

## **South Asian Regional Plan of Action for Home-based Workers**

**New Delhi, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2007**

1. We, Ministers, Secretaries and Senior Officers of the Governments, Networks of Home-based Workers, trade unions, NGOs and researchers from – Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, met at New Delhi from 18-20 January 2007 at the Women Work & Poverty: Policy Conference on Home-based Workers of South Asia, jointly organized by UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office and SEWA.
2. We note that all workers are entitled to universal rights to which the governments have committed themselves. However, as a large majority of women workers, especially home-based workers are denied their rights, the ILO Convention of 1996 and the Kathmandu Declaration of 2000 urged the recognition of Home-based Workers and steps to bring them into the national economic mainstream; formulation of National Policies for Home-based Workers; integration into regional markets and raising their visibility and voice.
3. Since then, there has been considerable progress with the formation of networks of organizations of home-based workers in the above-mentioned five countries and their federation into Homenet South Asia, which now has over 600 organizational members.
4. **After having deliberated on home-based workers and their concerns, we note the following:**
  - a) Whereas, home-based work, which is part of the informal economy, has been growing rapidly in South Asia, due to the opening of foreign and internal markets and due to out-sourcing by companies;

- b) Whereas home-based workers include own account or self employed workers as well as those who work for contractors or employers at piece-rates;
- c) Whereas home-based work exists in all sectors of employment including manufacturing, services and agro-based sectors;
- d) Whereas available evidence suggests that home-based work is an important source of employment especially for economically disadvantaged women, and that a great majority of both old and new forms of home-based work is undertaken by women;
- e) Whereas there are at least 50 million home-based workers in South Asia, most of whom are women;
- f) Whereas their remuneration amounts/earnings are very low, they lack social security protection and their conditions of work are poor;
- g) Whereas Home-based workers often have traditional skills, yet they lack access to further skill training and upgradation
- h) Whereas they lack direct access to markets due to long value chains;
- i) Whereas such workers contribute significantly to the National economies, these workers are mostly invisible, unrepresented and voiceless, and are not generally incorporated in the national development agendas;
- j) And whereas there is an ongoing Independent South Asia Commission on Poverty Alleviation (ISACPA) which has recommended special concern and focusing on women workers to eliminate poverty.

**5. In light of the above, we understand that in order to promote the growth and prosperity of our region we need to address poverty by focusing on the issues of *women, work and poverty*. We therefore support:**

**A) The formulation of National Policies on Home-based Workers, in consultation with all stakeholders. The key components of these policies could include the following:**

- i) Minimum protection, which would include:
- minimum remuneration, including adoption of national minimum wages for piece-rated home-based workers;
  - skill development and literacy programmes;
  - occupational health and safety; and
  - schemes for upgradations of their homes which are their workplaces, with a view to enhancing the work environment in order to make it more hygienic, safe and productive.
- ii) Social protection, which could include:
- Insurance – life and health;
  - Access to health care;
  - Child care;
  - Livelihood assets;
  - Pension;
  - Disability benefit;
  - Maternity benefit;
  - Children’s educational assistance;
  - Housing;
  - Legal counseling and support; and
  - Risk reduction, preparedness and support in time of disaster.
- iii) Access to market and economic resources, including:
- Raw materials;
  - Marketing infrastructure;
  - Technology, including information technology;
  - Skill training;
  - Credit and information
  - Market protection for the products of the Home-based workers; and

- Enabling existing schemes to include poor women's economic institutions to derive equal benefit as the organised sector players.

iv) Voice and governance:

- Recognise the home-based workers rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining;
- Recognition of HomeNet and other fora for Home-based workers's voice;
- Resource support to enable home-based workers to organize, lobby, advocate and campaign;
- Promote research and development; and
- Address the need to promote shared responsibility in care-giving roles in the family and prevent women from being overburdened by multiple tasks and responsibilities.

