

I. Brief Macro-Context

The current situation of homebased workers in the urban informal economies of Southeast Asia can be best understood in terms of various trends: increasing urbanization and informalization of employment, pervasive working poverty linked to gender subordination, and the overlapping impact of financial, food, and environmental crises in the context of climate change.

Rapid urbanization in the subregion has led to the rise of megacities like Metro Manila, Bangkok, and Jakarta, each with populations of more than ten million and with a large influx of rural migrants engaged in marginal occupations in the informal economy.

Due to the impact of globalization, informal work already comprised 156 million or 63.7 percent of total employment in ASEAN in 2006, according to the ILO. (ILO, 2007:3). Although the percentages vary from some 80 percent in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, more than 70 percent in the Philippines and Indonesia, more than 50 percent in Thailand, and 8.8 percent in Singapore, the average is still quite high.

In ASEAN, at least one out of ten workers live in extreme poverty, subsisting at less than one dollar a day. (In the Philippines, one out of five; and in Laos and Cambodia, one out of three). Of the more than 262 million workers in ASEAN, 148 million or 56.5 percent - at least five out of ten -- are living in poverty, subsisting at less than the two dollars a day poverty line. In terms of country breakdown, 80 percent of workers in Cambodia and Laos, 70 percent in Indonesia, and 60 percent in the Philippines do not have enough income to get themselves out of poverty. (ILO, 2007:4, 18). The working poor are mostly found in the informal economy.

Two-thirds of the working poor in Asia are women. (ILO, 2006:25-26). The informal economy is highly gendered, serving as a catch basin of women who have been among the first to be displaced from formal work, especially in the garments industry, as globalization progressed. But women have also been the mainstay of the informal economy even before the onslaughts of globalization since informal work (e.g., home-based work) is compatible with their reproductive work (child care, domestic chores), and since their status as secondary or supplemental earners often deprive them of opportunities to find formal employment. In their particular case, class, gender, ethnicity, and other issues often intersect. Women are concentrated in the lower strata of unpaid family workers and industrial homeworkers where earnings are meager and where poverty-inducing risks such as illness and job insecurity are high. On the other hand, men are concentrated in the higher rungs as employers and as fairly

“regular” informal workers with bigger remuneration and lower risk. Thus, financial and economic crises hit women homebased workers more seriously . (WIEGO, 2009). Such crises are often punctuated by rising food prices and are aggravated by unfair trade practices, deterioration of the environment, and more frequent and intense disasters.

Climate change due to global warming is a crucial factor in recent disasters – tsunamis in Indonesia and Thailand, frequent and stronger typhoons in the Philippines, flooding in Laos and Cambodia, etc. – which have resulted in much deprivation and suffering of homebased workers. UN agencies have predicted that the megacities in the subregion – Metro Manila, Bangkok, Jakarta, and Ho Chi Minh City – will be submerged in the near future due to climate change, with dire consequences for all, but especially for the poor who have little or no options.

II. Size and Significance of Home-based Work

Very little statistical data on homebased work are available, and many of these are dated and often contradictory. ILO (2002) reports that in the Philippines (for the period 1993-95), based on a national survey, there were 2,025,017 homebased workers comprising 14 percent of the non-agricultural work force, and composed of 79 percent women. Of this number, 43 percent were located in the urban areas. (Other surveys however showed much higher estimates of 6.437 million) (Joshi, 1996) up to 7.892 million (Abrera Mangahas, 1990). Data from Thailand from the same 2002 ILO source show much smaller figures for 1999 - 311,790 homebased workers constituting two percent of the non-agricultural work force, and 80 percent of whom are women. A 2007 survey by the National Statistics Office in Thailand showed that 244,290 households and 440,251 workers aged 15 and above were engaged in homeworking, 76.7 percent of whom were women. But these estimates were questioned by Homenet Thailand which offered a counter-estimate of about two million homebased workers based on export values and production capacity. (Homenet Thailand, 2009).

It was estimated that one out of three households in Indonesia is engaged in homebased work (Biggeri and Mehrotra, Innocenti paper, 2002) , and Homenet Indonesia leaders claim that homebased workers comprise more than 50 percent of all informal workers, who in turn comprise 69 percent of total employed. (Sumartini, 2010) . In Indonesia, women comprised more than 88 percent of all those who were engaged in homebased work (Mehrotra and Biggeri, 2002).

Data on urban homebased workers are spotty and even more difficult

to find. A survey done in Metro Manila in 1993 showed that there were 287,391 homebased workers, 63.5 percent of whom were women in garments, food, footwear, and other industries. (Joshi 1996). The 2007 NSO study in Thailand revealed that there were 21,618 households and 52,118 workers engaged in homebased work in Bangkok, 31,039 or almost 60 percent of whom were female. (Homenet Thailand, 2009).

