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SALT FARMERS OF SANTHALPUR TALUKA

(Field-study of their working and living condition)

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 1989

Updated

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Field-study & Report

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SEWA RECEPTION CENTRE, BHADRA

OPP : VICTORIA GARDEN.

AHMEDABAD : 380 001.

822-INGU90-8901

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SELF EMPLOYED WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION
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SEWA'S FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS AFTER STUDY

1. Step-by-step the realities of the arid-zone and valiant efforts of the rural communities lead us to the tail-end of Santhalpur taluka where the land merges into salinity of the desert. The underground brine and scorching solar energy are harnessed by human endeavour into an economic activity which survives thousands of local and migrant households. With uncertain monsoon, degraded land and the merciless absence of alternative sources of survival, contribute towards local resource development, One of them being salt-farming.
2. However the courageous human endeavour and ingenuity suffer from most exploitative economic relationship with rest of the economy and undergo most inhuman working and living conditions.
3. It was impossible for SEWA team to see, feel and experience the most productive and least human realities and stop at merely writing and documentation. Faces covered with salt molecules, the eyes that were night by night blinding, the bruised female feet upto knees corroding into insensitive lump of flesh and bones, the new lives that withered between mother's womb and waist, craved for and demanded action.
4. SEWA team did act, and made small beginnings totally inadequate for the situation and hardly solacing the conscience.
5. Large number of salt-workers who every day drudged 15 Kms. from their homes to reach work sites and needed extention of a bus-route. After collecting requisite information and representation to the authorities of the transport-service, SEWA succeeded in satisfying their long-standing need.

6. It lead to building up of trust relationship and rapport between women and men producing salt and SEWA and lead to hopes, expectations and articulation for humanising the working and living environments. The salt-workers support was unexpected and massive.
7. SEWA was unprepared and fumbling for the right response. As usual and traditional with voluntary agencies, we too opted for health programme and approached Rural Labour Department and the Salt-Commissioner's office at Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad who collect command and spend funds for the welfare and improving the working conditions of the salt-workers. Querries were made, details were collected and proposals were presented, but SEWA and the salt-workers were not fortunate. A symbolic proposal of Rs. 20,000 for two months Health Programme remained lost within papers and processes of Government bureaus. Financial year 1989-90 closed with unspent funds.
8. Yet our efforts were not fruitless, in 1990-91, the current financial SEWA has been informed to prepare another frush proposal for welfare scheme at the earliest, with a rider that the proposal has to be countersigned by 'Legal, Technical' salt-producers, who are in reality salt-traders and who are expected to contribute 40% of the matching funds. The stark and hostile reality threatens SEWA about the fulfilling the pre-condition. The District Industries Center (DIC) which processes the proposal and releases the funds has shown sympathy and advised to atleast submit the proposal and in case of failure to receive counter signatures, of traders, they may find a way out for programme implementation SEWA is working on it.

9. However the salt-workers are quite aware of socio-economic roots of their sufferings and far ahead in search of their solutions and crucial action to be undertaken.
10. Women salt-workers from Madhutra and Datrana villages visited SEWA's office at Radhanpur and requested to launch a cooperative. SEWA visited the villages, talked to women and men and decided to launch it.
11. Rs. 10 per each of 55 women salt-workers have been collected as share-capital and an application for its registration has already been filed with the District Registrar. On receipt of registration certificate application for allocation of 10 acres of land in the Rajusara desert area will be filed with the District Collector.
12. The District Industries Center, can recommend a loan upto Rs. 40,000 to a Bank for digging^g well and installing^g oil-engine for drawing brine.

