

WORKING IN THE SHADOWS

Women Home Workers in the Global Supply Chain

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I. INTRODUCTION

Global supply chains are a key source for economic opportunity in today's globalized economy. But the quality of - and returns from - those opportunities depends on how workers and enterprises are inserted into the supply chain. Within the manufacturing global supply chains, one of the ways in which the informal workers are inserted are as industrial outworkers for formal suppliers or lead firms, many of whom work from their own homes, called homeworkers. Homeworkers represent a significant share of employment in global supply chains, especially in Asia. They produce goods for global supply chains from within or around their own homes: stitching garments and weaving textiles; stitching shoe-uppers and footballs; producing craft products; processing and preparing food items; rolling incense sticks, cigarettes and cigars; assembling or packaging electronics, automobile parts, and pharmaceutical products; and more. Showing where homeworkers fit in the value chain for a particular product makes them more visible and also helps to identify the kind of interventions that would increase their skill, productivity and earnings.

Under the most common sub-contracting arrangement, the homeworkers provide the workplace, pay for utilities, and buy/rent and maintain their own equipment. The contractors provide the work orders and raw materials, specify the product/s to be made, and sell the finished goods, or supply them to firms further up the chain. In most cases, the homemaker goes to the contractor to receive raw materials/deliver finished goods; in some cases, the contractor comes to the homemaker's home or lives/works nearby. Also, some sub-contracted homeworkers work together in groups: either in one woman's home or in a common space within their neighbourhood. Whatever the arrangement, many homeworkers have limited knowledge of the markets and prices for raw materials and finished goods because they do not deal in these markets¹.

To cut costs and maximize profits, many firms outsource production to homeworkers, especially women. Advances in technology have facilitated this outsourcing of production to homeworkers. Homework in its modern form is therefore driven in large part by the purchasing practices of firms, and is facilitated by changes in trade and technology. Outsourcing of work to homeworkers, and the associated downloading of costs and risks to these workers, is therefore inextricably linked to recent shifts in how global production is organized.

Statistics on home workers

In order to present the statistical significance of home workers we need to understand that homeworkers are a sub-set of "home-based workers" who also include self-employed workers who buy their own raw materials and supplies and sell their own finished goods, mainly to local customers and buyers. Home-based workers represent a significant share of employment in some countries, particularly for women, and

¹ <http://wiego.org/organizing/c177-homework-convention>

especially in Asia. For instance, they represent 6 per cent of urban employment in South Africa and 18 per cent of urban employment in India. The majority of home-based workers are women (e.g. 70% in Brazil, 88% in Ghana, and 75% in Pakistan).² However, most available national data do not distinguish between self-employed and sub-contracted home-based workers.

HomeNet South Asia and the WIEGO network commissioned analyses of recent national data in four countries in South Asia. The data suggest that there are at least 41 million home-based workers outside agriculture in South Asia alone, representing 15 per cent of total non-agricultural employment (and 31 per cent of female non-agricultural employment) in India, and as much as 40 per cent of total non-agricultural employment (and 48 per cent of female non-agricultural employment) in Nepal. The data also suggest that homeworkers represent between 14 per cent (Bangladesh) to 33 per cent (India and Pakistan) of *all* home-based workers; and as high as 45 per cent (India) to 60 per cent (Pakistan) of *women* home-based workers. But even where such estimates of homeworkers are available, the data typically do not distinguish whether the homeworkers produce for domestic or global supply chains, or for both.

Consider what we know about home-based workers in the garment and textile sectors in India. In 2012, there were 37.4 million home-based

Home workers in India

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In 2012, there were 37.4 million home-based workers in India. Of these, around 45 per cent were involved in making garments or textiles; and, based on 1999 data, roughly 45 per cent of garment and textile workers were sub-contracted homeworkers. The data also suggest that homeworkers represent as high as 45 per cent of *women* home-based workers in India. It is also estimated that over 5 million homeworkers are part of garment and textile supply chains in India’s domestic and global supply chains alone.

² Akhtar, Sajjad and Joann Vanek. 2013. “Home-Based Workers in Pakistan: Statistics and Trends.” WIEGO Statistical Brief No. 9. Cambridge, MA, USA: WIEGO. Available at <http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Akhtar-HBW-Pakistan-WIEGO-SB9.pdf>; Mahmud, Simeen. 2014. “Home-Based Workers in Bangladesh: Statistics and Trends.” WIEGO Statistical Brief No. 12. Cambridge, MA, USA: WIEGO. Available at <http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Mahmud-HBW-Bangladesh-WIEGO-SB12.pdf>; Raveendran, Govindan, Ratna M. Sudarshan and Joann Vanek. 2013. “Home-Based Workers in India: Statistics and Trends.” WIEGO Statistical Brief No. 10. Cambridge, MA, USA: WIEGO. Available at <http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Raveendran-HBW-India-WIEGO-SB10.pdf>; Raveendran, Govindan and Joann Vanek. 2013. “Statistics on Home-Based Workers in Nepal.” WIEGO Statistical Brief No. 11. Cambridge, MA, USA: WIEGO. Available at <http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Raveendran-HBW-Nepal-WIEGO-SB11.pdf>

workers³ in India. Of these, around 45 per cent were involved in making garments or textiles; and, based on 1999 data, roughly 45 per cent of garment and textile workers were sub-contracted homeworkers. Given these figures, it can be estimated that over 5 million homeworkers are part of garment and textile supply chains in India's domestic and global supply chains alone⁴.

II. Objectives of the study

The objective of this research was to gather evidence from South Asia, on the work and livelihood issues of the women home workers in the global supply chains. It is hoped that the study findings will contribute towards designing a more scholarly research, on the subject, in the future.

II. Rationale and need for the Study

Information on Homeworkers – Scanty and Anecdotal

The information base on home workers is weak. At the national statistics level, though some of the countries in South Asia have recently started collecting data on home-based workers⁵, most available data did not distinguish between the self-employed home-based worker and the sub contracted 'home workers'. Even less information was available on the home workers in global value chains.

On the other hand, there is a great deal of anecdotal evidence from the ground, largely shared by the WIEGO and HNSA partners, about homework in a host of industries, such as shoe making, sports garments and goods, packaging and automobiles parts, especially in South Asia. Anecdotal evidence from the field also suggests that large and transnational firms, particularly in the garments sector were increasingly outsourcing production to the homeworkers, especially women.

