



We Are Workers Too!

Organizing Home-based Workers in the Global Economy

About WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global research-policy-action network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. WIEGO builds alliances with, and draws its membership from, three constituencies: membership-based organizations of informal workers, researchers and statisticians working on the informal economy, and professionals from development agencies interested in the informal economy. WIEGO pursues its objectives by helping to build and strengthen networks of informal worker organizations; undertaking policy analysis, statistical research and data analysis on the informal economy; providing policy advice and convening policy dialogues on the informal economy; and documenting and disseminating good practice in support of the informal workforce. For more information see www.wiego.org.

About Inclusive Cities: Launched in 2008, the Inclusive Cities project aims to strengthen membership-based organizations (MBOs) of the working poor in the areas of organizing, policy analysis and advocacy, in order to ensure that urban informal workers have the tools necessary to make themselves heard within urban planning processes. Inclusive Cities is a collaboration between MBOs of the working poor, international alliances of MBOs and those supporting the work of MBOs. The following partners are involved in the Inclusive Cities project: Asiyé eTafuleni (South Africa), AVINA (Latin America), HomeNet South Asia, HomeNet South-East Asia, Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP, India), the Latin America Network of Waste Pickers, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA, India), StreetNet International, and WIEGO. For more information, visit: www.InclusiveCities.org.

This handbook was written for the WIEGO Global Trade Programme by Celia Mather, a freelance writer on workers' rights in the global economy, based in the UK.

Acknowledgements

We are particularly grateful to the members and officials of the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) of India for their help in producing this manual. They include members of two SEWA Embroidery Centres for home-based workers in Sunder Nageri and Rajivnagar in East Delhi. We also thank those who came from various SEWAs, and other Indian trade unions and NGOs to a consultation workshop in Delhi in May 2009. Our especial thanks go to the SEWA Bharat office in Delhi for organizing these events.

We would also like to thank HomeNet South Asia, HomeNet South-East Asia, HomeNet Thailand, HomeNet Pakistan, HomeNet Indonesia, Fairwear Australia, HomeWorkers Worldwide, and Women Working Worldwide for their information, feedback and suggestions.

Publication date August 2010

Published by Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)

Address:

Harvard University
79 John F. Kennedy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
USA

521 Royal Exchange
Manchester M2 7EN
United Kingdom

Phone: 1-617-496-7037

Fax: 1-617-496-2828

Phone: 44-161-819-1200

Fax: 44-161-819-1222

Email: wiego@hks.harvard.edu.

Website: www.wiego.org

Design: Julian Luckham

Cover photograph: Homeworkers who belong to the embroidery centre run by the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Rajivnagar, East Delhi, India. Photograph by Celia Mather.

We Are Workers Too!

Organizing Home-Based Workers in the Global Economy

Introduction	2
1. A world of home-based work	5
2. Organizing home-based workers	17
3. Raising pay and security	33
4. Getting more out of global chains	45
Appendix 1: Support organizations for home-based workers	58
Appendix 2: Other useful sources of information	59



“When we women are not married, we live for our parents. Then we become a wife, and we think of our in-laws. When we are a mother, we think of our children. We don’t think about ourselves. But I say, ‘Come out. Think about yourself too. You can do anything a man can do!’”

Homeworker, SEWA Embroidery Centre, Sunder Nageri, East Delhi, India

Introduction

About this manual

This short manual aims to help home-based workers, no matter where in the world, to know more about:

- their skills and value, not just to their families but to society at large and to the economy, even at a global level;
- their status as workers, and the fact that, like all other workers in the world, they have rights, even if many others do not recognize this yet;
- how they can get together with other home-based workers to get more recognition and improve their situation.

Who this manual is for

This manual is for anyone who is involved in helping home-based workers to organize for a better future.

- You may be a home-based worker wanting to link up with others in your community to find out how together you can, for example, negotiate to get more pay for your work.
- You may come from a local women's organization, a trade union, or a labour rights/welfare body, and be interested in helping to bring home-based workers together, to raise awareness and build collective strength.

Whichever you are, we hope you find this manual useful.

There are two main types of home-based workers:

- 'Own-account' or 'self-employed' workers: those who work for themselves, providing their own capital and equipment, working to their own designs, and selling their own goods or services on the market.
- 'Dependent' workers: those who take in work from others – neighbours, agents, companies - supplying them with the goods or service they have asked for, and getting paid for the work done. In this manual, we refer to this type of home-based worker specifically as 'homeworkers'.

The emphasis in this manual is on the 'dependent' homeworkers rather than those who work for their own account. It is also on those who supply national/global markets rather than local ones. However, much of the manual applies to all home-based workers, whoever they are.

Why WIEGO produced this manual, and what it contains

Home-based workers are among the most exploited in the world, after those in slavery or bonded labour, or child workers.

They are exploited because they find it difficult to organize themselves, largely being separated one from another in their own homes.

Despite this, home-based workers are organizing themselves, in many countries across the world. Some are linked into regional and international networks such as the HomeNets in South Asia and South-East Asia. WIEGO has such organizations and networks of home-based workers among our member organizations.

While various of these organizations and networks have produced education manuals for home-based workers over the past decade or so, there still seems a need for some basic organizing materials.

So, this manual aims to be a first stepping-stone towards helping home-based workers to organize themselves.

- It gives some brief information on the topics covered.
- It suggests activities and questions that home-based workers might like to discuss together, hopefully to come up with a plan of action.
- There are some examples of what home-based workers are already doing, and things they are saying.
- There are 'Arguments to Use' – to persuade whoever is not yet convinced of the role and rights of home-based workers, whether they are other home-based workers, or the companies and agents supplying the work, or governments who make the laws, or husbands, families and communities who fail to appreciate home-based workers' contribution to society and the economy.
- There are suggestions of where to go for more information or help.

These contents are designed to be used in training or awareness-raising workshops with home-based workers. The aim is to stimulate discussion and confidence among them, hopefully leading to some ideas for action.

How people learn differs around the world. So, this is not a manual to use necessarily exactly as it is written. Instead, it aims to give the organizers of home-based workers ideas to use in their own situations.

We have also been able to draw on the experience and suggestions of others, such as HomeNet South Asia and HomeWorkers Worldwide, to compile this manual, for example using photographs to stimulate discussion.

About WIEGO

WIEGO is a global network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. The informal economy involves anyone who is not employed by a clear employer, with an employment contract, that is to say, most of the world's people.

WIEGO:

- carries out research to highlight how big the informal economy is, who is involved, what work they are doing, and the huge contribution they are making to the economy;
- helps to strengthen member-based organizations of informal workers;
- promotes dialogue between representatives of informal worker organizations and others, especially governments, employers, and organizations of civil society.

So our aim is to increase the visibility, voice and validity of the informal economy and the people involved: and that includes home-based workers.

Home-based workers are one focus of the global project **Inclusive Cities for the Working Poor** that WIEGO is a partner in. This project supports the urban working poor to organize themselves, to make themselves heard more clearly in urban planning processes. Other partners in this project include HomeNet South Asia and HomeNet South-East Asia.

More organizations and networks supporting home-based workers around the world are given throughout the manual and also in **Appendix 1**.

For more information visit:

www.wiego.org/occupational_groups/homeBasedProducers/index.php

www.inclusivecities.org/home-based_workers.html

Linked resources from WIEGO

Fact Sheet on Home-Based Workers: www.wiego.org/publications/FactSheets/WIEGO_HomeBased_Workers.pdf

'Organizing in the Informal Economy: Resource books for organizers', 6 booklets, WIEGO and Streetnet for the International Coordinating Committee on Organizing in the Informal Economy (ICC), 2009: www.wiego.org/program_areas/org_rep/index.php#ICCBooklets

'Promoting the ILO Home Work Convention, and the Rights of Homeworkers: A manual for workers' educators and facilitators', Global Labour Institute and HomeNet South Asia, 2010 (forthcoming). This booklet has in-depth information and suggested activities for workers' educators to use on organizing home-based workers, lobbying governments to ratify the **ILO Convention No.177 (1996) on Home Work**, and using this to negotiate collectively and campaign for the rights of home-based workers.

More sources of information are given throughout this manual, and also in **Appendix 2**.

1. A world of home-based work

Across the world perhaps as many as 100 million people work from their own homes, in countries both rich and poor. Some say there are many more. No-one knows for sure. The vast majority are women, combining work for the wider economy with domestic duties for their families.

They are stitching clothes and embroidering; they are assembling jewellery, toys, or umbrellas; they are packing sweets, medicines, or electrical parts; they are baking cakes or making sauces; they are repairing shoes; they are carrying out clerical services on their computer. These are just some of the many tasks that home-based workers do.

Some are 'self-employed' or 'own account' workers, making and selling their own goods or services, often in the local market, sometimes even further afield.

Others are homeworkers who are doing work for other businesses, usually paid on a piece-rate basis. Typically, their work comes to them through a local agent or intermediary. Sometimes, it is actually for a big national or even global company, with their products going to consumer markets far away.

Whoever they are, home-based workers are working behind closed doors, in their own private homes. So they are often invisible, and their contribution to society and the economy goes uncounted.

Often, home-based workers are not seen as 'workers' at all. The skills that they have are taken for granted – it is just 'something that women do'.

The truth is that home-based workers make a massive contribution, not only to their own families, but also to the local, national and even the global economy.

But home-based workers typically have the least security and lowest earnings of all workers. And, in the recent global recession, they were among the first to lose their work and income.

Home-based workers deserve recognition and appreciation for what they do, and to be treated fairly as workers and as women.

"We found that women are always seen as housewives, mothers or sisters, and not as workers. But in reality women are workers and contribute to the economy."

Renana Jhabvala,
Chairperson,
SEWA Bharat, India

Some home-based workers around the world



photo: Leslie Tuttle

Philippines: A woman stitching cushion covers.



photo: Marty Chen

India: A man doing embroidery



photo: Sumartini, HomeNet Indonesia

Indonesia: Children working on washing powder tablets



photo: Leslie Tuttle

Thailand: A man doing brass metal work



photo: John Harris/reportdigital.co.uk

UK: a woman cutting and sewing flags



photo: Carol Willis

Nepal: A weaver



photo: Leslie Turtle

Thailand: An elderly woman bead worker



photo: Sofia Trevino

Mexico: A man tin artisan



photo: Association for the Development of Home Production

Bulgaria: A woman gluing envelopes



photo: Marty Chen

China: Stitchers doing embroidery and beadwork



photo: Marty Chen

Kenya: A woman spinning



photo: Marty Chen

Bangladesh: A woman making clay pots

They also work at home

ACTIVITY

Aim: *To raise awareness of the scope and nature of home-based work around the world, and encourage a sense of shared experience.*

Use photos of home-based workers from around the world, such as those on pages 6-7. You might like to add in other photographs that you have of home-based workers.


Ask home-based workers, working in small groups, to look at the photographs, read out the captions, and consider such questions as:

- Who is in this photograph?
- Where does s/he live?
- Who does s/he live with?
- What work is s/he doing?
- Who is s/he doing the work for – herself or someone else?
- Is s/he paid by the day, the hour, or the piece?
- Is her income ‘pocket money’ or does s/he use it to buy essential items for her family?
- What equipment is s/he using? Did s/he have to go into debt to buy it?

Ask the participants what other questions they have about these home-based workers elsewhere.

Then have a general discussion about the ideas raised by the photographs, and ask:

- What do you think are the differences or similarities with your own situation?
- What conclusions can you draw from these discussions?

 **Tip:** Organizers at a WIEGO workshop in India in May 2009 suggested first using photographs from your own region or country, and then later using ones from around the world. They thought many home-based workers would find foreign photographs more difficult to interpret, and so a step-by-step process might help build awareness.

“We have learned that a good method is to gather the women together and show them SEWA movies about how women are working, and about SEWA rallies for better wages. They see that other women are doing what they are doing.”

Zaitun Pathan, former homemaker, and Ami Shailat, organizers for SEWA Ahmedabad, India, at a WIEGO workshop, May 2009

‘Invisible Workers’ is a short (1.15 minutes) SEWA video of homeworkers, doing their work, going on a street rally, and meeting an official. It can be downloaded from: www.videosewa.org/ourwork.htm

Why are home-based workers so invisible?

“No ID cards, no protective regulations, no safety measures, no bargaining powers.”

G. Nawab, Bihar Rajya Gharkhata Mazdoor Union, India, at a WIEGO workshop, May 2009

Where home-based workers work is their own home. This is a private space, not a public one. So it is hard for others to enter their world, see what they are doing, and know their reality.

Home-based workers often also work alone or at most with just some family members. Some may hardly ever leave their homes. It is not like working in a factory where you have your work colleagues to talk with.

Home-based workers usually work long hours on what they are producing for the outside world. Plus – especially for those (the majority) who are women - they have domestic responsibilities caring for their families. So it is hard to find the time to come together and form groups that might give them more voice and make them more visible.

As a result, all too often, it is as if home-based workers do not exist.

