



Building Visibility and Voice through Responsive Homebased Workers' Organizations in Asia: Focus On ILO Convention 177 on Home Work

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Joint Conference-Workshop on “Building Visibility and Voice through Responsive Home based Workers’ Organizations in Asia: Focus on ILO Convention 177 on Home Work”
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Introduction

Homenet South Asia (HNSA) and Homenet Southeast Asia (HNSEA), together with its funding partner, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) organized a joint conference-workshop to: (1) share experiences and assess the campaign for ILO C177 ratification on a per country and sub-regional basis; (2) to share experiences and lessons in advocating for national policies and laws on home-based workers; and (3) to review the results of membership based organizing initiatives. This was attended by 39 representatives from five (5) South Asian countries, namely, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and India, seven (7) Southeast Asia, namely, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Viet Nam and Malaysia, and representatives from FES.

Conference Highlights

1st session, chaired by Mr. Dilanthe Withanage, Program Director of HN Sri Lanka

Damyanty Sridharan, Senior Project Adviser from FES India stressed the importance of the meeting being the first joint conference organized by HNSA, HNSEA and FES, and further, it was held in the Southeast Asian Region. She reiterated the support of FES to the network to achieve visibility of home-based workers and their issues and represent their voices in the national, regional and international levels to influence legislation, policies and programs. She also explained that FES’ work in Asia is centered on the promotion of democratic development and realization of social justice as well as crisis prevention and international dialogue, reflecting the continuing legacy of its founder, Friedrich Ebert. Gender equality has been one of the focal points of FES since mid 80’s, and it is in this context that the Regional Gender Equality project of FES, in cooperation with HomeNets aims at creating the regional presence and voice to advocate for the millions of women in the home-based workers sector in Asia.

Jeff Lawrence Johnson, ILO Country Director in his keynote speech reiterated the commitment of ILO to give importance to home workers, majority of whom are women, which is considered a vulnerable category due to its absence of legal protection, minimum standards of health and safety, among other issues. ILO saw the need for standards that take into account the specific needs and characteristics of home work. The adoption in 1996 of ILO Convention 177, known as the Home Work Convention and the corresponding ILO Recommendation No. 184 for Home Work by the tripartite constituents – employers, workers and government around the world signifies recognition that home-based work has increasingly become a globally widespread phenomenon and is no longer limited to a small number of communities or social groups. ILO C177 sets out the definition of home workers. ILO Recommendation 184 on the other hand supplements the Convention and further elaborates on principles promoting equality of treatment between home workers vis-à-vis other wage earners. It also identifies program elements related to home work.

He stressed the importance of an Asian country to ratify ILO Convention 177, (currently ratified in only 7 member states), in the light of increasing globalization of markets and financial structures. ILO Convention 177 provides the global minimum labor standards for home workers. The ratification of ILO

Convention 177 and Recommendation 184 provides an enabling environment for home workers to organize at the national, regional and global levels. The right to collective bargaining is specified in the Recommendation as a means for home workers to determine their terms and conditions of work. Ratification can protect existing national policies and laws protecting home workers from being reversed or repealed that could come from change in political climate. The ILO supervisory mechanism ensures compliance through sustained dialogue with government where legal and implementation gaps are identified. It also provides opportunities to identify areas of ILO technical assistance to improve application of the Convention. He mentioned that the Decent Work Program of ILO can be an opportunity to advocate for the ratification of ILO C177, citing as example the Philippines' Decent Work Agenda which includes ratification of ILO C177.

Lastly, he underscored the importance of the conference as an opportunity for discussion on how to include Asia in the ratification record of ILO C177. He called on the group to take the challenge and welcomed conference recommendations where ILO assistance and partnership are identified.

Policies and programs for home-based workers in the Philippines

Chit Cilindro, Director of the Bureau of Workers with Special Concern, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), explained that home workers are categorized either as industrial or self-employed in the informal economy. The Labor Code of the Philippines, Chapter IV of its Implementing Rules and Regulations specifically refers to the three conditions of employment of Home Workers (Article 153 on the Regulation of Industrial Home workers, Article 154 on regulations of the Secretary of labor, and Article 155 on the Distribution of Home work).

Beth Angsioco, National Chairperson of the Democratic Socialist Women of the Philippines called for the support of DOLE in pushing for the proposed bill on Magna Carta for Workers in Informal Employment (MACWIE). The bill clearly defines informal workers and comprehensively addresses the most important points regarding informal employment through a rights-based framework. **Olive Parilla** on the other hand presented the seven features of the People's Social Protection Agenda (PSPA): 1) Jobs for All; (2) Social Security for All; (3) Health Care for All; (4) Skills for All; (5) Basic Services for All; (6) Justice for All; and (7) Voice for All. The PSPA hopes to address issues of lack of visibility, representation and access to justice faced by workers in the informal economy. She also discussed the conceptual definition of the informal sector as well as workers in the informal sector and showed the distinction and operational definition of household unincorporated enterprises and enterprises of informal employers.

