

# **Korean Construction Workers Job Centre Seoul, South Korea**

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## 1. Introduction

As part of the ILO's activities to build a database of innovative strategies to enhance social protection among the excluded (SES2), I distributed a questionnaire to 28 Korean NGOs working on socio-economic issues relating to women, the disabled, migrant workers, the unemployed and formal sector workers. The taskforce and I examined the 23 completed questionnaires we received in light of the organizations' innovative and sustainable contributions to the seven dimensions of labour security, as well as other criteria, with particular attention to programmes that targeted women.

One criterion that was particularly decisive was whether the NGO or union used what the ILO Decent Work Paper terms "integrated strategies to build — and use — human capabilities".<sup>1</sup> As pointed out in the paper, many programmes that attempt to generate income security through training programmes have failed because training in itself, that is, operating on the supply side alone, was inadequate to generating actual employment. This is relevant to the Korean experience with globalization as, following the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, Korea has had a severe lack of jobs for trained workers to enter. Many of the NGO programmes surveyed did in fact provide training; however, did not link the workers with jobs thereby resulting in only temporary income security, as provided by government welfare stipends to those undergoing job training, during the time of training alone.

The one programme that stood out in following up on training with employment placement and actual job creation on a larger scale was the Korean Construction Workers Job Centre (KCWJC). This centre targets flexible and mobile construction day labourers victimized by "informal labour practices", who have been implicitly excluded from unemployment insurance, minimum wage protection as well as other basic social protection. The KCWJC's strength was its remarkable ability to evolve and adapt its expertise in this sector toward gradually extending some level of social protection and income security from the grassroots level upwards to this vulnerable group of the working poor. Another consideration was that, despite the growing trend towards greater inequality in Korea, the KCWJC is working towards equality of access to jobs and incomes in both the short-term (training for new workers) and the long-term (reform of the employment structure) that has traditionally excluded workers based on personal ties to gang-leaders called the "Oyaji".

The taskforce decided to examine the KCWJC in detail. We looked at their books, interviewed with officers and staff at the national headquarters and regional centres, and we conducted site visits. The report will be divided into three sections: first a "background" section that situates the KCWJC's activities in Korea's economic crisis and that describes the root problems inhibiting labour market function, second, a description and analysis of the KCWJC's programmes that directly relate to the seven dimensions of labour security, a description and assessment of the KCWJC's organizational competencies and last, a section for conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Director-General: Decent Work*. 1999. International Labour Office: Geneva. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc87.rep-i.htm>

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## **PART I: Background**

### **1. Construction workers and economic crisis**

#### **1.1 Extreme employment instability**

In Korea, construction workers, already a population of workers living with precarious employment have been the group most severely impacted by insecurity after the Asian financial crisis and subsequent IMF bailout. Of the 12,977,000 workers in Korea, 1,246,000 are construction workers, and among these, 77.1 per cent are contingent, working as either day labourers or temporary hires (National Statistical Office, August 2000). Considering that in the overall economy, an average of 58.4 per cent of all Korean workers are irregular, the proportion of irregular construction workers constitutes a fairly high ratio. Because of the short duration of construction industry workers' contracts, construction workers repeatedly undergo periods of unemployment and are mobile, as they must move to wherever the jobs are. Additionally, because Korean unemployment insurance does not apply to those with a contract of less than one month in duration, many construction day labourers are implicitly excluded from employment insurance, and the instability of employment in this case directly impacts income security and even extends to the instability in daily life as well.

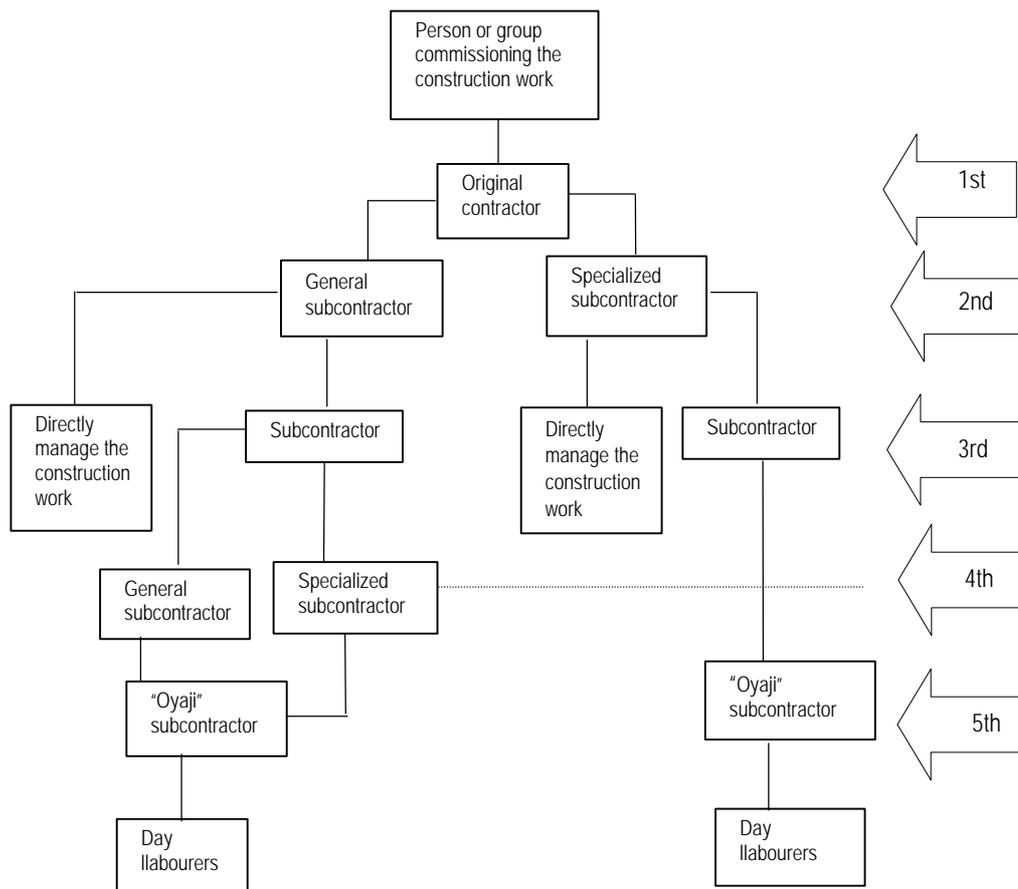
#### **1.2 Structural factors: Multi-tiered subcontracting system and pre-modern employment structure**

The construction industry in Korea is characterized by multi-tiered subcontracting. The labour market in this industry is unusual in that it relies on “gang” foremen, the “Oyaji,” who recruit manpower at the bottom-most tier of the subcontracting pyramid (Figure 1). This system of recruiting manpower has been practiced in the construction industry since the Japanese colonization of Korea and became institutionalized in the aftermath of the Second World War. Thus, although Korean laws formally prohibit such multi-tiered subcontracting, ingrained informal practices remain prevalent in violation of the law. Although subcontracting systems are common in other countries, in Korea, the construction industry is unique in its subcontracting of already subcontracted work and in its complete reliance on the foreman to recruit and maintain a workforce. In some construction projects, these foremen are also (sub)contract holders and thus, responsible for not only the mobilization of manpower but also the actual quality of the construction as well.

