



Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

Urban Policies Research Report, No. 10

January 2011

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Making Home-Based Work Visible: A Review of Evidence from South Asia



WIEGO Urban Policies Research Report Series

The global research-policy-action network Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) launched this dedicated urban policies research report series in October 2009. The series profiles content that makes either an empirical or theoretical contribution to existing knowledge about the urban working poor, their living and work environments and/or their organizations. Particular attention is paid to examining policy and planning paradigms and practice. The series includes statistical profiles of urban informal work and critical analysis of data gathering techniques. Attention is paid to methodological issues and innovations as well as suggestions for future research. All papers are peer reviewed. This series is co-ordinated by WIEGO's Urban Policies Programme Director, Caroline Skinner, who is based at the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town.

This report, *Making Home-Based Work Visible: A Review of Evidence from South Asia*, was commissioned by WIEGO under the Inclusive Cities Project.

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Acronyms

ERA	Equal Remuneration Act
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOI	Government of India
HBW	home-based worker
HNI	HomeNet India
HNSA	HomeNet South Asia
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ILC	International Labour Conference
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISST	Institute of Social Studies Trust
NCEUS	National Commission on Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector
NGO	Non Government Organization
NSS	National Sample Survey
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation
SEWA	Self Employed Workers Association
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNIFEM	United Nations Fund for Women
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and organizing

Glossary

<i>zari zardosi</i>	gold thread embroidery
<i>phulkari</i>	a traditional Punjabi art of embroidery
<i>beedi</i>	leaf cigarette
<i>pakorās</i>	vegetables in gram flour batter
<i>agarbathi</i>	incense sticks

Executive summary

Home-based work has a long history in South Asia, having evolved out of home-based craft production. Capitalist production has found outsourcing to home-based workers (HBWs) a stable and profitable mode of production. Workers, especially women workers, have found home-based work is a way of combining work and care responsibilities with least strain on family and community norms and expectations. Data shows that roughly half of all women workers are home-based in the region; and the trends suggest that home-based work is on the increase, and found in both old and new industries.

The ILO Convention passed in 1996 gave a great boost to the efforts of activists to gain recognition for HBW as “workers.” However the precise definition of HBW continues to be the subject of debate, ranging from the narrower definition of home workers as contracted workers to wider definitions that would include self-employed and unpaid family workers. The definition is the basis for statistical data collection which in turn helps to shape policy and determine the resources required to give shape to the policy. Given the paucity of macro data, several innovative methods have been used by researchers to illustrate the conditions of work of HBW and identify priorities for action. These include value chain analysis, which is a useful way of depicting the link between low paying home-based work and the often high-price of the resulting products on the international market; however, this has the limitation of being exclusively focused on the market, with little attention given to the local economy.

In general, researchers have used mixed methods – structured surveys combined with qualitative methods – to develop the information base on HBWs. While standard statistical sampling methods cannot be easily used, the identification of sectors and clusters by national experts, and sampling methods such as snowball sampling or random sampling within clusters, can collect fairly robust data. However, limited generalization is possible, and the need for national data collection remains; two national sample surveys have been conducted in India using “place of work” as an indicator, but the protocol for such surveys is still evolving. Policy discourse in the region on HBWs has tended to focus on social protection and retains a welfarist bias; much less debate has taken place on the developmental potential of home-based work, and the possibility of much more widespread cluster-based local economic development. While impressive efforts have been made to mobilize and organize HBW, the outreach is still limited; mobilizing is slow because it has to simultaneously address the exploitation of the production structure as well as overcome women’s fears and reluctance to step outside a known – albeit patriarchal – world at home.

1. Introduction

Macro economic policy sets as its objective the achievement of high and sustained economic growth, with low inflation and an “acceptable” deficit in the government budget and the trade balance; the presence of a large and non-transient informal economy is not normally explicitly factored into macro economic analysis; with the focus on production and growth, employment becomes an input or a necessary counterpart. Visible employment includes the farmer in the field or the factory worker. Exclusive focus on visible forms of employment, however, leads to an incomplete understanding of the labour market. Within the informal economy, one of the less visible forms of work is home-based work. A first step to making such work – and workers – visible, is necessarily getting better data: and this has been the point of departure for much of the informal economy research carried out in the last couple of decades. The subsequent question is whether, once better data are available, standard economic analysis will fully address the issues around informality.

In this review paper on home-based work and workers, focused on South Asia, we seek to make the following main points (among others). First, that this is a substantial and stable segment of the large informal economies of South Asia and therefore merits attention; second, that the existence of home-based work cannot be fully understood exclusively through economic factors, since socio-cultural factors continue to play an important role in influencing work and production decisions around home-based work; and third, that research suggests addressing the vulnerabilities of home-based workers calls for ensuring synergy between development trajectories and social protection approaches. This review of the available data on home-based workers also seeks to identify the main gaps in knowledge and hence to suggest a future research agenda.

The paper is organized as follows. After this brief introduction, Section 2 discusses the different ways in which home-based work has emerged in the region, its gendered nature, and the manner in which it is embedded both in social and economic structures. Section 3 reviews the various ways in which home-based work has been defined for purposes of statistics and data collection. Section 4 synthesizes the available estimates of the size and contribution to national income of this group of workers. Section 5 discusses the value chain approach to analyzing home-based workers. Section 6 provides further detail on the situation and vulnerabilities of HBWs through a review of recently completed case studies. Section 7 briefly reviews the existing policy frameworks that address, or partially address, in the region. Section 8 focuses on the existing approaches to organizing and advocacy to create a climate of awareness and seeking responsiveness from governments. The final section pulls together the research agenda emerging from this review.

2. Origins and history of home-based work

There have been multiple pathways through which home-based work has emerged in the region. The production of craft-based, fine-quality output initially for royal patrons was generally done at home by highly skilled crafts persons. With the growth of a capitalist economy and democratic political institutions, the gradual decline of royal patronage also meant a decline in the main support base for skilled crafts workers. In some cases, the state has intervened with subsidies and cluster development programmes (as in weaving) to ensure the craft does not die out. For example, in the town of Chanderi, in Madhya Pradesh, India, competition from modern textile mills and poor marketing, leading to debt bondage and exploitation by middlemen, placed home-based handloom weavers in a precarious position. In the first half of the twentieth century, the Scindia royal family attempted to support Chanderi weavers through the introduction of new technology and designs. Between 1960 and the mid-1990s, the cluster was heavily supported by government subsidies, training, design, and other forms of support. Subsidies were withdrawn after liberalization, although the government continued to assist and support the weavers particularly through providing marketing opportunities. In 2002, UNIDO extended its cluster development initiative to the handloom cluster of Chanderi (Green 2005). In other cases capitalists have been able, through subcontracting arrangements, to draw upon these skills and to link home-based work in this way into wider domestic and national markets. Thus, in the case of *zari zardosi* (gold thread embroidery), families traditionally in the business have shifted to production for a less exclusive market, while there are also new entrants into this sector due to the demand for the work (Jalees 1989).

There has been a tradition of home-based work for own use or gifting in many parts of the region. A good example is *phulkari*, a traditional Punjabi embroidery, which is still done at home by many women who are not necessarily producing for commercial sale. Another example is carpet weaving in Himachal; here, while some women have learned carpet weaving so as to be able to market the product, there is also a tradition, especially among tribal groups in Lahaul Spiti, of making carpets for own use or gifting, and these home-based products are not available for sale (ISST-HNI 2006; ISST 2009).

In the case of several agricultural products such as milk, and more recently vegetables, changes in the system and institutions of marketing have led to a shift from production for self-consumption to production for the market. Factors that have contributed to this shift include increased monetization, better transport, and organized marketing. This is seen with food processing, milk production, and now vegetables and fruit through organized retail. The role of expanding marketing networks has been most crucial in drawing HBW into production for sale here. Thus in the case of dairy, the Operation Flood programme started for the first time in India a process by which milk was collected from small producers in remote locations across the country and made available, after processing, largely to urban consumers. This was successful mainly because of the high and growing demand for milk and milk products from urban consumers. Organized retail in vegetables is in its infancy in India and has possibly made more inroads into the urban markets in the south than elsewhere in the country (see Kumar et al. 2008; Joseph et al. 2008).

There is thus a tradition of home-based work in the region. More recently, new industries have outsourced work to home-based workers, in activities that have not been done traditionally by them. For example, a study by UNIFEM finds a large number of home-based women assembling bicycle parts in Ludhiana; since 70 per cent of the women sampled had husbands who were technicians in adjoining factories or who were self-employed in technical trades, it appears that “the participation of household women in bicycle manufacturing trades can be considered as a spillover of the technical occupations practiced by their husbands” (UNIFEM 2000: 80). This has been possible because there is still, in many places, control over women’s mobility and a strong social resistance to women working outside the home; if work is offered to be done within the home, thus “invisible” and does not on the face of it disrupt other established roles such as family care, women and their households are willing to take it on. In a study of the *beedi* (leaf cigarette) industry, Meena Gopal finds that the subcontracting system prevailed because of stringent labour laws and the need to avoid the legal welfare liabilities towards workers (Gopal 2005). An example of disintegration of organized large units into smaller ones, including

home-based workers, is the hosiery industry in Ludhiana (UNIFEM 2000: 82). Such changes in the organization of production reflect entrepreneurial responses to market demand, and a balancing of costs of production including labour law compliance, and economies of scale, against flexibility and looser regulatory requirements.

