



REGIONAL PROGRAMME FOR POLLUTION CONTROL IN THE  
TANNING INDUSTRY IN SOUTH EAST ASIA - US/RAS/92/120

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# **STATUS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE TANNING INDUSTRY IN INDIA**

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## **COUNTRY SURVEY**

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**ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS USED**

CETP	COMMON EFFLUENT TREATMENT PLANT
CLRI	CENTRAL LEATHER RESEARCH INSTITUTE
ETP	EFFLUENT TREATMENT PLANT
ILIFO	INDIAN LEATHER INDUSTRIES FOUNDATION
ILO	INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION
ITI	INDUSTRIAL TRAINING INSTITUTION
NABARD	NATIONAL BANK FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT
NGO	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATION
PCB	POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD
RMK	RASHTRIYA MAHILA KOSH
RS	INDIAN RUPEE, US\$ 1 = RS 37.50
SC	SCHEDULED CASTE
SIDBI	SMALL INDUSTRIES DEVELOPMENT BANK OF INDIA
SSI	SMALL SCALE INDUSTRY
ST	SCHEDULED TRIBE
UNDP	UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
UNIDO	UNITED NATIONS INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION
WID	WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

## SUMMARY

### EMPLOYMENT PATTERN

- Employment of women in the tanning and associated sector is very limited, less than 10%. Further, employment tends to be restricted to the lowest category of jobs that are unskilled, and with little or no opportunity for up-gradation of skills.
- Comparatively more women work in the semi-finished to finished areas as the work is cleaner and less taxing. A profile of employment by gender in a typical tanning unit is given below.

**Table 1 - Distribution of women working in the raw to semi-finished area of a tannery**

Process stage	Women employed	Type of Work
Hide/skin receipt and storage	5-10	Trimming, loading and unloading (payment on piece rate basis)
Soaking	Nil	-
Unhairing	4-6	Manual unhairing, washing, drying and packing (payment on piece rate basis)
Fleshing	1-2	Cleaning and removing waste
Deliming and bating	Nil	-
Pickling and tanning	2-3	Cleaning, washing

**Table 2 - Distribution of women working in the semi-finished to finished area of a tannery**

Stage	Women employed	Type of Work
Sammying,	1-2	Carrying hides and skins
Setting	same women as for sammying	As above
Splitting, shaving	1-2	Carrying hides to and from machine
Re-chroming	as in tanning, no women	-
Staking, buffing	Nil	-
Toggling	2-3	Assistance to men in fixing hides; and in one unit doing it themselves
Auto toggling	3-4	Women are employed to load and for hooking
Padding	8-10	Manual application
Plating	Nil	-
Spraying & drying	4-5	Mainly for loading on auto-spray machine. Control of machine is in male hands only
Sorting, Measuring	2-3	Stacking hides or skins as per supervision of sorters & packers.

- Women employment is generally on a daily wage or casual basis. In some cases informal and contractual basis.
- Women are generally paid less than men. Women are considered as "cheap labour" by most employers.
- Women entrepreneurs are rare in the tanning industry. Generally tanneries are family owned business and only the male members of the family participate in management decisions. Women are not considered for succession.
- In one major leather industry group, where the entrepreneur is a woman, women are employed in far bigger numbers and in different levels of skills, compared to other tanneries.
- Women engineers are employed by Pollution Control Boards, but tend to be given posting only in the administrative offices, and not in the field.
- Consulting firms in the pollution control sector do not employ women for technical work. Employers feel that women cannot take up field work due to remoteness of the project sites and lack of amenities like lodging etc., for women in such places.
- Women are not employed at all levels in Leather Technology Institutions. In CLRI, for instance, there are women, though few in numbers, able to occupy senior positions.
- In the auxiliary sector, i.e., suppliers of chemicals to the tanning industry, there are few women working in positions which involve field visits or technical marketing, as travel for women is again seen to be difficult. For marketing, demonstrations need to be carried out in tanneries, and the perception of the employers is that women either would not be able to do this, or would not be taken seriously by tannery staff.

#### **FACTORS AFFECTING EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN**

- Attitudes of employers and co-workers generally do not favour employment of women on jobs that they perceive as physically and technically demanding. Machine operations are typically not considered suitable for women.
- Majority of employers are not against employment of women as such. The general attitude towards women's employment is favourable, with employers believing that women are more reliable and sincere, more disciplined and loyal.
- Labour legislation, restricting women working late evening and night hours, is a constraint in employment of women, especially for continuous operations such as tanning.

- The Factories Act specifies that separate amenities are to be provided for women wherever women are employed. While many tanneries do have separate washrooms, provision of crèches, rest rooms, health facilities etc. generally employers do not have any inclination to provide these facilities. They feel that it is an added burden to maintain these facilities and to administer them. Employers are willing to pay for the services if an outside agency could provide the facility.
- Work conditions in tanneries are often difficult. Cleanliness and safety aspects need considerable improvement in many tanneries. Work environment is seen to be not adequately hygienic in many tanneries by both women and men. These perceptions do seem to make the tanning sector unattractive for women to work. Women seeking employment in this sector are mostly unskilled and uneducated.
- Marital status is a major consideration for employment. Unmarried, literate young women are preferred in modern tanneries. Older women are acceptable, only if they are beyond child bearing age. The need to provide maternity leave with pay, and absenteeism during pregnancy, children's illness etc. are the factors leading to this preference.
- In the training institutes of leather technology girl students complain of being discouraged from choosing tanning as a major interest and also from working on the machines, on the other hand faculty complain of girls students' lack of interest in hands on training thus affecting the supply side of the technically skilled women for employment.

### **EFFORTS AT EMPLOYING WOMEN**

- There has been no special effort made to increase employment of women in the tanning sector. However, in recent years some attempts have been made by individual tanneries. Especially: Namaste Group; Farida Prime Tannery; and KKSK Leathers. Each has tried a different approach to employ more women. The approach of KKSK Leathers being seen as most suitable model in the long run.
- It is seen from the above efforts that women are as capable as men for all operations in a tannery if they are provided the requisite training.
- It is also felt that efforts at introducing women at just one kind of work tends to "feminisation" of such positions, leading to loss of status of the job. It was also noticed, though in isolated situations, that women were informally doing the work that men were supposed to do, e.g., removing hides from soaking pits, working on machines, etc., although the employers had

engaged these women as unskilled workers, and felt that women could not do such tasks.

- As per the Government policy of employing 30% women, women engineers have been employed in Pollution Control Boards.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provision of practical skill training for women in tanning operations, in a production setting.
- Sensitising of employers to employment of women and its desirability. While these owners and managers are in favour of employment of women, social and cultural bias continues to act as a barrier. Specific efforts need to be made to sensitising the employers and workers, e.g. through empowerment workshops and training programmes for women employees using the whole potential of women and for men employees.
- Provision of facilitating measures by an independent outside agency to reduce the added responsibility for the tanners and to ensure the support system really works.
- Development of best practitioners in women's employment with some of the identified best practitioners, to sensitise other tanners and the community.
- Encouragement of entrepreneurship by women in the tanning sector particularly for niche markets/specialised products.
- Social mobilisation of women working on piece rate, contract basis to improve their work skills and bargaining power, and encouragement of saving.
- Modernisation of work conditions and improvement of work practices with women in focus and with gender sensitivity. Benefiting from the present opportunity on ongoing modernisation to ensure women's employment.
- Raising awareness in the community about the changed work environment in the tanning units.
- A study of "best practice" in tanning techniques, processes equipment, hand tools and work practices should be taken by UNIDO in some of the countries where women are employed on a large scale and at all skill levels so as to promote a best practice model for replications and adoption. For instance, Chinese tanneries employ women in all operations. Such a study may lead to introduction of better ergonomic and other technological improvement. Such documentation will be an invaluable tool in enhancing the participation of women in tanning sector.



- Introduction of a culture of work study, resulting in constant improvement in work practices, with sensitivity to needs of women workers.
- A rapid work study by technical experts to introduce simple modification and improvement in material handling facilities & enabling work conditions for women.

## SCOPE OF STUDY

The study was taken up in the context of UNIDO currently implementing a Regional Programme for pollution control and cleaner environment in the tanning industry in selected countries of South-East Asia region. The programme aims at providing the tanners with practical solutions, managerial and technical, in tackling the problem of pollution and Occupational Safety and Health. In addition, one objective of the programme aims at increasing participation of women in the tanning industry and their effective integration in the activities of leather industry sector in the region. This study was thus initiated to assess the present status of women employment in tanning industry in India with focus on Tamilnadu and to make a set of recommendations to enhance the participation of women in the tanning sector. Mrs Madhura M. Chatrapathy, Asian Centre for Entrepreneurial Initiatives, in her function as a National Consultant, carried out the study in seven clusters of South India, which account for over 60% of the tanneries in the country.

## CONTEXT

Currently, the tanning industry is passing through a difficult phase, due to closure of many tanneries for non-implementation of stringent pollution control enforcement measures. Increased awareness in the public regarding hazards of effluents and pollution, public interest litigation, judicial activism and international market demand, have cumulatively resulted in stringent action by the pollution control authorities.