⇒ **Governments** fail to include home-based workers in their policies.

Few governments try to find out how many home-based workers there are, in what sectors they are working, and what their economic contribution really is. So, there are hardly any official statistics on home-based workers. They are usually ignored in economic development programmes, employment legislation, and social security systems. When they are noticed, governments tend to classify them all as ‘entrepreneurs’ rather than the ‘workers’ that many are - let alone as workers with rights under law.

⇒ **Private companies** often use the work of homeworkers, but indirectly.

Mostly, bigger companies put out the work to homeworkers through agents or other types of intermediary. Some know that homeworkers are involved in their supply chains, but prefer to turn a blind eye as much as possible. Some simply don’t know. Whichever is the case, most big companies like being able to side-step their responsibility as employers for these workers, while still benefiting from their work.

“The buyers and exporters keep calling what the women earn ‘pocket money’. I try my best to argue with them that, no, this is pay for them as workers. It is a real, on-going problem to change their mind-set. But it is also part of a much bigger problem.”

Sanjay Kumar, Coordinator, SEWA Bharat, India

-
- ⇒ **Communities and families** often don't see what they do as 'real work'.

Commonly - even among home-based workers – the work is seen as just 'something extra' that they do. Their earnings are spoken of as if 'pocket money' or merely additional to the 'main' income brought in by husbands or fathers. This is despite the fact that what they earn is often essential to the well-being of their families; it can in reality be the 'main' income.

Their skills are taken for granted. Most did not learn them at school or college, but from family members, or by sitting down together as neighbours, in the community. In these ways skills are passed on between women through the generations. But it means that even high-level skills are given low value.

A lot of this is to do with the way that women are seen in our societies, what women's 'place' is said to be. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Home-based workers do have rights, and can demand to be recognized.

What You Can Do

- ⇒ Use the following pages on home-based workers' rights – as handouts, or read them out aloud, or stick them on walls – to help raise awareness and stimulate more discussion.

Children who work at home



photo: Marfy Chen

In many situations where work is taken into the home, children are working as well as the adults. Their labour is needed because the family is poor, and needs to produce more so as to earn more. Or children are needed to help meet a difficult deadline on time.

Children should not work, even in their own homes. This is something agreed by governments at an international level. However, poverty and exploitation mean that many home-based workers have little other option.

Organizing together to negotiate better pay and reasonable deadlines starts the process of ending child labour.

What needs to happen so that you do not have to ask your children to work?

In **Indonesia**, organized homeworkers are focussing on getting the legal minimum wages (see page 27) applied also to them, so that parents do not need to have their children work, and children can go to school instead.

www.homenetseasia.org/new_impact.html

Home-based workers are workers and do have rights

All workers everywhere have rights. Whether we work in a workshop, a factory, an office, a field - **or in our own homes** - all of us have rights. This has been agreed at the highest level, in the United Nations, where governments agree to international standards on human rights. Of course, it is then often a struggle to get these rights respected. But the basic fact is that home-based workers do have rights.

⇒ Step 1: To know that we are workers

Home-based workers are often not seen as 'workers'. Families and communities say 'Oh, it is just some extra income that she brings in'. Even home-based workers can see themselves in this way.

This then means that most governments do not recognize home-based workers as 'workers' in employment and social security laws. So home-based workers are denied the employment rights and social security provision such as pensions that they should have.

Companies and agents also downplay the value they get from the hard work of home-based workers, even though they often make good profits out of it. It is very convenient for them.

It is not fair, and not according to international standards, to deny that home-based workers are workers. So the first step is for home-based workers to say:

'Yes, we are workers.'

⇒ Step 2: To know our rights

Rights are:

- What we are entitled to.
- What nobody can take away from us.
- What other people must respect, whoever they are.

All who work have rights, whoever and wherever we are. This has been laid down at the international level by governments in the United Nations. For example, the Universal Declaration of Fundamental Human Rights says:

*"All human beings are born free and equal
in dignity and rights."*

Workers' rights are human rights there is a special body, the International Labour Organization (ILO), which oversees these rights. Employers, governments and trade unions sit down in the ILO, and together they agree international labour standards.

Usually these standards then have to be passed into the laws of each country to make them work. However, some labour rights are so fundamental that they apply to all workers in all countries, whether or not our own government respects them. They are called the '**core**' ILO standards:

- The freedom to form and join trade unions.
- The right for trade unions to negotiate with employers.
- An end to forced labour.
- An end to child labour.
- An end to discrimination in the workplace.
- Equal pay for equal work.

These rights apply also to homeworkers who are working for others – or they should apply, even if your own government or employer tries to deny it.

What is more, in 1996 the ILO adopted a special convention for the rights of homeworkers who are working for others. To be clear, this Convention does not apply to 'own account workers' but only to 'dependent' homeworkers, (see page 2 for the distinction). It is **Convention No.177 on Home Work**, and it says, for example, that homeworkers have the right to:

- equal treatment with other kinds of workers
- statutory social protection, including maternity protection
- occupational health and safety protection.

This Convention also says that any person or body who places a contract with homeworkers is the employer, and should fulfill their legal responsibilities as an employer. The main companies and their sub-contractors and agents should agree and put it in their contracts with each other who is bearing that responsibility.

Also, governments should include home-based work in their statistics and policy-making.

It took a lot of hard work by the trade unions and homeworkers' organizations to get ILO Convention No.177 agreed at international level. So far, however, only seven countries: **Albania, Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Finland, Ireland, and the Netherlands** have put it into their national law. So, there is plenty to do to get this Convention accepted by more governments around the world.



Poster by HomeNet Pakistan

“It is hard to organize homeworkers. They do not understand their own identity as ‘workers’ – this is one of our biggest challenges.”

Zaitun Pathan, former homeworker, and Ami Shailat, organizers for SEWA Ahmedabad, India, at a WIEGO workshop, May 2009

Some countries do include homeworkers in national employment laws:

In the **Netherlands**, homeworkers have the same rights to holiday benefits and wage regulations as employees who work at a place of employment. (Decree No.481 of 2 September 1996)

In the **UK**, the National Group on Homeworking campaigned for many years and, with support from the trade unions, won specific rights for homeworkers in minimum wage legislation (see also page 25).

It is very important for all homeworkers to find out whether and how the laws in their own country do, at least in theory, give them some recognition and protection.

Whatever national laws state, however, the international ILO Convention means that all homeworkers in the world can firmly say:

‘Yes, we are workers with rights.’

⇒ **Step 3: To get our rights as workers respected**

Even though there is an international Convention and national laws in some countries, it is still a big problem for home-based workers to get their rights recognized and put into practice.

Across the world, all workers face difficulties in claiming their rights. In the global economy of today, countries and companies compete for markets. They play workers off each other. If you don’t want to do the work for the price they are offering and in the time that they demand, they threaten to go elsewhere, and they often do. In this way, they drive down the conditions for all workers everywhere. So, solidarity between workers is vital.

It is especially difficult for home-based workers to claim their rights. It is almost impossible for a lone homeworker to negotiate with the agent who brings the work to her house.

There will be no respect for their rights unless homeworkers organize together. By collaborating, homeworkers can more easily get their voice heard – by governments, employers, and communities. Even if their government tries to ignore them or the law doesn’t recognize them, homeworkers can still collectively approach their agent, their employer, to negotiate for better working terms and conditions. A group has much more power than individuals on their own.

This is why it is so important for homeworkers to find a way of getting together, to say:

‘Yes, we are workers with rights, and we want those rights respected.’

What you can do

- ⇒ **Get homeworkers together and make a list of the rights you would like to have respected;** these might include:
 - Being paid at least the legal minimum wage
 - Reasonable working hours and deadlines
 - Access to government social security provision, such as paid maternity leave.
- ⇒ **Find out your legal rights:** whether your country's employment and social security laws do or do not include home-based workers; what does your country's Constitution say?
- ⇒ **Try to win supporters** for your rights among trade unions, women's organizations, human rights groups, religious groups, sympathetic journalists, academics, and others.
- ⇒ **Raise public awareness,** for example, through the local radio, or by holding or joining in demonstrations on International Women's Day on 8 March, or International Labour Day on 1 May each year.
- ⇒ **Campaign for ILO Convention No.177 (1996) on Home Work** to be ratified by your government, working in collaboration with trade unions.

To carry out such activities, homeworkers need to get together. Ideas for how to do this are given in Section 2.

Arguments to use

- ⇒ Just because we are women working in our own homes, for our own families, doesn't mean we are not contributing to the economy and society as a whole; the truth is that we make a big contribution.
- ⇒ We are workers, and we do have rights; this is something agreed by governments at international level; now we need to get it put into practice.

For more information

WIEGO Fact Sheet on Home-Based Workers:

www.wiego.org/publications/FactSheets/WIEGO_HomeBased_Workers.pdf

'Promoting the ILO Home Work Convention, and the Rights of Homeworkers:

A Manual for Workers' Educators and Facilitators', Global Labour Institute and HomeNet South Asia, 2010 (forthcoming). As well as details about the ILO Home

Work Convention, this manual also has more workers' stories which can be read out in groups.

Winning legal rights for homeworkers

In **Thailand**, a survey by the National Statistical Office revealed over 440,000 home-based workers, three-quarters of them women. But in reality there may be up to two million. The country's National Economic and Social Development Board has accepted that the contribution of home work to the national economy is no less than that of the formal economy.



When thinking about how to get improvements in the laws for home-based workers, HomeNet Thailand took a careful look at the existing laws. They found several helpful paragraphs in the country's Constitution, and in legislation on occupational health and safety and welfare rights. They and their allies used this information to lobby for these laws to be applied to home-based workers.

Then, after much lobbying, in 2004 the Minister of Labour passed a special Ministerial Regulation for homeworkers (those who work for others). It contained some good elements, such as a written contract signed by both the employer and employee; payment within 15 days of the work being completed; employers' responsibility for workers' safety; equal treatment for women workers and no sexual harassment; no child labour under the age of 15 years; and homeworkers' right to make a complaint to labour inspectors or the courts. There were weaknesses, though: for example, it did not say whether contractors who bring the work to the homeworkers are the employers. And there were many difficulties in getting the regulation implemented.

So HomeNet continued to approach the Ministry for improvements, even meeting with the Minister several times. This led the Ministry to draft the Homeworker Protection Act, which was approved by the Cabinet in 2007. Again, it contained some good elements, including many of those above, plus official labour inspection. But the definition of homeworkers was limited, and HomeNet continued to lobby. Then political turmoil slowed its progress in Parliament. However, by March 2010 the Act had been passed by the Lower House and, depending on the state of unrest in the country, HomeNet was hopeful that it would become law before the end of 2010.

www.homenetthailand.org

Full text of the draft '**Promotion and Protection of Homeworkers Act**' of Thailand: www.homenetthailand.org/h_english/resources4-1.htm



photo: HomeNet Thailand

Mobilisation of home-based workers by HomeNet Thailand has helped to make their economic contribution, and their needs as workers, much more visible to the country's law-makers, see page 15.

2. Organizing home-based workers

“Unless we are organized, we cannot change the mindsets of people.”

Homeworker,
SEWA Embroidery Centre,
Rajivnagar,
East Delhi, India

By the very nature of what they do, home-based workers are often isolated from each other. It is not like all working in the same factory or workshop or office, where there is more opportunity to swap stories, exchange ideas, and come up with a plan together.

In some communities, women are working in their own homes because this makes it easier to fit income-earning activities around childcare, cooking and other household duties.

In others, women work at home because the general view is that they should not leave the house to go out to work. Sometimes family members can be very resistant to letting women leave the house to join up with other women.

Another difficulty is that women home-based workers have very little time and few resources to give to any organization. The organization has to be built around their real lives.

So, in many places, bringing home-based workers together and building an organization takes a lot of persistent effort. But it is the only way for them to improve their situation: to get more visibility and recognition for their work and economic contribution, to negotiate better pay and conditions, to get access to social security, and generally get what they deserve for all their hard work.



photo: Celia Mather

Homeworkers meet with organizers at the SEWA Stitching Centre in Sunder Nageri, East Delhi, India

How to bring home-based workers together

Aim: To discuss the best ways to attract home-based workers to come together.

How best to bring home-based workers together varies from community to community. So, the solutions need to be found through local discussion.

ACTIVITY

In small groups, discuss the benefits, opportunities and barriers to home-based workers in your locality getting together.

- What are the benefits of home-based workers becoming organized? What are the arguments we can use to persuade more of them about this?
- How can we best make contact with homeworkers?
- What stands in the way of women home-based workers in our community getting together? Is it, for example:
 - Lack of time?
 - Lack of confidence?
 - Resistance from family members?
 - Other problems?
- How might we overcome each of these barriers? What are the arguments and tactics we can use?
- What are the issues affecting home-based workers most, which they might like to discuss with each other?
- Where might we meet?
- Who might help us? Think about other community-based organizations in your locality that you could ask.

From these discussions, try to draw up a plan of action: what action to take, and who will do it.



