



WORKING HAND IN HAND WITH HOMEBASED WORKERS



AFGHANISTAN
BANGLADESH
HOMENET SOUTH ASIA
2014 INDIA
MALDIVES | NEPAL
PAKISTAN | SRI LANKA

HOMENET SOUTH ASIA - BRIEF HISTORY

Despite the several challenges organizing homebased workers, who work in isolation within the four walls of their homes, grass root experience shows that homebased workers have been organizing since 1970s. SEWA was the first organization to draw national and global attention to homebased workers and has over forty years of experience in organizing homebased workers, among others. In other parts of the world too, organizing of homebased workers has been taking place at varying degrees. In some cases, trade unions have begun to organize homebased workers; in other NGOs and networks or co-operatives of homebased workers have been created. Many of these organizations and networks collaborated globally to campaign and lobby for an international instrument on homebased workers in 1996. It was in this year that the International Labour Organization adopted the Convention on Home Work (C177)¹ - the first comprehensive standard in support of Home workers.

Post the ILO Convention, in 2000, international trade unions, UNIFEM, homebased workers and their organizations, South Asia governments' policy-makers and researchers met and formulated the Kathmandu Declaration for the rights of South Asian homebased workers. The Kathmandu Declaration calls for the formation of National Policy on homebased workers by each country, providing minimum protection, which would include right to be organized, minimum remuneration, occupational health and safety, statutory social protection, maternity, childcare, skill development and literacy programmes and access to market and economic resources for the homebased workers. It also urges SAARC to address the issues of homebased workers in the region and take measures to enable them to deal with the risks and opportunities of globalization. (See annex 1 for detailed Kathmandu Declaration)

In the same year (2000), HomeNet South Asia was born with the objectives of: 1) strengthening homebased workers' organizations and networks in South Asia; 2) support for the development of policy frameworks and advocacy on key issues affecting homebased workers; 3) support for pilot approaches for the provision of social protection for homebased workers; and 4) promotion of fair trade practices at the national level to ensure more favorable working conditions for women homebased workers.

¹According to this Convention, the ratifying countries will be obliged to "adopt, implement and periodically review a national policy on home work aimed at improving the situations of home-workers."

Five years down the line, HomeNet South Asia (HNSA) had emerged as a dynamic and vibrant network of organizations of homebased workers from five countries in South Asia - India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal. HNSA acquired a legal identity in 2006, when it was registered as a Charitable Trust in Mauritius.

Today, HNSA has evolved as the focal point and collective voice of homebased workers of the region. HNSA currently has a presence in 8 countries of South Asia - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. HNSA aims to build regional solidarity among homebased workers, especially women workers, and empower them to lead a life of dignity, free of poverty, through obtaining decent work and social protection.

HNSA strives to make homebased workers and their issues visible; to ensure secured livelihoods for them; and to strengthen their collective voices and organizing efforts in the region. HNSA also advocates implementation of national, regional and international policies for homebased workers; inclusion of homebased workers in the existing policies and laws, as well as promotes access of homebased workers' products to local, national, regional and international markets



Homebased Worker from Bangladesh - Embroidery Worker



Homebased Worker from Bhutan - Weaver

WHO ARE HOMEBASED WORKERS

Homebased work encompasses a wide diversity of activities, ranging from traditional embroidery and weaving to telework. Homebased workers may work in the new economy (assembling micro-electronics) or the old (weaving carpets), they are located in both rural and urban areas. There are two basic categories of homebased workers: those who are self-employed (also referred to as own account workers) and those who are sub-contracted industrial outworkers (called home workers or piece rate workers).

In South Asia, there are estimated to be at least 50 million homebased workers. In most South Asian countries, homebased workers account for a major share - 60 to 90 per cent – of selected key export industries including the agarbati and bidi industries in India, the football industry in Pakistan, and the coir industry in Sri Lanka². In Indonesia³, it is estimated that one out of every three households is engaged in homebased work. In the Philippines, multiple surveys had estimated homebased workers to be ranging from 2 million to 7.8 million. Estimates in Thailand (based on export values and production capacity) suggest that there may be up to 2 million homebased workers.

Homebased work is particularly significant among women workers. In Bangladesh, 71 per cent of all women workers, compared to 20 per cent of all male workers, are homebased. In Pakistan, 65 per cent of all women workers, compared to 4 per cent of all male workers, are homebased. In Thailand, a recent study of home workers found that some 440,251 workers in 294,290 households live off incomes from home working, and that 76.7 per cent of the home workers in these households were female⁴.

There is growing evidence to suggest why we should be concerned about homebased workers, especially about those engaged in low-end work. One reason for concern relates to a common problem faced by homebased workers and other informal workers: namely, the fact that they do not have access to employment based benefits or protection. Compounding the low wages amongst homebased workers is the fact that they have to pay for many of the non wage costs of production: notably, the overhead costs of space, utilities, and equipment. Another relates to the fact of working at or from home: they tend to remain isolated from other workers and, therefore, to be less well organized and have less voice vis-à-vis employers or public authorities than other workers. Also, women are over represented among homebased workers.

²Carr and Chen, *Feminist Economist*, 2000

³Mehrotra, Santosh and Mario Biggeri, eds. 2007. *Asian Informal Workers: Global Risks, Local Protection*. Routledge Studies in the Growth Economies of Asia. London and New York: Routledge.

⁴All figures from Sudarshan, R.M. and Sinha, S. 2011, 'Making Homebased Work Visible: A Review of Evidence from South Asia', WIEGO Urban Policies Research Report, No. 10.

