

WHO ARE HOMEBASED WORKERS?

Home-based workers (HBWs) are defined as those who produce goods and services inside or within the vicinity of their homes. They are categorized as:

- **own-account workers** and contributing family workers helping the own-account workers, involved in the production of goods and services using their own equipment and capital in their homes, and sell their own products in the market;
- subcontracted workers in their homes on a piece-rate remuneration, resulting in a product or service as specified by the employer(s), irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used;
- **unpaid family workers** contributing to the family business output .

Considered informal workers, they are often linked in the chain of production with little or no collective bargaining power to negotiate the terms of their labour with contractors. (*Source: We are Workers Too! Organizing Home-based Workers in the Global Economy.* Aug 2010.)

HBWs' products include food, garments, accessories, woven products, jewelry, wood carvings, home decor, and other handicrafts from indigenous and recycled materials among others.



IMPRESSIONS on HOMEBASED WORK

- Not work but “income generating activities”
- Income from homebased work considered “supplementary” to augment “family income”

What are the working and living conditions of HBWs?

- Homebased workers are mostly poor.
- Work is done inside the home .
- Eviction and demolition are risks and there is need to secure their equipment, their raw materials, and their finished products from fire, flood, theft, and other dangers.
- Work is interspersed with household chores.
- Work is not regular.
- Workers are not covered by social security.
- There is no clear employer-employee relationship.
- They suffer poor working conditions subject to harmful chemicals, unsafe machinery, electrical and fire risks, and other hazards.
- They need a steady supply of electricity and water, as well as sanitation facilities to ensure continuous production and safe and healthy living for themselves and other household members.
- They require accessible transportation facilities to market and deliver their products.



MBO Formation: The INDONESIAN Experience

Organizing efforts are concentrated in industrial cities such as Malang, Jakarta, Jogjakarta, and Tengarang, where homework is rapidly increasing because of the legalization of outsourcing in 2003. Organizers do observation and social investigation, whereby they identify potential leaders in the community. These key leaders are then approached and they are made aware of the importance of women's involvement in organizing. Women homebased workers who eventually become members are provided ID cards with their names, their signatures, and a table for recording their monthly contributions of 1000 rupiahs per month. Economic empowerment through formation of cooperatives is another key concern of HWPRI. Its collections of homebased workers' products are displayed, sold, and promoted. HBW producers also join exhibitions sponsored by government agencies.



Advocacy activities spearheaded by MWPRI and HWPRI include legalization or obtaining recognition for HBW groups. They also engage in legal aid and public dialogues with local and national officials in cooperation with the MWPRI. Alliance building with trade unions, student movements, women's organizations, and mass media groups is an ongoing effort to raise awareness regarding HBW issues and build solidarity with them. An important tool in advocacy work is the use of new technology, such as video documentation handled by HBW leaders themselves.



ORGANIZING in VIET NAM

Craft Link was established in 1996 by a group of international nongovernmental organizations and nonprofit organizations, and works with Vietnamese artisans to generate income, with a focus to organize and support ethnic minorities, street children and artisans with disabilities. Craft Link also markets products from traditional Vietnamese handicraft villages. Craft Link helps artisan groups design new products and develop marketing opportunities. The organization emphasizes cultural preservation of traditional skills in handicraft. It helps groups of ethnic groups in income generation for small-scale Vietnamese artisans and acquiring new markets. Artisans are organized and assisted by Craft Link in creating new ideas, providing training in management, bookkeeping, costing, pricing and product development. They are provided with tools, interest-free loans, education, training and literacy classes. Craft Link supports groups of artisans in selling the handicrafts locally, and exporting to fair trade organizations and commercial companies around the world.



Craft Link supports 63 ARTISAN GROUPS all over Vietnam, of which 45% are ethnic minorities, 25% are disadvantaged groups, and 30% are traditional villages.

MBOs in LAOS

Homenet Laos is still working towards organizational strengthening as an MBO and to form networks of MBOs. Homenet Laos has helped develop a joint marketing system for producer groups in the village bank network which provided technical assistance and developed profit sharing among member HBWs. Homenet Lao has also been instrumental in addressing other issues of HBWs by creating membership-based organizations (MBO) of HBWs, exploring fair trade opportunities that will benefit the poor HBWs, advocating for social protection through discussions with policy makers on occupational safety and labor policy and legislation, and pushing for gender and participatory governance through its network. It is an organization that draws together sustainable community and environmental development that acknowledges the co-dependency of people with its environment .



