

India

In a country with a vast informal economy and limited awareness of and access to social protection, Worker Facilitation Centres (WFCs) follow a proactive approach to reach out to people in remote areas.

The WFC is a single-window service available to informal economy households in the State of Karnataka in India. The centres improve access to social protection benefits by acting as a crucial bridge between government departments operating social protection schemes and informal economy households.

WFCs believe in taking social protection to the households of the beneficiaries instead of waiting for them to approach the centres. Their primary functions include, among others:

- identifying and recording information on eligible households and members;
- assisting people with the documentation required to register for schemes and claim benefits; and
- providing information on and creating awareness of social protection.¹

National social protection floors (SPFs) guarantee access to essential health care and basic income security for children, persons of working age and older persons.

185 countries have adopted the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), an approach to achieve universal social protection.

This note presents a successful country experience of expanding social protection.

¹ In September 2015, the Government of Karnataka launched Single Window Service Centres (SWSCs) that provide the same functions as the WFCs as well as employment services.



Main lessons learned

- WFCs are a concrete mechanism to implement the provisions of the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act of 2008.
- WFCs show how a single window and case management can help households to access social protection services and benefits by facilitating complex procedural requirements and addressing the drawbacks of a fragmented delivery system.
- Community Facilitators (CFs) or other people who work at the WFCs visit beneficiary households to inform remote and vulnerable population groups about their right to social protection and include them in existing social protection schemes. The proactive approach followed by WFCs can be an inspiration for countries with many social protection schemes and low coverage.
- A well-designed management information system (MIS) bridges the gap between the Government's existing programmes and intended beneficiaries. In addition, strict quality control systematically monitors CFs and contributes to the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery mechanism.

1. Why is there a need for WFCs?

In India, 93 per cent of the workforce is in the informal or unorganized sector, which contributes around 60 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Informal sector workers usually do not have a direct, formal or contractual relationship with their employers; therefore, they lack access to sufficient and reliable social security benefits. On the demand side, there are intrinsic challenges, such as illiteracy among workers, low awareness of entitlements and a lack of access to organizations or groups that can represent workers' interests. On the supply side, social policies are fragmented with low convergence among schemes, information management is inadequate and transaction costs are high.

In 2008, the Government of India passed the Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act, which stipulates minimum social security measures for informal sector workers, including health and maternity benefits, old-age pensions and death and disability grants. Subsequently, national- and state-level social security boards were set up to implement the provisions of the Act. The Act also encourages the formation of WFCs.

Recognizing the need to bridge the gap between the Government's existing programmes and intended beneficiaries, the Department of Labour of Karnataka, with support from the German International Cooperation (GIZ), set up Worker Facilitation Centres in 2011. The main objectives of WFCs are to provide information on social protection schemes, identify and register prospective beneficiaries, and help the users to access benefits and services.

WFCs are set up at the lowest administrative levels of government, i.e. village councils or urban wards. Each WFC covers 1,000 households, including in remote areas. Thus, they reduce the high opportunity costs for informal sector beneficiaries to access services.

2. How do WFCs function?

WFCs cover informal economy workers, such as agricultural labourers, construction workers, domestic helpers, garment workers and home-based workers in Karnataka. These workers rarely have formal labour

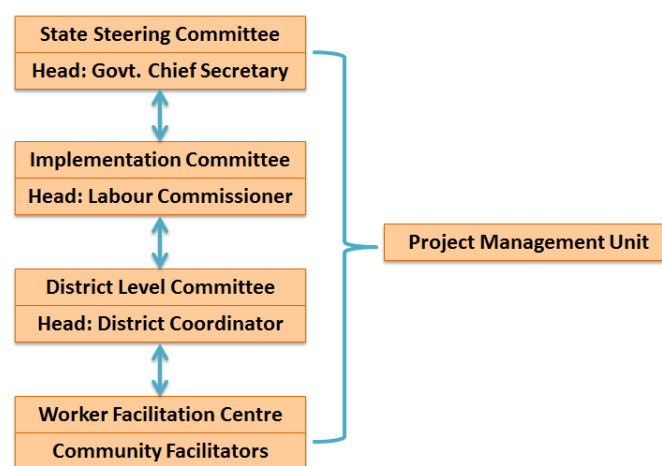
contracts, access to social protection or entitlements to the minimum wage.

