

# **SURFACING THE IGNORED ONES**

**A Study of Home-based Women Workers  
in the Informal Sector of Nepal**

## ***Biscons***

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The study is prepared for the United Nations Development Fund For Women (UNIFEM),  
New Delhi, India.

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# CHAPTER 1

## THE SETTING

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

The Nepalese pre-dominant agrarian economy employs the bulk of the labour force. The small proportion of employment in secondary and tertiary sector of the economy is largely in the micro enterprise level. Characterized by sluggish GDP growth coupled with high population growth rate and marginal rise in the per capita incomes, a large segment of the population lives below the poverty line. Employment problem manifests itself mainly in low productivity and underemployment besides unemployment including that of the educated manpower. The bulk of the work force being engaged in subsistence agriculture is largely categorized as the unorganized or the informal sector including self-employment. Even within the non-agricultural sector, most of the work is organized within the household. Going by the definition of organized sector in terms of establishments employing 10 or more workers, the organized sector in total employment remains very small.

Although women constitute a little over one half of Nepal's population, they rank lower than the men in almost every social indicator in the country. Majority of the female population are among the deprived groups. Their contribution to the household economy is marginally recognized although they are increasingly involved in economic activities. Due to the multiple role of the women, a significant number of them are balancing their responsibilities of householding and working for living outside agri-farming. For most of them participating in economic activities is possible only at the household level. This has resulted in many women being engaged in wage work within the home in the informal setting.

Opportunities of such home-based work have opened up with the promotion of industries and commerce in the private sector, poverty alleviation policies of the government, and women development programs of non government organizations in the country.

However, while there is a semblance of legislations in place in the organized sector, no specific policies and laws have been fixed for the people working in unorganized or informal sector. Though many activists are striving hard to develop power lobby and advocacy the situation has not been very successful. The informal sector women workers are worse off in this situation, and a serious effort at addressing social security of this sector is a far cry.

The issue of home-based work and workers in informal sector in Nepal has only recently surfaced, and a recognition of their existence made. A serious attempt at understanding the dynamics of the home-based workers is yet to be instituted despite the international recognition of the phenomenon and coverage by a specific International Labour Organization (ILO) standard. The ILO has recognized that homeworkers, like any section of the workforce, are entitled to minimum standards laid down by international law. Nepal cannot conceivably contemplate ratification of the convention at this juncture, but it should definitely consider the socio-economic implications of the home-based work and the women workers in this informal sector in the national context.

## 1.2 THE INFORMAL SECTOR

The work force in the country is predominantly engaged in the subsistence agriculture and remains highly unorganized, and thus form the informal sector. All enterprises, businesses, trades, etc. which are not registered or accounted for in any official records are considered to be in the informal sector. Small-scale manufacturing units and petty shop-keepers, home-based establishments of self-employed family workers, street vendors and hawkers, service specialists, unpaid family workers all form part of this sector. The 'gainful economic activities' through micro credit schemes promoted under various rural development programs also largely fall under the informal sector. It is not to imply, however, that all these production units of the informal sector do not comply to administrative provisions and various legislations which production units are bound by. Not all activities can be categorized in the 'hidden or underground economy'.

The term 'informal sector' came to the fore only in 1972 with the ILO report on Kenya Employment Mission. The informal sector is characterized by small scale of operation relying on indigenous resources, ease of entry, being unregulated, labour intensive, adoption of crude or adapted technology, employment of self or family labour which acquire skills outside formal school system. There is an absence of standards for quality equipment, environment and output. It operates on an unofficial identity. However, the ILO admits that the informal sector remains controversial and the definition somewhat obscure.

It is very difficult to establish the number of people in the unregulated sector of the economy. The organized sector is also defined in terms of establishments employing 10 or more employees. This makes the share of organized sector in total employment very small. The proportion of total number of workers in the organized sector varies according to various sources. The Central Bureau of Statistics shows the number as 0.69 million or 7 percent of the total employment, whereas the World Bank estimates 0.97 million or 10 percent, and the ILO -SAAT study states 0.84 million or 8.5 percent of the total employment including self-employment. Though 90 percent of the workers are in the unorganized or the informal sector, the informal sector is characterized by diversities in the wage rates, conditions of employment, and discrimination based on gender and age.

It is very difficult to determine the size of the informal sector due to the nature of the informal sector being an unorganized and unregulated sector of the economy. There is no statistical instrument to actually identify and measure the informal sector. Some attempts on estimation may be possible through the interaction of various sets of data available based on fragmented studies of individual researchers and surveys of the kind like the Population Census and the Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS).

- The variation of data sets in various official studies on directly productive work participation rates, particularly for women, is due to lack of information on how they are computed. Work participation rates may vary due to inclusion of people engaged in non-economic activities. Elimination of these non-economic activities will make assessment of economically active population fairly possible.
- According to 1991 Population Census, the directly productive work-force participation rate among women is approximately 46 percent as compared to 69 percent for men.

- The Nepal Living Standard Survey Report 1996 reports a participation rate of 66 percent for women and 75 percent for men. Likewise, the unemployment rates have been reported as 4.1 percent and 5.6 percent for women and men respectively. This data is based on calculating labour force as a percentage of the total gender-wise population of 10 years and above (based on the 7 days preceding the interview survey). Women comprised 52 percent of the total labour force.
- The NLSS calculates the participation rate in another refined way based on the work done a year preceding the interview. This expanded definition of active participation shows higher figures (72 percent for women) compared to those obtained using the previous definition. Correspondingly, the unemployment rates are lower: 1.4 percent for women and 1.1 percent for men.
- The women-specific survey made in 1996 by the Ministry of Health reports a 77 percent participation rate for women aged between 15 and 49 years of age and tends to corroborate the NLSS data set.
- Women's directly productive work routine is in the agricultural sector. 90 percent of economically active women compared to 75 percent of men engaged in this sector. Only 4 percent of all economically active women compared to 12 percent of men are in the formal sector employment.
- Overall, over 78 percent of those employed spent majority of their time in agriculture. 22 percent were employed outside agriculture, 9.5 percent working as self-employed, and 12 percent as wage-earners. Women worked predominantly on the farm and their share of wage employment (2.7 percent) and self-employment (4.6 percent) outside agriculture significantly lower than those of men.

This informal sector in Nepal has expanded at a fast pace during the last decade and has attracted the attention of economists and policy makers. But so far all their efforts seem to be directed only toward understanding the dynamics of the phenomenon, and less on smoothing the sector and instituting acceptable norms within the legal and social framework. The concept of 'regulated' informal sector of the economy has been sought to be put forward, but no serious studies into the ramifications of the sector has been attempted.

### **Women in the Informal Sector**

As in all parts of the world, women in Nepal hold the triple work responsibility of reproduction, householding and employment. However, reproduction is not treated as work, and householding has so far not been considered a productive work. As far as their participation in actual gainful economic activities is concerned, women are inadvertently a disadvantaged group, more so because of their roles in the other two work regimes. They are subject to restrictions in personal mobility which is required for skill development and independent decision making. This restriction may be less applicable to the 'modern educated women', but it is widely prevalent among the rest. Such restrictions have implications in the job market where they are discriminated as well - in terms of opportunity and wages.



Women in Nepal generally work longer hours than men. In fact, the overall work load of Nepali women is considered to be much higher than the global average for women. They possess very limited property rights, and the lack of access over landed property and credit have deprived women of gainful self-employment opportunities. Women are predominantly engaged in agriculture sector. Only 4 percent of women are self-employed outside agriculture as against 12 percent of men. More than 4 percent women are unpaid family workers, the only category where women have outnumbered men. Less than 1 percent of the working women hold the status of employer.

There has been a gradual shift in women's participation in economic activities from agriculture into the local market economy. They have been moving into small business and self employment ventures in search of wage employment. They are increasingly migrating to urban areas for employment in a range of cottage industries such as carpet weaving, textiles and handicrafts. Women's participation in the informal sectors has increased significantly both in the urban and rural areas. Vending, petty trade, liquor making, and vegetable selling are some of the more common employment ventures undertaken by women.

On the basis of the present female population at 10,939,621 (1998 estimates) and the participation rate of women at 66 percent, the economically active women population is 7.2 million. Since this study concentrates on only female wage workers outside agriculture, and the share of wage employment of women being 2.7 percent, the estimates in this category would be 195 thousand.

With the present available statistics, it may not be possible to breakdown the female population in this category to estimate the size of women employed in the formal and the informal sector.

### **1.3 HOME-BASED WORKERS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR**

Home-based work has been recognized as part of the informal or unorganized sector of the economy. Family-owned micro entrepreneurs constitute the majority of the home-based workers who are mostly engaged in some manufacturing or trade in which almost all family members are engaged in the work. The overwhelming engagement of the whole family in agricultural activities in the rural areas is a very common sight. Virtually the whole *Kumale* family is engaged in pottery. Likewise, family members sit together to create some artistic brass and wooden handicraft in Patan and Bhaktapur. Family members including children take turn to manage small grocery shops. The other type of home-based worker is the piece-rate worker who may get home-work directly from some establishment or through an intermediary, middlemen or *thekedar*.

The latter normally acquires 'orders' from a trader/exporter and distributes work to various home-based workers to fulfill the orders. Wool spinning is considered a piece-rate home-based work which is normally available at any of the numerous carpet factories. On the other hand, the men of Bungmati, Lalitpur acquire wood carving work through middlemen who have contacts with traders in Bhaktapur or other tourist centres of Kathmandu Valley. Similarly, *bidi* making is another home-based work which is scattered near the *bidi* factories at the Tarai region. In these type of home-based work the workers are paid on piece basis at their homestead itself by the middlemen who deliver the products to their contacts.

The recognition of the role of home-based workers in the informal sector of the mainstream economy of the modern world dawned quite late. The recognition of the dynamics of the situation of the home-workers manifested with aggravated exploitations, discriminations and their vulnerability led the international forum to adopt the ILO Recommendation 184 and Convention 177 on home workers in the general conference at its 83rd session in Geneva on 20th June 1996. The diverse nature of the homework in the context of a country's economy, and the socio-cultural dimensions of the home workers have made it quite difficult for many nations to ratify the convention. In fact, no member state has ratified this convention 177 as yet. In Nepal, the subject matter is yet to be seriously recognized.

#### **1.4 HOME-BASED WOMEN WORKERS**

The phenomenon of home-based women workers is not new in the country. Traditionally, they have existed in handloom work among the Newar community of Kathmandu and among some communities in Dhankuta, Palpa, etc. more than 100 years back. The coarse handloom fabrics ordered by *sahujis* were commercially sold in the downtown areas of Asan and Indrachowk. The emergence of export possibilities of Tibetan handmade carpets in the early 1970s saw the spillover of pre-fabricating works of the handmade carpets outside the factories. This resulted in massive home-work opportunities for women in the periphery of the factories in wool spinning. Another example is the indulgence of women in the sweater knitting work in areas like Sankhu, Bhaktapur and Banepa. With the opening up of the country as a tourist destination, large number of women became engaged in hand-knitted sweaters, socks, etc. Today, women home-based workers can be found in a number of other works like handicraft, needlework, embroidery, beadwork, candy wrapping, and even *bidi* rolling and giving finishing touches to *chappal* (rubber slipper wear).

The dealings of the women home workers are small in size, and are based on dependence on known people and verbal transactions. They have little control of their assets. Many are compelled to resort to at least one trade for survival. They acquire work either through some middlemen or directly from some industry. They are mostly regarded as unskilled and semi-skilled, requiring little and very simple tools of production, usually owned by workers themselves. They are easily replaceable, and have no control over the processes of production, or their conditions of work, except to opt out and possibly suffer. This makes them a vulnerable group in the society, devoid of any cover of social protection except private social arrangements at household or community level.

This study, possibly a first, dwells on a first hand insight into the work conditions and living conditions of the home based women workers in the informal sector of the country. The study attempts to surface this largely ignored class of people, and addresses itself to the needs of ameliorating their status which has assumed a significant importance in all women development programs in the country.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE STUDY

#### 2.1 THE OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

The terminology 'home-based worker' is quite new to the labour sector of Nepal. While almost all sectors of labour have by and large been studied by various sociologists and economists in the country, the category of home-based worker has so far been grossly overlooked. This has brought about the urgency to address the issue to understand the status of women workers in the informal sector. With the scarcity of any reliable secondary data, the study has to be based largely on the primary sources and has to virtually start from the scratch.