ILO Convention 177 on Home Work: Looking Back And Moving Forward

Dan Gallin, Chairperson of the Global Labor Institute reported that the ILO discussion on informal employment has concluded that own account workers are clearly workers and therefore entitled to all rights accorded to workers.

On the ratification of Convention 177 and Resolution 184, Albania, Bulgaria, and Bosnia have already ratified. The Bulgarian Association of home workers enabled to affiliate itself with a trade union confederation as well as with an employer's confederation. This gave the group the opportunity of working with both the union and employers confederations on developing national legislation to implement provisions of the Convention.

There is a consensus to rebuild Homenet International as one of the next steps and the potential of starting it is seen in Asia and Southeastern Europe. He emphasized that given the uncertainty of home work being unregulated and unprotected, there is an internal task on the need for the restructuring of the national movements and democratic structures. In this way, a lot of advocacy groups and NGOs which still do not have a representative membership based structure, may be able to be fully representative and increase their area of influence. On the external level, there should be consolidation of union alliances and union affiliations.

Reactions/Comments

Josua Mata, Secretary General of Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL) shared the challenges faced by his organization. One is the issue of identity – the informal workers do not want to be considered part of “the working class”, for they prefer to identify themselves as urban poor. Second is the question of where we should best invest our resources in terms of organizing given the problem of sustainability as memberships fluctuate. Third, they are bothered by a deeper question: are we supporting outsourcing or subcontracting by organizing industrial home workers? Nonetheless, he acknowledged the fact that the LABOR MOVEMENT has to get its act together and start working with the informal economy. However, he stresses the need TO ORGANIZE DEMOCRATIC ORGANIZATIONS.

Antonio Asper, Executive Assistant on External Affairs to the President, Federation of Free Workers (FFW) raised the following points in reaction to Dan Galin’s presentation : 1) the problem in unionism based on the premise that the formal and informal divide has moved unions to the formal side for so many decades, thus, there is a tendency for the unions to bifurcate the definition of workers- formal and informal workers; 2) Will the double affiliation of most informal home workers in both unions and employers in the international setting remove the class divide, or is this just a new way of organizing?; (3) The various distinctions of labor, as regular versus non regular, contractual versus permanent, and other forms of labor statuses creates confusion; and (4) the potential power of people’s organizations, such as the Philippines which has the densest population of people’s organizations - if this is considered to help unionize the 38 million workers in the country.

Inday Ofreneo commented that calling MBOS as unions, is problematic in some countries like the Philippines because the word “union” has very specific definitions and stringent requirements, and you need employee-employer relations, registration, etc and there are workers who do not want to bargain. **Babes Tesiorna** wanted to be clarified on how to handle the uncertainties of home workers’ affiliation to employers’ groups while recognizing its potential as partners for business, job and other economic activities.

Dan Gallin responded that there is need to be totally opportunistic in seizing every opportunity to organize workers who are obviously ready for it, no matter where they are, and to be careful not to add to the confusion of identity among home workers by using terminologies to label organizations. Avoid developing jargons and keep a language that can be understood by everyone. The issue of double affiliation is quite unique to Bulgaria, probably temporary and will not spread. It is quite inconceivable at international level. It is certainly not a new way of organizing and much less a way of abolishing the class struggle. The argument that organizing informal workers is equated to supporting subcontracting has no merit. There is also misunderstanding on the issue of international unions taking the lead in organizing the informal sector. Actually, the international movement has been slow to move and even now only a few recognize the importance of organizing and there is great difficulty in organizing.

On "new unionism", for decades there have been efforts to put the "movement "back into the labor movement, under different labels. The issue is restoring a sense or vision about social change. We need to gain ideological strength; restoring a vision to the labor movement about social change. We need to talk to society at large, not only a small section of the working class. On the class issue, this is fundamental because it is about exercising power that may only be dealt with by changing society.

After World War II, the labor movement in Europe and Japan emerged much weaker because of the tremendous losses it had suffered. It focused on what it perceived to be core issues like collective bargaining, setting aside the broader visions of social renewal and alternative vision of society. We paid a heavy price for that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the colonization of the former Soviet bloc by transnational capital and the domination of neoliberal ideology.

The split I referred to happened with HomeNet International in 2003 because of differing conceptions in organizing: whether unions and NGOs should have an equal voice in the governing bodies. The decision that the NGOs should run the organization led Asian HomeNets -- HNSA and HNSEA to continue independently, and Homenet International disappeared, especially that it had no funding then. We need to repair the damage and reconstitute Homenet International because we need a worldwide organization. The NGOs involved as advocacy groups can be associate members but they do not run the organization. And this I think should be the basis for rebuilding Homenet International.

There is no assurance that a country with 98% people's organizations will have substantial power to effect change. In the case of the Philippines, why don't you have a progressive state with the rule of law, respect for trade union rights, a high standard of living, no poverty, no oppression? Where is your power?