In this age of globalization and economic transformation, organizations of homebased workers have an important role to play. Today homebased women workers need collective organized strength. While organizing at the grassroots is fundamental to finding solutions to the various problems faced by homebased workers, there are many issues that go beyond local level. Homebased workers need associational linkages and network at national, regional and global levels.

'It is difficult to conceive of a meaningful strategy to fight poverty without substantially improving the living and working conditions of home workers. Home work is where the poor are, millions of them.'



Homebased Worker from Pakistan - Embroidery Worker



Homebased Worker from Bangladesh - Plastic Bag Maker

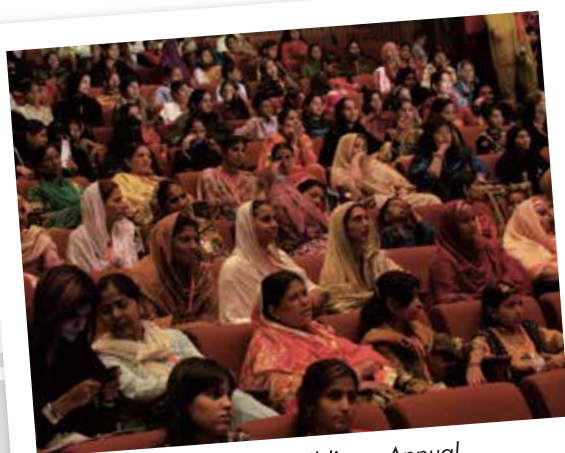
HNSA ACHIEVEMENTS

I) ORGANIZING AND SOLIDARITY BUILDING

Organizing is critical to bringing visibility and voice to the homebased workers. Organizing addresses vulnerability and insecurity of the homebased workers and builds their self-esteem and self-identity. For the homebased workers who work in the isolation of their homes, organizing alters not only her way of thinking, seeing and feeling, but also the material conditions of her life. Organizing helps workers access or build social services like childcare and insurance and pool resources to achieve scale. By coming together, workers find strength in solidarity, and they gain representation and voice in local, national, and international policy-making or rule-setting fora. Organizing and the act of creating responsive organizations is an important element in the economic, social and personal empowerment of the poor, especially the invisible homebased workers.

• Mapping Organizations Of Homebased Workers

One of the first activities of HNSA had been to map organizations of homebased workers, country wise, in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The Mapping Reports had highlighted not just the large number of organizations of homebased workers in the countries - as many as 508 in Bangladesh; 39 in India, 135 in Nepal and 307 in Pakistan but also used case studies and individual interviews to show the diversity of homebased work and the issues facing the homebased workers. Mapping has proved to be an excellent organizing tool - identifying the large number and types of organizations working with homebased workers at the country level and then building solidarity amongst them; and have been cited in several seminal works on the homebased workers or/and informal sector workers, including the flagship publication of UNIFEM- Progress of Women Workers, 2005.



Organizing & Solidarity Building - Annual Convention, Pakistan



Organizing & Solidarity Building - Rally, Nepal

• Strengthening Existing Organizations Of Homebased Workers

Once the mapping was completed, HNSA worked with a range of country level organizations of homebased workers, to strengthen them and their organizational strategies for the homebased workers, through a host of activities such as awareness raising, capacity building and exposure visits. The initial years (2003-2007) were spent in these activities and partner organizations ranged from self help groups and cooperatives to associations, NGOs, unions and research organizations. As a result, HNSA was able to facilitate the formation of networks of homebased workers at the national level for several countries in the region, such as HomeNet Bangladesh, HomeNet India, HomeNet Nepal, HomeNet Pakistan and HomeNet Sri Lanka.

The national networks became the voice of homebased workers at national level, and were able to leverage support for their homebased workers constituency on a host of issues, many of which are listed in the following paragraphs. It needs to be noted that in all the countries which are currently members of HNSA, the homebased workers were a non-issue at the time of the inception of the regional network.

These country networks have remained fluid in their membership, the number of organizations and the homebased workers under a country network ebbing and flowing depending on the activity that the network sought to undertake. For instance, HomeNet Nepal was able to mobilize 700 HBWs in a single day in October, 2011 to celebrate the Homebased Workers' Day, a first of its kind in the country. HomeNet India organized a convention for visibility of homebased workers in 2011 with representation of 700 HBWs from 6 states of India.



Rally to Celebrate 1st Homebased Workers' Day
(20th October) in Nepal



Rally to Celebrate 1st Homebased Workers' Day
(20th October) in Nepal

• Facilitating The Formation Of New Organizations Of Homebased Workers

Two pronged strategy was used by HNSA in organizing homebased workers. Where organization could not reach and organize homebased workers, HNSA initiated and facilitated the formation of new organizations representing homebased workers. In the second prong of its strategy, HNSA has been able to build awareness amongst existing trade unions about the home workers and their issues and many have responded by bringing the homebased workers within their ambit. For instance, five National Trade Unions in Nepal, have formed a Joint National Trade Union Congress which has been able to organize around 15000 HBWs..

• Promoting Member Based Organizations (MBO)

HNSA is committed to building a movement of homebased workers in the region, and in order to do so, the next inevitable step, after mapping organizations of homebased workers, and enhancing their collective strength was to ensure that homebased workers were the decision makers of their organizations and that the organizations promoted and supported by HNSA, had genuine and effective participation and leadership of homebased workers.

In the past few years, HNSA has prioritized its efforts towards promoting member based organizations for the homebased workers - organizations which are owned and managed by the members themselves. But this is not an easy road to travel. Building genuine and effective representation is a challenge for any organization of poor and of women; it is the same story for women homebased workers too. Training, capacity building and building awareness and ownership are ways of ensuring effective member participation, all of which have been employed by HNSA to achieve this objective.



