

PROMOTING DECENT WORK FOR WOMEN HOME-BASED WORKERS IN VALUE CHAINS: *Cases from India and Nepal*



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Network of Homebased workers in South Asia



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Glossary

Charkha:	spinning wheel
Gamcha:	towel
Ghagra:	traditional long skirt
Jamdani:	sari weave
Kasida:	traditional embroidery
Lungi:	traditional men's wear
Mahajan:	in Phulia, refers to a master weaver; also means money lender
Matha:	cotton
Pattu shawls:	woolen shawls
Sari (or saree):	traditional women's wear
Tangail:	sari weave
Zardozi:	embroidery using zari thread
Zari:	metallic thread traditionally made of fine gold or silver

Acronyms and Schemes

Aadhaar Card:	Aadhaar is a 12-digit unique identity number issued to residents or passport holders of India, based on their biometric and demographic data.
Anganwadi:	Anganwadi is a child care centre, started in 1975 as part of the Integrated Child Development Services programme in India.
Antyodaya Card:	Antyodaya Anna Yojana is a Government of India sponsored scheme to provide highly subsidised food to the poorest of the poor families. It was launched in 2000 and first implemented in the Indian state of Rajasthan.
APL:	Above Poverty Line – a category of card issued under the Targeted Public Distribution System in India with specified entitlements for households with annual income between Rs 15,000 and Rs 1 lakh. Other eligibility criteria are specified by the state government.
Artisan Cards:	The Artisan Identity Card is a photo-identity card issued by the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Government of India to artisans. The card facilitates easier identification of the artisans. It also acts as an official proof of their identity when they deal with various government schemes related to skill training, access to credit, marketing, and insurance, among other things. It carries the photograph of the artisan and denotes

the craft he/ she is engaged in. All artisans and craft workers are eligible to apply for the card. The card is issued free of cost, through different agencies selected by the office of the DC(H).

ATM:	Automated Teller Machine
B2B:	Business to Business
B2C:	Business to Consumer
Bhamashah Card:	Bhamashah Yojana is a scheme introduced by the Government of Rajasthan in 2014 to transfer financial and non-financial benefits of governmental schemes directly to women recipients in a transparent way. Under the Bhamashah Yojana, bank accounts are opened in the name of women and all the government cash benefits to the family are transferred into this account.
BPL:	Below Poverty Line - a category of card issued under the Targeted Public Distribution System in India with specified entitlements for households with annual income below Rs 15,000. Other eligibility criteria are specified by the state government.
CEO:	Chief Executive Officer
CFC:	Common Facilitation Centre (SABAH Nepal)
Citizenship Card:	The 2006 Nepal Citizenship Act entitles Nepali citizens who reach the age of 16 to obtain citizenship certificates. The citizenship certificate allows a citizen to exercise his/her rights and claim State protection and social benefits.
CSR:	Corporate Social Responsibility
CTEVT:	Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (Nepal) Earthquake affected card: Following the devastating earthquake of April 2015 in Nepal, "Earthquake Victims' Family Identity Card" was issued to each family with details of damages suffered by them recorded on it, to be used as a basis to provide facilities by the State.
ESI:	The Employees' State Insurance (ESI) Scheme is administered and regulated by an autonomous and self-financing social security and labour welfare organisation named ESIC, as per the rules and regulations given in the Indian ESI Act of 1948. Benefits include sickness benefits; maternity benefit; in case of death of an employee caused by any occupational hazard, ESIC pays 90% of his/her salary to his/her dependents every month; disability benefit; funeral expenses compensation, physical rehabilitation, vocational rehabilitation, old age medical care, etc. The rate of contribution has been reduced from 6.5 per cent to 4 per cent of the wages in July 2019.
FGD:	Focus Group Discussion
GST:	Goods and Services Tax

HBW:	Home-based worker
HNSA:	HomeNet South Asia
ICICI- RSETI:	ICICI Rural Self Employment Training Institutes are bank-run institutions that function under the banner of Ministry of Rural Development drawing support from ICICI Bank and ICICI Foundation.
ILO:	International Labour Organization
INR:	Indian Rupee
Jyoti Bima Yojana:	Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana is a government-backed life insurance scheme in India. It was formally launched in 2015.
Kanyashree:	Kanyashree is a conditional cash transfer scheme aiming at improving the status and wellbeing of the girl child by incentivising schooling of teenage girls and delaying their marriages until the age of 18. The United Nations, in 2017, awarded the West Bengal government the first place for Public Service for its “Kanyashree” scheme.
LIC:	Life Insurance Corporation of India
MGNREGA:	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005), India aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing one hundred days of wage employment in a financial year, to every rural household whose members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
NGO:	Non-governmental organisation
NPR:	Nepali Rupee
OBC:	Other Backward Classes
Palanhar:	A scheme of the Rajasthan Government to provide cash support for orphans and other vulnerable children between the ages of 0-18 years.
PF:	The Employees’ Provident Fund Scheme started in 1952 by the Government of India provides for Provident Fund, Pension and Insurance to employees. The primary purpose of PF fund is to help employees save a fraction of their salary every month for use at retirement, and part can be withdrawn before this for specified purposes. Employers and employees both contribute @12% of wages in contribution accounts.
Pehchan Card:	a newly upgraded ID card for artisans and weavers that will be linked with their Aadhaar numbers and bank accounts so that they can receive direct cash-transfer benefits. Under the Union Ministry of Textile- Office of Development Commissioner (Handlooms), Government of India.
RSBY:	Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana was launched in 2008 by Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India to provide health insurance coverage for Below Poverty Line (BPL) families. The objective of RSBY is

to provide protection to BPL households from financial liabilities arising out of health shocks that involve hospitalization. The beneficiary needs to pay Rs 30 per annum for registration/ renewal.

Samajik Suraksha Yojana:	Introduced by the Government of West Bengal in 2017 to provide financial support to workers in the unorganised sector for specified contingencies.
SC:	Scheduled Caste
SDF:	SAARC Development Fund
SEWA:	Self Employed Women's Association, a registered trade union that since 1972 has been organising self-employed informal women workers.
SEWA Shakti Kendra:	SEWA Shakti Kendra (SSK) are centres for helping members to access entitlements run by SEWA Bangla centers
ST:	Scheduled Tribe
TFC:	Trade Facilitation Centre
USD:	United States Dollar
Voter ID:	A photo identity card that is issued by the Election Commission of India to all individuals who are eligible to vote.
WFTO:	World Free Trade Organization

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Chapter 1

Introduction

BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Global sourcing has expanded, and the length of value chains has increased over the last two decades. Today, global brands seek suppliers that can be relied upon for timely delivery, consistent quality and low cost, and orders are given to enterprises that offer such guarantees. While these enterprises may, in turn, outsource some tasks to home-based workers, such outsourcing remains relatively invisible. A discussion paper published by UN Women points to the emergence and growth of global value chains and to women's presence within these as home-based workers, who face long hours, low wages, bad working conditions and are at the bottom of the hierarchy with a close link to poverty. The paper also observes that the question on whether insertion of home-based workers in global value chains represents exploitation or inclusion has not been sufficiently addressed (UN Women 2018). The outsourcing of supply by global brands is a key feature of the ready-made garments and agri-food sectors, which has led to increased employment in many developing countries.



As Barrientos (2019: 8, 12) points out, commercial pressures of low cost, volatile orders and short delivery times can lead to 'low road' outcomes for workers. The 'low road' segments of retail value chains are associated with increased casualization and with the use of contractors ('third-party labour intermediaries'), along with other practices, such as bonded labour, that are associated with exploitation of workers. The 'low road' trajectory is seen with production of low value, high volume and quick turnover. Conversely, in 'high road' segments, the emphasis on quality and standards has led to the creation of better paid jobs for some workers. These are likely to be skilled workers who produce for niche markets. Importantly, there need not be a binary divide between the 'low road' and the 'high road'. Suppliers adopt a mix of strategies to cope with cost, speed and quality pressures, and outcomes can vary for different groups of workers. Moreover, economic upgrading need not always imply social upgrading, which Barrientos notes involves 'the improvement of both measurable labour standards and enabling rights' (Barrientos 2019: 12). Some organisations in India and Nepal have mobilised home-based workers and attempted to connect them on fair terms to large brands, both domestic and global, in an effort to enable movement towards a 'high road' trajectory. It is some of these organisations, their strategies and the outcomes for women homeworkers that form the subject of this study.

Drawing on the framework provided by Barrientos (2019), the term 'private governance' is used here

to refer to the co-ordination and distribution of resources along the value chain by lead firms; including the product, environmental and labour standards that are applied. Customers and investors play key roles in pressuring lead firms to ensure proper observance of labour rights. Some companies have developed extensive codes of conduct with which all suppliers need to comply. Others, through membership in the Fair Trade Forum, are committed to principles of fair trade and will source only from suppliers who are likewise committed to these principles.

'Public governance' refers to the rules, regulations and policies of governments and relevant international agreements. Each country has laws that attempt to ensure decent working conditions for workers and requirements with which enterprises need to comply. The ILO Convention No. 177 (C177) – Home Work Convention 1996 – can be seen as a milestone in bringing both the identity and the rights of homeworkers to the fore. C177 offers guidelines for policy, although it has yet to be ratified in India and Nepal. 'Social governance' refers to the ability of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trade unions, community groups, and as a specific example, an organisation such as HomeNet South Asia (HNSA – see below), to influence social norms, policies, institutions and markets through advocacy and campaigns. The ways in which these organisations have been able to extend concerns around labour standards and include home-based workers in global value chains is considered here as an aspect of social governance.

In this study, the private and public dimensions of governance are briefly referred to in each of the case study contexts. The focus of the fieldwork was on the social governance innovations introduced in each place, which attempt to encourage fair trade and/or to support brands in making their value chains ethical. It is important to note that private and public governance determine the context and define the parameters in which social governance takes place.

Objectives and Research Questions

HNSA is a regional network of home-based worker organisations spread across eight countries of South Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Founded in 2000, it is South Asia's first and only network for home-based workers. Through its initiatives, HNSA aims to build regional solidarity among home-based workers and their representative organisations; create platforms for learning and sharing; advocate for relevant policies; increase the collective voice of home-based workers by strengthening their organisations; increase their visibility through improved statistics on home-based work; create better economic opportunities and secure social security for home-based workers; and develop the capacities of member-based organisations. These initiatives seek to empower women home-based workers and help them to improve their lives and livelihoods. A study on home-based workers linked to garment value chains was identified by HNSA member organisations as important in identifying strategies and

approaches for improving outcomes for their members.

Against this background, the aim of this study is to increase the voice and visibility of women home-based workers in South Asia who have organised as social enterprises, and to promote decent work for them within global and domestic value chains. The enterprises studied here have drawn upon Fair Trade principles to set their own internal standards, and in many cases have been able to develop partnerships with brands that are also committed to Fair Trade principles.¹ In other cases, the enterprises may have to not only observe Fair Trade principles but also the code of conduct of the international brands they may be producing for. The study has been conducted in the states of Rajasthan and West Bengal in India and the Kathmandu valley in Nepal.

THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY INCLUDE:

- a. To identify social governance initiatives that promote decent work for home-based workers
- b. To generate evidence-based data and information on the employment relationships and working conditions of home-based women workers who are supplying to global as well as domestic value chains, and
- c. To identify and document 'good practices' that could help in improving working conditions and extending social protection to women home-based workers in garment value chains

TO FULFIL THESE OBJECTIVES, THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS THAT HAVE GUIDED THE STUDY ARE:

1. How were the social enterprises established and developed?
2. What are the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of home-based workers? What are their labour, health and safety conditions?
3. What are the expressed preferences and aspirations of women home-based workers regarding type of work and location of work? What are the additional skills that home-based workers feel they need to improve the conditions, quality or security of their work?
4. What role do kin, caste and community play in determining the amount and conditions of home-based production?
5. In what ways are home-based workers involved in decisions relating to production and costing? Is there transparency in the operations of the social enterprises?

Defining Home-based Work

Home-based workers are informal economy workers who produce goods and/or provide services from their own homes or the adjacent grounds or premises. They may be self-employed own account workers, who are in direct contact with the market for raw materials and customers, or they may be sub-contracted piece-rate workers, also known as homeworkers, who rely on intermediaries for getting work and selling finished products.

For this study, women who work in centres near the home have been included in the definition of home-based workers. While these centres create a physical distance between 'work' and 'home', they retain flexible work arrangements and remain within easy walking distance. Women do the same work at the

centre as they would have done at home using the same methods and tools. The centres observed for this study generally only had between 10–20 women working there, which encourages conviviality. Advocates of better conditions for home-based workers have long argued that when the home is also the workplace, it is important to include lighting, storage and space to work in, as an essential part of designing homes. If women are able to work in small centres near the home, this creates an alternative possibility of spatial arrangements.

Country Context: Home-based Work in India and Nepal

India and Nepal are both growing economies, albeit their rates of growth have been different. While the ratio of trade to GDP has been going up in India, it has fallen in Nepal

¹ The specific articulation of Fair Trade principles by each enterprise is discussed in greater detail in the chapters that follow.

in recent years. In both countries, informal employment dominates, and gendered occupational segregation has persisted. A similarity between the two countries is the high share of home-based work in women's employment. According to official data for 2017-18, home-based workers in Nepal comprise 19.2 per cent of total employment. An estimated 30 per cent of all employed women and 12.2 per cent of all employed men are engaged in home-based work (NLFS 2017-18). In India, data for 2017-18 show that 9.1 per cent of total employed workers are engaged in home-based work: 16.4 per cent of the total women employed and 6.9 per cent of the total men employed (Raveendran 2020).

India is the seventh largest country in the world by area and the second most populous. Approximately 34 per cent of the population resides in urban areas. The most recent analysis of labour force data suggests that there has been a declining trend in the share of home-based workers in total employment. From a total of 27.54 million women engaged in home-based work in 2004-05, comprising of 19.2 per cent of the total employment, this has fallen to 17.19 million women, which is 16.4 per cent of total employment in 2017-18. Over the same period, there has been a slight increase in the percentage of men in home-based work from 6.4 to 6.9 per cent of total employment. As a share of total employment, both agricultural and non-agricultural home-based work has declined over these 13

years. The number of women in agricultural home-based work has seen a significant decline from 12.74 million in 2004-05 to 4.71 million in 2017-18 (a drop from 12.2 per cent to 8.2 per cent of total employment). The numbers for men agricultural home-based workers have increased slightly from 2.66 million to 3.91 million during the same time (in percentage terms, this is an increase from 1.8 per cent to 2.9 per cent). In the non-agricultural sector, there has been an increase in the number of men in home-based work, from 16.94 million to 20.75 million, which is a small decline in percentage from 10.8 per cent to 9.4 per cent of total employment. Women home-based workers in non-agricultural work has seen a significant decline both in terms of real numbers and percentages, having fallen from 14.80 million (38 per cent) in 2004-05 to 12.48 million (26.5 per cent). Within the manufacturing sector, the three industries with the largest share of women home-based workers in 2017-18 were wearing apparel, tobacco products and textiles. (Raveendran 2020).

Landlocked between India and China, Nepal has three distinct geographic and climatic areas: Mountain, Hill and Terai regions. The Hill region, with the Valleys of Kathmandu and Pokhara, is the most urbanized and populated: around 20 per cent of Nepal's population resides in urban areas. Nearly half of women non-agricultural workers in Nepal (47.6 per cent) were home-based workers compared to less than a quarter

(21.6 per cent) of men in 2008. Three quarters of the home-based workers reside in rural areas. Around 45 per cent of women home-based workers are in retail and manufacturing.

Among women home-based workers in manufacturing, the highest percentage are in food and beverage products, followed by garments and textiles (Raveendran and Vanek 2013).

Women in Home-based Work: The Productive-Reproductive Continuum

Home-based workers remain invisible as their workplace is their home, and when their work is linked to global value chains, they are located in the lowest tiers, largely out of sight of brands or social auditors. Invisibility is associated with poor working conditions, denial of fair/minimum wages, and lack of social security. Women working within homes face the additional concern of simultaneously managing child care and household responsibilities. Engaging in paid work does not reduce the reproductive responsibilities that women must fulfil. These duties are an important reason why women prefer to work at home, as it allows some time flexibility and makes it possible to simultaneously keep an eye on children and the household.²

Efforts to create regular income-

² *Feminists have argued that the very invisibility of home-based work contributed significantly to the growth of capitalism as well as led to 'housewifisation of labour' (Mies 1986) by reproducing the ideology of the family and the woman as the domestic labourer (Beechey 1977). They further argue that women have been drawn into the 'productive' economy, but in ways that do not question the productive and reproductive divide (Kalpagam 1994).*

earning opportunities for home-based women workers and to improve working conditions form key elements of the 'economic upgrading' that is being attempted by the organisations studied here. These organisations work exclusively with women home-based workers in the segments studied, so that there are no concerns around gender discrimination at work or equal remuneration of men and women workers. But as home-based workers, women need to continuously juggle their paid work and home responsibilities.

Chen and Doane (2008) have flagged a number of issues when it comes to understanding the market from a gender lens. Apart from participation rates, there are gendered patterns of employment, which are reflected both in unemployment and underemployment in the informal economy. Women, in comparison to men, report fewer days of work as well as greater irregularity of work. Industries are segmented by gender, with women over-represented in some sectors, such as unpaid family labour and agricultural wage work, while men are more prevalent in non-agricultural wage work and own account work. Women are also most likely to work within homes, due to household responsibilities and social norms regarding female modesty. In addition to segregation, there remains a gender gap in wages, which is exacerbated in the informal economy (for a fuller evidence-based discussion see Chen and Doane 2008). Given the widely predominant ideology of the male breadwinner and female supplementary earner, women working within homes lack a sense of worker identity and continue

to face poor working conditions, non-recognition of skills, and inadequate wages. Organising the women who work within their homes is harder as these women remain secluded and do not share a workplace. In the value chain context, the societal undervaluation of women's work contributes to their incorporation on adverse terms, which in turn may be contested by individual, collective (trade unions, industrial action) or collaborative (advocacy or campaigns against poor working conditions) action (Barrientos 2019: 11).

While the organisations studied do not make direct interventions in the domain of care and reproductive responsibilities, women's agency has increased in this realm through the gaining of information about

and exposure to the outside world, increased mobility and confidence, and the building of group solidarity.

This study looks at social enterprises that negotiate the binary of factory-home by operationalising practices that benefit women who have to navigate both labour market demands and reproductive labour that sustains the family.

Global brands offer some opportunities for work, and piece-rate work remains a reality; within these contexts, how best can one talk of rights and responsibilities both of companies and workers? What are the practices that can be developed that allow for good working conditions, minimum wages, access to social security, and balancing of work and care responsibilities?



A home-based worker works on an embroidery design sitting in her verandah. Udaipur, India.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Framing the Findings

The framework of Decent Work, as articulated by the International Labour Organization (ILO), with gender equality as a cross-cutting theme, has been used to assess the observed outcomes. This entails:

- **Creating employment opportunities:** with special focus on skills training, market access, and value chain work orders
- **Guaranteeing rights at work:** interventions to ensure fair piece rates, bonuses, and other worker benefits; ensuring no forced, bonded or child labour
- **Extending social protection:** access to social security, health care, occupational health and safety considerations
- **Promoting social dialogue:** steps taken towards organising workers, and advocacy and collective bargaining on their behalf

The study has two parts, though these are not mutually exclusive. The first is a mapping of home-based workers in different contexts, and the second involves locating 'good practices' that have been developed by the organisations studied here. The former includes the demographic and socio-economic profile of home-based workers, earnings and conditions of work, access to training and social security. The 'good practice' aspect identifies initiatives that have had a demonstrable and tangible impact in improving livelihood opportunities and social protection for women home-based workers.