Some of the forward looking tanners have made use of the situation to remodel and modernise their production settings. This scenario offers extraordinary opportunity for introduction of women in tanning industry. Cleaner working environment, improved equipment and modern machinery, lend themselves admirably for employment of women in various levels of skills and competence. Modern tanneries can also absorb women with management and other technical education at a higher level than the conventional ones. As tanning units are located close to one another in clusters, tanners are coming together to create facilities and support systems including common effluent treatment plants. This once again provides an extraordinary entry point for influencing employment of women in the entire cluster.

Some of the tanners are leasing their units for use for specific operations. A number of exporters are making use of such infrastructure for their production. These arrangements provide new opportunities for women entrepreneurs to start a tanning enterprise without much investment risk.

Pollution control measures need to be carried out by all tanners in a very stringent manner. Therefore, there is a potential for in-house lab technicians and such other related services. More CETPs are opening up, consulting firms are also coming up providing for employment of women with technical qualification. The Government and other agencies involved in women in development must seize this opportunity for increasing the participation of women particularly at the higher skills and levels of employment carefully strategising the whole process with gender sensitivity.

A legislation favouring 30% job reservation for women is prescribed, many states in India have already adopted this policy. Unless efforts are made to create multiple entry points and at all levels through suitable training it is likely that there will be "ghettoisation" in the tanning sector more than other sectors of leather. Once again, this is the opportune time for taking proactive steps to maximise women's participation and integration in the tanning industry.

The study presents the present status, on employment patterns and factors influencing them and recommends certain course of action to increase the participation of women not through legislation or incentive but more by bringing about attitudinal change. This can be achieved through the involvement of opinion leaders and the community.

Therefore it is suggested that a strategic alliance with other development agencies and NGOs be initiated with a long term vision for an ongoing initiative to train and empower women to enter the tanning industry at all levels particularly in semi-finished to finished sub-sectors.

## METHODOLOGY

The study aims at assessing the current employment status of women in tanneries and has three components:

- (i) Collection of data on employment of women in the past and at present, including details on type of work done, qualifications/experience needed etc.; and
- (ii) Collection of data on factors affecting employment of women, including attitudes and opinions of key persons, e.g., tanners, women working in tanneries, men working in tanneries, employers at auxiliary jobs such as pollution control consultants, etc. While qualitative data could be collected through individual

interviews or observation of records, for the second part it was felt that a different method is needed. Accordingly, the methodology used was:

- Round Table Meetings with different stakeholders at different clusters, where the issue of maximising women's participation in tannery industry would be discussed, along with the question of enabling women to utilise improved opportunities. (It was also felt that such meetings would also help in sensitising the employers to some extent on the possibility of employing women in different positions)
- Interviews, using prepared questions, with employers and employees at tanneries, training, research and educational institutions, pollution control consultants, suppliers of chemicals for tanning, etc.

(iii) Analysis of data collected with regard to employment levels and attitudes, and recommendation to enable women to benefit of economic opportunities in the sector and to set in motion a process of empowerment of women in the sector.

#### LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The study was conducted in seven clusters of Tamil Nadu and Bangalore only, which accounts for nearly 60% of the tanneries in the country. As such, the survey would provide an accurate picture of this area only, and may not reflect the socio-cultural conditions prevalent in other parts of the country where tanneries exist. In addition, the scope of the study did not provide for visit to Chinese owned tanneries in Eastern India, which are said to have a tradition of women participating at levels and sections of tanning process. This would have provided a good model for comparison. It may be considered to include these tanneries during a second survey phase.

A large number of tanneries were under closure due to legal embargo and similar other statutory constraints. Hence information on actual working conditions and opinions of the employees could not be gathered, to the full extent, at all clusters. However, discussions with tannery owners and other stakeholders were held in all the clusters.

The data gathered is on a "look and listen" basis. Employment of women, most of the time is off record or on contract or on daily wage basis. Therefore, authenticated official information was unavailable.

## TANNING INDUSTRY IN INDIA

Dispersion of tanning units in the country is non-uniform, with Tamil Nadu accounting for nearly 55% of the tanneries in the country, followed by West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. The majority of the tanning units in the study are SSI units, with only about 10% being in medium to large sector, and can termed as modern. Most units are family owned and managed, including many of the large ones.

Most of the small scale units convert the raw skin or hide to semi-finished stage. Semi-finished to finished tanneries are typically larger, being at the medium or large levels. The small units use traditional technology, with the drums being old and often outdated.

Work conditions in most of the small units are poor, with the exception of a few large units. The work area, especially in the wet sections, is generally dirty. Work in most cases is done manually, involving carrying of heavy loads, with material handling devices to make work lighter being rare.

There is also usually a strong odour in the wet sections, a combination of chemicals and organic materials making working even more difficult. In the tan-yard, drums are drained off directly to the floor itself, resulting in considerable splashing of the chemical solution on anybody standing nearby. While in a few cases women and men were seen wearing aprons and/or gloves, in many units no such safety guards were available.

This may probably affect health of both men and women. It is also seen that those working in such harsh environment have a shorter useful work life, e.g. a man starting work in a tannery at the age of 20 may expect to remain healthy at most to an age of 40-45, by which time he becomes "worn out". In case of women, there is a strong belief, though unsubstantiated, that the work conditions affect reproductive health.

## WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE TANNING INDUSTRY

Statistics on employment of women were not easily available, as in most cases, especially small scale tanneries, no records were found. Information provided was therefore approximate, and needed to be verified by random observation in the tanneries. Most women were employed as contract labour or on daily wages, for seasonal and part time work, for which clear records were not available with the tannery as such.

Past trends were available only for one unit, Presidency Kid Leather. Although the information provided generally confirmed other findings, it was felt that data from one unit alone would not provide for extrapolation for the whole industry.

At present employment of women is seen to be very limited in tanneries or in associated sectors. Most of the employment is in unskilled jobs, or for certain "skilled" jobs done on contract or piece rate basis. Women working at this level were mostly illiterate, and tended to be from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes or backward classes. In almost all cases the women had worked in the same job for a number of years and were not promoted to higher jobs. There were very few opportunities provided for acquiring literacy or other skills for upward mobility.

Data collected from visits to about 50 tanneries show that the employment of women varies from 8-10 per unit on an average, combining both large and small tanneries. This tends to agree with the "Indian Leather 2010 - A Technology, Industry and Trade forecast CLRI (India)" by Mr. Thyagarajan et al., report on employment of women in 1990-91. The report projects employment of women by the year 2010 at 13,000 which is 10% of total employment. However, it is felt that this figure takes into account the natural growth of the tanning industry, and not any specific effort to increase the presence of women in the sector. This would result in women continuing in the same type of jobs as before, at the lowest levels. It is felt that to make any impact on the present status it is necessary to revise this target upwards, to at least 20% i.e. 26,000, and that additional efforts, as mentioned later will be needed to attain this figure.

In discussions most employers first said that there were hardly any women employed in the raw to semi-finished areas, and that women tended to work only in the semi-finished to finished area. However, during actual visits to the work areas, it was seen that there were a number of women working in the raw to semi-finished area, more than what was stated. Employers did not immediately take into account these women as being employed, as most of them were on piece rate or contract basis, and not on full time employment (usually for some days of the week).

It was also interesting to note that in one group of tanneries, belonging to the Namaste group, e.g., Thrive Leathers, B.L.L.C., etc., there were far more women employed as compared to the rest of the tanneries. This difference is seen to be because the group was set up by a woman entrepreneur, who laid stress on employing women specifically.

Thrive Leathers has now cut back on production and retrenched many of the women. What is interesting is that most of these women have found work at similar or higher levels in other tanneries, while women working earlier in those tanneries were employed only at unskilled worker levels. It can be inferred

therefore that women who get trained in non-traditional operations can get such work. It also shows women are not incapable of working on machines, as was the general attitude among many tanners and workers of the tanneries, but that they lack opportunities to acquire the necessary skills in operating various machines and becoming proficient on them.

*Specific tasks being done by women in different sections of the tanning industry as found by the present study are listed in the following chapters.*

## **WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS**

### **TANNERIES**

#### **Raw to semi-finished**

Most tanners state that work in the raw to semi-finished area is too arduous for women, and hence women are not employed much in this section. However, it was found that women are working in significant numbers in this area as well, except that in many jobs they were not regular employees, but are employed on piece rate /daily wage basis.

The specific types of work being done are:

- **Trimming** involves cutting head and tail off the raw skin/hide. This is done manually by the women using special knives. The women employed for this work are invariably from the depressed sections of the SC/ST communities.
- **Loading and Unloading of Skins/Hides:** Women are engaged usually by the supplier (not the tanner) for unloading of hides and skins, as well as loading of waste (head/tail cuttings, fleshing waste etc.). Work is manual, with very primitive methods of handling the material.
- **Removal of hair:** In the clusters of Vaniyambadi and Ranipet where sheep or goat skin are predominantly processed the skin is brought from various other parts of India. The final plucking of wool/ hair is done by women. There is an emerging market for the hair, with many of the tanneries selling the hair after a preliminary wash and sun drying.