Various surveys of homebased workers in four countries show that many of them come from poor households, and that their incomes are essential or significant enough in ensuring family survival. From a 2006 IDRC-supported Malaysia survey of 75 homeworkers focusing on urban areas, “It is apparent that the personal earnings of the majority of the homeworkers are substantial additions to the household income and significantly uplift families out of poverty.” Among them are sole earners (29 percent) whose earnings fall below the poverty line, primary earners (17 percent) and supplemental earners (50 percent). (e-homemakers Malaysia, 2006).

The Homenet Thailand survey of 933 respondents revealed that most of the HBWs interviewed were poor. Three out of four belonged to families earning less than 10,000 baht a month. Individual HBWs earned around 3,000 baht a month. (Homenet Southeast Asia, 2006:73). The 2006 IDRC-supported survey of 75 homebased workers in key cities of Thailand (Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Khon Kaen), showed a wide range of income (between US\$50 to US\$550 per month) on the part of households engaged in homebased work. Individual homebased workers earned on the average between two to five US dollars daily, and monthly earnings ranged on the average from 50 to 150 dollars. (Intaratat and Lomchavakarn, 2007)

In Indonesia, the IDRC-supported survey of 75 workers in Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Malang also came up with a wide range of monthly income [from Rp50.000 (US\$5.26) to Rp750.000 (US\$78.9)] which can fall very much below or way above the poverty line of Rp117,082 or US\$13. (ASEAN Foundation, 2006).

The survey of one thousand respondents conducted in the Philippines by PATAMABA came up with the following findings (Homenet Southeast Asia, 2006: 86-89): Regarding the average monthly family income (including income from relatives abroad), the greatest number of respondents (32.1%) are clustered in the 2,501-5000 peso category (about US\$50-100).

III. Key Features of Homebased Work

In a very general sense, homebased workers are defined as those who

produce goods and services inside or within the vicinity of their homes. In Southeast Asia, homebased workers are classified into two main types, as described in the following definition used in South Asia: “(a) own-account workers and contributing family workers helping the own-account workers, involved in the production of goods and services, in their homes, for the market; and (b) those homeworkers, who work in their homes for remuneration, resulting in a product or service as specified by the employer (s), irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used; and those contributing family workers helping such homeworkers.” In Southeast Asia as well as in other parts of the world, homebased workers are found in manufacturing and assembly, artisanal production, personal services, and increasingly in IT-enabled clerical, technical and sometimes professional work. They have traditionally been found in large numbers in the clothing, textile and leather industries; in food, toy, and home-décor production, in jewellery, fashion accessories and silverware; in weaving and carpet-making, and even in waste sorting and recycling. They form “hidden assembly lines” of sorters, cleaners, packers, sanders, hemmers, etc. With the advent of the electronics industry and ICT, they are assembling electronic equipment, and have entered the more lucrative fields of word and data processing, invoicing, editing, translating, and transcribing¹.

What distinguishes homebased workers in the subregion are the distinctive characteristics of their products associated with indigenous materials and cultural traditions. For example, there is a lot of food processing involving traditional rice cakes, banana, jackfruit and other tropical fruit crisps and preserves, coconut-based sweets and coconut-, chili- and fish-flavored sauces. Batik-making and intricate leather craft are associated with Indonesia, while silk-based products distinguish the Mekong Region countries. Traditional massage is also a personal service which frequently appears in homebased workers’ lists of occupations.

Although in general, homebased workers across the globe are bound by certain common realities like the site of their work, their gender (most of them are women), and their relatively low income, they are far from

¹ The 2006 IDRC-supported Malaysian study perhaps best captures the variety of home-based occupations as well as the transitions in home-based work in terms of technology use in an urban setting. It reported that “the largest numbers of homeworkers are engaged in tailoring and embroidery (30%), followed by those in food processing (20%) and handicraft making (14%). Other activities include the beauty and health business (10%) such as massage, bridal makeup and hairdressing; packaging/assembly of industrial products/components (9%); babysitting (8%); secretarial and accounting including translation and data-entry (4%); private tuition (3%) and others such as multi-level marketing (2%) The majority of the homeworkers in Kuala Lumpur subcontract from factories – sewing and glove making.” (e-homemakers Malaysia, 2006).

homogeneous. As explained by Doane, “it is important to keep in mind that even among home-based workers, there is a clear income/social hierarchy with wide disparities and important differences between those who are better off – having more flexibility, options, and security – and those who are worse off.” Among the better off are men, younger and more educated workers, those with greater access to resources, markets, and technologies; with more flexibility to adapt to changing demand, and are organized into effective associations, unions, etc. Those who are worse off are most often women with restrictions on mobility, older and less educated, with less access to resources and markets, unorganized and isolated. Self-employed homebased workers usually are better off and have more options than subcontracted ones, but not always. In many instances, homebased workers move from piece-work to self-employment and vice versa, or may even take on both types of work. (Doane, 2007).