Affiliation to an employers' group is not necessary to do business with it. We should not confuse a situation where there is a limited business relationship with a more general and long term relationship that assumes a broader common interest. Workers and employers do not have a common interest. On the issue of what is a union, we need to go with the broadest definition and find the overarching fundamental interest -- that a union is a self-help organization of workers regardless of the legal definition from country to country. In some countries, associations work like trade unions. Informal workers, like any other workers, create democratic organizations that enable them to use their collective strength to fight for their interests and these need to be broadly defined.

Building Home-based Workers' Organizations for Greater Visibility and Voice

Dr. Donna Doane, Programme Consultant of Homenet South Asia discussed the importance of building home-based organizations and networks as these greatly help respond to the best and the worst of times by increasing visibility and voice as well as access to information, resources and other means of responding to rapid and destabilizing change, considering that home-based workers (HBW) face a different set of challenges such as visibility, gender issues and acceptance as "real workers". She stressed the importance of learning from each other – as South Asians and Southeast Asians, exposure to fair trade movements and sharing good ideas and practices from other organizations and networks.

Reactions/ Comments

Damyanti asked her about the issue on quantitative vs qualitative information on HBWs while **Laila Azhar** of HN Pakistan asked her about the possible role of Homenets with the emerging issues of domestic workers, networks and organizations at the grassroots level and towards the formation of Homenet International, the definition of workers and home-based workers, and combining work with various organizations across all types of sectors.

Donna replied that policymakers want both qualitative as well as quantitative data in order for HBWs to get a voice and be visible. Research is critical for good advocacy which include good stories or anecdotes aside from quantitative data. The possible role of Homenets to respond to emerging issues depends on the country situation and type of government. The amount of work depends on trade unions and informal workers organizations in each country. Cities with big budgets can work with unions. Sometimes there is a need to use backdoor strategies. For Nepal, there has been an attempt to get statistical data on registration and Pakistan expressed openness.

Beth Angsioco shared that Homenet Philippines evolved into the Magna Carta for Informal Sector Alliance (MAGCAISA) when it invited organizations of informal workers such as construction workers, drivers, and vendors in crafting a bill for the informal sector. The bill, filed in 2007 then became MACWIE, that contains very strong provisions guaranteeing adequate protection and services for women in the informal economy. In the course of its work in crafting the bill, the Magna Carta for Informal Sector Alliance (MAGCAISA) was born. Advocacy for the Bill is carried out simultaneously by Homenet within MAGCAISA and also other organizations. **Ms. Babes Tesiorna** mentioned the need to consider NSCB Resolution 15 defining informal sector according to economic activity and RA 8425 (Social Reform agenda) identifying 14 basic sectors as partners of the government in organizing the informal sector so that specific issues can be addressed and corresponding offices linked such as the Bureau of Workers with Special Concerns which is responsible for dealing with these various sectors.

Tess Borgonos from MAKALAYA suggested other ways of organizing workers in the light of difficulties confronted by formal (e.g. decreasing CBAs) and informal workers. She cited the inclusion of other forms of agreements, for example in the case of National Union of Building and Construction Workers (NUBCW) and HABITAT covering working conditions outside of CBAs. In working with construction workers, we will not be fighting with subcontractors and contractors but for standards of project-based workers and security of tenure and not really on regularization because that is impossible in the industry. She also suggested to do away with the traditional way of thinking, organizing, and measuring success in organizing. **Josua Mata** reminded everyone that the trade union movement did not come up as an organization of regular employees. In 1902, there were 200,000 members who were mostly women workers from cigarette factories. Cofradias were religious based organizations, and they never acted as a trade union for collective bargaining purposes. But the question is "WORKERS POWER". Who are the working class? For me, what is more important is how we weave all this organizing into one river of working class power as we are all part of the labor movement. Questions as to organizing HBWs into trade unions were shared by Selim Reza of Homenet Bangladesh and Inday Ofreneo given the preference by government and international organizations to recognize leaders of formal trade unions in formal tripartite discussions.

Sharing of Experiences on MBO Organizing for Policy Advocacy

PANEL from SOUTH ASIA: Selim Reza (Bangladesh), Om Thapaliya (Nepal), Ume Laila Azhar (Pakistan), and Dilanthe Withanage (Sri Lanka)

HomeNet Bangladesh and Nepal are working towards the formulation of a national policy for HBW, the former in partnership with Bangladesh Homemaker Women's Association (BHWA), and the latter with the trade union alliances GEFONT and NTUC and the Ministry of Labor. HomeNet Pakistan on the other hand successfully organized the union of glass bangle HBWs who are predominantly women recruited from two cooperatives. It is lobbying for ways to protect their rights as well as those of 600,000 women workers in the bangle industry by making representations with the Labor Department, Social Security Institute and Workers Welfare, and participating in conferences. On the other hand, Sri Lanka is experiencing difficulty in organizing HBWs as MBO because existing CBOs, funded by NGOs perceive it as threat to their existence. On work towards the ratification of ILO C177, South Asia HomeNets are undertaking media and advocacy activities.

