

Executive Summary



Home-based workers (HBWs), mostly women, although a critical part of global supply chains, are often invisible in economic statistics and, by extension, development policies and programmes. This has in turn led to limited research on the impact of climate change on HBWs. A few studies (MHT, 2015; UN Women, 2016; Kjellstrom & Phan, 2017) have highlighted how HBWs' productivity is impacted by increasing temperatures and how they face losses as livelihoods are disrupted by unseasonal rain and flooding. However, there is a lack of proper evidence on the impact of climate change on them.

In this context, the current study, ***“Impact of Climate Change on Urban Home-based Workers in South Asia”*** was planned to understand the implications of climate change on HBWs, especially women. The study reviewed existing literature on evidence of climate change and the nature of home-based work in South Asia to develop a conceptual framework for understanding the impact of climate change on HBWs in the region. This was followed by a primary survey of 202 women HBWs in five cities across Bangladesh (Dhaka), India (Ahmedabad and Surat), and Nepal (Bhaktapur and Lalitpur).

HBWs in occupations related to the garment sector, such as ball pressing or button making, thread cutting, tailoring and bead work; or food products, such as pani puri making, chocolate wrapping and papad making, participated in the study. Most of the respondents (61%) were in the age group 30 to 50 years, married (83%) and with children under 14 (63%).

The study covered three dimensions:

- a) the perception of the HBWs on climate change
- b) the impact of climate change on their livelihood
- c) mapping individual coping (household-level) strategies.





Key findings:

- Over 83% of the respondents reported that they had observed a rise in temperatures during summer in the last 10 years.
- More than two-thirds (66.3%) were unaware of the reasons for these changes, while around 11% believed such changes to be an “act of God”.
- Around 55% shared that climate change was affecting their family.
- The most visible impact has been on women’s unpaid work, with almost 46.5% of the HBWs reporting the same. Of them, almost 60% (56 respondents) said their work had increased by more than two hours daily. This increase was driven by the burden of caring for the ill, followed by the time and effort it took to fetch water and manage food stocks.
- Around 43% reported loss of cash incomes and 41% reported reduced productivity. This decline was largely attributed to climate change, especially increased temperature.
- Around 15% reported someone in the family facing heatstroke in the last couple of years, while 33% reported waterborne diseases and 34% vector-borne diseases.
- Around one in three (30%) reported that their homes were flooded during monsoons. Of these, 47% reported damage as well.
- Around one in three (30%) reported that their homes were flooded during monsoons. Of these, 47% reported damage as well.
- Nearly half (48%) had to resort to extreme measures to cope with climate change. Around 20% had to change their homes, 16% their livelihoods, and 12% both homes and livelihoods.
- Almost two-thirds (57%) reported working part time with monthly income less than 5000 in local currency¹. And although there were other sources of family income, the daily earnings for most of these HBWs are below the international poverty threshold of USD 1.90 per person per day (UN definition used for Sustainable Development Goals).
- Only 65% had a savings account, 24% had health insurance and 23% were members of collectives. This further reduces their financial resilience to climate impacts.
- There is a severe lack of information related to possible solutions for dealing with climate change. When asked about dealing with temperature rise in summers, only 55% respondents knew what could be done.

¹ Converted to USD, this corresponds to less than USD 59 for Dhaka (Bangladesh), less than USD 68 for Ahmedabad and Surat (India), and less than USD 43 for Bhaktapur and Lalitpur (Nepal).

- Around 43% had also tried to implement some solutions for the same and benefitted from it. However, there are challenges, especially in purchase costs.
- Around half (51%) reported lack of information as the key reason for not trying to implement solutions. This was followed by lack of suitability (18%), higher costs (17%) and no credit support (14%).

The study thus clearly brings to light that HBWs, especially women, are profoundly impacted by climate variabilities and will be especially vulnerable to climate change. Their poverty status, low access to social protection and lack of information further reduces their adaptive capacities. Most have to resort to negative coping measures, including giving up their residence and/or livelihood. There is an urgent need to focus on building the adaptation capacities and resilience of women HBWs.

Recommendations:

First and foremost, it is important to increase the understanding of climate change among HBWs, especially on adaptation solutions. Civil society organisations (CSOs) and organisations for HBWs should train the workers through community-based vulnerability assessments, community-led surveillance and action plan development. There are already various adaptation actions that can be explored, piloted, disseminated and converted into a social enterprise. These include personal choice and behaviour change solutions such as staying hydrated, ventilation, personal hygiene, mosquito-proofing homes and sleeping areas, etc.; technology solutions such as energy-efficient equipment, heat-resistant material, building designs, rainwater harvesting models, etc.; and financial solutions including insurance and social security schemes. It is important to test and implement projects related to various adaptation solutions.

Enabling this dissemination of knowledge at a large scale, however, will require building the knowledge and capacities of the CSOs and HBW organisations themselves, as well as policy advocacy at national and global levels to help finance these activities. A multi-stakeholder regional association could be considered towards this. It would provide the backstop for knowledge sharing and cross learning, which are so important to solve the complex issue of climate change adaptation. This multi-stakeholder forum can be developed through collaboration between existing international and regional climate change networks, and local organisations working with HBWs. This regional association should then focus on working with governments and donor agencies, especially international financial institutions and multilateral development banks (MDBs) that manage climate funds. Allocation of funds for climate change awareness and adaptation among HBWs by governments and donor agencies is key.

Achieving concrete results will, however, require concerted action at various levels: communication and awareness, networking and multi-stakeholder partnership development, scientific knowledge transfer, exploration and promotion of adaptation solutions, as well as regional and global advocacy.