*Membership Based Organization (MBO)
Consultation Meeting - Nepal*



*Membership Based Organization (MBO)
Consultation Meeting - Pakistan*

HNSA conducted specific studies in Nepal and Pakistan to assess the democratic functioning of the organizations working with homebased workers. 24 organizations were studied in Pakistan and 20 were studied in Nepal. Not surprisingly, the study revealed that in 98% of the organizations, homebased workers were not the part of decision making. While efforts to promote a country level network of Membership Based Organizations representing homebased workers have yet to show concrete results, some countries like Pakistan and Nepal are quite close to achieving this feat.

II) VISIBILITY AND IDENTITY BUILDING

Homebased work is characterized by its invisibility. The invisibility of homebased workers manifests itself in several ways. No policy for home workers exists, nor are they included in the national data collection systems. Most of the labour laws are designed for the protection of wages and working conditions of workers in the formal sector. When the work place is at home, such laws cannot offer protection to the workers. Working from home, homebased workers tend to remain isolated from other workers and, therefore, have less voice vis-à-vis employers or public authorities compared to other workers. Besides, the invisibility and lack of recognition, with no formal contracts or identity cards, gives rise to other insecurities like lack of access to credit, raw material, infrastructure facilities and technology etc.



Homebased Worker from India - Wick Maker



Homebased Worker from Nepal - Yarn Making

• Recognizing Homebased Workers In Policy/Public Arena

HNSA has been striving to strengthen homebased workers voice vis-à-vis employers or public authorities. It supports organizations of HBWs, at the country level, to gain voice in relevant policy making processes and institutions and to promote a more favourable policy environment for the HBW through improved analysis, broad awareness building and participatory policy dialogues.

Constant and rigorous dialogues with policy makers, in particular the Ministries of Labour as well as Women and Child Development to sensitize them about the homebased workers have yielded some results in bringing the issues of the homebased workers to the policy table. In Pakistan, it was the Women Ministry who advocated the cause of homebased workers and later it was taken and endorsed by Ministry of Labour who took the initiative to draft the National Policy.

The highlight of these efforts was the South Asia Policy conference, held in 2007. (See box.) The Conference was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Dr Man Mohan Singh. Speaking on the occasion, Dr Singh highlighted the current invisibility of homebased workers and undertook to take forward the National Policy for homebased workers in India and also to promote their issues at the SAARC level.

This Policy Conference concluded with a South Asian Regional Action Plan, which was endorsed and adopted in the presence of all the 5 participating Governments, clearly indicating their recognition of homebased workers in South Asia. The conference acted as a wakeup call for the governments of the region, opening their minds to issues of homebased workers and making them more receptive to the concerns of HBWs. The conference also propelled the issue of homebased workers onto the regional level and drew the attention of SAARC to the subject.

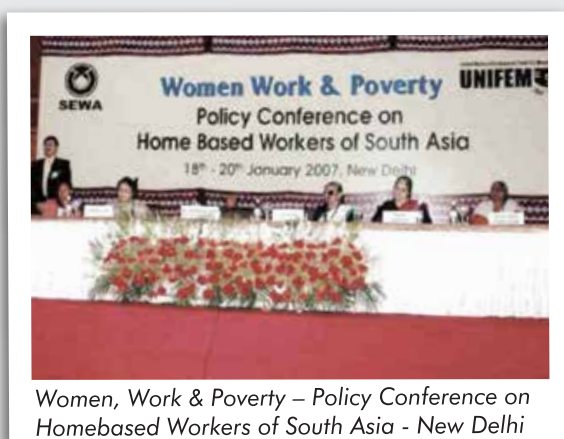


Consultative Meeting on National Policy on HBWs-Nepal



Awareness Meeting with Media on the Implementation of National Policy on HBWs - Pakistan

Women Work & Poverty Policy Conference On Homebased Workers Of South Asia 18-20 January, 2007, New Delhi



Women, Work & Poverty – Policy Conference on Homebased Workers of South Asia - New Delhi

UNIFEM and HNSA organized a regional Policy Conference on Homebased Workers of South Asia, in New Delhi on January 18-20, 2007.

The key objective of the Conference was to advocate for bringing benefits of growth to the homebased workers in the 5 countries of South Asia viz., India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh, in order to lift them out of poverty. Specifically, the

workshop deliberated on issues of policy for the homebased workers; fair trade; social security and building voice and organizations.

The Conference was attended by over 200 homebased workers and delegates from Governments, HomeNets and members of civil society from Bangladesh (5), India (35), Nepal (10), Pakistan(11) and Sri Lanka (9). Delegates from international agencies like ILO, Ethical Trading Initiatives (ETI) and WIEGO shared their expertise and experiences.

The Prime Minister of India, in his speech said,

“Estimates suggest that there are around 50 million homebased workers in South Asia, and most of them happen to be women... Unfortunately, most homebased workers receive very low levels of income due to a chain of middle-men through whom they work.... I would like the SAARC Summit in New Delhi to consider the Kathmandu Declaration and address effectively the problems of homebased workers.. Our Government will be happy to take forward the National Policy for India as well as to facilitate the programme for countries of South Asia.”

HNSA has also been advocating for a National Policy for Homebased Workers, at the state and country level, in all the network member countries. There have been significant developments at the provincial level in Pakistan, particularly in Sind and Punjab provinces where a dedicated policy for the homebased workers is poised to be launched. HBWs have also been included in other policies and labour laws in some countries, such as minimum wages and the workers welfare funds in India, due to the concerted efforts of HNSA and its partners.