In all the above cases payment for work is low, with the women being able to earn up to Rs. 20-25 per day. In case of trimming, some women can earn as much as Rs. 40 per day, if they are very fast.

However, trimming, hair plucking and the corresponding loading and unloading work is seasonal, and is not available throughout the year. As a result, the women need to find other employment during other parts of the year, mostly as agricultural labour.

Typically women for trimming, loading - unloading and plucking are employed in two ways:

1. Self formed groups: Few of the women have formed their own groups, generally moving together from one tannery to another in groups of 4 to 5 women. The deal is struck with the tannery by a leader and the payment is also made to the leader of the group and she in turn distributes the money according to the work done by each member.
2. Contract labour: The contractor may be independently working, who contracts a group of women for daily wages though contractor is paid on piece rate basis. In case of hair removal, washing, dressing and packing, women are employed by the hair purchaser, but on contract basis.

In both these cases women move from one tannery to another for a days' job but responsibility of finding the work rests with contractor. The work is found by moving from one tannery to another or by following the truck load with raw skin as soon as it enters the town. Interestingly, these groups also have their own network of informers, for example, a "pan" (=betelnut) shop owner located on the main road may give them signal as soon as the truck enters the main road.

Auxiliary Service in the tannery: Women are engaged as daily workers in the factory for general cleaning, material movement from one operation to another, etc. Women do not operate any machine in this stage, as the work is considered heavy though all the above mentioned work is in itself heavy and physically taxing.

While women are not formally working in the soaking or liming pits and in the tan-yard, there are instances where women lift hides from the pits, including stepping into pits if necessary, carrying wet hides to other areas, and in taking hides out of the drums. But the fact remains that formally this is not recognised as a job that women are supposed to work in. Women therefore do not receive any specific training in safety, hygiene, and in necessary skills to make the job easier. These also are the areas where technology up-gradation tends to receive the least attention.

**Table 3 - Women's employment pattern in tanneries (raw to semi-finished)**

Stage	Women employed	Type of Work
Hide/skin receipt and storage	5-10	Trimming, loading and unloading (paid on piece rate basis)
Soaking	Nil	-
Hair plucking	4-6	Plucking, washing, drying and packing (paid on piece rate basis)
Fleshing	1-2	Cleaning, removing waste
Deliming and bating	Nil	-
Pickling and tanning	2-3	Cleaning, washing

The typical distribution of women working in the raw to semi-finished area of a large tannery is shown in the table 3.

### Semi-finished to finished

In the semi-finished to finished stages, women are employed at all stages, but mainly as unskilled labour, to assist the operators of the machines in loading, unloading etc. In a few cases women are working directly on a few automatic machines, but again only for loading/unloading of automatic machines. Adjusting or controlling of machines is considered to be above the capabilities of women in most tanneries (including just switching on the machine).

In a few exceptional cases women are being tried out in a number of positions in the unit, from sammying onwards to the finishing operations. However, there are some interesting social perceptions which create different kinds of new barriers. Women working on the shaving machines were addressed as 'da', a typical way of addressing a male peer. Women working on these machines are teased about it by both men and other women. Social issues such as these are subtle but act as barriers which are difficult to tackle.

The typical distribution of women working in the semi-finished to finished area of a large tannery is shown in table 4.

**Table 4 - Women's employment pattern in tanneries (semi-finished to finished)**

Stage	Women employed	Type of Work
Sammying,	1-2	Carrying hides and skins
Setting	same women as for sammying	as above
Splitting, shaving	1-2	Carrying hides to and from machine
Re-chroming	as in tanning, no women	-
Staking, buffing	Nil	-
Toggling	2-3	Support to men in fixing hides (except in one unit where women only were engaged in toggling)
Auto toggling	3-4	Women are employed for hooking
Padding	8-10	Manual application of finishes
Plating,	Nil	-
Spraying & drying	4-5	Mainly for loading on auto-spray machine. Control of machine is in male hands only
Sorting, Measuring	2-3	Stacking hides or skins as per direction of sorter, packer

It is also noticed that women are rarely employed in decision making operations and process locations, even at operator levels, e.g. for quality control, sorting, dye mixing setting controls on machines, etc.



The limitation on women's work in the semi-finished to finished stage is not so much the physical incapability as the attitudes of employers and co-workers. The general perception both that of men and women is that operation of machines is a man's job, and women therefore should not attempt it.

#### LABORATORIES (IN TANNERIES OR CETPS)

Only a few of the larger tanneries have their own laboratories. In the semi-finished to finished units there are also testing units for dyes, which are transparent drums to check the proportion of dyes and chemicals to be added to obtain the requisite colour. In such cases there is no separate chemist, and the production in-charge does the testing. In most units there is no formal system of testing incoming materials for quality.

Women are employed as chemists in a few of the units having formal laboratories. Such women are usually from a different social class as compared to the women working as helpers or operators. They come from the middle class, educated to graduate level, and it is seen that often these women do not continue to work after marriage.

#### IN RELATED FIELDS

##### Common Effluent Treatment Plants

In the Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs), no women were found to be working. It was felt by the CETP management in all cases that the limiting factor was the remoteness and distance of the CETP from either the factories or residential areas. The CETPs had advertised for the post of chemists in many cases, but it was seen that no women applied for such jobs.

##### Pollution Control Board

In the case of Pollution Control Boards (State Government agency) and environmental consulting companies, it was seen that there are a number of women who are qualified, as environmental engineers, chemists etc., and are willing to work. While the Pollution Control Boards do employ a number of women, most of them are provided positions at the Head Office and not in the field in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. It was interesting to note that while in Karnataka the women expressed a preference for field jobs, as they had greater freedom of action and authority, women in Tamil Nadu strongly preferred jobs in the head office without any travel.

##### Environmental Consulting Companies

In environmental consulting companies, women were not seen to be employed as engineers. The employers felt that women are

not suitable for work in the field, as the job calls for a readiness to travel at very short notice, and stay wherever possible. Men could share rented accommodations more like a dorm, and could stay anywhere. With the presence of even one girl, the whole arrangement would change. It was also said that Project Engineers or Project Planning Executives at the office would have also to visit sites and interact with the clients, which women could not do.

While women could be employed only in local or desk bound jobs theoretically, in reality there was not enough local work to justify employing someone full-time for such work. In addition, using someone only for local work while others had to go to the field all over the state, would lead to resentment and lower the morale of the staff.

### **Research Laboratories**

Major laboratories of the Government employ large number of women scientists and technologists. However, they do not reach the senior management levels. Upward mobility for women appears to be limited by the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon. It was also mentioned that there are far fewer women working in Research & Development departments in the private sector as well, especially the decision making positions.

## **FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT**

### **LEGISLATION ON WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT**

The Factories Act specifies that women are permitted to work between 7 A.M. and 7 P.M., and between 6 A.M. to 7 A.M. and from 7 P.M. to 10 P.M. with specific permission from the Government. Women are not allowed to work in factory premises under any circumstances from 10 P.M. to 6 A.M. In addition, women are not permitted to work in areas declared as hazardous.

In the case of the tanning industry, there was no clarity whether the industry is hazardous or not. A clear response was not available from the employers or the government authorities. The fact remains that women are employed in tanning, even though there is some ambiguity on the government's position. However, it is seen that women work in the first shift, from 7 A.M. onwards, or in the general shift, from 8:30 or 9 A.M. usually.

The process of tanning involves a number of steps, of which the actual tanning itself is a continuous process. Once the hides or skins are loaded into the drums work continues round the clock till the tanning is complete. The restriction on employment of women in evening or night hours therefore means that women cannot work in this section. It is also difficult to employ women for the day shift only and employ men for the other shifts in the

continuous process section as the norm for shift work is the rotation of shift every week or fortnight, so that no worker works only at nights.

The restriction on working hours do not seem to apply to women working on piece rate basis, as they come and go depending on when work is available. It is also seen in a few tanneries that women do work up to 10 P.M., but these women are not on the pay-roll and are not "officially" working in the tanneries.

The Factories Act also specifies a number of other facilities to be made available where women are working. These include provision of separate washrooms, a crèche if there are more than 40 women employed, and also maternity leave with pay. There are a number of small tanners who cannot provide all the benefits, especially the crèche. This is also a factor limiting the employment of women. The employers were willing to pay a fees to an outside agency to provide these facilities but found it difficult to organise and administer such facilities.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

The tanning industry is considered difficult to work in. The lack of cleanliness and hygiene in many of the units, both large and small, confirms this perception. As a result it is seen that it is difficult to get literate women to work in tanneries. Only those women who do not have any other skill tend to choose to work in these units. In some cases while the employers are prepared to employ women in specific posts such as chemists, they do not find applicants.

## EQUAL PAY

Although the Constitution of India guarantees equal wage for equal work, it is a universal phenomenon to find women being paid less than men for any equivalent job. This is more pronounced in the case of informal and contractual employment. The Tanning industry is no exception. Off the record, employers may admit that one of the key factors for employing women is they cost less. Women are conditioned to believe that they deserve lower pay and that they effectively contribute less or are incapable of the same level of 'hard' work as men.