By externalizing the responsibility for workers employed at the site, construction companies — the original contractor — can cut labour costs and personnel management costs. This “foreman-based system” allows construction companies to eliminate pressure towards rising wage costs during times of economic growth and to shift the responsibility for workforce maintenance during economic slumps. However, it has also enabled unethical construction practices to go on unchecked — such as “payment” of wages to nonexistent people, money that is routed back into kickbacks and bribes — and an overall decreased efficiency of the construction sector.

Moreover, at each tier, middlemen who have not participated in the construction project take commission, thereby further impoverishing the workers at the bottom of the pyramid. In the end, this shift of responsibility from the construction companies to individual foremen allows large construction companies to pursue excessive profit levels while worsening work conditions and consolidating irregular employment relations with workers.

**Figure 1 The structure of employment — the *Oyaji*-based multi-tiered subcontracting system**



Source: Korean Council of Construction Day Labourers Unions, "Construction Workers" (1997)

In May of 2000, Korea Contingent Workers Centre carried out a survey of the 691 construction workers working on the Yeonjong Island New Airport Construction, a large government-commissioned construction project now known as Incheon International Airport. The survey indicated that 52.3 per cent of construction workers on the project found their jobs through word-of-mouth, and that the second most common way of securing a job on that project was through the foreman (Table 1). In contrast to the period before the IMF bailout and economic crisis, unemployment had risen sharply, illegal manpower agencies entered the stage, and, although small in number, workers began securing jobs through the trade union. These trade unions in the construction sector hold the removal of the multi-tiered subcontracting system as a major objective.

**Table 1 Channels to employment by job**

Channels to employment	Government-operated manpower agency	Manpower agency	Through the foreman	By word-of-mouth	Outdoor informal hiring hall	By going to the airport site directly	Through the union	Miscellaneous
All construction workers	1.7	2.9	28.3	52.3	1.0	3.5	0.9	8.3
Foremen	7.7	0	26.9	23.1	0	19.2		23.1
Skilled	1.2	2.3	30.5	54.3	0.7	2.8	0.5	7.9
Apprentice	0.7	7.9	25.0	56.6	1.3	2.6	0	5.9
Unskilled	5.8	7.2	21.7	44.9	2.9	2.9	5.8	8.7

Source: Korea Contingent Workers Center, *Survey of Workers at the Yeonjong Island New Airport Construction Site* (2001.3.13)

## 1.4 Impact of the economic crisis and high unemployment on construction workers

During the period of rapid development (1970–1980), the construction industry played a key role in the growth of the Korean economy. Even in the 1990s, construction remained an important and growing industry, consisting of about 12.4 per cent of GDP in 1995, and sometimes even 25 per cent of GNP as orders from abroad began to flow into Korea; however, the industry was severely impacted by the economic shocks in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, which began in 1997 (Table 2).

**Table 2** Composition of Korean GDP (prices standardized to 1995 value, Unit: 1 billion won)

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
All industries	343 942	367 888	389 373	365 448	405 746	443 090 (100%)
Agriculture, forestry and fishery	23 354	24 120	25 234	23 569	24 833	24 860 (5.6%)
Mining	1 776	1 775	1 759	1 338	1 409	1 439 (0.3%)
Manufacturing	110 827	118 343	126 117	116 735	141 295	163 015 (36.8%)
Electricity, gas and water	7 856	8 800	9 809	9 868	10 897	12 265 (2.8%)
Construction	42 564 (12.4%)	45 513 (12.4%)	46 137 (11.8%)	42 161 (11.5%)	38 306 (9.4%)	36 882 (8.3%)
Wholesale, retail, restaurants and hotels	47 173	50 500	52 512	46 813	53 422	58 470 (13.2%)
Transportation, warehouse and telecommunications	24 821	27 456	31 135	30 888	35 362	41 276 (9.3%)
Financial services, insurance and real estate services	68 235	73 132	77 411	75 956	80 097	83 860 (18.9%)
Social and personal services	17 335	18 249	19 259	18 119	20 124	21 024 (4.7%)

Source: Bank of Korea 2001

The currency crisis and liquidity crisis of November 1997 had great impact on construction companies; in 1998, about 7 per cent of all construction companies suddenly collapsed (Table 3). As a result of large construction company bankruptcies, construction began occupying a smaller portion of GDP, dropping to 8.3 per cent of GDP in 2000. As of 2000, although initially, construction companies have had difficulty regaining ground in the aftermath of the economic crisis, the overall industrial productivity of this sector has improved. While the viability of weakly financed construction companies remains a concern, the bankruptcy rate has decreased to about 1.5 per cent overall.

**Table 3** Rate of construction company failures (Unit: number of companies, %)

Year	Total			General subcontractors			Specialized subcontractors		
	Companies	Bank-ruptcies	Rate of Failure (%)	Companies	Bank-ruptcies	Rate of failure (%)	Companies	Bank-ruptcies	Rate of failure (%)
1995	22 579	912	4.04	2 958	145	4.90	19 621	767	3.91
1996	25 385	803	3.16	3 543	196	5.53	21 842	607	2.78
1997	27 825	1 352	4.86	3 900	291	7.46	23 925	1 061	4.43
1998	30 001	2 103	7.01	4 208	524	12.45	25 793	1 579	6.12
1999	34 859	466	1.34	5 155	112	2.17	29 704	354	1.19
2000	39 801	581	1.46	7 978	132	1.65	31 823	449	1.41

Source: Ministry of Construction and Transportation 2001

Construction workers were the hardest hit by the economic crisis. The impacts of the crisis for construction workers have translated into unemployment, increased work intensity, and a lowered age-limit to decrease employment of older workers. While new employment shrank 5.3 per cent between 1997 and 1998 for overall industry, new employment for construction workers dropped 21.3 per cent in the same period (Table 4). Because the vast majority of construction workers are irregular manual workers who cannot receive unemployment benefits, construction workers had incredible vulnerability to poverty in unemployment, and were only able to survive the economic shocks by depending on the central and local governments' public works projects. Although the statistics are in newly employed workers, one must also consider the accelerated pace of work, and workers no matter how highly skilled — in their 50's are being pushed out of the market by this high work intensity.

**Table 4 Trends in new employment (Unit: 1000 people, %)**

Newly employed workers	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Newly employed workers in all industries	20 432	20 817 (1.9%) <sup>1</sup>	21 106 (1.4%)	19 994 (-5.3%)	20 281 (1.4%)	21 061 (3.8%)
Newly employed workers in the construction industry	1 905	1 971 (3.5%)	2,004 (1.7%)	1 578 (-21.3%)	1 476 (-6.5%)	1 583 (7.3%)
Newly employed construction workers as a proportion of newly employed	9.3%	9.5%	9.5%	7.9%	7.3%	7.5%

Source: National Statistical Office 2001  
<sup>1</sup> Percent change from the previous year (in numbers of newly employed workers)

## 2. The trade union response

### 2.1 History of trade union activism

Most of Korea's independent unions, including the construction industry unions, were formed in the watershed outbreak of wildcat strikes known as the "Great Workers Struggle" from July to September 1987. In June 1987, the resistance to the repressive military dictatorship coalesced into a resistance movement that won gains for greater political freedom. This, in turn, opened the space for workers to demand changes to the militaristic industrial relations system and struggle to gain the three basic workers' rights.

Historically, Korean construction industry workers were organized in two different unions. First, white-collar office and technical workers in the construction industry formed trade unions at their individual enterprises since 1987. These unions broke away from the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), which was a conservative group that supported the military dictatorship at the time, and formed their own industrial federation, called the Korean Federation of Construction Trade Unions (KFCTU) in December of 1989. However, the government rejected the union federation's applications to register as a workers organization, and it wasn't until June 1993 that the federation was legally recognized as a union federation. Although the government had repressed the "banned" union federation in the early years after separating from the FKTU, the workers' unity and struggles together with the support of the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers (IFBWW) made the 1993 legalization possible. In November 1995, the KFCTU was one of the democratic (autonomous) union federations to form the new national centre, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU).

