

Report on “Consultation on International Home-Based Workers Day”

On 20th October 2023, Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA Delhi) and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) organised a consultation event on the International Home-Based Workers Day at India International Centre (IIC).

Our esteemed guests were invited to celebrate and discuss the visibility and recognition of home-based workers in India. The session offered a platform to discuss various topics ranging from roles of home-based workers in circular economy, analysis of wages in different cities, Occupational Safety and Health risks faced by workers to worker’s narrative. The event also had a special display of our home-based worker bens performing their work as shown in figure 1.



The welcome address was provided by **Subhadra Ben- Assistant Coordinator- Trade & Advocacy, SEWA Delhi** where she welcomed **Ankita Upreti Sibbal Ben-Secretary, SEWA Bharat** to set the context of the event while providing brief overview on why we celebrate International Home-Based Workers Day on 20th October. Ankita Ben briefly explained the Kathmandu Declaration on 20th October 2020 which was the first time that home-based workers were recognised and their trade was highlighted in Convention 177, International Labour Organisation (ILO). This was the first convention for informal works and home-based workers, and we celebrate the recognition of home-based workers on international level on this day- **making the invisible, visible.**

Session 01: Circular Economy

The first session was presented **Ms Priya- General Manager, SEWA Ruaab** and **Ms. Shalini Sinha- Advisor & Asia Strategist, WIEGO** on the roles of home-based workers as sustainable workers in the circular economy. Shalini ben explained as the world grapples with climate change, there is specific focus on sustainability where the potential of circular economy is immense. She explained circular economy where there is reuse, repairing, recycling and repurposing of materials and highlighted how there is a need to recognise the contribution of home-based workers in this field.

She further presented a case study on shoe repairing in Delhi with the full process from the point of acquiring the old shoes to reselling of the shoes. She highlighted the importance of this process as it provides affordable and quality shoes to the ones who need it the most but cannot afford the high costs. Even though, the workers are aware of their skills however they shared acknowledgment of their skills at large is still lacking. She further shared some examples of Khari trade in Chandani Chowk, electrical waste (getting copper from the wires)

and sharpening of knives which are directly contributing in the circular economy however, they continue to lack the acknowledgment they deserve.



Figure 2: Ms Priya (left) and Ms. Shalini Sinha presenting the roles of home-based workers in circular economy

Ms. Priya discussed the role of Ruaab, an enterprise established by SEWA Delhi in 2002, in sustainable fashion and the challenges faced by women who are working in this upcycling process. She outlined the ways in which Ruaab takes old clothes and makes something new out of it. She even shared that when compared with new fabrics, the old clothes take time as they require thorough cleaning and hesitation by women due to hygiene. Most of the recycled clothes are used in bags, wallets, keychains and others which are not directly touching the skin to maintain the hygiene. She further explained with the growing fast trend in fashion, majority of the discarded clothes are not damaged but just out of trend, requiring additional efforts to revitalise. She highlighted that the upcycling of the clothes takes at least three times the efforts and time when compared to a new fabric. Unfortunately, customers often remain unaware of the intricate process behind these products and the positive environmental impact of Ruaab's work, which makes it challenging to justify the pricing to them.

Session 02: Panel on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)

The first session was followed by the panel discussion on occupational safety and health



Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 3: Ms. Laxmi Bhatia, - Strategic Advisor, Business and Human Rights, and facilitator of WIVC network

moderated by Suman ben. **Ms. Laxmi Bhatia- Strategic Advisor, Business and Human Rights, and facilitator of WIVC network**, was asked to share her views on the present conditions of OSH and address the ways in which the workplace safety can be gender inclusive.

She highlighted the need to attain and identify solutions from within the community. She shared a case study in Karnataka regarding the usage of iron and folic acid tablets which improved the health of the workers and their productivity as they get no time to have breakfast due to large amount of time spent on their reproductive roles

like caring for others and productive work for at least 8-10 hours. She focused on the importance of organising and uniting women by providing them financial power. Another example shared by her on clothes dying where the harmful chemicals are capable of affecting lungs.



Figure 4: Mr. Sagnik Lahiri- Deputy General Manager, Foundation of MSME Clusters (FMC)

The same questions were also addressed to **Mr. Sagnik Lahiri- Deputy General Manager, Foundation of MSME Clusters (FMC)**. He highlighted that there are at least 12 millions Self Help Groups (SHGs) having 15-20 women in each. This means there are approximately 10-15 crores informal women workers in India which is still lacking visibility in numbers in surveys. He explained how they function on ground by identifying a geographic location for example, Okhla for readymade garments clusters, Lucknow for chickenkari and others. There are about 6500-7000 clusters in India where every cluster has at least 300-400 home-based workers or micro enterprises. He highlighted how there is a need to focus on their economic growth by regularising, equipment and addressing stability. He also emphasised on groups having higher strength to ensure

that cheap affordable rates exist in order to make the products competitive and sustainable. It is also imperative to identify the supply chain and connect the smaller enterprises with main supply chains at national and global supply chain. He shared case examples of work affecting the health of the workers such as back pain in weaving and handloom, eye pain in chikankari work and others. There is a need to focus on their health as it improves and extends their



productive working hours, this can further be incorporated in the business models.

Our third panellist **Ms Pallavi Mansingh- International Labour Organisation**, displayed a video on occupational health hazards faced by the work and how by installation of exhaustive fans and usage of protective gears like masks and gloves improved the health of the workers.

She emphasised the inclusion of occupational safety and health in the fundamental principles and rights in 2022. The ILO conventions needs to be ratified by more countries to recognise the informal workers. She further shared the work done with SEWA in Bhaavnagar, a town in Gujarat where women gather waste from airplanes and ropes from ship. She further highlighted the need to recognise women as workers and their work as productive work.