SEWA proposes to expand their share-capital base which will enhance their borrowing capacity from the bank. The details of capital-base, borrowed funds and their costs are being worked out.
13. The salt-workers are hopeful about the sale of the salt and want to liberate themselves from the debt-trap of small salt-farm owners and the big salt-traders. However the actual costs of production with details and business risks involved will have to be worked out.
14. It is also necessary to work out the scale of operation in terms of production and marketing to arrive at cooperativisation of exact number of salt workers and the number of salt-cooperatives to be launched. To meet with the hostile physical and economic

SALT-FARMERS (AGARIAS) OF SANTHALPUR TALUKA
FIELD-STUDY OF THEIR WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS

SEWA'S WOMEN'S PROJECT IN BANASKANTHA

- 1.0 The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Ahmedabad, has been active in helping the women in Santhalpur-Radhanpur Talukas in Banaskantha District of Gujarat for attaining an equal status and fuller participation in the socio-economic development of the region.
- 1.1 The drinking water supply through pipe-lines installed by the Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board has helped women of Santhalpur taluka in fulfilling their long cherished dream of freeing them from the time-consuming and extremely exhausting daily drudgery of carrying heavy headloads of water pitchers for distance of 3 to 4 Kms. Now they are able to save their energy and time, which can be used for a productive activity. The need is to find out an activity which would generate employment and income for them. Through meetings, and direct contact for first three months of the project, SEWA tried to perceive and identify their needs, problems and understanding of the over-all situation. And outcome is the Report.

PROJECT FORMULATION FOR WOMEN : SANTHALPUR-RADHANPUR TALUKAS

- 2.0 Potable drinking water is scarce even during normal years in Santhalpur taluka. In times of drought and short-fall in average rainfall, the problem becomes worse. Many villages have to depend on village tanks for drinking water supply. The unhygienic

unhealthy conditions that prevail at this water resource is need deplorable. And yet the people have no option but to use it.

2.1 To alleviate the sufferings of the people from lack of potable water, under Indo-dutch bilateral agreement a drinking water supply scheme has been initiated by the Gujarat Government in the area and Santhalpur talukas has been covered under the scheme. Santhalpur taluka is a drought-prone area and constant drought for the last four years has taken heavy toll of loss of livestock. SEWA had to organise activities for women that would generate income and raise their living standard reduced to deplorably low level. Women living below the poverty-line, or slightly above it and socially and educationally backward women were covered under the income-generating activities.

2.2 After constant contact, observation and investigation of the area, certain conclusions emerged on basis of which an action plan for their income-generation has been evolved. In doing so their existing skills, skill-level and asset-base in the land and cattle were taken into consideration to initiate following activities.

3.0 ORGANISING CRAFTS-WOMEN

3.1 Frequent meetings and data collection brought SEWA in closer contact with the crafts-women and men which in turn lead SEWA to the identification of their special skills. SEWA assisted to develop and upgrade their traditional skills, establish new links with the outside market and initiated income-generation.

ECO-REGENERATION

3.2 There were fairly good rains in 1989-90, which prompted to initiate land based activities which would produce flow of income. Basically

it included eco-regeneration programme which would help in our stalling the advancement of the desert. The eco-regeneration programme included following activities :

- (a) Water harvesting, conservation and distribution
- (b) Creation of a green shelter-belt which would help to stop the advancement of desert and protect the fertility of the land.
- (c) An extensive tree plantation programme at home, and social and organisational levels.

DAIRY INDUSTRY

3.3 Though the dairying is mainly women folk's activity, they have no say in the management of cooperatives. The co-operation extended by the Banas Dairy authorities to SEWA's endeavour helped the development of this economic activity, particularly the revival of 45 defunct milk co-operatives, and restarting of chilling center after 7 years closure.

3.4 In order to strengthen the milk co-operative societies and to enhance awareness amongst women about their role in running of the cooperative SEWA organised programme of women's visits to Banas Dairy, at Palanpur, the district Head-quarters.

4.0 SALT FARMING : MAJOR LOCAL RESOURCE BASED ACTIVITY

4.1 During various visits of the area SEWA workers came in contact with the salt industry and the salt workers. It was realised that the salt industry is an important occupation or economic activity in the region, where the climate is highly favourable and underground brine, a source for salt production is available. For salt-farming during production season the workers live in small clusters

in the Little Rann of Kutch on the border of Banaskantha District.

IMPORTANCE OF SALT-FARMING

- 4.2 The salt-farmers are poor and living conditions are none-too happy. Again they are all rural workers coming from villages and working in a rural environment. In the total workforce male and female workers were equal in number. SEWA decided to make efforts to work out plan of action to improve their socio-economic condition.
- 4.3 Total annual production of salt in Gujarat is 40 lakh metric tonnes, which is equal to 60% of the total salt requirement of the country.