The second union in the construction industry was for blue-collar manual workers. Starting in 1988, these workers formed unions in Seoul, Incheon, Seongnam, Pohang and cities throughout the country. Because their work was insecure, instead of forming

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enterprise-based unions, these workers formed “regional unions,” unions that based their membership and struggles in a region instead of a single enterprise. The government likewise refused to recognize the vast majority of these regional unions as workers organizations and it wasn’t until 1994 that those unions became legally recognized. Because these unions were banned until 1994, they had great difficulty organizing a large membership, and thus, lacked strong bargaining power when dealing with employers and were largely unable to engage in collective bargaining or conclude collective agreements for the region’s construction workers. Thus, most of the regional union activities centred on the daily needs of their membership. Because most of the union members were continually in and out of employment as a consequence of being irregular workers, the union began facilitating the exchange of information about jobs among the union members towards decreasing the periods of unemployment. In sharp contrast to the insular and exclusive foreman (Oyaji) system, the union carried out training programmes to facilitate skills transfer from the highly skilled to the unskilled. In 1992, these regional unions combined to form the Korean Council of Construction Day Labourers Unions (KCCDLU). This federation comprised of regional unions became legally recognized in 1998, and the organization developed into the Korean Federation of Construction Day Labourers Unions (KFCDLU).

In order to strengthen worker representation toward employers and government, the white-collar federation (KFCTU) and the blue-collar federation (KFCDLU) began promoting joint work together, and this work culminated in the amalgamation of the two federations into the Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions (KFCITU) in December of 1999. The major joint projects pursued by the two federations were the administration of a free job centre for construction workers rendered unemployed by the economic crisis and, lobbying the government for financial support to enable development of the construction industry in Korea.

## **2.2 The birth of the Korean Construction Workers’ Job Center (KCWJC)**

With the economic crisis, the white-collar union federation (KFCTU) and the blue-collar union federation (KFCDLU) began joint preparations in April 1998. In September 1998, the two federations received the license for the free job centre and began the following activities for irregular construction workers undergoing repeated periods of employment and unemployment, a situation particularly exacerbated by the economic crisis when 500,000 construction workers became unemployed. The activities included: job referrals, legal counselling to uphold workers’ rights, building the infrastructure for a network and database of jobs and unemployed construction workers, and job training.

Unions decided to directly operate a job centre because the unions intended to create an alternative system to displace the Oyaji (foreman-based) system that restricted employment to those loyal to the gang leader and operated quite informally instead of with regard to skills necessary to complete construction jobs safely. Second, the government had begun a public manpower agency for construction workers, but lacked not only the system, but also the knowledge of construction work, ways of contacting construction workers, and other construction-related expertise to make an impact on the lives of construction workers. On the other hand, the KCWJC had the expertise and in-depth knowledge of construction work as well as staff who had a first-hand knowledge of the construction worksite and construction-related skills; however, the KCWJC did not have the start-up capital to create a nation-wide network. In this process, the KCWJC applied for and received a grant of 1,045,000,000 won in 1999, a grant renewal worth 1,261,000,000 won in 2000, and a grant renewal of 994,000,000 in the year 2001 from the “Unemployed-relief Civil Movement” fund. With this support, the KCWJC was able to build the infrastructure for local job centres in 27 regions, and recruit knowledgeable

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personnel to work there and maintain a database of unemployed construction day labourers, their skill levels and preferred jobs, and companies seeking a workforce.

The administration of the nation-wide network and KCWJC national headquarters is as follows. The budget and bookkeeping are done within the KCWJC and independently of the unions. Thus, the 27 regional centres that comprise the nation-wide network must follow the KCWJC by-laws for standardized bookkeeping, and are audited and monitored by the national headquarters on their use of funds. In terms of functions, the KCWJC maintains an organic relationship with the unions with both complementing the other's activities. On the regional level, however, the relationship with the unions is a bit closer and regional union presidents also hold the position of regional centre head. Instead of injuring the job centres' independence, KCWJC instituted this in order to make clear that the regional unions would hold responsibility for the centres to increase the costs of, and thereby prevent, mismanagement.

### **2.3 Unemployed-relief Civil Movement Support**

The November 1997 economic crisis was unprecedented in the speed and scale with which mass unemployment became a daily reality; suddenly the unemployment figures rocketed to two million jobless workers. In response, Korean citizens, religious organizations, companies, and public organizations gathered resources to raise 114,100,000,000 won from grassroots fundraising and, on June 23, 1998, created the Unemployed-relief Civil Movement to manage the newly-created funds effectively. The Unemployed-relief Civil Movement has neither infrastructure nor affiliated regional branches; it has only a secretariat. Thus, instead of directly using the funds to help the unemployed, the Unemployed-relief Civil Movement accepted applications from organizations in civil society and redistributed the money to organizations the secretariat felt were capable of administering strong programmes. From 1998 to June 2001, the Unemployed-relief Civil Movement distributed funds worth a total of 79,900,000,000 won to different organizations in civil society, including to the KCWJC. Although the economy has improved, unemployment continues to increase, and the Unemployed-relief Civil Movement has decided to continue funding organizations to a total of 5,300,000,000 won from July 2001 until July 2002.

## **PART II Evaluation of the KCWJC activities for labour security**

Here, we will examine the Korean Construction Worker Job Centre's (KCWJC) main activities and achievements in light of seven dimensions of work-based security defined by the ILO.

### **3.1 Labour market security: Improving access to employment, creating employment**

The KCWJC has diverse activities to systematically link up all workers in the construction industry to jobs and create employment opportunity. First, as a professional labour market intermediary, the KCWJC has been actively linking up unemployed workers with jobs in the construction industry. The KCWJC has built a nation-wide infrastructure with regional centres in every main city to provide free services that create job security by facilitating the link-up between employers' demand for skilled workers and job seekers with a job appropriate to their skills and needs. As an active intermediary to link supply and demand in the construction industry labour market, the KCWJC has achieved positive results through intermediation; in 1999 and 2000, respectively, the total man-days (number

of workers gaining employment x number of days worked) amounted to 100,000 and 255,000 days respectively (Table 5.) The centres carry out job intermediation and counselling on a daily basis to intermediate between employers seeking labour and workers seeking employment, and the centre registers these labour market parties in the centre's database through direct site visits, phone and fax. The National Headquarters also operates a homepage on the Internet ([www.jobcenter.or.kr](http://www.jobcenter.or.kr)) to carry out online counselling. Additionally, a large number of the regional centres manage an independent hiring hall or conduct consultative site visits to construction companies in their district toward developing new worksites; thus, the regional centres also carry out proactive activities meant to secure jobs for construction workers.