MBOs in CAMBODIA

Homenet Cambodia has initiated organizing groups of HBWs into MBOs and as social enterprises. It undertakes capacity building activities beyond product design and development, facilitating access to local and international markets, facilitating capital formation through savings in credit institutions at the grassroots level, and access to social protection schemes.

Majority of HBWs are women and persons with disabilities and victims of human trafficking. They saw the need to form MBOs as self-help groups or social enterprises to collectively address issues and problems such as low income, job instability, unsafe work environment and health issues. Persons with disability can learn skills from the organization with the goal of improving their living conditions and economic status.



What are the key issues faced by HBWs?

Most HBWs live in poverty, due to low and insufficient income, coupled with irregularity and/or seasonality of jobs and orders. Whenever productive work is available, they work for longer hours since they also need to do domestic chores and other forms of care work at home, which is their workplace. Having skills is considered an advantage since most are low in education.

- **Invisible, isolated, and unorganized** due to being scattered and not effectively organized, HBWs lack the bargaining power to negotiate for higher wages, in the case of homeworkers, and for greater access to capital, markets, and other productive resources, in the case of own account workers. The lack of recognition, attention and support from community leaders and local government authorities render them invisible and excluded from participatory democratic processes which are very important avenues to vent out their issues and concerns.



- HBWs need to have **decent and sustainable jobs** which ensure minimum and reliable income in the context of a protected environment which is essential for survival and well-being.
- Women HBWs are **disadvantaged** because they are earning supplementary incomes within a gender division of labor where men are invariably awarded the role of primary bread winner. Gender stereotypes consign them to low-paying, low-status, monotonous and repetitious tasks requiring manual dexterity.

- **Climate change has resulted in much deprivation and suffering of homebased workers**



What is organizing?

“Organizing is the process by which people who are individually weak and vulnerable unite and create power together. It is the key to empowerment.” (SEWA)

WHY ORGANIZE?

Organizing builds the power of workers by

- **Bringing workers together into the organization**
- **Building and maintaining a democratic organization**
- **Developing accountable worker leaders**
- **Empowering members through activism, education, information**
- **Representing members individually and in collective negotiations**
- **Enabling them to deal with problems and disputes**

(Source; SEWA)



plan of action for campaigns are contributory to the progress of Homenet Thailand in the formation of MBOs.

Organizing in Thailand started when the HomeNet network was formed in the early 1990s when concerned NGOs, academics, and home-based workers' groups got together with support from the International Labour Organization (ILO) for a project on social protection. Organizing work continued after the project with the main concern to get legal protection and access to social security and health insurance for homebased workers. They also concentrated on occupational health and safety, and found that OSH training is a good organizing tool. An umbrella organization called the Foundation for Labour and Employment Promotion was formed and built five regional networks across the country, linked with the national HomeNet, and encouraged the organization of local groups of homebased workers, with about 1,750 individual members today. HomeNet Thailand has played more of a service role for these groups and build membership-based organizations (MBO) with individual members participating and having a say in the running of the organization. Members pay an annual fee of 10 baht and receive a membership card. They now have a newsletter to which these members are encouraged to contribute, and have been running a photo competition, for example. There is also a new cremation scheme in which members contribute 10 baht each to the family of any member who dies. *(Source: WIEGO, Mather we are Workers Too, and www.homenetthailand.org and Homenet SEA Magazine Vol 9, No. 1 April 2010)*



Organizing HBWs in Region VI and Iloilo City, Philippines

With humble beginnings as a small village chapter in Sta. Barbara, Iloilo in 1992, membership of PATAMABA in Region 6 quickly spread to 41 village chapters in 12 municipalities and in 4 provinces in the Western Visayas Region. Today with more than a thousand active members, the group draws inspiration from committed and disciplined leaders and key officials responsible for the successful formation of PATAMABA's two multi-purpose cooperatives, one in Sta. Barbara and the other in Carles, Iloilo.

PATAMABA Region 6 formation blends into two categories of solidarity economy organizations: a SELF -HELP organization where members support one another as a practical form of solidarity; and as MICROFINANCE provider. The group realized the essence of solidarity economy as a strategy when they experienced difficulties due to unfair competition with cheap foreign products. Co-operatives and group enterprises were formed to address the need for alternative livelihood in the context of dwindling resources and lack of market opportunities.