Tip: Doing a 'SWOT analysis' may help.

'SWOT' stands for:

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats



Reaching out to home-based workers

Making contact with home-based workers means taking imaginative steps - ones that fit with the lives and concerns of the workers, for example:

- ⇒ Training **organizers from the same community** as the home-based workers, in the UK, they call it 'like organizes like' (see below);
- ⇒ **Repeatedly visiting** home-based workers in their own homes, over a long period, as SEWA in India does (see page 20);
- ⇒ Using the **local radio**; this has proved successful in the UK (see below) as well as in Australia;
- ⇒ Getting access to **TV air-time**, by buying advertising space, being interviewed on helpful subjects such as health and safety, or by making news;
- ⇒ Asking a supportive organization such as a trade union or a community-based group to run a **hot-line** where home-based workers can ring in if they have access to a telephone;
- ⇒ Focussing on **the issues which are important to the workers**.

'Like Organizes Like'

In the **UK**, the KFAT garment workers' trade union knew it needed some new approaches to organize homeworkers. Many are women of the Asian communities in the UK, who for cultural reasons prefer to work at home.

The British unions had a special programme of developing young activists into union organizers. And they use the concept that 'Like Organizes Like' - that the best people to make contact with new workers and win their trust are people from the same community.

One of the new organizers they trained was Chanda Parmar-Bonta. She went to work in Leicester, a city with a big garment industry, employing many Asian workers who originally come from India and East Africa. Chanda says,

"Luckily, I come from the same community. We placed adverts on Asian language radio. This was at a time when the new minimum wage law was coming in, and we used this as a recruiting tool. We used the expertise of community-based organizations, for example the local Asian Women's Centre which has the capacity to translate, and has trust within the community."

'From Marginal Work to Core Business: European Trade Unions Organizing in the Informal Economy', FNV, May 2003

www.etuc.org/a/1924



“We hear the noise of their machines”

In **India**, organizers from the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in several regions have found that it takes persistence to enable home-based workers to organize.

One tactic SEWA organizers use is to repeatedly visit homes in particular communities to win the trust of women and their families. They have developed interesting ways of gaining the support and involvement of husbands.

“We go on door-to-door visits. We find out where they are working by hearing the noise of their machines. Then we go into their houses, and try to convince them to come to our meetings. This is the most difficult thing. Our organizers have to visit many times. Sometimes we are told we are ‘interfering’, but we persist.

Husbands can be very resistant. So we organize ‘couples’ classes where the husbands come too, to learn about what the women are doing. We organized it through the Central Board for Workers’ Education, and this means that we can pay them 70 rupees (US\$1.54) every day that they come, in lieu of wages. If we didn’t pay them, they wouldn’t come.”

Zaitun Pathan, former homemaker, and Ami Shailat, organizers for SEWA Ahmedabad, India, at a WIEGO workshop, May 2009

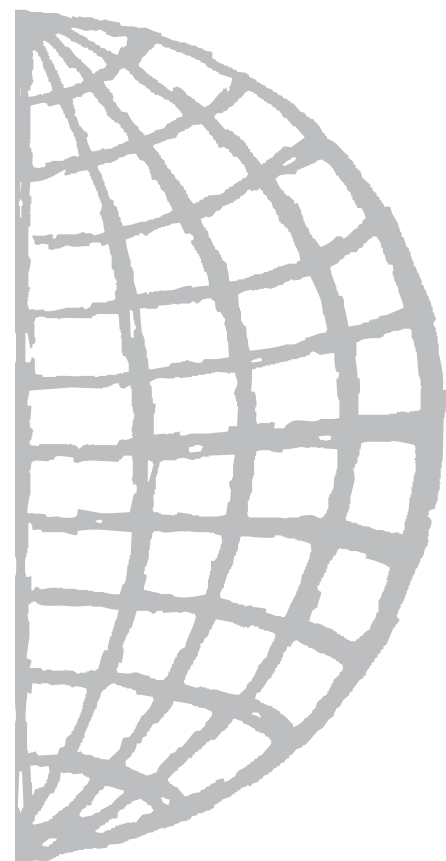
Pay and working hours are very important issues for homeworkers. But they may not be the most pressing problems that homeworkers want addressed first, in SEWA’s experience. Some might be more interested in childcare or healthcare; for others it might be literacy training, for example.

“On the home visits, we talk about family problems, not just about embroidery.”

Ushaben, SEWA Embroidery Centre organizer, Delhi, India

Being open to the actual concerns of home-based workers is very important. What are the difficulties they face; what are their hopes for the future?

More about the SEWA Embroidery Centres in Delhi can be found on pages 55-57.



“We find we have to persuade them through continually holding meetings. At first, three, four or five women come. They earn more money, and this impresses other women and so they join.”

Ms Sangeeta and Ms Manju, SEWA Bihar, at a WIEGO workshop, May 2009

Different types of organization

There are different types of organization to which home-based workers can belong.

Some are groups that give good support to home-based workers, but their policies and activities remain decided by people who are not themselves home-based workers.

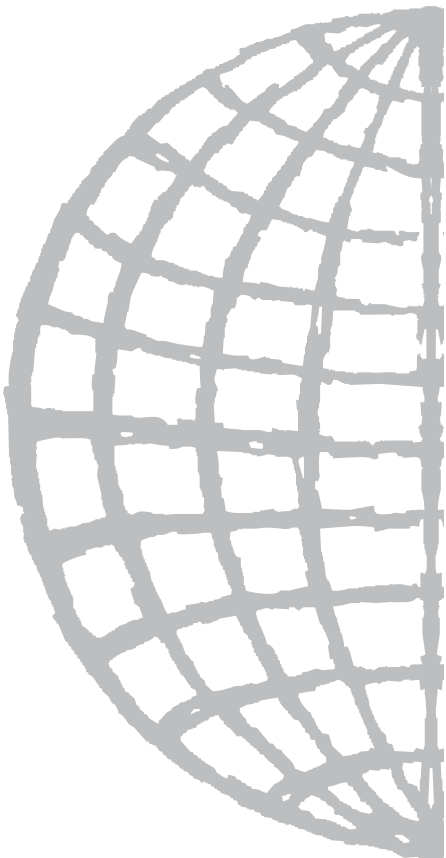
Some are associations of home-based workers themselves. In these 'member-based organizations' (MBOs), the workers who are members democratically decide the policies and activities of the organization.

Other groups are a mixture of both. Whatever the structure, the most important element is that the workers who are members should be the ones to determine the policies. This gives home-based workers the greatest possibility of expressing their own voice and determining their own future.

⇒ **Are there any organizations like these on the following pages which might help homeworkers in your area to organize? If you don't know, how might you find out?**

Local social, welfare or religious groups

A local group that is concerned about the situation may invite home-based workers to meet up. This can be a useful first step towards helping them gain confidence to discuss and develop plans together. Such groups may offer more support too, such as training or facilities, and then continue to be useful allies (see page 30).



In **Chile**, seaweed homeworkers were supported by the women's organization CECAM to develop a local trade union. After training, they managed to cut out the agents who had been buying their seaweed at a low price. Their incomes more than doubled and they got greater control over how they work. They became part of an international supply chain selling seaweed to international cosmetics firms and food producers.

From '**Campaigns at Work**' by Annie Delaney, HWW, 2004

Trade unions

These are organizations of workers, run by and for the members (MBOs). In some countries, the laws governing trade unions do not yet include homeworkers but, as we have seen (page 12), all workers in the world do have the right to join or form organizations of their own choice – and that means homeworkers too have this right.

There are advantages in being associated with the trade unions. Unions are officially recognized, and experienced in many aspects of organizing, lobbying governments, and negotiating with employers. They are also part of an international movement, known as the Global Unions (see page 49).

Many trade unions around the world are sympathetic to the plight of homeworkers, and try to help. However, they may not yet know what to do. Their focus has been on workers in the ‘formal’ economy, those who have jobs in factories, offices, workshops or on farms. So they tend to know less about the situation of homeworkers, and how to include them in their organization, lobbying or negotiating. Some only have enough resources to concentrate on their existing membership.

Other trade unions may be hostile to home-based work, believing that all work should take place in workplaces that can be more easily regulated by law. They may see homeworkers as undercutting the wages of factory-based workers. Some are still dominated by men who are not so willing to take up women workers’ issues.

Yet, more and more unions realize that part-time, short-term, casual work contracts, and outsourcing of work, have been growing. To continue to support their traditional members, they also have to fight for workers in other situations.

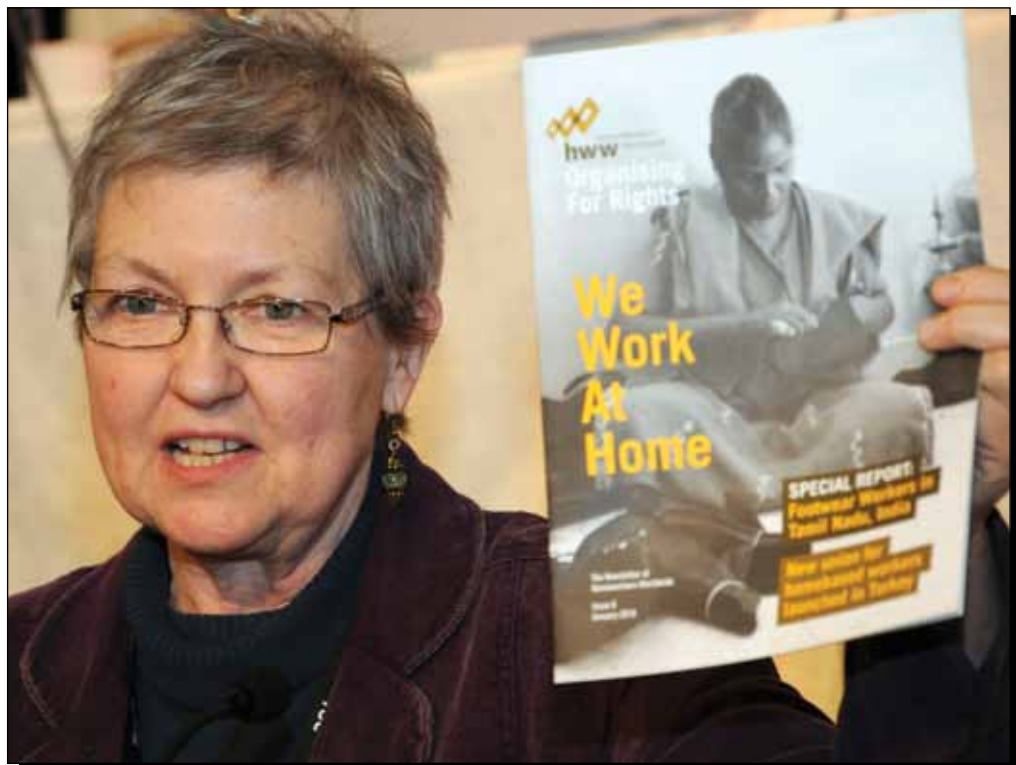


photo: Janina Strickreportdigital.co.uk

A trade union delegate speaks to the Women’s Conference of the British Trades Union Congress, to win more support for homeworkers’ rights around the world.



On the island of **Madeira**, an autonomous region of Portugal, the Union of Embroiderers has been active for over thirty years. It has organized thousands of homeworkers doing embroidery, most of whom live in the rural areas. Gradually, through constant mobilizing of the women, the union has won agreements with their employers and the regional government giving the homeworkers access to social protection and employment rights.

The most important is a special social security scheme for homeworkers giving them medical cover for themselves and their families, plus a pension when they retire – and they are entitled to retire early because of the strain to their eyes from their work. They also have rights to unemployment benefit, and to written statements about piece-rates and their earnings.

In **Nepal**, the GEFONT union federation started focussing on informal workers in 1992, and developed several sector-based unions for home-based workers. In April 2007, GEFONT succeeded in getting the country's Department of Labour to register a homeworkers' union for the first time.

www.homenetsrilanka.org/pdf/2/Presentation_on_Home_based_final.pdf

In **Turkey**, a new trade union specifically for home-based workers was launched in November 2009. It is called Ev-Ek-Sen and includes both 'own account' and 'dependent' homeworkers, and some who do both types of work. It is the result of many years of hard work by the Working Group on Women Homebased Workers in the country. Ev-Ek-Sen still has to struggle for the right to be a trade union as this is not yet recognized under Turkish law.

'**We Work At Home**', HWW newsletter, No.6, January 2010

In **Australia** from the late 1980s, the garment workers' trade union TCFUA (Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia) decided to reach out to homeworkers. Companies were putting more and more garment work out to workers in their own homes, and factory-based jobs were disappearing. The union set up a telephone hot-line in 1994, and was amazed when 6,000 homeworkers rang in the first year alone, looking for support. By the mid-1990s, the TCFUA calculated that Australia had over 300,000 homeworkers in the textile, clothing and footwear industries.