Some studies which do exist⁶, largely in the garments and embellishment sector, highlighted the complex and exploitative chains of production, with home-based workers located at the bottom end, invisible and unrecognized. They highlight the forms of control in value chains - either through the work process or through social institutions, or a combination of both. "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."⁷

³ Raveendran, Govindan, Ratna M. Sudarshan and Joann Vanek. 2013. "Home-Based Workers in India: Statistics and Trends." WIEGO Statistical Brief No. 10. Cambridge, MA, USA: WIEGO. Available at <http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/publications/files/Raveendran-HBW-India-WIEGO-SB10.pdf>;

⁴ WIEGO platform of Demands

⁵ 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).

⁶ Unni and SCaria, 2009. 'Governance structure and Labour Market outcomes in Garment Embellishment Chains', *IJLE*, Volume 52, no 4. Lim, Lin. 2015. "Employment Relationships and working conditions in Ikea Rattan Supply Chain", ILO

⁷ (Unni and Scaria 2009: op cit 648).

Commemorating Twenty Years of C177

Several recent developments at the international level had highlighted the issues related to the home workers. The year 2016 commemorates 20 years of the historic C177, Home Work Convention (No. 177)⁸ to protect the rights of home workers. The Convention was, at that time, historic and a huge victory for the home workers' as it gave visibility to homeworkers, recognized their valuable economic contributions, and established their status as "workers". C177 was the first time in the history of the ILO, that a group composed mainly of women workers in the informal economy was covered by an ILO Convention⁹.

In the 20 years since the passing of the Convention C177, much has been achieved and yet much more still needs to be done. Home-based workers now have better statistical visibility and stronger organizations in many parts of the world. Networks of home-based workers at regional levels have developed and are in the process of strengthening. Brazil, Peru and South Africa have incorporated homeworkers into legislation regulating labour relations. Homeworkers have also been included through supply chain legislation in some instances¹⁰.

On the other hand, despite the fact that the ILO Convention 177 on Homework was passed in 1996, only ten countries have ratified it so far, and none in Asia. HNSA and WIEGO are seeking to bring attention to the Homeworkers and their rights as they are enshrined in the Convention, on this 20th anniversary of the convention, and during the celebrations in Ahmedabad, the lack of information on home workers in global value chain was highlighted again and again¹¹.

The Workers' Group of the ILO also organized a special event, "Commemorating 20 Years of the ILO Convention on Home Work (C177)" in Geneva, Switzerland in June 2016. WIEGO, SEWA and homemaker representatives participated in the event where panelists reflected on the negotiation process towards a Convention 20 years ago, progress to date in terms of country ratification, discussed examples of legislation protecting homeworkers and the Convention's continued relevance today¹².

A New Narrative on Homework

The speakers at the special event organized by the workers group of ILO to Commemorate 20 years of the C177 highlighted new forms of home work such as the "gig economy" in the global North, and pointed out that home work is not restricted to the Global South.

'It is time to shape a new narrative to promote @ilo C177 for old and new forms of homework, both in need of decent work'.

⁸ <http://wiego.org/organizing/c177-homework-convention>

⁹ Sinha Shalini, "commemorating 20 years of Landmark Convention", <http://wiego.org/blog/commemorating-20-years-landmark-convention-homeworkers>

¹⁰ South Australia's Fair Work Act, which regulates the entire supply chain in the textile, footwear, and clothing industries, was amended in 2012 to include homeworkers.

¹¹ Twenty years and Time for Action Event, <http://wiego.org/content/celebrating-home-based-workers>

¹² <http://wiego.org/organizing/c177-homework-convention>

The speakers highlighted new forms of home work resulting from the "gig economy" in the global north (like crowd work, freelance work, and the rise of telework where workers are subcontracted by companies to do various types of service-based work from home in the North and in the South), and pointed out that home work is not restricted to the Global South. As Anna Biondi tweeted, "time to shape a new narrative to promote [@ilo](#) C177 for old and new forms of home work both in need of decent work". There was also mention that home work is something that should be considered as a concept in the ILO thinking of the "future of work".

In June 2016, homeworkers took a further step towards their recognition as workers. From May 30 to June 10, 2016, the ILO International Labour Conference (ILC) held a General Discussion on 'Decent Work in Global Supply Chains' in Geneva, Switzerland. A delegation of homeworker representatives from HNSA, together with WIEGO, participated in the ILC General Discussions. Homeworkers were recognized as being part of global supply chains and the also acknowledged C177 as one of the instruments that the ILO should base its programme of action to address decent work in global supply chains on.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

i. Challenges in designing the study

An ambitious study was planned initially. Several sectors such as garments, sports goods, leather, rugs, jewelry making, and a few locations such as Ludhiana, Dhaka, Jalandhar and Bareilly in India were identified and included. Several locations and sectors of home-based workers were also identified in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal. However, we soon realized there were several challenges in the very process of identifying a sample and location for the study as well in developing a relevant and

Challenges In Designing Research On Home Workers In Global Supply Chains

While the need for research to highlight the challenges and constraints faced by the homeworkers in global supply chains cannot be highlighted enough, designing and conducting a study of this nature is not easy.

- It was very difficult to identify home workers in the field who were part of global value chains.
- Fear amongst the home workers was palpable all through the study. They shared their deep insecurity and vulnerability many times and much assurance was needed before they agreed to participate in the research.
- SAVE identified as many as 39 brands, working with home workers in their areas, and wanted to target well known brands like GAP, O'Neil, Players, but could not convince the home workers to take the survey!
- Confidence building with the home workers groups; and other in the value chain is critical to collect authentic information from the home workers.
- Identifying a suitable partner to conduct the study is critical. Not only does the research partner needs to have a presence on the ground; they also need a clear conceptual understanding of the issues related to the home workers, in order to be able to capture authentic data and information.

effective research methodology. In many ways, the process of initializing the study, finding a research partners and selecting a suitable sample, underscored many of the challenges of studying home workers in global supply chains. Some of them are listed below.