The organization was instrumental in helping the typhoon Frank victims who lost their houses and livelihoods by mobilizing the distribution of relief goods and in rebuilding houses in San Isidro, Jaro, Iloilo City. Having experienced massive destruction to their homes and livelihoods of typhoons that hit the region since 2008, the women realized the need for awareness raising on disaster risk reduction management (DRRM) and initiated training leaders in their communities on disaster preparedness.

SOUTH EAST ASIAN EXPERIENCES in ORGANIZING



Mobilisation of home-based workers by HomeNet Thailand has helped to make their economic contribution, and their needs as workers, much more visible to the country's lawmakers,

MBO ORGANIZING IN THAILAND

Homenet Thailand has been most successful in advocating for social protection for all and extending services on occupational safety and health(OSH); in campaigning for universal health care; and recently in the promotion and approval of the Homeworkers Law to protect labor rights by providing for minimum wages and social protection including OSH. Awareness campaigns on the issues, situations and problems faced by HBWs and informal workers have been regularly conducted by Homenet Thailand.



Homebased workers' networks in Thailand assessed and realized the need to establish MBOs. Implementation of this initiative is based on a common agreement to work collectively on a concrete plan. A clear understanding of how MBOs can help in strengthening networks towards sustainability and empowerment of members is essential to ensure members' commitment. Setting clear goals, regulations, and achievable

Key Principles in Organizing

1. Win real, immediate concrete improvements in workers' lives
2. Give workers a sense of their own power
3. Alter power relationships

Organizing means more than recruiting and growing membership. It means building and maintaining an organisation, run and controlled by the members, through democratic organisational structures and processes.

Democratic, member-based workers' organizations....

"a membership based organisation is one where the members (who are women workers) are the users of the services of the organisation, the managers and its owners". (Ela Bhatt, founder of

Organizing means building and maintaining an organisation that effectively represents the interests of all its members, women and men. WIEGO ensures that the organization lasts. A democratic, member-based, workers' organization can take many different forms. It can be a trade union, an association, a network, a worker cooperative amongst others. It can be small or large; local, national, international. Its members can be informal workers, formal workers or a mix of both. Whatever its form or its name, it is based on strong, democratic grassroots (workshop, farm, market, taxi park, street, landfill site etc) structures led by elected leadership which is accountable to the members. It operates with a clear purpose, backed by sound values and principles.

(Source: WIEGO. *Organizing in the Informal Economy: Resource Books for Organizers*)

Membership-based Organizations(MBOs)

A membership-based organization (MBO) is one that is **run, managed, and owned** by the workers and members themselves. An MBO is run on the principles of democracy, transparency, solidarity, collective benefit, independence, control by the members, voluntary membership, collectively agreed objectives and decision-making structures.

An MBO **increases the voice and visibility** of the members and represents the members' interest to authorities. It **promotes solidarity** among members and the working poor, and strengthens their organizing spirit. It primarily exists to improve the economic and social well-being of members. Embracing a holistic approach, the organization works for members' self-identity and capacity building of both leaders and members, given that human beings have different needs.

In the light of global uncertainties, aggravated by the onslaught of the recent economic and financial crisis, changing employment systems and disasters, MBOs of the poor are necessary to empower women homebased and other informal workers in Southeast Asia.

SEWA's MBOP (membership-based organizing of the poor) model is distinct from an MBO in that the former are "controlled by and accountable to, and seek to fulfill the objectives of poor members." Distinguishing features of an MBOP include a defined criteria for membership, ensuring that it is drawn, from poor women working in the informal economy. An MBOP has a transparent and democratic management and governance mechanism. It is impelled by democratically agreed aims and objectives, and implements democratically agreed programs and activities. Its leadership is elected and is responsible for and accountable to the membership; decision-making powers rest with the members in a bottom up and top down process. It strives towards financial self-sufficiency, relying on members' contributions. It focuses on the needs of members, who complementing fit from them. government, gious and And it is built solidarity of sider their family.

(Source; SEWA ward, Homenet



the needs of mem- participate in im- activities and bene- It is independent of employers, reli- political authorities. on the unity and members who con- organization as

Shows the Way For- SEA Magazine, Vol. 9



individual members. SEWA has formed more than 100 campaign teams based on four categories of membership. This approach has helped not only in strengthening the existing major trades but has also provided a significant place to small trades engaged in bangle making, sand filters, etc. Twenty six campaign teams were also formed among the agarbatti or incense rollers, bidi workers, sewing and embroidery, kite making. Aside from organizing and linking, the campaign team brings out the issues to the respective trade committees to gain a wider audience.