The primary criterion used for identifying a 'good practice' is an improvement in the working conditions of women home-based workers. This can include one or more of the following:

- Higher piece rates/earnings (compared to a previous period and/or to those who are not associated with social enterprises)
- Better access to work (more regular and longer periods of work, including for women located in remote areas)
- Improved access to social security (in particular health and old-age support, and for work-related accidents and injuries), and education of children
- Upgradation of skills
- Better information about markets, training facilities, rights and entitlements
- Enhanced financial literacy
- Improved access to identity cards for access to government schemes
- Enhanced self-esteem and physical mobility for women workers

These outcomes are brought about through various interventions, including:

- Visibility, through advocacy, of the work of home-based workers in the value chain and giving them recognition as workers
- A reduction in the number of intermediaries in the value chain by obtaining direct orders from brands
- Negotiation with buyers on behalf of home-based workers
- Models of organising women workers that create a role for home-based workers at different levels of decision making and keep women home-based workers at the forefront
- Attempts to smooth market fluctuations by diversifying markets and providing financial support at times of crisis
- Peer support and group leadership, breaking down social barriers

The Field Sites

The sample of home-based workers studied here are those who are members/shareholders of a social enterprise of home-based workers through which work orders are received—with one exception: SEWA³ Bangla is a trade union and not a social enterprise. The sites for fieldwork in India were the city of

Udaipur and neighbouring villages in Rajasthan state; in and around the city of Bikaner in Rajasthan; Shantipur Block in the district of Nadia in West Bengal state; and clusters in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal. In each place, the study has been conducted in partnership with organisations working in the area. **The partner organisations were**

³ The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a registered trade union that since 1972 has been organising self-employed informal women workers.

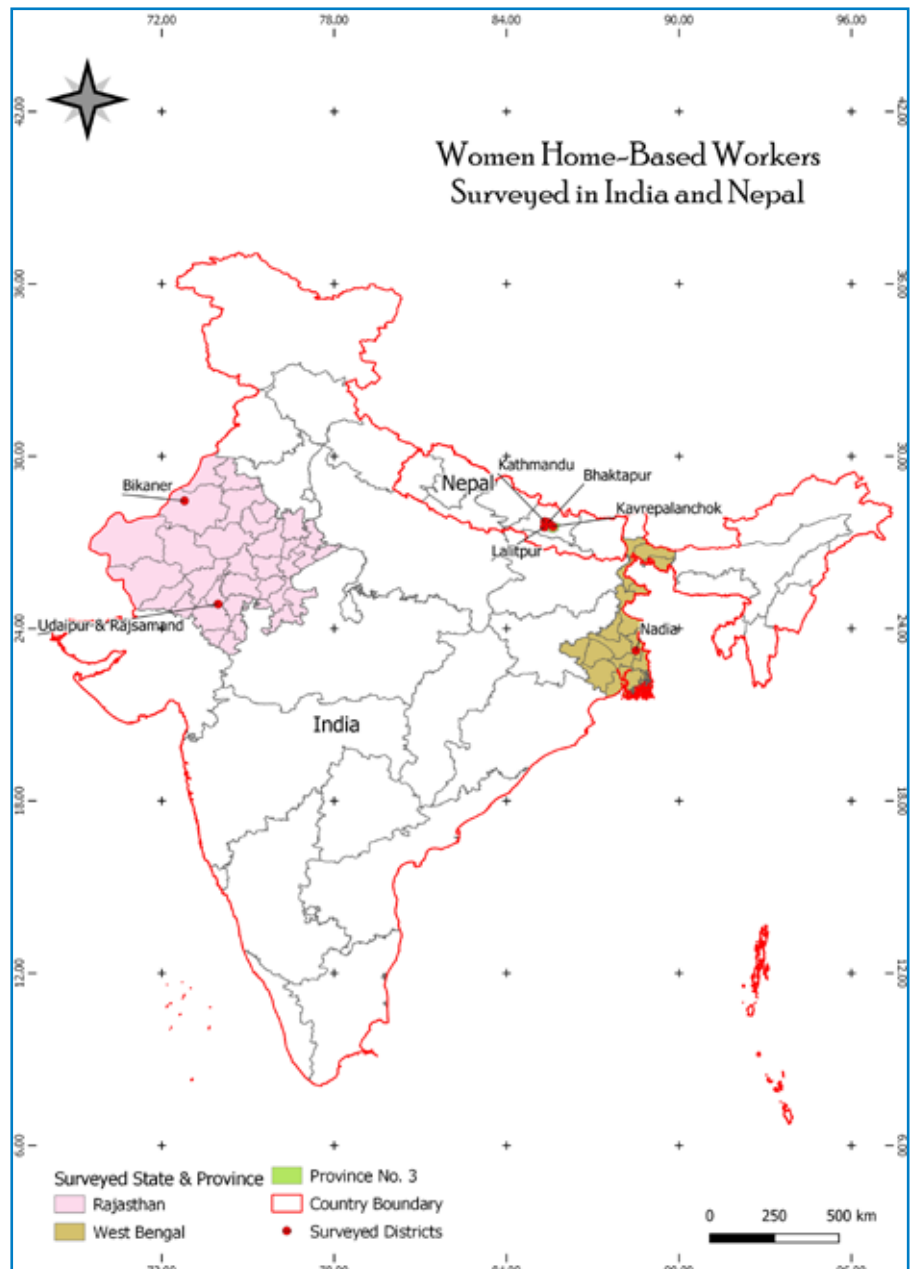
Sadhna in Udaipur, Rangсутra in Bikaner, SEWA Bangla in Phulia, and both SABAH Nepal and Sana Hastakala in the Kathmandu Valley.

Sadhna, in Udaipur, was started in 1988 as an income generation programme of Seva Mandir (a leading development organisation that has been working in the area for 50 years). Its aim was to provide another source of livelihood to tribal and rural women and to women from urban slum areas in and around Udaipur. Starting with just a small group of 15 women, it has grown over the years to now have a membership of around 700 women and is registered as a Mutual Benefit Trust. Sadhna mobilises women home-based workers, and links them to both global and domestic brands to get orders, and manages the entire production chain starting with sourcing of fabric up to final quality checks, packaging and transport of orders to the buying companies. In terms of organisational structure, all members are part of the General Body that meets once a year to make crucial decisions. Further, group leaders form the Management Committee, consisting of 43 members, which meets every quarter. Out of these 43 members, 2 are elected to become members of the Board of Trustees. Sadhna also has its own retail outlet.

Rangсутra, in Bikaner, was set up as a producer company in 2005, initially with 10 women as individual shareholders. It then evolved into first a private limited company and later a public limited company. The initial group of shareholders consisted of artisans associated with Urmul, an NGO that has worked in the area

since 1984. Today, there are around 3000 artisans (1500 in Bikaner) associated with Rangсутra, of which around two-thirds are shareholders. It has grown rapidly with a turnover of 15 crore (150 million) Indian rupees in the last financial year, 2018-19. Between 2006-11, it supplied only to a domestic brand. Since 2013, it has been supplying to a global brand and has also opened its own retail store.

The third research site in India was the town of Phulia and its adjoining villages in Shantipur block, district Nadia, West Bengal. An estimated 50-60 buyers, including export houses, source products from Phulia. The aim was to study the conditions of work of handloom weavers making primarily saris, stoles, and scarves. The partner organisation for the study was SEWA Bangla, which has recently started



India and Nepal Map

working in the area, mobilizing women weavers and linking them to local handloom and handicraft fairs and exhibitions. Currently SEWA Bangla, also a member of HNSA, has a membership of around 4000 in Nadia district, of whom around 40 per cent are weavers and the rest are ancillary workers. SEWA Bangla organises health awareness sessions, health check-up camps, eye camps and yoga sessions and has mobilized women around issues of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and more. The SEWA Shakti Kendra is a centre providing information and assistance to access key government schemes. A platform for regular dialogue among home-based women weavers has been created, and through this platform interaction and advocacy with other stakeholders has been initiated.

SABAH Nepal, also a member of HNSA, was established in 2008 with the objective of engaging and mobilising financially deprived and marginalised women, training them and helping them to have secure livelihoods. It is registered as a “not for profit” company and with the social welfare council; thus, it has a dual status as a business entity and as a social work organisation. At present there are around 3500 members of SABAH Nepal. Training is given to women for different skills, including knitting, weaving, stitching, and food preparation/processing, as well as leadership training, entrepreneurship development and resource management training. It is a member of Fair Trade Group Nepal and has developed the SABAH code of ethics, which is based on Fair Trade

Principles. Apart from negotiating Business to Business (B2B) orders, it has its own retail store.

Sana Hastakala is a Nepalese organisation that was established in 1989 with the aim of helping small scale artisan producers to earn by marketing their products in the national market. Started with financial and technical support from UNICEF, it became self-sufficient within two years and was registered as a non-profit organisation in Kathmandu in 1991. It began with only six employees and one outlet but has grown into a national organisation and one of the biggest players of the handicraft sector. It started exporting products after 2001 and became a member of World Fair Trade Organization in 2003. It is a founding member of the Fair Trade Group Nepal and also, since 2004, a member of Asia Fair Trade Forum. Currently, Sana Hastakala is working with 67 producer groups representing more than 1200 individual producers producing about 2000 craft items of different types. It serves domestic customers through its own retail outlet while exporting to more than 15 countries through its sister organisation, Sana Hastakala Pvt. Ltd. It lends support to producers by providing raw materials, financial help, technical support, skills training, product design, quality improvement and capacity development.

Study Methodology

The research design for this study, including the framework used for sampling and the methods used,

draws upon established research methods.⁴ Purposive sampling was used. The first step was to identify villages/clusters where women home-based workers were located. The partner organisations detailed the key characteristics of these different villages and groups, and a selection was made jointly by the researchers and the partner organisations. Randomly picking clusters was not desirable as there were particular issues to be explored in each place. **The sample selection was done so as to include a rural and urban component (where relevant), ‘old’ groups that are well established in the work as well as ‘new’ ones, and different social groups (as relevant).** In Bikaner, the sample was focused on villages where Village Craft Centres had been opened.

In all areas except Phulia, women had been organised into work groups. The second stage was to select one or more groups in each selected village or cluster. The survey questionnaire was canvassed to each woman who was present and willing among the groups selected. A small sample of home-based women workers who were not associated with the social enterprises were also surveyed in Udaipur and Kathmandu, to shed light on issues where membership in the social enterprises appears to have made the most difference.

In addition to women home-based workers, interviews were conducted with group leaders, management staff of the social enterprises/collectives, government representatives, and experts who were not connected to

⁴ See, for example Biggeri, Mehrotra, and Sudarshan 2009.

the enterprise in any way but whose understanding of the sector was valuable for the study. In all, 628 home-based workers answered the survey; semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 265 persons, including home-based workers and other stakeholders (see Annex 1 for a description of the complete sample). This study did not map the global or domestic value chains extending between the final buyer and the social enterprises. Some information about the brands, the terms on which orders are obtained, and the experiences with producing for different buyers was obtained from the enterprises and from other experts.

The parameters on which information was collected through the structured questionnaire are listed in Annex 2 and include: demographic information for the respondent and all household members; description of work, payments, and working conditions; skills and training; and access to social protection and key health issues. In addition to semi-structured in-depth interviews with selected home-based workers and other respondents, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, and general observations made by the researchers. While similar tools were used in all the sites of study, the community – or ‘working universe’ – in which the respondents live was varied. The villages and districts selected in Bengal, Rajasthan and Nepal had different social customs and norms, and different economic contexts. On the one hand, this allows a comparative study of how local contexts and culture influence women workers’ access to capital, collective spaces and understanding

of labour. On the other hand, it also makes clear the similarities or the commonality of experience between home-based workers across cultures and contexts.

Data collected from the qualitative methods is presented in the form of narratives, quotations and descriptions. Interviews were conducted when rapport could be built between the researcher and the respondent, and always with the consent of the respondent. All interviews were electronically recorded, transcribed and translated. Researchers made field notes of their observations. The quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other: the FGD was the initial entry point to the groups, clusters, and communities, followed by the survey. The FGD was conducted not just to understand group dynamics but also to serve as an ice breaking tool between the data collectors and the respondents. Depending on the willingness of the respondent and her enthusiasm to be part of the research process, the survey sheets were often followed by semi-structured interviews.

Given the small size of the sample and the qualitative nature of the study, the findings do not lend themselves to wider generalizations. Therefore, this study does not claim to represent all home-based workers located in West Bengal, Rajasthan or Kathmandu Valley.

Fieldwork Experiences

The fieldwork was conducted over a period of six months in 2019. Research

tools are always formulated with good intent and within a particular framework of thought. Once on the field there are unanticipated situations. This section pulls together some of the experiences of collecting data. The questionnaires for the quantitative and qualitative interviews were finalized in the Delhi office of HNSA, after many rounds of feedback, including a few rounds of pilot fieldwork. For Rajasthan, an effort was made to hire a team of data collectors who could speak the local languages/dialects; these data collectors visited the HNSA office in Delhi for an orientation workshop that included a pilot study with women home-based workers located in the urban slums of Sunder Nagari and Rajiv Nagar in New Delhi. This allowed for some self-reflection as well as conversations around data collection, process, and ethics. The same process was followed with the Bengal team, except that piloting was done in Bengal and in Bengali. While the orientation included a presentation of the research sample, questionnaire, and the rationale of the research project, the data collectors also contributed meaningfully to developing the tools. Recruiting local data collectors also helped with building rapport with respondents and local organisations, as it eliminated many of the cultural and language barriers. For Nepal, the overall process followed was similar, with SABAH Nepal taking on the responsibility of recruiting the data collectors and daily monitoring.

Both the quantitative and qualitative methods were used by the same researcher, thus ensuring continuity as well as avoiding repetitive questions. There was unanimous



Data collection with SABAH Nepal HBWs

consent that the sequence followed, of conducting the FGDs first and then filling out the survey form and identifying some respondents for a further and more detailed semi-structured interview, worked well. The India case studies had overlapping timeframes, with data collection in Bikaner and Phulia happening simultaneously. The team was split into two between Rajasthan and Bengal. To ensure that communication between the two sites was maintained and field surveys monitored on a daily basis, every evening there was a conference call attended by all team members. This not only allowed

comparisons between the sites but also created space for cross cutting conversations, which helped hone data collection tools. For instance, some changes were made to the Phulia questionnaires, as well as to some of the qualitative semi-structured interview schedules used in Bikaner, as a result of this daily sharing of experiences. The calls also gave data collectors the opportunity to voice the concerns, ideas, and challenges that they faced on a daily basis with the rest of the research team and HNSA personnel. This opened up channels to exchange ideas and discuss research tools, as well as revise and rethink research

processes. This also helped in displacing hierarchies between the data collectors in the field and the research team located in Delhi, leading to an equal exchange of ideas. Some members of the data collection team were retained for data entry in Delhi as well as remotely, which has helped in minimizing errors and in cross-checking data.

Limitations and Challenges of the Study

Data collection was facilitated by representatives of the partner organisations. This had different implications in different places. At one site, the team observed that having local staff and/or the group leader present during the FGD tended to create a barrier to free expression for the home-based workers. To avoid this, the semi-structured interviews of the local staff and/or group leader were carried out in parallel to the FGD. At another site, however, the team observed that women home-based workers spoke up only in the presence of and with encouragement from, the local staff and/or group leader. Thus, here the team did not exclude the local staff and/or group leader from being present during the FGD.

Some of the members in the research team noted that FGDs were often dominated by one or two women who were vocal and articulate. Women home-based workers also tended to look towards the group leader to answer on their behalf. Where women did not speak up in

groups they were often forthcoming in a one-to-one interview. Following the FGD with interviews helped to draw out more voices.

One of the challenges faced, as observed by the data collectors, concerned the use of a tape-recorder. Some women respondents, who were otherwise vocal and articulate, hesitated to speak up in the presence of a recording device. While the research team was able to reassure confidentiality to most of the respondents, some still declined to be interviewed and the team respected their decision.

Social customs and norms often came in the way of recording demographic details: women were hesitant in giving the names of husbands/fathers-in-law or were unsure of their age. This often led to group discussion as other members chipped in with details, which in turn sometimes became an ice breaker for further interviews.

In Bikaner, there were particularly severe challenges of language, with women speaking a mix of Sindi, Hindi, Marwari, and other dialects, a fact that encouraged HNSA to recruit local data collectors, which helped greatly both in conducting the interviews and subsequent translation.

The biggest challenge faced in all the sites was the anticipation of women home-based workers that the research team was there to provide them with work. In Phulia, there was a shortage of work orders, thus making it difficult to find women weavers who were engaged in handloom weaving on a regular



Data collectors sat with home-based weavers in Fulia to discuss issues of livelihood

basis. This also led many women to assume that the data collectors had come there to give them work. These moments were disconcerting.

However, a different common reaction was heartening. The research team was made acutely aware that women home-based workers are critically conscious of their rights, and the value of their labour and lives because many women asked, repeatedly, what impact the study would have, and why it was worth their time to participate in such an activity.

In Phulia, the value chain was very different from that of Nepal and Rajasthan. There was no single value chain linking home-based workers to global or domestic brands, and the weaving sector was organised more like a matrix with innumerable crosscutting linkages. This posed a challenge to the researchers as sometimes it was hard to categorize respondents, as a weaver could also

be a contractor or even a trader, given the opportunities available to her.

Scheduling of visits and data collection often presented another difficult challenge; this arose, for example, if artisans had just been given new work or had a deadline to meet, or during social gatherings and local festivals when women were busy in other ways. In Udaipur, finding a group of embroidery workers not connected to Sadhna proved difficult, since embroidery is not a traditional activity here. Instead, the research team had to broaden the scope and include independent home-based workers who specialized in zardozi work (embroidery with metallic gold and silver thread called zari), and who were producing these products for the local market or for domestic value chains. Similarly, despite numerous attempts, the research team also had difficulty in finding and interview contractors associated with such independent home-based workers.

OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

The next four chapters present an analysis of the field data for Udaipur, Bikaner, Phulia and Kathmandu. Each of these chapters contains a brief history of the evolution of the social enterprise/ union, its approach and organisation. An enterprise value chain has been constructed for each area detailing the manner in which

the work is distributed to home-based workers as well as those aspects of production that have been centralized. Using the survey data and interviews, the outcomes for home-based workers are examined using a framework that draws on the ILO Decent Work framework. Finally, innovations in practice and organisation that are

seen to be 'good practices' have been noted. The final chapter presents a summary picture of the outcomes for home-based women workers across areas, and an overall assessment of the good practices identified by the study as well as the challenges faced. The research tools and data tables are included as annexures.



HBWs prepare shipments at a SABA Nepal production centre

Chapter 2

Sadhna: Home-Based Work In and Around Udaipur

INTRODUCTION

The work of Seva Mandir and Sadhna extends across Udaipur and Rajsamand districts, the latter having been carved out as a separate district from Udaipur in 1991. Located in Southern Rajasthan bordering the state of Gujarat, over 80 per cent of the population of Udaipur and around 84 per cent of the population of Rajsamand is rural (Census 2011). The gender gap in literacy rate is high, standing at 26.3 per cent for Udaipur district and 30.4 per cent for Rajsamand; similarly the gender gap in labour force participation is significant: men's participation is 18 percentage points higher than women's in Udaipur and 14.8 points higher in Rajsamand. Almost half the population of Udaipur consists of Scheduled Tribes (STs). The economy of both districts is mainly dependent on agriculture: 61.7 per cent of workers in Udaipur district and 57.1 per cent in Rajsamand are either cultivators or agricultural labourers (Census 2011). These districts have vast stretches of semi-arid and hilly areas that are drought prone leading to high rates of male out-migration in search of livelihood. The rural, tribal and low-income urban population lacks other sources of income. It is to the women in these groups that Sadhna has reached out.



About Sadhna

Sadhna is a social enterprise with its roots in Seva Mandir, a leading development organisation founded 50 years ago. It grew out of Seva Mandir's community development programme for women's empowerment, which included interventions for health, hygiene, education and in the long term, improved female agency. Leela Vijayvergia, who during her tenure at Seva Mandir started this project, and then continued as the first CEO of Sadhna, recalls that:

"We wanted to work on women's empowerment, so we started calling women for meetings. But we also felt that they needed to see some tangible benefits, some additional income. Their families would ask them what was the point in attending these meetings.... we realized that we could talk about health, education, self-development, but to bring everyone together we need some other platform". Thus, income generating activities became the focal point for mobilising women.

