

HOMEBASED WORKERS in CAMBODIA



ISSUES OF HBWS

Invisibility

Lack of Income Opportunities

Access to Market

Unsafe housing, workplace & Environment

Access to Infrastructure & Utilities

Health, Education & Social Protection

Limited economic resources

UNRECOGNIZED WORKERS VOICE OUT THEIR ISSUES AND HOPES

Homebased workers in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, although largely invisible and voiceless, contribute a lot to the local urban economy. Available information reveals that they make all kinds of toys, bags, baskets, boxes, containers, jewelry, key rings, musical instruments, and wood carvings. They produce smock (fish, flowers, birds and other items made of palm leaves) to sell in markets and along temples. They also sew pants, neckties, scarves, mats, and hammocks. Despite their sub-

stantial economic contributions as they strive to lift themselves out of poverty, they are not yet organized and recognized. Their problems as producers remain hidden, especially from local government authorities who can easily assist them based on what they say they need. Their potential to reap greater gains not only from the tourist but also from the export markets remains largely untapped.

What are the current issues faced by the mostly women

homebased workers in Phnom Penh city and Siem Reap province, and which of these do they consider to be of top priority? How can local governments help?

Norm Sina of the Artisans Association of Cambodia conducted a study for the Inclusive Urban Planning (IUP) Project based on interviews with 109 HBWs (83 percent women) from Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.



SITUATIONER

Homebased workers in Phnom Penh live everywhere in the city, which includes urban and peri-urban areas. Most of them are migrants from other parts of Cambodia, and among them are people with disability. In Phnom Penh, they are able to find employment, build their homes, send their children to school, develop new skills, and run small businesses. Homebased workers in Siem Reap are already born in this province. They are completely dependent on the tourist market, and their skills have been transferred from generation to generation to

produce products for this market.

More than half (53 percent) of the HBWs interviewed are subcontracted, meaning they receive job orders on piece rate. About 38 percent are self-employed or own account, meaning that they produce products on their own and sell directly to the market.

Why are they engaged in homebased work? HBWs say they are poor and this is often the only option for them to earn an income for their families and improve their standard of living. (Almost half – 44 percent of the HBWs interviewed earn a monthly income between USD10 – USD40, and the next biggest group -38 percent – get be-

tween USD50-USD80). They have control over their time and have a sense of independence - this is particularly true for the self-employed.

For women who are not supposed to work far away from their house because of their domestic obligations, homebased work gives them the best opportunity to take care of both their homes and their children while earning an income. Some have disability, are in poor health, or have no access to transportation so they cannot work outside of their own homes. Those with disability who are able to do homebased work are proud that they have dignity and can help themselves.

PRIORITY ISSUES OF HOMEBASED WORKERS

Insufficient Work and Income

Homebased workers, especially the subcontracted ones, do not have regular employment. Their work depends on orders. This is why they look for other kinds of work during low season. In Phnom Penh, they sell shells, cakes and other desserts. They do laundry service, collect and clean waste materials, earn as construction workers, motorcycle or taxi drivers. For own-account or self-employed workers such as those in Siem Reap, they produce and market their products with or without orders. However, tourists are no longer buying as much. More than three-fourths of those interviewed do not earn enough income even if they work full-time. They make do by working in other jobs—farming, vegetable-raising, collecting firewood, getting palm juice, selling water melons or porridge, construction work, buying waste materials, playing traditional Khmer music, working as cleaners and guards for the temples.

Lack of Access to Markets and Other Productive Resources

Almost four-fifths (78 percent) of the HBWs interviewed had difficulties producing and selling their products. They lack information on actual and potential markets, and are dependent on orders from organizations or private companies. They do not have their own capital to invest in bulk-buying of raw materials, including zippers and thread.



These raw materials are even getting scarcer and more expensive. They have to borrow money from micro-credit institutions and private lenders who charge interest. They have no resources to spare for the repair of their sewing and other machines.