Some of the critical issues of definitional context involved while initiating the study are as follows:

- making a clear distinction of a home-based worker from the self-employed or own-account worker
- attributing the actual contribution to work by a particular home-based woman worker in a job where other family members are/may be also engaged
- deciding the definitional context of common workplace and flexitime provided by job provider outside the main production centre
- attributing a skill work done more on a casual basis and less as a regular income generating activity as a home-work

In this study, the definition of the home workers provided by the ILO Convention 177 has been used to denote the home-based-women workers in Nepal. In this study, thus, a home-based woman worker means an individual woman

- who works in her home or in other premises of her choice, other than the workplace of the employer;
- for remuneration; and
- which results in a product or service as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs.

However, women having economic independence and degree of autonomy on her work is not considered as home-based women workers.

#### **Objective Of The Study**

The overall objective of the study is to assess the situation of home-based women workers working in the informal sector of Nepal.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- to identify the production sector and regions where home-based women workers are extensively employed;
- to assess the magnitude of the home-based women workers in select group of work;
- to identify the different dimensions of home-based women workers with respect to economic, social, and legal issues; and
- to review the existing national policy, regulatory and structural framework for the protection of the rights of home-based women workers.

### **Scope and Limitation**

The study covers the home-based women workers in Nepal. It mainly covers the economic activities within the purview of urban-urban and urban-rural market linkages where an employer in the urban area provides gainful employment to urban or rural women workers working in their respective homes or elsewhere but not in the premises of the employers. The study subject is the home-based women workers engaged in gainful employment and will not include:

- women engaged in household work not classified as productive work;
- women engaged in self-employment and not working for any external employer or job provider;
- women engaged as part of the total household members earning where it is difficult to distinctly demarcate the workload and gain of a particular woman worker.

This study was completed in a very short time of two months during mid-June to mid-August, 1999. The time available for the study including the field survey was rather short, especially in the context of coverage of the country as a whole. Furthermore, the time of study coinciding with the rainy season and peak rice plantation period, it was very difficult to catch hold of the time and attention of most of the home-based workers.

## **2.2 METHODOLOGY**

Considering the definitional complexities and width of the study, a preparatory work was carried out in a series of preliminary interactions with the advisory committee instituted by the Ministry of Labour for the study. Further, interaction with some known home-based job providers and some relevant cooperatives, NGOs, as well as consultation of various literature on the subject matter formed the basis of the study. In addition to this, the extensive interaction with relevant people in the field, the clustering of regions in the country, and categorizing different types of home-work was also done.

For the study, the country has been divided into three regions - Central, Eastern and Western [Annex - 1]. The Central region comprising of the Kathmandu Valley and its adjoining areas which together cover almost 60 percent of all business transaction of the country has been taken as one cluster. The Eastern region which has a better aggregate economic indicator after the Central region has been taken as another cluster. This region covers the eastern part of the country from Narayani Zone to Mechi Zone. The western

region covering the western part of the country from Gandaki and Lumbini Zone to Mahakali Zone has been taken as the third cluster.

Likewise, the home-based work has been categorized into three groups according to the end use of the products, namely industrial items, art/gift items and household items. The product in which a home-based worker adds value through a sub contract work of an industry has been grouped as an industrial item. The product which employs creative and artistic skills has been grouped as an art/gift item. The product which is mainly used in households has been grouped as a household item.

### **Data Collection Instrument**

As an instrument for collecting data, two appropriate schedules were developed. These schedules were pre-tested to lend credibility to the final survey. These two sets of schedules or survey data sheets were designed with open-ended questions to be asked through structured and unstructured interviews during the survey. Some of the entries in the data sheets were to be made through critical observation of the surveyors. After analyzing the problems encountered by the surveyors at the time of pretest, the Survey Data Sheet-1 and Survey Data Sheet-2 were finalized. Survey Data Sheet-1 [Annex - 2] was designed to gather information from the women workers while the Survey Data Sheet-2 [Annex - 3] was designed for the job providers (the owners/employers and the intermediaries/middlemen).

### **Sample Frame and Sample Design**

As mentioned earlier, developing a sample frame for the study at this stage is quite impossible in the absence of any data-base on home-based women workers in the country. Therefore, arriving at a reliable estimate of the actual number of home-based women workers and their distribution may not be conclusive through the existing study data base. However, considering the time and financial resources available for the study, and the absence of a sampling frame, a rapid assessment through a purposive sampling method has been adopted.

An approach of urban-urban market linkage and urban-rural market linkage has been considered to locate and identify the samples for the survey. A sensible starting point for identifying the women workers was the market - the market for the final products in which the workers are involved at some stage of processing. In Nepal, commercial activities of all major products are invariably urban-centred and heavily Kathmandu-centred. Irrespective of the urban or rural location of the home-based workers and the job providers, the goods ultimately landed in the urban markets. Thus, a three stage sampling method has been applied in the study.

**First Stage:** In the first stage of sample design, out of the present 58 recognized municipalities in the country, those having a population more than 25 thousand were selected for consideration. [Annex - 4] The 27 sample municipalities in this criteria comprised of about 85 percent of the total population of all the municipalities. The regional distribution of the sample municipalities were as follows:

- Central region (5): Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Madhyapur Thimi and Kirtipur

- Eastern region (11): Biratnagar, Dharan, Birgunj, Bharatpur, Hetauda, Janakpur, Damak, Triyuga, Mechinagar, Itahari and Ratnanagar
- Western region (11): Pokhara, Mahendranagar, Nepalgunj, Dhangadhi, Siddharthanagar, Butwal, Guleriya, Lekhnath, Tribhubannagar, Putalibazaar, Tikapur

Key informants in the sample urban centres were utilized to identify the employers and intermediaries involved in providing the home-work, and also to understand the urban-urban and urban-rural linkages in the home-based work system in the country. The key informants were drawn from a cross section of organizations like the district chambers of commerce and industry, district departments of cottage and small industry, NGOs and INGOs, rural development banks, and individual traders, wholesalers and shopkeepers located in all the sample municipalities.

**Second Stage:** In the second stage, samples of employers or intermediaries were randomly selected from the list obtained through interviews with the key informants. The Survey Data Sheet-2 was utilized to identify the location of home-workers involved in the processing of individual groups of the product items.

**Third Stage:** In the third stage, the home-based women workers were randomly selected for survey after visiting the exact locations on the basis of the information collected from the employers and intermediaries. To give justice to the survey, at least five samples per location were selected for every group of product item ensuring coverage of all identified clusters of the subject. This way, altogether 542 samples were selected for the survey. The breakdown of the sample for the regional clusters vis-à-vis items group is given in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Sample Distribution

<u>ITEMS/REGION</u>	<u>CENTRAL</u>	<u>EASTERN</u>	<u>WESTERN</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	
Industrial items		143	56	29	228
Art/Gift items		23	37	8	68
Household items	165	63	18		246
Total		331	156	55	542

### 2.3 DATA COLLECTION

The survey was carried out during a period of five weeks by a team of three surveyors each covering the Central, Eastern, and Western regional clusters respectively. The surveyors first collected information regarding the location of home-based workers in each municipality of a region through interviews with the employers/intermediaries on Survey Data Sheet-2. As mentioned earlier, the sample employers/intermediaries were identified based on meetings with key informants at every sample municipalities. After identifying the samples of women workers and different types of wage-based work carried out in a specific location, the surveyors interviewed and collected information by asking questions and observing different dimensions regarding social status, work, working

conditions, living conditions, degree of decision making, etc. of home-based women workers through the Survey Data Sheet-1. Some information on work condition and living condition were gathered based on the personal observation and inference of the surveyors.

#### **2.4 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

Once the survey was completed, the data was coded and entered into the computer. Descriptive rather than inferential statistical tools were used to interpret the status of the home-based women workers in the informal sector of Nepal. Some cases have been utilized to highlight the status of these women.

The findings of the study are detailed in the chapters 3 to 7 of this report.

#### **2.5 POLICY REVIEW**

Beside the collection of data through the survey and subsequent analysis, a brief review of the policies and legislations regarding women workers in the informal sector and policy pronouncements of major political parties was made to assess the existing situation of women workers and their rights. Important persons of key institutions involved with the home-based women workers were interviewed to supplement the findings of the policy review. Chapter 8 of this report contains the insights of the review.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE EXTENT AND MAGNITUDE

#### 3.1 HOME-BASED WORK SYSTEM

When top-dressing of modern market mechanism was applied to the traditional craftsmanship, Nepalese handicraft began to find acceptance in the international markets like America, the Europe, Japan, etc. The history of the beginning of exports of hand-knotted woolen carpet to the German market does not go beyond 20 years. The accelerated growth in demand in the export market created the need for increased workers. The demand for the products in the international market was, however, due to their 'hand-made' characteristic. This 'imposed' the barrier to machines in the production of the carpets, and led to the influx of large number of workers in the factory premises. Since it became quite impossible to accommodate and control all the necessary number of manual workers in the factory premises, certain processes like wool spinning and even carpet weaving were deemed fit to be carried out outside the factory premises, preferably by women, with minimal instruction and supervision. Thus started the phenomenon and the first major emergence of home-based workers in the country.

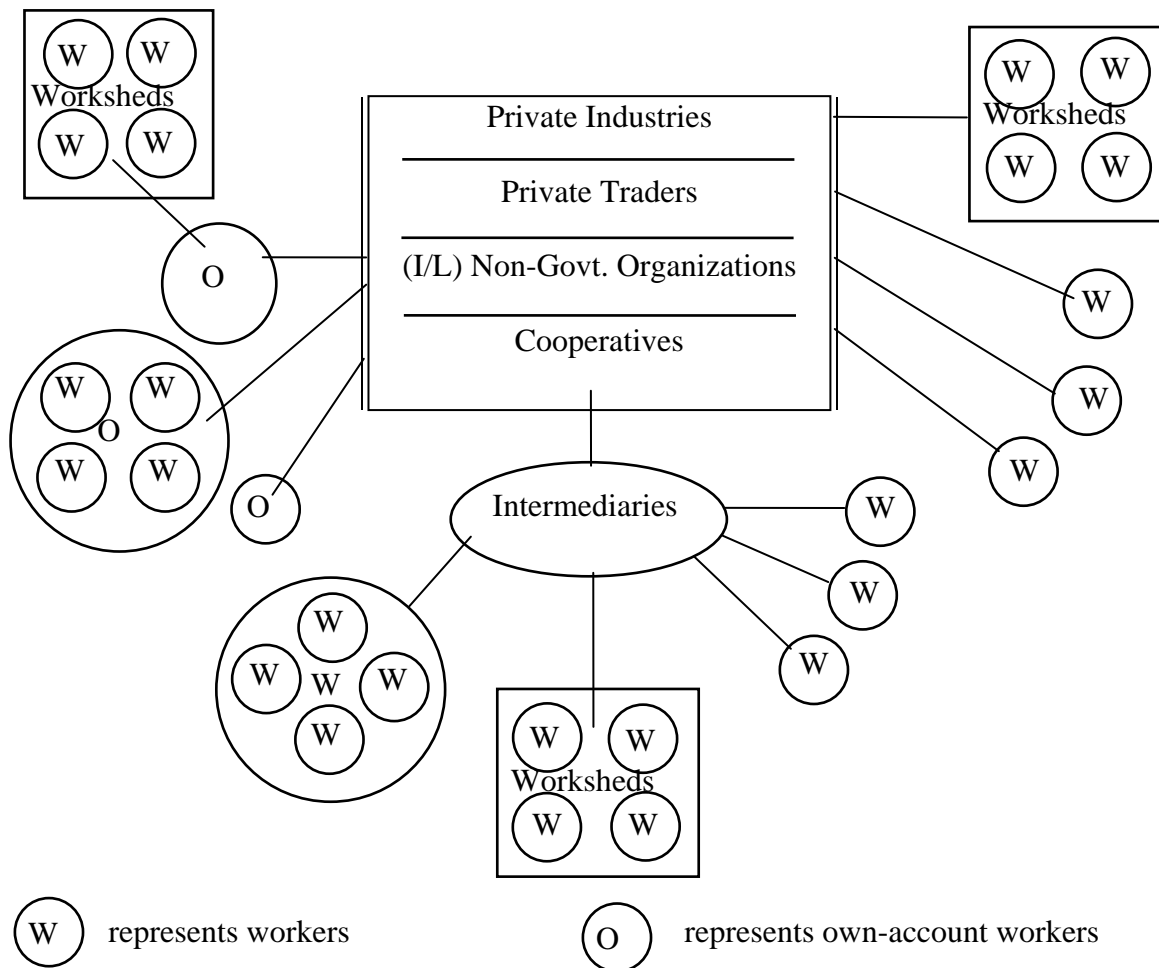
Subsequently, the home-based work concept developed in the sector of hand-knitted woolen sweaters, socks, caps, etc. which found significant entry into European and American markets. Since these products also sold due to their characteristic of being 'hand-knitted', this sector also required more hands, that too, the sensitive and delicate hands of women. Although the marketing of handicraft, art and gift items was started a long time back through the government sponsored Handicraft Sales Emporium, the Trade Promotion Centre and some in the private sector, the actual trend was very sluggish. Since the last one and half decade, various NGOs have included this sector in their social development programs. Today, this sector plays an important role in assisting home-based women workers.