Broadly, three phases can be identified in the growth of Sadhna as a successful social enterprise. The first phase is the period between 1998, when Seva Mandir started a livelihood programme for women with 15 artisans, and December 2004, when Sadhna registered as a community-owned Mutual Benefit Trust with 250 artisan members. All its artisan members are co-owners⁵ of the enterprise. For Sadhna to survive and become an independent



Sadhna members gather at a fellow member's house to collect new pieces and understand design

entity, it needed to generate a surplus that could be ploughed back into the organisation; this meant that it had to wean itself off from Seva Mandir, as the latter is a non-profit development organisation.

The second phase of growth as an independent organisation saw the opening of its first store in 2005 with 379 artisan members to whom social security coverage was given by registering them under the Provident Fund Scheme (detailed later). By 2006, Sadhna had 618 members and registered as a member of the Fair Trade Forum. In 2007 it recorded a turnover of INR 10,000,000 (USD 140,000⁶). Sadhna's stated goal is 'to provide alternative incomes for women in Udaipur's rural, tribal and urban slum belts. Sadhna provides continuous training to women

artisans to improve their skills, a support network to them in their villages and a respectable position in their family and society.⁷

The third phase can be said to have started in the last few years with the emergence of a clearer business orientation for continued further growth, renewed emphasis on developing contemporary designs, and on further strengthening of the B2C (Business to Consumer) component. Seva Mandir is represented on the Board of Sadhna and continues in this way to infuse its ideology and approach into the work of Sadhna, with the result that Sadhna attempts a blending of 'profit with purpose'.⁸ With that grounding, it is free to develop its own strategies. As part of this third phase, Sadhna has invested in a new brand, 'Raab', a premium collection of

⁵ As co-owners, members are eligible for a share of any surplus, which is disbursed in the form of bonuses.

⁶ Exchange rate used throughout this paper: INR 1 = USD 0.014

⁷ <https://www.sadhna.org/>

⁸ Sadhna annual report 2018-19, Chairperson's foreword, page 2

women's garments marketed through its own outlets.⁹

The Study Sample

For this study a sample of Sadhna members working from their homes was drawn from both rural and urban areas; it also includes a small

number of home-based workers not associated with Sadhna (discussed later in the chapter).

Today, Sadhna works with 50 groups of women home-based workers in all. For this study, a sample was drawn from 20 of these groups, half in urban Udaipur

and half in rural areas, for a total of 205 respondents in all. These included 171 regular members and 34 voucher members. Voucher members are those women who have joined recently.¹⁰

Table 2.1 summarises the groups visited.

TABLE 2.1: NO. OF SADHNA RESPONDENTS (BOTH REGULAR AND VOUCHER MEMBERS)

Groups	No. of respondents (regular members)	No. of respondents (voucher members)
Pula 1	14	
Delwada 3b	11	
Bhinder 2	13	
Bhinder 1	14	
Madar 1	14	3
Tasol	0	4
Kelwa	0	4
Delwada 1A	9	1
Delwada 2B	9	1
Delwada 4b	0	4
Fatehnagar	17	5
Ratakhet 4	7	1
Ratakhet 2	9	
Manoharpura	11	3
Ambaogarh	11	
Khanjipir	10	
Badgaon	0	4
Godva	11	4
Pula 2	11	
Total	171	34
Combined Total		205

⁹ <https://www.sadhna.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/RAAB-Firstlook-catalogue-1.pdf>

¹⁰ Women who take the training and are able to complete work orders of at least INR 8000–12000 (USD 105–159) over the year are eligible to register as regular members and can remain registered members if they continue to complete work orders of at least INR 6000 (USD 79) over the year. Others may continue as voucher members. The latter are paid piece rates for the work they do, but they are not eligible for bonus, or gifts (bonus and gifts are discussed in detail later) and Sadhna does not facilitate their access to social security schemes. Regular members pay INR 101 (USD 1.41) as their annual membership fee (Source: Sadhna Artisan Manual).

TABLE 2.2: NO. OF RESPONDENTS (NON-SADHNA) ACCORDING TO LOCATION

Villages	No. of respondents (non-Sadhna)
Pahada	18
Rajnagar	8
Rehmani Colony	4
Alo Factory	8
Bedla	4
Indira Colony	5
Bhuvana	7
Total	54

Demographic Profile of Sadhna Respondents

Of the survey respondents who were Sadhna members, 20 per cent were 21-30 years of age, 49 per cent were ages 31-40, 25 per cent were 41-50, and 6 per cent were between 50-60 years of age. The average age of respondents was 38. All but two of the respondents were married, one was unmarried, and one was widowed. There were no workers

under the age of 18, and there was no significant presence of child marriage in these households, with only two cases of girls below 18 years of age reported to be married.

The average household size was six, and the care dependency ratio was 0.48.¹¹ Among the respondents, 26 per cent had no schooling, and only five women (3 per cent) had studied beyond Class XII. In terms of economic activities, there was a range of occupations that household members of home-based workers

were engaged in, including daily-wage work other than construction (10 per cent), construction work (4 per cent), and home-based work (21 per cent), but most women did not engage in significant numbers in any paid economic activity other than home-based work. Forty-five per cent of women reported that the household monthly income ranged from INR 10,000–25,000 (USD 140–350); 14 per cent of households earned above INR 25,000 and 41 per cent earned below INR 10,000.

¹¹ Calculated as the ratio between the population in the dependent age groups (under 15 or over 65) to that in the working age group (15-64).

SADHNA'S DECENT WORK ACHIEVEMENTS

Sadhna's interventions and the observations from the survey can be grouped into four sections, using the categories of the ILO Agenda for Decent Work.

Creating Employment Opportunities

Sadhna's has aimed to create work opportunities for women from tribal, rural and urban low-income households in and around Udaipur city. This target group has remained constant since the beginning. The increase in membership from 15 artisans in 1998 to roughly 700 today is a measure of direct work opportunities that have been created. Given the strong patriarchal constraints on women's mobility in the area, many women were confined to their homes until they became members of self-help groups formed by Seva Mandir and started working with Sadhna. Thus, the creation of employment opportunities has had both an economic and social impact on women.

As one Group leader said, *"Because of Sadhna, we have travelled so much and our confidence has increased. Before, if someone spoke to us, we could not respond; now at least we can speak out ...we have even learnt how to write our names. Before we used to ask our children to write our names on our behalf."*

While the need for a livelihood focus was clear from the beginning, the choice of work was based on an assessment of what would be feasible. Since most women had some knowledge of stitching, it was possible to build their skills in



Sadhna has created employment opportunities for women residing in remote villages around Udaipur and Delwara districts

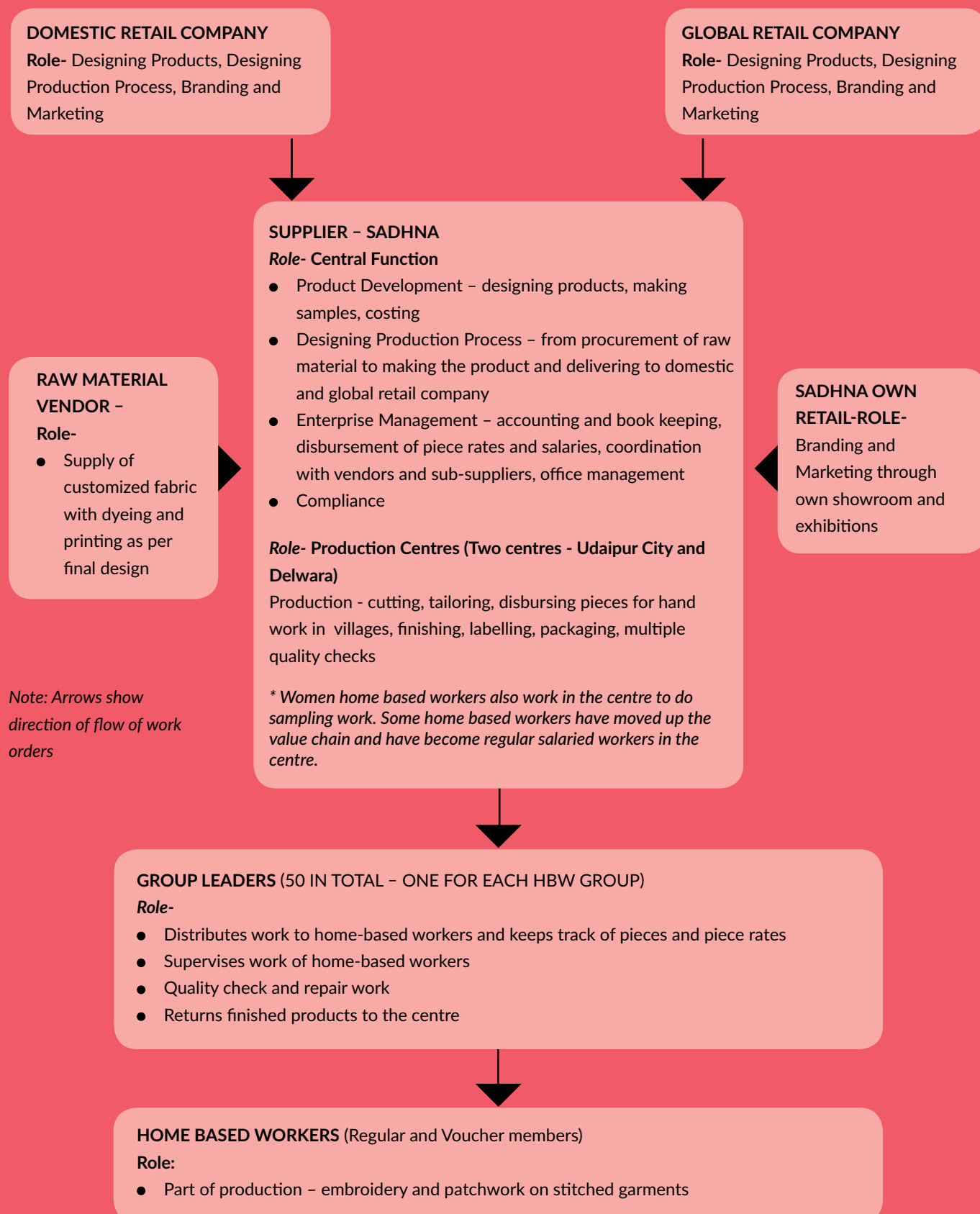
applique, patchwork and simple embroidery. It should be noted that Sadhna did not mobilise women already engaged in home-based work: it encouraged women who were hidden within their homes and not engaged in income-generating activity to improve their skills and become home-based workers. A home-based worker who became a member of Sadhna in 2006 and who has served on the Board told us, *"I was a Rajput woman and did not have permission to step out of the house. I started working with Sadhna from the confines of my home. Over the years I have started working in Sadhna's production centre and managing showrooms. I earn money; I step out and can travel alone across the country. This is a great achievement for me."*

Initially, Seva Mandir and Sadhna collaborated in implementing the livelihood programme. For example, in Delwara the training of women in

stitching happened through Nagrik Vikas Manch of Seva Mandir, and these women were then brought together under the Sadhna umbrella. Market access for the women mobilised in this way was enabled both through work orders from global and domestic brands, as well as for B2C sales in Sadhna showrooms and exhibitions. Sadhna today makes a range of products, including home furnishings (cushion covers, table mats, bed covers, quilts); clothes (shirts, kurtas, stoles, jackets, saris, skirts) and other items (wall hangings, jewellery, diaries and mobile phone covers). As shown in the Sadhna value chain diagram below, this work is distributed to artisans who work at the two production centres in Udaipur and Delwara, as well as to artisans who work from home. The work that is done at home includes embroidery, applique, patch work and embellishment. Each home-based worker is also a member of a self-help group.

FIGURE 2.1: VALUE CHAIN OF SADHNA (2020)

VALUE CHAIN – SADHNA (2020)



Sadhna members include around 100 artisans who work at the production centres on a regular basis and are engaged in work such as stitching, ironing, sampling and other centralized activities. The remaining members work from home. Members play different roles in the management of Sadhna. All members, including home-based-workers who are regular members of Sadhna, are members of the General Body. A group leader is selected from each group of home-based workers (this position is rotated every three years, and all members are eligible to be tested for the position). Responsibilities of the group leader include keeping the group together, giving and taking work from the members and helping them as needed, checking quality of products and ensuring that deadlines are met. The group leader is the connection between members and all departments in Sadhna and is expected to attend Management Committee meetings, maintain the records and add new members to the group.

All group leaders are part of the Management Committee. Two group leaders represent the artisans on the Board of Trustees.

Over the years, Sadhna has considerably expanded its B2B work orders. According to the Sadhna Annual Report for 2018-19, the total annual sales revenue exceeded INR 40 million (USD 5,60,000). Total B2B sales were over 73 per cent of the total sales revenue. Export sales for the year represented about 18 per cent of total sales revenue. The B2C component included Sadhna showroom sales (17 per cent) and

exhibitions (9 per cent).

B2B orders come with tight deadlines. If these deadlines cannot be maintained, then orders are not repeated, meaning there is no work in the following year. Women are aware that in peak seasons they have to work long and tedious hours to ensure timely delivery. During an FGD, Sadhna members explained how they managed household work along with the demands of peak seasons, which entail large orders with tight deadlines.

Respondent: We do both Sadhna and household work by turns. We wake up early in the morning to complete house work and later in the day we work on Sadhna's pieces.

Data Collector: Do you know for which company you are making these pieces and what is the final price in the market?

Respondent: Yes, we have heard that we make for brand x and y. When we go to Sadhna centre to pick up the work, then they tell us for which company the order is and also the deadline. At what price it is sold for in the market, we don't know that.

Data Collector: How many hours do you work in a day?

Respondent: We work around three to four hours in a day and if a big order comes, then sometimes we even work at night.

The B2C component has allowed Sadhna to reduce seasonal variations in work availability to home-based workers. Respondents reported that they had been working for an average of 10 years with Sadhna. Although women have reported variations in earnings, they also pointed out that Sadhna provides them with work

throughout the year. When B2B orders run out, women work on B2C orders – that is, merchandise sold in Sadhna outlets, exhibitions, online shopping portals, etc. Though there is no clearly defined peak season, respondents identified Diwali and Holi as peak seasons and January to March was pegged as the lean season.

During an FGD in Delwara, members spoke of the ways in which they have benefitted by becoming Sadhna members.

Respondent: We got the chance to go out of the house.

Respondent: We don't have to ask anyone for money now.

Respondent: We are self-reliant now. We can fulfil our own needs.

Respondent: Twice I have gone to Delhi and two times I have gone to Mumbai for exhibitions.

Skill development

Developing skills is an aspect of creating work opportunities that receives special attention at Sadhna. An initial training is given to all women who express interest in joining Sadhna. Training is given by the most skilled artisans to other women who are interested in learning. These trainings are usually held within the village/cluster, at a community centre or panchayat area or other common space. The basic skills around stitching and embroidery require just a one-time training, although skill levels will change with experience. The training includes teaching embroidery, patch work and applique, some of which may already be known to the women, as well as new designs, the system



Equipped with technical skills, Sadhna members are now creating beautiful home-decor and apparel products using applique and patchwork techniques

of getting work, and expectations for the women regarding quality and timely delivery. In the survey, a large number of respondents (46 per cent) reported learning embroidery through the training organised by Sadhna, while 19 per cent said they had learnt from family or community members; 37 per cent reported that they had passed on the skill to others in the family. Despite this, respondents did not necessarily wish to see their children grow up to do similar work, an observation that reflects rising aspirations with higher levels of education, and the relatively low returns of home-based work. Reasons given by respondents on why they did not want their daughters to join this sector included the fact that the work weakens eyesight; and the hope that schooling would lead to 'good jobs' paying more than home-based work.

A significant number of respondents

(66 per cent) wanted to improve their skills. Amongst those who wanted to improve skills, 59 per cent wanted to improve the quality of their work. About the training received from Sadhna, 93 per cent women reported that what was taught was already known to them. This probably reflects the fact that the work given out to women working from home requires simple embroidery skills that, once taught, do not need much upgradation. The sample is made in the stitching centre and is duplicated by women in their homes requiring mostly various simple stitches and patch work skills. Seema Shah, CEO of Sadhna, explains: *"Our techniques have not changed, so women do not need to repeat the training."*

The work is allocated to women according to their skill levels. Groups as well as individual women are graded according to levels of skill. *"Everyone gets the same training, but*

even within a group there are women who belong to A, B, and C category."

This can and often does lead to conflicts between members in the group about the work allocation. These conflicts can usually be resolved by the group leader but may need the intervention of other Sadhna staff. Artisans are also trained in administration and management, facilitating their participation in international meets and craft fairs.

The capacity building or training of women who were not traditionally part of the handicrafts sector has been funded in various ways. For instance, in 2017-18, the handwork group in Kelwa was linked to Seva Mandir projects funded by JK Tyres, which provided training for three months in livelihood generation. Sadhna also collaborated with ICICI-RSETI (Rural Self Employment Training Institute)¹² in Bhinder, Udaipur District, and women were trained in stitching patterns used by Sadhna. Collaborating with the Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India, Sadhna enrolled its members from minority communities in a national training programme called 'Ustaad' to enhance skills.

Upward mobility along the value chain

Mobility of home-based workers into better paid positions within Sadhna or into more remunerative opportunities elsewhere is another aspect of the creation of employment

¹² ICICI Rural Self Employment Training Institutes (ICICI- RSETIs) are bank-run institutions that function under the banner of Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), drawing support from ICICI Bank and ICICI Foundation. ICICI RSETIs works on creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for unemployed rural youth, the majority of whom belong to the underprivileged sections of the rural society, by imparting vocational training programs and also facilitating market linkages for them.

opportunities. About 9 or 10 women, who started off as home-based workers, are now employed in various capacities with the production centres, where they earn a regular salary of approximately INR 9000 (USD 126), a considerable increase from their earnings as piece-rate home-based workers. Apart from higher income, they also reported having fixed work hours and a fixed level of earnings.

Sadhna has also worked as an incubator for some women who have moved on to start their own businesses. One group of non-Sadhna members interviewed during the survey reported that they had started out with Sadhna and as their experience and networks grew, they were able to start independent small enterprises.

Earnings and Conditions of Work

Sadhna members receive remuneration in four ways: piece-rate payments for the work done; bonus payments that are paid out once a year from the overall enterprise surplus; incentive payments of various kinds; and contributions towards social security that are made by Sadhna for all members.

Orders received from global brands are accepted only if they permit the payment of reasonable piece rates and allow for some overheads to compensate for operational costs incurred by Sadhna. However, there is only a limited degree to which an enterprise such as Sadhna can influence the terms on which orders are given. The Costing Committee, consisting of former group leaders,



In these collectives, HBWs can upgrade their skills to gain better paying and more secure jobs in production centres, such as the one pictured here.

meets twice a year and is responsible for setting and resolving issues related to fixation of piece rates. Within the limited room to manoeuvre that there is, efforts are made to respond to the demands of artisans.

The survey, carried out in early 2019, gathered information about wage levels and hours of work.