Stating the example of electronic waste, she mentioned how men work with machines and get higher wages however, the same work is done by women through physical labour while facing disturbances at home and yet, gets lesser money. She further mentioned that body movements especially on the shoulders, back during such tasks have the same stress on the body as with heavy work, this needs to be recognised. ILO is focusing on trainings on occupational safety and health and identify measures in which the women workers can come together with their demands.



Figure 7: Dr. Ashish Mittal, CEO of OHCH, OSH Expert

Also, she highlighted the role of institutions to create awareness and make design considerations focused on the users, that is, women workers. The same should be considered in the policies as well. She mentioned the conventions C155 and C187 on occupational safety and health however, it is important to focuses on the preventive measures in the recommendations.

Our last panellist, **Dr. Ashish Mittal, CEO of OHCH, OSH Expert**, shared his journey of going from curative health to preventive measures. Citing his personal experiences, he highlighted the impact of stress and external stimuli like chemicals on the physical and mental health of the workers. He began his work in Delhi which was focused on the petrol pump workers to assess the cancer vulnerability in the workers. This work was further expanded to sewer workers, electronic waste, Banarasi saree where the numbers of women workers is very high. There are cost intensive measures which can improve the health outcomes however there needs to be a focus on the low-cost solutions. Government strategies and policies will take time however small-scale solutions which address individual needs can be identified.



Figure 6: Ms Pallavi Mansingh- National Project Officer, International Labour Organisation (ILO)



Lastly, **Ms. Shalini Sinha** highlighted the impact of their working place in their homes. By focusing on informal settlements where there is no provision of light, ventilation, space and other requirements, the place blurs the home-based work with their house work. That is, there is no clear distinction between productive and reproductive work. There are

differences within the sectors however, the work cannot be segregated from their homes. She emphasised on the need to have training and awareness sessions focused on health, home and design organisations focusing on design considerations addressing their requirements.

Figure 8: Ms Shalini Sinha, WIEGO

At the end there were certain questions asked by the audience members. The first question was asked by Ms Shabnam, SEWA Bharat, on whether the convention C190, on violence and harassment, includes OSH. The question was addressed to Ms Pallavi who agreed and mentioned that stress related to all kinds of harassment is addressed in the convention.

Session 03: Wage Analysis (Tirupur & Delhi)



This second last session was given by **Kratika Choubey- Associate Manager Business and Human Rights, Transform Trade**, on wage analysis of home-based workers in South Asia through organisations like SEWA Delhi, Sabah Nepal, SAVE Tamil Nadu and Pakistan. For the analysis, wage cards were provided to the workers to understand the benefits of wage cards. The data was gathered through two ways – Focus Group Discussions and Interviews, this ensured that the data collected could be correlated in the interviews. The presentation displayed key information related to marital status, age, education and contribution in the household income.

As per the results, it was found that 90% of the workers found it beneficial to keep a wage card. She further highlighted that even though the women in Delhi worked the most, they had the least wages and income compared to Tirupur. Kratika further recommended that there is a requirement of tracking payments through digitisation and trainings.

Session 04: Worker's Narrative- Identified Home-Based Workers Speakers

This session focused on our home-based work bens, moderated by **Ms. Lata Ben, Vice President, Sewa Delhi Union. Sarita Ben is an organiser** and has been a part of SEWA for a long time. She is a home-based worker and has faced many challenges related to recognition of herself as worker. She shared that she used to find the meetings and trainings as interruptions in her work but now she understands the value of the work by SEWA as it focuses on the issues not only faced by her but many like her.



Figure 10: Our home-based workers (left to right)- Rima Mishra ben, Sarita Chauhan ben, Sudha Ben, Rukmani Ben, Anju Ben and Lata Ben

Our **Reema Ben, is a member of Ruaab Board** who is a home-based worker and works in kadhai and silai (Embroidery and stitching) which she learnt from Ruaab training centre. She shared her experiences where the rates were increased based on the discussion with the boards. The company rates were assessed after discussions with sisters where bens are benefitted with bulk work and minimum wages markup.

Sudha Ben is our SEWA Delhi Union Board Member and is an aagewan from Rajiv Nagar. She highlighted the role of home-based workers in the supply chain. She further emphasized on the need to acknowledge the home-based workers in the overall supply chain.

Similarly, **Rukmani Ben, Home-based worker** questioned the existence and effectiveness of laws for the provision of safeguarding the home-based workers. She highlighted the need to make committees. Further, she focused on how the E-Shram cards have the tendency to be inaccurate because home-based worker who does stitching is regarded as boutique work which makes them invisible as home-based workers.

Our last speaker, **Anju Ben, Home-based worker** shared her experience where being unaware of occupational health risks which led her to have Lipoma due to overuse of muscles. She highlighted the need to recognise the importance of their work and also the recognition of the work that they do.



Figure 10: Ms. Ankita Upreti Sibal giving the Vote of Thanks

Recommendations

- To recognise home-based workers as workers by properly representing them in government schemes such as Eshram.
- To recognise the skills and roles of home-based workers in circular economy and the positive impact of their work on the environment.
- To have a discussion on wages of women home-based workers in different part of the country and addressing the factors affecting their wages.
- To identify preventive measures related to occupational safety and health.
- To assess risk related to OSH and identify low-cost solutions catering to the individuals and their needs.
- To have a discussion with government bodies, stakeholders, ILO and SEWA regarding the possible ways to recognise Home-based workers in the formal sector.
- To focus on ratify of C-155 and C-187 .