

INDIA'S CABINET SECRETARY FORMALLY LAUNCHES HOMENET SOUTH ASIA

South Asian Regional Plan of Action for Home-based Workers
New Delhi, 20th January 2007

National Governments to formulate and ensure implementation of national policies, ratify ILO Convention No. 177, include home -based workers in national statistics, facilitate more inclusive markets and recognize the home –based workers organizations and networks.

Trade Unions to reach out to home-based workers, to include them as members, as well as help them to build their own organizations, and to advocate for ratification of the ILO Convention No. 177.

Organisations of home-based workers to expand their reach nationally and across the region, raise awareness and advocate for the rights of home-based workers, ensure access to services, markets and social protection and work towards their empowerment.

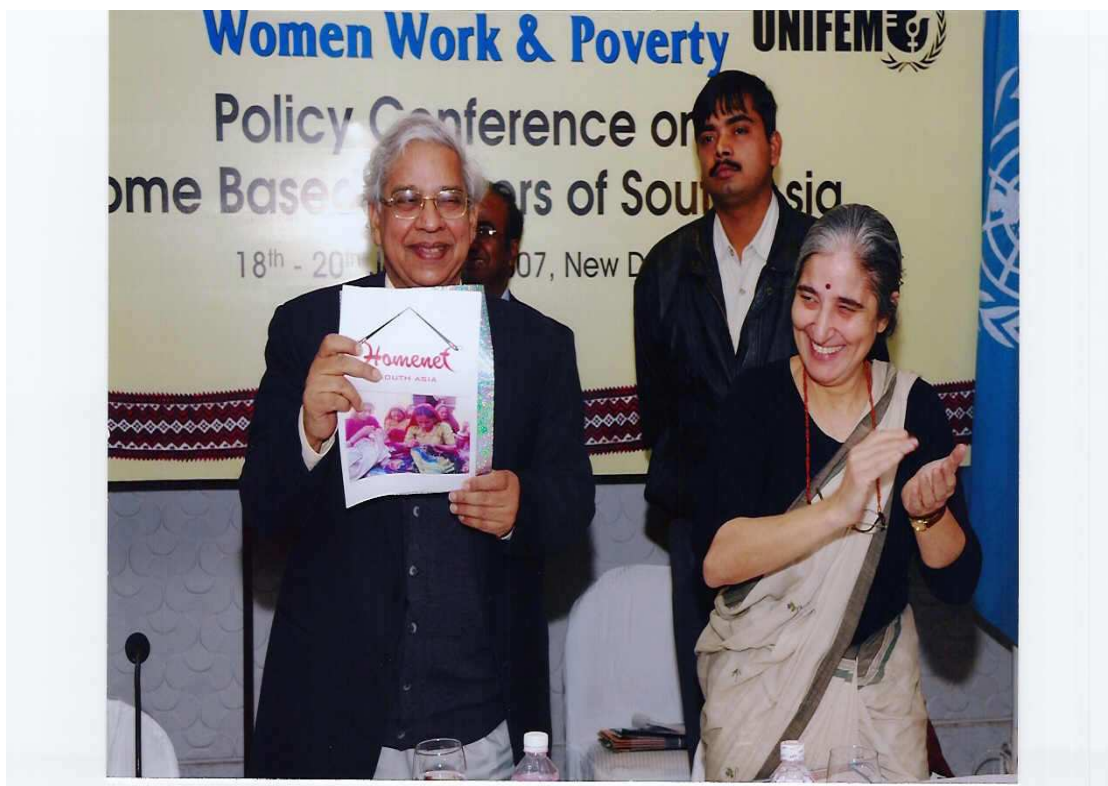
The private sector and employers to recognize the existence of home -based workers in value chains and to ensure fair earnings and social protection; to contribute towards building the capacity and skills of home -based workers; and to facilitate them to go up the value chain of production.

International development agencies to recognize the numbers and conditions of home -based workers and to realize that addressing their concerns would substantially reduce poverty and contribute towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals especially in empowering women and reducing the feminization of poverty; and to include the rights and concerns of home-based workers in their policies and programmes.

Mr. B. K Chaturvedi, Cabinet Secretary, Government of India, in his Valedictory Address, highlighted the key needs of the home based workers as up gradation of skills; microfinance: user friendly technology, marketing and social security.

Mr. Chaturvedi pointed out that numbers of home based workers have gone up in the region. Aspirations have arisen for decent wage. Wage structure needs to be modified and wages have to be increased. There is a need up grade the skills and more and more training needs to be given to home based workers. The trainings modules and trainings should be given in their own languages so that they can understand and use the training maximum. Microfinance is a critical need. There is a need to bring technology to increase the productivity and quality of home based workers. Better marketing facility is required for the home based workers. Social Security need have always existed. Recently, efforts have been made to provide social security for the home based workers. In India NCEUS has worked out the social security bill in most comprehensive manner. It has considered various security measures like accident coverage, health coverage.

After this session there was an official launching of HomeNet South Asia by Mr. Chaturvedi, Ms. Chandni Joshi and Ms. Renana Jhabvala and other members of Home Net South Asia.



Formal Launching of HomeNet South Asia by Mr. B.K. Chaturvedi, Cabinet Secretary of India

Lead Kindly light: Launch of Home Net South Asia

Homenet South Asia was formally launched by Indian Cabinet Secretary Shri B.K. Chaturvedi in a simple but poignant ceremony. Lighted candles and diyas and flowers were floated in urn full of water and a large number of colorful balloons were released. Members of HomeNet South Asia sang "We Shall Overcome"- in five languages, symbolizing both the commonality and the uniqueness of their struggle in the five countries of the region.