They have difficulty mixing colors and creating new designs.

Insecure and Unsafe Housing, Workplace and Community

For homebased workers, the home is the workplace. Yet, 64 percent of the HBWs interviewed report having problems with housing, and 55 percent worry about eviction. Among these problems are small space that is not enough

for the family; hot or leaking roof; and weak structure that cannot stand strong winds. These have implications on the working environment. It gets to be too hot during the dry season, and too inconvenient during the rainy season. There is no space to store raw materials. The working environment is much worse for 26 percent of the HBWs interviewed who report the absence of water drainage, and proper garbage collection, as well as the presence of mice, insects, bad-smelling canals and ponds.

Almost three-fifths (59 percent) of the HBWs interviewed feel insecure about the presence of crime and drugs in their neighborhood. Women are afraid to walk around. Mothers fear that their sons might be harmed by neighborhood gangs or get hooked on drugs along with their friends.

Those who are worried about eviction are divided into two groups. The first group own their houses in Siem Reap but are afraid that the Apsara Authority which is in charge of the land on which they built their homes may move them to a new location far away from their source of livelihood. The second group rent rooms in Phnom Penh but are fearful of being evicted if they are unable to keep up with the payments. Many say that the rent is expensive and find it hard to earn money to pay regularly, given the irregularity of their incomes, and the delayed payment of their wages.

Problems with Transportation, Utilities and Other Infrastructure

Sixty-two percent of the HBWs interviewed say they have problems with transportation. Even if majority (61 percent) have a bicycle or motorcycle to transport their products, still they need to pay money for petrol and to maintain their vehicles, which may also be getting old. Those in Phnom Penh commute a lot more when they look for jobs or orders, get or purchase the raw materi-

als, and deliver the products to those who order (sometimes, more than once when the products need to be revised). Those in Siem Reap rely on collectors who come to their areas to get the products for their buyers. (Some of HBWs in Siem Reap use their own bicycle to transport their products to markets and sell or consign by themselves). They travel only when they need to collect raw material such as palm leaves and ropeak from the forest. They go in a big car and share the cost between them.

In Phnom Penh, water and electricity connections are provided by the urban governor. In Siem Reap, these connections are **not yet available** so homebased workers use water pumps

that belong to them or to their neighbors, and gas or battery-operated lamps. Most of the HBWs interviewed have access to water either from the city government or from the pumps, but a small minority (16 percent) say that the water is too expensive. Almost half (49 percent) do not have access to electricity yet and even if they have access, 23 percent complain that it is too costly. Thus, they hesitate to turn on the light or the fan, which affects their working conditions.

INVISIBILITY
LACK OF INCOME OPPORTUNITIES
LIMITED ECONOMIC RESOURCES
ACCESS TO MARKET
UNSAFE HOUSING
UNSAFE WORKPLACE and COMMUNITY
ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION, UTILITIES and
INFRASTRUCTURE
HEALTH, EDUCATION and
SOCIAL PROTECTION



Health, Education, and Social Protection

More than half (54%) of the HBWs interviewed report that they have health problems that are serious and not so serious.

Working at home is not easy. Although a little more than half (51 percent) say they work eight hours a day, about one-third report that they work far longer, ranging from ten hours to 17 hours a day, with some (five percent) even saying they work “non-stop.” This accounting of hours spent refers only to productive work and does not even include the time interspersed which is devoted to cooking, cleaning, child care, and other types of reproductive work.

Sitting all day long requires lots of patience and results in a lot of occupational health and safety issues. Examples are eye strain, pain or numbness in certain parts of the body (back, waist, hands, and feet), stomach ache when they do not eat on time due to pressure of work, dizziness from working too hard without enough sleep. Female HBWs

suffer from “women’s diseases,” weakness after childbirth, fatigue after abortion. They can be malnourished and be more vulnerable to tuberculosis. Yet they do not get any treatment from doctors or hospitals for these health problems and even for more serious illnesses because of lack of information and resources. They do not take medicine or if they do, they buy at the pharmacy without consultation, or rely on Khmer traditional herbs, leaves, and barks.