Panel from Southeast Asia: Keang Sabay (Cambodia), Peni Astuti (Indonesia), Khanthone Phamuang (Lao) and Pensri Chuenwong (Thailand)

The Artisans Association of Cambodia (AAC), an MBO providing economic opportunity for persons with disabilities and the disadvantaged, linked up and actively engaged with government and the business sector and related networks locally and internationally. It has gained support, recognition, voice and representation in these bodies and expanded its membership. In Indonesia, the Association of Indonesian Women Homeworkers (HWPRI) has been active in coordination and advocacy meetings at the local and provincial levels, holding conferences and congress, policy dialogues with government, and media campaigns. Simultaneously, it is consolidating its organization and strengthening its management system. In Lao, Non-Profit Association of Lao Development (NALD), a savings group especially of poor women is conducting policy advocacy activities towards the formulation of a national policy for HBWs. Homenet Lao provides them opportunities to learn more about entrepreneurship, product development and marketing. Similarly, the Committee of Homenet Thailand for Northern Region's policy advocacy work focuses on the: a) Homeworkers Protection Act; b) amendment and improvement of the Social Security Act to cover informal workers; c) coverage of informal workers in the National Health Security System in terms of occupational safety and health, and d) the policy of local administration to protect HBWs.

Highlights of the OPEN FORUM

- 1) The possibility of coming up with a compendium or public document highlighting activities of the countries in organizing; 2) to rethink on practices and ideological divide of trade unions in the Philippines and not allow ourselves to be divided without giving up on our aspirations and ambitions;
- 3) more sharing on Lao Village Bank and how statistics were gathered in Thailand and how was it possible to include data on the 1.38 HBWs, if government was responsible for the survey and its inclusion;
- 4) Comprehensiveness of our organizing within the MBO framework – are issues we touching the economic, social and political dimensions; are issues concerning violence against women, power relations within MBO and union addressed or we are only focused on the economic aspect? And (5) To

balance advocacy work and focus on our target members, e.g. advocacy on social protection and how to improve the status of our members.

HOMEBASED WORKERS' CAFÉ

The activity allowed participants to listen to the sharing of personal experiences of homebased workers from a country of their choice - Laos, Nepal, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Thailand.

Lamphan (Laos), a mother of three children and leader of a women's group making blankets from rug materials related how she was able to enhance her skills and lead her group in fulfilling their tasks. She has been the head of Lao women union village level and currently the deputy leader of Homenet Lao. **Apsara Maharjan**, treasurer of Homenet Nepal(HNN) and also chairperson of Khokana Women Awareness Society Activities shared how they combined responding to reproductive health issues and advocacy in their work such as running reproductive health clinics and health camps and conducting skills training on embroidery and sewing, and homebased workers rights. Their health clinics are done in partnership with hospitals and other health associations. HNN also initiated a Signature Campaign for the "ROADMAP FROM KHOKANA TO GENEVA TO RATIFY ILO CONVENTION 177". **Chhoeung Srey Mach** (Cambodia), shared how she was discriminated as a garments factory worker when an accident partially disabled her. Her former employer refused to admit her to back to work. Undeterred, she continued to find work and also availed of opportunities to enhance her sewing skills. Since 2009 up to the present she works as a sewing trainer at the Association for Aid and Relief Vocational Training for the Disabled (AAR VTD) and is a member of HomeNet Cambodia. Her organization, aside from advocating for ILO C177 also provides political education to HBWs to enable them to sit and participate in decision making bodies, recognition and involvement in trade unions.

Wewalpanawa Gamage (Sri Lanka), has been engaged in handicraft making for twelve years now and is currently the president of a social enterprise comprising of 78 women. The organization provides them with guidance on organizational matters and production as well as in getting bulk orders. She is also a member of the Nimble Fingers Association which is a member of Homenet Sri Lanka. Political unrest is a major challenges for their organization aside from lack of technology, capital, market accessibility and foreign competition. Her organization calls on government to take firm action and give them the adequate recognition and market to sell their products. **Neazee Sultana** (Bangladesh) has been producing garments and home accessories. Being an own account worker herself, she works with other women towards advocacy for government to provide social protection and assistance on enterprise development , specifically capital to expand production. Part of their advocacy focuses on adopting a national policy in Bangladesh and ratifying Home Work Convention 177, gradual reduction and elimination of all forms of violence against HBWs through different activities and research on contribution of HBWs in the national development. **Peni Astuti** (Indonesia), started as a homebased worker doing accessories made from beads and other items. She is now a leader among a group of HBWs but the issues raised earlier on non-recognition of homebased workers and the lack of government's awareness on ILO C177 hinder them from moving forward. She hopes that their advocacy can put across their issues and concerns, part of it is the right to own their income as tradition dictates this belongs to their husbands. **Pensri Chuenwong** (Thailand) heads a community women's group which later developed to Ban Sanpoolieo Women Development Group (BSDG). Her group initiated the Tai Lue indigenous ethnic weaving as an off- farm income generating activity to address the repeated drought and poor farming. BSDG has earned a good reputation for its success in generating additional family

income for its members. She is also coordinating with diverse government offices and mobilize collaboration from the network's alliances.