Many big companies, including multinational corporations, have evolved a vendor system of subcontracting for their production. Jhabvala and Sinha (2002) report that, depending on the nature of work, some of these vendors either employ women workers in large numbers or give out work to HBWs mostly through contractors. Some companies have set up cooperatives of women living in the vicinity of their plants for production of items, for example the Steel Authority of India Ltd. and Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. Yet other companies have a subcontracting arrangement. Established companies give out work to small units in the organized/unorganized sector which in turn outsource some simple operations to home-based workers. The company often mediates with these units/workers through contractors who get the production work done and deliver the output to the company; this can include finishing and quality control, assembling, sorting, packaging and labeling. Many medium and small-scale industries in the organized sector and production units in the unorganized sector subcontract work to home-based women workers. Generally the manufacturers establish direct contacts with these workers and sometimes even act as contractors for bigger companies. This subcontracting has been found to be widespread in the unorganized manufacturing sector and seems to have expanded over the past decade. In almost 90 per cent of the households in the resettlement colonies and slum areas surveyed by SEWA, at least one woman was reported to be doing some kind of home-based work (Jhabvala and Sinha 2002: 2039).

In an analysis of data from the National Sample Survey Organisation, Unni and Rani find that the expansion of markets and heightening of economic activity in production systems as a result of economic reforms in India meant that “overall expanding markets led to an increase in homebased work, but not necessarily a movement towards this form of production system” (Unni and Rani 2004: 14). While there may be some doubt on the exact extent to which this “putting out” system has increased in the production systems of the economy, there is no doubt that it is not being displaced with modernization and high rates of economic growth. It can be argued that it is because home-based work is so deeply entrenched in production for domestic demand that it has also become a part of global value chains.

Gereffi, Humphrey and Sturgeon's (2005) analysis identified five global value chain governance types, ranging from “pure” markets to “pure” hierarchy. Outsourcing and home-based work is compatible with more than one type of network governance. In fact it could be found anywhere between the extremes of pure market co-ordination and complete vertical integration or hierarchy. They argue that the particular business form that emerges in any particular sector or country is influenced by the complexity of information, ability to codify it, and the capabilities of actual and potential suppliers. At the same time, it has been noted that: “Even when the underlying conditions for emergent organizational forms such as value chain modularity are well established, as they are in the Japanese personal computer industry, large scale outsourcing might be antithetical to long standing corporate strategies and institutions, such as lifetime employment in large firms, which make radical industry reorganization extremely difficult and slow” (Gereffi et al., 17). The South Asian region seems to be at the other extreme – dispersed, small scale home-based production is often resistant to efforts to bring work and workers into a factory or work shed. The manner in which workers, and women in particular, are drawn into the new and emerging agreements and networks is greatly influenced by underlying social structures. Social norms mediate between the trends that are associated with economic forces and the outcomes for women workers.

In summary, there is a tradition of home-based work in the region, and enterprises have used this tradition to develop a class of flexible and invisible contractual labour, largely female, and with varying levels of skill; the structure of production that we observe today, with home-based workers sometimes independent and self employed, but more often sub-contracted workers at the bottom end of value chains, has evolved as a result of economic forces playing out within a specific social and cultural context. There is a need for historical studies that can draw out the ways in which religious or cultural practices have supported social norms so as to mediate economic forces and result in a specific kind of production organization, with a stable and persisting home-based mode of production.

3. Defining home-based work

The use of the term “informal employment” is relatively recent, dating back to the 1970s. A clear definition of “home-based work” is even more recent. Home-based work is not a sector of production; it cuts across the analytical categories of “industry,” “occupation” and “activity status” by which workers are classified. As Unni and Rani have put it: “The employment status of the home-based workers can be seen along a continuum of dependence, from being completely independent to being fully dependent on the contractor/middleman for design, raw material and equipment and unable to negotiate price of the product. They constitute a separate production system forming a different layer or segment both in the product and labour markets” (Unni and Rani 2004: 4). The reason for seeking to define and visualize the group is because they have specific vulnerabilities. The NCEUS in India agreed that HBWs deserve to be separated out from the broad category of the “self-employed” where they usually get placed, because “They warrant separate treatment from a policy point of view” (GOI 2007: 5).

Internationally, the ILO Convention on home workers provided a definition of ‘home workers’ in 1996. This definition recognizes workers who work from home but are in a clear employment relationship (discussed in more detail below). While it is the location or place of work that characterizes home-based work, within the group of HBWs, a further distinction can be made between “piece-rate workers” and “own account workers.” Piece rate workers could be contracted by a firm, an individual entrepreneur, traders, subcontractors or other intermediaries, are usually given the raw materials and are paid a stated amount per piece produced. These workers do not have any direct contact with the markets for the goods they produce. Own-account workers are those who are generally in direct contact with the market and buy their own raw material.

Activists have strongly made the argument that separate data on home-based workers is needed to address their particular vulnerabilities. Therefore, it is useful to review the kinds of situations that a good definition could be expected to capture.

Home-based workers: who are they?

Is working from home itself a form of labour status? One of the first characteristics that can be noted about HBW is that of multiple sources of income. As Ela Bhatt has said:

A small farmer works on her farm and if it's not a good season, on other's farms as a labourer. When the agriculture season is over, she goes to the forests to collect gum or other forest produce. Year round, she produces hand embroidered items either at a piece-rate for a contractor or sells it to a trader who comes to her village to buy goods. Now how shall we categorize her trade? Does she belong to the agricultural sector, the forestry sector, or the handicraft sector? Is she the farmer or the farm worker? Is she self-employed or a piece-rate worker? For the lack of fit into a category, her work status suffers and her right of representation in the union movement is unrealized. The tyranny of definition has condemned her to be a nobody (Bhatt 2004:7).

In the case of home-based women workers, it is often hard to draw a clear line between work that sustains the home or is reproductive work, and work that is productive, since such workers continue to carry out gendered household duties simultaneously with home-based work, without separation of space or place of work. Observed adverse health outcomes are caused both by doing both kinds of work and by additional sources of strain, as in the example below:

I get up in the morning at about 4 a.m. and after finishing some household chores, start work at about 10 a.m. I work till midnight. Working after sunset is very tiring as lack of inadequate light often

makes my eyes ache and water and I get a headache on almost all days. In addition to that, sitting on the floor and doing intricate work causes cramps in my back and legs (GOI 2002b: 17).

Another complication is the difficulty of defining “home” as workers often work just outside the home or, as in the example below, from their boats. One of the most deprived groups in the region is a community of pearl divers in Bangladesh for whom “home” is a boat. The extract below shows the multiple deprivations that affect them – inability to acquire new and better equipment and shelter, as well as child poverty and vulnerability, occupational health risks, and exclusion from mainstream institutions.

The Boid community in Dhaka, Bangladesh, have been living for generations in this area on house boats, anchored by the banks of river Dholeshoiri for more than 50 years. They live in this area as they believe the pearls extracted from this part are larger in size and therefore, can fetch a good price. The boids search for shells at the river bed without any equipment. They have to keep their eyes open under water and search with their bare hands. The workers reported that finding pearls was so rare that after searching 100 to 200 shells one tiny pearl would usually be found. Fifty years ago when the first generation of boids settled on this bank, shells were abandoned and pearls were bigger in size. Now to extract shells people have to work much harder. Thus, during peak season women work for an average of 11 hours in a day. During the lean season, they work for 6 hours per day. Not only does work put the boid women’s health at risk; their children’s lives are made more dangerous as well. One woman said “when we go for shell extraction in deep river keeping our young children unguarded sometimes they fall into the water and drown.” One woman reported that since they live on the boats the Micro Finance Institutions do not lend to them, as they believe that ‘boids’ will go away despite the fact that they had been living on that riverbank for 50 years now and had no other place to go. Other women sarcastically said, “thank God we don’t have a home or else we had to pay the house rent.”

(HNSA-ISST 2006: 171-188)

Activists have argued that there are enough commonalities in the work-related vulnerabilities of home-based workers to justify identifying them as a group and addressing these vulnerabilities through appropriate policy and programmes. A clear definition becomes essential in order to collect data on home-based workers and estimate the resources required and the scale of the problems to be addressed.

It is difficult to make a sharp distinction between contractual and self-employed workers as many women do both kinds of work depending on what is available. Moreover, own account workers might be in a “commercial” arrangement that disguises their dependence. For example, *beedi* workers in India are required to “buy” the raw material from the contractor and “sell” the finished *beedis* back to the same contractor. The workers absorb the losses if the raw material is damaged due to natural events such as rains. Therefore, activists argue for a definition that would include both types of home-based workers, the self-employed and the piece rated.

Evolving international labour organization definitions

Internationally, the ILO has recognized the category of “home workers.” The term has been included in The Conditions of Work Digest of the ILO, and a definition has evolved which has been amended from time to time. The presence of an employment relationship remains a central feature of this definition.

Home work implies an *employment relationship* between the home worker and the employer, subcontractor, agent or middleman. The agreement may be implicit or explicit, verbal or written, as specified in the national legislation. The *place of work* is outside the premises of the employer. However, not all forms of homework are necessarily “home-based.” They can be carried out from neighbourhood workstations, workshops or premises that do not belong to the employer. This also implies there is very little supervision or regulation of methods of work by the employer.

The *form of payment* is usually by the piece or unit of production, but not all piece-rate workers are home workers. As regards the *supply of materials and tools*, in some cases home workers own their tools, while in others the employer provides the tools on loan or on hire-purchase basis. In a similar way, some workers may buy their raw materials on the market or from the employer or subcontractor and sell the finished or semi-processed products back to him or her (ILO 1989: 4).