Single homebased workers who live alone and HBWs who are single parents worry more about their health because they have no available support systems when they fall ill. Very few know about the private Sky health insurance program, and even if they do, they cannot afford the service fee as well as Sky health insurance program do not cover all the cities and provinces in Cambodia yet.

Homebased workers who have children in school are not sure if they can keep them there because of their irregular income. There is a high risk for these children to stop schooling especially when levels of expenditure increase with each grade level. Risks are higher if the school is far away



HBW SUGGESTIONS TO DECISION-MAKERS IN GOVERNMENT

Ensuring Employment, Adequate Incomes, Access to Productive Resources

- provide for regular jobs and regular income to address unemployment and seasonality of work of home-based workers;
- assist HBWs in upgrading their skills;
- help to increase wage rate of producers and the prices of their products because these are too cheap given the high cost of raw materials;
- cut down on or impose no tax on imported material relating to handicraft work especially zippers, buttons, and thread;
- provide credit schemes to enable HBWs to buy raw materials;
- encourage growing of natural material such as ropeak in local areas;
- provide machines for making roneat (a kind of musical instrument) and other local products.

Expanding Markets for HBW Products

- facilitate the provision of big orders to HBW groups;

- find export and local markets for handicraft products;
- attract more tourists because they are a potential market for handicraft products; and
- set up model work groups for handicraftmaking to attract the tourists.

Providing the Required Utilities and Infrastructure

- lower the price of electricity and water while ensuring enough supply;
- set up drainage systems, and build good roads and pumps and toilet/latrine.

Creating a Safe and Secure Environment

- prevent eviction of homebased workers from their workplace, which is their home;
- remove all drug users from the neighborhoods where they live;
- create a safe environment for people, especially women, to travel in.

Increasing Social Protection and Services for Vulnerable Groups

- set up accommodations for homebased workers with disability to stay

in, and provide regular jobs with good payment for them;

- enforce the practice of non-discrimination against persons with disability;
- support the education of disadvantaged children till they get a job.





**Artisans' Association of Cambodia
(AAC)**

#11b, Street 240
GPO Box 1303

Phone: 555-555-5555

Fax: 555-555-5555

E-mail: aac@online.com.kh

Homenet
South-East Asia

**EMPOWERING
HOMEBASED WORKERS**

<http://www.homenetseasia.org/>

THE ROLE OF ORGANIZING

- The above recommendations are not heard by government yet
- because HBWs are invisible and isolated. They cannot be heard
- by government unless they are organized and have a representative to voice these out to the proper authorities. Hence the need
- to organize homebased workers according to their felt needs.
- When HBWs are organized in a group as usually done by AAC, it
- does not only help them to articulate their views but also helps
- them to market their products and eventually have regular jobs
- with regular income. AAC have been helping them to link their
- products to different markets through its networks both at the national
- and international levels. At the same time AAC provides
- them training on product development and teach them how to do
- marketing as these are the core issues for selling their products.
- Will enable HBWs in realizing their economic, and social rights;
- the improvement of their working and living conditions; the enjoyment
- of income and employment security including social protection;
- and participation in governance related to homeworkers' and
- informal workers' concerns.



GALLERY of Products of AAC Members



The **Artisans' Association of Cambodia (AAC)** is a Fair Trade association that supports over 50 handcraft groups across Cambodia who are very often working with some of the nation's most vulnerable people, including landmine victims, those living with HIV/AIDS, street children and minority tribes people.

AAC is committed to helping these social enterprises develop their range of products – whether handicrafts, fashion accessories or homeware items – and ensure that buy-

ers have the opportunity to purchase these unique items.



We are determined to see the benefits of fair trade, passed down to the people behind the products.