SALT-FARMING : PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS

- 4.4 The salt-farming operations start in September and lasts upto April. Salt is produced during this period and transported to the markets. Men, women and children are employed in salt farming operations. The salt production passes through different stages.
- 4.5 The salt farming activity is carried out in little Rann of Kutch near Santhalpur taluka.
- (1) Brine is tapped and pumped out by drilling well up to the brine table.
 - (2) Small salt 'farmers' known as 'AGARIAS' engage in salt production at first drill 10' to 20' wells and sometimes 40ft. deep. Then they pump the brine out and store it in salt pans/beds or small ponds.
 - (3) The water in the brine evaporates due to extreme solar heat and the salt is recovered.

(4) The wells are dug twice or thrice in a season. Sometimes when the brine source is exhausted, they have to drill or dig new wells. The workers themselves do this job of well-digging. The salt yield is low in this type of salt farming which can provide employment for 3 to 4 labourers only. In this system of salt production generally only household members are employed.

DUG-WELL BORE-WELL SYSTEMS

4.6 Boring a well is a costly proposition and common 'Agarias' cannot afford it. Brine is available at a depth of 130 to 140 ft. in a bore-well and a single well will provide work for the whole season and yield abundant salt. It would provide employment to 20 to 25 salt workers.

4.7 The salt content of the ordinary drinking water is 0 degree, while it is 15 to 22 degrees in the water available in desert areas. To eliminate the water and increase the salt proportion the water drawn from underground is collected in a reservoir-locally known as 'GAMDU'. The evaporation due to solar heat helps brine to saturate and when its salinity reaches 28 degree salt starts crystallising.

STORAGE POND (GAMDU)

4.8 The saline water or brine is drawn out by traditional method, using bullocks for small wells or by diesel pumps from bore-wells and stored in 'GAMDU' or small storage ponds dug nearby. After the increase in salt content due to natural evaporation at intervals the brine is slowly allowed to flow into the pans.

SALT PANS

- 4.9 Crystallisation of salt takes place in salt pans which vary in size. The pans have low walls on all the four sides which would hold the brine water. The size of the pans depend on the height of the wells. The bore-wells require large-size salt pans than ordinary wells.
- 4.10 During this process pans are filled with brine water, 5 to 6 times. Most of the 'AGARIAS' preserve the pans to avoid repair expenses in the new season. Repair of the damaged pans is expensive as one has to spend 3 to 4 thousand ruppees in repairing. New pans may cost Rs. 10,000 to 15,000 depending on the size of the pan.

TRAMPLING

- 4.11 The water (brine) filled for the first time in the pans is allowed to be dried and evaporated. After a week or so before the brine is again released in the pan and puddled and trampled. As a result the thin layer of the salt mixes with the sirl. The processes is highly labourious and demands great patience. This particular task seems to be assigned more or less to women. Most of the workers doing this job are women. After the trampling the pan is again fed with fresh brine. The pan is trampled thrice in this manner. Then salt is separated with a rake and after doing this three or four times the floor turns smooth, again the process is repeated. After sometime 'VADAGARA' salt is produced which is separated and sorted in heaps.

LOADING AND UNLOADING

4.12 The salt is transported to the Railway Station for various destinations all over the country for marketing. The loading and unloading is also done by local labourers. A license is required for obtaining station wagons for salt. Small Agarias are unable to get such licenses because they do not produce wagon load of salt. This situation forces them to sell their salt to the traders.

TRADER-FARMER-LABOURER RELATIONSHIP

4.13 Three types of people are attached to the salt production. They are (1) Traders, (2) Agarias and (3) Labourers.

TRADERS

4.14 Private firms and one cooperative society purchase and sell the salt produced in Santhalpur Taluka. They are :

- (1) Sharad Salt Co., (2) Ramesh Salt Co., (3) Rajgot Salt Co.,
- (4) Nav Salt Co., (5) Banas Salt Co., (6) Rahim Salt Co.,
- (7) Arun Salt Co., (8) Dinesh Salt Co., (9) Pradeep Salt Co.,
- and (10) Vismagar Taluka Cooperative Society.