Besides the export-driven sector, few industrial and household items produced by small scale enterprises for domestic market featured the employment of women workers. Among the industrial items, some industries like *bidi* making, candy and slipper production started using home-based workers on contractual and piece-rate basis. This was more of a ploy to avoid certain provisions of the labour legislations and reduce the possible pressures from trade unions.

Nonetheless, although the method of employment may be specific to the sector concerned, the phenomenon of job providers and home-based women workers has been commonly acceptable in the production of certain industrial items, art and gift items or household items operating in the informal sector. In this context, the schematic diagram shown in Figure 3.1 illustrates the home-based work system in the informal sector.

Figure 3.1  
**HOME-BASED WORK SYSTEM IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR**





The main source of work could be some industrial unit, trader/exporter, or NGO or a cooperative institution. Some industries especially in the carpet sector and even NGOs like Kumbeshwor Technical School provide a common working area (workshed) where women can come, work and leave at their own convenience without any rigid commitment of time and volume of work. Some intermediary agencies may also provide a working space away from the home or the establishment of the agency. Groups of family members or individual women workers do their work and get paid according their outputs. Then there are the individual women who get work, like *bidi* rolling and candy wrapping, directly from the main source and from middlemen/contractors like in the case of woolen knitwear. There are the home-based self employed or own-account workers who produce certain items mainly handicrafts on their own and showcase them in the retail outlets of the main sources like NGOs, private traders and co-operatives.

All the items/products in which home-based women workers are engaged are classified into three major groups - Industrial items, Art and gift items, and Household items.

### 3.2 INDUSTRIAL ITEMS

The product of the work of a home-based woman worker which is mostly part of the manufacturing process of an industry has been classified in the industrial item group. In most cases, the job provider of such work is the manufacturing industry. The women workers in the industrial item group are basically concentrated in the following areas of work:

- wool spinning
- carpet weaving
- bidi making
- candy wrapping
- others not elsewhere specified (Slipper finishing, etc.)

### **Wool spinning**

Wool, the chief raw material in carpet manufacturing and sweater knitting, is mostly imported from New Zealand and Tibet, and some from others. The wool imported is first machine carded and then spun by hand. The traders get the job of spinning done either by hiring spinners, mostly women, inside the factory premises, or giving the work outside. In the latter method, bulk job is dispensed either through intermediaries or *thekedars*, or directly through home-based women workers. The trend of dispensing the wool spinning job both directly and through intermediaries is gaining popularity.

The wool traders are mostly concentrated in the Chabahil-Jorpati area of Kathmandu. These traders have formed the Central Woolen Yarn Industries Association in Kathmandu basically to protect their own interests. The workers are dispersed in the Kathmandu valley mainly at Jorpati, Gokarna, Harisiddhi, Thimi, Lubhu, Chapagaon, Dallu, Swoyambhu, Bhaktapur, and Kirtipur.[Photo - 1] Some traders are also trying to promote this trade in Jhapa district.

The rate per kilogram for wool spinning ranges from Rs. 20 for 60 knot wool to Rs. 65 for 100 knot wool while the intermediaries give Rs. 17 for 60 knot to Rs. 40 for 100 knot wool. Based on interviews with several persons, job providers and members of the yarn association, it is estimated that there are about 12,000 women wool spinners working as home-based workers in the country, and the disbursement of wages among the workers in this sector is estimated to be almost Rs. 1.2 crore.

### **Carpet weaving**

While many large carpet factories expanded their production capacity, small fabricators could not sustain during the sluggish demand in the export market. Some of these carpet manufacturers, instead of taking the risk of investing large capital in expanding the factories, are giving out the job of carpet weaving to small fabricators. The finishing process is then carried out in the factories. These small fabricators work in groups of 5 or 6 either in their own homes or in small rented rooms. They may be from the same family or from different families, but work together as home-based workers. A larger number of women have migrated into the Kathmandu valley mainly due to the opportunities provided by this sector of work. The men do other auxiliary jobs while the women mostly do the knotting job. The women workers here do not follow any fixed time schedule and generally they work on their own.

The production of these small carpet fabricators that employ home-based women workers are tied to some big industries that carry out the finishing process. The small fabricators are mostly found in Gokarna-Jorpati, Kirtipur, Harisidhhi, Bhainsepati, and Swoyambhu areas. [Photo - 2] These carpet factories (or the job providers) provide necessary equipment and materials and the workers can come on their own time and weave carpet for as long as they want to. Some NGOs like the Fair Trade Group are promoting this type of work as part of their women development programs. There are an estimated 2,200 home-based women workers in this sector. A total of Rs. 5 million per month is disbursed as wages to home-based women workers this sector.

### **Bidi making**

Prior to the influx of cigarettes, especially the low grade tobacco cigarettes, *bidi* making used to be very popular in the Terai districts of Nepal especially in Birgunj and Biratnagar. The advent of strict labour legislation and enactment of trade union laws coupled with large intrusions by cigarettes into their domain, *bidi* factories are facing huge losses. *Bidi* is cheap and consumed in the local market only. Today, most of the *bidi* factories are giving out the work of *bidi* rolling and binding to home-based workers, specially the women. These workers live near the *bidi* factories so that carrying tobacco leaves and finished *bidi* become easier and cheaper. [Photo - 3] It has been found that some factories are looking after the workers' accommodation. Most women workers in this field are from India, mainly from Malda of West Bengal. At present, there are an estimated 600 workers in this sector. With an average earning of around Rs. 2,000 per month, almost Rs. 1.2 million is being distributed as wages only in this sector.

### **Candy wrapping**

Candy (commonly known as chocolate) in Nepal is manufactured in large biscuit and confectionery industries, small cottage industries and at the household level. At the household level, candy is produced through a simple and crude method of cooking sugary mixture in a vat and simple molding. These manufacturers mostly situated in the Terai region in places like Dhangadhi, Nepalgunj, Bhairahawa, Butwal, Biratnagar, Birtamod, etc. dispense the work of wrapping the candy with some plastic wrapper to home-based women workers. Such candies are cheap and are sold locally. The women workers are paid at a rate of Rs. 2 per kilo and a woman earns about Rs. 1200 per month through this type of work. About 900 home-based women workers are engaged in this work, and an estimated Rs. 1.08 million is disbursed as wages to these women.

### **Others n.s.e.**

Around 1000 home-based women workers are engaged in various other work like slipper flap finishing, finishing of rubber shoes, dot pen finishing, silk yarn spinning, etc. These types of work are available in few numbers in the Terai, and the women earn around Rs. 1400 per month in these work. An estimated Rs. 1.4 million is distributed as wages in this sector of work.

## **3.3 ART AND GIFT ITEMS**

The product of the work of a home-based woman worker mainly in the handicraft sector and sold in gift shops as items for collection has been classified in the art and gift

item group. Most of these products are exported and are valued collection items popular among the foreign tourists visiting the country. The job providers of such work are generally the traders. The home-based women workers in the art and gift item group are concentrated in the following areas of work:

- Mithila art
- Natural fibres
- Bead working
- Other not elsewhere specified

### **Mithila art**

This is a typical style of art work basically comprising of paintings, and painted products like cards, mirror frames, boxes, etc. and other products of leather, fabric, etc. These products are marketed in many touristic areas of Kathmandu, Pokhara and Chitwan, and are available in retail outlets of some NGOs like Mahaguthi, Sana Hastakala, etc. in Kopundol, Lalitpur. The art work is a display of the ethnic culture of the Mithila people living in and around Janakpur, but the women involved in this art work are mainly concentrated in Kuwa village of Janakpur. The afore mentioned NGOs and especially the Janakpur Women's Development Centre, a member of the Fair Trade Group are promoting the art as an income generating activity for economic upliftment of the Mithila women. Around 200 women are engaged as home-based workers in this sector, and individual earning is about Rs. 1500 per month.

### **Natural fibre**

*Allo* and hemp are found in the high altitude Himalayan mountains in eastern and western Nepal, and are sources of natural fibres for making most of the textiles needed by households in the mountains. The process of separating the fibre from the bark of the giant wild plants is laborious and time-consuming and involves many different steps before a useable yarn is produced. The textile is gentle to the skin and has the characteristics of being warm in the cool season and cool in the hot season.

The *allo* fibres are brought to the urban centres, especially in Kathmandu, where entrepreneurs and traders give the material to home-based workers to weave or knit into fabrics and make clothes, table mats, bags, belts and other decorative products. About 200 home-based workers are involved in making these decorative products which are marketed by the WEAN Cooperative and the Fair Trade Group through their retail outlets as well by other individual traders in touristic areas. Women workers in this field earn about Rs. 1000 per month.

### **Bead working**

Bead or *pote* is one of the most important and the cheapest jewelry of Hindu women. All married Brahmin and Chhetri women wear bead necklaces. The Kashmiri

Muslims at Rakhi Bazaar in Indrachowk, Kathmandu have been involved in the trading of these bead necklaces since their settlement in Kathmandu some hundred years ago. They import beads of various colours, shapes and sizes from India, string them into necklaces of various designs, and sell them. Previously, bead working was done by this small community themselves. But lately, they have been employing about 800 women living in Sunargaon and Machhegaon areas of Kathmandu to do this work at their own homes as per specified designs. [Photo - 4] These home-based women workers earn about Rs. 1000 per month.

### **Others n.e.s.**

The other items in the art and gift item category include doll making, basketry, Tharu stitch, other art and painting work, etc. About 700 women are intermittently engaged in producing these assorted items which are basically sold in the touristic market of the country. The average income in this field is about Rs. 1000 per month.

## **3.4 HOUSEHOLD ITEMS**

The products of the home-based women workers which are used as general purpose items by an individual or in the households of common Nepalese have been classified in the household item group. Some household items have become quite popular in the export market and largely supplemented by NGO interventions. The home-based women workers in the household item group are concentrated in the following areas of work:

- Knitting
- Fabric weaving
- *Muda* and mat making
- Others not elsewhere specified

### **Knitting**

Sweater knitting by hand is commonly done by women in almost all households of the country. Traditionally, women have been knitting sweaters, socks, gloves and caps for the personal wear of their family members during the cold season. With the opening of the country to tourists, hand-knitted wears, especially those made of Tibetan wool, have been largely popular among foreign tourists, and later as an export item in the western world. The major market for hand-knitted wears is Thamel and its surrounding areas in Kathmandu.

The traders and exporters of hand-knitted wears give bulk orders to concerned entrepreneurs or *thekedars* (intermediaries) who in turn purchase wool from wool traders located mostly in Chhetrapati near Thamel. An individual *thekedar* distributes the knitting jobs to 20 to 30 home-based women workers living in the Kathmandu Valley and Kavre. These same *thekedars* collect the knitted products from the women workers and supply to the traders and exporters. While the women knitters are paid at rates varying from Rs. 70 for a plain sweater to Rs. 350 for a sweater in difficult pattern, the *thekedars* charge the traders around Rs. 100-110 for plain knitted sweaters and up to Rs. 400 per piece for sweaters with difficult patterns.

