

**HomeWorkers Worldwide**  
*Building solidarity with homeworker  
organisations around the world*



HomeWorkers  
**hwww** Worldwide

Annual Report 2012

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# Foreword

In 2012, Homeworkers Worldwide continued to campaign for rights and recognition for homebased workers around the world.

Here in the UK government cuts and policies have been having a particularly negative impact on women, and their ability to earn a decent living. Our work in the UK focussed on the development of the WWINN network, providing both lobbying opportunities and practical sessions on employment and enterprise for the groups involved.

In India we have been working with partners to explore ways informal women workers can fight back against forms of employment that exploit and discriminate against them in term of gender, age and caste. In many cases these exploitative practices are linked to major international retailers, including those based here in the UK and we have been using our membership of the ETI to exert pressure on those companies on the top of the chain, as well as building and organising with the workers at the end of these chains.

Elsewhere we have continued to build and strengthen solidarity links between homeworkers and other informal workers around the world. In much of the world, the economic and political climate is particularly difficult for such work, but these challenges make the determination of women workers to stand up for their rights all the more important.

# United Kingdom

## **Publication of WWINN research report “Earning a Living”**

Research conducted through WWINN in 2011 was written up in the form of two publications, the “Earning a Living” full report and “Earning a Living” briefing completed in 2012. The report was launched at a workshop in March.

## **WWINN Workshop for Action**

The Workshop took place on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> March. Attendance was lower than we had originally hoped – 12 women in total participated. However, four of the WWINN groups were represented (HWW, WHAT, WAST and ASHA Neighbourhood Project) as well as Oxfam. The smaller workshop created a more informal atmosphere, in which we were able to do some in depth planning, and discuss issues in some detail.

The workshop included a session on understanding power in order to create change, and in-depth discussions on what practical, as well as campaigning, action we could take together. We agreed that the current political context is very challenging and that alongside pursuing our policy goals, we need some practical activities that can produce a more immediate impact.

This resulted in a two-pronged strategy – to pursue lobbying activities with grass roots groups alongside developing practical support for groups looking for ways to earn a living (including through social enterprise).

## **Lobbying activities**

Follow-up meetings were held with three groups of women participants to reflect on our research and identify specific issues women wanted to raise with their elected representatives.

WWINN members then met with local MPs to discuss their concerns. The [Workers Health Advice Team \(WHAT\)](#) met with Gerry Sutcliffe MP to highlight the impact on women of cuts in the voluntary sector in Bradford. Leeds [Women Asylum Seekers Together](#) met with Fabian Hamilton MP to discuss the right to work for asylum seekers, and obstacles to women being reunited with their children who are overseas. Homeworkers Worldwide and [Unite the Union](#) met with Yvette Cooper, Shadow Minister for Women, to discuss the many obstacles to decently paid work that women face, as detailed in our research.

Jane Howie, from WHAT, described how she and colleague Cath Stevenson had used their local research to highlight some of the problems facing women in Bradford. 'It was very interesting undertaking this research and we helped to raise the awareness in Bradford about how the cuts are having a large impact on women. The local newspaper, the Telegraph and Argus covered the story and case studies from our research have been collated by the Bradford Inquiry Group who are researching the impacts of the cuts in Bradford and we have also given a presentation the Bradford District Assembly Equalities Forum.'

In addition to this local lobbying, we also submitted responses to the Low Pay Commission, APPG on Equality inquiry into BME Women's Unemployment and the government's Childcare Commission. We continued to follow government plans for Welfare Reform – particularly the impact on the self-employed – and raised our latest concerns with the Oxfam gender programme.

### **Enterprise and employment support activities**

On behalf of WWINN, educationalist Chris Hoy delivered a series of sessions using popular education methods to help women improve communication skills, build confidence and develop their recognition of skills and strengths, with a view to building forms of collective enterprise or self-employment. A fundamental principle of the work was to support women to be proactive and more confident about the direction of their lives. The work was sustained with one group in Beeston from March – July, and with another group in Harehills from March – December. Despite hopes for a longer term project, we were unable to secure funding to continue this work beyond the end of the year.

As part of this work we held an inspiring workshop with Lizzie at REMADE IN LEEDS in June. The two WWINN groups explored business strategies, collective enterprise and upcycling and ethical production opportunities.

In addition our volunteer Imogen Samman developed links with Create and the Careers Service to explore what kind of training and guidance was available in Leeds for women on low incomes looking for a route into decent (rather than precarious) employment. Imogen's work resulted in one WWINN member attending a Create training scheme and the participation of the Careers Service in a half-day workshop for WWINN groups.

The half-day workshop 'Working Choices' combined an introduction to the new ECHO centre in Harehills with a realistic discussion of both the employment and enterprise opportunities open to low income women. Six WWINN groups participated.