**Table 5 Impact of KCWJC activities**

	1999	2000	1 <sup>st</sup> quarter, 2001
Registered employers seeking manpower	2 467	24 431	3 595
Registered unemployed workers seeking jobs	7 648	22 602	3 469
Employment mediated (total man-days)	99 938	255 198	41 808
Privately-commissioned works projects (total man-days)	54 509	91 091	8 089
Public works projects (total man-days)	313 564	205 075	39 686

Second, the regional centres also maintain close ties with the regional unions and through employment policy conferencing with local government, have been commissioned by local government to administer public works projects and privately commissioned works projects to create new employment for construction workers. For the last three years, these regional centres worked to create new job opportunities for construction workers who had lost their jobs in the context of the Korean economic crisis and consequent contraction of the construction industry. In reality, as shown in Table 5, these centres have succeeded in creating 664,000 jobs for unemployed construction workers nationwide in the period from 1999-2000 by supplying manpower through the public works projects and privately commissioned works projects entrusted to the centre by local government. The concrete work carried out by the regional centres through the privately-commissioned works projects by local government include: cultivation of wooded areas in the city, home repair, maintenance of roadways and trees planted alongside the highways, repainting of water tanks, and repair of playgrounds. In the case of some regional centres (Ansan, Seongnam, Pohang, Jeonju, Bucheon, and Daegu Regional Centres), the regional centres in concerted action with the union, either set up unprecedented labour-government consultations to confer on employment policies in the construction industry on the local government level, or have concluded agreements with regional governments for policies to create jobs and stimulate growth in the regional construction industry.

Third, in the medium-long term, a policy aim of the KCWJC is to reform the overall structure of labour market supply and demand to eliminate irregularities such as the contractor (the so-called "Oyaji" or gangs) and contracting labour provision organs that dominate the labour market. Traditional contractors and the rapidly increasing numbers of service subcontractors have contributed to distortion in the construction industry labour market by restricting employment opportunities, indifference to skill level or other job qualifications, and kickbacks among other problems. Thus, as a non-profit, publicly minded organization aiming to reform the employment structure, the KCWJC is working to develop into the central mode of labour market intermediation.

### **3.2 Employment security**

The KCWJC carries out labour law counselling for workers who have been unfairly dismissed by their employers. The diverse measures taken to secure employment protection for construction workers include: lodging a petition with the Labour Ministry,

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filing a case with the Labour Court, pressing a lawsuit in court or bargaining with the employer on behalf of the workers who request counselling on arbitrary dismissal. In reality, in the year 2000 alone, the large number of 226 cases of unfair dismissal were registered with the construction workers receiving legal counselling on labour rights and support from the KCWJC toward realizing their rights.

Additionally, the KCWJC regional centres keep records from the companies seeking manpower and the employers on the length of employment for which they are hiring, and follow up to ensure that the employers adhere to the term of employment stated. The regional centres also work together with construction industry regional unions to periodically make site visits to construction sites to actively monitor, on the regional level, occurrences of arbitrary dismissal and conduct activities to prevent unfair dismissals.

### **3.3 Occupational security**

The KCWJC has built up a database, both on the regional and national levels, in which are recorded types and skill levels of unemployed construction workers so as to facilitate efficient routing to meet companies' demand for workers with certain skills and abilities. Thus, occupational security is enhanced for workers who want to continue to work in the construction industry, but need the maintenance of systematically organized records to show their level of skills and length of experience in this market characterized by informality and lack of regulation. As of 2001, the KCWJC database of job offerings and construction workers includes information on about 1,470 companies seeking manpower and detailed information about 21,100 construction workers, and thus constitutes a constantly updated database covering the employment histories of construction workers. Additionally, the KCWJC has prepared a system of occupational grades based on specialization and role in the labour process, with information on white-collar workers and landscaping workers kept separately from information on construction-site skilled workers. More concretely, the white-collar and landscaping workers are referred to the national KCWJC or another employment agency for specifically white-collar and landscaping workers, and the KCWJC regional centres carry out employment counselling for construction site manpower.

With regard to construction workers who can no longer work in the construction industry because of disability or advanced age, the KCWJC connects these workers to jobs in other industries where their experience in construction will be acknowledged as career-related work experience, and also promotes the creation of self-help enterprises for and by these workers. The KCWJC also refers middle-aged to advanced-aged construction workers who have difficulty continuing the hard manual labour of working on construction industry sites to non-construction-related jobs, including jobs as security guards, janitors, carpenters and wood processing. In the year 2000, the number of workers facilitated into new labour markets amounted to roughly 43,000. Additionally, the majority of the regional centres also carry out activities independent of this job placement; this includes self-help work for and by middle-aged and older construction workers. In particular, many regional centres administer collectives composed of former construction workers who have gone into the home repair business and caretakers of forest plant-life. The regional centres have mediated the market exit of older workers from the construction industry into these new industries on the level of 500 for home repair and about 1000 workers for forestry-related work in the year 2000.

Moreover, the KCWJC has also maintained the policy of hiring centre staff from among construction day labourers themselves, and training them. This has not only opened up new job opportunities to 67 (in 1999) and 83 workers (in 2000) per year amounting to employment creation on the level of 30,000 total man-days, but has also contributed to the

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regional centres' street credibility and penetration into the mores of informal labour markets.

### **3.4 Work security**

Each regional centre has activities to monitor construction sites towards the prevention of industrial disaster. The presidents of each regional union also serve as the head of each regional centre simultaneously, are entrusted with the office of honorary health and safety inspector and therefore, take initiative in preventing industrial accidents at construction sites. A few regional centres, such as the ones in Seongnam and Ansan, follow up on the safety of workers they refer, by working with the regional union to conclude industrial safety agreements with construction companies. Because of this, all workers at construction sites receive industrial accident prevention education once a month (with an attendance of 30 workers per education session).

Last, in the event that an industrial accident does occur, the centres provide legal counselling to the workers injured and assist them in the process of filing for and receiving compensation. In 2000, centres filed 427 cases for industrial accident compensation nationwide, thereby securing 76 million won in total for the workers injured on the job.

### **3.5 Skill reproduction security**

Some of the centres affiliated to the KCWJC have a construction workers' skills training school under their aegis. These vocational training schools give day labourer's opportunities to improve their skill level and give middle-aged and older construction workers skills to change their occupation. The schools are funded jointly by contributions from the Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions (KFCITU), local government subsidies and contributions from the regional union. The regional centres prepare the space and coordinate training programmes. If we examine the case of the Seongnam Construction Workers' Skills Training School, established in January 2000, and also the first skills school established among the centres, the concrete administration of the programme includes a training course on "General Construction Work: Theory and Practice" for younger construction workers (run from October to November), and a training course on "Cultivating the Skills to Become Forestry Workers" for middle-aged to older workers (run from August to October). 23 and 28 workers completed the two courses respectively. From June 2000 to now, seven regional centres (Seongnam, Ansan, Pohang, Daejeon, Suweon, Incheon and Jeonju) have begun administering such vocational schools. The KCWJC is also promoting the establishment and administration of such centres in other regions.

Additionally, unlike the subcontracting employers that recruit day labourers, the KCWJC links unskilled workers together with skilled workers on the same construction site to garner additional benefit of on-the-job training for unskilled workers the centre has referred.

### **3.6 Income security**

The KCWJC's policy on wages is to monitor the employers hiring referred workers so that they don't pay less than the standard market rate. Additionally, a few of the regional centres work in close coordination with the regional union to conclude wage agreements with large construction companies and government-subsidized construction projects to elevate the referred workers' wage premium to above the going market rate, and

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together with the union, the centres have also achieved a work-time reduction in practice, from 12 hours a day to 9 hours a day, for day labourers.