This definition was further refined by the *Convention No 177 of the ILO (1996)*, which defines homework as:

- (a) work carried out by a person, to be referred to as a home worker,
 - in his or her home or in other premises of his or her choice, other than the workplace of the employer;
 - for remuneration;
 - which results in a product or service as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used, as long as this person does not have the degree of autonomy and of economic independence necessary to be considered an independent worker under national laws, regulations or court decisions;
- (b) the term “employer” means a person, natural or legal, who either directly or through an intermediary, if any, gives out home work in pursuance of his or her business activity (ILO 1996).

The Homework Convention does not apply to genuinely self-employed home workers. An employer has to be identified. In many cases the employment relationship is ambiguous, disguised or triangular (or even involving multiple parties), thus difficult to make explicit.

At the ILC 2006, a Recommendation concerning the employment relationship has been adopted (R 198). The Recommendation encourages governments to introduce legislation in order to define an employment relationship. Criteria are listed (II/13) that might be helpful to fulfill this task, as follows:

The fact that the work:

- is carried out according to the instructions and under the control of another party
- involves the integration of the worker in the organization of the enterprise
- is performed solely or mainly for the benefit of another person
- must be carried out personally by the worker
- is carried out within specific working hours or at a workplace specified or agreed by the party requesting the work
- is of a particular duration and has a certain continuity
- requires the worker’s availability or
- involves the provision of tools, materials and machinery by the party requesting the work

further:

- periodic payment of remuneration to the worker
- the fact that such remuneration constitutes the worker’s sole or principal source of income
- provision of payment in kind, such as food, lodging or transport
- recognition of entitlements such as weekly rest and annual holidays
- payment by the party requesting the work for travel undertaken by the worker in order to carry out the work
- absence of financial risk for the worker.

(ILC 2006)

This Recommendation is important because it can be used as a guideline to lobby for the introduction of a law that clearly distinguishes between an employment relationship in which workers are not deprived of the protection they are due, and genuine self-employed workers. Furthermore these guidelines can help to formulate some essential parts of a national law on home work.

Other definitions

Within South Asia, the most progress with evolving a suitable definition has been made in India. The definition that has been pioneered here draws upon the international ILO definition, but seeks to expand it to include the self-employed and contributing family workers, as a large number of workers would otherwise be excluded, and the categories of contractual and self-employed workers are rarely mutually exclusive, stable arrangements.

The first such definition in India is found with reference to the *beedi* sector. Indirectly, the term “homeworker” has been defined in the *Beedi and Cigar (Conditions of Employment) Act 1996* and in the *Contract Labour (Abolition and Regulation) Act* and the *Minimum Wages Act*, all of which recognize the existence of outworkers who do not work from any establishment (see Mukul 1998).

The Expert Group on Informal Sector Statistics, chaired by the Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India and known as the “Delhi Group,” was set up in 1997 as one of the city groups of the United Nations Statistical Commission to address various methodological issues that arise in connection with the informal sector. The 4th Meeting of Delhi Group in 2000 produced this statement:

The Expert Group on Informal Sector Statistics recommends that countries include the variable “place of work” in labour force and informal sector surveys and endorses recommendations of the ILO Project on Measurement of Place of Work, as follows: The physical place of work – where the worker spends most of the time – rather than the place of the economic unit to which he or she is attached, is the appropriate unit of classification when the unit of analysis is the worker.

(Retrieved from http://mospi.nic.in/report_4.htm)

A question on “place of work” has been introduced in labour force surveys in several countries in South Asia, in Pakistan (2001-2), in Bangladesh (2002-03), in Nepal (1998-99), and in India (1999-2000), although not yet in Sri Lanka (Unni 2006).

In its 5th meeting in 2001, the Delhi Group made the following recommendations:

- (a) Depending upon their employment relationships and types of contracts, home workers can be found in any category of status in employment. Homeworkers should, therefore, be identified through the variable “place of work” in conjunction with existing other classifications, such as industrial and occupational classifications, rather than as a separate category of status in employment.
- (b) In order to define the criteria for the distinction between independent and dependent homeworkers, as well as between own-account workers and employees in general, questions on the type of contractual arrangements should be used in surveys. Such questions provide better results than a mere self-assessment by respondents of status in employment.¹

In January 2007, while inaugurating the “SEWA-UNIFEM Policy Conference on Home Based Workers of South Asia,” the Prime Minister of India referred to the statistical invisibility of home-based workers in the national statistics of the country. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation then decided, in May 2007, to set up an Independent Group on Home-based Workers in India, under the chairmanship of Dr. N.S. Sastry, to examine the existing data sources and suggest means to capture the data related to home-based workers. The Group recognized the central role played by “place of work” in defining “home-based worker.”

¹ At http://mospi.nic.in/rept%20_%20pubn/ftest.asp?rept_id=report_home_based_worker_28july08&type=nsso (accessed on 15 August 2010)

Economic activities at home such as weaving, pottery, basket-making with bamboo materials, tailoring, embroidery, jewelry-making, toy-making, sale of groceries, etc., are performed not only in the space used for living purpose but also in a structure attached to the living place, and/or open-area/detached structure adjacent to the living place. Taking into consideration such realities regarding the use of space for carrying out economic activities at home, the Group recognized the need to define “home” in the context of defining a “home-based worker.”

The Group recommended the following definitions for “home” and “home-based workers.” Home is defined as (i) dwelling unit and/or (ii) structure attached to dwelling unit and/or (iii) open area adjacent to the dwelling unit.

With the above definition of home, home-based workers are defined as:

- a) own-account workers and contributing family workers helping the own-account workers, involved in the production of goods and services, in their homes, for the market; and
- b) workers carrying out work in their homes for remuneration, resulting in a product or service as specified by the employer(s), irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used; and those contributing family workers helping such workers.

Workers referred to in (b), above, are homeworkers working in their homes according to ILO Convention 177 on Home Work, 1996. For data collection purposes, such home workers may be classified as own-account workers.

It may be noted that, unlike in the definition of “homeworkers” given in the ILO Convention 177 on Home Work, 1996, the Group felt that “Own-account workers and contributing family workers helping such own-account workers, having their workplaces in their own homes, qualify for inclusion in the group of home-based workers” (GOI 2008a:11). It can be noted that the 66th Round of Indian National Sample Survey (July 2009-June 2010), in “Employment and Unemployment” Schedule 10, collected data on “home-based workers” using the definitions of “home” and “home-based workers” recommended above by the Independent Group on Home-Based Workers.

The Unorganised Workers Social Security Act 2008 in India uses the following definition: “Home based worker’ means a person engaged in the production of goods and services, for an employer, in his or her home or other premises of his or her choice, other than the workplace of the employer, for remuneration, irrespective of whether or not the employer provides the equipment, materials or other inputs.” (GOI 2008b:2)

There are differences between the international ILO definitions and the one recommended within India; the main difference relates to the inclusion of the self-employed/own account workers and to unpaid family workers. A broader definition better reflects the context of fluidity between categories and also recognizes the large contribution of family members. In some countries, it is also argued that full-time domestic workers – women or men who live and work in the homes of others – should be considered HBW. Thus, there is still no universally accepted single definition of HBWs; the ILO definition is widely used, and the Indian definition has broadened this. Research that examines the inclusions and exclusions of varying definitions and with reference to existing empirical information is needed to help resolve these ongoing discussions.

4. Size of the sector: numbers, trends and contribution to GDP

Home-based work encompasses a wide diversity, ranging from traditional embroidery and weaving to tele-work. Home-based workers may work in the new economy (assembling micro-electronics) or the old (weaving carpets), they can be in the rural areas as well as in the urban. Finding the contribution of the group to the GDP requires that we have estimates of the home-based workforce in each sector, as well as the per capita productivity. However, very little data is available on this group of workers: in India there is some data available at the national level from the decennial Census, which provides data on “household industry.” More direct information based on identifying home-based workers by location of work is available for 1999-2000 and 2004-05 from the National Sample Survey. For other countries in the region there are fewer data sources, and there is an additional problem of lack of comparability across countries due to differences in definition. An attempt has been made through re-tabulation of data from various Labour Force Surveys to get a comparable picture. These calculations suggest that only around half of all workers produce from what can be called “conventional” workplaces in South Asia (Table 1).

Table 1: Conventional and non-conventional places of work in the informal sector in South Asian countries (non-agricultural workers)

Country/Year	Conventional Place of Work: Office/ Factory/ School/ Institution (per cent)	Non-conventional Place of Work: Home/Street/ Construction site (per cent)
India, 1999-2000, all ages	50.1	49.9
Pakistan, 2001-02, 10 years +	53.5	46.5
Bangladesh, 2002-03, 15 years +	40.2	59.8

Source: Jhabvala, Unni and Sinha 2007: 5.