It took a lot of organizing, but they won new state legislation and industry-wide agreements (known as 'industry awards' in Australia) that regulated pay and working hours, and gave homeworkers rights such as paid holidays. They also attracted supporters from community-based groups, religious groups, and consumer groups, and together they formed the 'FairWear' campaign.

By 1997, their campaign pressure led some companies that make and sell clothes to sign up to a Homeworkers' Code of Practice (see page 52). In 2006, they successfully beat off attempts by the national government to undermine the legislation they had won by redefining 'dependent' homeworkers as 'independent contractors' (own-account workers). But in the current economic decline, and with a reduction in import tariffs that had been protecting this industry in Australia, Fairwear reports many homeworkers now losing work or being paid less.

www.fairwear.org.au

"I work 14 hours a day, every day of the week. Last week I earned A\$1.70 (US\$1.50) an hour (and) that was with my husband and two children giving me a lot of help."

Jenny, a homemaker in Australia

"The treatment of clothing homeworkers in Australia is shameful for a society that promotes itself as clever, developed and first world."

Annie Delaney, TCFUA / FairWear, in 'New Ways of Organizing in the Informal Sector: Four Case Studies of Trade Union Activity', HomeNet, October 1999.



Photo: FairWear

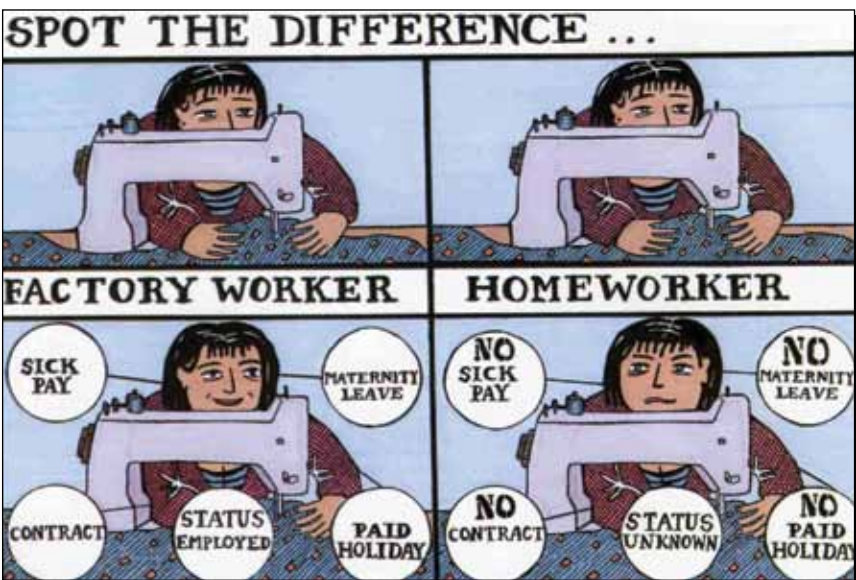
Associations of home-based workers

In some situations, it can be difficult for home-based workers to join the existing trade union movement. Perhaps the unions are not yet willing or able to take on organizing homeworkers. Perhaps the home-based workers wish to gain more confidence on their own first, or think it is a better way to represent their own voice, while still building alliances with others.

In the south-west of **Bulgaria** in Eastern Europe, women homeworkers have formed an association called Kaloian. Many shoe companies from Italy and Greece have set up factories in their region; they send work out to smaller workshops and intermediaries, who in turn pass some of it on to homeworkers in nearby towns and villages. Usually the women hand-stitch the uppers of shoes sold in expensive stores across the world.

Kaloian organizes small village meetings and bigger regional events to give visibility to the homeworkers and demand recognition and rights for them. So far, they have won equal pay for homeworkers doing the same work, written work contracts, entitlement to medical care, and the adoption of the ILO Home Work Convention by the Government of Bulgaria.

In the **UK**, the National Group on Homeworking operated for over twenty years, raising awareness through research and information, and campaigning for employment rights for homeworkers. The NGH produced training materials, lobbied politicians and governments at all levels, and stimulated the local organization of homeworkers. In cities such as Birmingham and Leicester, groups produced information packs, with translations in such languages as Urdu and Chinese for women from the minority communities in the UK who are often working from home. They let homeworkers know about their employment rights, social protection, and where to find local trade unions, training and advice centres. Together with the unions, they successfully lobbied central government and got the national legal minimum wage applied to homeworkers.



Sadly, after twenty years of operating, the National Group ran out of funding and had to close in November 2008. But its website still offers advice to British homeworkers, and there is a new project in the north of England, supported by funding from Oxfam.

www.homeworkersww.org.uk

'Your Rights as a Homeworker',
TUC, UK: www.tuc.org.uk/tuc/homeworkers.pdf

Networks and alliances of supporters

Home-based workers do not need to feel alone in fighting for their rights, as these pages show. As well as social and welfare groups, trade unions, and social enterprises, other supporters include concerned individuals such as academics and labour activists.

In some countries, such supporters have come together – along with the organizations of home-based workers where they exist - to form a network or alliance specifically to help fight for the rights of home-based workers.

HomeNets are an example of this. They exist in various Asian countries such as India, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, and they differ one from another in their form and activities. They are linked, along with others, into regional networks in South and South-East Asia (see pages 49 and Appendix 1).

In **Thailand**, the **HomeNet** network first started to form in the early 1990s, when concerned NGOs, academics, and home-based workers' groups got together, helped by a project of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on social protection. That project ended after a few years, but they didn't stop.

Their main concern was to get legal protection and access to social security and health insurance for home-based workers (see page 40). They also concentrated on occupational health and safety, and found that OHS training is a good organizing tool (see page 42). Plus they set up an umbrella organization called the Foundation for Labour and Employment Promotion which continues today.

Gradually they built five regional networks across the country, linked into the national HomeNet, and they encouraged the organization of local groups of home-based workers, which number about 150 today. Of these, 80 groups are for 'own account' workers, 30 for homeworkers who work for others, and about 40 have a mixture of both. Altogether about 7,000 workers are involved, three-quarters of whom are women.

HomeNet Thailand has played more of a service role for these groups, but now it is trying to become more of a membership-based organization (MBO, see page 21), that is to say with individual members who participate and have a say in the running of the organization. They have been taking advice on this from SEWA in India (see pages 55-57).

By early 2010 about 1,600 individual members had joined HomeNet Thailand, each paying an annual fee of 10 baht (US\$0.30) and receiving a membership card. They now have a newsletter to which these members are encouraged to contribute, and have been running a photo competition, for example. There is also a new cremation scheme in which members contribute 10 baht each to the family of any member who dies; at the time of writing 540 workers had joined.

www.homenetthailand.org

Cooperatives

“A cooperative is a democratic organization engaged in the market place, providing goods and services. It is based on people, not capital or government direction.”

‘Let’s organize! A SYNDICOOOP handbook for trade unions and cooperatives about organizing workers in the informal economy’, by Stirling Smith, Syndicoop, 2006: www.ledknowledge.org/UserFiles/UserAdmin/File/Document-Blog/Manualsyndicoop_report.pdf

“Cooperatives are enterprises which help their members cooperate together to solve problems they share.”

‘Handbook on Cooperatives for Use by Workers’ Organizations’, by Guy Tchami, ILO, 2007: www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_094046.pdf

Cooperatives are, like trade unions, a form of member-based organization (MBO). Ordinary people pool their resources – even as little as they have - and work together so as to improve their economic situation, as individuals and as a group. Some call this the ‘solidarity economy’ or the ‘social economy’. It is very different from the capitalist private enterprise that dominates our world, where just a few owners get almost all of the profit.

Women especially benefit from cooperatives because in many societies they have less access than men to ownership in the private economy.

Cooperatives can be set up for various types of activity. There are:

- ⇒ **Production cooperatives** where workers who produce the same goods or services can share the cost of raw materials, equipment, transport, etc., so reducing the cost for each individual member;
- ⇒ **Marketing cooperatives** where people who produce goods or services get together to find better markets for their enterprise; they are particularly useful for own account home-based workers;
- ⇒ **Savings and credit cooperatives** where members contribute savings and can borrow from this capital that they have collectively built up;
- ⇒ **Consumer cooperatives** where people get together to buy goods in bulk, at a cheaper price; sometimes they run shops where they, and perhaps others in their area, can buy food and other daily necessities at a better price.
- ⇒ **Housing cooperatives** where people collectively own and run the premises where they live, so as to secure better quality housing at a price they can afford.

Across the world, over 800 million people belong to cooperatives, and 100 million are employed by them. Over half of all agricultural produce in the world is marketed through cooperatives. Most countries have specific laws governing cooperatives.

HomeNet Indonesia is supporting two new initiatives related to cooperatives for the 3000 members of the Indonesian Women Homeworkers Trade Union (HWPRI) in different parts of the country. One is a marketing cooperative called HWPRI Collection, which aims to help members to improve their products and production methods – largely making traditional handicrafts and cloth/clothing - and to get better access to local and tourist markets.

The other is a savings-credit cooperative based in East Java. This cooperative also maintains stocks of nine daily necessities - rice, sugar, cooking oil, etc. - for its members to buy at a cheap price so as to ensure food security.

www.homenetindonesia.org

Social enterprises

These are privately-owned businesses, but ones which use their profits for social good. They may invite home-based workers to work with them rather than to get work from the usual companies and agents. They may hold meetings to encourage their workers to speak up and get involved in problem-solving. In some cases, their workers may hold shares in the enterprise, and therefore become co-owners.

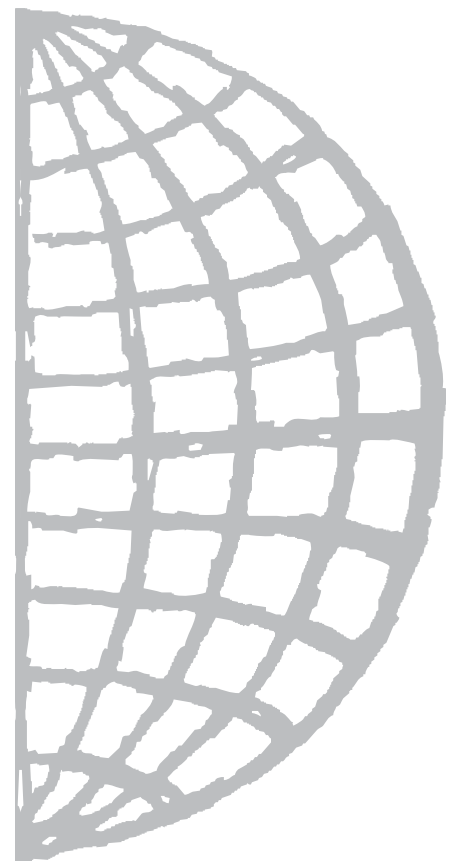
SADHNA is a women's handicraft enterprise in southern Rajasthan, **India**. It was originally set up by a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), named Seva Mandir, to provide a means of livelihood for women from poor communities. Starting with just a small group of 15, it has grown to 625 women members, in 43 groups.

Group leaders collect cut pieces from a central production centre and distribute them among the members to do embroidery and appliqué. "The ownership of the organization lies in the hands of these artisans and the entire surplus earned goes to them only".
www.sadhna.org

"When we started, the women had little self-confidence. The men were mostly daily wage earners, and whatever little they earned was often spent on drinking. Drawing the women into handicraft work was difficult because of their own hesitation and because of the restrictions imposed by men.

But now, after several years of working with them, there has been a sea change. The women are now highly respected, not just within their own families but also in their neighbourhoods and villages. They are now not just economically empowered, but also socially and politically so."

Leela Vijayvergia, Chief Executive, SADHNA, India



Developing capacity and leaders

Whichever type of organization home-based workers belong to, they ought to have a 'say' in developments that affect them. Why should others always speak on their behalf?

"We are going to have to negotiate with those who want to buy our work and for that we must be large, strong, organized, articulate, educated in modern knowledge; we must understand the economy; we must know the law; we must know about international relationships; we must know who we have to talk to and how to speak on an equal footing."

Women homeworkers in Chile, CECAM training centre for working women, HWW, 2003

At first, many women home-based workers may feel unconfident or too lacking in experience to speak up, let alone to take on an organizing or even leadership role. So, it is important to build capacity among them.

Building capacity and confidence is more likely to happen if activities are not overly dominated by those who are already experienced. Instead, tasks can be shared among individuals and small groups, and people encouraged. Role-plays can help the workers face a situation before dealing with it in reality.

Out of this shared approach, certain individuals will show themselves to be more interested and capable of becoming organizers or even leaders. Leaders are needed who can:

- inspire and take their lead from their fellow home-based workers
- raise the profile of homeworking among others
- negotiate/bargain with contractors, exporters/brands, government officials, etc.

One way to broaden the experience of up-coming leaders is 'mentoring' or 'shadowing'. This is where an experienced leader or organizer lets someone who shows potential but is still inexperienced to follow them as they go about their activities. In quiet moments, the leader takes the time to answer any questions the 'shadower' has and provides advice.