### **Other activities in 2012**

- We launched the WWINN e-newsletter, which is produced on a quarterly basis and combines news on WWINN group activities with updates on national policy developments affecting women on low incomes.
- We participated in a 'Women and the Cuts' event at the Y&H Regional TUC Women's Forum where we used WWINN research to contribute to a mapping of the impact of cuts in our region.
- We participated in planning meetings for a Y&H Regional TUC Women's Forum event planned for International Women's Day 2013.
- We attended a seminar on the 'precariat' at the TUC.
- We submitted a number of funding applications to continue our work in the UK but were unfortunately unsuccessful. We are continuing to maintain the WWINN website, e-group and e-newsletter but there is no current funding for further UK activities.

# India

## **Women Workers in Tamil Nadu's Textile and Garment Sector**

Throughout this year, HWW has been implementing the RAGS project on decent work in the garment industry in Tamil Nadu, through partnership with WWW in the UK, and with two NGOs in Tamil Nadu: Social Awareness and Voluntary Education (SAVE) in Tirupur and Rural Education and Development (READ) Foundation in Pudukkottai.

### **Background**

Tirupur, and neighbouring district, Coimbatore, are the centre of an expanding textile and garment sector. Originally established as a centre of production of textiles for a national market, in the last twenty years the sector has changed into producing garments for export in addition to textiles. The sector supplies garments like t-shirts, sports shirts and nightwear, made from knitted (or 'jersey') fabric to all the major clothing retailers in the UK, among others.

### **Workers without Rights**

The project has focused on two distinct groups of women workers in these supply chains. In Tirupur, Save has organised homeworkers, and in Pudukkottai, Read Foundation has been working with young women workers employed in large factories and mills. The two groups of women are drawn from different groups and are working in very different situations. They have in common that they are working outside normal employment and social protection and that they are employed at different points in the same supply chains.

### **SAVE and homeworkers in Tirupur**

Save has adopted a broad definition of homemaker which includes both women working by themselves in their own homes, and those working in small homebased workshops, many of whom also give out work to homeworkers. They are engaged in processes such as checking and finishing loose ends; attaching sequins; doing buttons and buttonholes; machining and waste separation (a process of recycling waste cloth), for both national and export markets.

Save has carried out the following activities:

- initial mapping to identify and make contact with homeworkers;
- setting up homemaker groups (HWG) on a self help model of savings and loans;
- extensive training programmes based around a dedicated manual, designed by Save;

- advocacy and lobbying with trade unions and government, especially on social security;

Save's organising work has led to active women's groups who have worked together to increase access to social security schemes; raise awareness of women's position in the family, community and at work; begin some collective bargaining around wages and community activities.

### **Read Foundation and Young Women Workers**

Read Foundation is working with young women, mainly between 14 and 20, from poor rural villages in Pudukkottai, who have worked in textile mills or garments factories in other parts of Tamil Nadu. They live in company controlled hostels where they have no freedom and conditions amount to forced labour. Some are also contracted to work for fixed periods of time, usually three years, with a lump sum being paid at the end, in schemes which amount to bonded labour.

Since most of these women work away from their homes, Read Foundation works with them when they return to their villages on leave, give up their jobs, or before they go to work in the first place. Unlike the women in Tirupur, this is a shifting group with women coming and going from their homes in the villages, both to go away to work and later when they get married and move to their husband's village.

Read Foundation has carried out the following activities:

- surveys of young women about the work and conditions;
- setting up sangams (groups) in the villages;
- training programmes on legal rights, women's health and leadership skills;
- awareness raising in the community, including with parents, schools and village leaders (panchayats) about the need for girls to continue their education and conditions in the factories and mills;
- advocacy with trade unions and government officials around violations of labour rights;
- a limited amount of alternative employment and training.

The organising work has led to the sangams providing a meeting place for the young women where they can share their experiences and to some extent increase their choices about their future, including employment, education or training and marriage. Many have accessed social security and medical insurance for the first time. There is greater awareness in the community

about the exploitation of young women and the need to monitor conditions when young women go to work away.

HWW was responsible for the project in Tamil Nadu and for liaison with Women Working Worldwide (WWW) who managed the overall project, which was also being implemented in Lesotho, Madagascar and initially in Bangladesh.

HWW monitored the project in both Tirupur and Pudukkottai, through written reports and with a monitoring visit in November and December. At the end of Year One of the project, in April 2012, HWW also appointed a local consultant to support the capacity of Read Foundation to manage the project and liaised with him.