One of the striking features of work force participation and of home-based work in particular, is its gendered construction. Data shows that in South Asia, women’s economic activity participation is roughly half that of men and varies from a low of 36.7 per cent in Pakistan to 66.5 per cent in Bangladesh. A large proportion of women workers are either paid or unpaid home-based or family workers. In a survey based study in Ahmedabad city, Gujarat, India, Unni and Rani estimated that 32 per cent of women workers and 5.8 per cent of men were home-based and self-employed (Unni and Rani 2000: 35). Across Asia, while HBWs are found mainly in manufacturing and services, they are also found in agriculture, and in both rural and urban areas (see Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007: 11). The NSS Employment and Unemployment Survey (1999-2000) estimated that in India, there were nearly 8.2 million HBWs, of whom about 4.8 million (or 58 per cent) were women; home-based workers thus represented about 7.4 per cent of the unorganized non-agricultural workers. Of all unorganized sector non-agricultural workers, 23.7 per cent worked from their own dwelling. Among rural workers, 18.6 per cent of male and 61.2 per cent of female HBWs worked from their own dwelling; in urban areas, the corresponding figures were 12.9 and 45.9 per cent respectively (GOI 2007: 5, 80). While women are over represented among home-based workers, it is also important to note that “while gender is a strong differentiating factor in the Indian labour market it is mediated by one’s class and caste/ community position in the society” (GOI 2007: 91). Although data does not always provide these differentiated categories, the overlap of social and economic disadvantages is well documented. For example, Unni and Rani (2005) find that “The scheduled castes had a higher participation of women both at home and outside as expected. Muslim women had a lower participation both at home and outside it. The odds ratio of a Muslim woman participating in work outside the home was significantly lower than her chances of participating in home-based work. The difference was not significant for the scheduled

castes where women tended to work equally outside or inside the home. This could be due to the fact that Muslims tend to find self-employed work through social networks while the scheduled castes are more in casual work” (Unni and Rani 2005: 47).

Women turn to home-based work for a number of reasons. Lack of necessary qualifications and formal training for formal sector work, absence of child care support, social and cultural constraints on mobility are some of the reasons. This social dimension is similar across South Asia. In Bangladesh, about 70 per cent of all women workers in manufacturing are found working in the garment factories. This does not release them from religious norms or traditional roles (see Absar 2001). As the table below shows, in Bangladesh, as in Pakistan, home-based work is the dominant form among informal sector non agricultural women workers.

Table 2: Home-based work among informal sector non-agricultural workers by gender

Place of Work	Pakistan (2001-2)		Bangladesh (2002-3)		India (1999-2000)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Own home	4.2	64.8	20.7	71	11.1	35.5
Employers home	11.9	15.1			13.1	7.5
All	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Jhabvala, Unni and Sinha 2007: 7

Statistics further suggest that home-based work has grown in the last couple of decades with liberalization and globalization. Subcontracting intensity, defined as “the ratio of the value of goods sold by the company in the same condition as purchased from a manufacturer to net value added by the company” went up for factories with more than 50 workers from 9.46 in 1970 to 15.9 in 1992-3 (Ramaswamy 1999 cited in Raj and Kapoor 2001: 10); and this is associated with other trends that have encouraged increasing home-based production, including a growth of exports and small scale industries, and increased outsourcing to women home-based workers (Raj and Kapoor op cit:12-3). Factors that contribute to extensive subcontracting include the importance for workers, especially women, to be near the home so as to also undertake other activities; the reluctance of contractors to hire regular employees and meet labour related regulations; saving on costs of space for the task assigned to the worker; no need for expensive capital equipment to be shared by workers; strong social networks that prevent individual workers from renegeing on contracts; repeated transactions resulting in less need for formal contracts (Sudarshan et al 2007: 181).

Home-based work appears to be on the rise around the world, particularly for women, largely reflecting the effort to cut costs through flexible work contracts or sub-contracting, and in some cases through loss of formal sector jobs, seen for this region too (GOI 2007: 5). In an analysis of the impact of recent policies on home-based work, Rani and Unni (2009) find that at the macro level, a rise in the unit cost of labour is associated with an increase in female home-based work. Their analysis suggests that while women “choose” home-based work – the micro model of social determinants was a better fit for women than for men, or than the macro model for women – men were “chosen” for home-based work. Cost cutting at a time of liberalization thus has more impact on men’s home-based work than women’s. In her analysis, Neetha finds that “a large proportion of women within the category of self-employed are unpaid and the increase in self employment during the reform period is on account of the swelling number of unpaid workers” (2010: 153). Table 3 below presents estimates of the changing structure of place of work in India over the periods 1999-2000 and 2004-05, based on two national sample surveys. A smaller percentage of both men and women report “no fixed place” while a marked increase is seen, for women, in “own dwelling” from 35.5 per cent to over 51 per cent, along with a lower proportion in “employer’s enterprise.” There is some increase in men’s presence on streets and construction sites.

Table 3: Increase in home-based work in India, 1999-2000 and 2004-05

Location of Work	1999-2000	2004-05	1999-2000	2004-05
	Male (per cent)		Female (per cent)	
No fixed place	13.8	8.3	11.2	3.2
Own dwelling	11.1	12.3	35.5	51.3
Own enterprise	17.7	18.5	8.4	10.7
Employer's dwelling	3.1	3.0	7.5	6.7
Employer's enterprise	35.9	35.0	26.3	18.9
Street	2.9	7.7	2.1	2.9
Construction sites	9.0	11.0	5.1	4.0
Other	6.4	4.2	3.8	2.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: GOI High Level Committee on Status of Muslim Community in India 2006, as cited in Jhabvala, Unni and Sinha 2007: 9

Micro level estimates, based both on small surveys and qualitative methods are available for some sectors and countries and these have been important in strengthening the knowledge base on home-based workers. Attempts have been made to estimate the numbers of home-based workers in sectors where they are known to be concentrated. This includes the garments sector. Unni, Bali and Vyas (1999) made an independent estimate of 34,957 home-based garment workers in Ahmedabad city. Of the total population, they estimated 27,157 (or around 78 per cent) were women (Unni et al 1999: 25). Paula Kantor, using a one-stage stratified cluster sample, conducted a similar study in Ahmedabad and estimated a total of 44,307 home-based garment enterprises, of which 75 per cent were female. This study found more than three times the number of home-based women producers in the garment sector than those counted by the Census as working in household industry plus marginal workers, even though garments is only one of many household-based enterprises (Kantor 2001).

Contribution of home-based workers

In India, an estimated 47 per cent of total non agricultural GDP was contributed by the non- agriculture informal sector in 1993; women's contribution to non agricultural informal sector GDP as a percentage of total non-agricultural GDP stood at 10 per cent; that of men stood at 18 per cent (ILO 2002 cited in Hill 2010: 25). While the numbers of home-based workers may be high, and their presence in the informal economy significant, estimates of their contribution to the economy are not separately available.

The contribution of home-based work to household income varies. In a study of around 600 sub-contracted home-based workers drawn from three sectors in India, the average contribution across all sectors of home work was seen to be 35 per cent in rural, and 35.6 per cent in urban households. The range is seen to be 22.3 – 46.8 per cent in rural areas, and 26.4 – 70.8 per cent in urban areas. (Sudarshan et al. 2007: 189). Other sources of income for households included wage work (53.6 per cent in rural and 39.9 per cent in urban households), self employment (6.1 per cent in rural and 9.9 per cent in urban households), salaried employment, remittances and others.

In Bajaj's 1999 study, an attempt was made to estimate home-based women workers' contributions in a few sectors across South Asia, drawing on available studies and using focus group discussions with groups of workers to supplement and corroborate the literature. While these estimates are rough and not based

on systematic sampling, they are important in setting a benchmark, and identifying perceptions, for further work to build on. For example, the study reports that:

- The *agarbathi* industry in India in 1989-90 showed total domestic sales of approximately USD 198 million and exports of USD 42 million; and employed approximately 500,000 workers. 90 per cent of the labour in the industry is supplied by women, 80 per cent of them are home-based workers (pp 11,13).
- Garment exports in Bangladesh by 1990-91 earned around Tk. 27,000 million (or approx USD 380 million²) per annum for the economy, being the country's principal export earner and fourth largest employer. 80 per cent of the labour used by the industry is that of women workers. Estimates for HBWs were not available, but their presence was confirmed by activists (p 19).
- Pakistan is the single largest manufacturer and exporter of match grade footballs in the world and accounts for over 80 per cent of total world production. An estimated 58 per cent of football stitchers in the industry are home-based women workers (pp 25, 27).
- The trade in medicinal plant and other non-timber forest products from Nepal employs over 100,000 people and contributes around 4 per cent of the share of forestry to the national GDP. While no data is available on the gender division of labour in this sector, forest product collection is predominantly the work of women (pp 32, 34).

An official survey on the working and living conditions of workers in *beedi* industry in the early 1990s found that 88 per cent of all those sampled considered *beedi* work to be their main source of income. On average, income from *beedi* work was 65 per cent of household income from all sources (GOI 1995). In an earlier survey of Muslim *beedi* makers in Allahabad, carried out for the ILO in 1980, Bhatta had reported that the contribution from women's earnings from *beedi* to household income averaged 45.5 per cent. A SEWA study in the mid-80s in Gujarat found women's contribution from *beedi* work to average 30 per cent of household income (cited in Sudarshan and Kaur 1999). A more recent study found in Madhya Pradesh the contribution to household income of *beedi* work was 30.9 per cent in urban areas, and in Tamil Nadu it was 46 per cent in rural and 71 per cent in urban areas (Sudarshan et al. 2007: 189).

Overall then, much of what we know about the contribution of home-based workers is still largely drawn from micro studies, though some data are available at national level. More research is needed at the "meso" level of city or sector, and especially research that seeks to capture the dynamics of change, interaction between formality and informality in the processes of economic growth, and changing organization of production.