The draft National Policy for Homebased Workers, 2007, was drafted by SEWA/HNI for India, but unfortunately further progress was very slow. In Nepal, the draft National Policy was discussed by HomeNet Nepal, in 2008 and later, was submitted in the cabinet as an agenda for discussion. In Pakistan, after long advocacy efforts, the cabinet in principle agreed to the Punjab homebased workers policy Act 2012, on 11th March, 2013. There have also been significant developments on the policy front at the provincial level in Pakistan, largely due to the efforts of HomeNet Pakistan (see box).

POLICY UPDATE: SUCCESS IN PAKISTAN

- *In Punjab, the biggest province of Pakistan, the “Provincial Punjan Policy on Homebased Workers was announced in 2012. The Policy has been put before the cabinet, which has agreed in principle to place the Punjab Homebased Workers Act 2012, before the provincial assembly of Punjab.*
- *In November 2010, the Sindh Assembly in Pakistan unanimously passed a resolution regarding the protection of the rights of the homebased working women and recommended that a campaign should be launched at the union council level to register Homebased Women Workers.*
- *The final draft of the Homebased Workers Provincial Policy of Sindh had been finalised in May, 2013 and was to be submitted to Cabinet soon.*



HNSA, along with its partners has also included the homebased workers in other policies, and labour laws such as minimum wages and the welfare funds in India. SEWA, a partner of HNSA in India, has noteworthy achievements in this regard. SEWA's strategy with the Minimum Wages Act⁵ has been two-fold. Firstly, SEWA has advocated including sectors of homebased workers in the state schedules; secondly, SEWA has worked to ensure strong enforcement of the Act and has been successful in periodically raising the wages of several sectors of the homebased workers such as the garment workers, agarbatti workers, and kite makers. Similarly, SEWA and HNI affiliates have been able to get benefits for the homebased workers by linking them to the welfare boards⁶.

• Recognition Within The Labour Movement

HNSA also strives to bring recognition of homebased workers and build their identity within the labour movement. With increasing importance of informal economy in the developing countries, many informal workers who work in public places have gained attention. But the homebased worker remains invisible, more so if she is a woman. The trade union movement, in each of the countries of South Asia, had not picked up the cause of the homebased workers. Nor had the labour research institutes, or women's movement or the broader civil society movement. In Nepal the efforts of HNSA and its affiliates resulted in establishment of partnership with National Trade Unions like National Trade Unions like General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT), Nepal Democratic Congress of Trade Union (NDECONT) and Nepal Trade Union Congress - I (NTUC-I). HomeNet Bangladesh works with TWARO and HomeNet India with several trade unions of the informal sector workers like All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) & Hind Mahila Sabha (HMS) in India.

HNSA and its affiliates in the respective countries have worked with leading national labour research institutes in order to bring the issues of HBWs in the mainstream research agenda. In Bangladesh, partnership was established with Development Consultant & Global Compliance Initiative (DCGCI) and Centre for Urban Studies (CUS), In Nepal with Center for Labor and Social Studies (Class Nepal) and in Pakistan with Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) & Labor Education Foundation (LEF) etc.

⁵India has the Minimum Wages Act, which has the potential to offer coverage to the homebased workers. The Act prescribes specific minimum wages for different types of employment in various industries scheduled in the Act. These schedules are decided state by state. But the Act, when extended to the homebased workers, has two major flaws. Firstly, piece-rate workers are usually not covered under the Act, which often fixes wages based on time spent. Secondly, in general, the Act is poorly implemented, due to weak enforcement by various States and other government agencies, lack of written evidence or contract (i.e. no clear employer-employee relationship) and time consuming grievance redressal mechanisms.

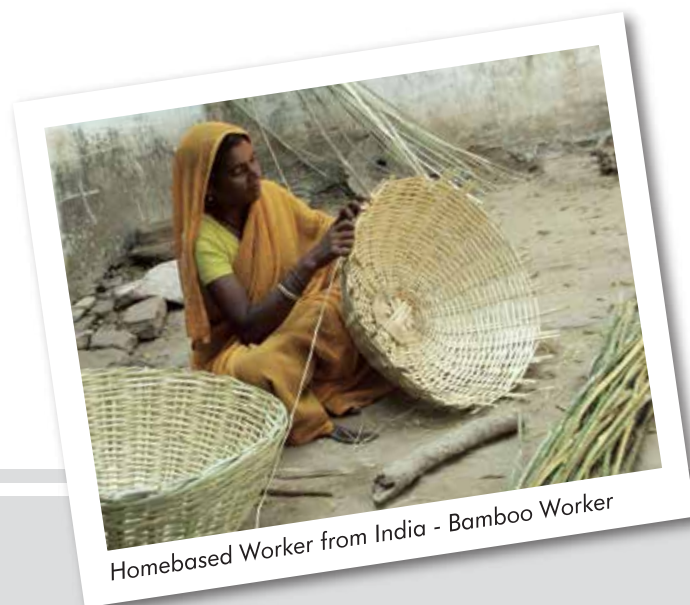
⁶One of the models developed in India for providing social security protection to workers in the informal economy are tripartite Welfare Boards on which representatives of workers, employers and government sit. Funds are raised by levying access on the production of specified goods, or through contributions from various sources including employers, employees, as well as the government. The funds are used for meeting expenditures for the welfare of workers, as prescribed in the laws or schemes concerned.