## ATTITUDES OF EMPLOYERS, CO-WORKERS AND WOMEN

### ***"Tanning jobs are not for women"***

Cutting across almost all clusters the strong stated attitude of the employers was that tanning is a difficult industry to work in and women cannot do the strenuous work that men can do.

### ***"Women cannot do heavy work"***

As such, they need to be employed only in those areas which do not call for heavy work. As mentioned, however, the work women do is quite heavy and strenuous, notwithstanding the fact that they are used only as helpers. It appears that general work as helpers is not recognised by employers as heavy work, or is not noticed formally. Similar is the case of women working on piece rate basis, or employed by contractors. These women, while in significant numbers, are often not taken into account by the employers when discussing employment of women. Time and again the response from employers was that there are not many women working in the tannery, but when a listing was made, it was noticed that the mention of women working in the trimming area came either as an afterthought or when prompted by specific questions. When compared with what really does happen, it is felt that the traditionally accepted belief, that women cannot be physically taxed, becomes a barrier for employment of more women.

***"Injury to women workers is a matter of concern and caution"***

There is also the feeling among employers that there would be more trouble for them if a woman is injured than if a man were to be injured in course of work, due to any accident. Most employers felt that men can be managed with suitable compensation and medical support. It is also felt that while a man can take rest when injured, a woman cannot as she has still to do her household chores. In addition, it was also said that any injury causing deformity of any kind will be a problem for marriageable girls.

***"Women cannot handle machines"***

Attitudes of both men and women at work, towards the kind of work suitable for women, are also similar. The women working in the plant in different areas also felt that they cannot handle machines, as machines were considered too complicated. There is a strong attitude among the men that machine work can and should be done only by men, and women are not fit to do any work on the machine. Similarly, it is seen that women are not considered capable of taking decisions on any aspect of work, whether it be quality control, production or other areas.

In a few exceptional cases some employers have tried to employ more women in different operations, including machine operations, with varying success. In the case of Namaste Leathers Ltd., while the management was keen on employing women, the male workers objected strongly to women operating the machines, and as a result of the conflict women were withdrawn from the machines. However, Namaste itself and two other units have been successful in employing women in the units. The basis on which these units have employed women is discussed later in the report.

***"Training women is a waste of time"***

Community attitudes appear to vary from cluster to cluster. While in Ambur and Vaniyambadi traditionally women do not work except in support positions, in Erode it was seen that women often work in shops or other areas in positions of responsibility. Thus in this cluster it was also seen that employment of women in non-traditional jobs in the tanneries was accepted by men and women more easily. Similarly both in Bangalore and Madras women are freely employed in relatively large number when compared other semi-urban areas.

It was also seen that most women view work outside the home as a temporary measure, as a means of earning adequate money in anticipation of expenses for marriage, such as buying jewellery, savings for actual marriage expense, etc. In the face of such attitudes, employers feel that training of women for skilled jobs would be a waste, as the trained women would leave in a few years and it would then become necessary to train someone else. As a result, training is provided only to men as a rule.

***"Dependable, hard working, loyal, and easy to manage"***

Almost all the employers and middle management staff unanimously expressed that women workers are more dependable, obedient, sincere and hard working. During the course of discussion with employers in many cases, it was expressed directly or indirectly that although women cannot do heavy physical work, women workers are more easy to be managed and given the choice, they would prefer women workers. At the same time, there was a strong opinion that women workers cannot be coerced to do intense work.

**EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN TANNERIES - CASE STUDIES**

Very few employers have made a specific effort to employ women at different positions in the tanneries. There have been three cases studied, each with a different approach.

**CASE 1 - NAMASTE GROUP**

The Namaste group of companies is a large group in leather and tanning. The unusual feature about this group is that the majority of their employees are women. The group was started by Ms. Madhura Bhat, first in leather products and then extending into tanning. While there are many other women entrepreneurs in leather products, Ms. Bhat is practically the only one in tanning. The Namaste group has consistently tried to employ a majority of women in their units with considerable success. In Ranipet the women were employed on almost all machines, and these women were accepted without much problem. When the unit was closed for business reasons, many of these women were

employed by other tanneries as they were seen to have good skills and were seen as better workers.

The same experiment in some of the sections in a Bangalore tannery of the group however met with strong opposition from the men and had to be deferred 'partially'. Here again the difference appears to be due to attitudinal variations among the clusters.

### **CASE 2 - FARIDA PRIME TANNERY**

Farida Prime Tannery has started employing women as operators in non-traditional positions in tanning. To avoid any conflict, a separate set of machines have been installed, so that the women are physically in a separate hall. Initially women are being trained to operate machines which, in the opinion of the management, is simple and not physically taxing. Women are working on the toggling and auto-spray machines at present, and will be introduced to other machines later. With regard to staking, however, the management feels that the work is too strenuous and not safe for women. It was also seen that while women were working in the auto-spray machine, the actual setting of machines controlling the sequence and the simple filling of paint to the hopper were done by men. As of now there has been no resistance from the men, it remains to be seen what the reaction would be if women were to operate all types of machines.

### **CASE 3 - KKSK LEATHERS (P) LTD.**

The KKSK Tannery in Erode, managed by progressive young entrepreneurs who are pragmatic and sensitive employers, took a policy decision about four years back to focus on employing women, as they felt that women are better and more conscientious workers. KKSK has made a systematic effort to employ women at different levels at the plant, with women being introduced for record keeping, simple machine operation, for supervision and later for management. At present women are working as supervisors in the packing section, the laboratory, and in the finishing section. All these women are educated up to class 12 or graduate levels, and are perceived by the other workers as belonging to the middle class. Recently, a female management graduate has been taken as production in-charge. There has been general acceptance of the women in the management positions in the plant. What was also noticed was the full management commitment to employ women at all levels. It was noticed that the act of the management in referring to the women for decision making sent a strong message to the workers that the women are here to stay.

### **ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENT ENTRY MODELS**

From the three experiences the following three models could be inferred:

## WOMEN-MAJORITY MODEL

*As done by the Namaste group, women can be employed to form the majority of workers in the plant. This would lead to their not being dominated by men in sheer numbers, and also reduce the social discomfort felt in case of resistance by men. This approach needs the willingness of the women to do all types of work, and the absence of strong resistance from the surrounding community. This approach focuses mainly on the operator level only. This approach also implies a belief in the management that women are capable of carrying out all types of work in the tannery.*

In this model it is possible to train a number of women in operation of machines and these women can become role models for other women in the cluster. However, at present the approach has focused only on women at operator or supervisory levels, and the possibility of women being employed at higher levels is seen as remote.

The advantages of this model are that

- it is comparatively easier to introduce new concepts, and there is less fear of resistance or conflicts,
- as majority are women. Introduction of women at the lower levels also provides time for the management to sensitise the middle management so that later employment of women in such posts also would be accepted.

The main disadvantages of this model are that

- it is essentially possible only when a new unit or plant is being started. In a tannery where there are already a majority of men employed, this approach is not possible.
- It also does not provide for greater integration and mainstreaming of women into the tanning sector.

Thus this approach can at best be a starting point, and not an end in itself. Otherwise, it tends to stratify women at certain levels, leading to greater possibilities of "feminisation" of jobs.

## COMPARTMENTALISED WORK MODEL

*As in Farida Prime Tannery, women can be introduced to the machine operators in a separate section and gradually. Such an approach implies that the management is not certain if women can operate on all types of machines, and therefore plants to work on an experimental basis, proceeding further only when the earlier stage is successfully completed. There is much greater caution in this approach, and this can be tried where there is a possibility of greater resistance from men or the community.*

Such a model is useful in case of more traditional communities or employers who are not themselves certain that women are capable of handling all machines. There needs to be an understanding on the part of the management that women can be better workers than men for a variety of positions, that they are more disciplined and conscientious. (During the study it was found that most employers did subscribe to this point of view.) Thus as a first approach this model has the best chances of success for introducing the concept of women working on machines. Again, in terms of maximising usage of opportunities this is not complete.

The advantages of this approach are that

- it has the best chances of being accepted by most of the employers in the tanning industry, who are themselves traditional in approach, and would be cautious with regard to any new concept.
- The gradual introduction of women, with a waiting period to see if they can be successful, would be the least threatening to both management and the employees. It must be noted that the resistance would come not only from the men but also from some of the women, who might be afraid of handling machines and taking on the new or added responsibilities.

The disadvantages of this model are that

- It is essentially a segregationist approach, not allowing for integration and mainstreaming. This approach over a period of time would lead to the first model, with a plant having a majority of women, or fully operated by women. Going beyond, to enable women to work in regular tanneries would be difficult.
- This approach looks at women being employed only as operators, and not at other levels. Promotions, if at all, would be slow. Employers would need further sensitisation before newer avenues are opened up for women.
- There is also the possibility that such experiments by a few management would be considered as being useless by other tanneries and may not lead to replication.

A major problem in this approach is that it focuses on the simplest skill level of employment first, and that this would lead to what may be called the "feminisation" of these jobs over time. This in turn tends to result in these jobs being termed as fit only for women, and then in "casualisation" of the job. This is seen as a possibility wherever introduction of women is tried into new positions, and is described later in the report.