Invisibility of home workers

It was very difficult to identify home workers in the field who were part of global value chains. Although it was decided that the survey would be conducted by HNSA partners working with the home-based workers, identifying a sample was a challenge. There were several reasons for this. First, was invisibility of home workers - the workers worked from home and many a times could not identify the brands that they were working for – leave alone identify whether the brands were global or Indian. Sometimes they worked for both – local and global producers. Most homeworkers in Tirupur and Delhi also worked for the local and national market, seamlessly crossing from producing from one market to another as per the demands for their skills. Often the same contractor also procured orders from exporters as well as produced for the local market, and gave it to the same set of home workers. There were issues of recall and reporting because a home worker worked for the international brand for a few months and for the local producer for the other months.

Fear amongst home workers

Fear amongst the home workers was palpable all through the study. They shared their deep insecurity and vulnerability many times. With some negative media attention on home workers for companies such as Gap and Wal-Mart in the third world countries in recent times, the home workers everywhere were very reluctant to share information, fearing loss of work. SAVE identified as many as 39 brands, working with home workers in their areas, and wanted to target well known brands like GAP, O'Neil, Players, but could not convince the home workers to take the survey! Infact the questionnaire for the survey was field tested with 8 home workers who worked with one of the leading retail international brand in Tirupur but the same group refused to take the survey when the study started, claiming fear of loss of jobs. In Delhi, the home workers were very reluctant to share the piece rates that they were getting. In Tirupur, the women did not want their photos to be shared or labels of the products they were making to be photographed.

Changing markets

The markets and the production processes and actor can change very quickly. For example, in Pakistan, first we were told that Bangles were being exported from Pakistan to the Middle East. Later we learnt that this had stopped. On further enquiries, we were told that now they were being exported to Iran and Afghanistan, but exporter and brand is still not clear. Each piece of this information was provided at different times at a different pace.

Confidence building

Confidence building with the home workers groups and other in the value chain is critical to collect authentic information from the home workers. This is possible only when the enumerators and surveyors are from the same community and belong to an organization that home workers trust and have faith in. SABAH Nepal has been

working in Nepal and has good relationship with many players in the field but it needed the intervention of senior colleagues even to understand the supply chain. It was the same with SEWA Delhi; and even they had been able to identify a slum in the border of Delhi where women were producing for international brands, the home workers needed a lot of assurance before they agreed to participate in the research.

Identifying research partners

Identifying a suitable partner to conduct the study is a challenge. In a study of this nature, good will and confidence amongst the many actors higher up in the supply chain is very critical. Only when they cooperate can we research the real supply chain and role of each of the actors. The research partner also needs to have a clear conceptual understanding of the issues related to the home workers, in order to be able to capture authentic data and information.

Finally, a less ambitious and a smaller study was planned in 3 locations – one in Nepal and 2 in India.

ii. Methodology

The study includes both a survey and a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method.

A questionnaire was field tested and then administered to home workers in three locations, followed by a FGD with the same set of home workers in all locations. A questionnaire/‘talking points’ was prepared to guide the FGD. In addition, interviews based on a prepared questionnaire/talking points’ was administered to one contractor in each location.

The study findings were further substantiated with discussions with local partners and FGD facilitators.

iii. Sample Size

- The sample consisted of 56 women home workers.
- The home workers were selected from three urban locations in South Asia.
 - from Kathmandu in Nepal and,
 - from Tirupur and Delhi from India (see table below)

It needs to be noted that the three locations are well known for production for export. Often referred to as the ‘T shirt city’, Tirupur has significant presence at the lower end of the international hosiery and knitwear market. Delhi is the prime export centre both in terms of value exported as well as quality of garments exported, particularly for ladies fashion garments. Nepal’s top ten export items include garments (and knitted products), much of it from Kathmandu.

Table 1: Sample Size And Geographic Location

City /Location	Local partners	Home workers interviewed	FGD	contractors interviewed
Tirupur	SAVE	18	3	3
Delhi	SEWA Delhi	19	1	1

Kathmandu	SABAH Nepal	19	2	1
Total		56	6	5

iv. Research Partners

Each of the city studies were conducted by HNSA partners

- SAVE in Tirupur,
- SEWA Bharat in Delhi and,
- SABAH in Nepal.

Social Awareness and Voluntary Education (SAVE) was registered as a society in 1993. SAVE's civil society intervention journey started with programmes for the eradication of child labour and promotion of child rights in the backdrop of garment & textile manufacturing scenario of Tirupur. Over the period, it has evolved as an organization with a holistic human rights approach for defending the rights of children, women and worker's community through research, advocacy and capacity building.

Registered as a Trust, *SEWA Delhi* is part of the larger SEWA Bharat movement, and covers 11 areas of the Delhi. Striving to achieve to achieve full employment and self-reliance for its members, in Delhi's informal economy, SEWA Delhi works by highlighting their issues at the national level and building poor women members' capacities.¹³

SABAH Nepal works towards strengthening the livelihoods of poor and marginalized women home-based workers in Nepal. Since its establishment it has been empowering the economically backward rural and urban women and making them economically self-sufficient. SABAH seeks to up-grade the skills of individual HBW so that they can earn a better living and also become entrepreneurs who produce products that meet global standards.

IV. FINDINGS

1. Profile of the home workers

- The entire sample, from all the three locations, consisted of women homeworkers
- The home workers were all married, barring 1 in Nepal. In all locations, one or two widows worked as home workers too.
- Most home workers in all locations were in the group of 25-50, but in Delhi some

International Retailors

- Leading retailer for menswear needs in Australia.
- Global retailer of athletic and sports wear
- Italian sportswear brand
- Denmark producer and retailer of women's clothing.
- Leading women fashion chains in Europe.
- Company has a presence in Japan, Canada and USA, and produces dolls and many other associated products with the same name.

¹³ <http://sewadelhi.org>

were a little younger, in the age group of 18-25 (about 40%); and in Nepal a few were a little older, in the age group of 50 and above.

- Most of them had children, and many had more than two children
- None were educated more than 10th class, and a small minority in Nepal and Delhi were illiterate.

2. Profile of International Brands

Six brands from the three locations were selected which ‘employed’ home workers in their supply chains. In order to protect the homeworkers and at their requests, the names of the brand are not included in the study.