Almost all the respondents (95 per cent) reported that home-based work was the second largest source of income for their households. Based on reported earnings, the ratio of piece-rate income earned to total household income ranged from 5 per cent in the lean season to 13 per cent in the peak season for home-based work orders. Almost half the respondents (45 per cent) reported that the main source of household income was daily wage work in construction or other manual

labour. Women reported that if they stopped working, it would primarily affect them in terms of less money for self, children and the household, in that order. In the peak season, regular members worked a daily average of 7 hours and voucher members worked for 5 hours; and the average earnings per month were INR 1279 (USD 18) for regular members and INR 793 (USD 11) for voucher members. In lean seasons, the average working hours in a day for regular members was 3 hours, and for voucher members, it was 2 hours. The average monthly earnings in a lean season for regular members was INR 522 (USD 7) and for voucher members it was INR 397 (USD 5). Fifty-six per cent of the women reported receiving an average piece rate of INR 100–200 (USD 1.50–3) while 36 per cent reported receiving piece rates below INR 100 (USD 1.50). Women

complained of low piece rates for the work and most respondents said that they were unaware of the piece rates at the time of work allocation. This was an unintended consequence of the incentive system that has been put in place – the group leaders avoid telling the women so as to encourage them to work harder and make the group eligible to earn the performance incentive, discussed later.

All the respondents work from home, paid their own utility bills, and obtained work only from Sadhna. Raw materials are provided by Sadhna. Women buy their own work tools from the market. In case of faulty work, 99 per cent of respondents reported that they could repair the work. Payments were received through bank transfers.¹³

All regular members in the sample reported that they were shareholders of Sadhna, and 92 per cent said they had received a bonus as their share of the enterprise surplus. The bonus is paid according to the value of work done by each member over the year. The share of surplus to be distributed in this way is a Board decision taken at the end of the financial year. Bonuses paid out can exceed the piece-rate earnings. Among regular members, 27 per cent reported having received INR 2000–3000 (USD 28–42) while 23 per cent reported having received INR 3000– 5000 (USD 42–70) annually. Despite fluctuations in market demand, Sadhna has been able to pay out a bonus every year. If the reported bonus is added to the piece rate earned and the

social security contribution made by Sadhna on behalf of members, the average monthly peak income of members goes up to around INR 2036 (USD 28), or 1.6 times the piece-rate income alone.

Various incentive payments are in place. Members receive a Diwali gift that is proportionate to the amount of work they have done. The Diwali Gift Committee, composed of former group leaders, is responsible for selecting the gift.

Sadhna offers group incentives to its member groups, as well as to the group leaders, in recognition of quality and timely delivery of products. The group leader earns 10 per cent of the total value of the work done by the group, 3 per cent of which is deducted from total earnings of the group members and 7 per cent of which is contributed by Sadhna. Based on the quality and timely delivery of work, an additional 12 per cent is paid out as a group incentive. This is a recognition that the group has reached the target, worked harmoniously together and has been able to deliver in time. From the perspective of the enterprise, encouraging timely delivery is essential for repeat orders – brands discontinue orders if timely delivery of quality goods is not maintained. Women are well aware that orders from retail brands come with inflexible deadlines, unlike Sadhna showroom orders, which may have more flexibility, and they increase their hours of work accordingly,

even working at night if needed.

In addition, INR 100,000 (USD 1400) is offered annually to the group that has excelled the most. These incentives help to maintain a regularity of work, which is difficult to monitor with women working from home. As Seema Shah explained, *“This has helped us in maintaining deadlines. Earlier we noticed if there was an event like a marriage in the village, everybody stopped working and the orders were getting delayed.”*

All respondents said that they got full payment regularly and 99 per cent of respondents said they received payments within a month of delivering the product. Also, 39 per cent of the respondents said that they maintained a workbook or diary to record work orders and payments.

Because Sadhna is a social enterprise registered as a Mutual Benefit Trust, all its overhead costs, including salaries of the management team and other full-time employees at the production centre, must be generated from the profit made. It is only after meeting all overhead costs of production, design, rent, maintenance and other such costs that a share of the remaining surplus can be distributed in bonuses to its members. Seema Shah explains the challenge: *“There is a need to invest in marketing and design. Looking at the market challenges, even our board agrees that we should invest in marketing and designing, but where does the fund come from?”*

¹³ One respondent reported getting paid in cash, likely due to a temporary difficulty. Sadhna ensures that all members open an account in their own name and receive payments in that account.

Sadhna is a member of the Fair Trade Trade Organization (WFTO)¹⁵ and the Fair Trade Principles,¹⁶ as shown in Table 2.3.

TABLE 2.3: FAIR TRADE PRINCIPLES AND SADHNA'S ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSE

Fair Trade Principle	Organisational Response
<p>Create opportunities for economically and socially marginalized farmers and artisans. Fair trade is a strategy for poverty alleviation and sustainable development achieved through long-term trading partnerships.</p>	<p>Sadhna's membership is mostly composed of women from socially and economically disadvantaged groups. The livelihood programme offers supplementary household earning through work provided on a regular basis to women artisans, who can work from home.</p>
<p>Develop transparent and accountable relationships with artisans and farmers to ensure that relationships are open, fair, consistent, and respectful.</p>	<p>Sadhna's members form the general body and management committee and are on different committees dealing with setting of rates, incentives, etc.</p>
<p>Build capacity of farmers, artisans, and their communities. Fair Trade Forum members invest time and resources to help producers build their businesses and create sustainable value chains.</p>	<p>Sadhna facilitates its members' presence in regional and national fairs and exhibitions, offers trainings of various sorts in collaboration with corporates and government platforms.</p>
<p>Promote fair trade by raising awareness about fair trade, educating customers and producers, and inspiring other businesses to adopt fair trade practices.</p>	<p>Sadhna celebrates World Fair Trade Day by conducting a rally and setting up stalls in a public place to create awareness among customers and the general public.</p>
<p>Pay promptly and fairly by discussing costs and pricing openly and honestly so that producers are able to earn a fair wage.</p>	<p>Payment is received in full and through bank transfer usually within a month. Pricing and costing are discussed in the Costing Committee and shared in the Management Committee Meeting of the group leaders. A further 30.5 per cent of earnings on a monthly basis is channeled into social security schemes directly by the organisation.</p>

¹⁴Fair Trade Forum – India (FTF-I) is the National Network for Fair Trade in India. It works with more than 200,000 producers – artisans and farmers – through more than 100 member organisations. FTF-I is a not-for-profit organisation, registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860.

¹⁵WFTO prescribes 10 Principles that Fair Trade Organisations must follow in their day-to-day work and carries out monitoring to ensure these principles are upheld. As a member of WFTO, Fair Trade Forum – India upholds these principles and works to ensure a dignified income and overall development of artisans, farmers and workers in the unorganised sector. See <http://www.fairtradeforum.org/>. 'In contrast to commodity certifiers, the WFTO Guarantee System assesses the entirety of a business, not just a specific product, ingredient or supply chain. It includes an assessment of the enterprise's structure and business model, its operations and its supply chains' at <https://wfto.com/our-fair-trade-system>.

¹⁶From the WFTO website: <https://wfto.com/our-fair-trade-system>

Fair Trade Principle	Organisational Response
<p>Support safe and empowering working conditions that are free of discrimination and forced labour. Healthy workplaces empower producers to participate in decision-making.</p>	<p>Sadhna ensures that no forced labour is practiced in its group and members are free to leave if they want to. Sadhna also works with women from OBC, SC and ST communities, thus mitigating against caste and community-based discriminations.</p>
<p>Cultivate environmental stewardship by encouraging responsible use of resources and eco-friendly production. FTF members reduce, reuse, reclaim, and recycle materials whenever possible.</p>	<p>Sadhna works on textile based products, uses only natural fabric, and upcycles the left-over fabric from apparel to make accessories and other lifestyle products.</p>
<p>Ensure the rights of children by never using exploitative child labour. FTF members support children's right to security, education, and play and respect the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.</p>	<p>Sadhna does not employ children and there are no instances of child labour. It has encouraged and facilitated education of members' children from the outset.</p>
<p>Respect the cultural identity of the farmers and artisans and celebrate diversity. Fair trade products and production methods respect the traditions of the local communities.</p>	<p>For some members, the work offered by Sadhna is a traditional craft, while others have trained for it. Sadhna does not ask its members to work in ways that upset their local customs and traditions. On the contrary, home-based work, as offered by Sadhna, can be integrated into their daily routines.</p>

Extending Social Protection

One of the flagship interventions that Sadhna has been able to make is linking all of its members to the Provident Fund (PF)¹⁷ and Employees State Insurance (ESI)¹⁸ schemes. Other government schemes to which it has facilitated access include getting artisan cards from the District Commissioner of Handicrafts (discussed below) and scholarships for children in Class 9-12 via an

LIC¹⁹ policy. Information about other government schemes to which members may be entitled is provided by Sadhna. In addition, it gives emergency loans when needed to members. Sadhna has also, from the beginning, emphasized education for children, and counselled its members on the importance of educating their children.

Facilitating access to PF and ESI was initiated by Sadhna in 2006, in response both to demands from the

workers and to requirements by the government. The annual premium for both these schemes together is 30.5 per cent of the earnings of individual workers. Women home-based workers had informed the Board, via their representatives, that they required some securities for their old age. Meanwhile the PF department also insisted that if Sadhna is a Mutual Benefit Trust Society, they must contribute to the PF. Calculating PF contributions, however, remains a challenge because the women

¹⁷ The Employees' Provident Fund Scheme includes a compulsory contributory Provident Fund Scheme, a Pension Scheme and an Insurance Scheme.

¹⁸ Employees' State Insurance is a self-financing social security and health insurance scheme managed by the Employees' State Insurance

¹⁹ Corporation according to rules and regulations stipulated in the ESI Act 1948. Life Insurance Corporation of India



Sadhna has facilitated receiving of Bhamashah cards for its members

workers do not have a fixed monthly income and often work inconsistently for some months of the year. Sadhna could have argued that as a marketing company they were not liable to make PF contributions, but instead chose to go ahead with the challenge of ensuring that every member had access to Provident Fund. Leela Vijayvergia said, *“We were keen to provide PF to workers, but ESI was not part of our plan. But as we registered women for PF, the government insisted that we also enroll them in the ESI scheme.”*

While social protection for women workers in the most precarious segments of the labour market is an important and long-standing demand of labour activists, trade unionists and workers, this research

with Sadhna brought out some of the challenges associated with promoting social protection for women home-based workers and other women informal workers. For instance, there has been a varied experience with the ESI. While some women have successfully accessed medical treatment from ESI hospitals, others were not able to do so either because ESI hospitals were too far away or the treatment they sought was available only in private hospitals or clinics. For instance, eyeglasses are not covered under ESI, yet weakening eyesight is a common problem among home-based workers. In the case of the PF, in many conversations, interviews and discussions with Sadhna members, they reported that they were unable to access their PF and resented the deduction from their

wages. Seema Shah explains the problem: *“Aadhaar²⁰ had not been introduced when the PF accounts were opened and as many of these artisans did not have a date of birth, we made an affidavit and got a date of birth. And when Aadhaar cards were introduced some of them gave a different date of birth. Now the biggest challenge in front of Sadhna is that some of the artisans are not able to withdraw without linking the PF with the Aadhaar cards and the latter has a different date of birth.”*

Sorting out these procedural difficulties and ensuring the access of members to government social protection schemes is a time-consuming process; Sadhna’s social workers spend considerable time on this.

It needs to be noted that once enrolled, it is not possible to discontinue these provisions. In light of low earnings, many women now resent the social security deductions; however the PF is a form of compulsory saving that will eventually accrue to the workers. In 2018, Sadhna had contributed INR 28,66,040 (USD 40,124) to the Provident Fund scheme and INR 7,13,716 (USD 9992) to the ESI scheme on behalf of its members and for their benefit (this included the amount deducted from the home-based workers’ wages, as well the amount contributed directly by Sadhna). Sadhna’s Annual Report (2018) also states that artisans have used the loan facility in the PF scheme to the tune of INR 26,800 (USD 375) for education purposes,

²⁰ Aadhaar is a 12-digit unique identity number assigned to residents of India, based on their biometric and demographic data.

INR 2,11,000 (USD 2954) for building homes, and INR 80,000 (USD 1120) for marriage purposes.

In 2018, Sadhna enrolled 601 artisans under the Jyoti Bima Yojana, a government-backed life insurance scheme. In addition, Sadhna has facilitated the linking of Aadhaar cards, bank accounts, and Bhamashah²¹ cards of their members with District Commissioner of Handicrafts (DCH) cards. The DCH cards are identity cards valid for all state government departments, which are used to access loans and

interest subvention schemes, as well as for participation in exhibitions and trade fairs. Artisans recommended by the DCH office get travel funds and daily allowances up to INR 7500 (USD 105) to attend exhibitions.

Table 2.4 details which schemes have been accessed by the respondents, broken out by whether they are regular members or voucher members. The difference between these two sets of members clearly shows the limited access women had to the schemes before they were helped by Sadhna to access them.

Among the respondents who are Sadhna members, 75 per cent of the families held APL (Above Poverty Line) cards, 21 per cent had BPL (Below Poverty Line) cards; 4 per cent held Antyodaya cards²²; 67 per cent held artisan cards, 99 per cent held Voter ID cards, and 99 per cent had Aadhaar cards. Further, 68 per cent of the women stated that they had received help in accessing schemes, and 97 per cent of those who had help stated that it was either Sadhna or Seva Mandir that had facilitated their links to the government schemes to which they are entitled.

TABLE 2.4: SCHEMES ACCESSED BY SADHNA'S REGULAR/VOUCHER MEMBERS (IN NUMBERS)

Scheme Accessed	Sadhna Members		
	Total	Voucher	Regular
NREGA	15	2	13
Health Insurance (RSBY) ²³	44	0	44
Old age pension	31	11	20
Widow Pension	13	4	9
Disability pension	1	0	1
Palanhar ²⁴	4	1	3
Housing scheme	2	0	2
Artisan loan	2	0	2
Self Help Groups	57	5	52
Employees' State Insurance (ESI)	73	0	73
The Employees' Provident Funds Scheme (EPF) ²⁵	100	0	100
Bhamashah	105	16	89
Others	2	0	2

²¹Bhamashah Yojana is a scheme introduced by the Government of Rajasthan to transfer financial and non-financial benefits of governmental schemes directly to women recipients in a transparent way.

²²Antyodaya Anna Yojana is a Government of India sponsored scheme to provide highly subsidised food to millions of the poorest families. It was launched in 2000 and first implemented in the Indian state of Rajasthan.

²³Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana is a government-run health insurance programme. The scheme aims to provide health insurance coverage to the workers belonging to the BPL category and their family members.

²⁴The Rajasthan Government offers financial assistance to their nearest relatives or any institutions for the upbringing, education, health and other essentials for orphans and vulnerable children.

²⁵All regular members are linked to the ESI and PF schemes, however, the responses suggest that not all of them are aware of the schemes, their provisions and benefits.

Fully 89 per cent of Sadhna respondents reported that they had faced health problems related to their work. The most common problem was weakening eyesight

(76 per cent of responses), followed by chest pain (52 per cent) and headache (32 per cent). About 45 per cent of respondents reported that they had stopped working for a

period of time in the last six months because of health issues. For some health needs, some members accessed the ESI hospitals, as indicated below.

TABLE 2.5: NUMBER OF ARTISANS BENEFITING FROM THE ESI SCHEME: SOURCE: SADHNA ANNUAL REPORT (2017-2018)

Benefits	No. of Artisans	Amount
Sickness benefits	5	INR 15547 (USD 218)
Maternity benefits	6	INR 70923 (USD 993)
Super Speciality benefits	2	INR 50000 (USD 700)
Dah Sanskar benefits (for cremation)	1	INR 10000 (USD 140)
	Total	INR 146470 (USD 2050)

Regular eye camps and health check-up camps have been organised for all artisans in collaboration with eye hospitals Alakh Nayan and Jagran Sanstha. Sadhna has also collaborated with Seva Mandir to ensure programs focusing on health, hygiene and clean environment were conducted.

The emphasis given by Sadhna from the start to children's education right has been successful in preventing the emergence of child labour within these households. In addition, Sadhna insisted that no children were allowed to work in any aspect of the production process. Leela Vijayvergia says, *"Because we were so keen that children go to school, we would ensure that registers are*

maintained documenting every child of our members and ensuring that they were enrolled in school." Seema Shah reiterates, *"We were linking the children of our members to government scholarships, so by default we ensured that no child stayed out of school and got involved in home-based work. We also don't enroll women below 18 as members."*

Promoting Social Dialogue

Sadhna negotiates the best terms possible for its members by engaging in 'collaborative contestation' with domestic and global brands. Barrientos has described this as an attempt to counter corporate power (Barrientos 2019: 238), though it

is done through an approach of cooperation and negotiation with brands.

Sadhna has been able to mobilise home-based workers, who otherwise tend to be isolated and unable to build solidarity with other workers. The coming together of women in this way can lead to spontaneous issue-based mobilisation and campaigns, albeit short lived. For instance, there is the experience of the Delwara group: *"The Delwara groups are very strong. Some years back there was an acute shortage of water and the tankers had stopped coming, so the women got together and blocked the road for several hours. First the police came, and then the District Collector and finally water tankers were sent."*

NON-SADHNA HOME-BASED WORKERS



Non-Sadhna home-based workers in Udaipur working on Zari embroidery

The original intention of canvassing a sample of non-Sadhna home-based workers was to attempt a comparison with Sadhna members. However, as the fieldwork proceeded and data was analysed, it became apparent that the situation of the non-Sadhna workers living in the same areas whom the research team interviewed was different in some significant ways. Nonetheless, the data collected from these workers helps to throw some light on the environment within which other home-based workers in the area are situated.

Demographic Profile

The non-Sadhna sample consisted of 54 women home-based workers. The average age of these respondents was 38. Fifteen respondents (28 per cent) had no schooling and 24 (44 per cent) had studied until Class 8. Only one respondent was unmarried. The average number

of household members was five and the care dependency ratio was 0.45. Over half of the respondents reported a household income between INR 10,000–25,000 (USD 140–350) with others earning less than INR 10,000.

Employment Opportunities

Work opportunities for this group are generated mainly through a well-established and robust network of market opportunities. These workers make different types of craft products and, on average, had been making these crafts for 30 years, far longer than the average for Sadhna members. The source of work was varied: 50 per cent of the women get work orders directly from shop owners, 19 per cent get work orders through relatives, 13 per cent get work orders from contractors, 12 per cent from Sadhna members and

the rest from miscellaneous sources. However the majority (76 per cent) worked for one contractor only. In case of shortfalls in the raw materials provided, 11 per cent women reported that they had to buy the raw material from the market. All women reported working from their homes and paying their own utility bills. Sixty-five per cent reported that they received work throughout the year and only 4 per cent reported getting work orders for less than four months. A woman entrepreneur who had organised a group of women to work with her said that work was available throughout the year, but that she sometimes took breaks for personal or family reasons.

Earnings and Conditions of Work

Home-based work was the primary source of household income for only 2 per cent of respondents, and the second largest source for 96 per cent. The share of earnings from home-based work to total household income ranged from 19 to 28 per cent for lean and peak seasons. The average daily working hours in the peak season was 7 and average monthly earnings were INR 2815 (USD 39). The average working hours daily in the lean season was 3 hours and average monthly earnings INR 1513 (USD 21). While 90 per cent women reported that if the product did not meet quality standards, they would redo it, in some cases repair was not possible and they had to bear the costs. For example, women who did zardozi work said that the threads easily unravel in attempts to repair mistakes.

All the non-Sadhna respondents reported that they were paid in cash; however, a significant share (88 per cent) have bank accounts. More than half – 59 per cent – of women reported that they were paid on the same day, and 89 per cent reported that they received payment within 30 days. All women reported getting full payment and 41 per cent said they maintained a workbook or diary. Very few (6 per cent) reported that they sold directly to customers. One of these respondents spoke of being cheated when it came to payments. As an own account worker, she had to bargain with the customer at the time of delivery, and often had to accept less than originally agreed upon. For a large majority (78 per cent), the skill was learnt from family or community members; only 4 per cent had acquired the skill at a training centre. However, only 41 per cent had passed

on the skill to others in the family.