The home-based women workers are mostly concentrated in places like Sankhu, Bhaktapur, Banepa, Nala, Panauti, Patan, Thali and Kirtipur area. [Photo - 5] It is interesting to note that almost all women including young girls in Sankhu are engaged in sweater knitting. One can observe the whole women community - almost 3000 women - engaged in this work as if it was some sort of a community work. An estimated 7,200 women workers are engaged in this particular work providing an average income of Rs. 1500 to them. Almost Rs. 10.8 million in wages disbursed per month in this sector alone.

### **Fabric weaving**

There are mainly two types of fabric weaving: Dhaka weaving and simple cotton fabric (*khaddar*) weaving. Dhaka cloth consists of typical colourful patterns weaved in intricate designs, and is traditionally used for decorative display in making Nepali Dhaka *topi* (caps), *cholo* (blouse) and shawls for women, *labeda sulwal* dress for the bridegroom. Lately, Dhaka fabric is also used for other ingenious decorative purposes. In Kathmandu, Dhaka weaving is generally done in some factory units, whereas, in the hilly areas of country like Palpa, Dhankuta, Tehrathum, etc., this type of weaving is all home-based. Plain *khaddar* handloom fabric weaving was a traditional craft prevalent in Bhaktapur, Lalitpur, Kirtipur, Kathmandu and Madhyapur. It was the chief source of textiles for the people of the Kathmandu Valley. However, this sort of weaving is limited to some places of Kirtipur and Lubhu. [Photo - 6]

Around 1200 women mostly concentrated in Kirtipur, Lubhu and some other hilly townships of the Eastern and Western regions are engaged as home-based workers in this field. Some NGO activities in the field have been helping women to sustain amidst competition from Indian and machine-made fabrics. The women earn around Rs. 2000 per month in this work.

### **Muda and mat making**

Mats like *gundri*, *jhalla*, *sukul*, etc. made of some types of dried wheat and paddy straw, jute yarns, etc. are popular forms of mats in rural areas. These are local home-based products available in the domestic market and commonly used in households. In the Terai, especially in the east, *muda* - a kind of stool for sitting made of strips of bamboo or cane - is gaining wide popularity. Around 600 women are engaged in this item group including 400 mostly in Jhapa district are engaged in making *muda*.

### **Others n.e.s.**

In the other items in the household item category, women are engaged in assorted work like making and packing *daltho* and *papad* (both eaten as snacks), making *dhoop* and *batti* (incense burned during worships), sewing clothes, etc. an estimated 1000 home-based women workers are distributed unevenly in this category. Their estimated earning per person through this work would be about Rs. 700 per month at the most.

From the survey, it has been found that there are an estimated 29,000 home-based women workers in the country. The breakdown of the estimation of the numbers in the

three item groups in three regions of the country is given in Table 3.1. An estimated amount of Rs. 40 million is disbursed per month in different types of wage work available for the home-based women workers.

Table 3.1 Estimated Home-based Women Workers

ITEMS	CENTRAL REGION	EASTERN REGION	WESTERN REGION	TOTAL
<b>INDUSTRIAL ITEMS</b>	<b>12,500</b>	<b>3,700</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>17,100</b>
• Wool spinning	10,000	2,000	ni	12,000
• Carpet weaving	2,000	200	ni	2,200
• Bidi making	ni	600	ni	600
• Candy wrapping	100	400	400	900
• Others n.e.s.	400	500	500	1,400
<b>ART &amp; GIFT ITEMS</b>	<b>1,250</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>1,900</b>
• Mithila art	ni	200	ni	200
• Natural fibre works	50	100	50	200
• Bead working	800	ni	ni	800
• Others n.e.s.	400	200	100	700
<b>HOUSEHOLD ITEMS</b>	<b>8,500</b>	<b>1,000</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>10,000</b>
• Knitting	7,000	200	ni	7,200
• Fabric weaving	800	200	200	1,200
• <i>Muda</i> & mat making	ni	400	200	600
• Others n.e.s.	700	200	100	1,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22,250</b>	<b>5,200</b>	<b>1,550</b>	<b>29,000</b>

Note; "ni" denotes "not identified"

The number of workers engaged in a particular work fluctuates according to the market situation of the particular item. The present period of study is considered to be a period of depression in terms of quantity of work available for the home-workers. Many home-based workers have either been remaining idle or not getting full share of work as they used to. Beside these women workers, there are other women engaged in manyfolds in other areas of work in informal sector of the country.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SOCIAL STATUS

Most women engage themselves in home-based earning activities to supplement their household income in order to raise their own as well as their families quality of life. For many, it is a compulsion and the only source of earning for the household. For others, it is a source of additional income to the household but still a compulsion as their other source is not adequate to maintain their household expenses. For a few, it is a source of "pocket money" which they utilize for non-basic expenses or personal expenses. Understanding various parameters like age, marital status, family size, education and training, ethnic groups, migration, and family's primary occupation and earnings, it provides a perspective of the social status of these women workers.

#### 4.1 AGE DISTRIBUTION

Most of the women workers fall in the age bracket of 19 to 40 years : 35.8 percent in 19 to 30 and 37.1 percent in 31 to 40 years age groups respectively. 0.7 percent are girl child workers (aged less than 14 years) and are found in the Western region. The minor female workers aged between 14 to 18 years are also found in the ratio of 10.1 percent of the total women workers. The average age of the women workers is 31.4 years. Table 4.1 depicts the age distribution of women workers.

Table 4.1: Age Distribution

AGE GROUP	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hold	Central	Eastern	Western
5 to 13 years	0.7	1	0	1	0	0	5
14 to 18 years	10.1	14	3	9	13	2	15
19 to 30 years	35.8	39	49	28	43	19	42
31 to 40 years	37.1	38	45	34	26	65	27
41 to 50 years	12.4	5	3	22	12	13	9
51 to 60 years	3.9	3	0	6	6	1	2
61 years and over	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Majority, 14 percent of the minor workers are mainly found in the industrial item group, 9 percent in household item group and only 3 percent in the art/gift item group. Regionwise, minor workers are mainly found in the Western (15 percent) and Central (13 percent) part of the country, whereas only 2 percent are found in the Eastern region. Interestingly, no women above 60 years of age is engaged in this sector. The daughter-in-laws and daughters prevent the elderly women from working due to their old age and hence they themselves engage in the home-based work in which the elderly women were previously engaged in. The old women themselves complain about their deteriorating health conditions due to hard work at their young age. They suffer from problems like sore eyes and bronchitis, which make it difficult to continue working. The average household size in the Central region is 5.90, but the variation in size ranged from a maximum of 14 to a minimum of 1.



## 4.2 MARTIAL STATUS

Almost 71 percent women workers are married and living with their husbands and families. 4.4 percent are widows and 0.4 percent have *Sauta*. No women workers are divorced or separated. Table 4.2 shows the marital status of the women workers.

Table 4.2: Marital Status

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hold	Central	Eastern	Western
Single	24.1	24	16	27	31	3	45
Married	71.1	74	80	65	63	94	53
Widow	4.4	2	3	8	5	3	2
Married and having <i>Sauta</i>	0.4	0	1	0	1	0	0
Divorcee/separated	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Itemwise, 80 percent of women workers engaged in art and gift item group are married. Regionwise, 94 percent of women workers in the Eastern region are married. The majority of the women have expressed their satisfaction over their additional role as earning women in addition to raising children and taking care of other household work.

## 4.3 FAMILY SIZE

The average size of household of women workers is 5.83 which is very close to the national average of 5.7 persons per household. There is very little variation in the average size of the households of women workers at the Central, Western and Eastern regions with 5.90, 5.67 and 5.89 respectively. It is worth noting that the average household size of women workers in the Central region, i.e. 5.90 persons is much higher than the average household size of Kathmandu Valley which is stated as 4.90 in the national census.

## 4.4 ETHNIC GROUP DISTRIBUTION

The Newar community with 41.3 percent comprises of the biggest group of women workers. They are followed by the Muslims (14.5 percent), Chhetris (14.2) percent, and Bahun with 6.4 percent respectively. Others like Mithila, Gurung, Tamang, Tharu and Rai/Limbu make up 3 to 5 percent of the total. The ethnic group distribution of women workers is given in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Ethnic Group Distribution

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hold	Central	Eastern	Western
Newar	41.3	23	16	65	62	5	20
Muslim	14.5	13	16	15	3	9	16
Chhetri	14.2	25	7	7	12	6	47
Bahun	6.4	7	16	2	7	3	15
Maithali	4.8	4	26	0	3	11	0
Gurung	4.4	7	3	3	4	7	0
Tamang	4.2	10	1	0	7	0	0
Tharu	3.5	7	6	0	0	12	0
Rai/Limbu	3.5	1	6	5	0	44	0
Magar	0.2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Others	3.0	3	2	3	2	3	2

In the household item group, 65 percent of the women workers engaged in the sector are predominantly Newars. The Newars also dominate the industrial item group with 23 percent. It has been observed that among the Newars, the Maharjan or Jyapu caste who are renowned as hard workers, are engaged in industrial item group jobs like wool spinning and carpet making, whereas, the Shrestha and other castes produce household items like woolen knitwear. It has been observed that most of the Newar women workers are concentrated in the Central region (62 percent) mainly in Kirtipur, Chapagaun, Lubhu, Sankhu, Bhaktapur and Banepa.

25 percent of women workers in the industrial item group are Chhetris, whereas 26 percent are Mithila and comprise of the largest community engaged in the art/gifts item group. Mithilas are mainly concentrated in the Eastern region especially in Janakpur area. Regionwise, Chhetris are predominant in the Western region and engaged in industrial item group. Likewise Rai/Limbu are concentrated in the Eastern region and engaged mainly in art and gift item and household item groups.

#### 4.5 MIGRATION

Mobility of people from one locality to another in search of work and better economic opportunities is common. Large number of migrated women workers are mainly found in the Central region, Kathmandu obviously - the capital and economic hub of the country. In the Western region, about 5.5 percent were found to have migrated from Chitwon and Nawalparasi districts. In the Eastern region, about 1.3 percent had migrated from India, and are mainly engaged in *bidi* rolling. In the Central region, about 29 percent are migrants mainly from Jhapa, Sunsari, Okhaldhunga, Dhanusa, Ramechhap and Kavre districts. They are mainly engaged in industrial item group like wool yarns spinning and woolen carpet weaving.

#### 4.6 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Almost 56.5 percent of women workers cannot read and write. Furthermore, only 37.8 percent of the workers can be considered ordinary literate. The remaining 5.7 percent are high school graduates. No one has had the opportunity of college education. The distribution of education level and skill training of women workers is given in Table 4.4

Table 4. 4: Education Level & Skill Training

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
Education							
No education	56.5	68	28	54	60	58	31
Ord. Reading/writing	37.8	30	57	39	37	40	36
S.L.C. pass	5.7	2	15	7	3	2	33
College graduate	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Skill Training							
	26.2	13	71	26	15	47	35

Among women workers engaged in art/gift item group, 15 percent are school graduates. 33 percent of workers in the Western region are school graduate's. While only 31 percent are illiterate. This means more women workers in the region (69 percent) are literate, whereas only 40 to 42 percent are literate in the Central and Eastern regions respectively.

26.2 percent of the total women workers have undertaken various type of skill training at different levels. Trained workers are mostly concentrated in the art and gift item group (71 percent), and located in the Eastern (47 percent) and Western (35 percent) regions. The contribution of the non-governmental organizations for uplifting the women workers is reflected in these figures. It is surprising to note that very little skill training has been provided in the Central region (15 percent only) and in industrial item group (13 percent only), where the concentration of women workers is observed.

#### 4.7 FAMILY OCCUPATION AND EARNING

Most of the home-based women workers live with their families. The basic income in most of the households is through earning as labourer by some family member. Besides this source, other family members have their own occupation and earning too. Less than 30 percent of the total workers surveyed could emphatically state their family earning. This may be because they do not really know the actual earned amount as the earning family members do not openly reveal their earning to the women in the house. It could also be that they do not want to tell the surveyor, since the income is small and is embarrassing to tell a stranger. In the absence of these figures, it is not possible to compute the share of the women workers in the total income of family. However, all women workers are of the opinion that their income has substantially helped in fulfilling their basic needs of fooding and clothing which would otherwise have been difficult.