### **Homeworking in Footwear Sector in Tamil Nadu**

HWW has continued to support a limited amount of work in the leather footwear sector in Chennai and Vellore/Ambur, in Tamil Nadu. These areas are a major centre for the leather footwear sector in India, particularly for exports. Thousands of homeworkers are employed mainly in hand-stitching of the uppers for certain models of shoes, including those for big brand names in the UK and Europe.

Limited funding has been available for this work from the Homework Research Group in Australia, linked to the current research programme on redress of violations of human and labour rights by multinational companies in Australia and the UK. HWW has supported the work on footwear through Annie Delaney and the Federation of Homeworkers Worldwide.

HWW has supported Read Foundation to continue the work in this sector, mainly focusing on documentation of supply chains involving homeworkers and establishment of groups among the homeworkers.



# Ethical Trading Initiative

- HWW is participating in several nascent ETI Programmes, contributing to their development and planning: South India (Tamil Nadu) India garments, Jewellery (North India) and the China toy sector. The process usually starts by companies mapping their supply chains to agree a collective focus of maximum leverage and influence. Programme work is only likely to start in 2013 or later.
- There is potential to apply lessons from the ETI Homeworker programme (N. India garments) within the Jewellery programme; companies have done useful mapping.
- The ETI programme looking at plastic toys in China has made slowest progress, due in part to the resignation of the ETI China representative, Dimitri Kessler.
- Much effort went into revising and validating the data from the wages studies carried out by ETI companies in the embellished garments sector in Bareilly/NCR north India in 2009/2010. ETI plans to publish these in a report which will describe and make more widely available the value chain methodology which HWW developed for the study.
- Feedback was given to ETI footwear supplier, William Lamb, and detailed advice on implementation with homeworkers working in the its leather footwear supply chains in India
- HWW made inputs into Asda's ethical strategic planning, with detailed advice about implementation with homeworkers. As a result Asda use and have adopted "the ETI Homeworker Guidelines" as their formal policy guiding implementation with homeworkers.
- HWW has agreed to act as a 'mentor' to the retailer The White Company, which joined ETI in late 2012. The company adopted a Homeworker policy, based on the model ETI policy, prior to joining the ETI.
- HWW presented on our Tirupur homeworking project as part of an ETI RAGS roundtable event in November.

## Conferences and networking

HWW continued to develop international links and contacts through conferences, visits and networking:

### **AWID conference, Istanbul, April**

Jane Tate attended this conference from HWW together with Ruth Pearson, who was working with Oxfam at the conference. The conference focused on economic empowerment with sessions on development of tools and education around economics.

HWW was responsible for a panel on organising homeworkers, with participation from the homeworkers' union, Ev-Ek-Sen from Turkey, and

homeworkers' association from Malang, Indonesia. We also participated in a series of sessions on organising for labour rights which was an opportunity to discuss issues with many others such as Maquila Solidarity Network, Women Working Worldwide, Chinese Women's Network, MEC from Nicaragua and others.

### **Visit from Annie Delaney, June 2012**

Annie and two colleagues visited from Australia to discuss their work on women workers, including the 'Redress Mechanisms' international research project. Together we met with Jane Holgate at Leeds University to discuss potential opportunities for joint working.

### **Forced Labour and Migration conference, Leeds, December.**

HWW presented on our work with young women in garment and textile mills in Tamil Nadu, explaining the forced labour and other human rights abuses endemic in this industry.

### **Federation of Homeworkers Worldwide**

Our volunteer Imogen Samman was a great help in organising material for our Federation of Homeworkers Worldwide website – launched in 2013.

## Trustees, volunteers and staff

In 2012 our trustees were Linda Devereux (chair); Ruth Pearson; Lucy Brill; Al Garthwaite; Anne-Marie Delettrez; and Peter Williams. The trustees also invited Julie Jarman to join the committee and are very pleased she has accepted. Staff are grateful for the support given to them by trustees through regular trust meetings and discussions of our work.

Volunteers have contributed greatly to our work in 2012, particularly representation in the Ethical Trading Initiative by Peter Williams and help with our UK work and Federation website from Imogen Samman.

Jane Tate, as International Coordinator, worked most closely on the RAGS project in India, supporting our partners in Turkey and elsewhere and our ETI work. Nesta Holden focussed on UK work through WWINN, as well as some work with Jane on the ETI and exploring options for continuing work in India.

## Thanks

Homeworkers Worldwide would like to express thanks to Oxfam UK for its support, both financial and otherwise, for our UK work; to Irene Breugel Fund for supporting our WWINN workshop; to WWW for supporting our local lobbying activities with WWINN, to the BOAG group of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) who gave us a grant to facilitate participation in the ETI; to WWW for its partnership in the RAGS project, and DfID who funded the project and to all the individuals who donated to HWW.

Thanks again to Steve Ireland for all his design work and web development support.

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