

WOMEN HOME-BASED WORKERS – EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

A HomeNet South Asia study – Promoting Decent Work for Women Home-based Workers in Value Chains: Cases from India and Nepal – across four sites in India and Nepal, brings together the ways in which organizations have linked home-based women workers with domestic and global brands, while securing some rights, securities and, to a large extent, a steady source of livelihood.

The study explored “good practices” – that is, the strategies and innovative practices put in place by the social enterprises, leading to an improvement in the conditions of work. This includes higher piece rates/earnings, better access to work, improved access to social security, learning more skills, enhanced financial literacy and improved access to government benefits.

PRIVATE GOVERNANCE AND GOOD PRACTICES

By “private governance” we mean the coordination and distribution of resources by lead firms. Some companies, through membership of the Fair Trade forum, are committed to principles of fair trade and source only from suppliers who are also committed to these principles.



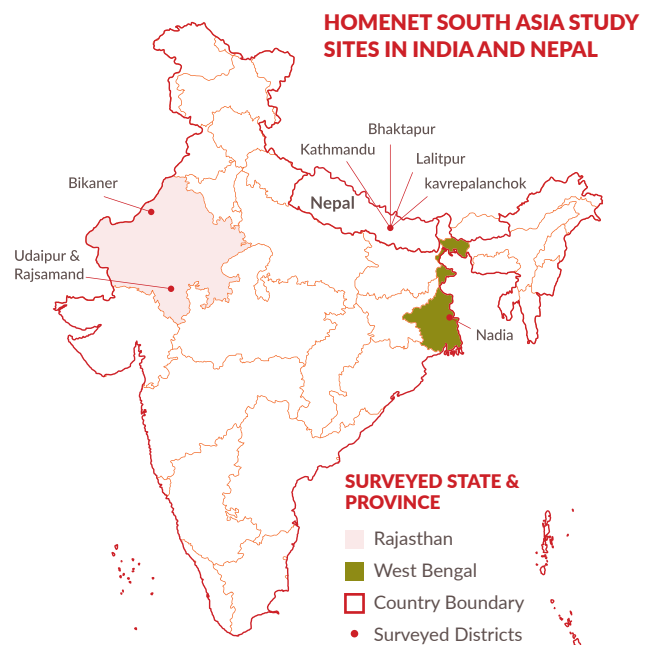
There is an increasing consciousness among consumers in high-income countries – *“Who made my clothes?”* – and thereby pressure on brands to follow ethical and Fair Trade practices.

Home-based worker enterprises/producer companies give some examples of good practice in private governance:

Rangсутra in Bikaner **enables ethical value chains** through setting up village craft centres where women come to work and where all required compliances are ensured. Rangсутra follows the code of conduct of the global brand it supplies and has expanded its scale of operations while ensuring compliance.

Fair Trade for home-based workers. Sadhna in Udaipur, Sana Hastakala and SABAH in Nepal are among the enterprises that have extended the Fair Trade philosophy to link women who are home-based workers with large retail buyers. Cooperation is key – and defines the nature of engagement of all the organizations in the HomeNet South Asia study.

A corporate social responsibility initiative by a global brand sourcing from West Bengal has made a positive impact on the lives of a community of weavers. Credit support and community health services are part of the programme and SEWA Bangla has been able to mobilize and strengthen a union of women who weave and ancillary workers through its partnership with this company.



PUBLIC GOVERNANCE AND GOOD PRACTICES

“Public governance” refers to the rules, regulations and policies of the government and relevant international agreements.

Enterprises link their workers to government **social security schemes** that provide security to home-based workers. Social enterprises in this study, particularly those in India, have facilitated registrations and obtaining documents to enable home-based workers to be covered under schemes that offer access to health facilities, health insurance and old-age support.

SOCIAL GOVERNANCE AND GOOD PRACTICES



“Social governance” refers to the ability of home-based workers’ organizations and enterprises to influence social norms, policies, institutions and markets through advocacy and campaigns. Private and public governance determine the context and define the parameters in which social governance takes place.

