



Workshop on the New Notification on Utilisation of Fly Ash Conducted in Bihar

The clay brick industry is currently based on a decentralised production activity using energy-intensive, resource-depleting, and highly polluting technologies and production methods. In Bihar, the brick sector is the third largest CO₂ emitter after the agriculture and energy sector. The industry provides seasonal employment to many labourers, but the production process involves fertile soil utilisation, which is in direct conflict with the agricultural industry. Curbing this challenge is crucial as Bihar is an agrarian economy. For Bihar to ensure that the state's economic growth is not at the cost of environmental and public health, it is imperative to promote cleaner brick technologies and waste management solutions. In the given situation, encouraging the production and usage of fly ash bricks in the state is an opportunity to transition towards resource-efficient bricks while providing decent jobs to the local community.

In this context, a one-day workshop titled 'Greening the Construction Sector in Bihar – Workshop on Notification on Utilisation of Fly Ash' was organised by the Development Alternatives Group in association with the Bihar State Pollution Control Board on 17 May, 2022. The chief guest for the event was Shri Neeraj Kumar Singh, Hon'ble Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bihar. The workshop involved 200+ participants including officials from the National Thermal Power Cooperation (NTPC) headquarters in New Delhi, Eastern Region Headquarter, Patna, NTPC, Bihar Fly Ash Brick Association, Local Fly Ash Brick Manufacturers, other concerned Bihar government departments, media agencies, and members of Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB). They all participated to discuss the issues regarding the new fly ash notification issued by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, ways to make it more readily available, and its promotion in the state.

The Chairman of BSPCB, Dr Ashok Kumar Ghosh, stressed how fly ash, a yesterday's waste, is a primary commodity for society today and is effectively used in the construction sector.

Dr Soumen Maity, Vice President, Development Alternatives, gave a detailed presentation on the status of fly ash brick enterprises and trends in Bihar. He also spoke about the issues associated with the traditional brick kiln industry and how its overconsumption of topsoil burdens the other resources alongside discharge of immense air pollutants in the environment. Another important suggestion he made was to not allocate any new licenses to the brick kiln owners.

Arvind Kumar Chaudhary, IAS, Principal Secretary, DoEF&CC, Bihar, emphasised on the importance of the topsoil in sustaining any form of life and stressed on the need to transition to cleaner modes of technology to help save the environment.

Following this, the Hon'ble Minister, Neeraj Kumar Singh spoke on the topsoil depletion and how dissatisfied the entrepreneurs were with the thermal power plants due to the irregularity of the availability of fly ash. He also sympathised with the entrepreneurs and promised government's full cooperation to help derive an effective strategy to their problems. Another strong declaration made by the minister was to ban any new red brick enterprises from coming up, which was received very well by the audience members.

In succession, another detailed presentation was prepared by Bharat Bhusan Chugh, General Manager, NTPC Headquarters, New Delhi. This gave a fair share of information from NTPC's end. However, post this, M. V. R. Reddy, Executive Director, NTPC Headquarters, New Delhi, pledged to effectively implement the government's mandate to promote fly ash to the best of his abilities and come up with possible solutions to problems highlighted by the fly ash entrepreneurs.

Dr Ashok Kumar Ghosh, Chairman, BSPCB, presented the closing notes for the workshop. He stated that Bihar's economy cannot be compared to other states as it is an agrarian economy where fertile land is crucial. He guaranteed that another meeting would be set up in the coming days to discuss what could be done regarding the current state of affairs and promised that all necessary steps would be taken up for the promotion of fly ash in Bihar. He remarked that with all the roadblocks of today, the NTPC and government favour the entrepreneurs and would see how policies at the state level can be made more industry-friendly.



'Promoting Green and Inclusive Entrepreneurship in the Construction sector': A dialogue between financiers and entrepreneurs.

Development Alternatives has been pursuing the mandate of promoting green and inclusive entrepreneurship in the construction sector for the past 10–12 years in Bihar. In a recent engagement, the organisation held a stakeholders interaction-cum-workshop between financiers and current and to-be fly ash brick manufacturers on 23 May, 2022 at Hotel Chanakya, Patna, Bihar.

During the field visit, the Development Alternatives team conducted a series of interviews with various entrepreneurs who are currently engaged in the fly ash brick manufacturing process and also those who aim to transition from red bricks to fly ash bricks. The credit gap to start a fly ash brick unit or to expand/diversify an existing one was identified as a major deterrent to the growth of this sector.

Towards the end, the workshop tried to initiate a dialogue for these entrepreneurs with financing institutions such as Karnataka Bank, Bandhan Bank, Indian Bank, Ujjivan Small Finance Bank, IndusInd Bank, etc. and highlighted the available financing options. It was also discussed with the attendees the common errors in the application process for business loans and guided them on ways to increase their bankability.

The stakeholders workshop succeeded in bringing together three different perspectives on a common platform – that of a red brick making entrepreneur, various financiers, and fly ash brick entrepreneurs. The three stakeholders also shared their respective insights on the increase in market demand for the fly ash brick making enterprises (MSMEs).