The regional centres carry out labour counselling regarding the frequent problem of unpaid wages, and have actively worked to hold employers accountable to the workers victimized by such wage arrears. In 2000, the KCWJC and its affiliated centres handled 960 cases of unpaid wages and 68 million won worth of unpaid wages and severance pay was recovered for the workers. Additionally, since private manpower agencies take 10 per cent of construction workers' wages as commission for job referrals, the KCWJC's free services not only resolve the problem of intermediary exploitation, but also mean an effective wage hike of 10% for these workers. If we break this down, the KCWJC's free job referral services amounted to a 378 million won wage increase to the working poor in 1999 alone.

Furthermore, in 1999, during the worst part of the construction industry economic slump, the centre administered programmes to help unemployed construction workers survive the worst of the downturn. These welfare programmes included: loans for basic living expenses, relief work, operation of a food bank and a shelter for jobless construction workers who had also become homeless. In that year, a total of 8,037 jobless construction workers (1,544 people were helped through government subsidized aid: and another 6,493 people were helped through privately-raised funds) received assistance from the KCWJC's assistance programmes. Additionally, the KCWJC, together with the Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions (KFCITU), carried out a survey on wages and the real living conditions of construction industry day labourers in the latter half of 2000. After analysis of the survey results, the centre and union presented policy directions to protect the livelihood of the ageing construction worker workforce.

### **3.7 Representation security**

As illustrated in Table 6, a major function of the KCWJC is to represent individual construction workers undergoing various difficulties experienced at the work site, such as: industrial accident, wage arrears, and arbitrary dismissal. This form of interest representation is the KCWJC's intervention towards helping construction workers realize their rights. In concrete terms, there were 1,734 cases in 1999 and 2,575 cases handled in 2000, and recorded compensation amounting to 292 million won and 286 million won respectively, thereby indicating effective interest representation on the individual level. Furthermore, a few regional centres have successfully worked with regional unions to bargain with local government toward improving the work conditions (employment succession, maintenance of employment levels, improvement of the environment of the work site) for construction workers in public works projects.

Strategically situated as an organ under the Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions (KFCITU), the KCWJC has a unique ability to work closely in coordination with unions and thereby successfully carry out negotiations and conclude agreements with both local government and construction companies. In return, the free job placement services and labour counselling provided by the centre enable effective organizing of non-unionized construction workers. The actual number of regional unions organized in 1999 among the KCWJC target workforce, day labourers, amounted to 18 regional unions and the number in 2001 grew to 40 regional unions; thus, we can only assess the KCWJC contribution to organizing non-unionized workers as a success.

Table 6 KCWJC Labour Rights Counselling Cases

	Industrial accident	Wage arrears	Unfair dismissal	Miscellaneous	Total
2000	427	960	226	962	2 575
First Quarter, 2001	529	132	18	94	773

## PART III Organizational aspects of the KCWJC

Here, we will examine the Korean Construction Workers Job Centre (KCWJC) itself as an organization using the six aspects stated in the SES guidelines.

### 4.1 Impact

#### ***Clear measurable indicators to gauge relevance and effectiveness***

The purpose of the KCWJC is to overcome the unemployment of construction workers through the continuous provision of construction labour supply and job introductions. Thus, the KCWJC measures their effectiveness by: the number of jobless construction workers registered in the database, the number of employers registered in the database, the number of job referrals, the number of privately-commissioned work projects and the number of workers placed at government-commissioned public works projects. The relevance can be measured by: whether or not the pre-modern labour market mechanisms in the construction industry can be reformed, and whether jobless construction workers can acquire skills to increase their overall skill levels.

Despite the formal purpose of the centre, which lies in overcoming unemployment among vulnerable construction workers, the real purpose of the centre includes efforts to organize construction workers. That is, the KCWJC concentrates on strengthening its internal organizational capacities through the more important external activities of job placements, new job creation, and labour rights counselling. Some regional unions perceive the regional centres as merely a means towards expanding union membership. However in order to achieve external success in securing jobs for the unemployed and supplying labour to employers, as well as to truly strengthen the union, the three most important activities are: (1) reform and modernization of the employment system in the construction industry, (2) protection and realization of workers' rights, and (3) interest representation. However, it would be difficult to assess the centre's success in being a labour market intermediary, in protecting and realizing workers' rights and in representing workers by looking at the increase in new union membership because we cannot know for certain what an individual's reasons for joining the union are.

Keeping this difficulty in mind, we can cautiously say that the large increase in union membership over the past three years reflects the success of the strategy to gain recognition from local government as the job centre for construction workers. However, it would be well to keep in mind that a large portion of this increase in union membership comes from workers who affiliated with the union after having been referred to and trained by the union for public works projects. It is unclear as to whether job placement services and privately commissioned works projects actually work to strengthen organizational capacity, and as such, more scientific surveys are necessary.

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## **Monitoring evaluation tools to gauge achievement of short and long-term goals**

The KCWJC's formal and short-term aim is to increase the numbers of jobs referred to unemployed construction workers. The KCWJC's long-term goals are: to reform the construction industry employment structure, to maintain skill-levels among skilled workers, to induce disappointed job-seekers to find jobs while inducing employers to hire enough workers for the job, to prepare the foundation for self-help employment programmes, and to protect the rights of construction workers. The KCWJC's two informal objectives are: to secure transparency in labour market mechanisms and to strengthen the union's influence in the labour market by organizing construction workers. In order to achieve these formal and informal objectives, the KCWJC has the internal goals of: (1) efficient personnel management in securing trained and efficient staff and (2) completing an accessible database for job seekers and job offerers etc.

In order to measure the KCWJC's success in meeting their own short-term goals, we can use the external indices stated above and conclude that the centre is monitoring their successes with a high level of accuracy. However, the success of job placements cannot be fully determined with regard to skilled and unskilled workers because we cannot be sure whether it is because of the centre referral or other individual characteristics that they have been hired.

We can determine whether the KCWJC is meeting its long-term goals by examining: (1) the numbers of skill-reproduction training centres established and the numbers of workers successfully trained at those schools, (2) the numbers of self-help employment programme participants as well as gross sales, and (3) the scale of new jobs creation. However, because the KCWJC is only two years old, these long-term-oriented programmes are still in their infancy and the KCWJC has yet to produce a systematic way of evaluating their effectiveness. That said it still would be difficult for the KCWJC to create evaluation tools to gauge the extent to which the Oyaji-based employment structure has truly been reformed at creating alternatives.

One can evaluate whether the organization has achieved its informal goal of increasing union membership by assessing the numbers of new union members and the rate of payment of union dues; the Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions (KFCITU) is evaluating its performance in these terms with great reliability. Lastly, in order to evaluate attainment of internal goals, the KCWJC (1) measures the staff turnover time with respect to evaluating efficiency in personnel management, and (2) assesses levels of database updating, particularly between the national headquarters and the regional centres, assesses the sharing of knowledge and experience among the centres, and assesses the amount of money spent to place one unemployed construction worker in a job with respect to work efficiency.

## **Mechanisms for internal and external evaluations**

At present, no evaluations are underway with the expertise of outside experts but within the organization, internal evaluations are actively taking place. Internally, centre reports—including book-keeping for the month as well as success of local activities from regional centres are written monthly and sent to national headquarters to be compiled and submitted for collective evaluation at the end of the year. A two-day session for staff (activists) is also held at the national level to evaluate the results and problems encountered during the project and to bring forth new solutions.

Evaluation by the beneficiaries of the project has not been systematized in the form of questionnaires or other methods but activists have monitored meetings between placed day labourers and employers as well as the adaptability and performance of the placed workers,

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and have telephoned work sites to follow up on the progress of the placed construction workers. Centre administrators who are labour activists cum job trainers usually tour work sites and in the process, hear open evaluations and proposals for the project from the beneficiaries. However, due to poor working conditions, the day labourers tend to appeal to personal sufferings rather than putting forth concrete proposals to the staff.