Social Protection

Of the non-Sadhna respondents, 80 per cent of the households belong to the APL category, 13 per cent to the BPL category, and 4 per cent to the Antyodaya category. All women had an Aadhaar card and 96 per cent had Voter ID cards. Only four women (7 per cent) reported that they had received help in accessing three schemes, three of whom said they had been helped by Seva Mandir. None of the non-Sadhna home-based workers had any access to either PF or ESI. A significant number did possess Bhamashah cards and had access to widow and old age pensions. Around 46 per cent said they had to stop working for a period of time due to poor health in the last six months. The main complaints

included weakening eyesight (47 per cent), back pain (32 per cent), and headache (19 per cent).

While only a general comparison is appropriate between the Sadhna and non-Sadhna respondents, this study suggests that the advantage of being a Sadhna member is clearly seen not in the absolute level of earnings, but a) in the regular availability of work to a group that otherwise would find it hard to access work, since it is not part of traditional craft networks; b) in the confidence and mobility gained from being part of a group, and c) in being enabled to access the PF, ESI and other government schemes. This is further confirmed by noting that Sadhna's voucher or new members, who come from very similar backgrounds as the regular members, earn much less and lack access to any social security.

GOOD PRACTICES

The overall 'good practice' identified by this study is the role of social enterprises in linking home-based women workers to the market while ensuring reasonable earnings, protection from risk, enabling social protection and group solidarity. Sadhna has been able to link home-based workers from disadvantaged groups to fair trade and/or socially responsible organisations, including both domestic and global brands. Through competitive awards and incentives Sadhna seeks to ensure that women display the discipline required to be able to complete work on time, and of the necessary quality and quantity, so that repeat orders are secured. Specific ways in which



Sadhna's good practices have become a tool for the economic and social empowerment of its member HBWs

Sadhna's interventions stand out include, first of all, that it has enabled a reduction of familial constraints that isolate women. Leela Vijayvergia explained, "The income generation was one part; the other part was encouraging women to come forward. Families would refuse to let women go to exhibitions... we call Sadhna a social enterprise because there are two parallel processes – the economic and the social. We faced both support and opposition from family members."

Second, Sadhna distributes work orders evenly across groups and members throughout the year, even though there are variations in levels

of skill and capabilities. Apart from that, Sadhna also ensures work year-round. While B2B orders tend to be seasonal, Sadhna gives women work for its own outlets that can be done in the lean seasons.

And third, one of Sadhna's biggest

achievements has been linking its home-based members, whose earnings vary from month to month, with government social security schemes. Given that brands do not contribute anything towards social protection, Sadhna contributes

premium payments from its profits. Apart from the direct benefits, being enrolled in government schemes opens up a range of other opportunities for the artisans, such as participation in exhibitions organised by the government.

CONCLUSION

This study had a twofold objective, as stated at the outset, to understand the situation of home-based workers and good practices or strategies adopted by Sadhna. Based on the data collected through the study, a perusal of Sadhna documents and follow up interviews with the Sadhna team, the ways in which Sadhna has worked to expand employment opportunities for women working from home while offering incentives to strengthen regularity and discipline in the work have been described. The study

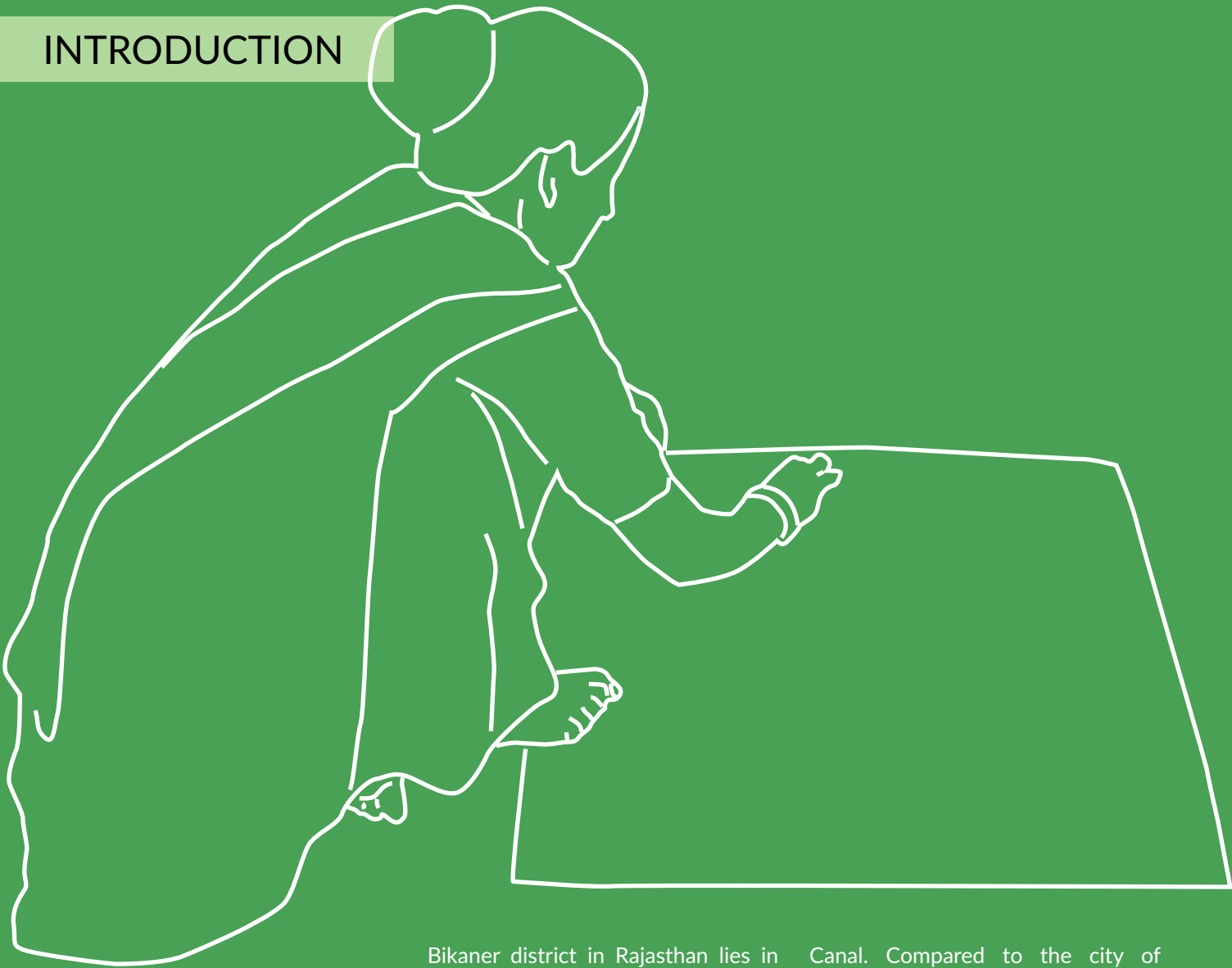
finds that piece-rate earnings are low, although women also earn a bonus and social security premiums are paid on their behalf, but this reflects the terms on which B2B orders are available from global and domestic brands. In its third phase of organisational growth, Sadhna is actively strengthening its own brand which also holds out the possibility of greater flexibility in wage payments. In accordance with Fair Trade principles, there is transparency in the work and payments arrangements, no forced

or child labour, and respect of local traditions. Members have been linked to government social security schemes and are being helped by the Sadhna team to sort out procedural issues to ensure they get the benefits they are entitled to from these and other schemes. Many members are new to the work, but receive training to enable them to build up skills and be accepted as registered crafts persons. As a Mutual Benefit Trust society, members play significant roles in determining the conditions and benefits of membership.

Chapter 3

Rangsutra: Home-Based Workers in Bikaner

INTRODUCTION



Bikaner district in Rajasthan lies in the Thar desert. The study sample was drawn from border villages in the Bikaner district, which are inhabited by former refugees from Pakistan. Development of these settlements was facilitated by the construction of the Indira Gandhi

Canal. Compared to the city of Bikaner only about 80 to 100 km away, which is rapidly modernising and is in touch with the rest of the country and the world, these villages remain isolated. Artisans in these villages are highly skilled at various traditional embroidery techniques.

Rangсутra has its roots in the URMUL (Uttari Rajasthan Milk Union Limited) Trust movement. The URMUL Trust was set up in Bikaner in 1983, with the objective of carrying out development activities and working for social and economic change, initially with a health programme started for milk producers in six villages. The drought of 1987-88 brought home the need to also strengthen livelihoods, beyond the initiatives related to food, fodder and health for 'drought proofing'.

"We procured charkhas [spinning wheels] and wool from the Khadi Gramodyog and provided them to older women. In the beginning, all they wove were traditional pattu shawls, with a market so local that they would only get sold if the crop that year was good," explained Arvind Ojha, co-founder of the URMUL Trust. Over the years, URMUL has developed into a family of organisations linked by shared values and a commitment to development.

The Managing Director and Founder of Rangсутra had been part of earlier URMUL endeavours and started Rangсутra with artisans from three URMUL organisations that were focused on textiles (Vasundhara, URMUL Seemant, and URMUL Samiti). Today, some URMUL groups continue to be suppliers to Rangсутra, while other products are marketed through URMUL's own outlets. While all of Rangсутra's original artisan shareholders were from among the artisans organised and mobilised by URMUL Trust, as the scale of its operations has expanded, artisans from other groups and villages and other parts of the country have become shareholders. Artisans are

represented on the Rangсутra Board of Directors through representation of supplier groups. Initially these were URMUL groups, but as the relative volume of production by other groups has risen, other sub-suppliers are now represented on the Board.

Rangсутra started as a producer company with 10 individual shareholders and then evolved to enable private equity and sustained expansion. First, it became a private limited company; equity was raised initially from artisans and Sumita Ghose, the founder, in addition to investments made by a domestic brand and a micro enterprise fund. Later more artisans showed an interest in becoming part of the company and Rangсутra became a Public Limited Company, registered in 2006. Deliberate decisions taken right in the beginning ensured that artisans remain a majority of the shareholders. These decisions included the founder herself taking personal loans to invest in the company and keeping aside some shares for artisans who would join later. Rangсутra remains an artisan-owned public limited company. Today, over two thirds of the 3000 artisans working with it across the country (approximately 1500 in Bikaner), are shareholders. Around 70 per cent of these shareholders are women.

Rangсутra sees itself as an organisation that tries to address social challenges through the market mechanism and acts as a bridge between rural artisans and global consumers as a way of developing sustainable livelihoods and helping to revive India's rich craft heritage. It started working from the Bikaner

district of Rajasthan and now has a presence in four states of India: Rajasthan, Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh and Manipur.

Study Location and Sample

This study was conducted in Bikaner and had a focus on women home-based workers associated with Rangсутra in villages that supply to both global and domestic brands. For the global brand, all production is done out of Village Craft Centres (discussed in more detail below). All seven of these centres were chosen as sample sites for this research. At these centres, artisans (all women), craft managers (men and women), and supervisors (all men) were interviewed. Other staff members were interviewed at the Rangсутra head office in Bikaner.

In all there were 103 respondents. The total number of quantitative survey respondents was 67, consisting only of home-based women workers. Forty-two in-depth interviews were done, which included a few women who had also responded to the survey, as well as respondents representing different functions within Rangсутra: home-based workers, centre supervisors, craft managers, management team members, directors, and the founding director. Apart from this, seven focus group discussions were conducted, one in each centre, with 6-10 artisans participating in each: allowing the researchers to interact with 40-60 women home-based workers in addition to the survey respondents. The purpose of the FGDs was to introduce the research and researchers to the artisans,

to build a rapport, and also to generate discussion and responses on some key issue which were not always discussed in interviews. Care was taken not to interview FGD participants for individual qualitative interviews to avoid repetition in data. Some ancillary workers who support the weaving work in Rangсутra's weaving centre in Napaser, another region in the Bikaner district, were also interviewed.

Demographic characteristics

Nearly one-third of the artisan respondents (32 per cent of our sample) were 21-30 years old and 26 per cent were 18-20 years old. The average age of respondents was 33 years. While the youngest respondent was 18 years old, the oldest was 70

years old. Only two respondents were aged 61 or above. The average household size was six, with a care dependency ratio of 0.43. Around 18 per cent of the sample consisted of young unmarried women, while 76 per cent were married, and 6 per cent widowed. No worker was under the age of 18 and no child labour was observed. The modal value for years of doing this work was 20 years, and the mean was 14 years.

As might be expected, the level of literacy and education was higher for younger women. Only one woman below the age of 30 years had no formal schooling, while overall 49 per cent of the sample had no formal schooling. Respondents showed awareness of the value of education for children, and aspirations for new careers through education.

The embroidery or *kasida*²⁶ work was valued but so were other opportunities that were expected to open up with education. Schools within the village boundaries teach up to Class VIII and studying beyond this requires commuting some distance. This restricts schooling for some children, particularly girls. As respondents put it, *"We are doing this work, but we don't want our children to do this. Boys go out to study further; girls are not sent which is why they end up doing this work."* The out-migration of boys started with schooling and continued with a search for jobs. Daughters and daughters-in-law tend to take up embroidery work.

The nature of work available to home-based workers and Rangсутra's model is assessed here using the ILO Decent Work framework.

CREATING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Rangсутra Crafts India Limited is a supplier providing embroidered and woven products to domestic as well as global brands. It also retails products through its own independent outlets in Delhi, at fairs and exhibitions, and through an online portal. It has a Head Office in Delhi, while its registered office is in Bikaner. Bikaner remains a significant production hub, with another one in Uttar Pradesh. Over the last 15 years, from 15 artisans at the outset, Rangсутra now provides work to around 1500 artisans in Bikaner.

Between 2006 and 2011, Rangсутra supplied exclusively to a domestic

brand. This company was one of the first investors in Rangсутra, buying its shares at a premium. It also provided store space to Rangсутra to hold its exhibitions free of cost and continues to be the most consistent buyer of Rangсутra products. While it sources from a wide range of organisations across the country, Rangсутra today is the single biggest supplier to this brand.

Rangсутra's association with a global brand began in 2011, in the course of a project for training and developing social entrepreneurs held in another part of the country, and in which Rangсутra had provided technical

support. Rangсутra was able to convince the company that training women in skills without following this up with work orders would not be enough to bring about positive change in the livelihoods of the trainees. Once it gave orders to Rangсутra, fulfilling these orders required some change in the organisation of production. The company was not willing to outsource work to home-based workers, primarily out of concern that child labour may be used. In Uttar Pradesh, two large production centres were opened due to the company's preference. But in Bikaner, given the scattered nature of habitations, Rangсутra proposed

²⁶ *Kasida in Urdu means "embroidery". It is a generic term used to describe the various types of skilled embroidery work done by artisans here.*

the use of small Village Craft Centres – within the village and at walking distance from homes – where compliance with the company's Code of Conduct would be ensured, but women still had some flexibility in the timing of their work and hours worked per day. This production model has allowed Rangсутra to continue providing work to artisans in remote and isolated areas, while being compliant with the company's Code of Conduct. It has turned out to be a successful innovation, with the volume of orders and number of centres increases each year. The products currently being supplied to the global brand are hand-embroidered cushion covers as well as handloom towels and throws.

In 2016-17, Rangсутra started its own retail outlets selling directly to consumers.

Its Annual Reports show that in financial year 2014-15, Rangсутra recorded a profit of INR 71,11,020 (USD 99,554) and distributed INR 18,99,540 (USD 26,594) (27 per cent of its profits) as dividends to the shareholders. Dividends were not distributed in successive years, as profits were re-invested in staff and production centres to build capacity for expanded production. These investments have allowed Rangсутra to work efficiently on a larger scale. As reported by a management team member: *“Now work is completed on time, but earlier there have been a lot of delays for which we had to pay penalties as well. We have paid penalties of up to 15 per cent. But for the past two years we have been on track... Earlier the embroidery work used to get delayed as the field is so far and there was just one team to*

do it. And for finishing, we had a very small unit earlier; now we have a very big unit. Also, we used to outsource a lot, so work used to get delayed and now we have our own departments for everything, so the work is smooth.”

In the most recent financial year of 2018-19 Rangсутra has recorded a good profit with a turnover for the year of approximately INR 150 million (USD 2.1 million). It is to be noted that decisions on dividend distribution are taken by the Board of Directors, which has representation from the various sub-suppliers from which Rangсутra sources.

In this study, which focused on home-based workers in Bikaner, 91 per cent of the survey respondents reported being shareholders with Rangсутra. Women workers met during the study displayed a strong sense of ownership and were well informed of rights and responsibilities. The Rangсутra slogan of *“samay par, safai se”* (on time, and neatly) is echoed in the women's



A Rangсутra member works on products for a global home-furnishings brand, at the village craft centre.

responses: *“When we work we have to be careful that no piece should be stained and also to keep it away from little children; we sit on a clean floor and work.”* Respondents displayed financial literacy, with an understanding of the concept of dividend. This was mentioned as one of the benefits and a right of being a shareholder, while women also explained that a dividend could not be expected each year, as the company could distribute it only if it made sufficient profits. Other rights of women shareholders were understood by respondents as including the right to get work and training if needed, and the right to participate in share trading: *“We have a window where the price of the share is shared and if a person wants to buy or sell, then they can do so within that window.”*

In all other respects, Rangсутra functions as a regular business enterprise. Its management team is efficient and understands the market. It negotiates with brands to get the best rates for its artisans, and it ensures its workers provide on time delivery of quality products. This team manages the production process, budgeting and costing, compliance with the brand's code of conduct, marketing and branding and designing for its own retail. Artisans have several opportunities to advance in their roles. For those who show leadership, there is the opportunity to become a Craft Manager, overseeing the work of a small group (10-20 artisans) in the village. Those who show creativity in their craft have opportunity to participate in Design Development Workshops and work closely with a Rangсутra designer to create new motifs, patterns and designs.

The Production Process at Rangsutra

Table 3.1 describes the production process that Rangsutra follows in the Bikaner production hub.