Many studies on homebased work use value chain analysis to see where homebased workers are located in complex production and supply-based relationships. Invariably, homeworkers are found at the bottom of an often lengthy subcontracting chain, where they receive a pittance for long hours of piece work. They only know their part of the production process, and are seldom aware of the ultimate destination of their product. Subcontracting is very common in the clothing, footwear, and handicraft industries, and subcontracted homeworkers are seldom aware of their rights and have access to social protection, except in cases where they are effectively organized ².

IV. Felt Needs and Strategic Concerns of Urban Home-based Workers in SEA

As articulated by homebased workers themselves, these needs and concerns can be generic to all working poor in an urban setting. For example, Homenet Cambodia identified the following needs of urban home-based workers: housing, health care, support for their children’s education, regular work and sufficient income, water, affordable electricity, information on various markets for their products, capital, and design skills. A recent focus group discussion conducted by PATAMABA with home-based workers in Caloocan City, Philippines brought out the following concerns: too small and crowded space, high cost of raw materials, lack of bargaining power, housing, no access to government programs that leads to individual approach, lack of health services, lack of equipment for production, and lack of training to improve product quality.

² For examples of subcontracting chains in the garments industry in the Philippines and Thailand in relation to access to social protection, see Lund and Nicholson, eds., *Chains of production, ladders of protection* (University of Natal, South Africa, 2003).

Following, however, are more specific needs and concerns peculiar to homebased work.

VISIBILITY AND RECOGNITION

Homebased workers work in their homes and are often invisible, isolated, and unorganized, except in countries where Homenet –related groups have been in existence for almost two decades and have made some headway in terms of research for advocacy, and representation in policy-making bodies, including statistical units of government. However, this is more the exception than the rule in Southeast Asia.

The Malaysian case typifies the situation in most Southeast Asian countries where homebased workers have not organized to assert their rights ³.

DECENT WORK

As articulated by many organized homebased workers and as promoted by the ILO, the right to decent work has four pillars: increasing employment and income opportunities for women and men, securing fundamental rights and labor standards at work, ensuring social protection for all, and strengthening social dialogue. All these pillars are mutually reinforcing. For homebased workers, having decent and sustainable jobs which ensure minimum and reliable income in the context of a protected environment are essential for survival and well-being. As data from an earlier section of this paper have shown, this goal is far from realized since in general homebased workers are poor.

And in this regard, there are differences between the demands of sub-contracted and self-employed homebased workers as exemplified by the responsees during a focus group discussion with Indonesian HBWs on the impact of the latest financial crisis. The former are “specifically focused on promoting and enforcing minimum wages” primarily for adults so that

They are not registered as a separate category of workers in the labour force but are generally grouped together with other own account workers or as unpaid family labour. Waged homeworkers and home-based subcontractors are also not regarded as workers and are not accorded the legal benefits of a worker such as medical and maternity benefits, paid leave or social security and provident fund contributions. As these women work from home, they are sometimes harassed by local authority officials who assert that residential premises cannot be used for production or that they are operating without a license or registration. Consequently, the homeworkers become invisible and their production and services are not perceived as work by principals, factories or the government. The value of their work is not costed and their contribution to the economy goes unrecorded. The majority of the homeworkers have worked in labour intensive factories but entered into home-based work after childbirth when confronted by a gender insensitive environment unsupportive of mothers with small or disabled children and aged parents. (Excerpted from the IDRC-supported study, 2006).

their children would no longer need to work. The latter's most common request was for access to low interest-business loans, in combination with technical and marketing assistance.”(WIEGO, 2009).

The economic security gained from the enjoyment of decent employment is easily translated into availment of social security and other forms of social protection, which the state should increasingly provide to all in need. Again, this is far from the reality in many countries in the region ⁴. Furthermore, in the context of climate change, social protection should have a more expansive meaning which should include participatory and gender-responsive disaster risk and reduction management mechanisms.