### ***Public access to the findings of assessments or evaluations***

The project is advertised to the public through stickers, posters, leaflets, and local newspapers and through related groups and affiliated unions. The contents of the project are advertised through the publication of the employment centre (newsletter of the construction worker). The “work diary of construction day workers” educates workers on methods to cope with delayed wages, work injuries and unemployment. The regional telephone numbers plus 1919 service will soon be put into operation for the benefit of the public. However, due to the Oyaji-centred relationships of the construction industry, it is not easy for workers to come freely into the Centre, and many job introductions are successfully undertaken for more skilled workers. In spite of this, public recognition of the Centre has increased through these various methods of advertising.

The KCWJC has also prepared a report for the Unemployment-relief Civil Movement fund. Once the fund has gathered reports from all the organizations supported, the fund has tentative plans to allow the Korean National Assembly to inspect the reports, at which point the public will have even greater awareness through media reporting on the National Assembly’s assessments. However, it is important to point out that this is only a tentative possibility and depends on what course of action the Unemployment-relief Civil Movement fund decides upon.

### ***Marketing strategies***

Much information is received by union and centre activists/staff at work sites through bosses. Bosses are frequently contacted for job information. Serious competition comes from private manpower agencies. Most of these organizations pay workers in advance after deducting their commission. The KCWJC has also gained publicity and recognition at work sites by fighting for workers’ rights including: pointing out unfair labour practices and filing complaints against employers who abuse their position, protecting workers’ rights and voicing workers’ demands, and working to denounce pre-modern and inhumane practices. Thus, the Centre is gaining much confidence from workers, as it requires no payment and works to improve upon the methods used by other employment agencies.

## **4.2 Procedures**

### ***Recruiting activists (employees)***

Staff is recruited from people with more than two years' of experience in a union, social workers, people with the necessary education with working experience in non-profit or public organizations and people with teaching qualifications. Emphasis is placed on people with excellent computer skills. Staff is recruited through recommendations from regional groups with approval from the Centre and the majority recruited are former union activists in the construction industry. The Centre can also ask for the transfer of a regional activist if the necessity arises. Local union leaders run most of the regional centres. Most of the activities of the regional centres are related to organizational activities and receive external aid from organizations like the Unemployment-relief Civil Movement and this calls for operational transparency. Regional centres also apply to local government for

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public works projects funding to hire staff and some regional unions also raise money at the grassroots level to supplement staff salaries.

### **Selecting beneficiaries**

There are no special steps taken to exclude certain groups of beneficiaries. Due to the situation of the construction work market, it is difficult to step up guidelines in the recruitment of beneficiaries. There are differences by region in the construction industry, and this call for different skills and thus, workers are spread out in the regions according to their skills.

### **4.3 Sustainability: The possibility of self-reliance and independent income/financing**

The national headquarters has been receiving aid from the Unemployment-relief Civil Movement to carry out its projects. Funds are divided between the national and regional levels. However, 75 per cent of these funds are allocated for wages and only 25 per cent for projects. If funding from the Unemployment-relief Civil Movement ceases completely, the projects would be seriously affected. Funding from the Unemployment-relief Civil Movement comprised 60 to 75 per cent of the budget and the national headquarters is preparing new projects to overcome the financial instability. In particular, the KCWJC is preparing to make the job referrals a paid service, in which employers would pay a small commission for referrals and construction workers would continue to receive free job placements.

The financial situation is worse in regional centres depending on organizational density and the difficulty in collecting union dues. Only 10 per cent of the members in a regional union of 2000 pay their membership dues. In a strong union, one to two union members are delegated to regional centres but in a poor union, one person would be delegated to both the union and regional centre. Some centres have registered as employment agencies with the local governments to receive public works projects funding to support payment of staff wages.

Accordingly, the national and regional centres face the challenge of overcoming the situation by expanding their functions of protecting union rights and interests while pursuing labour information-related projects. Financial independence of the KCWJC seems unlikely in the near future keeping in mind the low rate of public donations and the financial crisis of other NGOs in Korea. The construction union has both the characteristics of an NGO and a union and it is only with the firm rooting of the union through projects in the regions that would allow for financial stability and a guarantee for projects. With this in mind, the regional centres are dependant on local governments and it is only with organizational expansion that would allow for the independence of centres. The national headquarters must produce a competitive database and with governmental aid, begin charging employers for referrals.

### **4.4 Public relations**

#### ***Adherence to ethical statements, privacy or equality policies, evidence of good practice awards***

According to Article 6 of the KCWJC constitution, the regional job centres cannot use the information on the (job-seeking) membership in other capacities than job referral, for example, providing the database to a third party or allowing others to view the

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information without the consent of members. Thus, centres cannot use databases for profit purposes, and centres are committed to respecting the privacy of job seekers.

## **4.5 Organizational information**

### ***Organizational transparency***

Regional centres submit monthly financial reports and receive budgetary support for the following month after inspection of the monthly financial reports. This method allows for transparency in the organization and on the national level, expenses are fixed and so allows for no discrepancies with the budget. At the moment, a senior union leader with much experience in cooperative funds acts as the auditor. Other than financial matters, no special methods are undertaken to release the contents of organizational activities to the public; however, the centre does maintain a web page.

### ***Organizational formation***

Although this aspect was treated in “Part 1: Background,” this paper will include a brief summary here. The centre was established to overcome the unemployment of construction workers following the aftermath of the IMF crisis. Before 1998, the centre existed as an independent employment agency and in September was registered as a free employment agency. In the midst of operation it was chosen by the Unemployment-relief Civil Movement as a fund recipient. The KCWJC was organized after the amalgamation of the Korean Federation of Construction Trade Unions (KFCTU) and the Korean Federation of Construction Day Labourers Unions (KFCDLU) into the Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions (KFCITU) to provide free job counselling and job training to union members, construction workers and skilled workers. It is important to note that unions took the initiative to form such a centre because the governmental agencies did not understand the special characteristics of the construction work fields and as such, could not encompass the needs of the workers despite the extensive funding and network invested by the government into their own centre. With the active participation of the unions, the activities of the centre took on the role of protecting the rights of the workers and expanding organizational capacity. The role of the KCWJC as an employment agency is to act as a labour market intermediary to increase the organizational capacity of the local organizations. Other purposes include the modernization of the construction labour market’s employment structure and insurance that there is transparency in the system of labour construction supply .

However, only 27 centres were formed among the 40 regions in which the KFCITU has regional unions, as the steering committee limited the formation of centres to regions which could maintain office space of over 20 square metres and provide a regular stipend to their personnel. Only regions that can provide a regular salary to staff were allowed to organize a centre. In the end, only regions with adequate office space, computers and other minimal office equipment were approved as centres.

## **4.6 Governance**

### ***Explicit and disclosed aims and the KCWJC by-laws***

The KCWJC objectives are mainly stated in the KCWJC by-laws. The organization’s aims are to enhance employment security of construction workers by building a nationwide infrastructure for job referral services, and, as a comprehensive centre for the unemployed, to carry out diverse and needed services, including labour counselling, job referral, skills

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training and skills development, to protect the interests, promote the security in daily life, and maintain the skills of jobless workers. Since the centre was born, the two aims of organizing unorganized workers and providing assistance and services to job seekers and the unemployed have coexisted. If we can say that the centres based in areas with a long standing union movement focus more on organizing, then the newer centres have instead placed their emphases on welfare services and assistance. Overall, both management of job seekers and unionization of these job seekers are key motive forces for most centres. But none of these centres make joining the union a prerequisite to receiving job referral services. In general, the job placement service function contributes to strengthening the union in organizational terms; however, at times, the referral service functions and the functions of protecting workers' rights may be at odds because the union may rub against employers of construction workers.