TABLE 3.1: PRODUCTION PROCESS AT RANGSUTRA

Activity	Location	Anchor
Design sampling	Bikaner and Delhi offices of Rangsutra	Design team, production managers, sampling artisans
Approval of sample by Brand	Brand offices	Rangsutra design team and Brand design team
Costing of final sample	Rangsutra production centre (Bikaner)	Production manager and Business Head, after conducting time and motion study with home-based workers
Approval of final cost and placing bulk order	Brand head offices	Brand
Procurement of fabric and thread for bulk order	Bikaner production centre	Outsourced to trusted vendors by Rangsutra or to Rangsutra Producer groups (handloom fabric)
Cutting of fabric	Bikaner production centre	Cutting in-charge
Stitching of fabric to make apparel e.g. kurtas, shirts, dresses	Bikaner production centre	Tailors in stitching centre
Embroidery work	Work centres and homes of Rangsutra artisans	Rangsutra artisans
Finishing of garments	Bikaner production centre	Workers in finishing department
Packaging and labelling of garments	Bikaner production centre	Workers in packing department
Dispatch of the bulk order	Bikaner production centre	Production team

Over the years, as the enterprise has expanded, changes have taken place in production methods. For instance, in the beginning even cutting and stitching was done out of homes. However, Rangsutra soon realised that it was difficult to maintain standardisation in quality and sizes. As a result, cutting and stitching became centralised while

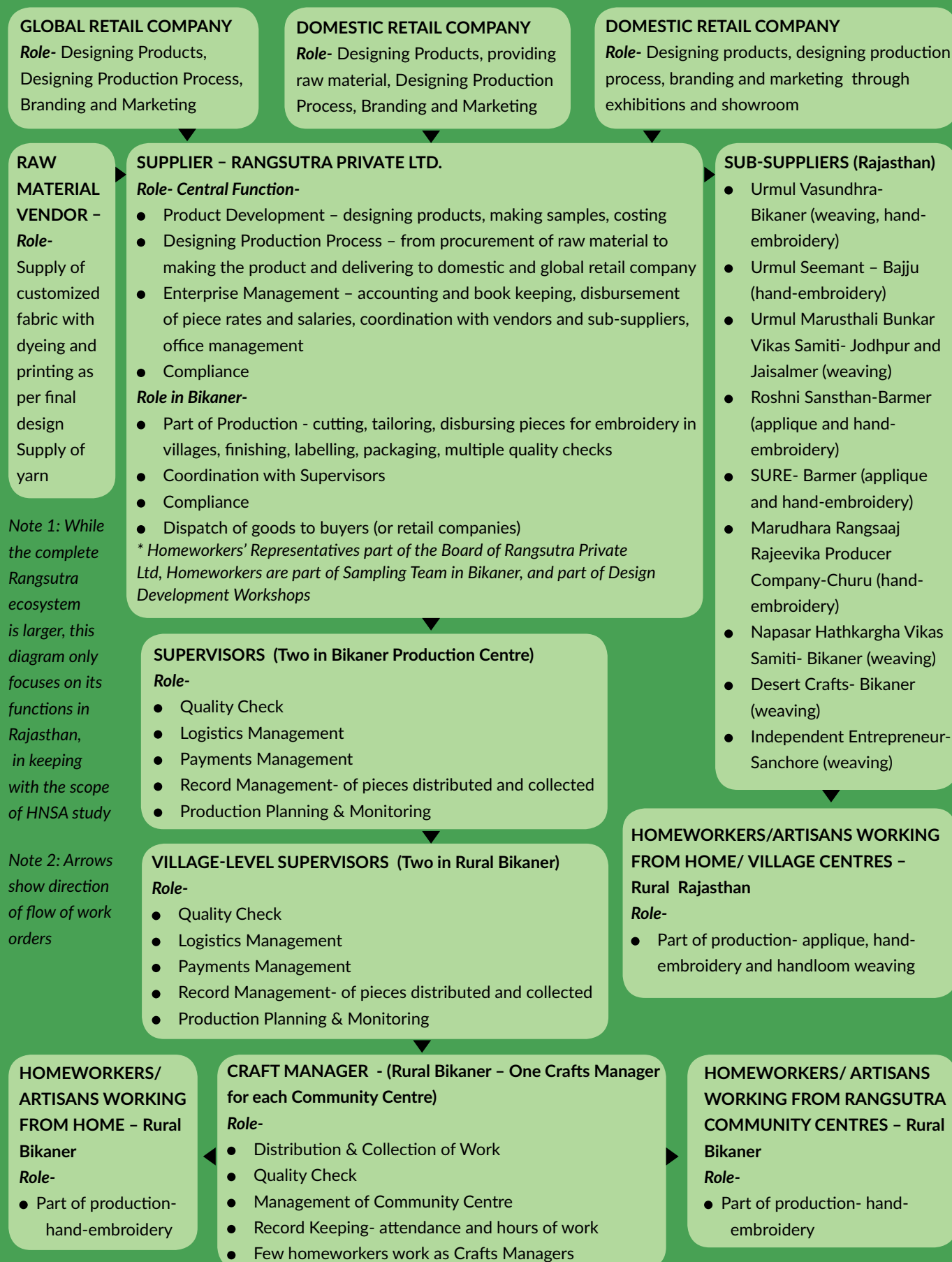
embroidery was, and is still done, at home and at the centres. There has been a change in sourcing of raw materials as well. *“In the beginning, all the fabric was being sourced in-house from Rangsutra’s weaving centres in Lunkaransar and Napaser. 2007 onward, as these two centres were no longer enough to meet the demand of fabric, Rangsutra began sourcing it*

from external vendors, as per quality standards required by the buyers.”
- Sumita Ghose, Founder and MD, Rangsutra

Figure 3.1 describes the Rangsutra value chain in Bikaner. Some artisans are directly connected to Rangsutra while others are connected via sub-suppliers.

VALUE CHAIN – RANGSUTRA (2020)

FIGURE 3.1: RANGSUTRA VALUE CHAIN



Developing skills

Rangсутra grades artisans into Skill Levels A, B and C on the basis of detailed skill assessments. Different groups of artisans, spread in different areas across Rajasthan, specialise in different styles of embroidery. The distribution of work takes note of the type of embroidery and level of skill required for a particular product. Among respondents, 79 per cent said that embroidery is a traditional skill they learnt from others in the family: only 7 per cent attributed their learning to training programmes organised by Rangсутra. It should be noted that 64 per cent of the respondents reported that they have taught their skill of embroidery to other family members.

Apart from general skills trainings, Rangсутra conducts various other types of training programmes. Artisans who are appointed as Crafts Managers are trained over five days, then receive on-the-job training. While in the older clusters this training was informal, for new clusters the training format has been formalised. At the time of a new work order, a member from the Bikaner production centre goes to the village centres and explains specific procedures and precautions the artisans must follow while making that particular order (such as, for example, ensuring that a design is traced fully). This is an on-the-job workshop. The content changes depending on the specific product.

Once a year during the lean periods, Rangсутra holds workshops on health, especially occupational health and safety concerns (for example, good posture while working).

Mobility along the value chain

Opportunities for women home-based workers to move into different work roles with better earnings, regular jobs or expanding roles have been opened up at Rangсутra. Examples of this include: one artisan who is now a senior Crafts Manager; artisans who have demonstrated advanced embroidery skills and creativity can take part in design development workshops with the Rangсутra design team; one woman who started out as an artisan in Barmer has now become a supervisor who independently manages the whole centre. With a new generation of better educated workers, it is anticipated that home-based workers will be able to play a wider range of roles, if they wish to do so.

Earnings and Conditions of Work

Conditions of work of artisans working from home or at the centres are regulated by Rangсутra's own commitment to the well-being of its artisans, and at the centres there are specific guidelines of the Code of Conduct of the global brand to which it supplies. These are summarised in Table 3.2.



All village crafts centres are fire-safety compliant, have access to drinking water and toilets, and at walking distance from HBWs' homes

TABLE 3.2: CLAUSES IN THE CODE OF THE GLOBAL BRAND AND COMPLIANCE BY RANGSUTRA

Clause	Organisational Response for all work orders from this brand
Prevention of child labour	Artisans are not allowed to bring children to centres, nor to take work home (unless child is 5 years old or younger, as negotiated with the brand).
No forced and bonded labour	There is no forced or bonded labour.
Prevent severe environmental pollution	<p>No harmful pollutants are discharged or released into the environment.</p> <p>Waste is duly collected and disposed of.</p> <p>Natural light and ventilation is present at community centres.</p> <p>Local building materials are used for sustainability.</p>
Prevent workers from exposure to severe safety hazards	<p>Fire Safety Equipment is provided at the centres.</p> <p>Workers are provided training on usage of fire safety equipment.</p> <p>Assembly points in case of fire are clearly marked.</p> <p>Two emergency exits have been marked in all centres.</p> <p>Highly toxic or chemical materials are not required or stored in these centres.</p> <p>A first aid box is present in a visible place in each centre.</p>
Maintain a transparent and reliable system for records on working hours and wages	<p>A system for calculation of wages for all workers has been devised with recording of work done and time spent at the centre.</p> <p>A workers' book is maintained by the craft manager, where in-time and out-time of the artisans is strictly noted, for calculation of working hours (artisans are free to go in and out as many times as they like, however making a note is essential).</p> <p>Piece rates are set so as to enable workers to earn minimum wages for a full day's work.</p> <p>Workers receive their salaries monthly, directly in their bank accounts.</p>
Provide accident insurance covering medical treatment for work related accidents to all workers	All artisans working on global brand orders are part of a group health insurance plan.

To ensure the centres are compliant with the Code of Conduct, the global brand conducts periodic compliance trainings and audits. Strict record keeping is done with daily records of attendance, the number of hours worked by each woman, and earnings per piece and per day. These records ensure transparency and prevent the possibility of exploitation of artisans in their own villages. At the same time, the centres are at walking distance from women's homes, and timings are flexible so as to allow women to attend to their household and care work as needed. All orders from the global brand are done only at the centres, the only exception being that women workers with children under the age of 5 years (estimated at roughly 5 per cent of all artisans) are allowed to take work home. These centres are rented by Rangсутра and managed by the artisans.

The management staff interviewed unanimously expressed a preference for work being done at centres rather than at home. The process of distributing unfinished pieces and then collecting finished pieces from individual homes was time-consuming, tedious and came with risks of quality damage due to stains and tears. In contrast, a centre provided a safe and clean environment for products to be embroidered, and this had brought down the rejection rate of pieces, leading to cost and time efficiency. As one centre supervisor said, *"Out of 2000 pieces, we used to reject around 20-25 pieces. However, now there is centralised work so that doesn't happen anymore."*

Centres also provide a safe and large space for storage of raw materials,

tools, and finished goods, and encourage healthy competition and learning from each other. While it took time for women to accept the shift from home-based work to centre-based work, the level of earnings is higher, which has made the change acceptable to them.

The study sample included respondents working from home or at centres. Place of work is largely determined by the source of the work order, as for orders from the global brand women have to work at the centre. While 26 per cent of the respondents reported working only from home, another 37 per cent reported working both from home and at a centre and 35 per cent reported working only at a centre. An overwhelming majority (88 per cent, or 53 out of 60) reported a preference for working at the centre, as compared to working at home. In-depth interviews and FGDs were able to throw some light on why women prefer working at the centres. This included companionship and productivity: *"I like coming to the centre. Women sit together and work... here we work more; at home we have to get up again and again."*

There were a few respondents who expressed a preference for home, citing the flexibility that it gives them to manage household chores alongside the Rangсутра work.

Redistributing care responsibilities

Women artisans working at centres reported that their family members were now contributing to domestic chores such as cooking, fathers were

playing a more active role in childcare often taking care of the children at home while the mother worked, and the older members of the family were being more self-reliant and taking care of themselves – all to enable the women artisans to do more work. This is a significant change and also indicates that women's earnings are high enough to be valued by the family. As women said, *"Men look after the children when we are at the centre working;"* and *"There are older men and other women (who do not work with Rangсутра) at home, and they manage the household work and look after the children."*

Primary and Secondary Sources of Livelihood

Around 40 per cent of the respondents reported that agriculture was the primary source of income in their household. Major crops cultivated in this region are chickpeas and rice. Home-based work is the primary source of income for the household for approximately 18 per cent of the respondents; for the other 80 per cent, home-based work is the second largest source of income for the household. The contribution of income from home-based work to total household income ranged from 15-35 per cent (average for lean and peak seasons) with overall average contribution being 26 per cent. To understand the significance of this income, respondents were asked to list ways in which losing this source of income would affect them. Respondents reported that the biggest effect would be in having less money for family health

care expenses, followed by having less for own personal expenses.

The significance of 'money for own expenses' should not be missed. In patriarchal societies such as the one in Rajasthan, control over the household funds and its spending is a tool of power that generally rests with men and older women. Work from Rangсутra is helping change that situation by placing money directly in women's own bank accounts, bringing with it the freedom to choose how to spend it.

Respondents said that work is not evenly distributed throughout the year. Most respondents reported that they work on family farms during sowing and harvest season, and often find it difficult to manage that along with home-based work, especially during the monsoon season when agricultural work as well as home-based work is at its peak. The uneven distribution of work reflects, firstly, that while the global brand gives a high-volume order it only translates into three-four months work for artisans.²⁷ Secondly, seasonal factors also influence orders, and respondents agreed that they received more orders during the monsoon and fewer orders during winter months of October, November and December.

For weaving workers in Napaser, the pattern is different. While embroidery artisans reported winter to be a relatively lean period, weavers reported having more work in the winters. Two of six respondents engaged in weaving

reported that orders increased around the time of Diwali.

Work hours and income during peak and lean seasons

In the peak period, around 58 per cent of the respondents worked 8-12 hours a day; another 36 per cent worked for 5-8 hours. Only one respondent reported working for 1-4 hours per day during peak periods. It is worth noting that some respondents also reported working for 12 hours or more, although this was only 4 per cent of the sample. Overall, the average hours worked was 8 hours in the peak season. During the lean period, nearly three-quarters of the respondents (73 per cent) worked for between 1-4 hours, for an average of 3 hours.

During peak periods of work, 40 per cent of respondents earned between INR 100-200 (USD 1.4-2.8) per day. The maximum daily earning reported during peak periods was INR 300-400 (USD 4.2-5.6), earned by 16 per cent of the respondents. A relatively small proportion of respondents (15 per cent) earned less than INR 100 (USD 1.4) per day during the peak season. During peak periods, 27 per cent respondents earned an average monthly INR 5000-8000 (USD 70-112) per month, and another 27 per cent of the respondents earned between INR 2000-5000 (USD 28-70) per month from home-based work. A small number (4 per cent) earned more than INR 8000 (USD 112) per month. The lowest earning that the respondents reported during peak periods was INR 500-1000 (USD 7-14), reported only by 3 per cent of the sample.



Rangсутra's community crafts centres have brought livelihood opportunities to the remote villages of Bikaner

²⁷ Regarding seasonal orders from the global brand, starting financial year 2017-18 in Varanasi and 2019-20 in Bikaner, Rangсутra has regular, evenly spread orders that will continue throughout the year, thus avoiding the harvest season peak time overload of work.

Since earnings depend primarily on hours of work, the high earnings tend to reflect more hours of work and lower earnings fewer hours of work. According to the Rangсутra management team, fewer hours of work is not due to the lack of work but to the fact that some women put less time into production.

During lean periods, over 80 per cent of the respondents earned only up to INR 100 per day from home-based work, while 14 per cent earned between INR 100–200 (USD 1.4–2.8) per day. During lean periods, one-third of the respondents (34 per cent of the sample) earned between INR 1000–2000 (USD 14–28) per month.

Earnings reflect hours of work and piece rates that are set for each order. In setting piece rates, Rangсутra takes note of the skill level of each artisan; the average number of working hours per day by the home-based workers; and the number of pieces that can be made by workers at a specified skill level in a day. This time and motion study conducted during the sampling stage enables piece rates to be set at a level that enables women to earn at least the state minimum wage for a full day's work.²⁸ The study found that women working only for the global brand were able to earn well over the minimum wage for semi-skilled workers, depending on their productivity, as their speed in completion of the tasks increased

day by day.

There is transparency in the piece rates that are set for each work order, which are discussed with artisan representatives on the costing team before a finalised cost proposal is sent to the buyers. The level of knowledge of home-based workers about final prices and product brands was mixed. Those artisans who had travelled to retail stores in the city or for exhibitions as part of the Rangсутra team were well aware of the final prices of products. All respondents reported that they receive payments on time and are paid via bank transfers into their accounts.

Work from other sources is paid in cash, and women take on such work only occasionally. A few artisans reported working for other contractors or large brands, based in Bikaner or Jaipur, during times when there were fewer orders from Rangсутra. But 96 per cent of respondents said that they work only with Rangсутra. Many respondents make embroidered articles for their own use or for their daughters' dowries. Following community tradition, the artisans make beautiful ghagras (traditional skirts), pillow covers and bedsheets with very detailed kasida (embroidery) work on them. Thus, apart from what they do for Rangсутra, the embroidery tradition stays alive by remaining an integral part of their everyday lives, their culture and customs.

It should be noted that due to purposive sampling, all clusters selected for data collection received orders from the global brand, for which piece rates are higher. The findings, therefore, cannot be generalised to all Bikaner artisans working with Rangсутra.

Being associated with Rangсутra also protected home-based workers from the impact of sudden policy changes and resulting market volatility. For example, the effects of the national demonetisation policy in 2016 were not significant, since Rangсутra had an existing policy of restricting cash dealings to amounts up to INR 5000 (USD 70), and wages were paid into the bank accounts. Demonetisation, in fact, accelerated the opening of bank accounts, and Rangсутra conducted financial literacy trainings for its members where they were taught how to operate ATM cards. They could then withdraw money from mobile banks with card machines that reached their villages. Similarly, the Goods and Services Tax (GST) policy added to compulsory compliances for Rangсутra, but its accounts team is strong and was able to develop required protocols. Rangсутra conducted workshops on GST rules for all its sub-suppliers, although it had to stop sourcing from some suppliers who were lax in implementing the requirements, since the penalties for non-compliance are severe.

²⁸ The state minimum wage for semi-skilled workers is the standard used for setting piece rates.

EXTENDING SOCIAL PROTECTION

In its early years, Rangсутra made a conscious choice to stay away from issues not directly related to livelihoods. However, since the global brand requires accident insurance, all those working for these orders directly with Rangсутra (i.e. not including those who work through sub-suppliers) are covered by a group insurance specifically for accident coverage. For regular health related needs, artisans are able to access health centres run by URMUL, or government facilities. Health camps are also held for artisans from time to time, open to all villagers.

Over 70 per cent of respondents reported some health concerns, with chest pain and weakening eyesight being the most frequently reported. Around 18 per cent said they had to stop working in the last six months for health-related reasons. The perceived long-term impact on health of the artisan was reported as a key reason why they did not want their children to

spend a lifetime doing the same work.

Out of 22 respondents who had accessed government schemes, 13 said they had been helped to do so by Rangсутra. The type of benefits accessed included a variety of social security programmes such as an access to housing scheme, old age pension, health insurance, widow pension, and the Bhamashah Yojana run by the state government. As far as child care is concerned, there has been no request from the women for such a facility, and usually young children are taken care of by other household members or relatives, or in government run aanganwadi centres. Since the residents come from the same community, there are strong familial bonds across households and networks that remain strong.

Promoting Social Dialogue

Social dialogue in the ILO sense

of tripartite discussions between employers, government and workers does not take place in this context. However, because most artisans are shareholders in the company, they have a sense of ownership over its various functions, and some artisan leaders are involved in the price-setting and management processes of Rangсутra. There is a shared perspective on the need for strengthening the organisation so as to ensure regular work at the best possible terms. Rangсутra has rejected work orders where the piece rate did not match the expectations of workers after it had assessed the time the work would take to do. The Managing Director is also clear that Rangсутra will only take orders from brands that understand the ethos of an enterprise such as Rangсутra, and with such brands they hope to have a long-term relationship.

GOOD PRACTICES

Some good practices emerging from the Rangсутra model of social enterprise are:

- Providing work on a regular basis to home-based women artisans – This has been possible by building a strong relationship with both the domestic brand and the global brand. Maintaining quality of work has been a key factor in this.
- Diversifying the market – This is being done in two ways: firstly, by building relationships with new



Awareness poster about child-labour in the Rangсутra office



Rangsutra members find a safe space to work at the Village Craft Centres

buyers to get more B2B orders and secondly, by focusing on Rangsutra's direct retail channel i.e. online retail and exhibitions to build its own B2C brand.

- Establishing a direct relationship with the lead brand, (i.e. the buyer at the top of the value chain) instead of with suppliers or vendors – Despite the overheads that are needed to cover production costs and salaries of the management staff, it has been able to provide higher piece rates to home-based workers.
- Helping brands achieve the goal of value chain transparency down through the last tier – For the orders given by the global and

domestic brand to Rangsutra, it is very easy to track where the products are made and by whom, as well as where they are shipped.

- Absorbing risk – Given Rangsutra's commitment to security of livelihood for the home-based workers, the focus is to provide work to as many artisans as possible, even in times of a slowdown, or lack of orders. Further, many of the risks associated with production – such as delays in raw material delivery, loss of material due to accident, loss of person days due to power cuts, and shipment delays – are borne by Rangsutra. In other words, the home-based

workers are paid their piece rates in full. When home-based workers work independently, many of these risks have to be borne by them.

- Creating opportunities for promotion – For example, providing training to artisans to take up the role of Craft Manager at the level of community work centre, involving highly skilled artisans in design development workshops, promoting an artisan to the level of supervisor for one hamlet, and representation on the Board of Directors. One of the current board members is a former weaver, and another one is a staff member from Rangsutra's

Varanasi production hub who had initially set up all operations and organised artisans to become members.