• Bringing Statistical Visibility

Much of the work of HNSA in the past few years has been aimed at making visible and achieving a greater understanding of the size and scope of homebased workers in South Asia. Believing strongly in the adage that 'statistics have power' and 'you do not count if you are not counted', HNSA has been working with national level data collections institutions to facilitate the collection and tabulation of national data on homebased workers.

A regional workshop was conducted in 2006, where government statisticians from 5 countries discussed about the employment status of homebased workers as per labour force surveys in their respective countries. This consultation was a significant first step towards collection of data on homebased worker at the national levels.

Due to the efforts of HNSA, along with its partners, the Government of India, in 2007, set up an Independent Group on Home-based Workers in India, to examine the existing data sources and suggest means to capture the data related to home-based workers. The recommendations included a formal a definition of the homebased workers, to be used in labour force surveys and data collection. All 5 countries of South Asia have adopted this definition, in 2010. This achievement goes a long way in bringing statistical visibility to the homebased workers, as it not only acknowledges their presence, but gives a clear and precise definition, critical for designing the survey instruments of national level labour force surveys. In India, the 66th Round of Indian National Sample Survey Employment and Unemployment (2009 - 2010), in the Survey collected data on home-based workers using the definitions recommended by the Independent Group on Home-Based Workers.



Homebased Worker from India - Bamboo Worker

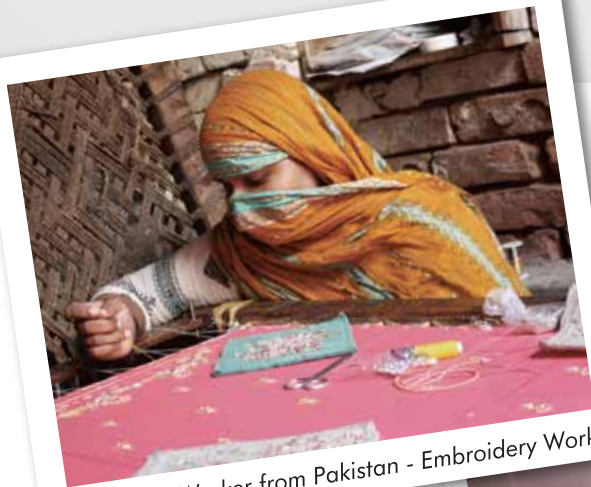
HOMEBASED WORKERS ARE DEFINED AS

(i) Own-account workers (self employed workers) and contributing family workers helping the own-account workers involved in the production of goods and services, in their homes for the market and

(ii) Those Home workers who work in their homes for remuneration, resulting in a product or service as specified by the employer(s), irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used; and those contributing family workers helping such Home workers.

'Home', referred to above, is defined as (i) living place and/or (ii) structure attached to living place and/or (iii) open area / detached structure adjacent to the living place.

Definition as adopted by the Independent Group on Homebased Workers in India, 2007



Piece Rate Worker from Pakistan - Embroidery Worker



Own Account Worker from Sri Lanka - Food Processing

III) SOCIAL SECURITY AND HOUSING

Typically, homebased workers have little or no social protection, and/or minimal or no workers benefits. The diversity of employment and the home as a workplace poses real challenges. Employment relations vary considerably and a major obstacle to introducing contributory social insurance schemes is the difficulty in identifying the employer.

A large number of homebased workers are urban, particularly in South Asia, and adequate shelter is a key issue for them. The situation of homebased workers differs from that of many other poor urban informal workers in that their home is also their workplace. For this reason, the slum-related shelter and environmental problems pose particular concerns in the case of homebased workers. In addition, the lack of urban services - including adequate and affordable supply of electricity, water, sanitation, transportation, and other basic services - threatens not only their living environment but also their livelihoods.

• Action Research As Tool For Visibility

In its efforts to address the vulnerability of homebased workers and to highlight their social security needs, an action research was conducted by HNSA, in partnership with ISST in 2006. This is a regional study, which captures both qualitative and quantitative data, across common sectors in five South Asian countries as well as the poorest of the poor homebased workers in the region. The study shows that all homebased workers share certain sources of vulnerability and their economic insecurities are linked to low earnings, seasonality, stagnant markets, competition from new products/ markets; and also to lack of credit and training support. Health, housing and children's education emerge as top priorities for the homebased workers, the study recommends multiple and creative partnerships - given the wide range of needs - and advocates joint action by many agencies.



Living Conditions - Bangladesh



Living Conditions - Nepal

The social security study also highlighted poignant vignettes of the life and work of some sectors of homebased workers, much of which was never documented earlier. For instance, the Study of Bangladesh workers gave visibility to the most scattered, vulnerable and invisible workers i.e., Shell/Pearl Workers who live on boats under very vulnerable conditions. Similarly, in Nepal the homebased hemp workers face health hazards like respiratory and eye diseases due to working on wooden looms in small rented houses.

• City Level Dialogues To Highlight Homebased Workers Issues

HNSA, through its Inclusive Cities Project⁷, highlights the shelter and infrastructure issues for the urban homebased workers and seeks to sensitize the civic authorities in selected cities about these issues (primarily housing, eviction/rehabilitation, zoning, water supply, electricity, sanitation, etc) in order to create platforms for engagement of HBWs with civic bodies.

Studies have been carried out by HomeNet South Asia researchers (www.homenetsouthasia.net⁸), in 8 countries of South and South East Asia, which guides the city dialogues. Many of these studies can be considered 'frontier' studies given that, in the past, the focus of such research had been primarily on rural homebased workers; relatively little is known about poor urban homebased workers. The goal of each study was to understand the current situation faced by urban poor homebased workers and begin to identify interventions that will help address some of their main challenges, in line with the priorities expressed by those workers themselves. All countries involved in this HomeNet South Asia research made a wide range of core recommendations aimed at improving the livelihoods and living conditions of urban poor homebased workers.