### ***Written Constitution, organizational and management structure, internal division of labour and power***

The KCWJC by-laws were written on February 9, 1999 and organization is divided into a national headquarters and regional centres. The national centre is responsible for employment creation work, administration of the network database, provision of guidance and support to regional centres, education for regional office counsellors, planning, and marketing, whereas the regional centres administer job referral and related activities, vocational guidance counselling and the meeting lounge for construction industry workers. The highest decision-making authority is the Steering Committee, which is composed of three officers from the Korean Federation of Construction Trade Unions (KFCTU), three officers from the Korean Council of Construction Day Labourers Unions (KCCDLU) and the head of the national headquarters to make a total of seven Steering Committee members. The national headquarters has a secretariat, under which are three departments, the General Affairs Department, the Information and Communications Department, and the Regional Support Department.

### ***Decision-making and democratic processes***

The Steering Committee is convened democratically. Regular meetings are held once a month, and an extraordinary session must be convened at the request of the national headquarters head and one-third of the steering committee members. Meetings require the attendance of the majority of steering committee members and are opened with the "yes" votes of over half the members. The KCWJC officers are elected through completely democratic processes. The regional centre heads are the regional union president or the regional union general secretary, and in the case of the regional union president, democratically elected. However, because the regional centre activities and the regional union activities are overlapping, in reality, regional centres can hardly be said to have separate decision-making capacity on their own. Thus, there is space for the regional union president or general secretary to hold all the decision-making power for the KCWJC regional centre. Although theoretically, in the case of the regional centres, it is possible for the regional union president to administer the centre arbitrarily, these powers are checked by the national headquarters and thus, transparency in organizational administration is guaranteed.

### ***Preparatory work and challenges for the future, weaknesses and competitive advantages***

The KCWJC has great potential for building workers' solidarity in representing their interests, should it begin charging commission or expand its skills development programme to all centres and, further penetrate the market for job referral currently dominated by manpower agencies. The KCWJC has begun building the infrastructure to

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plan for the long-term with its skills training programmes designed to ease the switch of unemployed construction workers into newly emerging job categories in non-construction areas. One of the longer-term goals of the KCWJC is to displace the pre-modern Oyajji (gang, school) at the construction work sites with a modern and rational structure. To attain this goal, the KCWJC has established skills training schools and self-help employment programmes at certain regional centres. Additionally, the KCWJC has concluded collective bargaining at 79 construction sites throughout Korea. In the case of tower crane construction workers, the Daegu-Kyeongbuk province branch has 100 per cent density among the target population, and one can conclude that the job placement centres have contributed greatly to organizing in those regions.

The most decisive problems, however, are lack of funding and the necessity for more training of talented activists. Because the finances are weak and the staff insecure, the centres are currently less competitive than well-financed professional manpower agencies and illegal manpower agencies. Only one percent of all construction workers who obtain employment do so through the KCWJC. Rather, the KCWJC's competitive advantage lies in its unique intersection of non-profit NGO-form and union-like activities to defend workers' interests. Namely, through the KCWJC's activities to retrieve wage arrears for workers, resolve workman's compensation claims and file unfair labour action complaints and its activities to represent the interests of workers that the centre can gain the confidence and trust of the workers; herein lies the KCWJC's unique competitive advantage. Initially, employers held a negative image of trade unions; however, that impression has slowly changed as the workforce referred by the KCWJC proved to live up to their skills and obligations, possibly in the interest of continued relationship with the KCWJC. With these changes, there is a real long-term possibility that the employers may conclude a regular labour supply contract with the centre directly as opposed to individual referral.

A possible long-term step toward KCWJC development is gradual structural separation from the union with maintenance of cooperative relations. This would allow the union to maintain its identity as an organization struggling against employers while the centre could administer its activities independently of such struggles. Creating a new relationship, one with a bit more distance, between the centre and union is necessary as union activities may occasionally exert negative influence on the centres. In particular, on the regional level, the NGO "image" would be more advantageous to the centres than the union "image." Such a transition to NGO status would facilitate regional centres' time and space to expand coalition-building to a broader spectrum of partners, particularly other NGOs in the region, to contribute to more active community-based local welfare movements, diverse self-help activities, and more construction skills training schools, increased ability to intervene in the labour market, better worker education as well as position the regional centre to exert more influence on regional politics. Because of the complex structure and informal practices of the construction industry, the government is not only unable to obtain accurate information and statistics, it is also virtually impossible for the government to effectively carry out job placement services, skills-training, and self-help employment programmes for this insecure population. Thus, the KCWJC has a large field of activities in which it can expand and intervene effectively to take a central position in these areas. Because legal and institutional machinery are needed to effect change in the employment structure, the KCWJC must deepen the solidarity between regional centres and local NGOs to push for institutional change.

### ***Human resources management, application of basic labour standards, unionization***

Currently, about one-third of the staff at the national headquarters and regional centres are college graduates, and two-thirds are recruited from the grassroots. When former construction workers are recruited to work at the centres, they first take computer

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classes and undergo responsible fiscal management/book-keeping training. Additionally, the new staff also participate in three day-two night educational session held once a year and organized by the national headquarters for staff at regional centres. However, this level of training could be beneficially expanded to meet higher levels of professionalism. Thus, the KCWJC needs to invest more into internal education to raise the overall level of professionalism.

The pay for KCWJC staff is fairly low at only 800,000 won per month; however staffs are mostly motivated to work there based on their desire to improve the status of employed workers. The turnover rate is approximately a year and a half; however, one should keep in mind that the centre has been in existence for only two years. Currently, among the 40 regional unions for construction day labourers, 29 have tried to establish KCWJC regional centres; however, two regional unions were not able to follow through and 27 regional centres shall be operating this year. The two regional unions unable to establish the KCWJC centre failed because one lacked a staff person, and at the other centre, the staff person departed owing to personal family problems.

However, it would do well to keep in mind that in Korea, all activists and staff in both the workers' movement and civil society/civic organizations lead lives made difficult by low remuneration and slim hopes for a secure future. Thus, those working at such organizations pass up on opportunities to pave the path towards higher earnings and their own personal self-realization by working in the civil society sector.

As in other organizations in Korea, the KCWJC staff have not created a trade union to represent their interests as staff because they know full well the tight financial situation of the KCWJC and that the resources do go to help those less fortunate than themselves.

## **PART IV Conclusions**

### **5.1 Conclusion: KCWJC activities in perspective**

The KCWJC has been able, in a comparatively short amount of time, to enhance worker security in an unfriendly environment of rising unemployment and uncertain economic times. The centre, formed by workers from the construction industry who understand the unique realities of the construction industry, is increasing worker security in an area where government organs or other NGO's would have difficulty attaining the expertise and informal contacts on the grassroots level needed to effectively carry out and direct such a programme. In particular, the centre had shown itself to be effective in linking jobless construction workers with jobs and creating employment thereby enhancing labour market security; in the period from 1999 to 2000, employment of over 1,000,000 construction workers was achieved.