Among the family members, 56 percent of the total women workers' husbands have their own occupation and earning. Out of these, 36.5 percent work as labourers, 32.6 percent are involved in organizational services, 17.4 percent are involved in agriculture, and 13.5 percent own commercial businesses.

12.4 percent of the total women workers' parents or in-laws have their own occupation and earning as well. Out of these, 32.8 percent are involved in agriculture, 25.4 percent work as labourers, 20.9 percent have jobs in organizations, and 20.9 percent have some business of their own.

4.1 percent of the total women workers' sons or daughters also have their own occupation and earning. Out of these, 77.3 percent work as labourers, 13.6 percent have jobs in some organizations, 4.6 percent are involved in agriculture, and 4.5 percent have their own business.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE JOB & WORK ENVIRONMENT

#### 5.1 TYPES OF JOB PROVIDERS

56.3 percent of the total women workers are getting work through *thekedars*, group leaders or coordinators. Irrespective of what they are called, they are the intermediaries or the middlemen. Next largest source of work is the trader or the factory management itself for 42.0 percent of the total women workers receive work through them. Table 5.1 shows the distribution of the type of job providers.

Table 5.1: Types of Job Providers

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
Thekedar/coordinator	56.3	50	62	61	72	39	9
Traders/factory	42.0	50	32	37	27	58	91
Relatives/friends	1.5	0	6	2	1	3	0
Others	0.2	0	0	0	0	1	0

In the industrial item group, the jobs like *bidi* making or candy wrapping which are concentrated mainly in the Eastern and Western parts of the country, are given directly to home-based workers without involving any middlemen. The industrial item work like wool spinning, concentrated mainly in the Central region, especially in the Kathmandu valley, is given to the women workers directly and partly through middlemen. The middlemen figure prominently in woolen knitwear, weaving, and some household items like bead work and others. Middlemen are involved in both the commercial enterprises in the private sector as well as in non-profit making commercial-social sector. In the former, the traders give bulk order to the middlemen who in turn are free to decide on their portion in the game. Whereas, in the latter sector, organizations themselves appoint the group leaders and decide on the benefits they want. It has been observed that certain NGOs or the non-profit making commercial-social organizations are working as catalytic agents for reducing exploitation of home-based women workers in some specific areas.

#### 5.2 FLEXIBILITY IN SELECTING JOB PROVIDERS

60 percent of women workers stated that there was flexibility in selecting their job providers. However, though possible, most of them do not like to shift from one job provider to another despite many complaints like job providers not paying their wages in time, deducting wages for reasons like material wastage and bad quality. The profile of the possibility of selecting job providers is given in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Possibility of Selecting Job Providers

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
Yes	60.0	57	22	74	66	44	65
No	40.0	43	78	26	34	56	35

Itemwise, 78 percent of the workers in the art and gift item group expressed their view that they can not select their job providers on their own will, whereas 74 percent of the workers in the households item group opined that they are quite free to shift from one job provider to another. Among the workers in the industrial item group, almost 57 percent said that they can chose to work for any job provider. The opinion about job providers in this regard in the private sector is quite interesting "as there are many job providers and many workers in the market, the selection depends on the relationship between the two (parties)". It has been observed that there is no strong binding force in the relationship between the two. There is a big question about job security for particular women workers. The NGOs involved in this field are trying to improve the security situation among women workers by providing better benefits than those given by the purely commercialized private sector job providers.

### 5.3 JOB REGULARITY

68 percent of women workers get work quite regularly. Only 12.2 percent stated that they get work only sometimes. Table 5.3 shows the proportion of the regularity in getting work.

Table 5.3: Regularity of job

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
Regularly	68.1	84	62	56	78	47	73
Most of the time	19.7	10	13	30	16	30	11
Only some time	12.2	6	25	14	6	23	16

It seems that women workers in the art and gift item and household item groups get work less regularly than those in the industrial item group. 84 percent in the industrial item group get regular work as against 6 percent workers getting work only sometimes.

In the Eastern region, getting work regularly seems difficult. Only 47 percent women workers get work on a regular basis, whereas 23 percent get work occasionally. In the Central region, 78 percent get work regularly.

### 5.4 JOB AGREEMENT

Job agreement is one of the most important legal linkage between the job provider and the worker. In the case of the women workers, a mere 5.7 percent receive some formal

job contracts from the job providers. The majority of them, i.e., 51.7 percent work simply on verbal orders, while 42.6 percent work on the basis of simple job notes which do not hold any legal weightage. Security of job is thus completely controlled by the job providers. This may raise chances of exploitation of women workers by the job providers. The proportions of the types of job agreement is given in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4: Types of Job Agreement

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
Verbal	51.7	49	62	56	49	40	100
Job note	42.6	49	18	44	51	40	0
Formal contract	5.7	2	20	0	0	20	0

It has been observed that 20 percent of those in the art and gift item group have formal contract with job providers which is a positive indication of job security. The NGOs involved in this field are the ones that have introduced this system of contracting. An example is in the Mithila art item in the Eastern region

## 5.5 OWNERSHIP OF THE FACILITIES FOR WORK.

In the formal sector, it is generally the responsibility of the job provider to provide the three factors of work, namely raw material, equipment and working space. However, in the home-work sector, this situation is quite different. Table 5.5 shows the ownership status of these three factors.

85.2 percent of the women workers get raw materials from job providers while 14.8 percent have to purchase raw materials by themselves. Some workers in the household item group (27 percent) and the art and gift item group (15 percent) purchase raw materials by themselves to fulfill the order of job providers. 33 percent of women workers in the Eastern region purchase required raw materials personally. This is mostly the case in the production of *muda* and mats.

Table 5.5: Raw Materials, Equipment and Working Space Ownership

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
<b>Raw Materials</b>							
Worker's own	14.8	2	15	27	9	33	0
Provided by employer	85.2	98	85	73	91	67	100
<b>Equipment</b>							
Worker's own	63.8	44	54	85	67	54	73
Provided by employer	36.2	56	46	15	33	46	27
<b>Working space</b>							
Worker's own	71.8	58	59	88	69	70	93
Provided by employer	28.2	42	41	12	31	30	7

In the case of equipment or implements for production, only 36.2 percent of the women workers get the facilities from their job providers, while 63.8 percent have to either purchase or acquire them by themselves. Moreover, in the household item group, weavers have to spend a lot of money in procuring the loom and other equipment. Only 15 percent of household item producers get necessary equipment from the job providers. In the Western region, almost 73 percent of workers have to make arrangements for the equipment on their own.

Regarding the working space, only 28.2 percent of the women workers get work space arrangement from the job providers. It is obvious from the terminology of home-based work, that most workers work in their own places of dwelling. However, working space is provided to some migrant workers by the job providers. Some job providers even prefer to have the women workers work in a definite place where they control over the quality of production. About 88 percent workers in the household item group work in their own houses. Likewise, 58 percent in the industrial item group and 59 percent in the art and gift item group work in their own houses.

## 5.6 WORK EXPERIENCE

Though traditional craft work come under home-based work sector, it did not emerge as a commercial activity until the last decade. Although the traditional craft workers have long experience in their particular craft, they were involved in making products for personal use only rather than for commerce. However, the recent opening of the export market has provided them with the opportunity for the economic scope in this field.

Only 18.6 percent of the women workers surveyed were found to have more than 10 years experience. Most of the women workers in this sector have less than 5 years experience. About 20.5 percent have experience of one year or less and 43.9 percent with 2 to 5 years experience. The profile of work experience of the women workers is given in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6: Work Experience

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
One year and less	20.5	22	24	18	21	19	18
2-5 years	43.9	42	61	41	33	60	67
6-10 years	17.0	11	15	24	19	14	15
Above 10 years	18.6	25	0	17	27	7	0

Itemwise, 6.1 percent of the women workers in the art and gift item group have experience of 2 to 5 years, and almost no one in this group has experience of more than 10 years. However, among those in the industrial item group, 25 percent have more than 10 years experience, and this is mainly in the carpet industry which has 15 years life span.

27 percent in the Central region have also stated experience of more than 10 years. It is to be noted that the phenomenon of home-based work for economic activity is relatively new in Nepal. It is less than two decades since some commercial activities started



incorporating women workers at home. Export of carpet, handlooms and woolen knitwear contributes to the development of women workers in home-based work.

## 5.7 WORKING HOURS

As in other least developed countries, women in Nepal get very little time to engage in economically gainful activities. They are engaged in discharging more important responsibilities of bearing and rearing children and other household chores. Along with fulfilling these basic responsibilities, the women workers manage to spare some time daily for engaging in economic activities. It has been observed that some of these women workers start their work as early as 3 'o clock in the morning and work till 10 at night. The working time however is quite flexible, as, in between, they cook, clean, do laundry and tend to their family members.

About 40.8 percent of the workers work only 5 to 6 hours a day for economic activities. This group of workers consider their work as a supplement to their family earning. On the other hand, 31.7 percent work a full 8 hours or more and consider their work as the prime support for their family earning. The profile of the work time of the women workers is shown in Table 5.7.

26 percent of the workers in the industrial item group and 16 percent in the art/ gift item group work more than 9 hours a day. Regionwise, 23 percent of the workers in the Central region and 18 percent in the Eastern region work more than 9 hours a day.

Table 5.7: Working Period

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
Working hours							
Less than 3 hrs	2.0	0	0	4	3	0	0
3 hrs	8.9	8	9	10	13	1	9
4 hrs	7.6	7	9	9	11	0	9
5 hrs	21.6	24	12	22	30	12	0
6 hrs	19.2	14	47	15	7	44	22
7 hrs	9.0	7	1	13	6	14	11
8 hrs	12.9	11	3	18	5	26	22
9 hrs	2.4	3	3	2	2	0	9
More than 9 hrs	16.4	26	16	7	23	3	18
Working days per week							
Less than 4 days	0.9	0	0	2	0	3	0
4 days	1.8	0	0	4	3	0	0
5 days	1.5	0	0	3	2	0	0
6 days	30.6	35	50	22	38	24	7
7 days	65.2	65	50	69	57	73	93

The majority of the women workers do not get the opportunity to enjoy any holiday or to leave the job even once a week. 65.2 percent of the total workers work all 7 days of the week. Home-based women workers have to work very hard. This is portrayed by the fact that 30.8 percent of them work 8 hours and more and 65.2 percent work 7 days a week.

## 5.8 REMUNERATION

The bulk or 84.9 percent of the women workers earn less than Rs. 1500 per month. This amount is equivalent to the minimum wage level determined by the government for workers in the organized sector. It is embarrassing to note that 17.3 percent of the women workers earn less than Rs. 500 per month. Only 13.8 percent earn between Rs. 1501 to Rs. 3000 per month, and 1.3 percent earn more than Rs. 3000 per month. The profile of monthly income bracket and savings is shown in Table 5.8.

In terms of earning, some workers in the art and gift item group are better off than those in the other item groups with 38 percent in the former group earning between Rs. 1500 to Rs. 3000 per month. Regionwise, 12 percent of the workers in the Central region and 26 percent in the Eastern region earn more than Rs. 1500 per month. 29 percent of the workers in the household item group and 13 percent in the art/ gift item group get less than Rs. 500, whereas 22 percent in the Western region and 21 percent in the Central region earn less than Rs. 500 per month.

Table 5.8: Monthly Income and Savings

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
<b>Income</b>							
Less than Rs. 500	17.3	6	13	29	21	8	22
Rs. 501 to Rs. 1500	67.6	85	49	57	67	66	71
Rs. 1501 to Rs. 3000	13.8	9	38	11	11	23	7
More than Rs. 3000	1.3	0	0	3	1	3	0
<b>Saving</b>							
None	60.0	66	37	61	56	75	44
One fourth of income	33.4	33	44	31	35	24	53
Half of income	5.5	0	18	7	8	0	3
Three fourth of income	0.2	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total income	0.9	1	0	1	1	1	0

60 percent of the women workers can save nothing from their earnings, while 33.4 percent of them manage to save only 25 percent of their earnings. Those in the art and gift item group save up to half of their income. Only about 1 percent save more than three fourth of their income.