DAY 2: Sharing of Good Practices on Policy and Law Advocacy

Southeast Asian Experience

Ms. Suntaree Saeng-ging (Thailand) shared that the current national policy advocacy is focused on three areas– the Homeworkers Protection Act; Amendment to the Social Security Act to cover informal workers; and the National Health Security System in terms of including occupational safety and health (OSH). It was only last year that the draft Homeworkers Protection Act was submitted to Parliament. It lobbied for two major political parties to have the Act considered. HNT negotiated for quota seats from both parties for labour lawyer and for NGOs as HNT's representative to the House of Representatives. The Act called for fair wages in that HBWs should receive no less than the minimum wage prescribed by the Thai Labor Protection Act. The Amendment to the Social Security Act now covers compensation on illness, disability, death, maternity, and retirement pension.

Inday Ofreneo (Philippines) shared that organizing with an MBO basis started in the late '80s when PATAMABA grassroots women from the rural areas began forming their own. The organization was run, managed and led basically by women HBWs . Lobbying with the DOLE preceded ILO C177, actually the result of lobbying efforts of grassroots women using the multi-stakeholder approach involving government and international agencies like the ILO. In 1998 the Informal Sector Coalition was formed and a huge campaign was conducted where they gathered 100,000 signatures and submitted these to the Senate in 1998. But that was the year of crisis. Employers said we cannot afford to pay this protection for informal workers. We started campaigning again with the formation of Homenet Philippines in 2006 and that was launched with the help of FES Manila. This morphed into a bigger coalition called MAGCAISA (Magna Carta for the Informal Sector Alliance) involving other sectors in the informal economy.

Sharing of problems and difficulties among HomeNets:

Daniel Sugama Stephanus, of Indonesia reported that ILO C177 is rejected by his government. It does not give protection nor recognition to homeworkers. The workers who are protected by law are only the formal workers. Homeworkers earn less than the minimum wage standard, have no social protection, no decent living environment as they live in extremely poor conditions. But micro, small and medium businesses comprise 99.9% of the national economy. This shows that the government has placed wrong priority to market economics and not to people economics. Data show that the flexible working relationship pattern for HBWs makes them unprotected and neglected by the government. Recommendations include ratification of ILO C177; revision of the Labor Act 13/2003 to put the textual definition of homebased workers including all characteristics to protect their basic needs and achieve a decent life; and full implementation of 40/2004 on the National Social Protection System.

Keang Sapbay (Cambodia) shared that the problem of HBWs is that their products are required to have a Certificate of Origin for export. Their advocacy work addresses the issues faced by HBWs such as low income, lack of capital, no market access, cannot afford to buy health insurance, etc. For those who work at home, they are oftentimes approached by local authority who ask for unofficial fees. If the MBO does not pay, they are threatened with business stoppage. Some goods produced by MBOs have been stopped by the customs clearance officers at the

airport or sea port. Cambodia has not ratified the ILO Convention 177 for homebased workers yet but we are already working closely with ILO Cambodia on monitoring migrant workers and on domestic violence.

Khantone Phamuang (Laos) informed that participants that organizations in Laos are government-initiated such as trade unions and youth. MBO work started in 2004 but since it is not government initiated, working with different government agencies is a difficulty. Sometimes people do not also like to participate in our activities because we are not government and they do not want to deal with political issues and they are also afraid to attend Homenet meetings. HBW problems include low income, no capacity to buy raw materials, no market access, lack of vocational training.

Inday Ofreneo in summing up the SEA experience cited the experience of Craft Link as a fair trade group and a social enterprise that could be a model we need to look into and think about because of their being self-sustaining by pooling their profits and use it to organize and capacitate their leaders on the ground and not dependent on foreign or development assistance.

On commonalities and differences, we have to look at the context of advocacy and the political, economic and cultural aspects as equally significant. The economic aspect is important, especially when we look at globalization, flexibilization, outsourcing and the emphasis on profits for big business that usually come at the expense of flexibilized workers. We need also to look at the character of government – whether or not it is all over the place, can tolerate or accept civil society organizations, is aware of informal and HBWs issues, sympathetic towards having laws not only for formal but also for informal workers as well as HBWs. Sometimes there may be laws but no implementation. There could be representation mechanisms but only trade unions are accepted and Informal workers still have to lobby for their seats.

But what is significant is that we are all doing ILO C177 advocacy. The role of ILO can be both positive and negative as in the case of Indonesia where there is no knowledge on ILO C177. We need to lobby with ILO office because they are very influential in terms of tripartite decision making especially in pushing for ratification of ILO C177.

On lessons learned, advocacy really takes time. We need to widen our base for advocacy first starting with HBWs. We need to capacitate them to really think for and represent themselves. OSH is a good entry point for advocacy or with the funeral fund like in Lao. On a wider level, HBWs can interact with other informal workers groups to strengthen the informal workers' movement nationally, sub regionally, and globally. That will also strengthen our hand when we deal with formal trade unions which tend to neglect home workers because they are women, not visible and hard to organize Part of the larger context is the gender issue. Women are still multiple burdened with domestic work, child care and household work; that goes to show that women mix reproductive work with productive work to earn a living while the men are hardly involved.