Effective advocacy for the various pillars of decent work in the true spirit of social dialogue is premised on homebased workers having visibility and voice, and a secure place at the table with employers, government, trade unions, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders when issues affecting them are discussed and decisions are made. Ultimately, advocating and realizing the right to decent work depends on the organizational strength of the HBWs and their capacity to claim their rights, as well as to network with other stakeholders to support their claims. There is a need therefore for establishing and strengthening membership-based organizations of HBWs.

Within the framework of the rights-based approach to development that the country Homenets are using, the state as duty bearer is obliged to protect, promote, defend, and fulfill the rights of its citizens who are the claim holders. The state must also play a pro-active and interventionist role, as demanded by Thai HBWs stricken by the financial crisis ⁵.

Access to new technologies, as exemplified by the Malaysian case, can also be a big boost in promoting decent work among HBWs because of its facilitative role in knowledge sharing, skills training, productivity

⁴ A survey of 1,000 homebased and other informal worker respondents conducted by PATAMABA in 2004 revealed that 63 percent had never had any form of social protection. (Homenet Southeast Asia, 2006:91). The research showed that most of these respondents relied primarily on family, relatives, friends and other personal networks to meet their social protection needs since existing social insurance mechanisms such as the SSS and Philhealth are often inaccessible, unaffordable, and /or inadequate. Less than five percent relied on the SSS, PhilHealth and their Local Government Units (LGUs). Philippine data contrast greatly with those obtained from Thailand where more than 90 percent of the recipients of various welfare services (including the 30 baht health care, one million baht funds, loans from various sources, funeral funds, community-based funds, etc.) reported to be satisfied. But 20 percent of respondents still think that the health security policy is inadequate and one-third maintain that the funds provided are not sufficient. (p.186). In Cambodia, the state has not established a health insurance system, and in Laos, only formal workers are covered.

enhancement, entrepreneurship development, and e-commerce for a wider slice of the market. The mobile phone is now an indispensable device for HBWs but many HBWs still do not own one or do not have enough funds to load the phone, as pointed out in a recent survey of urban home-based workers in the Philippines. (PATAMABA, 2010).

⁵ *The state should thus intervene to support and help them to continue to get jobs and to develop new products with better value added. The public discussion that day ended with the demand for the state to intervene. To help home-based workers (HBWs) to have constant job opportunities, the state should procure products made by the HBW groups including student uniforms, cloth products in hospital such as pillow covers, bedsheets, and patients' uniform. The self-employed workers need to have more marketing spaces to sell and develop their products and to have access to relevant knowledge including about taxation, management, accounting, etc. They also need better welfare services, including old age person benefit, low-interest loans, etc. HBWs propose that the government intervene to offer them more job opportunities, or to open markets for their products as well as come up with a social welfare package. They all want the government to consider all these proposals since they have been proven practical. These shall help to elevate economic and social conditions of the workers in a long run. (Tulaphan, 2009).*

SECURITY IN THE WORKPLACE ⁶

Obviously, for homebased workers, the home is the workplace, and the right to safe and if possible, disaster-proof housing as well as to the land on which it is built is primordial. Eviction and demolition are risks if the home is built on contested land, as exemplified by dramatic cases in Metro Manila in areas where homebased workers have been among those affected, together with many other “informal settlers.” In addition to their homes, to which they should also have the right to own, homebased workers need to secure their equipment, their raw materials, and their finished products from fire, flood, theft, and other dangers. Their work space should be well-lighted, well-ventilated, and free of dirt, dust, harmful chemicals, unsafe machinery, electrical and fire risks, and other hazards. They need adequate, safe, strong, and disaster-proof storage facilities for their raw materials, equipment and products. They need a steady supply of electricity and water, as well as sanitation facilities to ensure continuous production and safe and healthy living not only for themselves but also for other members of their households ⁷. They require accessible transportation facilities to market and deliver their products.

GENDER AND GENERATIONAL CONCERNS

⁶ **Security in the Workplace** refers to the right of every worker to an enabling environment that guarantees and protects the spaces for informal workers to undertake their work, including the right to feel safe in one’s own work space, legal security of tenure and freedom from discrimination, risk, danger, doubt, anxiety, or fear of being removed, evicted or prevented to work. Towards this end, the State shall take measures that will ensure legal security of tenure of workplaces, taking into account and including the physical environment, services, processes and systems that will be involved to enable the work. (Excerpted from the bill on the Magna Carta for Workers in Informal Employment filed in both houses of the Philippine Congress, July 2010).

