

Campaign for Home based workers

Numbers of Home-based workers all over the world are increasing. Sharing with you some of the statistics of the home-based workers. According to one of the ILO studies there were around 260 million home-based workers worldwide representing 7.9% of global employment out of which 56% of them that is 147 million are women. The percentage of home-based workers HBWs in South Asia alone is 67.5 million and **in India there are 41.85 million home-based workers, which constitutes 9% of the total employment in India.**

In India, the working and employment trends are changing and the employer to escape the liability under laws/legislation outsource or contract the work which has laid to the increase in the home-based workers.

SEWA has experienced large diversity in the home-based trades ranging from cotton wick making, eatables making, garment stitching and these trades are predominated by women and children. Unfortunately, these women workers are not recognised and have no identity as the workers. There is a complex and long chain of contractors in this system and at every level commission is deducted by the middlemen resulting in meagre wages and most importantly lack of social protection.

Some of the characteristics of home based trades and workers are there are two types of the home based workers- own account and piece rate. It was predominated by women and these women workers are not aware of their identity as workers. Home based trades involve unpaid family labour and high rate of child labour. There is a complex and long supply chain of employers/contractors. Home based workers are at the end of value chain- poorly paid- more vulnerable and exploited

The main issues of the home-based workers are they are highly scattered. There is lack of visibility and recognition. The Government does not have no statistical information. There is no protection under law. It is difficult to prove employer-employee relations. The working conditions are poor and the home based workers get fewer wages and suffers many Occupational Hazard. These workers have no protection under law and no social security.

Two main trades of the home-based category are Textile and Ready made garmenting and beedi trade.

Currently, in many States /Cities of India have become hub of the readymade garment. Many small and big industries/factories/units of readymade garment stitching. Many units providing value addition to the readymade garment like embroidery, decorations, colouring, tying the ends have also opened up on the large scale, thus it has become upcoming field with lot of earning potential, providing livelihood to million readymade garment workers.

There are two types of readymade garment workers i - home based or carried out in small factories or make shift sheds in the homes. These sheds are in the homes of the women where there are four to five electric machines and women (sometimes men) also work on these machines. The majority of readymade garment women workers are illiterate, unskilled, unaware, and victims of socio-cultural prejudices, which prevent their working outside. Further readymade garment is characterized by irregular hours, low and irregular income, poor and dangerous working conditions, lack of social protection (like healthcare, insurance, childcare or shelter). These workers are scattered and invisible. Moreover, as the homes of these workers are their work place, it becomes difficult to organize them. The Government has no statistics regarding them hence they remain voiceless and unprotected. Moreover, in many trades, it is difficult to establish the "employer- employee" relations. There is along

chain of the contractors. In many cases the starting point of this chain is the international brands and at the lowest end in the poor and vulnerable women worker.

Moreover, these women workers have to face different sort of problems. For example, they have to incur the cost of threads from their own pockets. The shopkeeper sensing the needs in the festival season increase the rates of the thread. That means fewer wages to the workers. Furthermore, if the electric company sees two sewing machines in the home, they charge electricity at the commercial rates thus reducing the wages. Lastly the globalization has also affected the livelihood of the readymade garment workers. Presently, new types of clothe materials such as velvet, net, jersey, knitted, hosiery and the new patters are very much demand. However, the home-based workers of informal economy does not know how to stitch this kind of materials and patterns because these kinds of fabrics do not pass from the present machines. Thus, there is absence of sustainable livelihood, income security and social security.

Sharing the example of the Beedi workers, when SEWA went to organise beedi (Indian cigarette workers) in one of district of Gujarat, we found that they were lowly paid. When we approached the labour commissioner he said that they are not the workers. They just do it to pass their time hence the employer- employee relationship is not applicable. All the rules of supervision and control were applicable to these workers. We filed the court cases for the same and coined the word home based workers to give them identity and we are talking about 7.5 million Beedi workers in India. It took 17 years of continuous struggle to establish employer employee relationship in the Court of Laws. We started organising these homebased workers because there was a social security coverage of them through "The Beedi Workers Welfare Cess Act ,1979 but unfortunately not a single worker was protected by it as the registration and Scheme forms were lengthy and in English language and the workers could not understand it. We took the Officials of the Labour and Employment Department to the home of the Beedi workers and showed them their socio- economic and working conditions. Our first step of collective bargaining was to provide social security coverage to beedi (Indian cigar workers) under the Act. We advocated for the simple registration system, forms in the local language and the schemes for the children like scholarship, attendance, school uniform etc. This especially helped us in reducing the child labour and promoted the girl's education. Currently because of the Goods and Service Tax the Beedi Welfare Cess Act is repealed without consulting anybody. The Government has not made any alternative arrangement hence it has become difficult for the 7.5 million workers to access the social security benefit.

System Gaps:

1. No Visibility, Validation and Recognition by the Government.
2. Difficult to identity by the Government as they are scattered and home based.
3. No protection under law and no social security.
4. No minimum wages. We demand piece rate minimum wages. Government is ready to fix per day minimum wages but the workers are at loss because actually they are paid on number of pieces they make.
5. Long Working hours
6. Health Hazards
7. Long supply chain – international and National with lots of contractors in between- Wages cut at all level

Long term campaigns are:

- Enactment for National Policy for the Home Based Workers (Ratification of ILO Convention 177).
- Implementation of Social Security schemes.
- Fixation of Wages on the piece rate basis: The Government has fixed the minimum wages on per day basis. Many times the design of the ready made garment is so complicated that it takes whole day to prepare one garment. SEWA made a representation to the government to fix the minimum wages on piece rate basis as the women workers are getting paid on the piece rate basis. The Government and SEWA are making a joint study to fix the minimum wages readymade garment on piece rate.

Short term campaigns are:

- Identity card
- Wage Increase
- Bonus- Allowance at the time of the festivals
- Linking with Sustainable employment
- Skill up gradation training
- Social Security Benefit