The role of NGOs can both be positive and negative. They can facilitate organizing but they can also monopolize power especially when it comes to resource generation and representation. This has to be dealt with diplomatically and in a determined manner. Since we are focusing on ILO C177, we need to do a tripartite approach and government is important. We have to deal with the executive, and legislative because HBW issues are not only labor issues but economic and social issues as well. Sometimes, we can go to the gender route more easily than through the labor route through trade unions and the ministries of labor.

For the ILO C177 ratification, we need the consent of Parliament and in the Philippine case, the upper house or Senate. We really need to go to legislature and do networking including campaigns for them to know our agenda and so that they can bring it up when they are already in Congress. Employers are a hard nut to crack as proven in the case of the Philippines, where they were the ones who blocked the ILO ratification. We need to attract employers and really convince them that when HBWs have good health and have good wages and feel protected this can lead to increased productivity and economic gains for them. Also, the role of academe needs to be recognized, especially when doing research which is participatory and in partnership with grassroots. International development agencies are also very important. Media is also very effective as it has a good multiplier effect.

Homenet South Asia panel presentation: Summing up the last ten years of policy advocacy in the subregion – nodal points

Sapna Joshi, HNSA Regional Coordinator emphasized that the Kathmandu Declaration in 2000 attended by representatives from South Asian governments, NGOs and Trade Unions was instrumental in pushing for the organization of homebased workers, as it also identified the importance of formulating a national policy as per ILO Convention 177, provision of minimum protection, remuneration, health and safety and child care services. Taking forward the Kathmandu Declaration, several initiatives were done including mapping of organizations, formation of networks, building alliances with trade unions and media, conducting surveys and studies, political consultations at the state and provincial levels, and holding dialogues with stakeholders. The 2007 Regional Conference on *Women, Work and Poverty* tried to address the issue of HBWs in the presence of policy makers from five countries.

At the Delhi conference in 2007, the template for the national policy was presented by the Homenets. Post conference activities included dialogues and consultations with homebased workers in the respective homenet. In India and Nepal, a task force was formed to discuss the national policy. The Ministry of Labour in Bangladesh asked for a letter to put pressure for a national policy for HBWs. In India, an independent group was formed by the government specifically from the Ministry of Statistics. Advocacy issues mainly focused on data on HBWs, definition, registration, organizing and building their organizations.

Laila Azhar from Homenet Pakistan cited the existing labor laws in her country as applicable only to formal workers, ignoring the majority of men and women working in the country either in agriculture nor in the informal sector. Labor regulations need to address vulnerabilities of working women and men and overcome bottlenecks in terms of capacity and capability. On the status of the national policy, Homenet Pakistan together with partners organized a series of provincial consultations on regional recommendations for HBWs. Collaborative efforts with major partners were exerted. Consolidated findings and results were then presented to the MoWD for incorporation into the national Policy and for ratification of ILO C177. Legislative initiatives since 2007 include passing of a Resolution to the National Assembly recognizing HBWs. The draft bill on HBWs was endorsed by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women's Development. In 2008, the Homebased Workers Social Protection Act was passed, aiming to protect women working at home or as domestic workers and also the provision for facilities to working women. The draft National Policy was finalized and handed over to the MoWD and MoLMP in November 2009. With the MoLMP on board in 2010, a coordination forum discussed the policy. Advocacy is at the provincial level after the 18 Amendments. The Legislation on Social Protection Bill is currently under review. There is strong advocacy among NGOs, and partner organizations and the

significant number of women in Parliament plus the commitment of parliamentarians to raise the issue of HBWs in assemblies. However, obstacles are likely along the way such as uncertainty of government policies and priorities, political and economic crisis, lack of interest among other legislators, lack of public awareness, and lack or inability to orient concerned departments and institutions on issues pertaining to HBWs.

Om Thapaliya of Homenet Nepal shared that they work for the registration of HBWs. Homenet Nepal has developed a data base using software and equipment from the local government. We provide computer training for staff of local government. The role of the local government is to identify clusters of HBWs within municipalities and VDCs, collect data from these clusters and keep data updated. We work with trade unions and, we get help from academicians and scholars on our data base. The data base on HBWs is linked with the sample survey of the Center Bureau of Statistics.

Hari Karki from the National Executive Committee of GEFONT discussed the formation of Nepal Homebased Workers Union (NHBWU) in 2007 as a national trade union and federation under the Trade Union Act. It submitted a charter to the Ministry of Labor demanding recognition of HBWs as workers, providing coverage under the social protection system, and coverage by law and legal protection. There is a Trade Union Act with the provision to the right to organize. But there is no provision for minimum wage, working hours and weekly leave, sick leave, even maternity leave. There is no provident fund, no gratuity fund, no medical insurance, no accident benefit, and no coverage for labor inspection. The draft Labor Law recognizes HBWs as dependent workers due to GEFONT's initiatives. The draft Labor Law on dependent workers contains provisions for the Trade Union Act to recognize the right to organize, minimum wage, leave benefits, provident and gratuity funds, medical insurance, accident benefit, and labor inspection coverage.