5. Home-based workers in value chains

The products of home-based work may be sold locally, nationally or even internationally. The value chain concept is a useful one to situate home-based work within the larger production system. A value chain traces all the stages of value addition as a product passes from the initial stage of design to the ultimate consumer. The chain may be short – for example deep fried *pakorras* (vegetables in batter) being prepared and sold by a street vendor – or it may be extremely long, where the product goes through several stages of manufacture and a series of wholesale and retail intermediaries before reaching the final consumer. Showing where HBWs fit in the value chain for a particular product makes them more visible; this also helps to identify the kind of interventions that would increase their skill, productivity and earnings. Several studies have traced the value chains for specific products. For example, Mehrotra and Biggeri (2007) present findings from value chain analysis studies carried out in India and Pakistan. The study in India looked at three sectors and found that there were usually four to five intermediaries between

² At an exchange rate of USD 1= 71 Taka, December 2010

the HBW at one end and the retailer at the other. The study also found the share of the final price paid by the consumer that reaches the home-based worker varies across sectors: of Rs 100 paid by the consumer, home workers received Rs 15 for *zardosi* (gold thread embroidery); Rs 17 in *beedi* or cigarettes; and just Rs 2.3 in *agarbathi* (incense sticks; perfuming, which adds most value, is done at a subsequent stage). The reasons behind these observed discrepancies also vary; for example *zardosi* work is highly skilled, but *zardosi* workers are not organized, while *beedi* workers are. Of course this analysis does not indicate the absolute levels of well being. The study in Pakistan finds that the HBW working in incense sticks got 0.083 per cent of what a consumer paid; for carpets, 18 per cent; in prawn peeling, 2.5 per cent (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007: 76). Based on this analysis, Khan and Kazmi argue: “Since power is unequal in the market equation, redress is necessary.” They suggest that there are ample margins at the higher ends of the value chain for it to be possible to establish a welfare fund for each sector (Khan and Kazmi 2003: 18).

Unni and Scaria (2009) have similarly traced the value chain in textiles, with home-based workers located at the bottom end of domestic or international value chains. They examine the forms of control in garment embellishment value chains through the work process and through social institutions. In global chains, lead firms exercise control through such factors as design, lead time and quality parameters. Flexibility in production is enabled through informalization. They suggest: “The comparative advantage in the cost of labour in the international chain is largely realized through outsourcing of work to home-based workers, who mostly comprise women, and whose workplace is most often their home.” (Unni and Scaria 2009: 648).

A study across five major retailers in the UK and USA revealed that up to 30 per cent of their total sourcing comes from India. The main products they source are apparel, accessories, leather products, brassware, home crafts and imitation jewellery. On an average, 25 per cent of their sourcing from India involves hand-work. This is in the form of embellishment of all kinds on apparel and home furnishing, stringing in jewellery, and even whole production in the case of craft products. If we were to look at the contribution of weavers and spinners in base fabric production, this percentage would rise even further (Singh 2007).

While the conventional use of value chain analysis has been to further understanding of the economic process, Lund and Nicholson point out that “the value chain approach has the potential to ground the study of social protection in the real world of the working poor. It offers the opportunity to understand better how workers at different points in the chain of production may have different access to a ‘ladder of protection’” (Lund and Nicholson 2003: 19). Value chain analysis has thus been used to draw out the forms of control on home-based work; to examine the exploitation made possible by weak power and high returns from the final consumer; and to explore the possibility of developing social protection out of the “hidden surplus” at higher tiers of the value chain.

It is a useful methodology to develop a “situation analysis” for any particular product group. It is, however exclusively, market focused and, at best, illustrates just some potential strategies that could be introduced within a specific global value chain. The Ethical Trading Initiative has tried such an approach. One of its limitations is its vertical focus – that is, it does not capture (as a sub-sector mapping would be able to do) the other agents at the same level of each node on the value chain. This can be important – for example, if the HBW is aware of other opportunities, domestic or local, this could improve her bargaining power even within the value chain. Therefore, value chain analysis that is “embedded” within the broader social and economic structure can be a more useful way of explicating the economic vulnerabilities of HBWs. So, for example while Mehrotra and Biggeri use the value chain method to understand the situation, in their policy recommendations they shift to a local economic perspective “because both promotive action and social protection upgrading need to have solid roots in the local economic system to be effective” (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007: 363).

6. Characteristics of home-based work

Many of the key characteristics of home-based work are already evident from the above analyses. The main motivations behind several micro studies that have tried to identify the characteristics and vulnerabilities of home-based work have been linked to the on-going efforts at organizing and policy advocacy. Research suggests there is an inverse link between being in home-based work (or other forms of informal work) and the level of access to schooling, skills training, health, credit; thus, high social costs are associated with informality (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007; Sudarshan 2002).

Research into this area has to address the difficulties of not being able to use standard statistical sampling methods, because of the difficulty in creating an appropriate sampling frame. However several innovative methods have been used by researchers to get over this problem. Usually mixed methods are employed, and there is a wealth of rich insights in the qualitative work from this area. Among some of the recent studies, methods used in three can be briefly described:

- 1) Mehrotra and Biggeri combined analysis of secondary data with a carefully designed sample survey, the findings of which cannot be generalized to the whole country, but are likely to be representative for the clusters and areas studied. This study included India and Pakistan, and three countries in South East Asia; a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to obtain comparable data on home-based workers across the five countries. The sample consisted of 603 households in India, 397 households in Pakistan. A multi-stage sampling method was used; first, a large grouping engaged in home-based work was identified; second, sectors and clusters were selected; and finally, households were selected within the clusters. While clusters were selected by national experts and based on their experience and knowledge about the sector, individual households were selected randomly. Almost all households in a cluster were engaged in home-based work in India; in Pakistan, a snowball method was used as it was difficult to locate HBWs, and this was done by getting information about other households in close proximity to the one being interviewed (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007: 33-4; Khan and Kazmi 2003: 6-7).
- 2) A five-country study that included Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka was conducted by ISST and HomeNet South Asia (a network for home-based workers). Sectors were selected for study in a manner similar to the above study – that is, a review of secondary data and discussion with national experts; a structured questionnaire was distributed to households where HBWs were willing to participate in the study. Sectors studied included pottery-making, shell and pearl collection, incense sticks (*agarbathi*) production, weaving and garment making. As an action-research project designed to help with developing the advocacy of the HNSA member organizations, the data collection was participatory and included case studies and focus group discussions to supplement the survey. Approximately 150 households with a home-based worker were surveyed in each country; a total of 837 respondents participated in five countries.
- 3) A third study was conducted among HBWs in different sectors and locations in three Indian states by ISST and HomeNet India. Data was collected through case studies, interviews, and focus group discussions with workers across several activities, and a structured survey covered 323 total respondents in four sectors. The sample for the survey was selected using a snowball method in clusters identified by key respondents (HNI-ISST 2007).

All three of the above studies had a focus on women HBWs.

The multi-country study directed by Mehrotra and Biggeri established that home-based work is not “part-time” as often perceived – high average per-day work hours were recorded. The average work-day varied from 5.2 hours per day to 9.2 hours per day, while the highest work day recorded was 15 hours, as in the table below.

Table 4: Work hours recorded by women home workers, 2001

	Average hours worked per day	Range across sectors surveyed
India (peak season)	8.7	7.8 – 10.6
India (lean season)	4.6	0-7
Pakistan	7.0	6.7-7.6
Indonesia	5.2	5-5.4
Philippines (high season)	-	10-18
Philippines (lean season)	-	1-6
Thailand	9.2	8.7-9.9

Source: Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007: 97

The study found that in India, all home worker contracts were unwritten. In Pakistan, close to 90 per cent were unwritten. Despite this, the production relationship was a stable one, in the sense that workers continued to take work from the same contractor/s and were not seen to shift easily from one contractor to another. The authors suggest a number of potential reasons – limited information about alternative work opportunities available to HBW and the strong social networks that link workers to particular contractors and to each other; lack of any direct contact with the main contractor or the consumer; isolation from other workers; and other forms of control, such as debt bondage (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007: 74, 78). The study found very limited organizing, with just 16.8 per cent of women HBW in India being a member of a labour or trade association; and only 12.5 per cent in Pakistan who reported that they had ever negotiated a better rate via collective action (Ibid 105).

Overall, 71.2 per cent of respondents in India and 69.6 per cent in Pakistan reported having a house – although the quality of facilities varies, in particular the regular availability of water has a direct impact on the time spent by women and children on this chore (Ibid 87-8). Homeworkers are often illiterate – in the Indian study, 52.5 per cent of all the sample was literate, while 94 per cent of all home workers in Pakistan had never attended school (Ibid 99, 194). Weak health status is a combination of work related problems and the unhealthy living conditions (Ibid 104). An important set of findings of this study was the presence of child labour and its implications for inter-generational transmission of poverty. In general, children from home-based work households had a higher probability of working than those from the control group; and the incidence is higher than the national incidence for child labour in a similar age group (Ibid 163).

Some of the main findings of the HNSA-ISST study are reproduced below. First, the fact that HBW includes piece-rated, self-employed and unpaid family workers; this has relevance for the earlier discussion on definitions, and shows how in the South Asian context all three types can be significant. Table 5 below shows the distribution of home-based workers in the sample across these categories. While self employment dominates in some sectors, piece-rated workers do so in others. Unpaid family labour is most significant in the pottery sector.