Tirupur

- Brand X is a leading retailer for menswear needs in Australia.
- Brand Y is a global retailer of athletic and sports wear.
- Brand Z is an Italian sportswear brand founded in 1967

New Delhi

- Brand A from Denmark produces women's clothing.
- Brand B is one of the leading fashion chains in Europe.

Kathmandu

- Brand M has a presence in Japan, Canada and USA, and produces dolls and many other associated products with the same name.

3. Products produced by home workers (partially or fully)

In the two geographic locations in India, in Tirupur and Delhi, the home worker contributed to the production of garments only partially. In Tirupur women home workers did finishing work for the factory produced garments. The garments were largely made in factories but came to the home workers for stitching buttons, thread cutting, stringing (track pants and bermudas), trimmimg threads, removing traces of foam used during tailoring, embroidering etc. In Delhi, the homeworkers did some cutting thread and trimming and putting buttons, as in Tirupur, but largely they did a lot of embellishment work for women’s fashion garments.

In contrast, in Nepal, the home work produced nearly the entire product (hand knitted woolens - caps, mufflers, headbands, socks, gloves) within their own homes and only 10% of the work, such as labelling, folding and packing was done elsewhere.

Table 2; Products produced (partially or fully) by home worker, by location.

Location	Tirupur, India	Kathmandu, Nepal	Delhi, India
Type of products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosiery products (T shirts, pants, Bermuda shorts) • Sports wear (T shirts, jackets, track pants, head bands) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knitted products (Caps, mufflers, headbands, socks, gloves etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ladies fashion (embroidered panels, and accessories)

4. *Global Supply Chains*¹⁴

It needs to be emphasized that the supply chains involving homeworkers were very complex. The global supply chains also varied – both in length and the number of players. In the case of Kathmandu, it was a relatively smaller and simpler production process, whereas in the case of Tirupur it was very complex.

Tirupur

Below is the most simplistic listing of the different stages of the production process, and the tasks done by the home workers in that production chain. Several permutations and combinations of this process exist – sometimes for the same product or for the same retailer simultaneously. Many stages of production may be confined, or condensed, or there may be slight variations. For example, a garment factory may do all the processes, from v to ix and then give work out to the home workers through a contractor. The large factories, employing 1,000 workers or more per unit, might combine vi, vii, viii & ix with smaller enterprises employing between 100-250 workers might do viii, ix, xi and xii. All of them link to the home workers through a large and complicated network of subcontractors, who essentially act as labour brokers.

The important point to note here is that the entire hosiery product – a T-shirt, Bermuda etc is produced in Tirupur India, but in a more formal work arrangements, in a factory setting usually. Only the finishing tasks of threading, buttoning, trimming are given out to the home workers.

- i. An international brand
- ii. Indian exporter (usually is in a port city in India – Chennai, Mumbai)
- iii. Tirupur merchandiser
- iv. Yarn manufacturing/spinning mills (Threads are manufactured from cotton/ rayon/mixed)
- v. Knitting process (Machines convert the threads in garment cloth rolls)
- vi. Dyeing and bleaching process (In this process the clothes are bleached first as white garments and then coloured using dyeing process)
- vii. Compacting and calendering process (In this process clothes are dried and straightened.)
- viii. Cutting the cloth (by hand or machine)
- ix. Stitching process (Clothes are cut and stitched as garments. Depending on the product, there are several ways in which this is done - by factories, small informal work stations at the slum level where a group of workers work as wage workers; could also be home workers)
- x. Embroidery and cleaning process (Embroidery/designs/embellishments are made in clothes if required by the design; threads are trimmed, foam is taken out etc) (done by the home workers)
- xi. Checking process (Garments are checked for any faults like small holes, scratches, imperfect colour, stitching errors etc.)
- xii. Packing and shipment (partially done by home based workers, partially by the merchandiser)

¹⁴ These chains have been constructed in consultation with our study partners in the three locations, and are more general than specific to a particular brand. The home workers were unable to provide us with any information on the global supply chain where they were working.

- xiii. Sent to exporter
- xiv. Shipped to destination

Nepal Supply chain diagram



5. *Kind of work done by the home worker*

The home workers surveyed in Tirupur did the following tasks.¹⁵

- Stitching buttons,
- Trimming
- Thread joining
- Rope joining
- Knotting
- Foam removing

In Delhi, the kind of work women home worker did ranged from tasks of cutting threads etc, to semi skilled tasks of embellishment by sticking beads and other ornaments to very skilled embroidery and embellishment work. Specifically, the home worker did the following tasks –

- Hand embroidery and embellishments (moti and adda work), mostly in panels of garments
- Attaching laces,
- Hand Hemming,

¹⁵ SAVE, the research partner who conducted this study reported that while all efforts were made to ask the home workers what they did for each of the brands, the home workers sometimes gave confused responses because a home worker often worked for several brands, for different kinds of work, in quick succession. This explained the slight discrepancies in the home workers response to this question in the survey and in the FGDs.

- Buttoning and Button holes for shirts and tops
- Crochet
- Thread cutting for all kinds of apparels

Work done by HWs

- Stitching buttons
- Stitching parts of collar
- Button hole making
- Trimming
- Knotting (draw string)
- Foam removing
- Folding
- Checking
- Packing
- Embellishment embroidery
- Knitting

In Delhi, the home workers could not figure out what the final product was. “We don’t know what the final product is ... mostly by the design and patterns of the embroidery we can some times make out it is a ‘top’, or because of the patterns, flowers and materials can make out the product is for women’s’ wear.” (Delhi FGD). They only embroidered panels and partial parts of the garment which was then stitched together in some other location, within India or outside. They never saw the final product and could not visualize it.

The home worker in Kathmandu did hand knitting work, and produced the entire product - - gloves, caps etc. – including at times stitching small embellishments, if the design so demanded.

6. Place of work

All the women workers worked from their home. At times, some worked, in places other than home, mostly in groups, as described below.

In Kathmandu, the women home workers, some times, used a collective space in the their credit cooperative office, particularly if they wanted to work in a group. The women home workers reported that they occasionally liked to get out of their homes and work collectively for a variety of reasons – enjoyed social interactions while working, better light and environment, and no interference from household duties.