Homenet Nepal is exerting efforts for the finalization of the HBW policy, organize to the maximum possible, conduct rights based and skills training, facilitate registration in local bodies as informal workers, motivate HBWs to work for own social protection schemes like developing micro cooperatives, and build awareness and advocacy towards ratification of ILO C177.

Selim Reza of Bangladesh reported that activities in relation to this involve organizing the HBWs in his country, involving other stakeholders such as leaders of HBWs, academe, local government elected officials, and NGOs working on HBWs. We have our short-term and long-term goals. It is also important to carry out good, solid and substantial research because we cannot do advocacy without good grassroots research. Finally, we need to use all these efforts to do organizing and advocacy as effectively as possible with complete sincerity and unselfishness.

Dilanthe Withanage, Homenet Sri Lanka said their group only registered in 2008. In 2010 there was shift in the organization and we separated as an organization and we have limited funds to handle new huge tasks. Negotiations with the Department of Statistics have been going on to get proper data on HBWs and we are still struggling on this. We also have to request the Department to include HBWS as a separate category of the employment sector. Another problem is the definition of HBWs as in other countries, despite the general definition of ILO C177. Membership in Homenet of individuals is another problem because there is preference to register organizations of HBWs. We need to look into the possibility of this as most partners want to work with individuals rather than organizations of HBWs.

National policy for HBWs and discussion at the national level are also a difficulty because government says it is not a priority; it has been working on eliminating terrorism. The change of government is another difficulty because we need to make them aware of these HBWs issues. Working in urban cities in Sri Lanka is another difficulty because as an organization we have limited experience in working with urban poverty and urban issues. We need to advocate for the Ratification of ILO C177, acceptance of the national policy by the government and to have possible interventions to support HBWs.

Donna Doanne in her summing up considered the Delhi Conference declaration as turning point for South Asia. Good practices in Nepal were cited. Registration of HBWs plus focus on data collection, inclusion in statistics, working with trade unions and city governments and at the national level are the main problems faced by HBWs. For Pakistan, there is some movement forward but again there are problems they are still working on; e.g., HBWs are still not considered as workers. The policy conference in Delhi generated enthusiasm among policymakers. Also, working with trade unions and organizations in Pakistan is important. Governments keep on changing faces and this affects legislation and mobility in terms of moving forward.

For Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, problems and difficulties focus on getting recognition of HBWs' issues, their geographic locations make it difficult to organize, the rapid change in government and, getting basic data on HBWs. Political tension in both countries makes difficult moving forward. There is a BUREAUCRATIC DEADLOCK in Bangladesh. We need to go step by step on national policy issues. A lot of awareness-raising is needed, also for media across the border. We have to plan it carefully-- how to go about this because we have a lot of stories of HBWs from different countries.

Additional comments and sharing

In Pakistan, Laila added that there is a lot of media activity going on and this is the first time that these issues go on air in radio programs. Dilanthe also highlighted their efforts to write to all Parliament members of Sri Lanka to make them aware of HBWs and the National Policy, and within one month one member of Parliament submitted recommendations and was able to get it tabled for discussion.

From Malaysia, **Jeyasothy Arulambalam, Event Administration Coordinator of eHomemakers.net** briefed the participants on success factors to bring prospects of ICT use to the home. Their organization, initiated by middle class members working from home maximized the technology in their organizing and marketing work. They were able to distribute large orders of Eco-Baskets and offer services like typing and translation to members. They developed an innovative application, "Distributed Work Management Application"(DWMA), which enables buyers to automatically relay orders to all their participating weavers via mobile phones and then it automatically tallies those responses to the coordinator. The women are now able to work as a team to fulfill customers' requests without leaving their homes.

They also train immigrants to Malaysia to produce eco-basket to generate homebased income. Their mainline activities provide 17,000 workers registration in the website and of this number, 70% are women. They also have a homebased administrative program for ICT for women with disability.

Workshop: Action Plan for Advocating ILO C177 and other Policies for Homebased Workers (country and sub-regional levels)

South Asia

Organize more Homebased Workers by strengthening, mobilizing MBOs to build real voices, develop linkages expand networks with concerned stakeholders who are providing services. Develop leadership of HBWs and MBO leaders, and enhance their capacities. Develop database at country and regional level develop and publish IEC materials and advocacy tools especially in local languages and undertake mass media campaigns. Advocate that government incorporate HBW rights in the Labor Act Reformation, urge government to include HBWs into the existing social security mechanism, mainstream HBWs as labor force, include HBWs in the national budget and make local government responsible. Urge SAARC to intervene on policy matters of HBWs in the region and Intervene to ensure fair trade for HBWs and Declare October 20 as International Homebased Workers Day.

Some possible fund raising schemes include the development and publication of institutional profile with vision and mission, issuing appeals, organizing events, exhibitions, proposing for project funds from donors, and encouraging private sector responsibility on CSR by creating a concept and model.

SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Southeast Asia workshop showed that there are different levels of organizing HBWs currently undertaken. In developing linkages with stakeholders for ILO C177 ratification, there is need to win over trade unions, governments and employers. This is a challenge in Indonesia. In Laos, trade unions are allied with government and Homenet Laos is networking with them through the entry point of OSH Incorporation into the Labor law Reformation is a tactic that Homenet Lao wants to do. In Cambodia the government focus is on garment workers because the industry is a big export earner. So the work involves finding out if there are labor laws that need influence from government pertaining to HBWs. In Thailand, there is a big chance to have ILO C177 ratified if the Homeworkers' Act passes Parliament. However, Homenet Thailand still has to assure the consent of employers in the tripartite discussions. Lobbying with ASEAN to provide universal health for all is also explored considering its past efforts in 2005. ICT utilization can also be a way for ASEAN bodies to know more about HomeNet.

Southeast Asian country homenets fund raising activities include accessing sin taxes for OSH programs for informal workers in Thailand while Cambodia and Vietnam use business development to support themselves.

Comments from the presentation

Diane Respall said that many recommendation arising from the presentations and group work discussions coincide with the provisions of ILO Convention 177 and Recommendation 184. **Inday Ofreneo** explained that HNSEA and HNSA coordinated efforts for pushing ILO C177. The campaign will be on national, regional, sub-regional, or global levels. Country homenets can have the autonomy to approach each ILO office in their respective countries and see how cooperation can be possible. If the coverage of the ILO Bangkok office is for the whole of Asia then maybe this can be discussed with Sapna and others from Homenet South Asia. We can coordinate and do a big proposal to move things forward.

On the question of membership of Homenet Philippines in Homenet Southeast Asia, Inday Ofreneo said it is in the process of formalizing Homenet Philippines as it is now the right time. PATAMABA which is affiliated with Homenet Southeast Asia is willing to step aside for Homenet Philippines. We are currently in the process of discussing and doing things regarding its legal personality. **LAILA** proposed that ILO arrange for another conference and representatives from government from South Asia and Southeast Asian countries are invited to address policy issues.

Synthesis and Concluding Observations from Dan Gallin

The effort to organize this workshop and the political will emerging from cooperation between HNSA and HNSEA is laudable and a great step forward in building an international movement. We have learned formal and informal workers are moving constantly and the issue here is fighting for workers' rights both in the formal and informal economy. This means adopting the union culture which is **solidarity - the concept of "one for all and all for one."**

There is an issue on the relationship between national policy and ratification of the Convention. Is the national policy a first step towards the goal of ratification or is it divergence or a pre-emptive way of diverting attention from ratification? By all means you should welcome progressive national policies but not as a substitute for the ratification of the Convention. The ratification has to remain to be the goal because it entails government obligations as a tool and one is international accountability. Governments that ratify the Convention commit themselves on how the Convention is applied to national laws and policies in terms of implementation and adoption. This international accountability does not exist when the government adopts a national policy. I suspect that in some cases it is possible that some governments might proclaim a national policy in order. There is a global aspect of our work towards an international movement. I mentioned the perspective of rebuilding Homenet International. The global effort to achieve economic security for home workers will obviously have success if you can organize internationally and I hope you can count on this in the coming months. I would like to remind you that WIEGO is at your disposal and at your service. You can use it as a tool to build your global organization and advance the general interest of your members internationally.

Evaluation

Participants learned from each other, like the use of ICT in marketing products, on the work towards ratification of ILO C177 and corresponding work for a national policy in respective countries, advocacy related to social protection, organizing and fund raising. Another important leaning is the opportunity to join trade unions as a workers' movement. On a personal note, they were also thankful for the friendships and are hopeful they can move together towards a common goal to advance the cause of home based workers.

In the participatory evaluation measuring satisfaction through four emotions, the participants generally said they were **happy** because the workshop was fruitful: they understand each country's experiences and problems, there was intensive discussion about ILO C177 and HBWs' issues and concerns, and it was an excellent idea to bring South Asia and Southeast Asia together. They were **enlightened** to learn from MBOs in SEA, the experiences of the two regions and of Craftlink of Viet Nam on self-reliance from own business. Those who felt **sad** identified absence of field visits in the program, shortness of time in relation to agenda and language barrier as the reasons. A few expressed **confusion** because concepts

and terms were used interchangeably, and why labor laws cannot recognize HBWs and make provisions for them to have equal rights with formal workers.

Closing Remarks by Kristina Birke

It is very encouraging to take this direction. From the inputs I can see diverse experiences and cultures coming from different political, economic and social backgrounds. It is really difficult to do and from a regional perspective, Homenet is one of the true regional partners and we recognize the fact that there is not much organization in this field from this gender equality perspective working at this level all the time. We can bargain and interact with regional organizations such as SAARC, and maybe ASEAN on opportunities that may arise. I also strongly encourage you to work with FES in collaborating with Trade Unions because they have a wealth of experience in that field. We know that it is not an easy task but we can find a way to bring this two worlds together and get a common ground.