## INTEGRATED WORK MODEL

*As tried at the KSK Leathers unit, women can be inducted into the tanning unit at more than one level simultaneously. This requires the availability of women with the necessary qualifications and willingness to work in the tanneries. This involves not just waiting for women to apply for posts, but actively seeking out women with the right qualifications and offering them suitable posts and convincing them that it is worth their while to work in the tannery.*

Such an approach implies a strong commitment of the management to employ women, its belief that women can handle all kinds of work, and also the belief that the management will be able to resolve any conflicts that may arise. This is a very confident approach, and can come about when there is a social acceptance of women in managerial positions. This model also makes it clear that if there is a strong management commitment, improvement of the status of women can be brought about without major conflicts in this sector. In terms of maximising job opportunities for women, this model goes the furthest. Over a period of time, the other two models would need to be transformed into this model.

The advantages of this model are that it allows for full integration of women into the tanning industry, and allows them to hold responsible positions. These women can act as strong role models for other women in the area. It is also seen elsewhere that women managers are more ready to employ women in non-traditional areas, and the process of increasing employment of women is speeded up in this model. Further, it is this model that leads to true improvement in the status of women qualitatively in the tanning industry.

The disadvantages of this model are that it is difficult to introduce in most situations. Only exceptional managements can think of using this model, and as was pointed out, "it takes guts to employ women in this industry in new posts".

## PRE-REQUISITES OF THE THREE MODELS

1. There is need to be a genuine concern on the part of employers for employing women, over and above the understanding that women are better workers.
2. There is need to be a general improvement in the cleanliness of the tanneries, making it less unattractive for women to work. This needs investment in modernisation and up-gradation, and follows to some extent from the management commitment. In addition, there must be adequate amenities for women, and arrangements for transport where necessary.

3. The management needs to formalise its policy of employing women, so that it is clear as to what plans it will adopt in the process of increasing employment of women. It needs to be understood that this process is gradual, and not something that will be achieved in a short time.
4. It is also seen from the above that all three models are relevant in different situations, and in different clusters different models may have to be used.

### **EMPLOYMENT POTENTIAL OF WOMEN**

From the study and the experiences with the three models it is clear that in practice women can and have been carrying out a variety of jobs in the tanning industry, including those which are traditionally perceived as not possible by women due to the heavy nature of work. For supervisory posts physical constraints are not seen to exist as they do for operator level jobs.

It is also a fact that for most women, opportunities for training are poor. There are hardly any training institutions for training operators, and the same can be said of on-the-job training. While there are adequate general management training institutes for supervisory and higher level posts, women who do attend such courses do not find work in tanning industry attractive.

### **DESIRABLE POSITIONS**

The general attitude seen was that the raw to semi-finished process is more hazardous and that women find it more difficult to work in this area. While this is true, the hazards remain the same for both men and women. It is the opinion of the consultant that this should not be the basis for deciding that women should work in the semi-finished to finished process only. On the other hand, the realisation that the work in the raw to semi-finished stage is hazardous should provide a greater thrust to up-gradation and improvement in the process to make it less hazardous. Once this is set in motion, and the process becomes safer and easier, there should be no reason why women cannot work in this area as well.

Again, it must be noted that these present objections pertain only to operator level tasks, and do not apply for other tasks such as record keeping, measurement, quality control and supervision. In these areas the constraint is mainly attitudinal, compounded by the fact that educated women are not willing to work in the primitive surroundings found in these units.

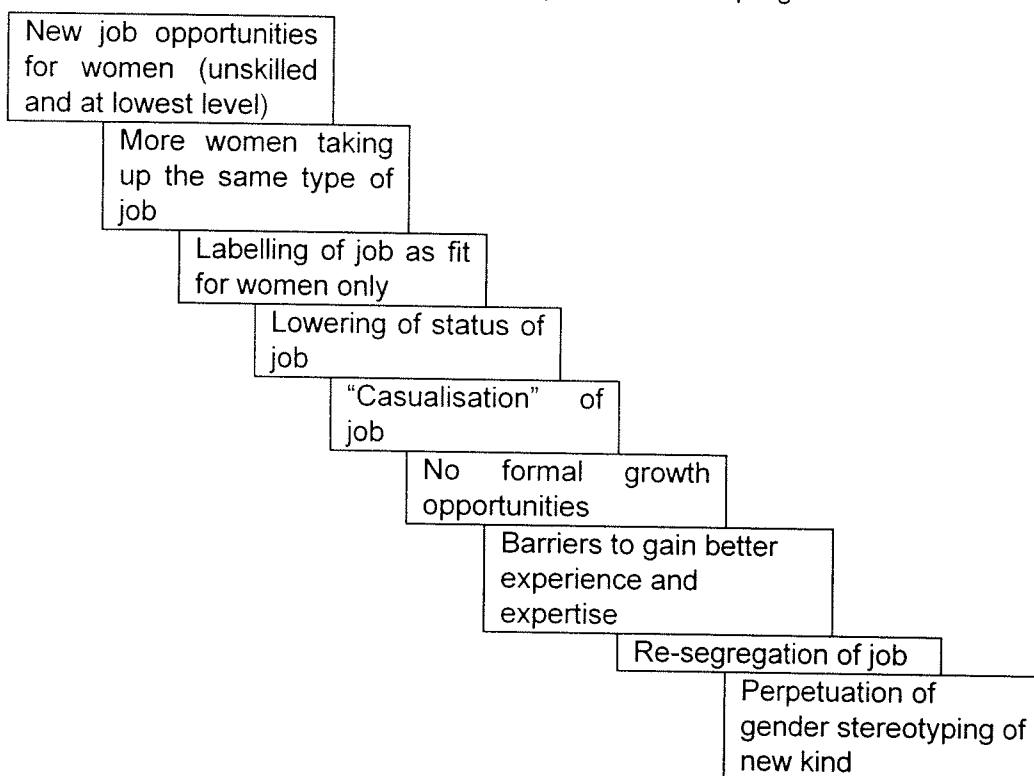
In the semi-finished to finished positions, the environment is much cleaner, and the problems of safety are much less. Here again, most employers appear to think only of operator level posts and not higher when looking at employment of women. It

is also clear that women can work in all the positions in this process.

Thus the choice of where, or in which preferred areas women should work, is ideally left to women themselves, with support being available for women to enter at all positions and levels in the tanning industry.

### "FEMINISATION" OF JOBS

In all these cases, if entry of women into certain positions is seen as possible and attempts are made at bringing women into certain specific positions, there is the danger that these jobs get "feminised", resulting in ultimate gender stereotyping all over, defeating the object of the sub-programme.



## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the present scenario, it will become necessary to provide considerable input to enhance the objective of improving the status of women in the tanning industry. In brief, the process could be specified in the following approach:

### APPROACH

#### IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE

Improvement of status of women in the tanning industry.

## PROJECTED RESULTS/OUTPUTS AND ACTIVITIES

**Output 1:** A co-ordination and monitoring mechanism is established.

- 1.1. Workshop for stakeholders to create awareness on problems and prospects, as well as the challenges.
- 1.2. Workshop for NGOs on improving status of women in tanning, to create awareness among NGOs and to identify possible lead NGOs for future co-operation - UNIDO
- 1.3. Preparing an action plan and getting financial support from relevant agencies, to develop a comprehensive project leading to achievement of recommendations - Lead NGO, with support from UNIDO, ILIFO

**Output 2:** Employers are sensitised towards employment of women

- 2.1. Sensitising of employers through a series of workshops in each cluster, to create and develop an atmosphere receptive to employment of more women - Lead NGO with resource organisation support from UNIFEM.

**Output 3:** Women have acquired capacity to work in different levels and areas in the tanning industry

- 3.1. Sensitising of faculty in Training Institutes on empowering of women students. - Lead NGO with ILIFO, CLRI.
- 3.2. Providing production oriented training services, to develop greater skills among women in tanning operations. - Lead NGO with support from CLRI and ILIFO
- 3.3. Development of best practitioners, to develop and provide role models with regard to employment of women - Lead NGO, ILIFO, local tanneries (This will involve continuing discussions with the tanneries and be expected to be done over an extended period of time)

**Output 4:** An enabling environment is available for employment of women

- 4.1. Provision of common facilities, to provide for common facilities for women such as crèches, women's hostel, health clinics, etc. in each cluster - Lead NGO with identified and interested local NGO.
- 4.2. Improvement of working conditions, to provide for better working conditions and facilitate working with less physical effort, provide cleaner environment - Lead NGO, ILIFO, local tanneries, and local NGO

4.3. Sensitisation of community to develop awareness of improved conditions in tanning sector in community - Lead NGO with local NGO, ILIFO

4.4. Social mobilisation to develop collective strength among contract women workers, and provide them with alternate skills and means for finance to pursue such alternate vocations - Lead NGO and local NGO, with possible support from NABARD, RMK, etc.