City Official Workshop, Dhaka
(Bangladesh) - 2012



City Official Workshop, Kanpur (India) - 2012

⁷Inclusive cities :-<http://www.inclusivecities.org/>

⁸weblink. http://homenetsouthasia.net/Research_Study.html

These findings of the study are being taken up in dialogues with city officials in all the study cities. They have been successfully held in Dhaka, Kanpur, Siem Reap, Lahore, Gujranwala and Faisalabad, each resulting in some concrete gains for HBWs. In Dhaka, Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has allocated 2 Crores Takas (250,000 \$) for slum upgradation of areas in Dhaka North City. The city dialogues have also fostered dialogues and informal agreements with the employers, and the benefits of this are evident in Kanpur where successful negotiations for regular work and skill building of 200 hosiery homebased workers had been achieved under the government's Micro Small and Medium Enterprise Schemes.

IV) INCREASING MARKET ACCESS

For women homebased workers, accessing markets is a major challenge. Women homebased workers work through middlemen and sub contractors, many a times layers and tiers of contractors and sub contractors. While globalization and trade liberalization has created new opportunities and the demand for many of the products of the homebased workers, particularly in the crafts sector, has expanded considerably – both globally and nationally - the benefits of this do not accrue to them. They are not able to reach these new and expanding markets because they remain isolated, dispersed, and have restrictions on mobility. They do not have appropriate market information, lack exposure to marketing, especially at regional, national or international levels. In many cases, though exceptionally skilled, they are constrained by poor designs, inadequate skills and outdated technology.

• SAARC Business Association Of Homebased Workers (SABAH)

HomeNet South Asia is implementing a project, called SABAH, to strengthen the livelihood for homebased workers in the SAARC region, since 2008, in partnership with SEWA and supported by the SAARC Development Fund⁹. The basic objective is to provide regular work and decent earnings to the HBW members. Over 7000 HBWs, across 7 countries have been touched by this project, till early 2013, with HBW incomes augmented in the range of US \$250,000, in the same period.

The project has several achievements. Homebased workers capacities have been built to manage their own organizations, and several HBWs are part of the Board, constituted under this project. HBW skills and technical knowledge have improved (in terms of understanding design, and relevant techniques and technology, etc), with 4500 HBWs from all 7 countries trained under this project. The HBWs are also fully involved in sales and marketing, negotiating with buyers, understanding consumer preferences, market demands and trends etc.

⁹.weblink, <http://www.sabahsa.org>

The SABAH project has also created infrastructure and institutions. HBW - owned and managed business entities called SABAH (SAARC Business Association of Homebased Workers') have been established in all the SAARC member states - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Buildings and centers such as the Trade Facilitation Centers (TFC), where all the business operations take place have been established alongwith sales outlets in 6 countries.

Trade fairs, exhibitions and crafts mela have been organized during the project period and the project has facilitated homebased workers specially own account workers access to markets and established linkages with international and national associations that promote fair trade practices.

“SABAH is the first and most successful initiative on poverty alleviation undertaken by the SAARC Development Fund. Through the initiative thousands of women have been impacted in their own countries and also, initiative has helped in bringing together women homebased workers in building peace and co-operation within the SAARC region”.

The Former Secretary General of SAARC, Dr. Sheelkant Sharma, at the 16th SAARC Summit, April 2010.



16th SAARC Summit - Bhutan



SOUTH ASIAN
CRAFT MELA, PAKISTAN - 2005

SRI LANKA
SURAJKUND MELA



NEPAL -
PHOTO EXHIBITION - PICTORIAL
STORY OF HOMEBASED
WORKERS IN SOUTH ASIA

‘SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN HOMEBASED WORKERS PRODUCT FAIR’

(a three day Mela 8th - 10th April 2005 organized at Lahore in Pakistan.)

At first glance it could have been mistaken for just another commercial fair; over 30 stalls, four nations and Pakistan's four provinces. But what the estimated near fifteen thousand casual visitors quickly became aware of was that the Mela had been set up with motives superior to commercial ones. Public awareness raising and government lobbying aside, the most exciting aspect of the Mela was how it was empowering those whom it was intended for and how unified they felt in their struggle. Zahida Parveen from Lahore exclaimed, "It feels like we're all one community [within this collection of stalls], and we're all like one family. I made parathas with the Indians yesterday."

Puran Rai from Nepal expressed how impressed she was with the Lahori customer, "We've been to so many melas, but this is unique because it looks like a "para likha" educated mela. Here good people are coming to us and speaking decently. We are sitting here with respect and dignity. They are not bargaining down the prices we have set."

Perhaps the most aesthetically powerful moment of the Mela was the inauguration. The chief guests of the Mela, the homebased workers of South Asia, collected in a line of solidarity to tie up separate ribbons to symbolize a unified network, singing a song of their determination to adorn a world of their choice. The spectrum of colours and designs of their clothes and their faces spoke volumes about the rich diversity of race and culture throughout Pakistan and South Asia. As the song ended, there was a trade unionist chant of "Hum Saab Eik Hai!"