There are 250 WFCs in Karnataka, housed in village council offices (in rural areas) or municipal offices (in urban areas). The Centres are equipped with computers, printers and Internet access, and are run by Community Facilitators from the same locality. This contributes to their acceptability by beneficiaries. CFs conduct household visits to perform several functions:

- identify eligible beneficiary households and collect basic household information;
- upload the information on an MIS;
- disseminate information on existing social protection schemes for the unemployed, sick, injured, elderly and survivors, as well as on education scholarships;
- assist beneficiaries to obtain, fill and submit the necessary documents and application forms; and
- follow up on benefit claims.

CFs play a special role as they do not wait for beneficiaries to come to the centres and apply for benefits. Instead, CFs visit the households within the WFC's jurisdiction. To ensure alignment between their work and the State's agenda on social protection delivery, the WFCs have governing committees at different levels of government (see figure below).

Figure 1. Institutional framework



Source: GIZ

The State Steering Committee, headed by the Chief Secretary of the Government, provides overall guidance for inter-departmental coordination and

cooperation. The Implementation Committee, headed by the Commissioner of Labour, discusses the problems related to the implementation of the project and takes corrective actions. The District Coordination Committee facilitates inter-departmental cooperation for convergence of different benefits and greater outreach towards beneficiaries. The WFCs are at the lowest level of this institutional framework. They are overseen by a Project Management Unit consisting of technical staff and the State Coordinator. The Project Management Unit interacts with all levels to analyse, consolidate and share information, and coordinate quality checks and impact studies.

All this information along with data on prospective beneficiaries, existing social protection schemes and data from other relevant government departments, are consolidated in a custom-designed MIS. Data on beneficiaries are collected by CFs through surveys and updated into beneficiary database. The quality of these surveys is monitored by a third party that samples and conducts reverse checks on the surveys.

The Community Facilitators undergo capacity training for their role. The training covers a conceptual understanding of social protection, key social protection schemes, conditions of informal economy workers and communication skills.

3. What impact have WFCs had so far?

The social protection system in India is affected by many challenges that create barriers to access, such as inadequate and poorly disseminated information, a complex delivery system and high illiteracy and poverty rates. Against this backdrop, WFCs have helped to identify and register eligible households and facilitate their access to benefits. WFCs have also significantly improved coverage of schemes that are most relevant to informal economy workers, including health and accident insurance, death benefits and pensions.

The MIS used by the WFCs contains data on 260,348 households out of a total estimated 361,525 informal economy households in Karnataka. Of these households, 260,470 individuals were found to be eligible for existing social protection schemes. Community Facilitators have helped to submit applications for 47 per cent of these eligible

individuals. Of these applications to existing schemes, 72 per cent have been approved.

Findings of a randomized controlled trial conducted in 2012 show that WFCs have helped increase people's awareness of social protection schemes and improved access to them. For instance, the coverage of Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna (National Health Insurance Scheme) was 75 per cent higher in households covered by WFCs. The study also showed that older Centres performed better, which suggests that the performance of WFCs improves over time.



4. What's next?

Certain bottlenecks hamper the effective coverage of all eligible beneficiaries:

- Slightly over 50 per cent of eligible individuals have not yet had their applications submitted.
- Submitting applications involves complex and time-consuming procedures, such as filling separate forms for different schemes and providing formal documents, such as proof of age, which are difficult for informal economy members to acquire.
- Informal economy households are often reluctant to register for contributory schemes as they may not understand the mechanisms and advantages of insurance and may not have clear information about the benefits they would receive in future.

To address these bottlenecks and increase the effectiveness of the centres, the Government of Karnataka decided to expand the WFC model in September 2015. This was done by launching 1,200 Single Window Service Centres that provide training and employment services in addition to WFC functions.

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This note was prepared by Hans-Christoph Ammon and Namerta Sharma from GIZ, D Rajasekhar from the Institute for Social and Economic Change, and Loveleen De and Jurriaan Linsen of the ILO. It was reviewed by Isabel Ortiz and Valérie Schmitt of the ILO.

The editor of the series is Isabel Ortiz, Director of the Social Protection Department, International Labour Organization (ILO).

For more information, contact: ortizi@ilo.org



www.social-protection.org

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE

4, route des Morillons
1211 Genève 22
Switzerland

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