

SEEDS MASON ACADEMY: STEP PROGRAM

A Spirit of Empowerment



ORGANISING THE UNORGANISED

The underlying theme of SEEDS Mason Academy aims to build a skilled construction workforce, including women, while helping formalise the largely informal sector of labour and construction workers in India.

Savda Ghevra JJ Colony, where the Academy is located, is a resettlement colony on the outskirts of Delhi established in 2006. It houses around 8000 families, but infrastructure is sub-standard. Families are culturally conservative and survive mainly on daily wage jobs.

The Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) of the SEEDS Mason Academy was run under the Ministry of Women and Child Development initiative to provide technical training to women and build their capacities as masons and plumbers. There were two relevant and demand based courses of assistant mason and plumber general (helper). The modules were designed after a thorough assessment for the skills required and needed in the market. The process of identification was done through door-to-door visits and community focus group discussion meetings after which both experienced and novice women were enrolled.

The vision of the STEP program was to help women boost their skills and get employed. Such job placement was an insistent attempt of the Academy, enhancing income and subsequently the quality of life. At the same time, this was an effort to instill confidence and a can-do attitude among women who had doubted themselves for a long time. It had been the determination of women of these women that marked the success of the programme.

BREAKING BARRIERS, CHANGING MINDSETS

Committed, passionate and diligent, these women trainees had knowingly and unknowingly challenged multiple social and traditional barriers. Juggling between work, home and children, these women dedicated time to equip themselves with new skills. One of the major challenges in getting women to enroll in the academy was finding a suitable time that worked for them. Understanding the situation, SEEDS came up with evening/night classes from 6 pm to 9 pm. A total of 96 women were enrolled with 50 women for Assistant Masonry and 46 women for the plumbing course.

A step towards progress

Women attending the mason programme were often subjected to discouraging remarks, from their families, neighbours or both. Raj Kumari, a 33 year old woman remembers how she was scoffed at with remarks that masonry is not for women.

The scorn of others was largely ignored for the women were ready to do everything in their power to better provide better for their families. It was their curiosity that brought them to the academy and their determination that kept them there.



“My relatives would say that we don’t get opportunities to work, who do you think will give you work? Who will hire you?”

- Raj Kumari, Assistant Masonry course Trainee



A woman trainer for women masons

For Rakhi Kashyap, a trainer with SEEDS Academy, the journey has been a complete roller coaster. Travelling daily to the other end of the city and having days as long as 12 hours, the efforts in making the academy a success were relentless.

Rakhi has a strong background in low-cost and energy-efficient architecture and over six years of training experience, but this was a new experience all together.

As she commented: "The major challenge remained in getting the women to place their belief in your work as they were extremely hesitant to explore this idea. We cultivated a very happy and healthy environment, one extremely conducive to learning. This enabled us to sustain the classes and build the level of self-esteem among the women. I saw these women coming every day to learn and empower themselves despite various obstacles. It was their trust and faith in me that gave me the strength to turn up each day even in the face of personal crisis. I and the women connected on a unique level. There was an ease in communication and we all felt part of the same purpose."



"We cultivated a very happy and healthy environment, one extremely conducive to learning."

- Rakhi Kashyap, Trainer, SEEDS Academy

ACHIEVING EASE IN THE RIGOUR: 864 HOURS CURRICULUM

The trainers understood that the women they were reaching had limited formal education. However, this was not seen as a hindrance to learning. Rather, more creative ways were taken up to impart training. The programmes ran with a combination of audio-video lectures, presentations and practical sessions that enabled women from all levels of education to grasp the concepts.

A 5-star grading and certification system was introduced, based on theory and practical tests. Most women in the course met the 3-star benchmark.



A classroom for everybody

Radha's love for math and interest in plumbing made her the most meticulous student in class. She was initially apprehensive as she had no previous knowledge of the subject. Soon, that ceased to be a concern as the academy sought to teach everything from A-to-Z, leaving no detail out. She was equally keen on both theory and practical and maintained a neat register to record notes of each lesson. That register soon became the talk of the class!



“I learnt everything here about plumbing. Even the kind of tools one has to ask for the hardware store, their size, quantity and use.”