- Respecting the preferences of home-based workers involved in the production — This is reflected in the manner in which the Rangsutra management was able to negotiate with the global company for village-level centres within walking distance from the artisans' homes, instead of one central large factory. The centres are able to fulfil conditions of the company code of conduct while also allowing women to take on work orders from the global brand with minimal disruption to their way of life.
- Reviving craft — The varied intricate embroidery patterns and weaving patterns are the shared legacy of the community of artisans that Rangsutra works with in Bikaner. Building a brand around this traditional embroidery has not only made the traditional skill of home-based workers financially lucrative, it has also led to a renewed appreciation and recognition of this art and the artisans, as these age-old designs now adorn apparel and home furnishings that are sold all over India, and in other countries as well. It has also encouraged some women from the younger generation to take up this embroidery work.
- Hiring local staff — Rangsutra understands that while professionals are needed to ensure design and other expertise, it is essential to hire local people as part of the management staff. Apart from being sensitive to the local culture, they understand the embroidery work better and therefore can co-ordinate workers with the ability to help out as needed in the work. This reflects Rangsutra's core guiding principle of respecting the producer and respecting the consumer.
- Building relationships with the right brands — The success of this operation is also due to cooperation with brands whose values include sourcing from local artisans.

CONCLUSION AND CHALLENGES

The philosophy underlying Rangsutra's operations includes an emphasis on developing opportunities for artisans to grow into different and larger roles, and on accepting orders only from those brands that understand the nature of work done by hand (not doing so leads to unacceptably high rejection rates due to minor differences across pieces) and are committed to sourcing from local artisans. It is important to note that while Rangsutra has remained

present in Bikaner and continues to provide work to artisans in remote border villages, it has also expanded its operations to other states of India where different production models are in use.

Despite its success in establishing itself as a known brand and in securing regular orders from leading domestic and global brands, Rangsutra faces challenges. Competition from big corporate players is a new challenge,

as these too have entered the handloom and khadi market rapidly in the past few years, with the ability to cross-subsidise these products from other segments and hence reduce market prices for similar products. Given that they can offer attractive discounts and achieve economies of scale, continuous innovation becomes essential for an organisation like Rangsutra. Consumer consciousness can help, but only to some degree.

Chapter 4

SEWA Bangla and Weavers in Phulia-Shantipur Belt, West Bengal

INTRODUCTION

One of the research sites was the town of Phulia and its adjoining villages in Shantipur block, district Nadia, West Bengal, which is situated in Southern Bengal close to the Bangladesh border. Bordered by the rivers Bhagirathi, Jalangi, and Mathabhanga, the rich soil here makes agriculture a very profitable enterprise in the district. The economy of Nadia is mostly dependent on agriculture and there are no major industries; however, the Shantipur block is famous for its handloom textiles. The aim was to study the production system and value chains in handloom weaving of primarily saris, stoles, and scarves, and to explore the work, working conditions, income, and levels of organisation amongst women handloom weavers who are home-based workers in the villages of Shantipur-Phulia belt.

The study was conducted in villages where SEWA Bangla works to mobilise and organise home-based women weavers.



About Handloom Clusters

According to the Directorate of Textiles, Government of West Bengal,²⁹ Nadia district has five major handloom clusters, of which three are in decline. The website details the history of weaving in the region, dating back to the 15th century. It observes that the introduction of treadle looms with Dobby and Jacquard fittings in the 20th century facilitated newer designs and to sped up production. In the early 1980s, the Bengal Small Scale Aids Industry Act was instrumental to the growth of the handloom industry, as it facilitated loans and grants for investment in looms and other ancillary materials.

The beginning of the handloom industry in Phulia is usually traced back to the migration of weavers from what is now Bangladesh during the partition of India (1947) as well as later during the liberation war of Bangladesh (1971). The State Government rehabilitated these refugee-weavers around the town of Phulia, leading to the creation of weavers' colonies. Most were from the Basak community, famous for its unique 'Tangail' weave. Despite

facing innumerable difficulties, hardship, and exploitation, the weavers were able to come together under cooperative banners. Over the years, these cooperatives saw a growing membership as the number of weavers increased and by 1977, three cooperative societies had been registered (under West Bengal Co-operative Society Act) in collaboration with the State Handloom Department and Co-operative department (Basak and Paul 2015). The Phulia-Shantipur belt continues to be renowned for its handloom, including both the Tangail weave and the Jamdani style of weaving, which was patronized by the Mughals and royal courts (Roy 2017).

Field studies have pointed out that in Phulia, only 10 per cent of weavers are 'mahajan' (a term used to refer both to master and sub-master weavers), while the rest are mostly those located at the bottom of the chain with no capital except ownership of the loom. A few weavers work in the sheds of mahajans as they do not own looms of their own. One study has also pointed out that often handlooms are operated by migrant labourers from the district of Cooch Behar as well as other parts of

North Bengal (Basak and Paul 2015). However, in this research we have observed the opposite: most men are migrating to southern states, such as Kerala, and handlooms are lying idle. Roy, too, argues that the weavers are facing destitution as their livelihoods decline and are becoming indebted to the mahajans, which possibly explains their lack of involvement with the various cooperative societies.³⁰

The cooperatives were formed to provide weavers with work without a percentage of the earnings being appropriated by intermediaries; however in practice, the costs of overheads and maintenance of showrooms has meant that they could hardly break even. For instance, Jwaha Sircar, the former MD of Manjusha, narrates that unlike the big brands of the current government (such as Viswa Bangla), Tantuj was a cooperative society: *"In a weaving cluster of 50 to 100 households a cooperative society is formed, which sells to a marketing cooperative and then there was an apex cooperative. A cooperative is a non-profit body...but then there are all the costs of marketing, overheads, rentals etc. which added to the cost of the product."*

²⁹ https://westbengalhandloom.org/htm/ihtcdp_santi.html

³⁰ Roy (2017) lists five handloom co-operatives:

1. Handloom Weavers Co-operative Society
2. Fulia Tangail Shari Bayan Silpa Samabay Samity Ltd
3. Fulia Progotisil Tantubay Samity
4. Nutan Fulia Tantubay Samabay Samity Ltd.
5. Tangail Tantujibi Unnayan Samabay Samity Ltd.

According to him there are four female handloom co-operatives as well:

1. Ashanandapura Mahila Co-operative Society (1980)
2. Sutragarh Narimukti Samity
3. Dhakapura Mahila Samabai Samity Limited.
4. Santipur Garhpara Narimukti Tantubai samity (1984)

TABLE 4.1: HANDLOOM CLUSTERS OF NADIA, WEST BENGAL

Sl	Handloom clusters of Nadia	Product	Estimated Number of Looms Present	Trends
1	Ranaghat I & II	Coarser sari, lungi, gamcha, furnishing, fabric	2000	In decline
2	Phulia & Adjoining	Tangail sari, jamdani sari, dress material, exportable fabrics	12000	Prospering
3	Shantipur	Shantipuri sari, exportable fabrics	20000	Prospering
4	Nabadeep	Coarser sari, lungi, gamcha, jamdani, shirting	2000	In decline
5	Nakshipara/ Rajapur	Jamdani exportable fabrics	1000	In decline

Source: Directorate of Textiles, Government of West Bengal

Weaving clusters have evolved in an organic manner, with some weavers taking on the role of the master weaver. Master weavers and sub-master weavers are those who have moved on from being weavers to becoming traders and entrepreneurs: taking responsibility of production, designing, sourcing raw materials, and trading with and supplying to export houses, brands and firms in cities across the country. They may or may not continue weaving. The major difference between being a master weaver and sub-master weaver is the amount of capital one controls, the nature of engagement with the market on the one hand and the level of involvement with the production process on the other. Master weavers usually deal directly with the buyers and sub-contract the production process to the sub-master weavers. However, to

maintain quality, they retain control over raw material supply and other such sundry matters.

The handloom sector has many actors in addition to weavers. First the dyers—those directly employed by master weavers or who work for dyeing units. A cluster may have large, medium and small dyeing units according to the volume of yarn dyed. Coloured yarn consists of 60 per cent of total yarn sold and the rest consists of the grey colour. There are those who work as designers, whose role is to design the weave, enter the design into punch cards for the Jacquard loom and also calculate the costs for the master weaver. Then there are raw material suppliers. Cotton yarn is obtained from traders/supplier of Barabazar in Kolkata, who in turn procure it from small scale spinners located in Andhra Pradesh

and Tamil Nadu. Then there are the equipment suppliers. Usually a cluster like Santipur or Phulia will have around 100 loom manufacturers and suppliers. Most looms within the handloom sector are Jacquard looms. The average cost of Jacquard loom is approximately INR 4800 (USD 67), without accessories. However, jamdani weaving, which requires the addition of a supplemental weft to create the designs, is done on a simple handloom.

About SEWA Bangla

The partner organisation for the research was SEWA Bangla, which started organising women weavers in the Phulia-Shantipur belt around 2016. SEWA, a globally recognized trade union of women workers in the informal economy, seeks to secure economic, social, and legal rights

for its members. SEWA Bangla is affiliated to SEWA Bharat, national federation of SEWA organizations, and works in West Bengal. SEWA Bangla mobilises women, gives its members training in leadership and financial literacy, facilitates their access to pehchan cards and to government schemes, organises regular health camps, and provides training to enhance weaving skills. A SEWA Shakti Kendra (empowerment centre) has been opened to provide information and to link its members to government schemes.

In 2017, on behalf of the Government of India, SEWA Bangla conducted the Fourth National Census of Handloom Weavers in Phulia. As a result, 5000 women were counted and registered as weavers. In earlier Censuses, women weavers were either not counted as workers or were registered as ancillary workers. The work of SEWA Bangla with its members is supported by a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) grant from a global brand that sources from the area, and which has been open to supporting a range of activities and services that respond to the actual needs of women weavers.

SEWA Bangla's work with its members led to an awareness that women need new skills to be able to fulfil orders from large brands. Sanchita Mitra, National Co-ordinator of SEWA Bharat, says, that ***"It is the use of a jacquard that allows more options in weaving techniques. Women did not know how to use a jacquard loom so we are focusing on enhancing their skills. We have identified one woman who knows how to set the loom and***

asked her to be the trainer. So we are aiming for training of women by women."

SEWA Bangla has also taken the initiative to connect its members directly to the market, by helping them to participate in fairs and exhibitions. Moumita Chakroborty, the State Coordinator of SEWA Bangla, says that women who aspire to become mahajans find this difficult as companies do not pay in advance. ***"In 2017 we directly linked two to three of our members to a company. However, they were unable to finish the work on time because of early onset of monsoon and other factors. They had an order for that year because we managed the process for them, however, the order was not repeated the following year."*** According to Moumita Ben, companies prefer to go through intermediary organisations instead of dealing directly with weavers, as it is easier to hold the former accountable for deadlines. The training of women weavers, thus, needs to go beyond weaving skills to understanding the demands of the market, and the necessity of maintaining deadlines.

The Study Sample

The research in Phulia covered five villages in Shantipur Block: Gobarchar, Belgaria, Biharia Mathpara, Khapradanga Para (Ghoralia), and Kalipur, in which there are members of SEWA Bangla. The team surveyed 44 weavers who are members of SEWA Bangla and 20 who were not in contact with any union. In addition to the survey, six FGDs were conducted and 52 semi-

structured interviews were done, including with master and sub-master weavers, women weavers (both SEWA Bangla members and non-members), community leaders, ancillary workers, and experts. Given the short period that SEWA Bangla has been present in the area, and because it does not directly intervene in the weaving value chain, little difference was noted in the responses of members and non-members on the conditions of work and earnings, and hence the combined data is presented here.

The five villages that were selected differ in characteristics and weaving arrangements. For instance, the village of Gobarchar was predominantly populated by handloom weavers who got work on a regular basis throughout the year. Belgaria, however, was populated by those who were on the verge of giving up weaving or had already done so, in favour of alternative livelihoods, such as agriculture, construction, painting and other masonry jobs. A large number of women worked on MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) sites and male migration to the southern states for semi-skilled jobs had become a common phenomenon. In Biharia Mathpara, Khapradanga Para (Ghoralia), and Kalipur, both powerlooms and handlooms are used. There was a general understanding that while powerloom textiles had a ready market, the market for handloom products was volatile. However, there was also a general optimism among the weaving community that handloom textiles could see a turn for the better in the near future.

TABLE 4.2: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY VILLAGES

Village	Number of respondents associated with SEWA-BANGLA	Number of respondents not associated with SEWA-BANGLA	Total
Gobarchar	12	4	16
Belgaria	8	4	12
Biharia Mothpara	8	4	12
Ghoralia Khapradanga	8	4	12
Kalipur	8	4	12
Total	44	20	64

The Demographic profile of the respondents

Most of the respondents (45 per cent) were in the age group of 31-40 while the rest were more or less equally divided between the age groups 20-30 and 41-50. The average age of respondents was 36 years. Nearly two-thirds (sixty-four per cent) belonged to Scheduled Castes, 8 per cent to Other Backward Classes (OBC)

category and 28 per cent belonged to the Forward or Upper Castes. In terms of education, 36 per cent had not attended school; 26 per cent had been educated up to Class V; 31 per cent had studied between Class V and VIII; and 7 per cent had studied beyond class X. Almost all respondents (98 per cent) were married. The care dependency ratio (ratio between children 0-14 and adults over 65 to those in the 15-64 age group) was 0.29, that is, 29 per cent of the total household population were dependent on

other members of the family. The average household size was four. While there was some child marriage (three daughters below the age of 18 were married) there was no evidence of child labour.

Decent Work Framework

The research findings on the situation of home-based women weavers have been analyzed and organised according to the ILO Decent Work framework.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Comprising a large portion of the 'textiles and garments' sector, handloom weaving has historically been the second-largest employment sector, second only to agriculture. As discussed below, there have been new entrants from different castes into the weaving sector as well as shifts from handloom to powerloom and between types of products. Out-migration of men and increased

participation of women in weaving in Phulia, as weavers and not just as allied workers, are also happening.

The weavers who had migrated from East Pakistan (or Bangladesh) to Phulia were mostly from the Basak community that belongs to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category. However, caste and community have gradually lost relevance in the

handloom sector. While in Phulia, the art of weaving tangai was brought in and popularized by the Basak community, many outside the caste-community have taken to weaving and trading. The experience of shared poverty of different caste groups due to the crisis in agriculture has precipitated the breaking of the caste-community composition of weavers and weaving-related labour.

Given the competition from machine-made textiles, the survival of handloom weaving as a viable occupation remains open to question. One view is that the proliferation of powerlooms and the decline of the handloom sector, particularly after the 1980s, was a consequence of a policy shift from a focus on employment to a focus on productivity. Mazumdar argues that the number of handlooms has almost halved in the past two-three decades, leading to a decline in the number of handloom weavers and a spate of suicides by weavers,

along with the feminization of the weaving community with an increase in the number of women weavers. For instance, in West Bengal, women weavers increased from 30 per cent in 1996 to 63 per cent in 2010 (Mazumdar 2018). This feminization came about as women who previously did ancillary tasks began to weave, some women who were never weavers or ancillary workers took up weaving, and men who were formerly weavers looked for other work.

As the table below shows, between

1995-96 and 2009-10, while there has been a marked decrease in the number of weavers and weaving households, there has been an increase in the percentage of all weavers who weave full-time and, among weaver households, an increase in the share which generate 60 per cent or more of their income from handloom and related activities. There has been a concurrent decrease in the share of those who produce less than a metre of cloth per day. For those households that have stayed in this work, household dependence on weaving has thus gone up.

TABLE 4.3: PROFILE OF HANDLOOM WEAVER HOUSEHOLDS

Selected Indicators	Second Census 1995-96	Third Census 2009-10
Handloom weaver households	25.25	22.68
Handloom weavers (Lakh = 100,000)	34.71	29.09
Total person-days worked by weaver household (lakh) during census year	4,977	5,313
Person-days worked per weaver household during census year	197	234
Share of full-time weavers to total weavers	44%	64%
Share of weaver household reporting less than a metre production (weaving) per day	68%	46%
Share of weaver household reporting more than 60 per cent income from handloom and related activities	31%	35%
Share of idle looms	10%	4%

Source: *Third Handloom Census of India, 2009-10*, published by National Council of Applied Economic Research,



SEWA Bharat member working on a new design on her loom

West Bengal has a relatively large handloom sector and a relatively large percentage of women handloom weavers. But the share of household income from weaving is far lower than that in states where powerloom weaving predominates. While it is Northeastern India, particularly Assam, which has the highest numbers of weavers (64.7

per cent, 98.6 per cent of whom are women), Bengal is next, contributing 13.9 per cent of women weavers to the All-India female handloom workforce; 62.5 per cent of Bengal's handloom weavers are women and 35.7 per cent of women workers in the state are handloom weavers. In handloom households, the average contribution of income from weaving

is 42.3 per cent of the total annual household income. This is far behind states such as Tamil Nadu (79.4 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (61.7 per cent), Odisha (75.2), Jharkhand (83.2) amongst others, but higher than states such as Rajasthan (25.2) and Himachal Pradesh (15.7), among others (Mazumdar 2018: 48). (For more information, see the author's

calculation in Annex III.)

While official statistics show a declining trend in women's work participation rates overall in India, over the last 15 years, there has been an increased participation of women in the handloom sector. Also, it is important to note that when the handloom sector no longer generated viable livelihoods, men weavers began to migrate for alternative sources of work and women weavers began to take over the handloom sector. This relationship between poverty, livelihood and gender has been seen in other contexts.

In the interviews with various stakeholders and interested bystanders, it became clear that one of the keys to Phulia's emergence as the poster town of handloom weaving was its transition to weaving stoles. To meet demands from the international market, several boutiques bypassed the weavers' cooperatives and started working directly with weavers. Two of the more well-known are SASHA and Bai Lou. Swagata, which has been associated with SASHA, a fair trade organisation, from its beginning, describes how they started working directly with weavers, encouraging them to move out of weaving saris to weaving dupattas and stoles. Weavers unfamiliar with stoles were reluctant to change. Only after one master weaver, supported by the government and a Japanese company, travelled across the country with a group of weavers, gaining exposure to different kinds of looms and designs, did local weavers start weaving stoles. *"This is when everything changed in Phulia. They*

went from saris to stoles and loose weave using different kinds of yarn which they could not imagine earlier. It started something like a revolution and suddenly you see that Phulia is not making saris anymore, they are only weaving stoles.... Now, the demand for the Phulia stole has started falling. Weavers are unable to compete with the cheaper stoles, from countries like Vietnam, which is why they have started going back to saris."

The return from stoles to saris as the dominant product is illustrated in the experience of Bai Lou, a company initially making mostly scarves, cushions, pillows and bedspreads exclusively for export. By 2005, the international market had shrunk. Moreover, global buyers had strict requirements and deadlines, leading to a large volume of rejects because the quantity required was not met or the colour was not exact. As Bappadity Biswas of Bai Lou explained: *"Big organisations are very rigidly structured and weaving from home is a very unstructured way of working.... We realized we are forcing weavers to be paid labourers rather than artisans." Around 2005, this company started making saris and shifted to the domestic market. "Saris have become such a big part of our business and now it is 90 per cent of all our products."*

Weaving in Bengal has traditionally been a male occupation with the ancillary work delegated to women, mostly unpaid family workers. According to the Third Handloom Census, 84.8 per cent of allied workers are women. Sanchita Mitra of SEWA explained that even where women have learnt to weave, their skills are often limited. *"In Phulia, many of the intricate saris are not*

woven by women because they do not have the upgraded skills. Though, when compared to other states, Bengal has more women weavers working on low price-range saris. When we asked contractors, why do they not give work to women, they cite lack of skill." The gendered division of labour within the weaving community is historically produced and socially legitimized. As a sub-master weaver tells us: *"Women sit at home and do this work and it also gives them an additional income... The art of weaving requires a lot of physical effort and that is not the way women in our community have been brought up...So they do work that is physically easier and which allows them to earn some money as well. Ancillary work is crucial to the handloom sector, without which we cannot weave, and this is wholly done by women."* The commodification of yarn spinning and starching has led to remuneration, for what was earlier unpaid family labour, generating what is now perceived as women's supplementary income.

