



Homeworkers stitching shoes in South India

Homeworkers Worldwide

Annual Report 2014

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Summary

In 2014 HWW continued to actively promote the rights of homeworkers and women informal workers. A large proportion of work in 2014 focussed on India, but we were also involved in work with a UK focus, and a global scope. A good deal of work has been achieved in collaboration with other organisations, and we look forward to building on these relationships and working together to maximise our impact in the future.

Tamil Nadu - Garments and Textiles

Tamil Nadu (and particularly the area in and around the city of Tirupur) is a major exporter of cotton jersey garments - such as leggings, pyjamas, T-shirts - to the UK and elsewhere. The industry is a major employer of young women. The conditions in the textile mills and garment factories are however, frequently appalling. Many young women employed in the industry live in company-controlled hostels where they have no freedom of movement, or freedom of association, and are subject to forced labour. Wages are low, hours are long, and both the living and working conditions are damaging to health. Homeworkers Worldwide has been working with these young women, and exposing the problems they face since 2010.

We finished our pilot project with young women garment workers in Pudukkottai and other parts of Tamil Nadu. This project has deepened our understanding of the working conditions for young women in the textile and garment sector, and also the obstacles to organising. Jane visited in February/March. A report was written for the donor.

We finalised a research report on forced labour at a Tamil Nadu garment company, in liaison with a local NGO. A summary of the findings was sent to six companies in September, in collaboration with the India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN). Follow-up discussions were held with three Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) members companies, and an ETI-member NGO which has a corporate partnership with one of the companies. We intend to pursue the companies which have not responded or have responded inadequately.

We continued to work within the Ethical Trading Initiative to strengthen their Tamil Nadu project, through participation in the working group and advisory committee. This work included attendance at an ETI meeting in Tamil Nadu in February, correspondence with ICN and local groups in Tamil Nadu, and ongoing discussions in the UK. Our objective is to place eliminating forced labour, and securing freedom of movement and association at the heart of any work to improve labour conditions in these supply chains.

To raise awareness and increase understanding of the issues at stake, we published a briefing on our website, and have also given presentations at meetings such as the Yorkshire & Humberside TUC Women's Forum.

Tamil Nadu - Footwear

Ambur, in Tamil Nadu, is a major centre for the production of leather footwear, much of it for export. Thousands of women homeworkers are engaged in the stitching of leather uppers. Leather work is considered very low status in India, and most workers in the industry are from disadvantaged groups such as Dalits, Muslims and Christians. They are badly paid and poorly treated. For some years HWW has been in contact with homeworkers in this area, and with brands sourcing from Ambur, and it is our intention to develop a project with homeworkers to improve working conditions.

We have held ongoing discussions with an Indian partner about organising leather footwear homeworkers, and have developed plans for a future project together. HWW visited Tamil Nadu in February.

We published a briefing on leather footwear workers on our website. The briefing draws on evidence and interviews with homeworkers gathered in Ambur.

We have continued liaising with Annie Delaney (Victoria University, Australia) and the Redress Mechanisms Project which is researching the effectiveness of means of redress for violations of human rights in multinational supply chains - including in footwear and garments.

Ethical Trading Initiative

In addition to extensive work on Tamil Nadu within the ETI, HWW attended meetings of the ETI working group in Leicester on the garment sector. We continue to be actively involved in this group. HWW gave a presentation on homeworking at a seminar organised by Leicester University

HWW has also done extensive work within the ETI providing advice and guidance to companies on improving their reporting, and on homeworking issues.

Traidcraft – Preventing Child Labour in homebased craft production

HWW completed a piece of research commissioned by Traidcraft on company (both mainstream and fairtrade) policies towards child labour and homeworkers.

Traidcraft commissioned a follow-up piece of work from HWW, a toolkit for companies based on the research. This was completed and is available on the HWW website. HWW has helped Traidcraft to promote this toolkit, through the media and meetings with companies.

ILO – Case study on organising homeworkers

HWW completed a commissioned case study for the ILO on organising homeworkers. The study was drawn from experience of the HWW Mapping Programme, with a focus on Chile.

HWW Seminar

In July, HWW held a seminar to discuss organising women workers, to coincide with a visit by Gopinath Parakuni, Director of Cividep and Annie Delaney from Australia. Marijn Peepercamp,

from ICN, also attended. The meeting brought together activists and academics to discuss how we can work together to support organising initiatives with women workers.

Modern Slavery Bill

In 2014 the government brought forward the Modern Slavery Bill. Following lobbying by NGOs a clause was included covering slavery and forced labour in international supply chains. The clause does not require specific action from companies, only 'transparency' regarding what action they have taken to address modern slavery in their chains. It is, nonetheless, a significant step forwards in holding companies trading in the UK to account for conditions in their overseas supply chains.

HWW has worked with an alliance of NGOs on strengthening the Modern Slavery Bill - in particular the Transparency in Supply Chains clause. This work has involved responding to government consultations and lobbying Hilary Benn MP - and has drawn on our experience of forced labour in the Tamil Nadu textiles and garment sector.

Alliances

We have worked closely with a number of organisations this year. We continued to keep in close contact with groups in India, in particular Tirupur People's Forum, Cividep and Save, as well as our allies in the Netherlands, ICN. We have also met with and maintained close correspondence with a number of other organisations including Labour Behind The Label and Women Working Worldwide. The work on the Modern Slavery Bill was conducted primarily through the CORE coalition, of which we are members. Our work with Traidcraft developed into a positive collaboration which both sides hope to renew if opportunities arise. HWW also met with the Fair Labor Association, and contributed to a consultation on homeworkers in the garment sector with Wiego.

Organisational

In January HWW moved office and set up a new computer system.

One member of staff was on maternity leave until September, when she returned to her previous part time role.

We have had two students working with us this year.

Thanks

Thanks to our donor for supporting work in Tamil Nadu.

Thanks to staff for all their work.

Thanks to Trustees for all their support.