- Radha, Plumbing (helper)
Trainee





**282hrs Theory
582hrs Practical**



**Field Visit
and Internship**














★★★★★

**5 Star Rating
System and
Certification
by DDMA**

STEP Training

Syllabus Elements

- | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| 
Introduction, Basics
and History of plumbing | 
Health, Safety
and Environment | 
Measurements, Maths
and Calculation – Basic | 
Tools, Equipments
and Uses | 
Material, Material
Handling and Storage |
| 
Plumbing
Drawings – Basic | 
Repairs and
trouble shooting | 
DRR
Techniques | 
Waste
Reduction | 
Work and Labor
Management |
| | | | | 
Communication
and Work Ethics |

Course specific Modules

Plumbing

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---|--|
| Pipes, Valves
and Joints | Water
Supply | Fittings and
Fixtures | Drainage, Waste and
Vent Systems – Basic | Preliminary Installation –
Cutting, Assembling and Fixing |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---|--|

Masonry

- | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--------------|--|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| Basic of Building
Structures | Basic Masonry –
Bricks, Stone
and Blocks | Scaffolding,
Shuttering
and Formwork | Basic
RCC | Doors & Windows –
Openings & Fixing | Plastering and
Finishing | PCC and
Flooring |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--------------|--|-----------------------------|---------------------|

LINKING LEARNING TO WORK

Following a holistic method from enrolment to placement, the academy not only provided classroom training, but engaged the students in field visits and internships, giving them opportunities to learn on ground. The internship period of one month post the training bolstered their experiences of work and diversified their knowledge.

An experience centred approach

Srimati Devi, 34, had always been a keen observer. As a mother of seven, she had to be! She didn't let her lack of education get in the way of learning and took each task head on, meticulously.

Her favourite part was the internship where she was able to work under constant guidance and instructions, applying all that was taught in class.

Srimati's husband, a mason, has also been supportive and she is confident about finding work.



“Even if I managed to write, I wouldn't be able to read. However, when someone instructed me on the work, I can follow and get the work done exactly.”

- Srimati Devi, Assistant Masonry course Trainee



Working in collaboration with Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB), the trainees from SEEDS Mason Academy were taken to their project sites as part of field visits and were later associated with them as interns. DUSIB here acted as a local contractor and an agency, offering a platform to further hone the skills of the trainees.

A ground of potential

Sonu, the supervisor, oversaw the visits and closely worked with the women. Speaking about their performance and prospects he said: “The women worked very hard in the summer days despite the heat. Although there are fewer instances of women plumbers and masons, if more are trained, they would definitely get employed.”

On asking if the kind of education being imparted was enough for one to get an actual job, he affirmed that it was sufficient to be eligible for employment.



“Areas where in the demand is high and there are plenty of opportunities, the difference between the work of men and women often vanishes. There is a good chance for women to find work.”

- Sonu, Supervisor at DUSIB

NOT JUST TRAINING, A PASSION TO LEARN

While many joined the academy in hopes of better work opportunities, there were others for whom these classes were more than just skill training. They found a sense of purpose here, a couple of hours where their minds were focused on creative work. It was this continuous revelation of discovering their capabilities and the sense of contentment that fuelled the drive to continue. The presence of other women in large numbers provided security and unity of goal in achieving what others had doubted. The simple fact that this academy could make them self-sufficient and equip them with the basics to fix their own homes was in itself a life altering (and money-saving) opportunity.



Learning is empowering

Fatima and Asma, sisters who are not allowed to work. They stepped out of their homes to make it to the Academy solely due to their passion to learn.

Attracted by the new skills they could acquire and thrilled to do something they've never done before, Asma and Fatima would come for the classes with an agenda to learn. Their family did not permit women to work outside of home. On asking what she would do with this knowledge if not work, Fatima said, "We've learnt enough to build our own home. We can build walls and fix pipes all by ourselves for our houses."

When Fatima and Asma joined there were only 10 women enrolled, but slowly this number grew larger. This made them extremely happy and even more determined to attend classes, hurrying every day to be on time. Fatima and Asma also started speaking to other women and sharing their experiences of the academy, urging them to come in and give it a try. At the end of the course, they've expressed interest to learn other new skills that they want the academy to offer.

"We can't work but at least we can learn. If in the future there are other things taught here, we will surely come to learn."

- Fatima Assistant Masonry course Trainee
- Asma, Plumbing (helper) Trainee



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