand for construction workers goes up and when there are economic crises the construction sector suffers a set back and therefore, demand for construction workers goes down. On the other hand neither the contractor nor the owner is ready to give an assurance of work in rainy season due to which the construction activity takes a halt, which results in shrinkage of unskilled workers. The following table shows the nature of employment of women construction labour.

Table 7: Nature of employment.

Nature of job	Frequency	%
Temporary	65	54.6
Seasonal	36	30.3
Permanent	18	15.1
Total	119	100

Source: Filed Survey

The above table reveals that 54.6% of women construction labors are having temporary mode of work, 30.3% respondents are seasonal labors and 15.1% of them are permanent labour.

Type of construction work

Generally, the construction workers engage themselves in different types of work such as head loading, helper, carrying water, mixing mortar, cleaning and sweeping works, sand silting, crushing bricks, stone crushing, construction mason, etc., The table below gives the details of the type of work undertaken in the study area.

Table 8: Type of construction work.

Type of work	Frequency	%
Bricks, Sand and Jelly carrying (Head loaders)	61	51.3
Water feeding and Cleaning works	29	24.4
Concrete mixing and stone crushing	04	3.3
Multi-task (All of the above)	25	21.0
Total	119	100

Source: Filed Survey

Table 8 depicts the type of work of the women construction laborers in the study area. Around 51.3% of the women construction labors are head loaders, that involve work of carrying bricks/sand/cement/jelly etc., 24.4% are involved in water feeding and cleaning works, 3.3% of the women construction labors are involved in concrete mixing and stone crushing works, and 21.0% of the women construction labors are performing multi-task. It is clear from the empirical evidence that major chunk of the women construction laborers are head loaders. The women construction labors are always employed in unskilled work, which is very arduous and laborious in nature.

Working Hours

The working hour is an important factor to determine the working condition of the women labors. On account of dual responsibility in the working place and home the women labors are very particular about working hours. Hours of work are not fixed in construction sector. They are totally flexible and depend upon the mood of foreman or contractor. Usually, the work starts at around 9.00 AM and extends up to 6 PM or even beyond 6 PM with a brief 45 to 60 minutes' lunch break. Table 9 shows the classification of women construction labors based on working hours per day.

Table 9: Working hours

Time of work	Frequency	%
Below 8 hours	4	3.4
8 hours	81	68.1
Above 8 hours	34	28.5
Total	119	100

Source: Filed Survey

Majority of the respondents, i.e, 68.1%, spend eight hours a day on their job, 28.5% worked for more than eight hours a day and 3.4% worked for less than normal working time of eight hours. The mean daily hours of work of the women construction labors thus come to seven hours and thirty minutes. It would be relevant to remember that a majority of the women construction labors also worked overtime whenever the occasion arose. Moreover, a women’s working day does not end with her job-related activities; she has to do her household chores in addition with in invisible, unpaid and thankless.

Wages

There is no uniformity in wages of construction workers. The wages are fixed on the ground of skill of work, capacity to work, nature of work and gender is a common criteria taken into consideration. The following table focuses on wage rate of construction labors in the study area.

Table 10: Wages of the respondents.

Wages per day	Frequency	%
Rs. 250-300	31	26.1
Rs. 300-350	68	57.1
Rs. 350-400	20	16.8
Total	119	100

Source: Filed Survey

Table no. 10 portrays the average wage of the women construction laborers in the study area. Nearly 57.1% of the women construction labors get the wage of Rs. 300-350 per day followed by 26.1% whose wages range between Rs. 250-300 and nearly 16.8% get the wage between Rs. 350-400 per day.

Exploitation at the workplace

Working women are always in danger of physical and economic exploitation by their male co-workers. Since physically females are supposed to be gentle and weaker than males. The table below shows the response of women construction labors with regard to exploitation at workplace.

Table 11: Exploitation of women workers at construction site.

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	110	92.4
No	9	7.6

Total	119	100
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Source: Filed Survey

Table 11 depicts that the majority 92.4% of the women construction labors have faced exploitation at the workplace, and 7.6% respond that they never faced any exploitation at the workplace. The sample respondents revealed that they are exploited by the contractors and male workers; wage discrimination and sexual harassment are commonly found / traced.

Health status

The good physical and mental health of the worker are also good indications of labor efficiency. It depends not only on the physical condition but also on the occupation of the person. Therefore, a better working condition has an important bearing on the health status of the workers. Here an attempt is made to know the distribution of women construction labors as per the health conditions they are exposed at places of work i.e., the so called occupational health hazard.

Table 12: Health status of the respondents.

Health status	Frequency	%
No Diseases	73	61.3
Gastric	12	10.1
Chronic backache	22	18.5
Other diseases	12	10.1
Total	119	100

Source: Filed Survey

It can be observed from the table that the majority of 61.3% of the women construction labors have no diseases. However, 18.5% of them are suffering from chronic backache, while 10.1 % of the sample respondents have Gastric problems. The rest 10.1% of the respondents are suffering from various other diseases such as knee dislocation, headache, eye problems, teeth problems, chest pain, asthma, and general weakness and women specific health problem. Most of these problems are branded as occupational health hazard.