⁷ This is in stark contrast with the following observation in the IDRC-supported study in Thailand : “In the urban areas, there is overcrowding, lack of ventilation and poor sanitation. The poor sanitation especially in the city slum areas is breeding ground for mosquitoes and flies and are infested with mice and other disease-carrying vermin. In contrast, HBWs around the city fringes are operated in open –air and well-ventilated areas.”Intaratat et al, 2006). A similar study on homebased workers in key cities in Indonesia had this to say:

Due to the lack of a proper water supply and proper drainage, sanitation in all the sites is poor. As a result, the standard of hygiene is poor, including those homeworkers involved in food processing. Flies and cockroaches infest the workplace. Overcrowding in the home due to the smallness of the homes, the large number of occupants and the multiple use of the home especially for work, cause other problems as well as safety hazards. Hot wax for the batik or boiling oil for frying emping, presents great dangers to infants, children and adults alike. The poor lighting combined with intricate work causes eyestrain. Some older women who have been doing home-based work for more than five years suffer poor sight, back pain, and rheumatism or asam urat. Others have rashes on their skin due to the chemicals used. Those processing fresh seafood also suffer from allergies. There is little understanding on how to protect themselves from such chemicals and occupational hazards. (ASEAN Foundation, 2006).

As revealed in the earlier section of the paper, virtually all surveys show that women comprise the overwhelming majority of homebased workers, and this fact has very important implications. Homebased workers are disadvantaged because they are women and therefore considered to be 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. For many married women with small children, the only employment option is home-based because the cultural expectation is that they personally undertake child care and domestic chores.⁸ As dictated by culture and religion and as best exemplified by the Indonesian situation very much influenced by Islam, their main identity is as “homemakers” and not workers entitled to certain rights and benefits. Their husbands hardly share the household’s burden, and child care facilities are virtually not available. Even if husbands are away, as they often are in the context of a highly mobile and transient urban migrant situation, they are still considered heads of households and in most cases, remain in control of incomes and resources, even if their wives are the de facto owners and workers. (ASEAN Foundation, 2006)

Many other studies (notably Mehrotra and Biggeri, 2002) have shown that child labor is endemic in homebased work because it is done most often in the context of a family production system. The girl child in particular is more vulnerable, because she is often the one pulled in by her mother to assist in both productive and reproductive work inside the home. Inter-generational poverty is therefore a concern which also needs to be addressed. (Doane, 2007).

Family violence directed by men against women and children also affects households engaged in homebased work and this should be urgently addressed by concrete policies and programs. A related issue is sexual and reproductive health, the lack of which severely limits the options of women homebased workers in poverty and aggravates the impoverishment of their families. (Pineda Ofreneo, 2010).

V. Initiatives and Interventions (What Can Be Done) and Their Impact⁹

Existing member-based organizations (MBOs) and other civil society organizations (CSOs) of or for homebased workers have done a lot in the past two decades to increase visibility and recognition of HBWs in the

⁸ The IDRC-supported study of urban homebased workers in key cities in Indonesia observes that many of them used to be in factory work when they were single but shifted to homebased work when they got married and had children.

subregion, to advocate and realize the right to decent work (especially in the area of access to social protection and productive resources), to assert security in the workplace, to promote gender equity, to address child labor, to engage national and local governments in crafting enabling laws and policies for HBWs, and to provide concrete programs and services for them in an urban context, often in cooperation with other stakeholders. Various homenets in Thailand, Philippines, and Indonesia have been particularly active and successful in varying degrees, and the relatively new formations and focal points in Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Malaysia, are also making their mark. The first three emerged as part of a major sub-regional project undertaken from 1988 to 1996 by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and funded by DANIDA, while the latter came as a result of expansion initiatives by subregional and country Homenets.

Membership-based organizing began in the Philippines with the formation of PATAMABA in the late 1980s. Out of some 17,000 members today, PATAMABA has more than 9,500 urban HBWs and other informal workers in 28 cities in 15 provinces and nine regions. Its urban chapters, 101 in all, are engaged in social enterprises, networking with and participation in local government bodies, community housing, training cum production, social protection, food and health service. It has also aided in persuading the Social Security System (SSS) to allow self-employed home workers to avail of social insurance and to facilitate this process through the Automatic Debit Account (ADA) arrangement whereby self-employed

SSS members can use the facilities of partner banks to make their contributions. (Homenet Southeast Asia, 2006). PATAMABA spearheaded the formation of Homenet Philippines with 20 other organizations in 2006, and a larger coalition of informal workers called MAGCAISA in 2007 to have a larger base for visibility and advocacy at all levels, including in key cities¹⁰.

