

Recommendation for a National Policy on

Home Based Workers in Sri Lanka

(Prepared in consultation with multi stakeholder consultations (Home Based Workers, Organizations working with HBWs , Government, private Sector, NGOs, and Civil Society Organizations) facilitated by HomeNet Sri Lanka)



1) Introduction

Home Based workers (HBWs) in Sri Lanka can be considered as one of the most vulnerable sectors Represented by women. Although the contribution of HBW for the national economy is comparatively high, it is not recognized both quantitatively and qualitatively. The socio-economic development of the Home Based Worker is essential for the overall national development of the country to reach the Human Development Goals either United National or Sri Lankan government's reduce multi dimensional nature of poverty ,

Economic growth is necessary but not enough. Building a better and conducive environment with rich and diverse choices and opportunities for home based workers will play a major role in any society especially in the developing world in order to ensure that the benefits of economic growth will reach the entire population.

In a globalised economy Home Based Workers are becoming a part of a global value chain. With the advent of large firms and global completion these small entrepreneurs face both opportunities and threats. This policy focuses on how to capture the advantages of globalization_ and to minimize its risks.

In this globalised liberal and open trade environment formal employment and trade union Membership is shrinking while the informal economy is growing, all over the world, and where the Future of the labor movement therefore largely depends on its ability to organize the informal Economy of which home workers play such an important role.

2) Background

The HBWs of the informal sector can be considered as the largest section of the work force in Sri Lanka although accepted quantitative data of their representation is not available. HBWs are referred to as the workers who carry out remunerative or income generating activities within their homes or surrounding areas. HBW come from diverse backgrounds representing virtually all the industries covering all geographical locations. While representing both the rural and urban populations HBWs are engaged in both traditional and modern economic sectors. Similar to other nations, women in Sri Lanka also represent a larger percentage of the Home Based Workers.

The International Labor Conference of the ILO at its 86th session in Geneva, in June 1996, adopted Convention (No 177) and a recommendation (No 184) concerning home work. The terms of the Convention and the recommendations are aimed at providing basic social protection for HBWs and Also for the adoption, implementation and periodic review of a national policy in each country on Home Based Workers. These two instruments further focus on important provisions such as health, safety, social security and welfare.

The Kathmandu Declaration for which Sri Lanka was a signatory emphasized the need for formation of a National Policy for HBW in all countries. It agreed on the need for providing minimum protection, which would include the right to organize, minimum remuneration, occupational health and safety, statutory social protection , maternity, child care and skill development.

Defining HBWs is a critical elements and each country has its own unique definition. In general terms, “ Home Based Workers “refer to those persons who are not formally employed but work either from their own homes or premises which are outside the establishments of the persons for whom they produce certain goods or services of economic value”

Generally, Home Based Worker tends to be done by the entire family, often involving children.

The ILO Convention No 177 (Home Work Convention 1996) has defined “**Home Work**” as that work which is carried out by a person to be referred to as Home Based Worker (HBW) in his or her home Or any other premises of his or her choice other than the workplace of the employer, for remuneration, which results in a product or service as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, material or other inputs.

The "employer" has been defined to mean a person, natural or legal, who, either directly or through an intermediary; whether or not intermediaries are provided for in national legislation, carries out home work in pursuance of his or her business activity.

The ILO definition of HBWs refers specifically to the workers on the “piece rate” with a defined employer. It does not include those that produce directly for the market.

In the Sri Lankan context HBW is defined as a “**person involved in the production of goods and services directly to the market, or for an employer, in his or her own home or other premises of his or her choice other than the work place of the employer, for remuneration, irrespective of whether or not the employer provides the equipments, material or other inputs.**”

In the Sri Lankan situation the Agro-Based income generating activities carryout from the place of residence is also being recognized as a Home Based industry.