In addition, the KCWJC has administered a skills reproduction school to improve workers' skill-levels, and uplift self-help activities, and has represented workers with insecure and poor work conditions toward achieving some measure of employment, occupational and income security. When one considers these successes, we can expect that the KCWJC will continue to be a centrally important labour market intermediary and that it will continue to play an important role in the representation of construction workers' interests.

### **5.2 The significance of the KCWJC activities**

The significance of the KCWJC activities can be summarized as follows.

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First, the KCWJC's job placement service has great merit as a publicly-minded, transparently-operated alternative to the commercialized manpower agencies and Oyaji-based system. Gradually enlarging its scope to replace the Oyaji and eventually reduce the tiers of the employment system in the industry will enable construction companies to rely on a stable and skilled workforce while reducing kickbacks and other inefficiencies made possible by informal and non-transparent subcontracting mechanisms. Thus, the KCWJC can play a role in the future toward reform and modernization of the construction industry employment structure to thereby, both increase the overall competitiveness and efficiency of the construction industry as well as decrease intermediary exploitation of the workers.

Second, through a division of labour and organic relation with the construction unions, the KCWJC can follow-up on job placement with monitoring of work/wage conditions and representation of worker voice. Thus, the centre is able to be yet more comprehensive in its activities to affect more dimensions of labour security. This is important in a country like Korea because despite current laws prohibiting wage arrears, non-payment of workman's compensation for on-the-job injuries and so forth, it takes other social actors, such as the KCWJC, to pursue enforcement of these workers' rights and ensure that such existing but not enforced institutions can take root.

Third, the KCWJC provides a good model for building labour security from the grassroots up that can be applied to other industries with high job turnover rates, such as Korea's printing industry. If we take the lessons learned from this effort at taming insecurity, a "model" can emerge in which using the existing infrastructure in the unions can enable greater penetration, scope and stability to activities designed to extend social protection to mobile and insecure workers. This model also strengthens the representativeness of the social partner; labour, particularly as more irregular and vulnerable construction workers join the union after positive experiences with the KCWJC. Thus, the founding of the KCWJC also contributes to the evolution of workers organizations' activities away from representation of a limited minority of craft workers towards enhancing the labour security of the many insecure, unorganized workers. Likewise in other industries, it is possible that when unions take on social protection work for irregular workers, they can be pushed to be more inclusive and representative.

However, an important step for the KCWJC to conduct its activities on an even larger scale is to attain financial independence. The current size of unions makes it difficult for them to sustain the growth of such social welfare activities on a national scale when, in this case, the Unemployed-relief Civil Movement funding ends in June 2002. Currently, both the national headquarters and regional centres are increasing dialogue with the government and local government to prepare for the post-June 2002 activities. Thus, by tackling issues such as unemployment and pursuing the public interest, the social partners can also be drawn closer and set down the relations that in the future can evolve into greater participation of employers, workers, and government to modernize the construction industry while taking into account labour insecurity.

## Expanded checklist

- 1) Organization name: Korean Construction Workers Job Center  
 2) Date of establishment: September 2, 1998  
 3) National HQ head (contact): Kisoo Ro  
 4) Address: Eosu Bldg. 2<sup>nd</sup> Fl., 700-4 Daerim-1-dong, Yeongdeungpo-Gu  
 Seoul KOREA 150-071  
 5) Telephone: 82 2 848-9191  
 6) Fax: 82 2 843-1436  
 7) Email: jobcenter@jobcenter.or.kr  
 8) Website: http://www.jobcenter.or.kr  
 9) KCWJC Regional Centers:

Regional centre	Established date	Centre head	Staff	Database size <sup>1</sup>	Telephone	Fax
National HQ	98.9.2	Kisoo Ro	4	5 300	02-848-9191	02-843-1436
Seoul	98.9.2	Jongtae Kim	1	1 535	02-848-9190	02-848-9091
Incheon	98.9.2	Jungeol Lee	2	535	032-435-8110	032-421-1504
Ansan	98.9.2	Junmo Lee	4	3 200	031-491-7664	031-493-4173
Seongnam	98.9.2	Gwang-il Lee	2	2 700	031-745-0826	031-749-3951
Kyonggi-do	98.9.2	Gyeongsik Ham	1	560	031-765-4955	031-767-4955
Hanam	98.9.2	Taejo Tang	1	565	031-795-5419	031-792-9779
Icheon	98.9.2	Jaeseok Oh	2	764	031-636-1013	031-637-1504
Yongin	98.9.2	Mingu Jo	1	520	031-282-9192	031-285-4768
Suwon	98.9.2	Yeongho Do	2	6 542	031-257-3816	031-242-7754
Pyeongtaek	98.9.2	Yeongjik Kwon	2	700	031-657-6569	031-658-2640
Bucheon	98.9.2	Dongun Kim	2	264	032-663(6)9192	032-665-9192
Daejeon r	98.9.2	Byeongryong Park	4	2 099	042-255-6766	042-256-3628
Pohang	98.9.2	Yeongju Kim	3	5 000	054-283-2221	054-277-2932
Daegu	98.9.2	Jibaek Jang	5	1 449	053-762-6476	053-762-6477
Busan	98.9.2	Jonggil Jang	9	2 500	051-313-4811	051-315-5253
Kwangju	98.9.2	Seungwon Kim	1	677	062-524-8883	062-524-8886
Jeonbuk	98.9.2	Gwangsu Jung	2	3 125	063-244-1982	063-245-9863
Andong	98.11.1	Seok-gwon Yun	3	200	054-859-2191	054-853-0093
Cheonan	98.11.1	Yeongjae Park	5	470	041-568-1814	041-561-1814
Cheongju	98.11.1	Juho No	2	600	043-275-2216	043-275-2215
Gunsan	98.11.1	Hayun Seong	1	586	063-468-0985	063-462-0986
Masan/Changwon	98.11.1	Yongsu Lee	2	341	055-264-1911	055-262-8291
Iksan	99.10.3	Chan Min	1	420	063-843-9061	063-852-4933
Kyonggi Branch	00.7.10	Hanheung Park	1	126	031-856-8219	031-844-5492
Kangwon	00.7.10	Byeongho Lee	1	73	033-765-2697	033-763-3122
Tower	00.7.10	Subong Chae	1	108	02-3472-6878	02-523-2441
Dongducheon	00.7.10	Byeong-gyu Ko	2	80	031-863-0171,2	031-863-0308

<sup>1</sup> Database size is measured in terms of the numbers of workers and companies registered in the database.

### 10. Partnerships:

- a. Organization name: Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions  
 Date of establishment: 1999. 12 (date of amalgamation)  
 Contact: Yongshik Lee  
 Address: Eosu Bldg. 2<sup>nd</sup> Fl., 700-4 Daerim-1-dong, Yeongdeungpo-Gu

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Telephone: 82 2 843-1432  
Fax: 82 2 843-1436  
Email: kfcitu@kfcitu.org  
Website: [krhttp://www.kfcitu.org](http://www.kfcitu.org)  
Affiliated unions: 97 enterprise- and regional unions  
Partnerships: International Federation of Building and Wood Workers

- b. Organization name: Unemployed-Relief Civil Movement  
Date established: 1998. 6. 23  
Contact: Suhwan Kim, Wueolju Song, Wonyong Kang  
Address: 94-267 Yeongdeungpo Dong, Yeongdeungpo-Gu, Seoul KOREA  
Telephone: 82 2 6700-571  
Fax: 82 2 6700-550  
Email: [hamkke21@hamkke.or.kr](mailto:hamkke21@hamkke.or.kr)  
Website: <http://www.hamkke.or.kr>