**B) Institutionalise the systematic collection of data on Home-based Workers and their contribution to the national economies and promote and support the development of a SAARC Gender Data Base to include the above:**

- Taking cognizance of the saying "If you are not counted, you do not count", ensuring that women Home-based workers are made part of the official statistics, computing a value for their work and acknowledging & recognizing their contribution to the economy of their country;
- Building on existing good practices of data collection in each country in order to expand into a more inclusive official data collection system and learning and sharing between the statistical institutions of the countries of the region;

- Ensuring that all countries surveys include question on the ‘place of work’ and carry out the required analysis and tabulation, so as to provide a complete picture;
- Ensuring the participation and voice of women Home-based workers in the formulation of macro-and micro-economic policies; and
- Building on the already created consensus on the SAARC Gender Data Base, to strengthen it and include in it the various dimensions of Home-based Work, including highlighting the gaps and opportunities.

**C) Using globalization and trade opportunities to build better and inclusive markets.**

The South Asian region, presents immense market opportunities for Home-based products. The major factors that need to be addressed to ensure that home-based workers benefit from these opportunities are as follows:

- Building trade related capacity of Home-based producers through investment in the areas of skill upgradation, technology upgradation, design development and product development;
- Building exclusive retail platforms for Home-based products in all countries in the South Asian region;
- Promoting Collective Enterprises of Home-based Workers;
- Undertaking Trade Promotion initiatives specific to Home-based products, as a part of the mainstream trade promotion initiatives for the organized sector by country governments;
- Promoting the use of Information Technology to facilitate the linkages between the Home-based producers and global and regional markets;
- Encouraging governments of SAARC countries to negotiate preferential or zero tariffs, with the OECD countries, for goods of home-based worker;

- Including products of home-based workers included in the SAFTA priority list;
- Supporting and facilitating processes to engender global and regional trade agreements and treaties;
- Facilitating research on trade and Home-based work, especially looking at bringing women workers up in the value chain of production.

#### **D) Ratification of ILO Convention No. 177 (1996) on Home Work**

Ratification by all governments is most essential because it recognizes the importance of this lowest tier of workers, most of whom are women, and when implemented will prove to be part of an effective anti-poverty strategy. It will also contribute to the empowerment of women both as workers and as citizens. As several governments have themselves pointed out, the Home Work Convention is actually modest and simple in that it merely extends protection to a category of workers who had been previously ignored and excluded.

#### **E) Recognition of Home-based Workers networks as representational bodies at the regional level.**

Since the Kathmandu Declaration (2000), great strides have been made in the formation and the development of organizations of Home-based workers and their networks. Homenet South Asia has emerged as a representational body of the organizations working with and for Home-based workers in the five countries of the region and has been formally launched on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2007. It has provided a platform for women Home-based workers in the region to link to each other and provide solidarity across barriers. Homenet South Asia needs to be acknowledged as the representational body of Home-based workers in the

region and be included in the formation of policies and the implementation and monitoring of programs concerning all aspects of Home-based workers' lives and work.

**6. We therefore urge:**

**SAARC** to recognize the importance of home-based workers as contributors to national economies and growth, and to realize that addressing their concerns would substantially reduce poverty and give women's empowerment an impetus; and to acknowledge Homenet South Asia as the representational body of home-based workers in the region. The rights and concerns of home-based workers should therefore be given priority in the deliberations and programmes of SAARC. As a first step this should be taken up in the upcoming SAARC Summit in April 2007.

**National Governments** to formulate and ensure implementation of national policies, ratify ILO Convention No. 177, include home-based workers in national statistics, facilitate more inclusive markets and recognize the home-based workers organizations and networks.

**Trade Unions** to reach out to home-based workers, to include them as members, as well as help them to build their own organizations, and to advocate for ratification of the ILO Convention No. 177.

**Organisations of home-based workers** to expand their reach nationally and across the region, raise awareness and advocate for the rights of home-based workers, ensure access to services, markets and social protection and work towards their empowerment.

**The private sector and employers** to recognize the existence of home-based workers in value chains and to ensure fair earnings and social protection; to

contribute towards building the capacity and skills of home-based workers; and to facilitate them to go up the value chain of production.

**International development agencies** to recognize the numbers and conditions of home-based workers and to realize that addressing their concerns would substantially reduce poverty and contribute towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals especially in empowering women and reducing the feminization of poverty; and to include the rights and concerns of home-based workers in their policies and programmes.