**Output 5:** There is an increase in the number of women entrepreneurs in the tanning industry

5.1. Study on entrepreneurial opportunities to identify feasible opportunities for entrepreneurship in the sector for women - Lead NGO, with resource /consulting agency

5.2. Entrepreneurship Training to develop women entrepreneurs to set up small enterprises in tanning sector - Entrepreneurship Development agencies CLRI and SIDBI

## PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

### SENSITISATION OF EMPLOYERS

The most crucial factor in employment of women and improvement of their status is the attitude of the employers. While the attitude of the employees and the community do play a part, it is the employer's attitude that influences to the maximum extent, the improvement of the status of women. It is therefore felt that sensitising of tanners to the possibility and desirability of employing women, is of great importance.

During the study it was seen that employers, with a few exceptions, were not strongly against employment of women. Most of the attitudes stemmed from traditional beliefs, and from not having thought earlier specifically about employing women per se. In most cases employers agreed that women are better workers, and it would be of advantage to them if they could employ more women. Thus what really hinders more employment is the imagined perception that women are not capable of working in all areas. In this context it is interesting to note that the process of the study itself, with its round table meetings, has initiated thought among a few tanners at least in this direction. A number of tanners were quite open to employing women when specifically asked. Thus it is felt that greater and more frequent interactions on this issue would lead to more efforts at employing women.

It is also interesting to note that the tanners in different clusters appeared to be aware of what was being done by Namaste group, Farida Prime Tannery and the KSK unit with regard to employment of women. It appeared that other tanners would be

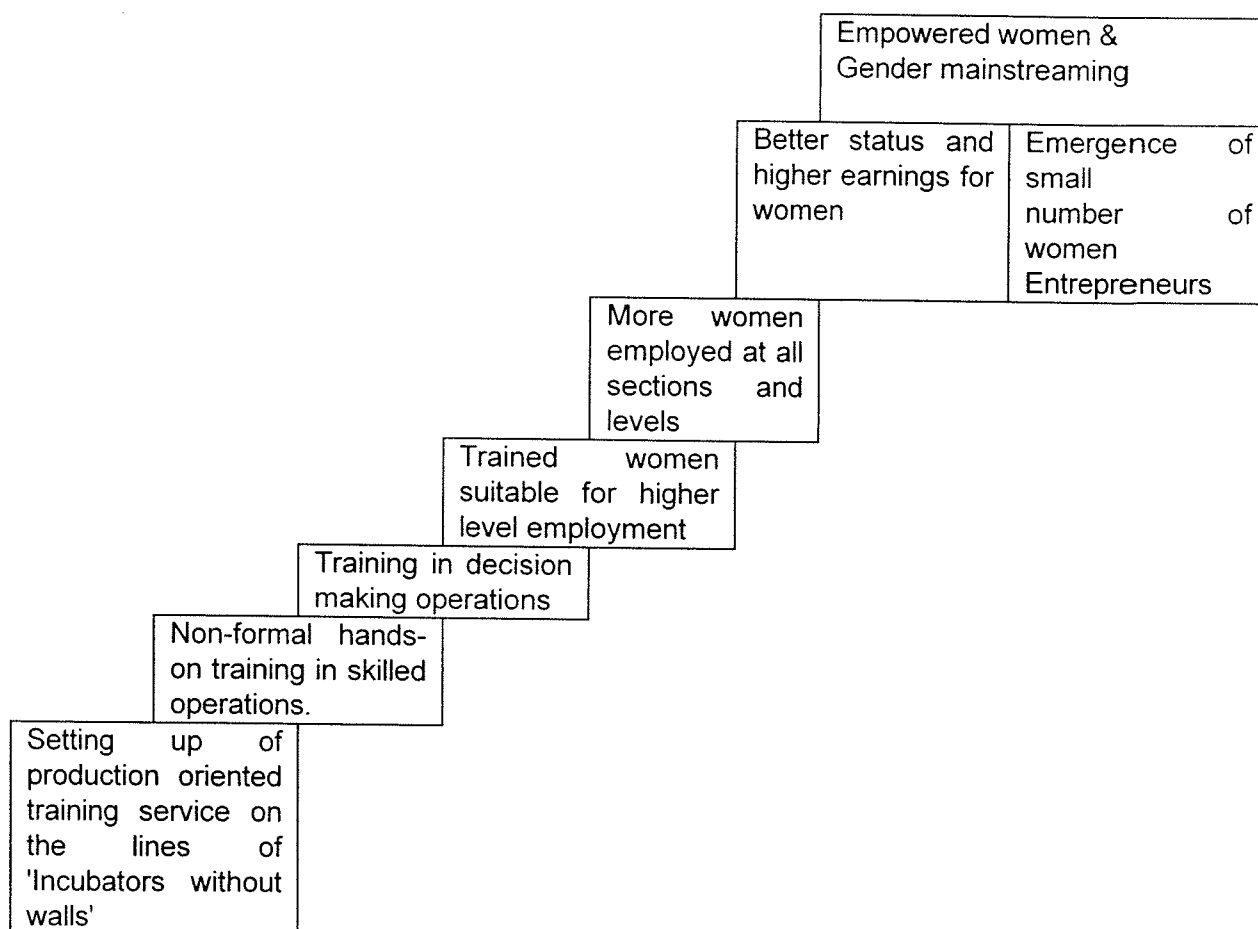
interested to follow these models if these were found to be successful conclusively. Most tanners seemed to prefer to try out employment little by little as in the case of Farida Prime Tannery.

## TRAINING FOR WOMEN

It is felt that women need to be trained at different levels, though formal training for machine handling as such is not felt needed. It is however strongly suggested that a special scheme of hands-on, practical training in a production setting be provided to women. This would enable them to learn a variety of skills needed, including machine handling, quality concepts and control, inspection, storage, thus giving a basic but overall understanding of the tanning process.

Understanding the importance and the reason for most of the processes would be the re-requisite for possible promotion or employment at higher levels, for which an added module of people-management could be provided, for those women who show managerial capability.

**Table 5 - Overall process of empowerment**



## DEVELOPMENT OF BEST PRACTITIONERS

It would not be practical to expect that all tanneries in any cluster would show similar enthusiasm for employing women. It is better to identify those units where the employers are more receptive to employment of women, and provide them support to create such employment. These chosen units could be developed as best practitioners in the area, so that they can act as role models for others. It is seen that almost all the employers believe that women can be better workers in terms of sincerity, loyalty and discipline. Thus it would be logical to assume that given similar levels of skills, women would also contribute to better productivity and quality, though there are no comparable data available at present.

## FACILITATING MEASURES

It must also be noted that it has been difficult for many tanneries to provide the additional facilities needed for increasing employment of women. In this regard it is felt that innovative measures need to be taken. In view of the fact that the tanneries are clustered fairly close together, it is recommended that setting up of common facilities for the cluster should be considered. Such auxiliary could be managed and administered by independent organisations, who would charge the tanneries an agreed fee for provision of necessary services. It is suggested that there might be suitable NGOs in the area who would be willing to take on this work, especially those involved in mother and child health, literacy, and environment.

Common auxiliary facilities could additionally include provision of a working women's hostel, with different grades of facilities, which could provide accommodation not only for tannery workers but also for women consultants from pollution control companies; provision of common transport facilities to enable women to work in the evening hours where they agree; and common health and diagnostic facilities, for regular medical-check-ups. Many of these facilities can be mobile units like mobile crèche, mobile clinic etc. All the above facilities can be run and managed by NGOs or other institutions. These organisations would not be able to arrange for funds for investment, hence the setting of the necessary infrastructure would need to be done with financial support from the large, medium and small tanneries as well as possibly the UNIDO programme to the extent feasible.

## MODERNISATION AND UP-GRADATION OF WORK PRACTICES

One of the major problems in the tanneries is the material handling, especially in the raw section. This single practice causes the maximum hardship, leading to carrying of heavy loads, dripping of chemicals and other fluids on the shop floor, wetting of the hands and legs of the employees, etc. Improved material handling devices are thus seen as essential in all

tanneries. While the larger tanneries would be able to afford such investment, for the smaller ones this might be difficult. It might be worthwhile considering a scheme of assistance to small tanneries to provide for such equipment on concessional terms with easier repayment and soft loans.

While this is a specific case, it is seen that the practices followed in traditional tanneries are not user-friendly, and redesign of operations from the point of view of the operator and the workers would help greatly in improving the general working conditions. A work study in efficiency improvement and woman friendly practices is called for, leading to simple modifications in process settings and improved material handling facilities will facilitate employment of women. Some examples of simple improvements in this direction could be

provision of cutting tables for the trimming operation so that the women do not have to bend and work, straining their backs;

providing force multipliers or guards on machines to reduce the physical force required to operate the machine, and to increase safety.

Other modifications would involve much greater investment and would need support from an industry modernisation fund. Such funds have been set up in the past for other industries, notably the textile industry, and soft loans given on easy repayment terms.

In order to familiarise tanners with such minor or other improvements, exposure tours or exchange visits among the small tanners and those who have introduced such modifications, within the cluster or between clusters, could be considered. Observation of the modifications visually would provide greater interest than any explanations in this regard.