Building solidarity among members has **empowered women** and helped towards **gender justice** goals. Sadhna’s members say that working with the organization has enabled them to negotiate gender norms around mobility and seclusion as well as to become more self-reliant. Some respondents from Rangсутra said their enhanced earnings had inspired others in their households to take on care work. Some women said they spent some of their earnings on themselves, suggesting a positive impact on women’s agency. The CFC model of SABAH Nepal creates a platform where women can discuss social issues, including domestic violence. SEWA Bangla has started a process through which women who weave are able to raise wage-related issues with master weavers and their entitlements to schemes with government officials.

Their commitment to working with groups who are disadvantaged socially and economically is what separates these social enterprises from conventional businesses. They subscribe to the **ideology of a social enterprise** in balancing profit with purpose, addressing social challenges through the market mechanism, and making markets work for the poor. The home-based workers have a sense of belonging and ownership that comes from being members or shareholders of the enterprise.

All enterprises in the study **reach out** to women from vulnerable groups and remote areas. Sadhna has drawn in tribal and rural women, and women living in informal settlements, and created work opportunities for them. Its sharp increase in membership attests to these direct opportunities. Rather than mobilize women already engaged in home-based work, Sadhna encouraged women who were hidden within their home and not engaged in income-generating activity to improve their skills and become home-based workers.



In another example of outreach, each CFC linked to SABAH Nepal was connected with about 200 home-based workers, mostly in remote areas without access to information or distant markets. They have been enabled to develop a new source of livelihood, become part of a group, learn about legal rights and have access to psycho-social counselling.



Innovations in workspaces have been made, with Rangсутra's setting up of village craft centres being a prime example. While it took time for the shift from home-based to centre-based work to be fully accepted by women who were affected, the higher level of earnings has meant that other household members have been willing to share child-care and other household responsibilities. Similarly, the CFCs of SABAH Nepal have provided workspaces to women in remote areas to use as they wish. There are no fixed times and women who live within easy walking distance are able to work at the centres at their convenience.

To expand opportunities and **contain market volatility**, enterprises have tried to develop multiple sources of work for home-based workers. As well as obtaining large orders from global and national brands for business-to-business sales, all enterprises in the study had their own retail outlets for business-to-consumer sales.

In one example of **training and skills upgrading** that the enterprises in the study provide, Sadhna's most skilled artisans train women who express interest in joining the enterprise. These trainings cover basic skills in stitching and embroidery, as well as new designs. Women also learn the system of getting work and the expectations of buyers and customers regarding quality and timely delivery.



Photo Credit: HNSA Sadhna Udaipur

Women are introduced to consumer tastes and the nature of urban demand through participation in fairs and exhibitions. This **exposure to distant** markets also contributes to transparency as women are made aware of the prices of the final products.



Social protection includes a provident fund that SABAH Nepal set up for its members, where each home-based worker contributes 10 per cent of her monthly earnings and the enterprise matches this with another 10 per cent. Protection from shocks has been important, particularly after Nepal was hit by an earthquake in 2015. SABAH and Sana Hastakala were heavily involved in reconstruction and revival of livelihoods.

By organizing women and giving them information and training, SEWA Bangla expects that, over time, **women's voices** will be heard in work negotiations. It holds regular trade committee meetings (with the committee comprising weaver representatives) to discuss issues such as minimum wages and working conditions. These meetings have led a global retail brand to pressure its suppliers to ensure that master weavers provide minimum wages to weavers. SEWA Bangla has designed a format showing how records can be maintained by both weavers and master weavers.

COLLECTIVE VOICE AND SUSTAINABILITY

The overall 'good practice' identified by the study is the role of these enterprises in linking home-based workers, the last and most vulnerable link in global value chains, to the market while ensuring reasonable earnings and protection from risk, and enabling social protection and group solidarity.