Service based Approach deals with organizing workers around demands, relevant issues and problems or needs of poor women workers with the aim of facilitating in resolving their problems. Trade groups for example have to deal with issues like social security and protection, livelihood, housing which is also the workplace for the HBWs, childcare, credit and banking facilities, etc. Doing the service approach facilitates in obtaining the needed services to increase productivity and efficiency and at the same time provide protection for the HBWs. Examples of these demands pertain to housing, basic services such as water, light, education, day care services, etc. (Source: SEWA Learning Academy, Modules and Presentation Materials on Organizing, Leadership and Communications)



SEWA's STRATEGIES for ORGANIZING

Area approach means targeting groups of informal workers groups within a common geographic location. This makes it easier for them to have access to services and resources and to have regular meetings.



Trade Approach organizes women according to the type of trade they are engaged in. This enables them to address needs, problems and issues of particular trade groups such as regularity of market and job orders, protection of workers, income security, sources of raw materials, etc. Being a trade union, SEWA is an organization of poor self employed women workers who earn their livelihood through their own labour or different small trades/business. Different trade groups have different issues to be addressed. For example, HBWs and vendors have separate specific issues despite common ones that can be addressed. In the Trade Approach, trade committees are formed, representatives are elected by the members themselves, and the committees meet at least once a month to discuss their issues. There are more than 120 different trade groups organize by SEWA.



Campaign Approach deals with having a complete planned course of action to achieve desired objectives at a definite and decided time. Campaigns can be done across various trade groups and in various geographic areas. Trade or area approach enables groups of women to meet regularly, say once a month. But in a campaign approach, the group can form campaign teams and decide how more often they can meet to address policy level issues, change in structures, or any advocacy issues that they need to address either on a long- or short-term basis. Campaign groups act as link between the organizers and the

What are the challenges faced by organizers ?

It is never easy to run a democratic member-based organisation. Because the members are the owners, the managers and the beneficiaries, decision making is often slow and complicated and administration and management not very efficient. For informal workers, it is particularly challenging to run an effective and democratic organization:

Challenge 1: Choosing the right kind of leader. Some leaders are drawn from organisations with a history of weak and undemocratic organisational practices. Some want to be leaders to further their own interests. Others are corrupt, and some are in the pockets of politicians or criminals. Men predominate in leadership positions even where a majority of the members are women.

Challenge 2: Developing the necessary skills and knowledge to run an organisation. Many workers in the informal economy have had little opportunity to acquire a good education and formal skills. They often lack the confidence and experience to run their organizations well.

Challenge 3: Having enough money to carry out the objectives of the organisation. Member-based organizations rely on fees paid by their members. Informal workers are generally poor and cannot pay high and/or regular subscription fees. It is often difficult to collect subscriptions regularly because of members' poverty, scattered locations and lack of financial facilities. It is not easy to find donors who are willing to support them. *(Source: WIEGO. Organizing in the Informal Economy: Re-*

OTHER CHALLENGES IN ORGANIZING AND RECRUITING WOMEN:

1. Time is usually a hindrance for women to attend meetings because of household chores including child caring activities.
2. Traditional male attitudes prevent women from joining and participating in activities of the organization.
3. Religion and culture should also be considered as they limit women's freedom to leave their homes.
4. Women lack confidence and self esteem to join the group and attend activities.
5. Women experience fear of losing work and time for livelihood activities, fear of husbands, and fear for safety.

STEPS IN ORGANIZING

1. Get information about the workers you are targeting:

- What work do they do?
- Where do they work and live?
- What problems do they encounter in their work (e.g., health and safety, harassment from employers, long working hours, income)?
- What problems do they generally experience (e.g., housing, transport, access to health and other basic services)?
- Are they organized? What are their experiences in being organized?
- What laws and policies relate to the workers (labor laws and regulations, municipal or city ordinances, etc)?
- Are there other organizations in the community and how can they affect your organizing strategies?
- What resources are available that can assist in organizing (people, transport, materials, finances, etc)?