Facilities at workplace

At the time of personal visit to various construction locations question about the facilities available at work sites are discussed. The response of women construction labors with regard to various facilities at workplace are presented in the following Table 13.

Table 13: Workplace facilities of the sample respondents.

Workplace Facilities	Frequency	%
Drinking water, washing area	103	86.6
Toilet	1	.8
Safety Gloves	14	11.8
Safety Helmet	1	.8
Restroom	--	--
Refreshment	--	--
Total	119	100

Source: Filed Survey

The above table 13 reveals that the drinking water, washing facilities are provided favorably by the owners/contractors in maximum sites. Only 11.8% had facilities of safety gloves. Whereas toilet, safety helmets, restrooms and refreshment facilities did not exist on the site. Further, it can also be inferred that the employers seem to be ignorant of certain provisions of the labour laws meant for the workers' welfare.

9. Results of Hypotheses Testing

The present research article has made an attempt to test hypotheses mentioned in the beginning of the article.

Hypothesis 1

H₀: There is no significant correlation between Socio-economic condition and working condition of women construction labors.

H₁: There is significant correlation between Socio-economic condition and working condition of women construction labors.

To investigate the relationship between Socio-economic condition and working condition of women construction labors the Pearson's coefficient of correlation test is used.

Correlation analysis

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	r - value	Sig. (2 tailed)
Socio-economic condition	119	2.15	.206	-.178	.053

Working condition	119	1.79	.499		
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Pearson product correlation of women construction labors socio-economic conditions and working conditions was found to be very low negative correlation and statistically insignificant ($r = - .178, p > .05$). Hence, H_1 was not supported. This shows that an increase in socio-economic condition would not lead to a better working condition among the women construction labors.

Hypothesis 2

H_0 :Thesaving habits of the women construction workers is not influenced by their nature of employment.

H_1 :The saving habits of the women construction workers is influenced by their nature of employment.

To test this hypothesis, the saving habits of the respondents as dependent variable and age, education level, marital status, size of the household, migration, nature of employment, and wages are considered as independent variables. The regression model is used to test this hypothesis.

Estimation Methodology

The following multiple regression model is used to for the analysis.

$$Y = \beta_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + U_i \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

$$\text{Savings} = \beta_1 + \beta_2 \text{AGE} + \beta_3 \text{EDU} + \beta_4 \text{MG} + \beta_5 \text{NE} + \beta_6 \text{WG} + U_i \dots \dots \dots (2)$$

Where, Y is Savings, AGE is age of the respondents, EDU is education level, MG is migration status, NE is nature of employment, WG is wages and U_i is as usual statistical property of the model. $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4, \beta_5, \beta_6$ and β_6 are Coefficients to be estimated. The stated model is estimated by using Ordinary Least Square (OLS) method.

The estimated parameter of the model is presented as follows:

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	
Constant	5.020	2.024	.015

Age	-.528	.208	.012**
Education	-.223	.073	.003*
Migration	-.099	.282	.725
Nature of Employment	-.301	.167	.045**
Wage	-.104	.024	.086
$\bar{R}^2 = 0.521$ F (d. f. 7, 118) = 4.327 p = 0.000			

Source: Field Survey.

Note: * Denotes significant at 1% and ** denotes 5% level.

The estimated model is statistically significant at 1% level with the F value of 4.327. It is revealed from the R squared value that, 52% of the variation is explained by the independent variables like age, education, migration, nature of employment, and wages. It is also proved from the coefficient values of the respective variables that, the nature of employment of the construction women laborers has an influence on saving habit. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Suggestions

The following suggestions can be made by the present study to improve the socio-economic conditions and to overcome deprivation of the women construction laborers.

1. Lack of skill and education are matters to prefer this risky job by women workers and hence providing training and skill development will help them to choose better jobs.
2. It is the responsibility of the Labour Welfare Department to monitor the contractors and employers and to arrange safety measures and basic facilities at the construction sites.
3. A comprehensive methodology is needed to survey the available size of the construction laborers of the informal economy.
4. The employment, conditions of work and service need to be regulated at construction sites.
5. In order to improve the living conditions of women construction workers, social security and labour welfare measures are to be provided.
6. Periodic free health check-up camps should be organized by the NGO's and the State Government.

7. Proper guidelines and awareness about medical insurance, various schemes, and financial support, program offered through the welfare board go a long way in improving the socio-economic conditions of informal labors in general and women labour in particular.
8. The contractor need to be educated reg socio-economic and legal implication of hiring women labour in the construction industry.

Conclusion

The construction industry is one of the major contributors to the overall economic growth of the country. It is also known as a large labor-intensive sector where ¼ of the total women workforce is employed. It is found from the empirical information gathered through primary survey in Mandya district of Karnataka that, majority of the women construction laborers are facing socio-economic problems and several challenges at the workplace.

Given the importance of the construction sector in creating mass employment; providing effective welfare measures will increase the productivity of this vital sector through improvements in working and living conditions of informal women labors. The data suggests that States need to streamline processes and act with a sense of urgency to deliver these benefits, and are likely to see positive economic impacts if they do so. This will ensure that construction workers, especially women construction labors, are not left out of the economic growth as they play an integral role in creating.

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