SEWA in **India** aims to help women to be "autonomous and self-reliant, individually and collectively, both economically and in terms of their decision-making ability".

"I am a shoe-maker and I have been with SEWA four years. I came to know about it through a meeting in a nearby temple held by a SEWA organizer. But I was too scared of my husband to come to meetings openly, and so I came secretly, without permission.

Now I am an elected representative of the workers. I get a lot of information and ideas from the SEWA organizers, and I have been to far away cities such as Ahmedabad and Bhopal.

And now my husband cannot speak just as he likes. I told him 'I can leave you but I cannot leave SEWA!' He tried to stop me from sitting at the market to sell the shoes but I said, 'I fought so hard for this, I'm not going to give it up now'."

A home-based worker who has become an elected leader or 'Aagewan' in SEWA in Delhi.

Friends and allies

Organizations of home-based workers certainly need to develop their own strength, their own voice. But they will make yet more progress if they can also build friendships and alliances with others who are willing to help them (see also page 26).

Alliances and networks with other organizations can give access to resources, both material and human. They can add to the knowledge that homeworkers have about themselves in the world, about their rights. They can increase the visibility, political presence and lobbying power of home-based workers.

For example, what can trade unions offer? Even where homeworkers do not become actual union members (see pages 22-24), unions might still give many kinds of assistance. They might make facilities available, such as meeting rooms, photocopying, or telephone/email. Unions often have access to local politicians, government officials, friendly journalists or researchers. Unions might agree to highlight the plight of homeworkers in their May Day activities. These are just some examples of the support trade unionists can give.

Other kinds of local community-based organizations, religious groups, or campaigners might be able to offer similar things.

As well as thinking locally, it can sometimes be useful for home-based workers to consider who their allies might be on a regional or even global level. This is especially the case where homeworkers are producing goods for international markets rather than local ones. Section 4 goes into this question of international solidarity in greater detail.

⇒ **Who might be good allies in your fight for the rights of home-based workers? What kind of support could you ask from them?**

For more information

'Campaigns at Work: A guide to campaigning for homemaker organizations, unions, campaign groups and activists', by Annie Delaney, HomeWorkers Worldwide, 2004. This manual gives many ideas for building alliances and developing joint campaigns for the rights of homeworkers. www.homeworkersww.org.uk/files/resources/campaign-manual.pdf

'We Work at Home: the Training Manual', HomeWorkers Worldwide, 2006, contains a section on 'horizontal mapping' for home-based workers to explore their potential local allies. Available on CD and paper. www.homeworkersww.org.uk/resources/mapping-publications

'Promoting the ILO Home Work Convention and the Rights of Homeworkers', GLI and HomeNet South Asia, 2010 (forthcoming), Section 7 has a diagram 'map' of the potential allies of homeworkers.

What you can do

- ⇒ Get to know the neighbourhood and where home-based workers live.
- ⇒ Visit home-based workers often to get to know them and the problems they face.
- ⇒ Hold some small discussions in neighbours' houses about the particular issues the workers are raising.
- ⇒ Organize awareness-raising sessions for home-based workers in local community centres, religious centres, etc.
- ⇒ Identify homeworkers who seem to be informal leaders in their community, and encourage them to take on a leadership role in this organizing too.
- ⇒ Build in role plays and leadership mentoring to foster confidence and capacity.
- ⇒ Together, map who might be your local allies. Start making contact with them to find out what support they can give.

Arguments to use

By meeting and organizing together, home-based workers have more possibilities to:

- ⇒ make friends, share ideas, and make plans to do things together
- ⇒ become more confident
- ⇒ learn more skills
- ⇒ negotiate collectively with the agents who supply the work
- ⇒ earn more money, and support their family better
- ⇒ get access to social security schemes, improving the welfare of themselves and their families.

For more information

HomeNet South-East Asia resources on organizing home-based workers, including: 'Sharing Stories, Connecting and Building a Homeworkers' Movement through Participatory Video'
'Movement Building among Home-based and Other Informal Workers Worldwide: Focus on Southeast Asia':

www.homenetseasia.org/resources.html



photo: Leslie Tuttle

Patamaba is a national alliance of home-based workers in the Philippines, including vegetable growers, bead workers, makers of slippers, and volunteer health workers. Activities include micro-finance services, skills training and political advocacy.



photo: Donald S. Stephanus

HomeNet Indonesia is helping the Indonesian Women Homeworkers Trade Union (HWPRI) to develop their own marketing and savings-credit cooperatives (see page 27).

3. Raising pay and security

“People have pre-conceived ideas that we are ‘needy’ and take us for granted.”

Homeworker, SEWA
Embroidery Centre, Sunder
Nageri, East Delhi, India

In **Indonesia**, homeworkers are being paid 195,000 rupiah a month (USD\$20), less than a quarter of the legal minimum wage - 850,000 rupiah (US\$85) - for factory workers for the same work. www.homenetseasia.org/new_impact.html

Low pay, stressful hours, and not being sure about the supply of work are some of the biggest issues for home-based workers.

Most homeworkers are paid by the piece. They have to work very hard to complete each piece within a certain period of time, or it is their own time that they lose. Those who give them the work take no responsibility for anything that interferes with meeting the deadline.

On top of that, homeworkers are often squeezed very hard by demands to complete the work within a very short time. They are given the work now, and told it should be back in a few hours' time. If they had planned to do something else – even something vital for the family - it has to give way or they lose the work. This is very stressful.

And they have no control over when there is work, and when the contracts have dried up or gone elsewhere.

They often have to pay for the equipment and electricity they use, and perhaps even essential materials such as thread. They may have to go into debt to buy what they need to do the work.

Sometimes they are told their work is not of sufficient standard and they don't get paid, even though the agent still takes away what they have produced.

One big difficulty is that homeworkers are competing against each other. There are plenty of other women who want the work.

This is something to overcome by organizing together. It is, for example, possible to use homeworkers' collective strength to discuss wage levels with contractors, or even to form a cooperative (see Section 2).

“Every month we hold a ‘trade committee’ meeting to discuss the problems that homeworkers are facing, such as low wages. We also give legal awareness training. Every year we have a meeting between the workers and the contractors to increase the wages. We encourage the women to fight for their own rights.”

Zaitun Pathan, former homeworker and now organizer for SEWA
Ahmedabad, India, at a WIEGO workshop, May 2009

SEWA's main goals are “to organize women workers for full employment. Full employment means employment whereby workers obtain work security, income security, food security and social security (at least health care, child care and shelter)”.

Respect our skills!

One key reason for low pay is how little women's work is valued. Women's skills are often barely recognized. Women in factories, offices and farms also have to fight to get their skills as respected as men's skills.

Some companies do recognize that they are profiting from the high skills of homeworkers, but they are happy pay little for the work if they can get away with it.

Sometimes, even homeworkers fail to recognize and value their own skills. Some think that, if only their skills could be upgraded, they might get paid more. But they may be failing to see that they are already highly skilled.

Low pay is not due to low skills, but how women's work is valued, and because employers can exploit this low evaluation.



photo: Celia Mather

Making this flower takes 20-25 minutes but the flower-maker, a home-based worker in Delhi, India, only gets 1 rupee (US\$0.02) for it.

So she gets about 20 rupees (US\$0.44) for a day's work. But the regional minimum wage for an unskilled worker is 151 rupees (US\$3.32) a day.

Can anyone say she gets a fair wage?

What is our work worth?

ACTIVITY

Aim: *To be more certain of what our work is worth, so as to argue for better pay and conditions.*

In small groups:

- **Compare your skills with other workers:** just because you, your sister, your mother, your neighbours can do this work, does that make it 'unskilled'? Whose skills are higher, lower or the same as yours?
- **Ask yourselves why the work is being put out to you rather than others:** isn't it because you have the right skills for the job?
- **Consider where your work goes** when it leaves your hands, and when the agent who comes to your house passes it on; are not others making profits from your work? (We come back to this in Section 4.)

Then discuss:

- **What is the real level of skill among the workers present?**
- **How could a greater awareness of skills be used to help get better pay?**

Homeworkers and the legal minimum wage

The employment laws in many countries do not yet include homeworkers. This leads some to argue that homeworkers are not legally entitled to the minimum wage.

Many homeworkers seem not to think about the legal minimum wage in relation to themselves – whether they are entitled to it. This again is a question of how homeworkers value themselves.

Homeworkers can get legal recognition, giving them the right to a legal minimum wage. There are examples from the **Netherlands** and the **UK** (see page 13).

In **India**, SEWA fought hard to get homeworkers who make ‘bidis’ (traditional cigarettes) and incense sticks recognized by the Workers Welfare Board. This means that they can be registered and get their official ID, and become entitled to rights set out in employment laws.

The fight for the legal minimum wage for homeworkers is something to take up through action with allies (see page 30).

Homeworkers and a ‘living wage’

In some places, the legal minimum wage is not actually set at a level which meets a decent living standard for workers and their families. So, the concept of a ‘living wage’ has been developed.

A living wage is one that would let a single earner support a family of four (2 adults and 2 children), by working a reasonable working week (say, 48 hours, excluding any payment for overtime or other bonuses/allowances). It would pay for a fair amount of food per day, plus other essential living costs such as healthcare, housing, clothing, childcare, transportation, fuel, and education.

In a situation where homeworkers are not even paid the legal minimum wage, campaigning for a ‘living wage’ might seem unrealistic. However, it is important for homeworkers to understand all the options in front of them before deciding which demands they want to put forward.

The **Asia Floor Wage** unites garment workers across Asia in a campaign for a ‘living wage’ for all. Currently, when workers in one country win better wages, the companies dump them and run to where wages are cheaper. The Asia Floor Wage hopes to end this by campaigning for a wage based on a new formula: a wage which is different in each country’s currency, but buys the same set of goods and services in each country.

www.asiafloorwage.org


For more information

‘**Key Principles: Setting a fair piece rate for homeworkers**’, Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), UK: www.ethicaltrade.org/in-action/projects/homeworkers-project

What you can do

- ⇒ **Compare what you earn now with legal minimum wage rates.**
- ⇒ **Do ‘time-motion studies’** to work out how many pieces you can do in a day, compare this with the legal minimum daily wage rate, and calculate what is a fair piece rate. See the box ‘Seven steps to a fair piece rate’ below.
- ⇒ **Consider how you might use these calculations** to argue/ negotiate for better pay.
- ⇒ **Keep a written record of your output, pay and hours:** some women may not be able to write and so it could be something you do as a group.
- ⇒ **Discuss how you can be accepted as a worker with rights to at least the legal minimum wage.**

Seven steps to a fair piece rate

1. Take a typical piece of work, and note the different activities a homemaker takes to complete that task; include set-up, unpacking materials, and take-down.
2. Time several homeworkers doing that task so as to get an average rate.
 **Tip:** Time the work of, say, five homeworkers who do the task in a typical time, not those who are fastest.
3. Work out how much time is also needed each day for organizing tasks such as buying in materials and record-keeping, as well as rest periods, and add this in.
4. Calculate how many pieces can therefore reasonably be completed in a standard working day of, say, 8 hours.
5. Find out the legal minimum daily wage for a worker in your location (state / country) and at your skill level.
6. Divide that legal minimum wage (Step 5) by the number of pieces that you can do in a day (Step 4).

This will give a fair piece-rate based on the legal minimum wage.

7. Add in other costs: Many homeworkers incur costs which factory-based workers do not, for example to hire or buy the necessary equipment, electricity, materials, or transport. You may have to spend time travelling to collect materials or deliver products. Family members may be helping you at particular stages of the job. If this is the case, then your calculation of a fair piece-rate should also include these costs and this time.

In Canada, 10% is added to cover these kinds of activities for garment homeworkers.

This will give you a fair piece-rate based on the legal minimum wage plus the extra costs that homeworkers incur.

They found keeping a log-book is important

In the town of Bareilly in the foothills of the Himalaya mountains of **India**, there are at least 100,000 women 'zari' embroiderers. The Ethical Trading Initiative in the UK (see page 51) has a special project there looking at ways of improving the pay and conditions of the homeworkers.

"Homeworkers are now coming with record when they come to take work or payment. I have insisted that from now onwards I will not give work if they do not come with their record book. It is beneficial for both as all transactions get recorded... thus minimizing confusion."

Ilyas, a contractor,
Bareilly, India

One lesson is the importance of homeworkers as well as agents keeping written records, such as work contracts, a log-book of the work, and itemized pay slips that show the piece rate and any deductions. The project has been giving contractors and workers training on how to do this, and it is making the relationship between them clearer and smoother, benefiting them all. See below for a model log-book.

The project has also successfully lobbied the Indian Government to recognize homeworkers. The Bareilly homeworkers now have access to government-subsidized social security and credit schemes, and better schooling for their children. The project has run health and safety training, and several health camps.

The lessons of the Bareilly project are now being extended to a National Homemaker Group (NHG), with more activities especially in the capital of city Delhi.