The private companies are doing big business in Salt.

4.15 All the traders have acquired land from the Government on lease and they in turn give these plots during season on rental or share cropping basis to the salt farmers (Agarias). The traders also private loans to the Agarias which are to be repaid in the form of salt.

THE SALT-FARMERS : AGARIAS

4.16 The salt-farmers use this finance for salt production. They employ labourers and pay them wages. The traders pay salt farmers (Agarias) Rs. 2.25 to 2.50 per 100 Kg (1 ton) of salt. They transport salt to the Railway station in their own trucks. Then the salt is loaded in the wagons and sent to Delhi, U.P., Jammu and Kashmir, etc. The market price of the salt varies from Rs. 150 to 170 per ton (100 kg.).

ADVANCE LENDING SYSTEM

4.17 There are small and big Agarias. In case of small Agarias all the members of their households are employed in salt farming. They also employ generally one or two workers. They also follow the practices the big Agarias in employing labourers. They pay the labourers money in advance which assures them required number of labourers. The salt farmers having Bore-wells employ 20 to 21 labourers in the beginning on daily wage basis. In addition they also employ 2 to 3 labourers on salary basis.

SALT FARMERS INCOME

4.18 The agarias after deduction of the expenses earn net income of Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 4,000 during the season. The large sized families earn higher income. The trader will purchase all the salt produced. But when the salt farmers are not able to produce enough salt that would clear the credit, they have to clear the debt with interest in the following year by selling salt to the same trader. This process will go on till the debt is totally repaid. Thus the debt cycle goes on and the Agarias are seldom able to be free from the clutches of the traders and as a consequence there will be no change in their economic conditions.

LACK OF FINANCE WITH SALT FARMERS

4.19 The salt farmer-Agaria-lacks adequate finance for his productive-activities and he has to borrow money from the salt-traders who are always willing to oblige them because it would develop captive relationship. The Agarias have to pay the rent for the land, brine-pump and wages to labourers. After ededucting these expenses, the net income he earns is not adequate for his livelihood and he is forced to work on other salt-farms doing all sorts of casual jobs like loading and unloading activities.

SALT WORKERS

4.20 It is estimated about 10,000 to 12,000 labourers are employed in salt farming in this region. They come from villages around the salt-farm area and others migrate from distant villages. It is a seasonal work and employment. Most of them are landless and they earn Rs. 10 to 20 per day by performing multiple tasks. It should be noted that rains in Santhalpur taluka are erratic, irregular and frequently inadequate and irrigation facilities negligible. Even landholding farmers particularly the small once are in constant search of employment and work. Again the salt farming starts when rains have gone. If the rains are scanty or have failed the salt farming starts earlier. Thus salt farming-salt industry provides off season employment to large number of men and women in the region.

DEBT TRAP

4.21 Most of the salt-workers have taken loans in advance from Agarias and hence it is obligatory for them to work for the same salt farmer-Agaria, till the debt is repaid which generally is not possible.

Their economic plight forces them to frequently borrow money and Agarias who badly need their labour provide it. Agarias in turn borrow from the salt traders. This turns out to be a sort of debt-trap - which virtually snatches away his freedom of working for an employer of his choice. The debt-trap virtually enslaves him.

SEASONAL ACTIVITY

4.22 The salt-farming is a seasonal industry and hence the employment it generates is also seasonal. The salt labourers work in the salt farms in the dry salt farming season and in the off season they work on farm as agricultural workers. They also accept the loading and unloading of salt on lump sum basis. The work in salt farms start at 9 in the morning and lasts upto 5 in the evening and most of the labourers stay in shelters built at the site of salt-farms.

Thus a sort of dependency relation develops between the trader and the Agaria and between Agaria and the labourer which ties them together almost perpetually. A vicious circle sets in which forces them to abandon all hopes and initiative.

5.0 TASKS IN SALT FARMING

5.1 Small salt farmers - Agarias generally work along with the labourers but large salt farmers supervise various types of jobs carried out by the labourers.