## 5.9 WAGE PAYMENT

The mode and frequency of wage payment are important motivation factors after actual income for wage earners. 94.3 percent of the total women workers work on piece-rate basis and only 5.5 percent work on monthly basis. Monthly basis of wage payment is prominent in art and gift item in the Eastern region. The basis and frequency of wage payment is given in Table 5.9.

Table 5.9: Payment of Wages

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
<b>Basis of Payment</b>							
Peace rate	94.3	98	62	98	100	77	100
Daily wages	0.2	0	1	0	0	1	0
Monthly	5.5	2	37	2	0	22	0
<b>Frequency of Payment</b>							
On completion of job	51.5	49	46	55	47	46	98
Daily	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Weekly	5.2	10	0	2	0	18	0
Monthly	28.8	39	54	13	33	28	0
Irregular	14.4	2	0	30	20	8	0

It seems quite obvious that workers employed on piece-rate wage basis should receive payment on completion of the job. However, only 51.5 percent workers are paid their wages on completion of the job, 28.8 percent are paid on monthly basis, and even worse, 14.4 percent receive their payment irregularly. Irregularity in payment means that job providers pay whenever they feel like paying. And in many cases, they receive their wages very late or they do not receive payment at all. In the absence of legal job contract system, this irregular payment of wages is a big problem to the workers. This problem is bigger in the household item group in the Central region.

## 5.10 OTHER BENEFITS RECEIVED

Beside wages, some extra benefits of various forms, both direct and indirect, are also being provided by some job providers. Some 31.2 percent of the workers received advance loan facilities, 10.1 percent received maternity benefits, 8.7 percent received housing facilities, and 3 to 6 percent received other facilities like skill training, retention during no work, bonus, children's education, provident fund and medical facilities. Table 5.10 shows the extra benefits provided by the job providers to the women workers.

Table 5.10: Extra Benefits Provided

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
Advance / Loan	31.2	42	35	20	33	20	53
Maternity services	10.1	10	38	2	7	21	0
Housing facilities	8.7	21	0	0	14	1	0
Skill training	6.8	2	37	3	3	15	9
Retention on no work	6.6	1	47	1	4	15	0
Bonus	6.3	1	29	5	3	15	0
Children education	5.2	9	0	3	8	1	0
Provident Fund	4.6	1	29	1	1	15	0
Medical facilities	3.3	7	0	0	5	1	0
Child care	1.3	3	0	0	2	0	0

The majority of the workers are receiving advance/loan facilities. This is attributed to the interdependence of the job providers and women workers. Despite working more than 8 hours and the monthly cumulative earning amounting to less than Rs. 1500 per month, the women workers often need some loans and advances to manage their various expenditure demands and stave off some crises. The job providers are forced to cater to the needs of workers - if not for the concern of the workers, at least for their own commercial benefit. Moreover, these advances and loans generally add to the burdens of the workers who become increasingly dependent on the job providers. This is one major reason a woman worker cannot leave a particular job provider and opt for another despite the stated flexibility in doing so.

Beside loans and advances, the other form of benefit is the maternity facility largely provided to women workers in the art/ gift group in the Eastern region. It is not surprising that the largest number of benefits are provided in the sector where many NGOs are actively engaged in women development programs. Their concern for women workers are more evident than the commercial job providers.

### 5.11 WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Home-based workers by definition work in their homes or in the environment of their own choice. However, although some women workers chose to work at home or in the surrounding areas, others may not have a choice. 29.7 percent of the women workers work in open common space of the *chowk* or *bahal* (courtyard) or street-sides along with other members of the family, or community/ friends.

Table 5.11: Working Environment

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
Light							
Excellent	23.2	25	16	24	29	3	49
Sufficient	64.9	67	79	59	58	85	51
Poor	11.9	8	5	17	13	12	0
Noisy							
Very much	18.2	27	25	8	19	10	13
Moderate	25.5	38	16	16	25	28	20
Not	56.3	35	59	76	56	53	67
Cleanliness							
Excellent	6.3	3	25	4	1	11	25
Sufficient	44.6	42	43	48	42	44	62
Poor	49.1	55	32	48	57	46	13
Safety							
Excellent	13.3	10	37	10	8	13	49
Moderate	67.7	75	60	63	67	76	47
Poor	19.0	15	3	27	25	11	4
Health Hazard							
Very much	25.3	41	9	15	22	40	4
Moderate	21.0	24	35	15	14	41	5
Not	53.7	35	56	70	64	19	91

70.3 percent work in closed sheds and rooms. During the survey, a total of 1245 women workers were observed working indoors. The total working space available for these workers in different locations was 33,732 sq. ft. On an average those working indoors have a per capita working space of 27 sq. ft. Although this number seems quite comfortable, a closer look at these workplaces reveals that the rooms are over-crowded with workers, specially in the case of wool spinning in the Central region. Table 5.11 gives details of the survey findings on working environment.

For 88.1 percent of the workers, light is not so much of a problem. This includes those working in open space. However, 11.9 percent of the workers work in conditions of poor lighting specially among those in the household item group of the Central region. On the other hand, 18.2 percent of the workers work in a noisy environment.

49.1 percent of the women workers work in dirty or poor conditions of cleanliness generally unsuitable for living or working. 19 percent of the workers work in unsafe environment with ample scope for accidents. This situation is largely prevalent among workers in the industrial item group in the Central region. However, 71 percent of the workers work in safe working environment.

25.3 percent of the workers work in conditions which can be considered to be very hazardous to their health. The workers in the Eastern and the Central regions engaged in the industrial item group are largely exposed to hazardous environment. The wool spinners and *bidi* rollers fall under these categories.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE LIVING CONDITION

The situation of the basic needs in the context of food habit, clothes purchasing behaviour, health condition, habit of health care and condition of accommodation and amenities determine the status of the living conditions of the women workers.

#### 6.1 FOOD HABIT

98.9 percent of the women workers take normal twice a day diet. The general opinion of the workers is that without normal food how can one work hard as a labourer. Table 6.1 gives the description of the food habit.

Table 6.1: Food Habit

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
Normal diet per day							
One time	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Two times	98.9	99	100	99	99	99	100
More than two times	1.1	1	0	1	1	1	0
Nutrition diet peer week							
One time	54.5	55	26	62	64	49	15
Two times	26.3	30	44	18	28	27	18
Three times	9.6	9	13	9	5	13	27
Four times	2.0	2	2	2	0	6	2
More than four times	7.6	4	15	8	3	5	38

54.5 percent of the workers take "nutrition" diet once a week while 26.3 percent take "nutrition" diet twice a week. "Nutrition" diet here refers to consumption of meat, fish, milk or fruits. The total intake of protein is quite low. In the Western region however, 38 percent of the workers take "nutrition" diet more than four times a week.

#### 6.2 CLOTHES PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR

Only 10.1 percent of the total women workers buy clothes very often. The majority of them, 62.8 percent, very rarely buy clothes. Table 6.2 shows the clothes purchasing behaviour of the workers.

The workers in the Western region are in the forefront in purchasing clothes also. 87 percent of those in the Western region buy clothes occasionally. 61 percent in the Central region and 84 percent in the Eastern region rarely buy clothes.

Table 6.2: Clothes Purchase Habit

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
Very often	10.1	8	4	14	15	4	2
Occasional	27.1	24	51	24	24	12	87
Very rare	62.8	68	45	62	61	84	11

### 6.3 HEALTH CONDITION AND CARE

A cursory observation reveals that 43.9 percent of the women workers are quite healthy and 47.4 percent possess normal health condition. The condition of 8.5 percent is poor and 0.2 percent are sickly. However, majority of them are found to be of normal and healthy condition. The general health condition and the habit of health care is shown in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Health Condition and Health care

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
<b>General Health Condition</b>							
Sickly	0.2	1	0	0	0	1	0
Poor	8.5	10	18	4	4	21	6
Normal	47.4	45	41	52	40	62	47
Healthy	43.9	44	41	44	56	16	47
<b>Visit Doctor When Sick</b>							
Medical shop	67.7	74	62	63	55	87	93
Hospital/Healthpost	58.1	68	75	44	36	90	96
Doctor's clinic	22.9	16	38	25	40	4	33
Call doctor at home	0.4	0	0	1	1	0	0

Notable, however, is that 21 percent of the workers in the Eastern region engaged in art and gift items group fall in the poor health condition category.

In terms of caring about their health 67.7 percent of the total women workers go to the medical shop for treatment when they fall sick. Medical shopkeepers are their health advisors and generally prescribe the appropriate medicines themselves. When sick 58.1 percent visit hospitals or health posts, 22.9 percent go to private clinics of some doctor's and only 0.4 percent of the total workers can afford to call doctors at home.

### 6.4 ACCOMMODATION AND AMENITIES

71.2 percent of the total women workers live in their own house and 16.9 percent live in rental houses. 5.2 percent live in their employers' houses. Tables 6.4 depicts the pattern of accommodation and amenities utilized by women workers.

Table 6.4: Accommodation and Amenities

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
<b>Accommodation</b>							
Own house	71.2	50	77	89	63	81	95
Rental house	16.9	23	23	11	18	18	5
Employers house	5.2	12	0	0	8	0	0
Relative's house	0.2	0	0	0	0	1	0
Friend's house	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Others	6.5	15	0	0	11	0	0
<b>Amenities</b>							
Electricity	89.5	93	76	89	99	66	100
Toilet	76.6	64	78	81	82	47	95
Drinking water	67.5	71	54	68	68	55	100
Telephone	4.1	1	15	4	5	3	2
<b>Recreation</b>							
Radio	59.6	54	37	69	78	30	22
Television	46.7	27	35	37	39	14	49
Visit cinema/theater	41.3	40	47	41	44	31	56
No recreation	35.6	37	54	29	28	53	35

Itemwise, the majority of those in the household item group (89 percent) and art and gift group (77 percent) live in their own houses. Regionwise, 95% of the workers in the Western region and 81% in the Eastern region live in their own houses.

89.5 percent of the women workers have electricity, 76.6 percent of the workers have toilets, and 67.5 percent of the workers have access to drinking water facilities in their accommodation. Only 4.1 percent have telephone facilities. The extent of possession of the amenities by the women workers is quite impressive in comparison to the normal standards of the country. This conditions may be because, almost all women workers are living either in suburban areas or suburban areas close to the markets.

Radio is the most popular media for entertainment/recreation for majority of the workers. 59.6 percent of the women workers enjoy listening to it while 46.7 percent take pleasure watching television. 41.3 percent occasionally visit cinema or theatres for entertainment. However, 35.6 percent of the workers cannot afford any means of recreation.



## CHAPTER 7

### THE DECISION POWER

The capability to make decision on earnings, job undertaking, children education, family planning, voting candidates of choice during elections, and freedom of associations are some of the key indicators to understand the empowerment status of women. These issues should be focused to empower women workers. Some observation in this regard was made during the survey

#### 7.1 DECISION ON KEEPING AND SPENDING EARNINGS

The primary sense of empowerment for any wage earner is the right to keep his or her earning and spend the earnings according to their own choice. It has been observed that 82.5 percent of the women workers keep their earnings themselves. However, 10.9 percent give their earnings to their parents or in-laws and 5.5 percent to their husbands for keeping. Table 7.1 shows the pattern of habits of keeping and spending of their earnings.

Table 7.1: Keeping and Spending Decisions

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
Keeping and spending the earnings by:							
Self	82.5	87	95	76	81	96	56
Parents/In-laws	10.9	7	3	17	12	2	29
Husband	5.5	6	1	6	6	1	15
Children	0.4	0	0	0	0	1	0
Others	0.7	0	1	1	1	0	0
Usually earnings spent on:							
Foods	88.7	96	82	84	86	95	85
Clothes	52.0	54	65	47	27	91	95
Education	49.0	43	78	48	42	54	80
Medicine	39.5	43	53	32	24	83	9
Utilities	14.6	7	38	15	1	48	2
Recreation	14.6	20	16	9	11	16	31
Emergency	6.5	11	4	3	6	4	18
Alcohol/Smoking	6.3	9	6	4	1	12	22
Others	4.8	10	0	1	8	0	2

Among those in the household item group 17 percent give their earning to their parents/in-law. 29 percent of workers in the Western region give their earnings to their

parents/in-laws for keeping while 15 percent give to their husbands. Only 56 percent of those in the Western region keep their earnings by themselves.