Homenet Thailand has five regional networks, including the central one based in Bangkok. It has recently shifted to membership-based organizing focusing on key cities. It has made its mark in extending occupational safety and health services to homebased workers since 2001 in cooperation with both national and local government bodies, and has spread this knowledge to other country homenets through a subregional workshop

⁹ For reasons of space, this section will be confined to the initiatives and interventions associated with the various country Homenets and focal points in Southeast Asia, with which the author is most familiar with and have first-hand knowledge of. There are many others which can be cited, particularly in the IDRC-supported studies on urban homebased workers in Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

it co-hosted in 2007. It has done research and practical work on social protection for homebased workers in both rural and urban settings. (Homenet Southeast Asia, 2006). Its latest achievement is the passage of a law for homebased workers in the Thai parliament in 2010. Homenet Thailand works closely with the National Statistics Office and Ministry of Labor for the latter to address informal workers' issue as their agenda. It has advanced employment promotion through product development, entrepreneurship training, marketing and clustering, taking advantage of government programs like OTOP at city level. It was able, at one point, to convince the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority (BMA) to order garments from organized homebased workers groups. And it is now focusing more and more of its attention on working youth in the informal economy.

The MWPRI (National Network of Friends of Women Homeworkers) of Indonesia has MWPRI has 42 collaborating NGOs serving 19,248 homebased workers (12,609 of whom are subcontracted and 6,639 are self-employed) in nine provinces and has been instrumental in the formation of HWPRI as an independent association of Indonesian women homeworkers. MWPRI and HWPRI have strong groups in key cities of Indonesia such as Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Malang, and Surabaya. In Malang, particularly, Homenet Indonesia managed to obtain legal recognition of homebased workers as workers. It conducts regular skills training, runs cooperatives and other social enterprises, and engages in social marketing of HBW products in partnership with Oxfam, academic institutions, and local government (which provided selling space in the city center). In Yogyakarta which has been stricken by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, Homenet Indonesia has participated in disaster risk reduction and management mechanisms, and has shown a viable way of post-disaster rebuilding that have led to many concrete benefits for homebased workers through the example of the Setara Women's Cooperative. This was plain for all seven country homenet representatives to see during the subregional work-

¹⁰ Members of these larger coalitions individually and collectively ensured that surveys, mapping and other research activities were done in coordination with national statistical bodies, the Department of Labor and Employment, local government units, and international development agencies like UNDP and ILO to identify where HBWs and other informal workers are located, notably in Metro Manila. Task forces and desks for informal workers were set up in certain cities but these need follow-through. Social protection policy briefs as well as a book and a booklet were produced in the process of conducting dialogues, training and awareness-raising campaigns on the need for greater social security, health insurance, occupational and reproductive health services, disaster risk reduction and management mechanisms. With the help of a UNIFEM catalytic grant for building visibility and voice of homebased workers, HBWs in the Philippines have been able to push for their agenda during national and local elections, to campaign more vigorously for a magna carta for all informal workers as well as for the ratification of the ILO Convention on Home Work, and to focus on key cities and other localities in the drive to participate in and derive benefits from gender-responsive governance.

shop on gender, informal work, climate change, and participatory disaster risk reduction management held in Yogyakarta in 2010 and co-hosted by Homenet Indonesia with Oxfam Hong Kong funding. (Homenet SEA newsmagazine, December, 2010).

Since 2004, NALD (the focal point for organizing Homenet Lao) has promoted and established 11 saving groups or village banks consisting of slum dwellers in Vientiane Capital, with a total number of 1,897 members. It also expanded to Luang Prabang area, the tourist spot with many traditional weaving groups. Homenet Lao has also gained increasing government recognition through its strong collaboration with the Lao Women's Association and LUSEA, which was evident during its highly successful hosting of the subregional workshop on solidarity economy in Vientiane in 2008, with seven countries participating. Homenet Lao, with the support of a Korean CSO, established a training, research and communications center in Vientiane which caters to homebased workers. Through the village bank structures, Homenet Lao hopes to develop homebased worker leaders who can make their own rules, and formulate their plans in a democratic way based on local conditions. Homenet Lao leaders also have experience in facilitating the building and improvement of housing facilities of urban dwellers.

The Artisans Association of Cambodia is a fair trade group comprised of craft producers and sellers, including landmine and trafficking survivors, people with disabilities, etc. It assists almost 50 handicraft groups to whom it provides the following livelihood and welfare-related services: Product Development/ Techniques; Organizational Development; Design; Quality Improvement; Organizational Reform; Loan Information; Shop Management; Conflict Intervention; Exposure Tours; Providing Donor Information/Fund Raising, etc. AAC ensures that the benefits of trade are passed down to the people behind the products comprised of 1989 grassroots producers and staff throughout Cambodia; 57 percent of AAC's member organizations are managed by women. AAC has recently focused on research preparatory to organizing homebased workers in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh. It has conducted occupational safety and health training among them and has facilitated access to social protection through a private entity called Sky Insurance.