- (a) Well digging : The small Agarias dig the wells themselves. The wells are 10 to 20 ft. deep.
- (b) Water drawing from the wells : The water (brine) is drawn from the wells by traditional means using bullocks or by pumps run by diesel engine or electric motors. The drawn water is allowed to flow in 'Gandya' or small storage ponds.
- (c) The diesel engine and pump are hired by the Agarias. They have to purchase the diesel oil for the engine.
- (d) The water from the Gandya is allowed to run into pans. The job is done by Agarias.
- (e) When the water is evaporated and the pan is dry, the small Agarias along with the labourers puddle and trample the floor of the pan.
- (f) When the salt is ready for the market, labourers load it in the trader's trucks. After delivery of the salt the salt farmers will have to be in constant touch of the traders for weight and prices of their product.

TASKS OF SALT-WORKERS

5.2 The labourers are employed both by small and large salt-farmers. The small salt farmers supervise and work along with the labourers, while bigger once only supervise the work. The working hours are from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. If they are coming from the near by village

they return to their homes in the evening but if they are coming from distant villages, they stay at the site for the whole season in huts erected near the work site. The workers generally migrate with their families and build temporary small huts themselves.

- 5.3 They dig wells which are 10 to 40 ft. deep. In small salt farms the wells are dug twice or thrice during a season. The labour charges for well-digging is Rs. 10 to Rs. 20 per day.
- 5.4 The labourers after digging the well prepare the 'GAMDU' or a small storage pond near the well in which the water from the well (brine) is stored. It is surrounded by low boundary walls on all sides. Rs. 10 per day is paid as the labour charges for this job.
- 5.5 The labourers also repair the old pans if there are any preparation of new pans need about 15 to 20 days labour and the labourers are paid Rs. 10 per day for this work.

Once the pans are ready for use they are fed with water from 'GAMDU'. The water is allowed to dry. Then the floor of the pan is puddled and trampled. This process goes on for about two months. There are more than one pans at a salt-farm and Rs. 10 per day for trampling work. The job of collection and loading of also done by these labourers.

- 5.6 Often the whole family is employed by the Agarias and they work for him.

6.0 WORKING CONDITIONS OF SALT WORKERS

6.1 Salt farming is a seasonal activity and the season begins in September and last upto April end. It means that the employment is available to salt workers for 6 to 7 months. For the rest of the year they have to go in search of casual labour.

(a) Recruitment of workers : The salt workers come from adjoining and far-off villages to make living. Most of them have to borrow and have borrowed money from the Agarias in the off season which they have to repay through work. Only way to clear the debt is to work for the Agarias who has lent them money. A vicious circle sets in and an ordinary salt-worker hardly has capacity to break it. He is tied to one salt farmer as long as physically possible for him to work, and on conditions stipulated by the Agaria.

6.2 Transport facility : There are two types of salt workers :

- (a) The workers coming from near by villages and
- (b) workers coming from far-off villages. The workers who come from near by villages are provided transport by the Agarias or traders. Those who come from far off places build their shelters on work site and stay.

6.3 Working hours : The salt farming operations starts at 9 in the morning and end at 5 in the evening with a recess from 1 P.M. 1.30 P.M. - just half an hour. They are not given any leave and if they observe any the wage will be cut i.e. the worker would not be paid any wage for the day. They are unable to enjoy the rights and benefits available to the industrial workers.

EMPLOYMENT - WAGE-RATE - INCOME

6.4 The Agarias sale 100 Kg. of salt at Rs. 2.25 to Rs. 2.50 and earn Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 5000 per season of generally six months. The income of an Agaria is the income of his whole family. They would be able to clear the debt if the salt production is good other-wise he will have to repay by supplying salt next season.

WAGE RATE

6.5 The daily wage of the labourer is Rs. 10 to Rs. 20. Sometimes the whole family of the labourer is employed by one salt-farmer or Agaria. Large Agarias employ 2-3 labourers on salary basis for the last two or three months. Their salary is Rs. 20 per day and they are paid every fifteenth day. The salaried workers are also paid ex-gratia in kind i.e. a watch, clothes, etc., at the end of the season.

MEDICAL FACILITIES

6.6 No medical facility is available at the site of the work or salt farms. In an event of sickness or illness the worker has to go to a large village or an urban centre for medical aid. But the travel is beyond their means and have to depend upon nature and traditional medi-care.