Home Based workers in Sri Lanka faces various challenges and issues when it comes to their right to live and work with respect to the multi dimensional poverty they have to face;

- Low Income and asset base
- Illiteracy and poor quality in Education & Training
- Ill Health
- Gender Inequality
- Child Labour
- Environmental Degradation
- Challenges of Globalization
- Inadequate Legal Protection
- Threat to traditional Knowledge and skills

Government, Private Sector and Civil Society establishments are currently taking various measures to improve the living standard of Home Based Workers in isolation and it is vital to have a National Policy and an integrated approach with multi stakeholder partnerships to improve this sector.

The ILO Home Work Convention calls for national policies promoting the equality of treatment between home workers and other wage earners, and it specifies the areas where the equality of treatment shall be promoted.

These include:

- The right to establish or join organizations of their own choosing and to participate in the
- Activities of such organizations.
- Protection against discrimination in employment or occupation.

- Protection in the field of occupational safety and health; national laws and regulations on safety and health at work shall apply to home work and certain types of work or the use of certain substances may be prohibited in home work for reasons of safety and health.

- Remuneration.

- Statutory social security protection.

- Minimum age for admission to employment or work, thereby preventing the use of child labor in home work.

- and finally; Maternity protection- a basic need for a category of workers where the great majority are women.

ILO instruments, and particular conventions, are internationally accepted guidelines for national policies and for national legislation supporting such policies. Governments that ratify the Home Work Convention is therefore expected to “adopt, implement and periodically review a national policy on home work aimed at improving the situations of home workers”. It should be done in consultation with the most representative organizations of employers and workers and, where they exist, organizations of home workers themselves, and those of their employers. The Convention states that such a “national policy on home work shall be implemented by means of laws and regulations, collective agreements, arbitration awards or in any other appropriate manner consistent with national Practice.”

Governments that ratify the Home Work Convention commit themselves to policies which include:

- The recognition of the social and economic value of the home work;

- An effective anti poverty strategy, based on gradually raising the living standards of the lowest tier of society, through higher incomes and social protection;

- A progressive and sustainable development strategy, based on strengthening the internal demand by increasing the purchasing power of the masses of the people;

- An affirmative human rights policy, by enabling a sizeable part of its working class to exercise its rights;

- A positive policy on gender equality, by empowering millions of women and enabling them to achieve, through their organizations, lives with independence, dignity and security.

3) Vision

Better Life for Home Based Workers

4) Mission

Empowering HBWs to further contribute to increase national income while fighting poverty through productive and competitive work with fair treatment, avoiding forms of discrimination and exploitation therefore ensuring basic minimum social protection. Ultimately, to facilitate a better life for all.

5) Goals

- To reach the benefits of the overall Economic Growth to the HBWs by improving their the earnings
- To allow Home Based Workers to be free from all forms of discrimination and exploitation and to maintain the ethnic and gender equity in Home Works.
- To provide or facilitate direct, affordable and better access to Markets, Finances, Science & Technology, Education & Training, and Information & knowledge.
- To provide or facilitate measures of welfare and social security and improve working conditions of HBWs making Home Work more accepted and decent while ensuring occupational safety and health to eradicate all types of violence and discouragement.
- To provide or facilitate the appropriate recognition to Home Based Workers and the contribution of Home Based Workers in the National Economy.
- To provide legislative Protection for Home Based Workers.
- To promote HBWs in Governance at different levels.
- To make HBWs more resilient to disasters.
- To empower women to be involved in Home Based Industries.
- To eradicate all forms of Child Labor in Home Based Industries

6) Strategic Themes

Social Protection

To facilitate and promote the introduction of social protection mechanisms which guarantees Death and Disability Benefits, Maternity Benefits, Old Age Pensions, Health Care Child Care and other appropriate facilities To negotiate extending of the existing social protection systems to HBWs To promote minimum wage for all employment

Access to Markets

To facilitate and promote special exhibitions, trade fairs, and trade centers to improve market access to Home Based Workers

To promote Buyer Seller meetings and linkages.

To promote special space for HBWs in markets & shopping centers.

To develop Market Information Centers for Various Clusters.

To promote linkages with Chambers for Marketing and technical support.