The pareto table of areas of spending or areas of utilization of the earnings shows that the most important area of spending is on food. 88.7 percent of the workers spend their income on food. The second priority is clothes as expressed by 52 percent of the workers. Education is the third priority in terms of spending for which 49 percent of the workers. Likewise other areas of spending in the order of priority as expressed by the women workers are medicine (39.5 percent), utilities and recreation both 14.6 percent, emergency (6.5 percent), and spending on alcohol/smoking by only 6.3 percent of women workers.

It is however, interesting to note that the majority of the women workers choose to keep their earning by themselves, and their decision on spending is mainly on food, clothes, education and medicine in sequence.

## **7.2 SOCIAL DECISIONS**

Beside keeping and spending the earnings, other decisions like choice on job undertaking, children's education, family planning, and selecting candidates of choice for voting in elections are very important issues to be observed in women empowerment. Table 7.2 shows the pattern of decisions made on these matters.

47.2 percent of the women workers decide jointly on the issue of undertaking any job. Whereas, 43 percent make their own decision regarding the selection of the job. 6.1 percent ask their parents, while 1.5 percent ask their husbands.

Itemwise, 59 percent of those in the art and gift group decide on undertaking jobs by themselves, and 38 percent decide jointly. Regionwise, the workers in the Eastern region seem quite empowered. 84 percent make personal decisions on job undertaking and 15 percent decide jointly. In the Western region, however, 20 percent of the workers leave the decision to their parents or in-laws.

About children's education, 46.5 percent of women workers decide jointly and only 5.7 percent of the workers decide by themselves. Interestingly, 41.3 percent of the workers do not know who makes the decision regarding this. The reason stated is difficulty in deciding.

The majority of the women workers, i.e., 49.4 percent decide jointly on the matters of family planning, while 39.3 percent are unaware of the subject. Only 5 percent decide themselves.

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
<b>Job undertaking</b>							
Jointly	47.2	52	38	46	67	15	20
Self	43.0	38	59	43	22	85	53
Parents/In-laws	6.1	8	0	6	6	1	20
Husband	1.5	1	0	2	2	0	2
Don't know	2.2	1	3	3	3	0	5
<b>Children education</b>							
Jointly	46.5	52	54	39	41	61	38
Self	5.7	8	4	4	8	2	4
Husband	4.8	3	18	3	6	0	11
Parents/In-laws	1.7	0	0	3	3	0	0
Don't know	41.3	37	24	51	42	37	47
<b>Family planning</b>							
Jointly	49.4	61	60	35	35	87	33
Husband	5.9	1	18	7	10	0	0
Self	5.0	3	1	8	7	10	2
Parents/In-laws	0.4	0	0	1	1	0	0
Don't know	39.3	35	21	49	47	13	65
<b>Candidate for voting in election</b>							
Self	46.1	40	72	44	37	74	18
Husband	12.7	17	16	8	20	0	5
Jointly	12.7	11	8	12	8	18	32
Parents/In-laws	5.0	0	0	11	8	0	0
Don't know	23.5	27	4	25	27	8	45

The majority (46.1 percent) of the women workers make their own decision on choosing the candidates for voting. However, 5 percent depend on their parents and 12.7 percent on their husbands for this decision. 12.7 percent make the decision jointly. Itemwise, among those in the art and gift group, 72 percent decide on their own regarding the selection of candidates for voting. Regionwise, 74 percent in the Eastern region decide solely on candidates for voting.

### 7.3 MEMBERSHIP OF ASSOCIATION

women workers are not very attracted and exercise no freedom to either organize or be members of any form of association. Some social organizations, however, have been quite successful in luring these workers as members under their respective organizational fold for their collective benefit. 24.2 percent of the women workers are involved in one or the other social organizations. None however are members of any trade union, business association or other form of organization. The responses of the women workers regarding membership of associations are given in Table 7.3

Table 7.3: Membership of Associations

DESCRIPTION	TOTAL(%)	ITEMWISE (%)			REGIONWISE (%)		
		Industrial	Art/Gift	Hhold	Central	Eastern	Western
Social organization							
Yes	24.2	26	53	15	24	33	0
No	75.8	74	47	85	76	67	100
Trade unions							
Yes	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No	100.0	100	100	100	100	100	100
Business association							
Yes	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No	100.0	100	100	100	100	100	100

Social organizations mostly in the non-governmental sector are active in art and gift and industrial item groups. There are hardly any in the household item group. Regionwise, 24 percent of workers in the Central region and 33 percent in the Eastern region are involved in some or the other social organizations.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE POLICY PERSPECTIVE

#### 8.1 NATIONAL POLICY AND LEGISLATION

##### **The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal**

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1990) protects the interests of the women [Article 11(3)]. The Constitution confers on them certain fundamental rights and imposes certain duties like "making special provisions for women employment" on the state in the form of the directive principles and policies of the state [Article 26(7)]. Women pressure groups in the country have been strongly advocating for the application of these provisions in general, but not for the specific issue of women workers largely engaged in the informal sector of the economy.

##### **Commitment in the International Forum**

Nepal has endorsed a host of international declarations and treaties on human rights and the rights of women. It is a signatory to the Beijing Convention (1996) on women development, and a strong supporter of the efforts of SAARC in the sector. Nepal is in the process of developing new laws based on the guidelines of international conventions, and rectifying the discriminatory laws in terms of women's and children's rights. However, Nepal is yet to fully its commitments in the international forum.

##### **The Five Year Plan**

The government of Nepal has made policy pronouncements and policy intents in respect to issues relating to improving participation of women in economic activities including their employment and growth generation through multi dimensional programs. Although these pronouncements are embodied in the five-year plans, the annual plans and sectoral development plans of the country since the sixth five-year plan period, a concerted approach in this direction is yet to take place.

Both the Eighth Plan (1992-1997) and the present Ninth Plan (1997-2002) emphasize the role of vocational education, skill-oriented training, cooperative institutions, etc., and the encouragement for self-reliance and empowerment of women through employment and self-employment. The Ninth Plan is categorical about reducing work burden and time of women in their household, and utilizing time saved on productive economic activities on cottage and small industries both on and off farm. Although the policy intents are yet to be translated into concrete actions, some signs of off-farm economic activity of the women in the industrial and commercial sector are visible. The existence, or rather, the terminology of home-based women workers is yet to be recognized by the planners at the strategic level of the country.

### **Annual Budget and Plan**

The national budget of the fiscal year 1999-2000 (Budget Speech) has made an ambitious outlay in its reference to empowerment of women and development:

" ..... From the next year, an income generating program for women (called 'Jagriti') will be initiated as a national campaign by bringing women leadership on the forefront with their participation, making women power a medium of economic and social change initiatives. Under the program, groups will be formed comprising 65,000 women of 940 VDCs of the country who will be trained on group education, skill development, self-employment, ..... The program is expected to benefit 380,000 women in the next five years."

Ambitious policies with grandeur targets such as those set above are generally taken with a pinch of salt because Nepalese people have come out wise to 'populist' assertions made in the budget speech every year by the finance minister of a particular political party. However, the existence of a set of conducive policies and policy intents can be favourably utilized in the sector of women development, specially in the context of women workers in the informal sector.

### **Election Manifestos of Political Parties**

After the popular uprising and the advent of democracy in the country a decade ago, all major political forces have honed women empowerment as a popular slogan for poverty alleviation and a subject for vote catching. The party manifesto brought out by the Nepali Congress, the largest party, during the 1999 general elections has reference to "new programmes for employment generation" without being specific to women. Whereas, the CPN (UML) and CPN (ML), the splintered factions, have more or less the same tone on "making women economically self-reliant", "equal pay for equal work" to end gender discrimination, "instituting realistic minimum wage", etc. The policy intents of the political parties in the sector of women development are definitely positive, but again, home-based workers do not figure in the programs of these national parties.

The fact that these parties have not made any mention of the home-based women workers in their policy documents shows that the lawmakers themselves are still not aware of the necessity of uplifting this ignored class of workers in the informal sector of the country. In this context, it is a far cry to expect positive actions towards this group.

### **Legal Instruments**

The labour laws like the Labour Act and the Trade Union Act reassert the principle of gender equality, prohibit discrimination in wages and work conditions, and provide freedom of association. The Labour Act specifies special facilities and conditions of work. Since this Act is applicable to establishments in the organized sector employing more than 10 persons, the home-based workers have been left to fend on their own with no legal instruments for their protection. However, the first amendment in the Trade Union Act has redefined the term 'worker' and broaden the scope of organizing unions even among those working outside the establishments. This could form a basis for bringing the workers in the informal sector including the home-based women workers under some associations.

Surprisingly, this group of workers has been gravely neglected by all the contemporary trade union federations in the country.

## **8.2 INSTITUTIONS INVOLVED**

In Nepal, various government agencies, donor driven specific projects, non-government organizations, cooperatives and the private sector have been involved in skill development and employment generation programmes since the country adopted the path of planned development in the late 1950s. Despite massive expenditure of resources and efforts, and experiments with different models of development, these programs have been largely ineffective in ameliorating the employment situation in the country. Intervention packages in the social upliftment sphere of women have included among others their participation in economic activities. The little achievements in this regard is manifested in the women being involved in many gainful activities mostly in the informal sector.

### **Public Institutions**

Two ministries, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare, have been vested with the responsibility of the development of women workers. The Ministry of Labour through its Department of Labour and various offices located in major industrial centres of the country looks after the welfare of the workers specially in the organized sector. The Ministry of Women and Social Welfare however focuses its activities on the alleviating the status of the women in general.

The government's intervention package for employment generation in rural areas with a combination of education, skill development training, access to micro-credit, market linkage, etc. through women specific programs like Production Credit for Rural Women, projects such as Training for Rural Gainful Activities, and its offshoot, the UNDP funded Training for Rural Employment, and the Basic Vocational Training Project have been noteworthy. The Cottage and Small Industry Development Board was established to coordinate training, production credit and marketing. These and a host of other programs succeeded in training women in such skills as knitting, embroidery, tailoring, carpet weaving, wool spinning, basket weaving, fruit processing, minor art and craft work, etc. In fact, the Cottage and Small Industry Development Board and the Department of Cottage and Small Industry execute targeted training in different trades in all 75 districts of the country.

The Cottage and Handicraft Emporium showcases art and handicraft production of rural people to market in Kathmandu. However, in many respects, the methodology adopted by the government could not actually improve the employability of women mainly because the skill training supplemented with support facilities have not been sensitive to the market situation.

### **Social Institutions**

During the Panchayat and the post-Panchayat period, many non-governmental organizations became actively engaged in complementing the social development efforts of

the country. Majority of the NGOs and INGOs experimented with a host of indigenous and some imported models to target the objective of poverty alleviation through rural development with emphasis on women including their employment in gainful economic activities. Cooperatives were highlighted as providing larger scope for participation of small producers in the total business aspect. Among the cooperatives, the Women Entrepreneurs' Association of Nepal trains and facilitates the marketing of the products of home-based women own-account workers.

Among the NGOs, the Fair Trade Group which involves seven NGOs engaged in handicraft production and marketing has emerged fairly successful in institutionalizing cooperation to reduce exploitation in the handicraft industry through mutual exchange of marketing information, consultation and sharing of resources like training, production, product development, technical assistance. The organizations represented are Association of Craft Producers, Manushi Art and Craft, Kumbeshwar Technical School, Mahaguthi, Sana Hastakala, Janakpur Skill Development Centre, and Women Skill Development Project, Pokhara. In real terms, the 2,000 odd members comprising of low income women producers of different parts of the country and organized by the seven NGOs, have been faring better. They take job orders along with the necessary materials from their respective NGOs, produce at home, delivers them to the NGOs which give them fair wages. With their established channels of marketing, the NGOs market the products. The women members get bonuses and also have access to fringe benefits like education and health services, etc.