LIVING CONDITIONS OF SALT WORKERS

7.1 As we have seen earlier small agarias and salt labourers mostly stay at the work site. For this they build small temporary shelters on open lands at the work site. Here they have to face innumerable difficulties;

- (a) In addition to hazardous work in hostile climate women are expected to bear the burden of managing the household and look after its members.
- (b) Shelters : The salt workers coming from distant villages to stay at the work site in temporary shelters, constructed with mud x walls and kuchcha roofs at their own costs. The children also live with them.

IMPROVISED SHELTERS

7.2 They have also to bring all necessary household items alongwith them. Often their shelters are at a distance as the open land is not available at the site. They and their families to face the most severe heat and cold of the desert region. When the season is over the workers return to their villages leaving the vacant shelters to be destroyed by the ravages of the desert climate and monsoon waters. With onset of new season, they have again to build new shelters.

CHILDREN AND THEIR EDUCATION

7.3 As the salt farms are situated some 10 to 25 kms. in the desert and workers have to stay there for six months, they have to face innumerable problems. One of the major anxiety is education of their children. Who have leave their school and there is no educational facility near the work-sites. Their education is disrupted and have no option but to join work with their parents.

7.4 A study has revealed that illiteracy amongst males is 54% and in females 87%. In Hada village there is only one literate person. All the salt-workers demand a school near the cluster of their shelters. So that their children can hope for a better future.

7.5 The women workers have also to carry their infants and children upto 3-4 years with them to the work site as there is nobody to look after them at home. There are no facilities like creche or Anganwadi.

WATER FOR DOMESTIC USE

7.6 Water is the most difficult problem in this area. There is always a shortage of water in the desert. A study has shown that salt workers spend Rs. 8 lakhs annually for procuring water. After ten hours work in salt farms they need a thorough bath to wash salt particles accumulated on their bodies. But the cost of water is high and they simply cannot afford it. Maganbhai, an Agaria, lamented that there is a sanctuary for wild asses in the Kutch Desert where they are assured food and even drinking water but we are not even that lucky.

7.7 The salt workers have to spend Rs. 150 to 300 per month for water. A study has revealed that 4% workers take bath daily, 18% workers do so every alternate day, 30% workers twice a week, 33% workers take bath once a week and 13% salt workers take bath once a fortnight.

HEALTH AND SANITATION

- 7.8 This is most difficult problem of salt workers. Most of them suffer from lack of or inadequate nutrition. Salinity affects their feet as constantly work in saline water. The skin of the feet suffers from fungus and cuts. They do not afford gumboots which can protect their feet against corroding effects of the saline water. Constant exposure to desert sun and the glare from the water in the salt pan weakens their eyesight and they also suffer from night blindness.
- 7.9 Diseases like Malaria, Diarrhea are widespread amongst these workers. An Agaria said that when they die and their bodies are offered to fire, their hands and legs did not burn because of heavy salt deposit accumulation.

UNAFFORDABLE DISTANCE OF HEALTH-CENTRE

- 7.10 There is no dispensary or a Primary Health Centre in the vicinity of the salt farms and hence they have to rush to distant places for medical aid when they are ill. By going to a medical centre they lose a day's wages. Fees are needed even in a Government dispensary and they cannot afford.

MATERNITY AND CHILD CARE

- 7.11 Thus the salt workers suffer from difficult health problems but they are accustomed to the hardships and go on suffering and living. The infant mortality rate in this area is high, particularly amongst female infants. The immunisation facility is negligible. There is no maternity hospital and cent percent women deliver their child at their home attended by 55 trained and 45% untrained midwives (DAIS).