The companies involved must respect the Base Code of the ETI. However, low wages remain a big problem, and so this is now a major focus for the work of the NHG.

Indian National Homemaker Group: www.ethicaltrade.org/in-action/projects/the-indian-national-homemaker-group

Date	Amount of material given	Date	No of finished goods received	Deductions	Payment due	Payment received	Signature of contractor

From: ETI 'Homeworker Guidelines: Recommendations for working with homeworkers', 2007, page 88: www.ethicaltrade.org/resources/key-eti-resources/eti-homeworker-guidelines

Arguments to use

- ⇒ Homeworkers should not be paid less, just because they work at home. It should be people's choice whether they work at home or in a factory; and, whichever they choose, they should receive the same pay and rights; there is an international Convention that says so.
- ⇒ The legal minimum wage should never be violated, and that includes for home-based workers.
- ⇒ Homeworkers' high level of skill deserves proper pay.
- ⇒ The bigger companies which sell what homeworkers produce make good profits; so there IS money which can and should be passed on down to the homeworkers in the form of better pay.
- ⇒ Short lead times are exploitative; they force homeworkers to do overly long hours, and then they cannot attend properly to their children, the sick or elderly.
- ⇒ When women are low paid, this means greater poverty for their families and the wider society.



photo: HomeNet Thailand

This homeworker in Thailand helps to produce stuffed toys for export.

Access to savings and credit

“As long as we design attractive savings schemes tailored to their needs and provide them with easy collection mechanisms, we see that poor women are great savers.”

Jayshree Vyas, Managing Director, SEWA Bank
www.sewabank.com

One of the biggest difficulties facing many home-based workers is that they don't have enough money to buy or upgrade the equipment they need for the work. Many homeworkers have to borrow from the agent who brings them the work. But then they are in debt to that agent, who uses it to squeeze more work out of them on unfair terms. Some homeworkers become tied to their agent for a long period, in what is called 'debt bondage'. Other home-based workers have to borrow from local money-lenders at exorbitant rates of interest.

Another money problem comes from the irregular nature of the work. Some weeks or months there is plenty; at other times there is little. This makes the cash-flow uneven. When there is little money coming in, many home-based workers have to borrow from money-lenders, which again puts them in a lot of debt.

Meanwhile, there are moments in everyone's lives when we need a large sum to cover a family activity, such as a marriage or a funeral.

So, developing alternative forms of borrowing and saving is very useful and attractive to home-based workers.

You don't always need to start from zero. In many poor communities worldwide, forms of mutual savings and credit clubs already exist that can be built on; some are quite traditional and women will be familiar with them. In some places, the government has stepped in.

In the **Philippines**, the local government runs a savings and credit scheme. www.homenetseasia.org/research_article1.html

In **Laos**, there are now 500 'village banks' linked to community development. www.homenetseasia.org/resources_laosadvoc.html

In **India**, SEWA has developed its own SEWA Bank. Members are encouraged to form groups and make regular – even if only small – savings. After a certain period, the members can then benefit from loans, insurance and pensions.

What you can do

- ⇒ Discuss how you can help home-based workers get access to savings, and credit at a fair interest rate.
 - Is there a cooperative bank or a local village bank which you could approach?
 - Does your local government run a savings and credit scheme?
 - Could you develop your own mutual savings and credit club? Is there such a tradition in your community that you can draw on?

Access to social protection

In many countries some form of social protection exists, but it is largely for workers in the formal economy, those with jobs. They and their employer make regular payments into the scheme. In return, they get access to health insurance, and benefit payments for such things as maternity, sickness, death, injury, and disability. But the schemes were designed without considering how they could work for home-based workers too. So, millions of the most vulnerable working poor have no access to the social protection they need.

This is beginning to change. At an international level, ILO Convention No.177 gives homeworkers the same right to statutory social protection and to maternity protection as other workers. And in a number of countries there have been legal changes to bring home-based workers into social protection schemes. It is something that organizations for home-based workers are fighting for.

In **Pakistan**, it is thought that over 65% of women workers are home-based (over 8.5 million women). But they are not covered by any labour legislation; nor are 'home-based workers' defined in any statute. So they cannot access social protection, and HomeNet Pakistan has made legal changes one of its priorities.

HomeNet Pakistan and others responded to a policy conference in January 2007 and a new law, the Home-based Workers Social Protection Act, was tabled in June 2008. However, disappointingly it was not taken up in the National Assembly. Meanwhile, they continued to consult widely and their draft policy was discussed in 70 districts across the country.

By November 2009, they handed a National Policy for Home-Based Workers to the Ministry of Women's Development. The Policy covers the full range of social security including old-age pensions, health services for workers and their families, maternity care, child care, plus insurance against accident, death, and disability, and support against natural disasters.

The Ministry of Women's Development has since handed the Policy on to the Ministry of Labour and Manpower, and a Task Force has been formed that includes representatives of the two Ministries plus civil society organizations. HomeNet Pakistan continues to lobby the Government to implement the policy. www.homenetpakistan.org

In the La Union province of the **Philippines**, an NGO called the Organization for Educational Resources and Training (ORT) set up a non-profit health insurance scheme for people excluded from other schemes, especially home-based workers and others in the informal economy. It is called the ORT Health Plus Scheme (OHPS). The biggest risk to the scheme is the high drop-out rate because people are too poor to keep up their contribution payments. www.homenetseasia.org/philippines/article_learning.html

For home-based workers to get social protection, a key step is to get officially registered as ‘workers’. For some women, this is the first time they have ever had an official identity of their own, separate from their father or husband.

What you can do

- ⇒ Find out what social protection laws exist in your country, how they do/do not apply to home-based workers, and how they need to be improved.
- ⇒ Find out how to register home-based workers officially as ‘workers’ and encourage them to sign up.

For more information

‘Tools for Advocacy: Social Protection for Informal Workers’, WIEGO and HomeNet Thailand, 2006, including sections on access to health insurance and child care: www.wiego.org/publications/Tools_For_Advocacy.pdf

‘Policy Briefs’ on Social Security and Health Insurance, HomeNet Thailand, June 2009



Photo: Marjory Chen

Hard-working yet poor families like this one in Mexico deserve better access to social protection like maternity benefits and old-age pensions.

Health and safety at work

When asked about the problems they face, health and safety is often high on the list of homeworkers' concerns. At the same time, they often say that continuing to earn an income is more important than their own health. Yet, they also know that if they get sick or injured their capacity to earn will go down, and their families will suffer more.

Homeworkers get no compensation if they get sick or injured through their work. Yet, occupational health and safety protection is a right given to homeworkers by ILO Convention No.177 on Home Work (see page 12). Governments should be ensuring that homeworkers are included in health and safety laws and compensation schemes.

So, providing more awareness-raising or training about how to improve occupational health and safety can be a good way to encourage home-based workers to organize.

In **Thailand**, a survey among homeworkers by the National Office for Statistics in 2005 found that 40% complain of a health and safety problem. HomeNet Thailand has been doing health and safety training with its members around the country, and has produced resources in Thai and English: www.homenetthailand.org

Most recently, in September 2009, they started up a youth programme and it was launched with a training camp involving children and relatives of home-based workers. The focus was on occupational health and safety and labour rights for informal workers.



This metalworker in Bangkok, Thailand, is working on cutlery in his home.

He is wearing just a handkerchief as a face mask.

photo: Leslie Tuttle

Typical health and safety problems for homeworkers

- ⇒ They are given work to do with harsh deadlines, meaning they have to work long hours to complete the job, making them stressed and exhausted.
- ⇒ They often work in a cramped space, and may sit for long hours in an awkward position, causing body stress.
- ⇒ They do the same tasks over and over again, causing repetition strain injury (RSI) to a particular part of their body.
- ⇒ Poor ventilation may give them respiratory diseases
- ⇒ Low lighting may cause their eye-sight to deteriorate.
- ⇒ Using noisy machinery, especially for long periods, can lead to loss of hearing.
- ⇒ The equipment and tools they use can break easily, causing injury, because they have to supply our own and, being poor, buy the cheapest.
- ⇒ They may breathe in toxic chemicals, or get them on their skin, because they are given no protective clothing or masks.
- ⇒ They may be handling flammable materials which are a fire hazard, especially if it is near where they cook.
- ⇒ There can be an impact on their wider community environment, such as from dust or noise, solid waste disposal, water waste containing chemicals that contaminate the water supply, or fire hazard in their densely-populated areas.

For more information

'Home-based work and OHS', by Melody Kemp, HomeNet South-East Asia subregional workshop, 2007: www.homenetseasia.org/research_article1.html

'Work Improvement for Safe Home', ILO and HomeNet Thailand, 2006: www.ilo.org/asia/whatwedo/publications/lang--en/docName--WCMS_099070/index.htm

Various resources on OHS for homeworkers, and using OHS as an organizing tool in Thailand, HomeNet Thailand: www.homenetthailand.org/h_english/resources5.htm

'Shoes, Glues and Homework: Dangerous Work in the Global Footwear Industry', by Pia Markkanen, Baywood Publishing Company, 2009

'Tools for Advocacy: Social protection for informal workers', WIEGO and HomeNet Thailand, 2006, Section 4 on occupational health and safety: www.wiego.org/publications/Tools_For_Advocacy.pdf

Body mapping

“When one person has an ache, it’s an ache. When everyone has it is almost certain it is an occupational health problem. Body mapping allows you the chance to see if ‘your problem’ is really a work problem.”

Hazards magazine, UK

- Get together in a group of women who share the same or similar job.
- Draw the outline of a woman’s body, and ask each woman to place on it a mark where her body aches or hurts.
- Use the results to see whether a number of you are suffering similar symptoms.
- If so, discuss what the reasons might be and any ideas for solutions.

Body Mapping Fact Sheet: www.hazards.org/diyresearch/bodymapping.pdf

Workplace mapping

- Get together in a group of women who have the same kind of working environment at home, e.g. using similar equipment.
- Draw a plan of a typical working area and the equipment.
- On the plan, mark where the unsafe areas are.
- Use the plan to consider how safety could be improved (such as better use of space, safer machinery, better lighting, noise prevention, etc.)

Workplace Mapping Fact Sheet:
www.losh.ucla.edu/catalog/factsheets/worksite_mapping_fact_sheet.pdf

- ⇒ Look at the list ‘Typical health and safety problems for homeworkers’ on page 43 and see whether you are at risk from any of these conditions.
- ⇒ Do ‘body-mapping’ or ‘workplace mapping’ (see above) together, and discuss the results to find some solutions.
- ⇒ Find out if there is someone who knows more about health and safety, for example in your local trade unions, among health workers, at a university, or in the ILO office in your country. They should be able to help you better identify the health and safety risks you face, find solutions, and know your legal rights.

4. Getting more out of global chains

“We don’t really know where our products go, only that they leave India.”

Homeworker, SEWA Embroidery Centre, Sunder Nageri, East Delhi, India

Among the products being worked on by the embroiderers of Sunder Nageri was a scarf for H&M, a Swedish retailer that has stores in 34 countries. Their embroidery might be being appreciated by people, for example, in Germany, the UK, Canada, China, or Bahrain.

While some women choose to work at home for cultural reasons or simply because it is more convenient, many do so because that is how industry is organized. In the global economy of today, many companies benefit by putting out work to contractors and subcontractors, and as far as homeworkers, whether locally or in far off lands.

The companies are looking for workers who have good enough skills but who can be hired only as and when the company needs them, paid very low prices for their work, and given very short time in which to do it. Homeworkers especially fit this profile because they are highly vulnerable to such exploitation.

The relatively low cost of transport and communications also helps companies to organize their production globally. So do the trade policies of many governments, which have deliberately opened up their countries to this global trade.