Common working spaces

The women home workers in Delhi expressed a need, during the FGD, for a better place to work, in the vicinity of their homes. ‘We would prefer to come and work in a common work space with good light and electricity and air coolers during summers for better productivity.’

In Delhi, they occasionally worked in the contractor’s distribution centre, often only a small room in the vicinity of their own slum. When a woman worker came to pick up the work in the mornings, she occasionally stayed back to do a design sample and have it approved before taking the work home. In some instances, when the time line was very short and/or the pieces to be embroidered were expensive, the contractor made the women worker finish the order in the distribution centre itself. Therefore, the home worker in Delhi largely worked at home but some times also worked in a contractor’s

distribution centre, for urgent orders.

When the place of work is home, the care responsibilities of the women often infringe upon economic activity and maintaining a balance can take a toll on the women. In Nepal FGD, combining childcare with productive work was identified as a challenge. 'My child is still small and after he comes back from school, I have to take care of him and won't be able to work'; and 'I have to take care my children and can't give much time in my work.' In Delhi, the women reported that 'the work pressure was high.... Not able to work throughout the day due to domestic responsibilities.' In the FGD with home workers in Tirupur, the women shared their childcare responsibilities. 'Many a times, I have to work with my child by my side'. Quarrels were reported in the household because the women hadn't had the time to take care of husband's food.

Care Work and Paid Work

In the FGDs, women often talked about the challenges of combining childcare with productive work.

'My child is still small and after he comes back from school, I have to take care of him and won't be able to work';

'I have to take care my children and can't give much time in my work.';

'the work pressure was high.... Not able to work throughout the day due to domestic responsibilities;'

'Many a times, I have to work with my child by my side'.

7. Work contract/record of transaction

No written work contract/job orders existed in any of the three locations, and all transactions were oral.

No common records of transaction or number of work/pieces given or amount paid, to which both the home workers and contractor had access to existed. In some instances, the worker or the contractor did keep some account for the transaction but nowhere was it signed mutually, or shared with the home worker.

In Tirupur, the contractor claimed he had no documentation or records of any transaction- work given, payments, piece rates. In Delhi, the contractor did keep a 'work register' where the home workers signed what work and raw material she was taking. Some women kept informal records in their diaries (small note books; children copy books) but all payments calculations were made as per the contractor's 'work register'.

In Nepal, the survey recorded that women kept 'log books', but further exploring revealed that they were never counter signed by the contractor and had no validity. The contractor did keep records but the the home worker had no access to it.

In Tirupur, SAVE, the research partner pointed out that this was a major way of cheating the home workers of their due earnings. Rates were calculated per piece, but no common records of pieces per day existed and payments were made monthly. The home worker could not keep track of the calculations (piece rate multiplied by products per day multiplied by of the days of work in a month, with many variations in products per day or week) and often were cheated by the contractor. An organizer from SAVE explained that one of the first interventions that they make when starting to organize home workers in the region is to make the home workers see them selves as workers, who needed to be paid for the work that they are doing, in a fair manner, at the rate that has been mutually decided.

In the FGDs conducted in Kathmandu, the women workers pointed out that the absence of any work contract leads to job insecurity and makes them more dependent on the contractor – for piece rates and for getting regular work.

8. Work arrangements

All the home workers from the entire sample received work from a contractor or a middle man.

In Tirupur, all homeworkers worked for only one contractor. Work was delivered and picked up from their own homes – delivered every morning and picked up every evening. The dependence on the contractor was very strong and even during the survey, the women workers often were very uncomfortable talking outside their homes and often asked the enumerator to come inside so that the contractor would not know that they were revealing information to unknown people. In the FGDs in Tirupur, the women requested us to be careful so that their livelihood should not be jeopardized. They did not want their photos to be shared or labels of the products they were making to be photographed.

In Delhi, the home workers worked with more than one contractor – usually 2-3 but the contractor's hold on them was no less. They agreed to participate in the study only when we approached them through the contractor and assured them that the contractor was fine with them taking a few questions for this study.

The contractor remained the only point of contact for the home worker. They had no idea who they were producing for, and how many layers of contractors, exporters and suppliers were in the supply chain.

9. Invisibility of the international brand (for the homeworkers)

In all FGDs, we asked the home workers to make the production chain, and no where could they do that. The question of who they were producing for, or for which markets, was further probed in the FGDs with the home workers. In Delhi and Kathmandu, most workers knew that they were producing for an international market based on the quality of skilled work required from them, the design of the product, the tight time lines and the relatively better piece-rates. In Delhi, some home workers knew of the name of the exporter that the contractor was supplying to, but no other details beyond that. Many presumed that their products must be selling at very high prices abroad, but were unable to make any estimates. In Nepal, though the export house was not very far from where the home worker lived, none of the home workers had any direct contact with them.

In Tirupur, many home workers did not realize that they were producing for international brands probably because Tirupur also produces large number of similar hosiery products for the Indian market. In the FGD with home workers working in Tirupur, the home workers knew that the pieces were brought from neighbouring areas such as Sathyamanagalam but were not aware of the name of the company, or buyer or where they will be sold or anyone else except their contractor. At best they guessed that it was sold to the upper middle class at higher prices.

Invisibility in global supply chains

In all FGDs, we asked the home workers to make the production chain, and nowhere could they do that. In Delhi and Kathmandu, most workers knew that they were producing for an international market based on the quality of skilled work required from them, the design of the product, the tight time lines and the relatively better piece-rates. In Tirupur, many home workers did not realize that they were producing for international brands

10. Hours of work and days of work

Working hours are long, and often stretch into the night, as women have to perform their care responsibilities during the day.

50% of the home based workers worked for more than 8 hours in a day and none worked for less than 6 hours in a day in Tirupur. In Nepal, the working day for most workers interviewed was usually up to 8 hours. In Delhi most home workers reported working on this work for up to 6 hours in a day, on this work.

Work was available for all of the home workers for more than 20 days in a month in Tirupur, as the table below shows. Most had work for the entire month. Work was generally available with the home workers for about 10-15 days, in Delhi, though several reported having work for the entire month. In Kathmandu, the home workers had work only for 10 days in a month.

