

Home Based Workers in Nepal

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Home-based work is not a new thing in case of Nepal. However, the present day nature of home-based work after intensifying globalization basically after 1990 is quite different in this regard. Home-based workers are scattered here and there all over Nepal. Actual statistics is also not available. No survey or research has been conducted so far separately on home-based workers. Though there is male involvement in a number of home-based works, involvement of women is higher.

Categories of workers

We can categorize them into two types - those who work as self employed on their own investment and sale their product to the concerned entrepreneurs who trade internally as well as internationally and those who work on subcontracting by using the raw materials of the factories or establishments.

Thus, **self employed home-based workers** and **wage-dependent home-based workers** are the major two categories of home-based workers in Nepal. Wage dependent home-based workers are basically piece-rate workers. Whether they are piece rate workers or self employed ones, the nature of rural home-based and urban home-based differs.

Home-based works in Nepal

The main categories of home-based work without going into further details may be mentioned as follows:

- Food processing
- Textile
- Dhaka weaving
- Beads
- Painting - fabric and boutique
- Packaging

- Garment & tailoring
- Animal husbandry
- Carpet & pashmina weaving
- Cash crop farming
- Handicraft – bamboo, wood, metal, clay
- Knitting
- Ceramics
- Paper

Problems of Home-based workers

Problems of home-based workers also differs in accordance with the nature of the category. Self-employed ones basically face the problem of marketing and price as well as skill upgrading & low access to training. Because of the problem of market, their products are taken much cheaper by the factories and exporters and those big fishes take away all the fruits of their skill and labour. They are also less mobile in comparison to other types of workers in the labour market. They also face the lack of necessary finances in spite of their traditional skill. Outlook & attitudinal change and modernization of their skill is necessary for them.

On the other hand, wage dependent subcontracted home-based workers have been facing the problem of very low wages hardly sufficient even for mere subsistence. They also feel helpless as they are excluded form any type of social security system by the employers. They are always deprived of any type of benefits that can be obtained from the factories they are concerned with. our focus from trade union movement are those who work as home-based workers taking order and raw material from the factory and work on piece rate.

In carpet and garment, the piece rates are declining for home-based workers. It is because of the fact that the export of carpet and garment is deteriorating very fast due to worsening international situation and adverse effects in tourism industry. Almost the same is the case with handicraft sector - particularly the artistic handicrafts. Garment factories are being closed. Carpet factories are also curtailing their production. As a result, both the in-factory workers in Nepal and outside-factory workers i.e. home-based ones are being victimized.

The problems being faced common by both the wage-dependent and self-employed workers are exclusion from social protection system, poor level of awareness and being neglected by the present structure of labour legislation & inspection system. As a result, low payment and long hours of work under difficult hand to mouth conditions & unsafe-unhealthy environment is the common phenomena.

Initiatives

Very little initiatives particularly for home-based ones have been taken so far. It is also because of the fact that the home-based workers themselves do not come nearer to the organizations - to trade unions or other mass organizations or NGOs.

From the very beginning GEFONT tried to organize informal sectors workers, but under the GEFONT fold and its affiliate folds, very small number of home-based workers has been organized.

Kathmandu Declaration of Oct 20, 2000 on women workers in the informal sector is significant also with the viewpoint of home-based workers of Nepal.

- Formulation of national policy & plan of action on Home-based workers
- Minimum protection, which includes right to organize, minimum wages, occupational safety & health, social protection, child care, skill training and literacy
 - Access to market
 - Social funds for contingencies
 - Database development
- Urging SAARC
 - Setting up technical committee for informal and particularly home-based workers to promote national policies as well as bilateral and regional cooperation

But actual implementation activities are poor because of the fact that efforts for organizing and mobilizing have been less than sufficient.

Organizing home-based workers

In order to organize home-based workers of informal sector, initiatives are necessary in both rural and urban areas with predominant emphasis on rural areas. The organizing work can be undertaken by the following:

- Ministry of Industries, Commerce and Supplies
- Employers association
- Small women entrepreneurs
- NGOs
- Trade unions

Ministry of Industries, Commerce & Supplies has done a number of training works and tried to organize them in small groups without any long-term vision which has not been effective. It is done through Department of Cottage & Small industries. On the other hand, both Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce & Industries and Federation of Nepalese Cottage & Small Industries have tried to use their skills in favour of bigger ones and never taken care of their problems and welfare. Small Women Entrepreneurs have also been organized in the form of NGOs and in the wings of FNCCI and FNCSI. But few of the home-based workers are employers and most of them are real workers. NGOs have gone in more publicity for them, but majority NGOs have collaborated with trade groups and in the name of home-based workers, those organizations have been getting all benefits for their own sake. So the real responsibility rests on trade union movement, but still trade unions have not given full attention to this big mass of workers.

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