EXPANDING SALT FARMS

- 8.1 In addition to Rajusara desert, the traders have started salt farming in Zazam desert this year. The efforts to start salt farming in this desert were going on since last eight years but the success was eluded them. This year efforts in this direction are being made by Shri. P.C. Patel, President, Visnagar Salt Workers Cooperative Society.
- 8.2 Workers from villages surrounding this desert and situated at a distance of 10 to 15 Kms. are coming to work on salt farms. They are paid fixed wages of Rs. 12 to 15 per day.
- 8.3 It has been observed that Agarias are also active in Rann of Kutch. Workers from surrounding villages situated at a 25 to 30 Kms. distance come for work on the salt farms. The system of working and salt producing is same as Santhalpur area.
- 8.4 The trader-Agaria and Agaria-labourer relationship pattern in vogue in Santhalpur area is followed into in Rajusara area also. The traders advance money to the Agarias and they in turn go to villages and pay the workers money in advance and thus arrange an assured availability of workers. The agarias and workers organise their settlements at a distance of one to one-and-a-half kms.

SHELTERS - SHOPPING

- 8.5 The shelters are small and dark inside. It is known as GHOLKU in local dialect. First they dig a pit in the ground and then build mud walls around it. The roof is made up of shrubs and other locally available materials. Sometimes the workers also bring their cattle with them. There is generally a small gracer's shop

which caters to their daily needs like sugar, tea, chillies, etc. The settlements present stark - naked picture of poverty.

8.6 Generally for shopping the workers use the transport vehicle operated by the traders.

WOMEN'S TASKS

8.7 Many women workers are seen doing trampling work with their 2-3 months old infants on their back or waist. They are paid Rs. 14 to 15 per day. The health of these workers is generally in a bad shape.

SALT COMMISSIONER'S AND FUNCTIONS OF HIS OFFICE

9.1 The Government has appointed a Salt Commissioner for the salt industry. The salt producers have to pay salt cess in the Commissioner's office.

9.2 The cess is Rs. 3.50 per quintal of salt. It is to be paid by producers who have more than 100 acres of land (under salt farming). The salt producers having less than 95 acres of land are not charged any cess. In 1987-88 a sum of Rs. 122.4 lakhs has been collected as cess in Gujarat out of which only Rs. 22,64,540 had been allotted for welfare schemes.

WELFARE SCHEMES : WHO WILL IMPLEMENT

9.3 It has been decided by the Government of India to spend 20% of the cess for the labour welfare. The labour welfare schemes announced in 1986 include the following:

- (1) To provide drinking water with water coolers
- (2) To provide sheds where workers can take rest
- (3) To provide health facilities
- (4) To provide entertainment facilities including facilities for sports.
- (5) Creches for children,
- (6) To provide educational facilities for the workers' children
- (7) To provide housing facilities to the workers and
- (8) To upgrade the skills of the salt producers with the help of audio-visual gadgets.

PROVISION OF FUNDS

9.4 On inquiry in the Ahmedabad office of the Salt Commissioner, we came to know that it was planned to build 6 more school-rooms at a cost of Rs. 6.40 lakhs in Santhalpur village. Of the total amount 59% grant will be provided by the Salt Commissioner and 41% by the Gujarat Government. A health centre costing Rs. 27 lakhs has also been planned and all the funds will be provided by the Commissioner.

There are provisions for all several schemes and facilities but the benefits are yet to reach the workers.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

10.1 During our talks with the workers, they have made following suggestions.

BALVADI-PRIMARY SCHOOL

10.2 Balvadi and Primary school in which the children upto the age from 10 to 12 years can be accomodated and in which the primary education can also be provided.

HEALTH - MEDICAL FACILITIES : MOBILE VAN

10.3 According to the workers there is a Government dispensary at Santhalpur but they have spend money to buy medicines. Again it is difficult to go to the dispensary when they are at work on the salt farms. Therefore it was suggested that arrangement of a mobile van dispensary would be of great relief to the salt workers.

TARPAULIN FOR ROOFING THE SHELTERS

10.4 The salt workers have to stay at the work sites for the season and hence they construct temporary shelters. Provision of tarpaulin as roofing material may provide them greater protection and it may be of useful for more than one season.

TRANSPORT FACILITY

10.5 The salt workers suffer from non-availability of transport facility for commuting to the salt farms. The bus plies upto Rajusara at the moment and if it is extended upto AGARS-salt farms in the morning and evening it would be a great relief to the workers.

SUPPLY AND STORAGE FACILITY FOR WATER

10.6 At present drinking water is brought from Santhalpur by camel carts which costs Rs. 300 per month. The provision for drinking water would also heap mitigate health hazards.

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