Inaugural Address by Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India, at the opening of Regional Policy Conference, 'Women Work & Poverty: Policy Conference, on Home Based Workers of South Asia', New Delhi, January 18, 2007

'It gives me great pleasure to inaugurate your Conference on Homebased Workers in South Asia. Countries of South Asia are similar in many ways and we face similar social and economic challenges. I compliment UNIFEM and SEWA for taking this initiative to bring together representatives of the civil society of our South Asia to discuss issues of great contemporary significance.

I have always been inspired by the work of Elaben and SEWA in empowering women and other disadvantaged sections by giving them new hope. The Nobel Prize winner Dr. Mohammed Yunus has demonstrated in Bangladesh the effectiveness of grassroot initiatives in the same

direction. I do believe that women's empowerment should be a major objective of our social, political and economic policy in South Asia region as a whole. Most homebased workers happen to be women. The women of South Asia have waited for long to secure equality in all senses of that term. They can and they should wait no longer. It should be our solemn and common resolve in South Asia to ensure gender equity and equality.

This has been a key guiding principle of the National Common Minimum Programme that our Government adopted in the year 2004. We remain deeply committed to this objective because I believe no civilized society, no modern polity, no developing economy can ignore the aspirations and the rights of women.

The key to the empowerment of all people is education and the assurance of gainful employment. Our challenge is to ensure that the benefits of economic growth and development translate into productive employment for all, including women. We find that women are more likely to be at the lower end of the production ladder. Most of our working women are in fact in the informal economy. Perhaps there is, in our societies, a cultural bias for women to be in home-based work.

Estimates suggest that there are around 50 million home based workers in South Asia, and most of them happen to be women. In India, 57% of all women workers are homebased. The large number of homebased workers also reflects the fact that small units and enterprises are still the norm in countries of South Asia with 86% of the workers in the manufacturing sector still working in small or household enterprises.

Homebased workers are of many different categories. Some are artisans. Many work in small household enterprises, often ancillary to large units. Some homebased workers make products for contractors, the last in a chain of production. As our economies become globalised, homebased workers are becoming part of a global value chain.

Unfortunately, most homebased workers receive very low levels of income due to a chain of middle-men through whom they work. Child labour is a major area of concern for homebased workers. Children assisting their families in homebased work learn useful skills and can also make a little extra money. But the concern arises when work becomes the child's main occupation and when she or he becomes an important source of earning for the family. I sincerely believe, a child's major occupation should be education not work. We all have to work for realization of this important objective.

I am happy to note that the issues of Homebased workers are being addressed in a number of ways, internationally and in our countries. The ILO Convention No. 177 of 1996 represents a watershed in the progress of the movement of home based workers for recognition and for human rights.

In October 2000, the UNIFEM Conference on the rights of South Asian home based workers adopted the Kathmandu Declaration. It highlights the need for a National Policy on home based workers in each country. Our Government has provided funding for implementation of the Recommendations of that Conference. I would like the SAARC Summit in New Delhi to

consider the Kathmandu Declaration and address effectively the problems of homebased workers.

SAARC member governments must identify the products actually produced by homebased workers and ensure that such workers directly benefit from regional and international trade. I would be happy to consider the suggestions that emerge from this important workshop. The Kathmandu Declaration identifies certain areas in which the deprivations faced by homebased workers need to be addressed. These include the “invisibility” of homebased workers, especially women; social protection; skill-building, technology development, marketing skills, credit availability; and, finally effective organization and political participation.

In India, we have been trying to address these concerns in various ways. We have tried to overcome the “invisibility” of homebased workers by ensuring that they are covered by our statistical systems. The 1999-2000 NSS Round for the first time surveyed homebased workers. These estimates show that there are over 28 million homebased workers in India. We would like to continue this collection of appropriate statistics and in fact expand it to find out more about their work, their earnings, their skill levels and what more needs to be done to enable them to lead a life of dignity and self respect.

Our main challenge is that of increasing the skills, productivity and earnings of these workers. The country's crafts scene is presently undergoing a complete transformation, governed by compelling market factors. We need to put in place processes which will ensure that the benefits of progress reach the most disadvantaged sections of our population, particularly the homebased workers. The unprecedented increase in the demand for handicrafts at home and abroad has helped crafts-persons to secure access to finance and markets. Many have successfully made the transition from traditional techniques to modern ones. This needs to be encouraged and spread over other sectors where women homebased workers are employed in large numbers.

Our Government has been giving high priority to skill development of workers. The Approach Paper to the Eleventh Plan commits us to increasing funds for vocational training substantially. Next to skills is credit availability. Micro finance has become an important instrument in reaching credit to the poor and to tiny enterprises. We are working on a Bill for Microfinance institutions to help create a friendly policy environment for microfinance services. These must reach the poor in far greater number and build their capacities to absorb higher amounts of credit. We will try to facilitate varied models of delivering microfinance services to grow at a faster pace.

The “invisibility” of Homebased workers also extends to the media. The media too should listen more carefully to their needs. In this age of globalization and economic transformation, organizations of home-based workers have an important role to play in creating awareness about their situation. I congratulate SEWA for giving voice to voiceless homebased workers. I assure you that our Government will listen to your needs and extend recognition to the newly created network of homebased workers.

I understand that your Conference intends to propose country specific policies for homebased workers, within the framework suggested by the ILO Convention. Elaben has referred to the

need for provision of social security for homebased workers. We are examining various possibilities and I greatly welcome any suggestions that may emanate from your Conference. I look forward to receiving those recommendations. Our Government will be happy to take forward the National Policy for India as well as to facilitate the programme for countries of South Asia. With these words, I wish your conference all success. You are engaged in a socially most important noble venture. I wish you all success'.