### **Commercial Institutions**

The concept of home-based women workers has developed in specific area of industry and commerce in the private sector. The largest number of women engaged as home-based workers is in the wool spinning process of hand-knotted Tibetan woolen carpet manufacturing industry. The large demand for hand-knotted carpet in the international market has resulted in the employment of large number of home-based workers, basically women, to carry out this particular process at their homes. Likewise, the demand for Tibetan wool hand-knitted wears in the tourism market provided opportunity to women-knitters who carry out the work at their homes. These two types of work flourished mainly due to the export potential of the hand-made characteristic of the end products. Many private intermediary-agencies and middlemen employ these women workers. In this arrangement of work, there are possibilities of various forms of exploitation of the workers by the intermediaries in the absence of any regulatory mechanism.

Beside these, small local chocolate manufacturing enterprises mostly in the Terai region provide candy wrapping work to be done at the home by women workers. The *bidi* rolling and wrapping work available in some places in the eastern Terai are generally done outside the factory premises by women. This type of home-based work was generated mainly due to the ulterior motive of evading provisions of the Labour Act by the owner of such enterprises.



## CHAPTER 9

### THE SUMMING UP

#### 9.1 CONCLUSION

- The fact that home-based women workers exist within the informal sector of our economy and that they make a significant socio- economic contribution has not dawned upon the sensibilities of policy makers and those concerned with that sector. The women workers are largely utilized for off-establishment work, and taken for granted as cheap and practical sources of human resources. However, they are a largely ignored lot and have never surfaced in the politico-legal mainstream. They have not surfaced out of the socio-economic limbo and the maze of entanglements within the domestic work and home-work. The informal sector women workers are basically engaged in some economic activities, curtailing their leisure time to earn wages and at the same time fulfilling their responsibilities at their homes. These women are socially neglected and economically discriminated. They lack the benefits of social security both from their job providers as well as from the state. Their plight largely go unnoticed because they work in the unorganized informal sector all by themselves within the confines of their homes. They have never been surfaced before. This study is the first attempt to surface these ignored ones.
  
- These women workers in Nepal can be characterized by the lack of the following elements of justice:
  - strength to demand fair wages for their efforts;
  - opportunity to organize themselves;
  - job security;
  - instruments for collective bargaining with employer;
  - opportunity for skill development and training; and
  - social security.
  
- The home workers and their contribution to the economy have been gaining recognition in many parts of the world since the early 1980s. This group of workers is not a phenomenon of the underdeveloped nations only, but prevalent all over the world in various sectors of work. This has led the ILO to recognize this group and adopt a convention on homeworkers. Many Asian countries are already turning to the homework under some formal and acceptable framework for social, legal and political interventions. Initiatives by particular institutions in India, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, etc. of this region have already made commendable strides. It is time for Nepal also to make a concerted introspection at the situation of women workers in the informal sector county with special emphasis on those in the home-based work, and institutionalize a mechanism to serve the interests of this ignored lot.

**A SHADY ENVIRONMENT**

An invitation from a *thekedar* was a great gesture towards the surveyor. The situation was such that one wonders why invite when you don't really mean it. A 12 ft. by 14 ft. room in a huge house in Thali was filled with 15 women all engrossed in spinning woolen yarn. The room was obviously congested with barely any room to move about. These women were actually home based workers on a contractual basis. The question is why are they working in one room and not in their respective houses? Well! the intermediaries would not trust these women with the raw materials. He accuses them of stealing some for profit making. The lack of trust hovers around in the room's atmosphere along with the harmful caddies off the yarn. The surveyor was invited by the *thekedar* but at the same time was not permitted to enter and see for herself the situation inside the room. At a time like this, one can not help but be curious to know the workers' feelings in working in such a "shady" environment.

☐ The women workers have to be viewed from the worker as well as gender perspective. For this, both trade unions and women pressure groups are equally responsible to pay attention to these ignored women. So, far, trade unions in Nepal have not reached this category of workers mainly because of their hidden status. Unions have encompassed large sectors of employment specially in the formal sector. Likewise, women activists and others concerned with women welfare have been focusing on various dimensions of the gender issue. They have shown concern for participation of women in economic activities as exhibited by various programs of the government and NGOs. But none have gone beyond that. None have focused on aspects of equality at work, job security, social security etc. with respect to the women workers in the informal sector.

☐ These informal sector women workers are spread all over the country and are engaged in various wage-earning activities whose products or services contribute to the formal sector of economy. Many clusters are located through linkages of intermediaries which in turn have direct links with trade and industries in the formal sector. The export potentials of some specific items like hand-knotted carpets, hand-knitted woolen wears, and some handicraft items are responsible for large employment of this category of workers. Their size is very flexible and dependent on the growth of economic activities in the formal sector. Expansion of export market and industries will cause exponential increase in the size of these workers.

The size and magnitude of the workers revealed through the present observation may only be the tip of the iceberg. A larger dimension may still be submerged and well hidden. If no effort is made to recognize their presence and take necessary measures to improve their quality of life, it may be quite uncontrollable.

Box - 2

AN ADDICTIVE WORKER

A hot and sunny summer day in Biratnagar could be torturous when one has to live under a tinned roof, a 8 ft. by 10 ft. rented room. The situation worsens when you have four young children all under the age of 6. Such is the case of Nautara who lives in the room with four of her children. Nautara is a home-based worker, she makes *bidis* for living on a contractual basis. The room she calls her home is small and unhygienic. In one corner of the room there is a small cot on which lay two of her youngest children, two live goats are tied on the legs of the cot, along side which is scattered grass and fodder for the animals. While rolling *bidis* seated on the ground Nautara is tending to her 3 year old daughter on her lap while the other son is running around demanding attention. The room is suffocating due to the smell and dust of the tobacco which is used in *bidis*. Nautara and the children seemed immune to the smell and the dust which her employer is unaware or ignorant of.

- ☐ In Nepal, the women workers in the informal sector are socially neglected, and no serious research have been made in this area. Even small children and minor girls are engaged in wage activity at home together with the women workers instead of going to schools and enjoying their basic rights. Significant proportion of displacement phenomenon has started to emerge in this area. Beside these, many other social issues have emerged, the impacts of which are yet to be fully gauged.
  
- ☐ The women workers are being economically discriminated in terms of mismatch between their contribution and returns. They can not even earn a comparable amount of the formal minimum wage despite working 10 hours a day and seven days a week. Moreover, having finished their work, many do not receive their wages on time. These women are exploited in many ways by the middlemen who provide them work. A common problem is the devaluation of their work leading to reduced wages.
  
- ☐ The women workers have no legal protection against the exploitation of the job providers or for redressal of their complaints. They are not covered by any legislation. Nor do they figure in any national or sectoral policy. Even the Trade Union Act which vests the rights to freedom of association of workers and the Labour Act that protects the interests of workers in formal establishments, have not recognized the existence of these women workers in the informal sector.

Box - 3

### IGNORANCE IS BLISS?

A visit to sankhu on a bright and sunny afternoon is a picturesque experience. The houses there are all closely knit with a legendary story to follow that there are 1000 houses in sankhu ever since. The *bahaal* in the centre of these houses is filled with chatters and laughter. After an early lunch and the house chores all over, the women, all under the age of 30, come out and sit under the sun knitting sweaters. The women are home-based workers on a contractual basis. The atmosphere is cheerful and one can see and feel a sense of contentment. On one such day, there were 13 women all very busy knitting with a few of them taking a break. A woman during her break was picking out lice from another woman's head who was knitting intensely but participating in the discussion at the same time. Someone from the other end cracked a joke, and the rest burst out laughing. What a feeling of sisterhood and neighbourly love! The *bahaal* was neat and clean. These women are paid by the group leader, and they are self content. Could this be possible because they have no clue as to what they should be getting? Are they getting the right price for their labour? Well, who knows. The fact that all of them are illiterate is known to the group leader.

## **9.2 RECOMMENDATION**

- A consensus on the working definition of the home-based work is imperative to develop action programs required to focus on this sector. The confusion persisting in the definition of home-based worker may blur the focus. The ILO convention on homeworkers should be taken as a guideline regarding various actions to focus. In a strict sense, the convention emphasizes production of goods and services for an employer or contractor who 'provides' work and with implicit agreement that the products will be accepted as long as they meet prescribed specifications. However, in the Nepalese context, a broader definition should be established to incorporate the home-based wage earning workers and the own-account or self-employed workers in the informal sector. This widens the scope for implementing programs for a larger sections of those in the informal sectors.
- Trade unions, women pressure groups, labour law enforcers, and various other civil society organizations should be widely mobilized for advocacy to provide recognition of the existence and contribution of home-based workers. A wide campaign could be launched to create general awareness about the subject and targeted lobbying for its formal recognition.
- The Convention 177 of ILO could be the basis for starting the process of getting home-based workers recognized as workers in the definational context. The Convention has included the provision for the member states to adopt a national policy for homework to recognize the important of home-based workers and the need to protect their rights as workers. A national policy on home-based workers should be formulated and to address the specific needs of the home-based women workers in the informal sector of the country.

For this, a task force in the form of a committee with representation of the government, the employers, trade unions, NGOs and representatives of home

workers should be set up with the specific objective of addressing the needs of the workers including legislation, organization and social protection.

- ☐ The national policy should be translated into specific legislation that provides social protection for the informal sector home-based workers, their rights as workers, and equal treatment as other workers in the formal sector. The examples of some home-based women specific trade unions of neighboring countries could provide an insight into their struggle for recognition, organizing and campaigning for recognition in labour laws and other legislation. The policy pronouncement and legislation should be suitable and sensitive to the cultural social environment of our country.
  
- ☐ The national policy for home-based workers should be supported by appropriate measures to collect basic statistics on them; establish monitoring devices to identify the constraints they face; and ways of mitigating them. The Population Census of 2058 (2001 A.D.) could be designed as an instrument to gather maximum statistics specific to home-based work. In fact, the survey of home-based workers could be institutionalized as a module of integrated survey of households which is being administered in some form by the Central Bureau of Statistics. The Population Census and the periodic Nepal Labour Force Survey recently introduced in Nepal could be used for a host of interpretations, and subsequent application of supportive programs on the home-based workers in the informal sector.
  
- ☐ The ILO Convention 177 spells out basic rights as equal wages, social security, health and safety protection and the right to organize. While the labour laws emphasize on some elements of social security to employees of all public and private formal organizations in the form of provident fund, and the gratuity benefits on retirement, nothing of the sort exist in the informal sector. The home-based women workers work under very precarious conditions of non availability of regular work; irregularity in receiving payments; having to fend off on their own during non availability of work; and having no resort to health care for themselves or their family. Specific schemes for housing or children's education are a far cry. Some industries have been providing advances or loans to enable women to take care of the maternity periods. But this token gesture emanated more out of compulsion than concern for their benefit.

Thus a social security system for the home-based workers should be institutionalized to respond to the basic needs of these workers. The specific form and modalities of such a system could be worked out by the committee formed to draw the national policy, in consultation with various experts. The working committee could draw upon the experience of successful institutions which have built up strong social protection mechanisms for home-based women workers in the informal sector.

- ☐ The various pressure groups could carry out advocacy and lobbying at different levels of the government and legislature to adopt the social security systems as an inherent part of legislation.
  
- ☐ Further understanding of the multi dimensions of women workers in the informal sector of the economy and the social structure of the country is needed. For this, in-depth studies and base line surveys should be conducted for targeted groups of work and locations at the national level.
  
- ☐ As mentioned earlier, the ILO Convention on home workers should be the guiding principles for all efforts in improving the conditions of home workers in the informal sector of the country. All the articles of the convention should be thoroughly discussed and debated with appropriate rationalization of their implications to the Nepalese context, drawing upon the experiences of various countries particularly those in the neighbourhood and the region. The issue of home-based workers, specifically of women, has only recently been raised, but definitely, it was not on the agenda of any concerned agency before. The country itself needs to do a lot of home work regarding the understanding and presentation of home-based workers before contemplating ratification of the Convention 177. In fact, none of the member states of ILO has ratified this convention as yet. Nepal definitely need not be the first. A consensus has to be built up and commitment garnered at the highest level. Past experience has shown that Nepal is quick to ratify international conventions but lack in respecting its commitments.

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