Suraj Kund Mela, Sri Lanka - 2013

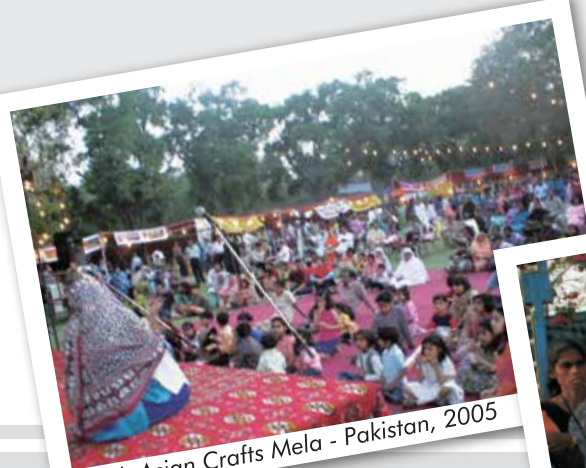
V) BUILDING A REGIONAL PRESENCE

The situation of homebased workers is not very different across countries of South Asia. A large number of them are women who are at the bottom of income and social hierarchies, value chains, and gender hierarchies in almost all parts of South Asia. They are among the poorest and most vulnerable in the region. Using their talents and skills, homebased workers provide crucial incomes, goods and services for their families and communities. However, because they are usually not seen as true 'workers', they are effectively not covered by labour or social protection schemes, and poor women tend to be isolated and voiceless.

WOMEN HOMEBASED WORKERS: REGIONAL CONNECTIONS

In 2007 when the Prime Minister of India, Shri Man Mohan Singh inaugurated a Regional Conference where women workers from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka came together for this event. Padma Kumari Gurung a handloom weaver from Nepal greeted the Prime Minister, saying "I learnt to weave as a little girl and it has given me my living. Today my weaving has brought me to meet many sisters in other countries and the Prime Minister of a neighboring country. I am inspired to do great things with the support of so many people".

The Prime Minister responded by saying, "I do believe that women's empowerment should be a major objective of our social, political and economic policy in South Asia region as a whole. Most homebased workers happen to be women who... have waited for long to secure equality in all senses of that term.



South Asian Crafts Mela - Pakistan, 2005



South Asian Crafts Mela - Pakistan, 2005

Many of the home workers are subcontracted outworkers in large, multi-country international production chains, and as global capital seamlessly moves across national borders for cheap labour, so must the workers' movements. The countries in the South Asia region are quite alike with workers engaged in many similar sectors, it is imperative to build a universal strategy and regional collective strength. This solidarity is essential to have a long-standing impact on improving the industry, since if only one country improves measures, the business will simply move to another of the South Asian profiteers.

The region is also fraught with conflict and tension, and women of the region can go a long way in building peace. A large number of homebased workers are women and when they come together around work issues, they foster a nurturing bond through their work. Their friendships and alliances produce much stronger bonds – with deeper and wider effects – than diplomatic efforts alone could ever hope to achieve.

Collaborating with SAARC One of the key concerns amongst SAARC countries is how to build cooperative ties across the countries of South Asia. To date, efforts towards the cross-country integration of SAARC take place on a number of levels: at the government-to-government level, through business associations, professional associations (e.g., of journalists, doctors and lawyers), cultural exchanges (music, films, dance and the like), and through many other types of exchanges, often involving elite groups. In contrast, the types of exchanges that take place through organisations like the HomeNets and SEWA involve those who are near the bottom of social and economic hierarchies, which makes these kinds of exchanges and alliances across SAARC countries of 'common' people particularly important. In a sense, HNSA has been able to create a slow but steady integration of SAARC countries through poor women, with women taking the lead.

A strong, innovative and unparalleled information base on homebased workers in the region has been created by HNSA and its partners in the region. As of today HNSA is associated with nearly 300 organizations spread over all eight countries of South Asia, and a voice that is heard by both governments and development sector organizations. HomeNet South Asia has been designated by SAARC as the organisational representative (nodal organisation) of homebased workers in the South Asia region.

Today, HNSA has emerged as a leading network of homebased workers in the region, which benefits its network members through information sharing and learning; creating solidarity, removing isolation and facilitating networking; and advocating for enhanced voice and visibility of the homebased workers. In addition to these three classical network functions, HNSA plays a critical role in raising resources for itself and its members. Simultaneously, HBWs and their organizations, NGOs and associated groups are able to benefit through expanded room for negotiation through the 'strength in numbers' concept as well as build regional unity and identity. HNSA has emerged as a platform in the region, which has given poor women homebased workers a hope that the world can be different from their lived realities. It has given them confidence that by creating their own organizations and building a regional network, their lives too can change for the better.

EMPOWERING WOMEN, CHANGING COMMUNITIES

In most communities of South Asia, women tend to be confined to their homes, restricted in their movements and opportunities. When they join an organization it boosts their energies, creates opportunities and leads to empowerment. Although the restrictions continue, they begin to build up support leading to changes in their families and their communities. As Shahida Begum of Sakhar District (Pakistan) noted, in a recent skills training programme hosted by HomeNet South Asia, 'One woman from my village came to my home and told my husband, "How can you allow her to go? It would be the first time anyone from this village would be going out of the country – and that, too, to India! You know the situation there." But before I could answer, my son said, "Someone has to be first, and I'm proud that it's my mother!"'

Reegi Khadgi from Nepal recollecting her transition from a mere homebased worker to an organized Homebased Worker said "When I was just a homebased worker, I had very limited awareness, organizing strength and publicity about my work and thus restricted to a marginal income and recognition. When I organized through Home Net, I got exposure to the outer world, thus getting knowledge of market demand, quality control and publicity of my work. Which help me improving my work and now I am getting good price of my product and more importantly I am getting recognition for my skill."