Table 3: The average number of days in a month where this work is available:

Average days per month	Tirupur	Delhi	Kathmandu	total
10 days	0	0	18	18
10-15 days	0	9	1	10
15-20 days	3	3	0	6
21 – 29 days	11	0	0	11
Entire month	4	7	0	11

11. Earnings and Income

In all locations, for all brands, the home worker was paid per piece.

The earnings per piece was the abysmally low. Some examples are below

- In both Delhi and Tirupur, one of the tasks that women did was cutting threads, for which they were paid 30-50p in Tirupur and in Delhi, it ranged from Rs 0.50 to Rs 1, for simple trimming.
- In Nepal, knitting a cap takes 3 hours, for which the home worker is paid Nepalese Rs 70 (\$0.66)
- In Delhi, doing beadwork and lace work, which took about 4 hours, was paid Rs 35. (women workers reported not doing more than 2-3 pieces in a day).
- In Tirupur, the earning per piece for the tasks were as below. Women reported doing as many as 200 pieces in one day.
 - Trimming – 30 paise to 75 paise per piece (less than \$.01)
 - Foam removing – Re 1 per piece (\$.01)
 - Buttoning – Re 1 per piece.

The women worker had no say in deciding the piece rates and often took what the contractor decided to pay her. Most women were aware of how low their earnings were. In the FGD in Nepal said, 'Though we know we are not getting enough pay for our work, we can't just stop working because we can't just sit idle without working. Another poignant quote from the FGD report, 'Some people has even told us that if you sell vegetable you will earn more. This made me cry and was very hurt.'

Though rates are fixed per piece, payment to the homemaker is never made per day. Payment was made mostly once in a month in Tirupur and Delhi. In Kathmandu, most payments were made once in two months.

INCOME AND EARNINGS

The home worker was paid piece-rate in all locations, and we tried to calculate their earnings, based on the piece rates, the hours worked in a day, and the days for which work is available in a month.

Piece rates

In Nepal, knitting a cap takes 3 hours, for which the home workers is paid Nepalese Rs 70 (\$0.65)

In Delhi, for doing beadwork and lace work, which took about 4 hours, she was paid Rs 35 (\$0.52)

In Turupur, the earning per tasks were as below, and women reported doing as many as 200 pieces in a day.

Trimming – 30 paise to 75 paise per piece (Less than \$ 0.01)

Foam removing – Rs 1 per piece (\$0.01)

Buttoning Re 1 per piece (\$ 0.1)

(1 US\$=107.52 NPR; 1 US\$=67.20 INR)

ESTIMATED MONTHLY INCOME

In Nepal, 3 caps in a day = NPR 210

Monthly income (For 20 days of work a month)= NPR 4200 (\$39.06)

In Delhi, 2 pieces per day = INR 70

Monthly income: INR 2100 (\$31.25)

In Tirupur, daily earning in Rs 200

Monthly (for 30 days) = INR 6000 (\$89.20)

[Minimum Wages (w.e.f. 1.4.16) : In Delhi for unskilled labour - Rs.9568 pm or Rs.368 per day

And for most workers in export garment manufacturing in Tamil Nadu it is Rs 7829 or Rs 301 per day.]

In Delhi, mostly the women reported earnings which ranged from INR 3000 to 7000, making in an average of Rs 100 to 230¹⁶ per day. This was more than what we had been able to calculate (see box). During the FGDs, the women workers in Kathmandu reported earning Nepalese Rs 200 per day. All home workers reported that their

¹⁶ \$1.25 -\$3.45 per day

earnings ranged from Rs 3000-12000 per month, making the average per day earning to be Rs 100- 400¹⁷ per day in Tirupur.

In the FGDs, in almost all locations, the home workers also cited delayed payment; reduction in the piece rate /wages agreed and failure to pay total amount owed as key challenges.

The partner NGO SAVE in Tirupur was very skeptical about the earning data, though the survey was conducted by them. They conveyed that the home worker deliberately reported increased earnings because of the fear of reporting poor conditions of work and losing their livelihood. Also, they felt that the women did not/could not keep track of their earnings, which was made complex by being payment mechanisms – calculated per day, on piece rate but paid once a week, and also delayed payments.

SEWA Delhi too put in a word of caution during discussions in the data regarding monthly earnings and wages. They pointed out that the women had found it difficult to calculate and report monthly earning. There was a huge variation in their earnings per piece – simple jobs paid very little but embellishment work which took more time paid well. Pieces per day also varied depending on the kind of work and speed of the home workers. Days of work available in a month also varied due to the seasonality of work for the global market: the current months were called ‘sampling’, and it was only in the months aug to oct that large number of work orders were available. Also, the women themselves were very flexible in taking on work, depending on their care responsibilities. For example, a woman might take on 100 pieces of trimming and 2 embroidery panels if her children were home, and she had extra care responsibilities. Conversely, if her children were at school and she would take more embroidery panels and less of low paying trimming or thread cutting work.

12. Household Income

Barring one each in Tirupur and in Delhi, the homeworkers in our sample were never the sole bread earning member of the household. Besides herself, home worker had 2-3 other earning members in the family. Despite that, the total household income was low .

Augmenting Incomes

Work is not available through out the year; and women do many different kind of work to augment their incomes.

In Nepal, since there is no local demand for similar products, women did other kind of home-based work, like food processing. It was true for the some homeworkers in Delhi too. The women homeworkers would often take up very poor paying home-based work when embellishment/embroidery work was not available, such as cutting the stems from cauliflower where they would be paid as low as Rs 0.50 per kilo of the vegetable. In Tirupur, the women workers took on waste thread removal which paid them as less as Rs 22 per kg for color cloth pieces and Rs 30 per kg for white color cloth.

¹⁷ \$1.25 - \$6

In Nepal too, an overwhelming large number of home workers had other members of the household earning too but the reported household earnings varied.

The total household income, as reported by the home workers themselves, was not more than Rs 20,000 for all home workers in India. In Tirupur, the largely remained in the range of Rs 15000-20,000 for most. In Delhi, the household incomes were lower, in the range of Rs 7000 to 12000 per month.