2. Plan details for recruiting target members.

- Decide on your strategic approach
 - ✓ Type of organization appropriate to the group
 - ✓ Target sector, subsector and groups of workers
 - ✓ membership criteria and priorities (e.g., poorest women)
 - ✓ Contact persons who can work with you
 - ✓ Choose the best place and time to talk with the target workers
 - ✓ Choose the most appropriate communication tools and materials
 - ✓ Choose the best mobilizing issues that are real concerns of workers and think of how to build and sustain their interest
 - ✓ Decide who is responsible for recording monitoring progress and reporting

3. Maintain contact with new members by holding regular meetings and visits. (Source: WIEGO, Organising In The Informal Economy: Resource Books For Organisers)

SEWA's Organizing Strategies

The challenges faced by poor women which include cultural barriers, divisions among workers, pressures from the outside (e.g., the dominant caste or class), victimization and termination of employment, tactics such as singling out those who are weak, harassment and violence, use of dominant and legal bodies to discourage workers, negative self-image especially of women, resistance from the husband and other family members, and uncooperative attitudes made SEWA realized the need to organize them.

Organizing can address vulnerability and insecurity of workers, can build their hope, self-esteem and self-identity, can overcome their fear, can increase their bargaining power, can enable them to pool resources, access services, share experiences, help each other in times of need, and when they have the numbers, even to change laws and policies. (Source; SEWA Shows the Way Forward, Homenet SEA Magazine, Vol. 9 No. 1)

SEWA's Eleven Questions

1. Have more members obtained more **EMPLOYMENT** ?
2. Has their **INCOME** increased ?
3. Have they obtained **FOOD AND NUTRITION** ?
4. Have their **HEALTH** been safeguarded ?
5. Have they obtained **CHILD-CARE**?
6. Have they obtained or improved their **HOUSING** ?
7. Have their **ASSETS** increased ? (e.g. their own savings, land, house, work-space, tools or work, licenses, identity cards, cattle and share in cooperatives; and all in their own name.
8. Have the workers' **ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTH** increased ?
9. Has workers' **LEADERSHIP** increased ?
10. Have they become **SELF-RELIANT** both collectively & individually ?
11. Have they become **LITERATE**?



Recruiting Members for the MBO

What you can do

- **Get homeworkers together and make a list of the rights they should have** such as:
 - Being paid at least the legal minimum wage
 - Reasonable working hours and deadlines
 - Access to government social security provision, such as paid maternity leave.
- **Find out your legal rights:** whether your country's employment and social security laws do or do not include home-based workers; what does your country's Constitution say?
- **Try to win supporters** for your rights among trade unions, women's organizations, human rights groups, religious groups, sympathetic journalists, academics, and others.
- **Raise public awareness**, for example, through the local radio, or by holding or joining in demonstrations on International Women's Day on 8 March, or International Labour Day on 1 May each year.
- **Campaign for the ratification of ILO Convention No.177 (1996) on Home Work** to be ratified by your government, working in collaboration with trade unions.



CAMPAIGN LEADERS are

- Fearless
- Hardworking
- Ready to devote time
- Honest
- Enthusiastic
- Trustworthy
- Clever

(Source: Organizing in SEWA)



TWO ASPECTS OF ORGANIZING HBWS

A struggle over specific issue/cause

- Vitrally affects the interests of the people
- Short-lived
- Creates an external atmosphere for the issue

A Program-based organizing

- Organizing efforts continue into the future, for a longer time period
- This development-oriented organizing is for building new structures for running and managing a program

LEVELS OF ORGANIZING HBWs

• DIRECT ACTION

• Working with the State

• Lobbying

Source: SEWA Learning Academy, Modules and Presentation Materials on Organizing, Leadership and Communications



PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZING

It should be based on membership.

All the members should organize with same objective.

All the members are the beneficiaries of organization.

Members are the owners of organization and they should run the organization.

Organization should run according to the rules and regulation.

It should have transparency.

Members should have trust in organization.

Members share the benefits and risks

Source: Organizing in SEWA



BENEFITS of ORGANIZING

Gain knowledge about their rights, and obligation as economic actors, health and education of their families, finance-credit and savings and the resources available in society.

Gain self esteem

Gain a sense of community

Increases their bargaining power and gives a voice to voiceless.

V
I
S
I
B
I
L
I
T
Y
E
M
P
O
W
E
R
M
E
N
T

Source: Organizing in SEWA