Table 5: Activity status reported by home-based workers in five South Asian countries, 2006

Country	Sector (arranged in ascending order of earnings level)	Self-employed	Piece-rate workers	Unpaid family labour
		(percentage of all workers)		
Bangladesh	Weaving	10	77	13
	Shell/Pearl	100	-	-
	Garments	29	71	-
	Pottery	40	8	68
India	Agarbathi	3	87	10
	Garments	11	80	7
	Weaving	2	90	6
Nepal	Handmade paper	76	24	-
	Weaving	75	25	-
	Garments	37	63	-
Pakistan	Weaving	11	61	28
		n/a	45	n/a
	Garments	6	94	-
		n/a	62	n/a
	Pottery	-	39	61
Sri Lanka	Coir Yarn	7	87	6
	Reed	54	36	10
	Mat making	32	68	-
	Jewellery	18	61	21
	Batik	57	33	5

Source: Sudarshan 2010: 174

The key problems commonly faced by home-based workers, as reported by them, are given in the table below. Access to inputs such as electricity and raw materials, difficulty of storing the product and raw materials, and problems in receiving timely and regular payments emerge as commonly-faced problems. However the relative ease or difficulty can vary, bringing out the necessity of locale-specific and differentiated strategies for each cluster of workers.

Table 6: Work-related problems as reported by home-based workers in five South Asian countries, 2006

Country	Sector	Access to electricity	Problems with raw materials	Problems with storage	Problems with payment
(Percentage of responses)					
Bangladesh	Weaving	48	76	76	74
	Shell/Pearl	0	46	96	71
	Garments	68	74	40	28
	Pottery	32	92	72	64
India	Agarbathi	76	4	86	7
	Garments	96	9	67	24
	Weaving	88	21	83	22
Nepal	Handmade paper	100	62	18	44
	Weaving	97	45	47	48
	Garments	100	14	63	63
Pakistan	Weaving	95	21	16	47
	Garments	100	6	93	55
	Pottery	84	6	83	13
Sri Lanka	Coir Yarn	90	69	24	69
	Reed	91	54	27	54
	Mat making	80	60	23	60
	Jewellery	67	100	26	100
	Batik	81	62	24	62

Source: HNSA-ISST 2006: 274

Given the difficulty of capturing incomes earned through work that has no fixed wage rates and suffers from seasonality in demand, the following table reports on the ratio of peak season earnings to the average per capita income of the country to illustrate the location of home-based workers in a country's economic spectrum; the data show that actual peak season earnings, as a proportion of the national per capita income, ranged from a low of 4 per cent to a "high" of 40 per cent for this group. While all groups listed income-related problems, for the weaker groups the main issues were the need for more work and timely payment, while those with a little more security also listed skill training and credit for expansion.

Table 7: Earnings, needs and priorities reported by home-based workers in five South Asian countries, 2006

Country	Sectors	Earnings (percentage of per capita income in peak season)	Needs		
Bangladesh	Weaving	5	Timely payment	Minimum Wage	More Work
	Shell/ Pearl	5	Housing	Maternity Benefits	Credit
	Garments	15	Skill training	Credit	Housing
	Pottery	21	Credit	Housing	Skill training
India	Agarbathi	4	Loans	Housing	Health Insurance
	Garments	10	More work	Housing	Loans
	Weaving	11	More work	Loans	Housing
Nepal	Handmade paper	30	More work	Market Information	Health Care Centre
	Weaving	30	Market Information	More work	Health Care Centre
	Garments	40	Skill training	More work	Timely payment
Pakistan	Weaving	16	Credit	Timely payment	Market Information
	Garments	22	Timely Payment	More work	Skill training
	Pottery	31	Timely payment	Credit	More work
Sri Lanka	Coir Yarn	6	Credit	Loans	Housing
	Reed	7	Minimum wage	Loans	Housing
	Mat making	7	Loans	Housing	Skill training
	Jewellery	n/a	Skill training	More work	Credit
	Batik	16	Skill training	Credit	More work

Source: Sudarshan 2010: 177

Apart from “economic insecurities,” discussed above, the HNSA-ISST study explored key sources of “social insecurities,” including, predominantly, poor housing conditions, limited access to health care and high burden of health care expenditure. The low age of entry into home-based work, with a majority of the workers in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan reporting that they started work before age 15, is linked to workers having limited (if any) schooling, and a pattern of perpetuating poverty through the generations (see HNSA-ISST 2006, pp 268-270).

The study carried out by HNI and ISST on home-based work in three Indian states compared the average income earned in peak and lean seasons as a ratio of the state minimum wage; to be noted is both the variation at different times of the year as well as the different experience across sectors. In this study, the range is from 6 – 46 per cent of the state minimum wage in the lean season, and from 18 – 116 per cent in the peak period.

Table 8: Average earnings of home-based workers in selected locations in India as a ratio of the state minimum wage, 2006

Characteristics	Appliqué work in Rampur, Uttar Pradesh	Zari Zardosi work in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh	Phulkari work in Patiala, Punjab
State minimum wage	Rs 58.00 per day	Rs 58.00 per day	Rs 83.00 per day
Average income (per month) in peak period	Rs 305	Rs 1916	Rs 2889
Percentage of state minimum wage	18	110	116
Average income (per month) in lean period	Rs 110	Rs 798	Rs 1026
Percentage of state minimum wage	6	46	41

Source: Bhattacharya and Nandi 2006

This brief review of observed characteristics of HBW offers a direction to policy advocacy. The multiple disadvantages faced by HBW due to poverty, poor habitat, unsuitability of the house from the point of view of storage and working environment, weak educational and health status are compounded by gendered norms and additional care responsibilities. Because women HBW are not “workers” in one sphere and “mothers/wives” in another – but rather fill all these roles simultaneously and in the same space, both literally and figuratively, economic and human development approaches and social protection strategies need to be equally holistic and there needs to be synergy between them. Some sources of insecurity and vulnerability lie within the boundaries of the local space; others arise from processes which are national or global in nature. While more such explicative studies will be useful, given limitations of existing information, future research needs to further unravel the implications for development and social protection policy.

7. The policy environment

International and regional policy trends

Internationally, an important milestone in the development of policies for home-based workers has been the ratification of ILO Convention No. 177, which mandates that all home workers should have basic labour rights – irrespective of the sector in which they work – and guarantees the applicability of core labour standards and other standards to all home workers.

The Self Employed Women's Association was instrumental in persuading the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) to pass this convention.

Prugl (1999) notes:

Negotiating the Home Work Convention was contentious in part because participants brought to the table very different understandings of what home-based workers were.... Next to conceptualizations of identity that revived the old image of exploited mothers (the unions' perspective) appeared those that suggested home-based workers were the maternal source of economic development (the Third World government perspective), and those that reversed the dichotomy and described home-based workers as resilient and resourceful family providers (the homemaker advocates' perspective).

Prugl 1999: 106

Individual governments need to ratify the Convention, and introduce national legislation. The campaign to ratify C177 is making slow but important progress. To date, seven countries have ratified the convention: Albania, Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands. HomeNet South Asia and the Global Labour Institute, with support from WIEGO, continue to encourage unions and other opinion-formers to press for ratification, and for the introduction of national laws to implement the Convention's principles.

The Home Work Convention (C177) is an international regulatory, comprehensive framework that aims to treat home workers equally to other wage earners. In Article 4 (2) of C177, the Convention states:

Equality of treatment shall be promoted, in particular, in relation to:

- a) the homeworkers' right to establish or join organizations of their own choosing and to participate in the activities of such organizations;
- b) protection against discrimination in employment and occupation;
- c) protection in the field of occupational safety and health;
- d) remuneration;
- e) statutory social security protection;
- f) access to training;
- g) minimum age for admission to employment or work; and
- h) maternity protection.

(ILO Convention No. 177)

In October 2000, in a Conference organized by UNIFEM and WIEGO, home-based workers and their organizations, South Asia governments' policy-makers and researchers met and formulated the Kathmandu Declaration for the rights of South Asian home-based workers. The Kathmandu Declaration recommended formulation of a national policy and a plan of action on home-based workers by the governments of the

South Asian Region in consultation with the stakeholders. It also urged SAARC to address the issues of home-based workers in the region and take measures to enable them to deal with the risks and opportunities of globalization.

The Kathmandu Declaration (see Annex 1) identifies the following major areas inviting the attention of governments:

- Formation of National Policy on home-based workers by each country;
- Minimum protection, which would include right to organized, minimum remuneration, occupational health and safety, statutory social protection, maternity, childcare, skill development and literacy programmed;
- Access to market and economic resources including raw material, marketing infrastructure, technology, credit and information.
- The establishment of social funds for home-based workers, which would provide insurance against risk of illnesses, death, old age, accidents, loss of livelihood assists and contingencies as locally required;
- Incorporation into official statistics baseline data regarding various categories of workers in the informal sector.

These discussions led to the formation of HomeNet South Asia (HNSA) by SEWA and UNIFEM in 2000. HomeNet South Asia has emerged as a dynamic and vibrant network of organizations working with HBWs from five countries in South Asia: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal. It seeks to be the collective voice of the HBWs of the region, and use this voice at the national, regional and international levels to influence legislation, policies and programmes; the network also extends technical support to its members.³

The home work convention and the Kathmandu Declaration seek to put in place special and separate measures that would secure for HBWs a status as workers entitled to social security. There are, however, a range of other measures in place to which HBWs have an entitlement, even though the actual outreach may be low. Some argue that more effort should go into ensuring better outreach and implementation of existing policies and programmes; others believe a separate law is needed to ensure adequate protection. In India, the official website of the Ministry of Labour and Employment states:

With a view to provide legislative protection, welfare measures and social security to this large body of home based workers who have been hitherto neglected, Government proposes to formulate a National Policy on Home Based Workers. The elements that could go into the preparation of this document could, inter-alia, include survey of home based workers, provision of legislative protection, occupational health and safety, provision of social security, prevention of child labour and forced labour, access to training, provision of welfare measures etc.

Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India
(accessed at <http://labour.gov.in/dglw/homeworker.html> on Dec 6, 2010)

In other South Asian countries however, despite HNSA lobbying for similar national policies, the need for a separate policy is not yet accepted.

Country specific policy frameworks

A range of social protection initiatives do exist in South Asian countries that cover home-based workers, in theory; however the outreach is very limited in practice. Thus labour laws, insurance schemes, micro finance, pensions, employment guarantee schemes, and welfare funds have some limited application to home-based workers. But they are not tailored to home-based workers and hence are not designed to cover their specific vulnerabilities.

³ <http://www.homenetsouthasia.org/index.php> accessed Dec 6, 2010.

In India, Ela Bhatt, while a member of the Rajya Sabha,⁴ proposed the Home Based Workers (Problem and Welfare) Bill as a private member's bill in 1988. This could not be passed at that time due to insufficient support among legislators (Mukul 1998: 758). Recognition of home-based work within policy circles has come about gradually. Shramshakti (GOI 1988) and the National Commission on Rural Labour (GOI, 1991) both drew attention to the group, as did the Second National Commission on Labour (2002a) (GOI 1988, 1991, 2002).

The current outreach of government social protection is limited, and a report of the National Commission on Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector on social security estimates that “the total number of persons covered under various social security schemes is 21 million, which is equivalent to a mere 6 per cent of the total number of unorganized/informal workers of around 362 million, as in the year 2000” (GOI 2006: 4.0)⁵. This means in practice, people cope with contingencies and chronic problems by relying upon traditional mechanisms of support, including borrowing from neighbours, contractors, employers and relatives.

While economic aspects of security (wage level, seasonality, access to credit) are critical, health emerges as a top priority as confirmed for example in the HNSA-ISST study. Poor health was reported to be linked to the work process and seen as an occupational health issue, as well as being influenced by overall living conditions. Examples of the former include abdominal pain and miscarriage among weavers due to continuous pedaling; and eye problems and joint pains among garment and pottery workers due to posture and poor lighting. Pottery workers had other problems – the constant handling of clay leading to creases and discoloration of the hands. *Agarbathi* workers suffered from working in poor lighting and in cramped spaces; inhaling of *agarbathi* powder led to persistent colds, coughs and bronchial problems. Sitting in a hunched position for long hours caused backaches and joint pain. Shell and pearl collectors complained of eyesight troubles as they keep their eyes open under water. Finally, in the handmade paper sector, workers felt they faced immense health risks due to the chemicals they were exposed to during their work.

In all South Asian countries there has been some effort to reach out to workers, including home-based workers, in the unorganized or informal sector, but outreach is low. The tables below list the existing state initiatives, and best practices identified by HNSA members.

Table 9: Existing state initiatives to extend social protection to informal and home-based workers

Country	Policy	Status
Bangladesh	Workers Welfare Fund Act Maternity Voucher Scheme	Proposed Pilot Scheme
India	Minimum Wages Act 1948 Employees Provident Fund Act 1952 Maternity Benefit Act 1961 Beedi Workers Welfare Fund Act 1976 Beedi Workers Welfare Cess Act 1976 Beedi and Cigar Workers Act 1996 Janashree Bima Yojana Insurance schemes for fishermen, handloom weavers Universal Health Insurance Scheme National Social Assistance Programme 1995 Wage employment programmes notably NREGA 2005 Unorganised Workers Social Security Act 2008	Passed by Parliament December 2008

continued on following page

⁴ The Rajya Sabha is the Upper House of the Indian Parliament. Ela Bhatt, who founded SEWA in 1972, served as a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha between 2006-09.

⁵ http://www.nceus.gov.in/Final_Edited_Social_Security_Repor.htm#chap2 accessed on 14 AUGUST 2010

Table 9 continued: Existing state initiatives to extend social protection to informal and home-based workers

Country	Policy	Status
Nepal	Labour Act 1992 Labour and Employment Policy 2006	
Pakistan	Labour Policy 2002 National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women 2002	
Sri Lanka	Workmen's Compensation Ordinance of 1934 as amended Maternity Benefits Ordinance of 1939 as amended Statutory Pension Schemes for the Self Employed – farmers, fishermen, others Poverty alleviation scheme 1989	Covers all workers Covers all trades

Source: Sudarshan 2010: 180

Apart from the state-level initiatives, in each country there are several non-government efforts reaching out to home-based workers and seeking to offer some kind of support. Bangladesh pioneered innovative efforts around micro credit; these have since also come up in other countries (India and Pakistan, for example). However most NGO efforts are small in scale and while they might work intensively with a small group, only a few are able to offer holistic support. A brief discussion of some of these “best practices” is included in the report by HNSA-ISST (2006).

Mazumdar draws attention to the fact that policy approaches have been embedded within a patriarchal framework; while recognizing that home-based work might lead to “more direct forms of income for women in the family,” this means that the policy discourse continues to “buttress the practice of confinement of women to the home by the economic process.” (Mazumdar n.d.: 40-41). Tradition and faith play an important role in the persisting seclusion of women and hence the necessity for any intervention to be gradual and organic, concludes a study among home-based women workers in the costume jewelry industry (Action India 2000: 26).

Mehrotra and Biggeri suggest that the challenge for policy “is to minimize the vulnerability of workers in home work while supporting the elements that ensure efficiency in production.” Their recommendation is to focus on local economic development, using a cluster approach, a strategy used very successfully in Italy, for example (Mehrotra and Biggeri 2007: 120, 362).

Most of the policy discussion for HBWs in the region, and especially in India, has tended to focus more on social protection than on development. While the policy on home-based workers remains in draft form, the government has now passed legislation designed to offer social security to all unorganized workers. Its proposal includes health insurance, life insurance, maternity benefits and old age pensions. The home work activists have argued the need for other forms of social protection – notably child care, shelter security and micro finance. One of the ways in which informal workers have been reached, including some groups of HBW, is through sectoral and tripartite welfare funds of which the Beedi Workers Welfare Fund is the oldest example. Southern states in India have been more proactive in introducing welfare funds for diverse groups. Discussions around ways in which HBW could contribute through a cluster development approach to local economic development have been muted. The national development strategy envisions a particular form of decentralization but the connections between HBWs and local development, and between local development strategies and macro economic policy formulation, remains weak.

8. Organizing and voice

Organizing, particularly for poor women, is a way of addressing the limitations imposed by poverty, lack of knowledge about the world, and dependence that results from such insecurity. “For women whose world has been confined to home, family and work, the very act of joining an organization adds breadth to their lives” (UNIFEM 2005: 76). Through organizing, voices of the disempowered can be heard across the world.

Barriers to organizing

However there are several barriers to organizing home-based workers. When SEWA tried to register itself as a trade union under the Trade Unions Act, the Labour Commissioner objected on the grounds that in the absence of clear employer-employee relationship, they did not fit the “traditional” definition of a worker. Also, since HBWs typically engage in a wide range of occupations, simultaneously or consecutively, it is difficult to slot the union into a particular sector. Generally, a typical “worker” has only one permanent occupation and trade unions are formed by occupation. In defining HBWs as a category of workers entitled to the same rights as other workers, the definition of “work” itself is being questioned, as Ela Bhatt of SEWA explains:

The first conceptual block we encountered was when we tried to register SEWA as a trade union under the Trade Union Act of India. We did not fit into their definition of “worker” or “trade union.” We were an organization of chindi workers, cart pullers, rag pickers, embroiderers, midwives, forest produce gatherers; but we were not “workers.” Moreover, we did not have a fixed employer to agitate or fight against and so the government resisted against our registration as a trade union. Labour laws could not be applied to us. According to them, we were not workers; we did not work. The day we registered SEWA, we questioned the definition of work.

(Bhatt 2004: 7)

One of the reasons that women working from home is socially acceptable is because there are often stated or unstated restrictions on women’s mobility – some communities being more explicit about the restriction. Contractors and sub contractors will ensure that work is carried to the woman’s house and the completed product taken back. This reduces chances of organized protest or collective bargaining, or competitive price setting. Control can also be exercised through varying forms of debt bondage as in the example below:

The contractor delivers the raw materials and collects the finished product from my house. We have to maintain good relations with the contractor because he is our only source of income and we cannot afford to annoy him. When my father died, he had lent us some grains and some money. We are still repaying that loan. On the other hand, he always turns down our requests for better payments, citing some excuse or the other. Neither does he pay us our entire earnings at one go – often retaining or deducting for poor quality of work.

I know that he employs other workers too, but I am unaware about the rates he pays them and the rate at which he sells the products embroidered by us. Sometimes, he gets orders from other countries too, at very good rates.

(GOI 2002b: 17)

In practice, one of the most powerful barriers to organizing has been seen to be fear – women have been brought up to fear their men, their employers, and their communities. Traditional attitudes towards women result in a lack of mobility, a lack of value for women’s worth, and a position of deference to male opinions;

traditional attitudes also lead to a sense of helplessness among women, which must be overcome before they can begin to take their lives into their own hands. This makes the process of building solidarity a deeply political and transformative endeavour. Hill concludes her analysis of SEWA's strategies by noting that "poor women workers who come together in their own union use their collective agency specifically to advocate for access to the productive resources they have historically been denied. This is a contested strategy that emphasizes the social relations of socio-economic power" (Hill 2010: 180). Among the examples of organizing home-based workers, the process by which a tripartite agreement was eventually reached for *agarbathi* workers in the mid-1990s – a process that had to break through the barriers placed by those with economic power colluding with those with political power – is an excellent example of the opposition that women face when their demands are for equality of treatment and include minimum wages, identity cards, and welfare (Hill 2010: 163-4).