Table 5: Total household monthly income in INR

Monthly Income	Delhi	Tirupur
Less than 1000	-	
3000-7000		
7000-12000	11	5
12000-20000	7	13
20000-40000		NIL
Above 40000		NIL

As reported by the partner NGOs, the main bread winner of most households of home workers earned their livelihood in informal employment, with all the insecurities and vulnerabilities that informality brings with it, inherent in their lives. In Tirupur, most husbands/ male members were working in the neighbourhood garment factories, as fabricators, cutters etc. Though work in the factories was regular, it was not permanent and did not include any social security benefits or pensions etc. Either the workers worked on contract basis, with monthly wages or as daily wage earners. In Delhi, the husbands were also in precarious employment – working as rickshaw pullers, mechanics, temporary jobs in local factories or drivers. In Kathmandu, most of the husbands had immigrated to the middle east and to neighbouring countries for employment.

13. Costs incurred by the home workers

While the contractor provided the raw material, the equipment or tools of the trade were all bought and maintained by the home workers.

In Tirupur, all home workers said that they had to buy a trimmer and cone needle, every few months from their earnings. (It was reported that a trimmer costs Rs 45).

Most women were aware of how low their earnings were. In the FGD in Nepal said, 'Though we know we are not getting enough pay for our work, we can't just stop working because we can't just sit idle without working. Another poignant quote, 'Some people has even told us that if you sell vegetable you will earn more. This made me cry and was very hurt.'

In Delhi, the home workers cited the following as expenses that went from their pocket and estimated it to be approximately Rs 25 per month.

- Needles
- Addas and frames
- Transport costs – upto the common distribution centre

In Nepal, the home workers bore the following costs

- Knitting Needles
- Transport cost
- Work space
- Phone cost
- Plastic bags

In addition, some home workers had also had bought commercial sewing machines which costs Nep R 12000. Many had taken loan from their credit cooperative to buy the machines

Despite prompting, the homeworkers in Tirupur or Delhi did not factor in the cost of electricity or space or a few other expenses that they incurred. In Kathmandu, though the workers listed workspace as a cost, they only counted the small fee that had to pay to use the cooperative space. There were other costs too. In Tirupur, the home workers have to put the cloth on the mattress and then work, for international brands, so that the products do not get dirty. The home workers did not count it as any expense. This indicates the lack of awareness and inability of the homeworker to be able to calculate their net incomes

Homeworkers in Delhi and Kathmandu incurred transport costs as they collected and/or dropped work at the collection centre. Only in Tirupur did the contractor deliver work door to door to the home workers and picked it up on his two-wheeler every day. In Delhi, the women home workers incurred transport costs to fetch the work from the contractor's distribution centre, which could be as much as 1/4 of their total daily earnings. Some often walked, to save on the transport costs, but lost on productive hours. Similarly in Kathmandu, exporter had several outlets in Kathmandu where women workers picked up their work from.

The costs of production that the home worker incurs – needles, transport, phone calls, space –etc eat into the already meager earnings of the home worker, bringing the net earning of the home workers to very low.

Costs of production

Many of the costs of production are borne by the home workers which eat into their already meager earnings.

They home worker provide the workplace (their own home);

The home worker pays for utilities, such as electricity;

Homeworkers buy and maintain equipment's, like sewing needles, addas and frames, scissors and trimmers. In Delhi, the home workers estimated that they spent approximately Rs 25 per month on needles, addas and frames, and transport costs – upto the common distribution centre. In Tirupur, all homeworkers said that they had to buy trimmer and cone needle, every few months. (A trimmer costs as much as Rs 45). In Nepal, the home workers bore the costs of knitting needles, phone calls, transport costs and plastic bags.

Risks of production

Besides, costs of production, the home workers also bear some of the risks of production such as changing and fluctuating demands. In the FGD, the women in Delhi said, 'The design and style changes frequently. By the time our hand gets set on a design and we are able to generate faster the opieces, the design changes.' Or "The company many times changes design in between and then we have to do too many alterations for which we are not paid extra.". Often the women worked without a clear and good sample. 'We would prefer very specific directions for work, maybe a photo, picture of the sample approved , so that no alterations come up.' Sometimes the home workers has to pay if a piece is lost; incur a deduction from her earnings of as much as Rs 500, as was reported in by the home workers in the FGD in Tirrupur.

Poor quality raw material was also a problem, as reported by the home workers in Delhi. 'Materials provided sometimes was of not good quality, then we lose time in returning it and thus day is wasted'. The home workers in Tirupur said that having a sewing machine would definitely increased their productivity.

14. Health issues

Women reported health issues in the FGDs as key challenges in all locations. Most health issues were related to their work.

In Tirupur, the women reported during the FGDs of frequent body pain and vomiting due to smell of the cloth or of the hard and uncomfortable working space. However, the enumerator made the observation that continuous trimming had stiffened the fingers of several home workers and that their home was filled with minute particles of dusts which is being inhaled by all family members

In Delhi too, the women home workers mentioned health as one of their key challenges - eye sight weakness, back and neck and shoulder pains due to bead work or adda work.

The Nepal FGD reported, 'Most of the HBWs complained about the health hazards related to their work. For example, knitting woolen products are very strenuous to their eyes which can require regular eye check-ups or use of spectacles which could be very expensive compared to what they are getting as their payment of the work. Several of the HBWs complained about getting itchiness in the eyes or either eye strain while knitting. Also, the dust of the wool can create respiratory illness which was the problem often cited by HBWs in the FGD. In some cases, their husbands didn't allow them to knit as they thought it could create health problems to their children.

Medical help was expensive, as one worker from Nepal explained in the FGD. 'If we get sick and go to hospital for treatment. The money we are earning is not enough for the treatment.'

Conclusions:

1. While the need for research to highlight the challenges and constraints faced by the homeworkers in global supply chains cannot be emphasized enough, designing and conducting a study of this nature is not easy. In this study too,

we had many hardships in identifying homeworkers who were part of global value chains. The workers worked from home and remained isolated and invisible. Many a times they could not identify the brands that they were working for – leave alone identify whether the brands were global or local. The brands on the other hand denied having any homeworkers in their supply chains.