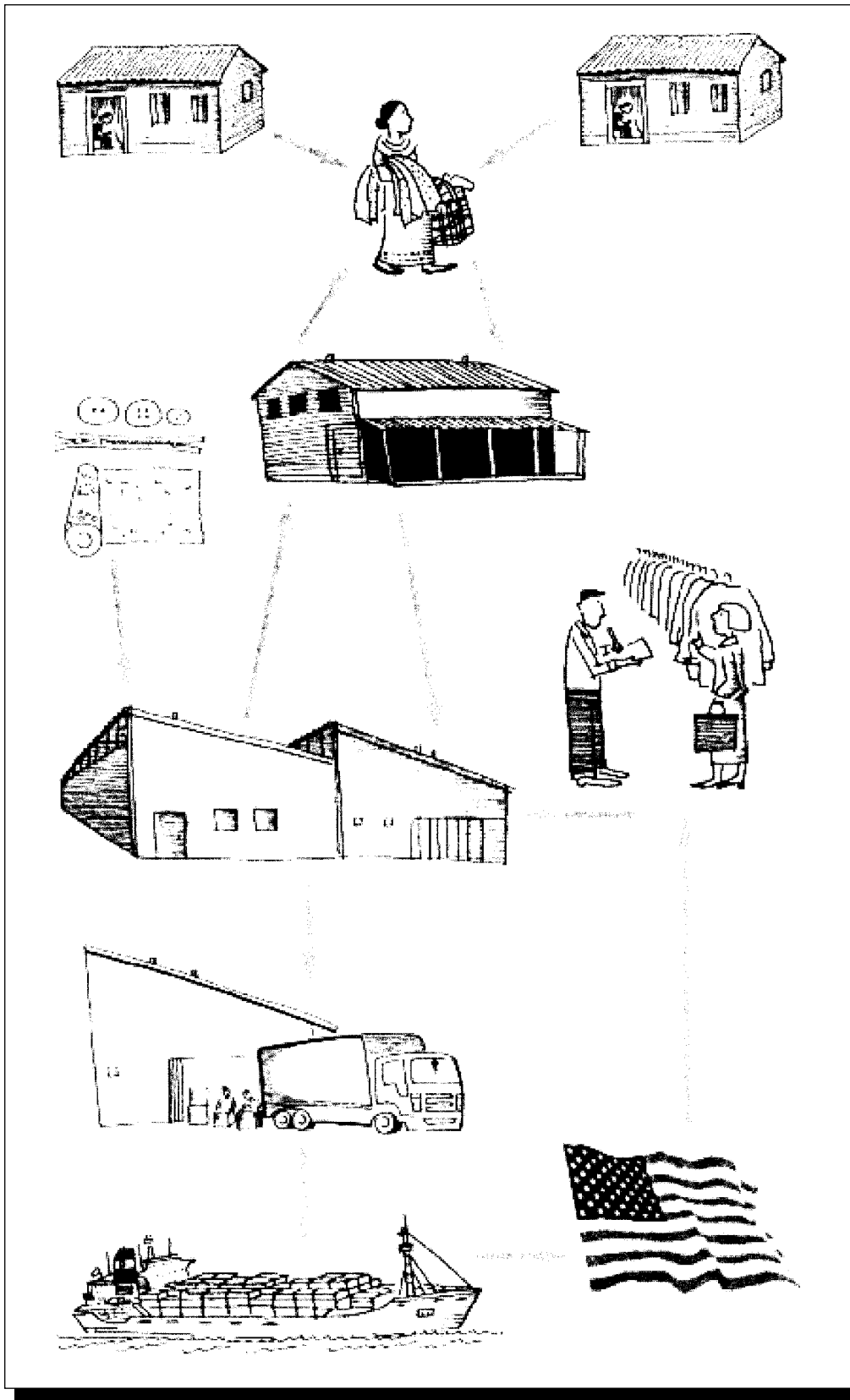
So now the world’s economy is built on long ‘**supply chains**’. Global companies - producers and retailers - outsource the production of their goods to large factories. The large factories often then place it out further to smaller factories or workshops. They in turn send parts of the process out to homeworkers. They all interact in one long ‘chain’ that is dominated by the main company at its top.

These are sometimes also called ‘**value chains**’ to reflect the way that value is added at each stage of production. The main company profits from all the value that has been put in by others lower down the chain, including the homeworkers – even though the company may not know these homeworkers exist.

On page 46, there is a diagram of such a supply chain, from homeworkers all the way through to the consumer market, in this case the USA represented by the US ‘stars and stripes’ flag. It shows:

- the homeworkers in their houses
- the agent moving between the homeworkers and a workshop
- the factory that has placed a contract with the workshop
- the buyer from the main company who placed the order with the factory
- the goods leaving the factory by truck to go by sea to the main company

This is a simple ‘supply chain’. Sometimes, there are even more factories and other intermediaries in it.



From: 'Garment Industry Supply Chains: A resource for worker education and solidarity', Women Working Worldwide, 2004, page 17: www.women-ww.org/pdfs/www_education_pack.pdf

Where do our products go?

Knowing where the products go, who sells them, and what price the consumers pay can sometimes give homeworkers information that is useful when making the case for better pay and conditions.

It is clearly easier for homeworkers to find out this information if their products go to local markets.

But what about goods destined for markets in distant countries? Is it possible to find out where they go? And how might knowing that help to improve homeworkers' pay and working conditions?

Seaweed collectors in the south of **Chile** did some 'mapping' of where their products went, and found it was multinational cosmetic and food companies that used their seaweed.

"The seaweed workers registered a union through which they negotiated improved payment, and eliminated the need to work through a middle person. They negotiated directly with buyers, arranged a new work-distribution process and bargained collectively for better prices, which doubled their annual incomes."

Rosaria Burchielli, Donna Buttigieg and Annie Delaney, '**Organizing Homeworkers: the use of mapping as an organizing tool**', 'Work, Employment and Society', Volume 22(1), BSA Publications Ltd., 2008

A word of caution


In some sectors and industries it is easier than in others to find out about the supply chain in which you are working.

Garments and sportswear are easier, for example. This is because companies in these sectors have come under pressure from concerned consumers, and there is now more information available about their global operations (see page 49).

Homeworkers are in a very wide range of sectors, however. Not always are there such supporters, or companies that are willing to be transparent.

It is also true that you can spend a lot of time on researching your 'supply chain', only to find that it has changed and the information is no longer useful. The contract you were working on may be only short-lived; perhaps the consumers shifted to buying something else, or the main company has moved production to a different contractor or a different country to save costs even more.

So, you will need to make judgements about how much effort to put in. For some, it is very worthwhile to map their supply chain and get useful information. For others, it is much less useful.

 **Tip:** Do any mapping in such a way that you are at the same time building your local strength as homeworkers together, as well as making allies (see Section 2).

What you can do

- ⇒ **Try to find out about the supply chain in which you are working, and which is the main company dominating it.** This activity is often called ‘mapping your supply chain’, or ‘vertical mapping’.

It is not always easy, but there are others who might help you build up the picture:

- **The agent(s)** from whom you get work will know who they are working for, and perhaps in turn who gave them the contract. Sometimes agents are relatives or close neighbours who are also not being treated fairly; so, they might be willing to work with you, to improve their own income too.
 - If you are getting work from a local factory, perhaps **factory workers** will help find information, for example by looking at the labels on goods or packaging, or office paperwork.
 - Others who may help find information include: **trade unions, workers’ support organizations, consumer groups, and academic researchers.**
- ⇒ **If you can access the Internet**, especially in English, or have a friend, colleague or family member who can help, you may well find information on:
- **the big companies who sell your products:** where they are operating – and even what profits they are making. In many countries, companies are obliged by law to do annual reports on their accounts and make them public.
 - **the very products you made**, or something similar, being sold on the Internet, showing the price that the consumer will pay; this can highlight the difference between what you are paid and the value that others in the chain are getting (see the graphic on page 49).

If you do identify a big company at the top of your chain, then you can:

- ⇒ **Find out if the company has signed up to a ‘code of conduct’** (see page 50); it is most likely to have done this if it is in the garment / sportswear, food, or toy industries, or is a big retailer. You may need help from others to get this information, for example from the Internet. If you find such a code, you can use this to lobby the company in question, and to raise public awareness about your situation; again, you may need help from your allies to do this.
- ⇒ **Strengthen your contacts with any local trade unions** in that sector or that company. What is more, unions are linked internationally into the Global Unions, and they exchange information and solidarity on big companies. The best route to these international structures is through your national unions.

Global Unions: Trade unions in countries across the world belong to global bodies. Union centres/federations in each country affiliate to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Individual trade unions affiliate to Global Union Federations (GUFs) that operate in their industrial sectors. Homeworkers are most likely to be in unions that are part of:

ITGLWF for textile/garment/leather workers

IUF for food and agriculture workers

IMF for metalworkers

www.global-unions.org

⇒ **Link into a network of home-based workers:**

There may be a HomeNet in your country (see page 26), and they are linked at a regional level:

HomeNet South Asia: www.homenetsouthasia.org

HomeNet South-East Asia: www.homenetseasia.org

There is also the international network **Homeworkers Worldwide (HWW)** based in the UK: www.homeworkersww.org.uk

⇒ **See if there are consumer activists or other workers' rights activists who might help;** they too have international networks, such as:

Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC): brings together activists in Europe and Scandinavia who are concerned about how clothing and sportswear is made and sold in the global economy. They know a lot about the big companies involved, and are very experienced campaigners. www.cleanclothes.org

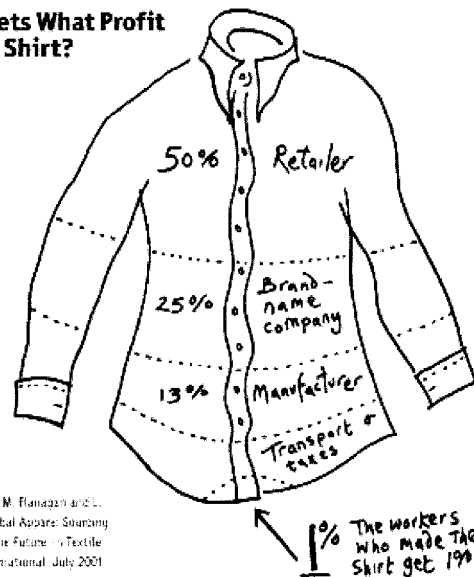
Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN): based in Canada, this is a network similar to CCC above, that campaigns for the rights of workers in Latin America who produce goods for the markets of North America: maquilasolidarity.org

Women Working Worldwide is a UK-based organization that has produced materials for garment workers, including homeworkers, in international supply chains. www.womenww.org.uk

What the homeworkers get is a tiny part of this 1%.

From: 'Garment Industry Supply Chains: A resource for worker education and solidarity', Women Working Worldwide, 2004: www.women-ww.org/pdfs/www_education_pack.pdf

Who Gets What Profit from a Shirt?



Figures from: M. Flanagan and L. Leftman, 'Global Apparel: Sourcing Options for the Future', Textile Outlook International, July 2001

Company codes of conduct

It is not only the workers in global supply chains who are concerned about exploitation. In Europe and North America especially, consumers, together with trade unions, campaign groups, and other supporters, have been putting pressure on the global corporations about their behaviour.

For the past two decades, there have been some big campaigns and activities to make companies more transparent and accountable for how they treat the workers in their supply chains. This is especially so for the big 'brand-name' garment and sportswear companies like Nike, Gap, and H&M, as well as giant retailers such as Wal-Mart, Tesco and Carrefour who now own many stores around the world and are very powerful.

At first, the companies tried to deny any responsibility for those working on their goods and services via contractors. But, bad publicity started to affect their markets, and so they saw it was in their best interest to be more open and 'socially responsible' or 'ethical'.

Now many garment companies and retailers publish more information about their activities, for example on the Internet. Plus the campaigners themselves can be a source of information and solidarity about individual companies and their practices.

Many of these companies have signed up to 'codes of conduct' which say they will treat workers according to international labour standards. One example of such a code is that of the Ethical Trading Initiative (see page 51). Typically such a code says that the workers making the company's products should be earning a living wage, for example.

However, many companies who outsource their production still try to ignore the homeworkers at the far end of their supply chain. They still want to say that it is up to the suppliers how the homeworkers are treated. This is not right. ILO Convention No.177 says that anyone who gives work out to homeworkers, whether or not through an intermediary, has responsibilities as the employer (see page 12).

Or, if they do acknowledge that homeworkers exist, some companies like to take advantage of the idea that they are only earning 'pocket-money' or 'money to help out the family'. The companies try to sidestep their responsibilities, benefiting from the poverty that drives homeworkers to accept very low paid work.

In the end, many companies - even some with an 'ethical code' - resist what they call 'interference with the market'. They may well be willing to give a donation to a charity or a good cause. But, when it comes to paying out more to the workers who make their goods, they resist because that would reduce their profits, which are their main priority. At most, some will add on just a little 'extra' to the market rate for wages.

So, it is still a big struggle to get more out of the big companies so as to really improve pay for homeworkers.

But there are arguments to use and actions to take.

"There are companies that like to talk about the welfare of poor communities and 'development', but they will not discuss the issue of wages.

This has to change."

Sanjay Kumar, Coordinator,
SEWA Bharat, India

Ethical Trading Initiative, UK

This is an alliance of companies, trade unions and NGOs in the UK, working in partnership *“to improve the working lives of people across the globe who make or grow consumer goods - everything from tea to T-shirts, from flowers to footballs”*. Over 50 companies belong to the ETI, including some that are well-known names in the UK such as Gap, M&S, Monsoon, Next, and Tesco.

They have all signed up to the **ETI Base Code**, which has minimum standards that the companies should respect at the very least. This is what the ETI code says about wages:

“5. Living Wages are Paid.

5.1 Wages and benefits paid for a standard working week meet, at a minimum, national legal standards or industry benchmark standards, whichever is higher. In any event wages should always be enough to meet basic needs and to provide some discretionary income.”

Where national laws give better standards, the companies should respect those laws. So, any ETI companies paying below the legal minimum wage are violating the Code that they have signed up to. Homeworkers can report such a violation to the ETI – it is better to do this in alliance with a trade union or an NGO to make the case more strongly.