The latest group which joined Homenet Southeast Asia is e-Homemakers of Malaysia which has always been engaged in ICT (information and communication technology) work and has done IDRC-supported research and advocacy on home workers in relation to ICT use, especially for economic empowerment.

Right now, e-homemakers has 13,000 e-members, and is assisting 300 vulnerable and disadvantaged homebased workers through their ICT network program called Distributed Work Management System. This has benefited homebased workers monetarily, socially, and psychologically, (Ching, 2010) and has attracted the interest of other country homenets wishing to adapt it for their own empowerment purposes in urban areas where HBWs have more access to ICT.

VII. Challenges and Ways Forward

DATA CONSTRAINTS/GAPS

Globally, few countries collect national statistics on homebased work regularly, and this is also true of Southeast Asia. This problem stems from the invisibility of homebased workers, who are not recognized as workers in their own right, or who are lumped together with other categories of workers in more generalized figures on informal employment. Definitions of home-based work are not available or not standardized to serve the purpose of national data collection or to allow cross-country comparisons. Whatever are collected can be assumed to be underestimated due to the often invisible or clandestine nature of homebased work. If national data on homebased workers are not available or reliable, information on more specific categories like urban-based homeworkers are even more difficult to obtain.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS

There are other constraints along the way. Much has been said about the financial and economic crisis as well as the “race to the bottom” associated with unbridled globalization that destroy jobs and push incomes of the most vulnerable – including homebased workers – even lower. Political contexts also vary and can hinder organizing and advocacy. For example, in Laos and Cambodia, Homenet leaders have pointed out the necessity of cultivating positive relations with state actors in a situation where civil society organizations are just beginning to gain ground. In Malaysia, it would be very difficult, if not impossible for homebased workers to organize into unions. In Thailand, the recent political turmoil had the effect of delaying the passage of the Homeworkers’ bill. In the Philippines, changes in political and local leadership can result in an accompanying change in priorities, with the issues of homebased and other informal workers sliding to the bottom. The social and cultural context is also important – most homebased worker leaders sharing their stories

point to the unchanged division of labor wherein women are triply burdened as they shoulder productive, reproductive, and community work.

The environmental crisis is also taking its toll on the livelihood of homebased workers and disrupt their organizing and advocacy work. Climate change and ensuing disasters destroy lives, properties and resources. They render women homebased workers more vulnerable because they are poor to begin with and are disadvantaged in terms of access to resources, technology, and services, as well as in terms of visibility and participation in decision making bodies, including those having to do with disaster risk reduction and management. When disasters strike, women are often relied upon to hold their families together, take care of children and the elderly, often in evacuation centers which are poorly equipped, and insensitive to women's needs in relation to sanitation and hygiene.

WAYS FORWARD

These include those identified in meetings of homenets in the sub-region which are meant to preserve and advance the gains achieved through past efforts in the following areas:

- 1) Research for visibility, advocacy and empowerment** – Although it is important to make sure that quantitative data through censuses and surveys are regularly and systematically collected by government and other entities for homebased workers (including those in the urban setting) to gain visibility, these are not enough. Qualitative data could be obtained --and most Homenets already have solid experience in this -- through focus groups discussions, key informant interviews, and oral narratives to facilitate advocacy directed at policy makers. There is a need for grassroots-based participatory action research to obtain authentic and nuanced data which can also be used for organizing, capability-building and other empowerment purposes (Doane, 2008) in an urban setting.
- 2) Practising and promoting solidarity economy** – This means continuing the good work already started in building group and other social enterprises, cooperatives, production and marketing clusters, and fair trade associations in order to provide sufficient and reliable income to urban homebased workers in the context of gender equity and with a green perspective.(Pineda Ofreneo, 2009).
- 3) Calling for social protection for social, gender, and environmental justice** – The current campaign discourse could be

broadened and made more comprehensive , as has been done in the Philippines, in order to call for jobs (green and decent), health care, social security, basic services, education and skills, justice, and voice for all , and with specific demands in each category directed at urban policy makers to specifically benefit homebased and other informal workers. (CIJ/ACIW and Homenet Southeast Asia, 2010). Within this broad rubric, homebased workers' groups can continue their long-standing work in providing awareness, training, and services on **occupational health and safety** and localizing these efforts at the city level. Beginning work on **participatory and gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and management** can target inclusion of women homebased workers' representatives and concerns in urban planning and implementation mechanisms.