To promote ICT to improve market access to Home Based Workers.

To promote use of Products and services of HBW in Government and other selected institutions as a special promotion.

To negotiate with authorities for special tax concessions on products and services of HBWs. and to exception of export and import duties.

To promote venturing partnerships with corporate to market products and services of HBWs.

To join & support regional market channels established to promote products of HBWs.

To build linkages to existing trade promotions of the state to support products of HBWs.

Promote collective enterprises of HBWs.

Access to Finances and Raw Materials ,

To promote more Micro Credit and Micro Finance for HBWs.

To Promote Collective bargaining for Raw materials for HBWs.

To promote common infrastructure facility with machinery and other facilities for HBWs.

Work Place (home), Infrastructure and other physical resources

To promote special subsidy schemes and loan schemes for upgrading workplace t.e. housing for HBWs.

To promote specialized or focused provision of basic infrastructure facilities such as water drainage, electricity, telecommunication etc for HBWs.

To promote new strategies and facilities to use home as the work place safeguarding the needs of vulnerable groups such as children and elders.

To promote the management & training guidelines.

Access to Education & Training

To facilitate and promote the establishment of specialized schools or introduce training programs for HBWs in strategic Locations.

To facilitate and promote Entrepreneurial Training for HBWs.

To recognize and accredit community based skill s development initiatives.

To identify skills required by various sectors of HBWs.

To facilitate and promote training on design, product identification, display and quality control.

To facilitate and promote training programs for technical training to upgrade skills & technology.

To facilitate and promote training programs Marketing.

To facilitate and promote training programs to integrate Information & Communication.

Technology (ICT) to improve HBWs.

Access to Science ,Technology, Knowledge and Information

To identify clusters where a large number of HBWs of one type of Trade.

To conduct various Research and surveys on HBWs.

To measure the HBWs on regular basis which facilitate policy making on a continuous basis.

To support further R&D required by HBWs.

To promote mechanism to improve quality of products and services of HBWs.

To promote standardization of products & services of HBWs.

To collect, classify and disseminate information required by HBWs.

To create sector wise knowledge bases required by HBWs.

To preserve Traditional Knowledge and skills and blend with modern knowledge and skills appropriately

To promote special schemes to access modern machinery or technology for HBW.

Recognition to HBWs

To recognize and make provision for adequate representation of organizations of Home Based Workers at the Policy Making and Planning Level.

To adequately represent HBWs in National Economy

To register HBWs with the Government

To conduct competitions and award schemes to recognize and encourage HBWs

Organizing and Networking HBWs

To organize, support and network member based organizations, cooperatives and networks of HBWs.

To promote, build and support regional and apex national level federations of HBWs and their organizations, cooperatives and Networks.

To support the building of sector wise organizations, cooperatives and networks of HBWs.

To develop and maintain Data Bases and Directories of HBWs and their Organizations.

To maintain state of the art technology solutions such as web portals to support the development of HBWs.

Building Linkages & Partnerships for HBWs

To initiate Multi Stakeholder Partnerships to strengthen the HBWs sector

To promote more Corporate Social Responsibility(CSR) Projects to support HBWs

To build linkages with Government Sector organizations to improve the extension services offered to HBWs.

To network with HBW organizations in the SAARC region and other international Networks.

To build linkages with National and International Agencies working on Issues of HBWs.

Work Place (Home), Occupational Health and Safety

To educate HBWs on Occupational Health and safety

To promote the construction of the work place with improved conditions to ensure occupational health and Safety

Women Empowerment

To improve the leadership, entrepreneurial and other skills of Women HBWs.

To create a conducive environment for women HBWs to engage in their socio-political and economic activities.

Disaster Preparedness

To promote disaster preparedness / mitigation plans sector wise and at local government levels

To empower HBWs to be more resilient to natural and other disasters.

Childcare

To promote 100% participation of education by all children which helps to eradicate child labor and ensure sufficient income of parents of school going children, so parents will not have to make their children to work.