## AWARENESS RAISING IN COMMUNITY

It is also a fact that the perception that tanneries are difficult to work in is not limited to the employers alone. Most workers and the community share this view. While some of the changes suggested above would bring about improvements in the actual environment, it is also necessary at the same time to raise awareness of the community of the improvements, so that their perception also changes. This includes awareness about the present situation and how improvements can be made, so that there is an added social pressure also for the improvements to be undertaken. Again, such social awareness raising would be ideally done by the tanners' association in conjunction with suitable existing NGO in the area. It is important that the NGO chosen already has established a degree of credibility with the community, so that the message is received positively by the community.



## SOCIAL MOBILISATION OF WOMEN

The case of women working on piece rate is special and needs to be considered independently. Such women have little opportunity for further training, as they are mostly illiterate and come from backward communities. They are also the most exploited in terms of wages and net earnings, and vulnerable in terms of continuity of work as well. It is suggested that in the case of these women, social mobilisation needs to be taken up independently of the tanning units. Suitable organisations would need to be encouraged to work with these women to form self-help groups, start savings and credit activities, and train them in additional vocations so that their overall annual incomes might increase. Such organising of groups would also lead to increase in their bargaining power vis-à-vis the contractors or the employers, and then possibly to an increase in their wages. Formally while this is not connected with the tanning industry, definitely this is linked to the improvement in the status of the women engaged in the tanning industry, and should be considered as an essential activity.

In the long run, such mobilisation could also in future lead to some of the groups developing the capacity to take tanning units on lease and carry out some of the tanning work on job work basis, thus becoming their own employers and earning better wages.

## ENCOURAGEMENT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP BY WOMEN

As mentioned earlier, far more women tend to be employed if the entrepreneur is also a woman. In addition, development of women as entrepreneurs in the tanning sector is in itself a step in improving the status of women in this sector. In recent years it has been possible to set up small tanneries in the finishing sub-sector, for speciality leathers, e.g., dye-less natural leather, leather with natural dyes etc., which can provide opportunities for small scale industries. Encouragement of women to avail of such and other entrepreneurial opportunities will help in bringing about a larger increase in the employment of women in the tanning industry as a whole.

Again modernisation, cleaner work environment, availability of leasing and subcontracting facilities will facilitate women entering the sector as entrepreneurs.

It is said 70% of the business ideas generate from previous employment. This opportunity was unavailable to women so far. If more women are employed at higher levels, the experience and expertise gained will provide impetus to generate entrepreneurs within short span of time.

However, spotting possible and feasible opportunities in this area needs further study, and it is suggested that such a study be

carried out, either with UNIDO funding or with the financial support of other development agencies.

Implementation of the above mentioned recommendations implies the presence of an institution which can initiate and execute the necessary actions as a comprehensive project. It is felt that this should be a gender-focused organisation, preferably a women-centred NGO. As the issue is complex, such an NGO will need the support of employers, and technical support agencies. In addition, the NGO will need to seek out support from various agencies to provide financial support. In India support might be available from UNDP, which has a component on leather industry in its country programme, UNIFEM, ILO as well as national agencies such as the Ministry of Labour, Central Social Welfare Board, NABARD etc.

The NGO will need to work in close co-operation with an organisation of employers to ensure acceptance of the different policies and actions that it would undertake. It is suggested that ILIFO could be considered in this regard as ILIFO is already working in close collaboration with UNIDO in the present programme.

**ANNEX I****CLUSTER-WISE SURVEY RESULTS****RANIPET**

- Women are not found in the tanneries on a regular basis
- There are specially skilled women labourers who are contracted for cutting of the head and tail of the buff calf. A special knife is used for the same. These groups of women are hired only when the load comes which is imported from Rajasthan, Kerala etc. These women earn around Rs.40-50 per day. They are paid at the piece rate.
- The presence of a shoe factory has made a difference and women prefer to work in factories now. The tanners feel that the shoe factory jobs suit women and that only women can do such elaborate jobs.
- Tanners are open to women employment but not in the wet areas. It was very clearly expressed that the physical requirements, the dress etc., are not suitable for women to work in the wet areas.
- Thrive leather, which was presently closed at the time of the survey, had women at all levels, however this has not influenced other tanners.
- One other tanner who had a very positive attitude towards women employment in tanneries was a Hindu tanner. This is mentioned in particular to notice the cultural factors.
- If women were employed tanners felt there are additional burdens such as the provision of separate bathroom, toilet, etc.
- If there is continuous work women cannot be employed in the night shifts.

Tannery*	Total No. Drums	Total No. of Employees	Male	Female	% of Women
1.	34	700	698	2	0.3
2.	2	30	26	4	13.3
3.	8	85	63	22	38.6
4.	16	200	175	25	12.5
5.	3	12	12	-	-
6.	21	200	15	185	92
7.	4	38	30	8	21

\* anonymous survey

Apart from the female employees within the tannery there are several women working in cutting the head and tail of the buff calf skin. They work in groups, on the whole, there might be about 250 women working in this area in Ranipet.

**AMBUR**

- Export oriented units.
- Labour is mostly from the local areas and neighbourhood. Sometimes people from the neighbouring villages also migrate.
- Very few women are employed within the tannery. Women are 'seen' in tanneries, which are totally mechanised, as helpers, otherwise as basic labourers.
- Mainly Muslim owned tanneries. It is a cultural taboo for men and women to work together.
- Women are employed for wool-plucking, wool sorting, wool washing, loading and unloading. This is purely on a contract basis. Women earn Rupees 30 (i.e. US\$ 0.80) per day on an average with no other incentives.
- Most of the workers are from scheduled castes, particularly women and they are definitely the poorest of the poor.
- The tanners generally feel that, if the tanneries are mechanised, women can work as helpers but definitely not on heavy machines and skilled jobs.
- Middle-management jobs are possible only if there is enough women employees. Otherwise, it seems difficult for a woman to manage male labour.
- Separate women units are preferred by tanners.
- Shoe factory / product job is meant for women.

Tannery	Total No. Drums	Total No. of Employees	Male	Female	% of Women
1.	18	300	275	25	9
2.	dry units	85	85	-	-
3.	6	100	90	10	11
4.	22	400	390	10	2.5
5.	4	9	9	-	-
6.	11	14	10	4	40
7.	n.a.	400	390	10	2.5
8.	5	35	26	9	35
9.	5	65	50	15	30
10.	10	50	50	-	-
11.	4	27	27	-	-
12.	11	50	46	4	8.7
13.	4	20	20	-	-
14.	6	30	30	-	-

Women here are hired on contract for wool plucking, loading and unloading.

**VANIYAMBADI**

- Mostly minority community tanners
- Tanners very strongly feel that women cannot do hard work and especially in the soak pit.
- Alternative employment for women in Vaniyambadi is beedi (=cigarette) and matchstick which are home based activities.
- Women are involved in wool plucking, loading and unloading. They are hired by the wool purchasers. Women earn approx. Rs. 40/- a day. They are not covered by any labour act.
- Like in Ambur Muslim women are not found working in tanneries or in contract labour. Contract labour is totally for SC Women and also the poorest of the poor.
- The Vaniyambadi tanners are a little more conservative towards women's employment in tanneries compared to the tanners of Ambur. This is due to the shoe factories in Ambur. However, women in raw to semi-finished sections are totally opposed to work in tanneries.
- There is a feeling that women are cheap labour and, therefore, could be employed

Tannery	Total No. Drums	Total No. of Employees	Male	Female	% of Women
1.	12	80	52	38	73
2.	6	22	18	4	22
3.	4	32	32	-	-
4.	6	16	11	5	45
5.	4	30	30	-	-
6.	6	20	20	-	-
7.	4	20	20	-	-
8.	36	128	117	11	9.4

Women hired for wool plucking, washing, sorting out, loading & unloading are all on contract and hired by the wool purchaser. In the tanneries surveyed 10 women were identified. Total number of women might be 200.

**MADRAS (PALLAVARAM)**

- There is a contrast picture of women employment in Madras tanneries. In mechanised tanneries women employees are quite significant in number, whereas in non-mechanised there are no women at all except for basic tasks. However, the common feature is that women work only as helpers. Nowhere do they have decision making powers.
- There is a lot of demand for women employment in middle-management areas according to a training Institution head.
- The tanners had no reservations to women's employment but they felt that there was definitely a social barrier.
- Practical difficulties were given e.g. there were continuous orders as women could not be employed in continuous shifts.

**KANNIVAKKAM**

One large tannery which was established in 1978. With production capacity of about one million sq.ft a day. there were about 185 men and 42 women working. The unique feature of this tannery was that the women were all between the age 16 - 25 years. All of them worked as helpers. Most of them have passed matriculation (school-leaving) examination. The employees expressed that the girls left the job the moment they were married but it seemed to be an unwritten policy that married women were not allowed to continue work.