4) Maximizing use of new information and communication technology – The Malaysian example earlier referred to can be replicated in other Southeast Asian countries to increase the virtual visibility of homebased workers, promote their causes, enhance their productivity and market access, and facilitate organizing and networking.

5) Creating an enabling policy environment – This means sustaining advocacy efforts that can take decades to bear fruit. Such efforts can occur at local level, such as mainstreaming homebased and other informal workers' concerns in city planning and implementation. They can aim for a national policy on homebased workers, exemplified by the new Homeworkers' Law which Homenet Thailand took ten years to achieve. These national policies and laws, however, cannot substitute for the ratification of the ILO Convention 177 on Home Work, which imposes international sanctions on countries which ratify but violate provisions of the Convention. (Gallin, 2010). Another route, taken by PATAMABA and Homenet Philippines, is to advocate for the passage of a comprehensive magna carta for all workers in informal employment, for which a bill has already been filed in both houses of Congress.

6) Strengthening and sustaining membership-based organizing and networking of HBWs at all levels - Based on feedback from homebased worker members , much more needs to be done by the Homenets to really transform their lives. They are still very much in need of pivotal support to improve their productivity and harness their potentials. They need assistance for better access to resources, technology and social protection. They need responsive policies and laws that will make their working environment facilitative and conducive to the realization of their rights and simultaneously encouraging and supportive of so-

cial enterprise development. They need to further capacitate fellow home-based worker leaders to manage, run, and represent their own membership-based organizations. They need to work together for the institution of programs oriented to the poor that are empowering, gender-responsive, culturally appropriate, environment-friendly, and participatory, especially in key cities which are the centers of power.

Surfacing homebased workers' visibility and sustaining their empowerment in recent years would not have been attained without the inspiration and support provided by advocates and supporters from the ILO, UNIFEM, Ford Foundation, BMGF Foundation, Oxfam Hong Kong, trade unions such as FNV, labor support institutions such as the FES, sister networks such as Homenet South Asia and WIEGO, various universities and research institutions, and other civil society groups. The importance of bringing together homeworkers' and informal workers' organizations, academics, activists, policy makers, international development agencies, and other stakeholders to promote and give voice to homeworkers' and informal workers' concerns needs to be highlighted.

With the flowering of collaborative work among the various homenet in South and Southeast Asia, and the inspiring stewardship of SEWA, in relation particularly to advancing the rights and interests of urban home-based workers, the time is ripe for the formation of Homenet Asia and the revival of of an even much broader Homenet International to facilitate the consolidation of homebased worker power worldwide. (Proceedings of joint Homenet SEA and HNSA meeting, 2010).

Security in the Workplace refers to the right of every worker to an enabling environment and protects the spaces for informal workers to undertake their work, including the right to one's own work space, legal security of tenure and freedom from discrimination, risk, anxiety, or fear of being removed, evicted or prevented to work. Towards this end, the measures that will ensure legal security of tenure of workplaces, taking into account an physical environment, services, processes and systems that will be involved to ensure (Excerpted from the bill on the Magna Carta for Workers in Informal Employment filed of the Philippine Congress, July 2010).

This is in stark contrast with the following observation in the IDRC-supported study in Thailand: "In the urban areas, there is overcrowding, lack of ventilation and poor sanitation. The poor sanitation, especially in the city slum areas is breeding ground for mosquitoes and flies and are infested with other disease-carrying vermin. In contrast, HBWs around the city fringes are operated in well-ventilated areas." (Intaratat et al, 2006). A similar study on homebased workers in key cities in Indonesia had this to say:

Due to the lack of a proper water supply and proper drainage, sanitation in all the homes is poor. As a result, the standard of hygiene is poor, including those homeworkers involved in food processing. Flies and cockroaches infest the workplace. Overcrowding in the homes, the large number of occupants and the multiple use of the home for work, cause other problems as well as safety hazards. Hot wax for the batik or batik printing, presents great dangers to infants, children and adults alike. The poor ventilation combined with intricate work causes eyestrain. Some older women who have been doing homebased work for more than five years suffer poor sight, back pain, and rheumatism. Others have rashes on their skin due to the chemicals used. Those processing fresh fruit suffer from allergies. There is little understanding on how to protect themselves from chemicals and occupational hazards. (ASEAN Foundation, 2006).

The IDRC-supported study of urban homebased workers in key cities in Indonesia observed that many of them used to be in factory work when they were single but shifted to homebased work when they married and had children.

For reasons of space, this section will be confined to the initiatives and interventions associated with various country Homenets and focal points in Southeast Asia, with which the author is most familiar and have first-hand knowledge of. There are many others which can be cited, particularly from IDRC-supported studies on urban homebased workers in Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