Yet another factor that impedes organizing is the manner in which the isolation of home-based work can lead to competitiveness with each other. For example, Meena Gopal writes:

as the workplace enters the homes, where each woman is literally on her own...women are isolated in their struggle for survival... Being unaware of the workings of the industry and the real reasons why certain terms and conditions are imposed on them, they try to compete with each other also. Thus their own labour process exercises divisiveness.

(Gopal 2005: 143)

Trends in organizing

Despite these barriers, when UNIFEM and HomeNet South Asia carried out a mapping of organizations before developing a programme for home-based workers, they found that there were at least 508 such organizations in Bangladesh and 307 in Pakistan, with a large percentage of women members. It can be an advantage for women to join "new" unions because there is less weight of established practices to contend with:

For women, the advantages of organizing in 'new' unions is that they can set up innovative structures and programmes that are less patriarchal and more open to changes than traditional unions. For example, women's unions are generally more creative in finding solutions to issues such as child care and meeting times.

(UNIFEM 2005: 77, 80)

There are also a large number of co-operatives of home-based workers in the region and this seems to be a preferred form of organizing for the women home-based workers. Co-operatives are people's organizations which promote and generate women's employment for those who do not have bargaining power in the labour market and are placed at a lower level in the economic hierarchy. There are a few Trusts and Societies too, which function with the "spirit" of a cooperative, though they are not registered as such. One of the commonly used entry points in organizing HBWs is through micro-finance, which has spread considerably in the last two decades. A large number of self-help groups (SHGs) are now in existence, and these form a base for further organizing; SEWA, for example, has found this especially true as it extends to newer areas. The SHGs themselves are a result of considerable mobilization at village levels, which may have occurred spontaneously or more usually through the interventions of NGOs or government efforts.

SEWA has been in the forefront of organizing and policy advocacy for HBWs and, as mentioned earlier, played a key role in the formulation of the ILO convention on home work. Among SEWA's own membership, HBWs were 17 per cent of the total membership of 483,012 in 2006 (Hill 2010: 47). Labour unions in the region have developed their organizing skills in the context of the formal economy, and until today very few have been able to organize informal workers, including HBWs (Ibid 51). SEWA is the largest organization of informal working women; others include the Working Women's Forum in Tamil Nadu and the Annapurna Mahila Mandal in Mumbai.

Organizing for work and traditional gendered roles

Most organizing and advocacy for HBWs has therefore grown out of women's experience and has been led by women. Naila Kabeer points out that "women-led organizations appear to express a preference for negotiation over confrontation, with militant tactics treated as an option of last resort. SEWA ...opts for a style of negotiation that does not threaten the livelihoods of workers whose weak bargaining power makes protest difficult" (Kabeer 2008: 86). This likely reflects fewer work choices, greater social embeddedness, and care responsibilities (Ibid 87). As Hill points out, quite apart from exploitative work arrangements, families and communities value women more for their reproductive roles, and this makes it doubly difficult to organize women (Hill 2010: 71).

Precisely because there are high barriers to be overcome, successful organizing can have powerful impact. As Doane (2007) put it:

...it is crucially important for home-based women workers to become organised, in order to ensure access to even basic levels of social protection. Home-based and other informal workers' organizations provide information to and a voice for their members. In fact, it is not clear that effective policies will be implemented or sustained in the absence of this 'voice' and these well established and ongoing organizations... The 'success stories' of informal women workers, of which policymakers are understandably proud, can certainly be a source of inspiration and learning. However, coming up with systematic and effective responses to the real needs of the most vulnerable must remain the clear and sustained focus of attention, beginning with a recognition of the true circumstances of those at the bottom.

(Doane 2007: 29-30)

Even as mobilizing of HBWs extends to include more and more workers in South Asia, some of the basic dilemmas remain to be resolved. Whether or not paid work can be a pathway to empowerment has elicited different views, but there is a convergence in the view that work within the home "is least likely to effect any significant changes in power relations, either within the family or outside it" (Kabeer 2008: 31). Socialist feminists, in particular, have argued that subordination to "merchants, sub contractors, and employers" is greatly facilitated by HBWs being seen as housewives (Prugl 1999: 91). Is a feminist, transformatory mobilization possible without changing the home-based nature of the work? Hill's analysis suggests that it is; while others might argue otherwise.

A recent analysis of the experience in using the Equal Remuneration Act (ERA) in India showed how little it has, in fact, been used as an instrument of gender equality (ISST 2010). In a context where informal workers are poor and vulnerable, individual efforts for equality are risky and could not lead to more systemic change; and organized groups are yet to exert their weight to ensure implementation of such available policy tools as the ERA. Narratives of women organizing for change are still insufficiently recorded and analyzed, and this is an exciting future agenda for research.

9. Conclusion: critical research gaps

In concluding this paper presents some areas where more research is needed that would help to advance the policy debate, and where activist energies are needed.

First, there has been a lot of progress over the last 10-15 years towards evolving a universally accepted definition of home-based workers and collecting data on the group so defined. More work remains to be done in comparing definitions being used in different countries – examining which groups get included and which excluded in each of these – and whether there is a case to be made for including the excluded groups, and what this would mean for the definition itself.

Second, the data on HBWs is still very patchy. Countries have collected some data nationally but there is still no clear protocol for national data collection on this group. Micro and meso level studies that have been carried out, and these have helped to illuminate the picture. Most studies use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Given the nature of the group and its heterogeneity, small case studies continue to be relevant; however future work needs to make an effort to embed such studies into the “macroscope” to determine how the work has evolved over a period of time, what the nature of the link is, if any, with formal enterprises and the organized sector, and what the growth trajectory might be.

Third, much more attention needs to be given to the relevance and potential of cluster development approaches for HBWs. While there is a role for global consumer-led ethical approaches to ensure implementation of labour codes for all workers, including HBWs, sustainability and implementation of labour codes require local embeddedness. Given the significance of domestic markets for home-based work in South Asia, value chain studies need to be supplemented with local economic development analysis.

Fourth, women HBWs face multiple disadvantages due to poverty, poor habitat, the unsuitability of their houses for working and storing goods, weak educational and health status, and also the simultaneous constraints imposed by gendered norms, specifically but not exclusively around care responsibilities. The implications of the latter for actual outcomes of policy interventions or even programmes designed by activists need to be understood. Research also needs to document the ways in which such gendered social norms change over time.

Fifth, at a policy level, the discourse on social protection needs to be linked to development discourse more strongly. Social protection is often presented to economic growth advocates as a safety net, while its developmental potential is ignored. The development potential of each group of HBWs is not the same, and the nature of the social protection deficit will correspondingly vary. While many segments are strongly linked to existing growth paths, others may be more in tune with alternative growth paths. The nature of the impediments to the growth of HBW groups – technical, administrative, political, or other – call for more research.

And finally, narratives of women organizing for change are still insufficiently recorded and analyzed. The actual strategies used – the ways in which women address household constraints as well as work constraints, the role of external agents and of organizing, the shifting social norms and the HBWs work life choices – are a rich source for gender and empowerment research.

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Annex 1: Kathmandu Declaration on Women Workers in the Informal Sector, particularly home-based workers, 20 October 2000

The South Asian Regional Meeting on Women Workers in the Informal Sector: Creating an Enabling Environment, participated by the Governments of India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka; and by trade unions, nongovernmental organizations, relevant UN and international organizations, community based organizations and research organizations from these countries, and Bangladesh, having met in Kathmandu on 18-20 October 2000 and having deliberated on the issues hereby resolved as follows:

Whereas, women workers in the informal sector, unorganized and agro-based sectors contribute significantly to the economic development of their respective countries, and acknowledging that home-based work has been growing rapidly worldwide due to globalization and liberalization, particularly in South Asia, And whereas available evidence suggests that homebased work is an important source of employment especially for economically disadvantaged women, And Noting that there are at least 50 million homebased workers in South Asia of whom around 80% are women, who carry out remunerative production and services in their own homes and include own account or self employed workers as well as those who do not work for contractors or employers at the piece-rates,

And whereas such workers contribute significantly to the National Economy, these workers are mostly illiterate, invisible, unrepresented and voiceless, and are not generally incorporated in the National Development agenda. Therefore, in order to bring these homebased workers into the national economic mainstream in accordance with the ILO Convention no. 177, this meeting recommends:

Formulation of a National Policy and a Plan of Action on Home-based Workers by the Government of the South Asian Region in consultation with the stakeholders, with the following components:

- Minimum protection, which would include right to organize, minimum remuneration, occupational health and safety, statutory social protection, maternity, child-care, skill development and literacy programme.
- Access to markets and economic resources including raw materials, marketing infrastructure, technology, credit and information.
- Set up Social Funds for homebased workers, which would provide insurance against risks of illness, death, old age, accidents, loss of livelihood assets and contingencies as locally required.
- Incorporate into official statistics baseline data regarding various categories of workers in the informal sector and in particular homebased workers and their contribution to national economies.

Urges SAARC to address the issues of homebased workers in the region and take measures to enable them to deal with the risks and opportunities of globalization by:

Setting up a Technical Committee for informal sector workers and home-based workers to promote:

- National Policies
- Bilateral Co-operation
- Regional Co-operation
- Promote increased integration of markets at the regional level so as to create more employment opportunities.
- Include homebased products in the SAFTA priority list.

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 organisations 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 organisations; 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 organisations (MBOs) of the working poor in the areas of organising, 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: Asiye 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 see www.inclusivecities.org.