KATHMANDU DECLARATION

The South Asian Regional Meeting on Women Workers in the Informal Economy Sector, participated by the Governments of India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and by trade unions, nongovernmental organizations and Bangladesh, having met in Kathmandu on 18-20 October 2000 and having deliberated on the issues, hereby resolve as follows:

There are at least 50 million homebased workers in South Asia out of whom around 80% are women. They include own account or self employed workers as well as those who do work for contractors at piece rate.

While these workers contribute significantly to the National Economy, they are mostly illiterate, invisible, unrepresented and voiceless, and are not generally incorporated in the National Development agendas.

Therefore, in order to bring these homebased workers into the national economic mainstream in accordance with the ILO Convention no.177, this meeting recommends:

- Formulation of a National Policy on homebased workers by each country.
- Minimum protection, which would include right to organise, minimum remuneration, occupational health and safety, statutory social protection, maternity, childcare, skill development and literacy programmes.
- Access to markets and economic resources including raw materials, marketing infrastructure, technology, credit and information.
- Set up Social Funds for homebased workers, which would provide insurance against risks of illness, death, old age, accidents, loss of livelihood assets and contingencies as locally required.
- Incorporate into official statistics baseline data regarding various categories of worker in the informal sector.
- Urges SAARC to address the issues of homebased workers in the region and take measures to enable them to deal with the risks and opportunities of globalization.

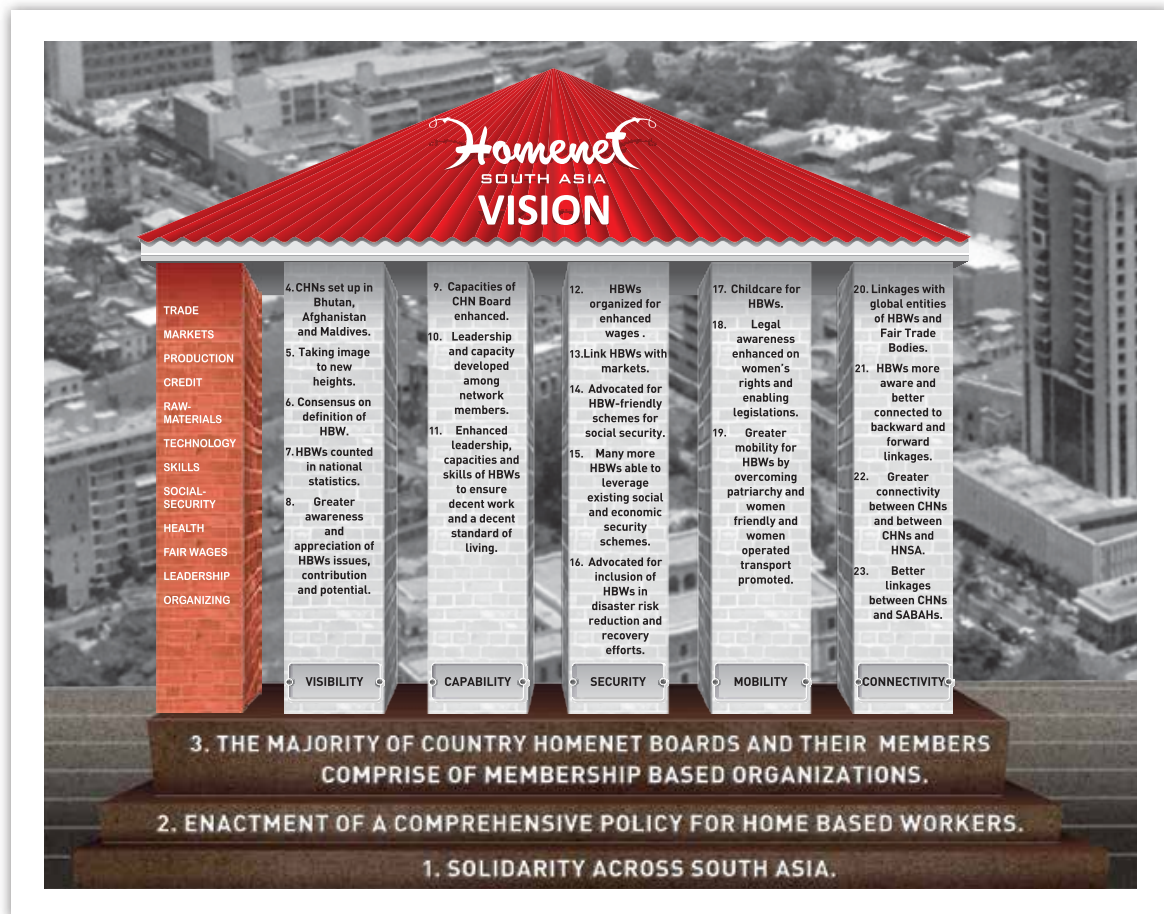
HomeNet's guiding philosophy is presented in its VISION 2015 which stated that HomeNets in South Asia take the lead in building regional solidarity among homebased workers, especially women workers, and empowering them to lead a life of dignity, free of poverty, through obtaining decent work and social protection.

This vision is conceived of as a house with three foundations. These foundations represent: (i) solidarity for homebased workers across South Asia; (ii) a comprehensive policy for homebased workers in each HNSA country; and (iii) the assertion that member-based organizations (MBOS) shall constitute the majority in the governing bodies of all country homenet.

This house is supported by five pillars: (i) visibility; (ii) capability; (iii) social and economic security; (iv) mobility; and (v) connectivity. Each of these pillars has several facets. The national policies embodying this vision-the foundation upon which the house is built-as well as the pillars must take into consideration such key aspects as organization, leadership, fair wages, literacy, health, social security, skills, technology, raw materials, credit, production, markets and trade.



VISION FOR HOMENET SOUTH ASIA





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