2. Fear amongst the home workers was palpable all through the study. Even once home workers were identified, they were reluctant to participate in the study and provide information on sensitive aspects like incomes, owing to a lack of confidence and trust.
3. Homeworkers shared their deep insecurity and vulnerability many times and much assurance was needed before they agreed to participate in the research. Confidence building with the home workers groups; and other in the value chain is critical to collect authentic information from the home workers.
4. Identifying a suitable partner to conduct the study is vital. Not only does the research partner needs to have confidence of the community; they also need a clear conceptual understanding of the issues related to the home workers, in order to be able to capture authentic data and information.
5. There can be several models and supply chains in which the home workers may exist. Within the garment sector too, a home workers can do the finishing jobs on a factory produced nearly-complete product such as stitching buttons, stitching parts of collars, button hole making, trimming, knotting, foam removing, folding, checking, packing; or do the embellishment on a panel without knowing what the final product would be; or produce nearly the entire product herself such as a knitted glove. Final products in our study which were made by the homeworkers (partially or fully) included hosiery-T shirts, shorts, sports T-shirts, track pants, headbands, ladies fashion-embroidered panels and accessories and knitted products, among others.
6. The study identified several international brands, including an Australian menswear brand, Italian sports wear company, European fashion chains and others producing women clothing and woollens. It was established that many home workers are connected to their global supply chains to make complete or partial products.
7. None of the home workers had any written contracts with their employers or contractors. This resulted in homeworkers having little leverage when a contractor or trader fails to comply with verbal agreements.
8. The average earnings of home workers are abysmally low – much below the minimum wages. The home workers in Delhi earned a monthly income of Rs 2100; where as the in Tiruppur, they had monthly income of Rs 6000. The minimum wages in Delhi for unskilled labour was Rs 9568 per month; and for garment workers in TamilNadu was Rs 7829.
9. Home-based workers, in addition, also absorb a wide range of costs associated with the production process, which eat into their meagre earnings. They provide the workplace (their own home); pay for utilities, and must buy and maintain equipments, like sewing machines and needles, addas and frames, scissors and trimmers. These costs of production weigh heavily against the paltry piece rates they earn. There are other costs that don't appear so transparently in the balance sheet. Many home-based garment workers must go to the trader's shop, by foot or by local transport at their own expense, to

- collect cloth and any other raw materials provided by the trader. Some other transaction costs such as phone must also be borne by the homemaker.
10. Delayed payments are common, as is rejection and cancellation of orders. The homemaker is never paid per day. Payment was made mostly once in a month in Tirupur and Delhi. In Kathmandu, most payments were made once in two months.
 11. Many of the risks of production are also downloaded to the homemaker. This includes seasonality of work, fast changing fashion and lead time in production and lack of clarity of sample. In the FGD, the women in Delhi said, 'The design and style changes frequently. By the time our hand gets set on a design and we are able to generate faster the pieces, the design changes.' Or 'The company many times changes design in between and then we have to do too many alterations for which we are not paid extra.' Often the women worked without a clear and good sample. 'We would prefer very specific directions for work, maybe a photo, picture of the sample approved, so that no alterations come up.' Poor quality raw material was also a problem, as reported by the home workers in Delhi. 'Materials provided sometimes was of not good quality, then we lose time in returning it and thus day is wasted'.
 12. Lack of education coupled with limited alternative employment options for employment makes their lives very vulnerable. In addition, mostly homemakers are married with children and struggling with their care responsibilities. As a result, in the absence of work, many are forced to take on work which are extremely low paying. In Nepal, since there is no local demand for similar products, women did other kind of home-based work, like food processing. It was true for the some home workers in Delhi too. The SEWA Bharat staff who coordinated this study reported that these women would often take up very poor paying home based work when embellishment/embroidery work was not available, such as cutting the stems from cauliflower where they would be paid as low as Rs 0.50 per kilo of the vegetable. In Tirupur, the women workers reported in the FGDs that they took on waste thread removal which paid them as little as Rs 22 per kg for color cloth pieces and Rs 30 per kg for white color cloth.
 13. The household was also precarious and vulnerable, with the main bread winner of most households of home workers earning their livelihood in informal employment, with all the insecurities and vulnerabilities that informality brings with it, inherent in their lives. The total household income, as reported by the home workers themselves, was not more than Rs 20,000 for all home workers in India. In Tirupur, most husbands/ male members were working in the neighbourhood garment factories, as fabricators, cutters etc. Though work in the factories was regular, it was not permanent and did not include any social security benefits or pensions etc. Either the workers worked on contract basis, with monthly wages or as daily wage earners. In Delhi, the husbands were also in precarious employment – working as rickshaw pullers, mechanics, temporary jobs in local factories or drivers. In Kathmandu, most of the husbands had immigrated to the middle east and to neighbouring countries for employment.
 14. Home-based workers are vulnerable to occupational health and safety hazards, which limits their productivity. Common ailments reported were eye sight weakness, back and neck and shoulder pains and respiratory disorders. In Tirupur, the enumerator observed that continuous trimming had stiffened the

fingers of several homeworkers and that their home was filled with minute particles of dusts which is being inhaled by all family members.

15. Their invisibility is remarkable: not only are they invisible to the international brand, the brand is also invisible to them. In all FGDs, we asked the homeworkers to make the production chain, and nowhere could they do that. In Delhi and Kathmandu, most workers knew that they were producing for an international market based on the quality of skilled work required from them, the design of the product, the tight time lines and the relatively better piece-rates. In Tirupur, many homeworkers did not realize that they were producing for international brands.

Home workers in the garment sector in the three case studies in this research operated from a vulnerable position in the value chain - highly exposed to risk and highly dependent on their earnings for survival. They remained in the shadows, invisible and unrecognized, working for very low piece rates and with no or very little bargaining power.

About HomeNet South Asia (HNSA) is a regional network of organisations of home based workers. Born out of the Kathmandu Declaration in 2000, HNSA currently has a presence in 8 countries of South Asia - Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. HNSA aims to build regional solidarity among home-based workers, especially women workers, and empower them to lead a life of dignity, free of poverty, through obtaining decent work and social protection, within a rights based framework. HNSA strives to make home based workers and their issues more visible; to ensure secure livelihoods for them; and to strengthen their collective voice and organizing efforts in the region. HNSA also advocates for the implementation of national, regional and international policies for homebased workers; inclusion of home based workers in the existing policies and laws, as well as promotes access of homebased workers' products to local, national, regional and international markets. For more information, visit www.homenetsouthasia.net or email homenetsouthasia@gmail.com