<b>Women's Employment</b>	<b>Pattern</b>
1992	35
1993	48
1994	57
1995	67
1996	85

**Wage Pattern**

<b>Minimum wages</b>	<b>Indian Rupees per day</b>
Starting	28.50
2 Years	30.00
3 Years	32.00
4 Years	33.50
5 Years	34.00

## ANNEX II - A

### PROFILE OF WOMEN IN THE TANNING INDUSTRY

- Not a regularised job, mostly daily-wage
- Average wage : Rs. 28 per day
- Most preferred age : 16 - 25 years
- Marital status : Unmarried
- Alternate to young women, older women of over 30 years with child bearing and rearing behind them, particularly those who have undergone sterilisation measures.
- Mostly from the backward communities
- Women from minority communities not present
- Poorest of the poor
- Education: No literacy or very low literacy
- Some single women or women with problematic family life
- Those with no other alternative employment opportunities.
- Employed as unskilled labour, as helpers or for material carrying
- In exceptional cases women are employed as operators and other higher level jobs

Employment of women in tanneries most of the time in the clusters covered under the study is not regularised.

The age group preferred by some tanners is between 16-25 years and unmarried status. On the other hand there are tanners who preferred women who are above 35 years where they would have completed their child bearing and rearing process.

Women doing the menial labour working in the wet areas even wool plucking and head and tail cutting etc. are all from SC community and mostly single or problematic family life. One could say their job was the only choice. These women came from the poorest of the poor strata of the society .

In contrast to the above situation women working in shoe factories come from all communities and from middle class families also. Muslim women are not employed in the tanneries where as they are employed in the shoe factories. It was given to understand that the shoe factory in Ambur was started mainly to give employment to poor Muslim women

**ANNEX II - B****PROFILE OF WOMEN IN THE LEATHER PRODUCTS INDUSTRY**

- Usually, regularised jobs
- Average wage: Rs. 45 - 60 per day
- Preferred age : 18-25 years
- Marital status : Unmarried
- Education : literate generally above 7th standard
- Upper end of poor and lower end of middle income level
- All communities, not restricted to depressed community .
- Minority community women are also employed in good numbers
- Generally 50-80 female workers employed per unit
- Employment at all levels, particularly, as machine operators



**ANNEX III****PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM THE SURVEY****Methodology:**

Employment of women is an issue governed very much by attitudes and opinions, on the part of employers, employees themselves, and the surrounding community. In such a context, a direct structured questionnaire approach may not be satisfactory. In order to develop a more appropriate method, some of the problems likely to be faced were analysed.

**Activities:**

- Identify consultant or group of consultants with gender sensitivity, and awareness of technology and work study concepts in the tanning sector.

**Note:**

*As the study calls for a variety of knowledge and skills, it may be necessary to identify a group of consultants rather than one, if a single consultant with the relevant skills is not available. What will be needed is a person with a co-operative approach rather than an activist approach.*

Prepare questionnaire for collection of facts and figures, to be filled up by interviewer, not respondents.

Prepare framework for unstructured discussions in various meetings, involving tanners, supervisors, workers as well as academics and research institutions.

Organise round Table Meetings with tanners, and significant stakeholders in the selected geographical areas (e.g. tannery cluster).

**Note:**

This meeting will help in a number of ways:

- ⇒ *It would be in a friendly, non-threatening atmosphere.*
- ⇒ *Interaction between respondents in the meeting would lead to free flow of thought, and to new ideas being developed.*
- ⇒ *It creates an entry point for subsequent one-to-one interviews and sets a positive frame.*
- ⇒ *It allows for a pro-active suggestions from tanners, rather than just reactions and responses.*

Hold one to one interviews with tanners following the Round Table meeting.

Hold meetings with workers, and their leaders in the tannery.

Organise meetings and interviews with members of academic institutions

Organise meetings and interviews with Industry associations.

Organise meetings and interviews with auxiliary institutions (e.g. chemical suppliers, pollution control authorities and consultants).

Analyse data to bring out salient features of the present status, with regard to factual position as well as feelings, attitudes and opinions and possible models for future improvement.

Develop action plan with special regard to sensitisation activities, ensuring of a non-threatening environment and development of specific skills.

The major problems likely to be encountered were:

1. Employers may not understand the relevance of the study fully.
2. Employers may feel threatened by the study.
3. Data on employment of women are not available.
4. Attitudes and opinions may not be expressed openly in direct interviews
5. Structured questionnaires may not bring out nuances of opinion clearly.
6. Interviewer may be activist/aggressive in approach.
7. Interviewer may not be alert to concepts relating to technology/ work study.

**ANNEX IV****ACTIVITY PLAN**

Date	Place	Activity
24 <sup>th</sup> August 1996	Madras	Meeting at UNIDO office - preparation, briefing
	Madras	Meeting with Arafat Leathers
	Madras	Meeting with GGN Leathers
25 <sup>th</sup> August 1996	Madras	Meeting with Ms. Millie Nihila, MIDS
26 <sup>th</sup> August 1996	Madras	Visit to CLRI, desk work
27 <sup>th</sup> August 1996	Madras	Visit to CLRI, desk work
28 <sup>th</sup> August 1996	Madras	Round Table Meeting at UNIDO office
29 <sup>th</sup> August 1996	Madras	Meeting with Dy. Director, ETI
	Madras	Meeting at UNIDO office
	Kannivakkam	Visit to Presidency Kid Leathers
30 <sup>th</sup> August - 3 <sup>rd</sup> September 1996	Home-based Bangalore	Desk review of data collected as well as a Round Table meeting and collection of data regarding legal framework of women's employment in the sector.
4 <sup>th</sup> September 1996	Ambur	Visit to Farida Prime Tannery
	Ambur	Visit to Rizwana Banu Tannery
	Ambur	Visit to CETP
	Ambur	Round Table Meeting
	Ambur	Visit to Middle East Tanning Co.
5 <sup>th</sup> September 1996	Ambur	Visit to Shafeeq Shamil & Co.
	Ambur	Visit to Fahim Tanning Co.
	Ambur	Visit to Bonnaventure Shoe Factory
	Ambur	Visit to Raafi Leather Co.
	Ambur	Visit to M. Mohamed Habibullah & Co.
6 <sup>th</sup> September 1996	Ambur	Visit to T. Abdul Wahid & Co.
	Pernambut	Visit to Association
	Pernambut	Visit to BA Balasubramaniam & Co.
	Pernambut	Visit to Tejoomals Industries Ltd.
	Pernambut	Visit to Crescent Tanning Co.
7 <sup>th</sup> September 1996	Pernambut	Interaction with women working for loading and unloading
	Ambur	Visit to Moh Leathers Pvt. Ltd.
	Ambur	Visit to Sura Leathers Pvt. Ltd.
	Ambur	Visit to Supreme Overseas
8 <sup>th</sup> September 1996	Ambur	Visit to Zubaida Tanning Industries
	Vaniyambadi	Meeting at Association office
	Vaniyambadi	Visit to H. Mohammed Osman & Co
	Vaniyambadi	Visit to Jamal Leathers
9 <sup>th</sup> September 1996	Vaniyambadi	Visit to Safa Export Leathers
	Vaniyambadi	Visit to Hizaz Leathers
	Vaniyambadi	Visit to B. Nadeem & Co.
	Vaniyambadi	Visit to Nazeer Ahmed & Co.
	Vaniyambadi	Visit to Nuseba & Co.
	Vaniyambadi	Visit to A. Abdul Shookur & Co.
10 <sup>th</sup> - 11 <sup>th</sup> September 1996	Vaniyambadi	Interaction with labour association members and tanners
	Home-based Bangalore	Internal review of data collected in above clusters

12 <sup>th</sup> September 1996	Ranipet Ranipet Ranipet Ranipet Ranipet	Meeting at association office with Secretary Visit to M.H. Khizar Hussain & Sons Visit to Guru & Co. Visit to B.S. Leather & Co. Visit to Malack Leathers
13 <sup>th</sup> September 1996	Ranipet Ranipet Ranipet Ranipet Ranipet	Visit to Enyes Prime Tannery Visit to Namaste Exports Ltd. Visit to Mahadev Industries Visit to J.S. Leathers Round Table Meeting
16 <sup>th</sup> - 17 <sup>th</sup> September 1996	Madras	Mid-term review with RePO, Madras
18 <sup>th</sup> - 23 <sup>rd</sup> September 1996	Home-based Bangalore	Preliminary work on draft report
24 <sup>th</sup> September 1996	Erode Erode Erode Erode Erode Erode	Visit to KSK Leathers Visit to Rathinam & Rathinam Visit to CETP Meeting with Mr. G. Muhammed Thaj Meeting with Tannery Association President Meeting with Mr. K.K.M. Ahmed Abdul Kadeer
25 <sup>th</sup> September 1996	Bangalore Bangalore Bangalore Bangalore Bangalore	Visit to BLLC Visit to Karnataka Institute of Leather Technology Visit to Cosmos Leathers Visit to Karnataka Pollution Control Board Visit to Bangalore Chrome Tannery
27 <sup>th</sup> September 1996	Bangalore Bangalore	Visit to CETP Bangalore Organising of Round Table Meeting
28 <sup>th</sup> September - 15 <sup>th</sup> November 1996	Home -based Bangalore	Review of findings and preparation of draft report in consultation with concerned co-ordinator in RePO, Madras
25 <sup>th</sup> October 1996		Submission of interim report for comments by co-ordinator in RePO Madras
16 <sup>th</sup> November 1996		Submission of draft final report to RePO Madras
20 <sup>th</sup> November 1996 - 21 <sup>st</sup> December, 1996		Completion and submission of final report