The ETI also has developed some **‘Guidelines on Homeworkers’** (2007). These are for companies (retailers, and suppliers) as well as trade unions and NGOs, on action they can take to help improve the working conditions of homeworkers: www.ethicaltrade.org/sites/default/files/resources/ETI%20Homeworker%20guidelines,%20ENG.pdf

A full list of companies belonging to the ETI is on the ETI website. So too is the ETI Base Code in many languages including Afrikaans, Bengali, Chinese, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Sinhala, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu, and Xhosa.

www.ethicaltrade.org

There are many other codes / standards agreed by major companies who use the labour of homeworkers. This is particularly the case in the textile/garment/sportswear industries.

One of the biggest problems is making sure that such codes are properly implemented, to monitor that what companies say is what they actually are doing.

This is especially the case for homeworking. It is not easy for people monitoring the codes to visit homeworkers at home to get their opinions. Many homeworkers are not free to speak openly for fear of losing their work. Only by organizing together can homeworkers make sure that any codes are really improving their lives.

‘Ethical Clothing Australia’

In **Australia**, the trade union TCFUA agreed with employer organizations to establish a Homeworkers’ Code of Practice. Companies that sign up to the Code agree to give the union details of their supply chain, and can then use a label – formerly called ‘No Sweat Shop’, now ‘Ethical Clothing Australia’. The code only applies to Australian-made garments.

By early 2010, over 30 companies had become accredited and were licensed to put the ‘Ethical Clothing Australia’ logo on their Australian-made products.

The Code largely mirrors the national labour law, industry-wide agreements (‘awards’), and homeworker-specific legislation in different Australian states. The clothing industry has had a culture of not complying with such laws - homeworkers in Australia can still earn as little as A\$3.00 (US\$2.64) an hour – and adhering to the Code is voluntary. But the industry is slowly understanding the need to improve its ethical credentials. As more companies become ECA accredited, monitored by the TCFUA union, the laws and agreements should become better implemented, and more homeworkers actually access their legal rights. More are for the first time now getting their social security entitlements.

www.ethicalclothingaustralia.org.au

FairWear (see page 24) has done a lot of creative public campaigning to encourage companies to join the Code. FairWear says it is *“the critical voice that links the industry to the community and homeworkers, and importantly makes the difference between industry rhetoric and real outcomes for homeworkers, gaining their legal rights and most importantly their dignity as workers”*.



Fairwear is campaigning and working with schools so that school uniforms in Australia meet the ‘Ethical Clothing Australia’ standard.

Who are we really producing for?

Aim: *To start gathering information about the supply chain in which we are working.*

Bring together homeworkers who are working for the same agent.

- Use the diagram on page 46 as a model to start drawing a map of your supply chain; fill in any details you might already know.
- Discuss who you might ask for missing details or for more help (see the ideas on pages 48-49), and which of you might follow up on this.
- Discuss how doing this might help draw more homeworkers in, and find more allies.

Later, when the map is more complete, discuss your findings and how you might use them.

Who might you approach with this information, and what will you say to them? See the arguments you could use on page 54.

For more information

'Vertical Mapping Pack: Tracing Subcontracting and Marketing Chains to Support Homebased Worker Organizing', HomeNet, March 2002: www.homeworkersww.org.uk/files/resources/vertical-mapping-pack.pdf

'We Work at Home: the Training Manual', HomeWorkers Worldwide, 2006, contains a section on 'vertical mapping': On CD and from www.homeworkersww.org.uk/resources/mapping-publications

'Garment Industry Supply Chains: A Resource for Worker Education and Solidarity', Women Working Worldwide, 2004: www.women-ww.org/pdfs/www_education_pack.pdf

'Manual for Value Chain Research on Homeworkers in the Garment Industry', by Dorothy McCormick and Hubert Schmitz, WIEGO and IDS, 2002: www.ids.ac.uk/index.cfm?objectid=FA0B9BA4-5056-8171-7B4DFD21A04B0550

'Corporate Social Responsibility: A Guide for Trade Unionists', Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 2006: www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity/publications1

Arguments to use

When homeworkers ask for better pay and working conditions, those higher up the chain – the contractors, brand-name companies, export houses, and so on – like to use arguments that may divert them. Here are some common arguments that companies use:

- *‘Changes in fashion dictate what, when, and where we source, and at what price.’*
- *‘If only the consumers would pay more, then we could pay more to the workers.’*
- *‘There are too many agents and sub-contractors in the chain who take a cut; if there were fewer of them, there would be more money for the workers.’*

So homeworkers need strong arguments to fight their own case, for example:

- ⇒ The main companies in the supply chain are responsible for homeworkers’ pay and conditions. That includes making sure that homeworkers get the legal minimum wage at least.
- ⇒ There is value to pass on down the chain to homeworkers, because good profits are being made from their work. Most of the profit is kept by the big companies at the top of the chain, however, not the contractors and agents lower down.
- ⇒ So, rather than the price that the consumers pay, it is more a question of who gets how much of the profits.

It is possible to win the sympathy or perhaps even support of the agent who brings the work by arguing that they too should have more payment for what they do. They might be even more willing to support homeworkers’ case if they are a relative or neighbour.

Sometimes, where homeworkers are working to supply a company that has an ‘ethical code’, they may get to meet representatives of that company. This is an opportunity to demand that the company includes homeworkers, and not just factory workers, in its employment policies.

It is obvious, though, that only by being organized can homeworkers find an audience for such arguments.

SEWA: Stepping into the 'chain'

In India, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has gone a step further than many other organizations. It has not only set up embroidery centres for home-based workers in five locations in East Delhi. It has also sought out some 'socially responsible' companies to provide them with work. Effectively, SEWA has itself stepped into the chain and is now acting as an agent, in an attempt to provide a better living for its members.

The women are skilled artisans, developing their designs and passing on skills over generations. Their tradition, and often their preference, is to work at home, taking in work from contractors, men from the community who act as agents for local and national markets. But they have always been paid far too little for their beautiful work.

So SEWA sent organizers into the communities, to find women home-based workers who would like to try something different.

The SEWA centre in each community brings the women together, helping them to organize themselves, to get more recognition and pay for what they do, and to benefit from other SEWA activities. In just a couple of years, over 500 women have become members of these centres.

Joining a centre is not an easy step for many. One young Moslem woman said:

"I didn't used to leave the house. Then I learnt about SEWA through a friend who is a member. So I went to the centre and made some samples for them. This exposure has made me quite bold. I used to be introvert but now I am extrovert! My family did create barriers, but now they understand it is good for a girl to go out of the house. They saw it was alright because SEWA is a secure place, with no men inside. Also, I get earnings!"



photo: Chitra Mather

As part of their strategy to get more pay for the women, SEWA has stepped into the chain and become an agent. It is SEWA's strategy to cut out the middlemen who pay the homeworkers so little. SEWA directly negotiates contracts with international clothing companies such as Gap and H&M, and with Delhi-based export houses. The women come to the centres to get the work and deliver it back there when finished.

SEWA has persuaded some global companies who claim a more 'ethical' approach to pay more, and the women are pleased. Their own sense of self-worth is increasing, and many say their husbands and families see them in a different light.

But the companies are not paying a lot more, often only an extra 10-20%. And, 10-20% of a little is very little. Many would say this is skilled work, but the SEWA homeworkers are getting only just about the legal minimum wage in Delhi for an unskilled worker.

"The market presses down on the rates. We can only get contracts when our prices are close to what the contractors accept. So we only get a few more rupees per piece. And we have to accept very low rates when there is no other work."

Organizer, SEWA Embroidery Centre, Delhi, India www.sewabharat.org

However, because SEWA has taken the place of the middlemen and its overheads are low, it passes more of what the companies pay directly to the workers. So SEWA stitchers get almost double what they would get from the ordinary contractors. So, while in real terms it is not a lot, and it is not yet a fair price, the women artisans are very happy with being paid more.

SEWA has been learning a lot about the power of the export houses. They determine the price. They sometimes give out the samples late. Then they insist on short lead-times. Sometimes they are late paying for the work, which means that SEWA has to find the money from elsewhere to pass on to the workers in the meantime. It is clear that the SEWA organizers feel the pressure coming from the women members, and do their best to meet their needs. But they have little power within the chain.

"The export houses want the work back the same day – even for a thousand pieces. It makes life impossible. And they are in Gurgaon, at least two hours away. So, the women who deliver the goods to them come back late at night, and we are concerned for their safety. The response from the export houses was that we should move our centres to Gurgaon. But that's not possible – these are home-based workers!"

Organizers, SEWA Delhi

SEWA has a team of 16 organizers for the centres. As well as encouraging more women to join, they negotiate with the brands / exporters, get the women to make samples, ensure delivery on time, do quality control (keeping a system where they can trace which worker did which piece), pay the workers, control the financial accounts, and so on.

SEWA is not yet meeting all its costs in running these centres. They take a small element of the price paid by the companies, but it is a tiny sum. Plus there are 'thin' times when there is little work, for example related to the 'fashion seasons' in the main consuming countries. So SEWA has to subsidize the centres with grants from a UK-based charity and some charitable foundations run by the more 'ethical' brands that are their buyers. Sometimes SEWA has to step in with cash-flow from elsewhere. So these centres are still at a pilot stage.

But the women artisans are earning more, and they now have access to other benefits that contractors don't give. This includes the SEWA Credit Co-operative for savings and loans, which takes them out of the clutches of moneylenders. Also, SEWA is trying to register the women with the Ministry of Textiles, to get them official ID as workers. Family members benefit as well. Girls can get vocational training in hand-painting, embroidery and tailoring at SEWA Gender Resource Centres. Husbands have been registered with the Welfare Board through SEWA's construction workers' scheme.

Even so, there are still many women who have not yet joined a centre. Many Muslim families in particular still don't want wives and daughters to leave the house. Also, the ordinary contractors give 'advances' against the work, whereas SEWA pays every 15-20 days. Poor people without savings need immediate cash-flow.

Yet, 500 women artisans are now part of an organization through which they are improving their own lives. What do they say to other homeworkers of the world? One put it like this:

"Be a part of a centre like this. You can get many benefits, not just savings and work, but pensions, training, so many things. We have been able to go on pilgrimage. We hold drawing competitions between us. Women who are not organized, come into the union! A union has its own power and, if you join, you will feel that power."

'Weaving the World', a DVD about SEWA's Embroidery Centres for women home-based workers in East Delhi, India: www.sewadelhi.org

www.sewabharat.org

Support organizations for home-based workers

Many organizations are listed throughout this manual. Here is a list of some key ones:

HomeNet South Asia: www.homenetsouthasia.org

HomeNet Bangladesh: www.homenetbangladesh.org

HomeNet India: www.homenetsouthasia.org/hni.php

HomeNet Nepal: www.homenetnepal.org

HomeNet Pakistan: www.homenetpakistan.org

HomeNet Sri Lanka: www.homenetsrilanka.org

HomeNet South-East Asia: www.homenetseasia.org

HomeNet Indonesia / MWPRI: homenetindonesia.org

HomeNet Philippines / Patamba: www.homenetseasia.org/philippines/index.html

HomeNet Thailand: www.homenetthailand.org

Federation of Homeworkers Worldwide (FHWW): an international organization of homemaker organizations of all kinds, plus supporters. It encourages new organizing particularly by 'horizontal' and 'vertical' mapping, and campaigns internationally. The FHWW can be contacted through the HWW (see below).

HomeWorkers Worldwide (HWW), UK: www.homeworkersww.org.uk

Fairwear, Australia: www.fairwear.org.au

Other useful sources of information

There are many references to publications and websites throughout this manual, especially under the heading **'For more information'**. Here are some more:

'Out of the Shadows: Home-Based Workers Organize for International Recognition', by Renana Jhabvala and Jane Tate, SEEDS, No.18, 1996: www.wiego.org/publications/Jhabvala%20Tate%20Out%20of%20the%20Shadows.pdf

'Organizing the unorganized: informal economy and other unprotected workers', booklet 4, 'Promoting Gender Equality - A Resource Kit for Trade Unions', see pages 24-28 on 'Homeworkers', ILO, Gender Promotion Programme, 2001: www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/eeo/tu/tu_toc.htm

'The Shifting Pattern of Women's Work' by Nina Ascoly and Chantal Finney, in **'Made By Women'**, Clean Clothes Campaign, 2005: www.cleanclothes.org/resources/ccc/gender/made-by-women

'From Chile to China: Organizing Homebased Workers', HomeWorkers Worldwide, 2005

We Are Workers Too! Organizing Home-Based Workers in the Global Economy

About this manual: This manual aims to help home-based workers, no matter where in the world, to know more about:

- their skills and value, not just to their families but to society at large and to the economy, even at a global level;
- their status as workers, and the fact that, like all other workers in the world, they have rights, even if many others do not recognize this yet;
- how they can get together with other home-based workers to get more recognition and improve their situation.

