

INDIA'S CABINET SECRETARY FORMALLY LAUNCHES HOMENET SOUTH ASIA

South Asian policy conference recommends National Policies for Home-based Workers

South Asian Regional Plan of Action for Home-based Workers gets endorsement and approval of participating Ministers, Secretaries & Senior Officers of Governments, Networks of Home-based Workers, trade unions, NGOs & researchers from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan & Sri Lanka

KEY FEATURES OF STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

- ***Include the rights and concerns of home-based workers mentioned in the Strategic Action Plan as priority issues in the upcoming SAARC Summit in April 2007***
 - ***Formulate National Policies for Home Based Workers***
 - ***Increase Trade Opportunities for Home Based Workers by exclusive retail platforms and trade promotion initiatives***
 - ***Ratify ILO Convention 177***
 - ***Support Development of the SAARC Gender Database to include data on Home Based Workers***
 - ***Recognize Homenet South Asia as a representational body of home based workers***
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The *Cabinet Secretary of India, Sh. B.K. Chaturvedi* formally launched HomeNet South Asia (HNSA), the apex federation working towards strengthening home-based workers' organizations and networks in South Asia. Mr. Chaturvedi was chairing the valedictory session of the 3-day Policy Conference on Home Based Workers of South Asia, organized by UNFEM & SEWA, which concluded in the capital recently.

In the year 2000, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) held its first Regional Conference on home-based workers in Kathmandu resulting in the famous '*Kathmandu Declaration*'. Since then, UNIFEM and Indian trade union SEWA have worked to organize home-based workers. **HomeNet South Asia (HNSA)** has federated networks of organizations of home-based workers comprising of over 600 member organizations in the five countries. It has emerged as a dynamic and vibrant network representing **over 3, 00,000 home based workers** from the region. In order to boost its advocacy efforts on a global level, **HNSA has forged partnerships with international agencies** including US-based Women in Informal Environment: Globalizing & Organizing (WIEGO) to highlight needs of urban informal sector workers, with Geneva-based Global Labour Institute (GLI) for the ILO Convention and with UK-based Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) for fair trade policies.

Highlighting key achievements of HNSA over the last five years since its inception, **Ms. Renana Jhabvala** from SEWA said, 'One of the major cornerstones of the progress made by HomeNet has been to map organizations of home based workers and bring them together. The Mapping Reports have highlighted not just the large number of organizations of home based workers in the countries – as many as 508 in Bangladesh and 307 in Pakistan - but also used case studies and individual

interviews to show diversity in kinds of home based work in these countries and the major issues afflicting home based workers. The Mapping Reports have developed as an excellent advocacy tool and have been cited in several seminal works on the homebased workers or/and informal sector workers, including the flagship publication of UNIFEM- *Progress of Women Workers, 2005.*”

Adds **Ms. Chandni Joshi, South Asia Regional Program Director, UNIFEM**, “An action based research conducted by HNSA shows that HBWs across the South Asian region share certain sources of vulnerability but the heterogeneity within the sector is a strong argument in favour of locale-specific approaches. It further shows that economic insecurities of HBWs are linked to low earnings, seasonality, stagnant markets, competition from new products/ markets, and also to lack of credit and training support. The study highlights health, housing and children’s education are top priorities for the home based workers and recommends for multiple and creative partnerships.” The statistics, numbers, ‘best practices’, and the policy learnings from this study can be strategically used for advocacy for social security needs for the homebased workers in their respective countries, pointed **Ms. Joshi**.

Progress made by HNSA has also borne tangible results for improving the status of home-based workers. In India, sustained advocacy and lobbying by SEWA has led to an increase in minimum wages in the **Agarbatti, garments and other sectors**. Similarly, in Pakistan, the Labour Department has assured that if ten thousand or more home based workers are organized, the department will cover them under national social security scheme. In Sri Lanka, collaboration with the government, HNSA has undertaken review of the government supported community development projects from a point of view of home based workers. Due to the efforts of the HomeNet Nepal, a draft national policy on home based workers has been drafted there. Due to the efforts of HNSA, the concerns of ‘own-account’ home-based workers were included in the **Resolution on Informal Economy, ILO, 2002**.

Reiterating Indian Government’s commitment to empowering women home-based workers, **India’s Cabinet Secretary, Sh. B.K. Chaturvedi**, said that two draft legislations on providing social security to unorganised sector - one prepared by the Arjun Sen Gupta Committee and the other by the labour ministry - have been sent to Authoritative Group of Secretaries for its perusal, and within a month, it would come before the cabinet. He asked the Conference leaders to send their draft of the policy to the government, which would take suitable action to benefit the three crore home based women workers of India. The government is already taking steps to increase their earning capacity, skill upgradation and social security, he added.

Mr Chaturvedi said that the bill regarding providing micro-finance would focus on the requirements of rural areas and small scale and cottage industries as most of the home based workers are employed in textiles, handicrafts and computer chip assembly units. He said that it was part of the government's commitment for empowerment of women.

The concluding session also saw the endorsement of a **Regional Strategic Action Plan for home based workers of South Asia** by ministers, secretaries, and Senior Officers of the Governments, Networks of Home-based Workers, trade unions, NGOs and researchers from all South Asian countries.

The Strategic plan recommended formulation of respective National Policies on Home-based Workers in each of the participating South Asian countries. Key recommended components of these policies as outlined in the strategic action plan include - a minimum protection in terms of social protection like insurance, access to health care, child care, livelihood assets, maternity benefit etc; access to market and economic resources like raw material, marketing infrastructure, technology, credit and information etc.; recognition of HBWs' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining; recognition of forums like country HomeNets that represent

HBWs' voice; resource support to enable HBWs to organize, lobby, advocate and campaign; and promotion of research and development. The action plan also urged governments to address the need to promote within families *a shared responsibility in care-giving roles* that could *prevent women from being overburdened* by multiple tasks and responsibilities.

The action plan has also advised institutionalizing systematic collection of data on Home-based Workers and their contribution to the national economies. It strongly urged the governments to promote and support development of a **SAARC Gender Data Base** that includes Home based workers and their contributions.

Taking forward the Kathmandu Declaration, the policy conference also advocated for the ratification of International Labour Organization's "*ILO Home Work Convention 177*" with the respective national governments. The ILO Convention requires countries to adopt, implement and periodically review national policy on homework that promotes equality of treatment between homeworkers and other wage earners. Says *Dan Gallin, Chair of the Global Labour Institute, Geneva*, "To date, ratification of ILO Home Work Convention has been a slow process. However, it is a simple and modest convention that can be easily ratified."

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