The research drew attention to how women were rarely able to take on trading activities. Moumita Chakraborty of SEWA Bangla drew attention to women's lack of capital: *"Master weavers are mostly men, an area that requires investment and capital, and 90 per cent of all ancillary workers are women. Men do not want to do ancillary work, as wages are really low. At the sub-master level, 70 per cent are male and 30 per cent women."*

The table below summarises the production process, bringing out the critical role of various ancillary activities in the weaving sector and who does them.

TABLE 4.4: THE PROCESS OF PRODUCTION

Process	Description
Bleaching and dyeing	The cotton yarns are bleached before dyeing and stretched out on bamboo frames to dry in natural light. This is mostly done by dyeing units, either owned or rented by master weavers.
Sizing	Warp yarns are soaked in starch for imparting strength and increasing resistance to abrasion. This helps in reducing yarn breakage and improves quality and efficiency of weaving. This labour is mostly provided by ancillary women workers.
Warping and beaming	Warping is a process by which the length and width of warp sheet is fixed by combining spools. This process is done on a wooden drum from a wooden peg creel. The warp sheet is then mounted on the loom and this process is called beaming. This labour is mostly provided by ancillary women workers.
Pirn winding	On the hand spool (charkha) the weft or pirn is prepared. Pirn winding is the process of transferring the yarns from the hanks into bobbin/pirn of the shuttles used in the weft while weaving. This labour is mostly provided by ancillary women workers.
Preparation of loom	The loom is prepared by expert weavers, mostly submaster weavers, by drafting and denting, that is passing the warp yarn as per the draft of the design. Denting is the process by which the yarn is passed through the reed, whereby the width of fabric is maintained during weaving.
Setting up of jacquard	Jacquard enables weaving of complicated designs and increases pace of production and it is usually used for the borders of the sari and the buttas (in the body) which need extra warp. This setting up is mostly done by submaster weavers.
Weaving	Weavers weave the yarn into fabric, mostly in their own homes, and sometimes in sheds provided by master and sub-master weavers.

Source: Field observation

In Phulia, there are complex relationships between weavers, mahajans, and buyers. In that sense the production organisation can be described as a 'matrix'. Individual roles are fluid and can change depending on the volatility of the market, ability to accumulate capital, supply and demand, as well as individual initiative. For most women weavers located at

the middle or bottom of the chain who have tried to trade as well as weave, profits are marginal, often leading to loss and indebtedness.

At the lowest end of the chain is the woman weaver who weaves handloom textiles in her home. She is usually connected to a sub-master weaver who gives her an order, sets up the loom, provides

her with yarn and collects the finished product within a stipulated time. Remuneration is decided on a piece rate basis, depending on the volume of work, intricacy of design, and the labour involved. The sub-master weavers, predominantly men but also some women, usually get orders from a master weaver, which they subcontract to other weavers and also engage

in trade. A sub-master weaver, most likely, is also a weaver and is deeply involved in organising the production process. S/he is closely in touch with the weaving community, often living amongst the weavers. A sub-master weaver can also be a trader/entrepreneur depending on whether s/he can accumulate enough capital to control both production as well as marketing. S/he could directly sell in fairs, markets, city-based traders or even to boutiques and export houses. The role of a sub-master weaver is fluid, and s/he can slip from being a sub-contracted weaver to an entrepreneur and back, depending on the ability to accumulate capital or to forge linkages/access to markets. The pricing and fixing of piece rates are usually not a transparent process,

and weavers are not told what the final product will be sold for. Sometimes the sub-master weaver does not know what the master weaver will sell items for to the export house/boutique. As a sub-master weaver said, *“The mahajan will never tell me the final price at which he sells the products. There has to be some secrecy in the business because if he tells me the final price, I can figure out how much profit he makes. And I will not tell the weavers how much profit I make or else the weavers won’t work for me.”*

The role of the master weaver includes procuring raw material, designing in consultation with brands, fixing piece rates, sub-contracting work to sub-master weavers and then preparing the final product after it returns

from weaving. He usually owns a production centre and may even own dyeing units, for which he directly recruits workers. The master weaver supplies to cooperative societies, government outlets (such as Tantuja, Viswa Bangla), independent boutiques, domestic brands, vendors, the local market in Kolkata, and export houses; they may also sell in their own outlets or government fairs.

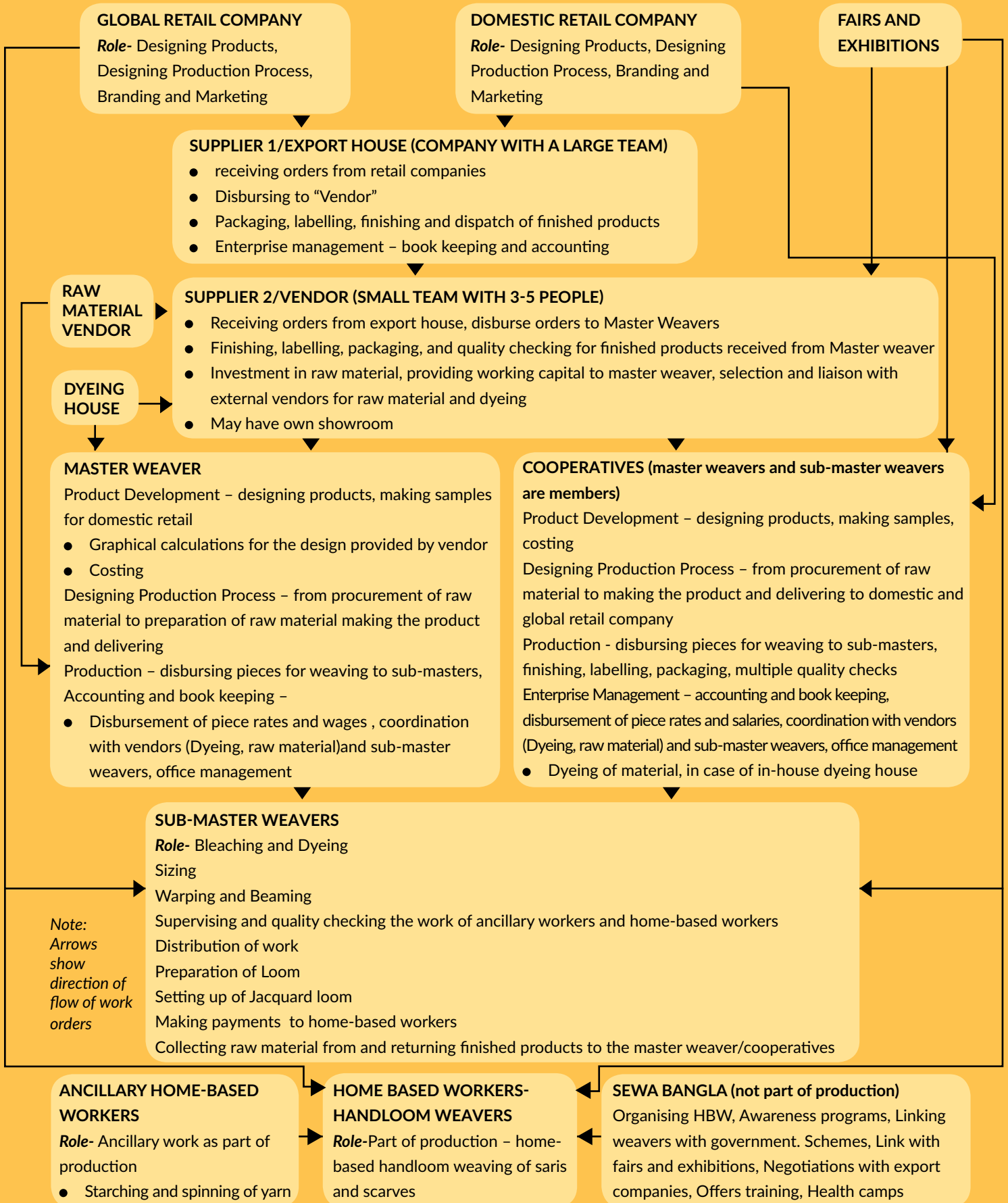
The cooperatives in turn sell their products to domestic brands and government outlets as well as having their own outlets. The export houses supply to international brands. There are also instances when boutiques directly deal with weavers, bypassing the intermediaries and cutting through value chains.



Each home in the weaver villages of Nadia district in West Bengal comes alive with the pitter patter of handlooms

FIGURE 4.1 SUPPLY NETWORK OF HANDLOOM WEAVING PRODUCTS, PHULIA (2020)

NETWORK OF HANDLOOM WEAVING PRODUCTS – PHULIA (2020)



Old and New Crises in the Handloom Sector

Despite various innovations in technology and design, the handloom sector in Phulia is facing severe crisis. One of the major problems being faced by weavers is the competition from cheaper and mass-produced powerloom products. Apart from that, weavers are largely dependent for marketing of products on private traders who continue to exploit them; low wages have led to migration of skilled weavers seeking livelihood elsewhere; difficulties in getting loans from formal banking institutions have led weavers, smaller entrepreneurs and traders to borrow money at high interest rates from local money lenders, thus leading to a vicious cycle of debt; cheap imports from Bangladesh after 2011 have led to a flooding of the market, thus affecting prices and demand of handloom textiles (Roy 2017).

The main crisis identified by respondents as well as other stakeholders was the advent of the powerloom. While the piece rates/price for powerloom textiles are lower, the volume of production of powerlooms is higher, compared to handloom textiles and handlooms. A woman sub-master weaver reported that five to six saris can be made in a day on a powerloom which would sell for INR 80–100 (USD 1–1.3) per sari; whereas it takes a day or more to make one sari on a handloom which would sell for INR 250 (USD 3.5) at least. So, for an entrepreneur seeking profit, the powerloom is more attractive.

The linkages between mechanization and gender was very stark in the

study. It was observed that in households where both men and women wove, women worked on the handloom while men shifted to the powerloom. Powerlooms are expensive, and those that buy them often have to take out a loan; market fluctuations often lead to debt and destitution. Powerlooms also require high maintenance costs and electricity costs. Fluctuations in the market for powerloom textiles has led to debt and destitution. The increasing migration of male weavers has resulted in powerlooms lying idle as women have not been trained to work with them or do not have the ability to take loans to buy them.

In sum, Phulia has transformed from a bustling weaving hub to a desolate and poverty-stricken township. Where once male migrant workers came during peak season and wove to meet the growing demands of handloom products, it is now a town where women weavers eke out a living while male weavers migrate to other states, and the younger generation look for employment in the cities. Kerala was frequently cited as a favoured destination for men. As one respondent said: *“My husband works as a construction site worker. He used to weave before but right now it is difficult to run a household by being a weaver, so he went to Kerala.”*

For women weavers, however, weaving and its ancillary activities are often the only source of livelihood available. A large number of respondents belonged to Scheduled Castes or Other Backward Classes and lacked assets in the form of land or livestock. Some women reported that they learnt weaving as young children and it was the only skill

that they knew. During an FGD, a respondent said: *“The point is that weaving is our only option. We are poor people. If we do not weave, we would have to go to the city, like Kolkata or elsewhere to work. That is not possible for us women to do. It is not possible for women to work as construction site workers.”*

Interviews with women weavers and other stakeholders brought out some other concerns. Both the demonetization policy in 2016 and the imposition of the GST were attempts by the national government to regulate the cash-intensive informal economy and bring those outside the tax net into its fold. Demonetization in 2016 adversely affected weavers at the bottom of the chain who struggled with the shortage of cash. Similarly, without adequate prior information, GST compliance has been difficult for small entrepreneurs, some of whom may have gone out of business. Only those few weavers and entrepreneurs who had previously acquired a trade license and bank account were not affected. According to a master weaver, to protect the sector, handloom products should be exempted from GST.

Competition from powerloom products is not a new challenge, and one of the suggestions made was that the labelling of handloom products would eliminate this challenge, at least partially. As most city-based customers could not easily distinguish a powerloom or a handloom product, they often bought the former at cheaper rates assuming that they were handloom textiles. Another problem reported by smaller traders and sub-master

weavers was storage of finished products. Lack of secure space led to distress sale of products, often leading to loss.

Skills and Training

Most respondents reported that they had been weaving for 20 years, while some had been weaving for 26 to 30 years. The average number of years engaged in weaving was 17 years. While 45 per cent women reported having always known weaving as they were traditionally from weaving families, 55 per cent reported learning it elsewhere. However, most women (91 per cent) reported that they had not learnt it in formal training centres. Interestingly, although 45 per cent of the women reported that they came from traditional weaving families, 81 per cent reported that they do not teach weaving to their family members. This could be directly linked to the loss of interest of the newer generation in weaving: 38 per cent felt that there was no one in the family who they could teach it to, while 25 per cent felt that they would rather have their children study than weave textiles. One respondent said, *"Weaving is extremely labour intensive. It takes so much effort to learn and one tiny mistake takes so long to fix. So I told my children not to learn weaving. My son is now a goldsmith and my daughter gives tutorials to school children. Weaving is really labour intensive."*

A sub master weaver similarly said, *"I have worked for 25 years so I know that a weaver never progresses. I do not want my daughter to weave or marry into a family where the traditional occupation is weaving."*

However, despite the lack of interest to encourage the next generation to become weavers, 86 per cent of women still wanted to improve their own weaving skills. Most women (78 per cent) would rather improve the quality of weaving than hone marketing abilities or acquire different sets of skills. However, 84 per cent said they would like to engage in selling handloom saris and not just weaving them.

Training for weavers to help them to upgrade their skills is conducted through the government cooperatives, and recently SEWA Bangla has started some training

albeit on a small scale. When asked whether they have received skill up-gradation training, 53 per cent responded in the affirmative, and 48 per cent said they had received training in the past. Mostly the skills taught are weaving, designing and repairing the warp-weft or the product. Among those who had received training, 33 per cent of women reported that it was useful to them.

SEWA Bangla also does leadership development training, which includes training community leaders (oragyavaans) around labour rights in a programme called Agyavaan Vikas Training.



Setting up of looms is traditionally done by men - now women HBWs are learning this skill via trainings organised by SEWA Bharat

Earnings and Conditions of Work

The outcomes reported here are indicative of the situation of women weavers in the villages visited.

In the survey, 36 per cent of the

women weavers reported that their monthly household income was in the range of INR 5001–8000 (USD 70–112), while 17 per cent reported a range of INR 8001–10000 (USD 112–140). Only 10 per cent of the respondents reported a monthly household income above INR 10,000

(USD 140). The average earning of 73 per cent of those surveyed is less than the minimum wage of INR 6376 (USD 89) as set by the State of West Bengal (2019).

Some key findings are reported in the table below.

TABLE 4.5: INCOME AND HOURS OF WORK: SURVEY DATA

Occupation and mean income	Survey respondents
Weaving as primary source of household income	69 %
Weaving as second largest source of household income	33 %
Mean monthly income in peak season	3022
Mean hours of work in peak season	6
Mean monthly income in lean season	INR 1568 (USD 22)
Mean hours of work in lean season	2

Just under 60 per cent of women reported that other members of the household are also involved in the weaving industry in different capacities. Those who did not report handloom weaving as the primary source of household income cited manual work such as construction, manual labour and other kinds of casual work as the primary source of livelihood.

Among respondents, 63 per cent reported that they were able to procure work throughout the year but in terms of working hours, there was greater variation. In peak season women weavers worked for a range of 1–4 hours (34 per cent), 5–8 hours (34 per cent), and 8–12 hours (28 per cent). However, the daily earnings show that there is an intensification of labour with low

wages, as 51 per cent of women weavers reported earning INR 100 (USD 1.5) or less per day and 44 per cent reported earning in the range of INR 100–300 (USD 1.5–4) per day. The average hours worked daily is 6 hours in the peak period and 2 hours in the lean season, with average monthly earnings of INR 3022 (USD 42) and INR 1568 (USD 22) respectively.

TABLE 4.6: PIECE RATES AND MARGINS OF PROFITS

Product	Piece Rate for weaver	Time required	Master/sub-master weaver's profit margin	Boutique/export houses' profit margin
Matha (plain) sari	INR 130–200 (USD 2-3)	8 hours	10-20 per cent	100 to 150 per cent
Jamdani sari	INR 250–2000 USD 3–28)	8 to 50 hours	10-20 per cent	100 to 150 per cent
Stole/dupatta	INR 125 (USD 2)	4 hours	10-20 per cent	100 to 150 per cent

Source: Based on an interview with a sub-master weaver

The wage paid for a matha (cotton) sari is INR 130 (USD 2) and can take from two to three days to complete. During one FGD, a participant reported that men could weave six to seven matha saris a week, while women could not make as many, primarily due to their household responsibilities. A participant in the FGD stated: *“It is not possible for women to start weaving before 11 AM. We get up at the crack of dawn, do all the household chores, cook, and get the children ready for school, and then we get time to sit down at the loom. Again, at around 2 PM we bathe, tend to the household and return to work at 4 PM.”*

During the lean period, a significantly large number of respondents (70 per cent) reported that they worked 1 to 4 hours a day; about 20 per cent reported that in the lean season there was no work and of those who got work, most earned less than INR 100 (USD 1.5) a day. The peak season in the weaving sector is mostly from August to October (around the time of festivities) when they work 10 to 12 hours; and the lean season starts from November till the end of monsoons, around August, when

there is practically no work. In the FGD at Ghoralia village, a participant described the lean season as follows: *“As soon as Durga Puja is gone, our mahajans tell us not to weave. They say if you weave saris now, we will not be able to pay you. So they do not give us raw materials, and we cannot weave.”*

Most of the respondents (94 per cent) reported that they received work from the sub-master weavers and only a few (6 per cent) received work directly from the master weavers. 92 per cent respondents wove in their homes; while a few (6 per cent) wove in the sheds provided by the mahajans, either master or sub-master weavers; and 2 per cent reported working at both their own homes and the sheds. Almost all respondents (98 per cent) reported that they do not like to work at the mahajans' sheds.

All women weavers in this study reported that they were given raw materials (yarn, thread) by their mahajan except for one who bought supplies from the market. In case of a shortage of yarn, only 9 per cent of respondents reported that they

bought materials directly from the market to make up for the deficiency; 91 per cent of the respondents were given the additional material by the master/sub master weaver. However, when it came to tools including looms, frames, scissors, 58 per cent reported procuring directly from the market, while 42 per cent received tools from the sub/master weavers. There were no additional maintenance costs of tools reported by the respondents. Some of the respondents reported that if they work on looms provided by the mahajans, INR 10 (USD 0.14) would be deducted from their piece rates. Given the relation between the weaver and mahajan, it is not surprising that 89 per cent of the respondents reported that they took work from a single mahajan.

While 39 per cent of the respondents reported that they already knew their mahajans through social and familial networks before working with him, 53 per cent of the respondents had no prior connection with their mahajans. The fact that the majority of weavers operate outside kinship structures confirms that weaving is no longer ghettoized in specific caste and communities but open to

all those who have picked up the skill and are able to invest in looms. One respondent tells us that *“I shift from one mahajan to another on the basis of who can sell products at a faster rate in the market.”* In case of faulty work, 48 per cent reported that they had to repair it, while 52 per cent reported that they found other ways to dispose of the product.

Also, 48 per cent of the respondents reported that they deliver the product to their mahajans, 20 per cent reported that the product is collected from them, and 30 per cent used both means. While there are no formal records maintained, women kept track of their work, but almost 58 per cent of respondents reported that they do not maintain work diaries.

The very word mahajan literally means one who trades and lends money. The payment system that is followed is that 60-80 per cent of the full wages for a week's work is paid when the finished goods are delivered, and the rest is paid when the product is sold in the market and the mahajan receives his full payment. Most of the time women weavers kept money for safe keeping with the mahajan to be taken and used in times of emergency; so he is not just the employer but also someone with whom the weaver's savings are deposited.

All respondents reported that they were paid in cash. However, there are variations in the number of days within which they received payments: 19 per cent reported that they were paid on the same day; 66 per cent reported that payment usually took a week; and 2 per cent reported receiving payments after as

much as 60 days. Further, 48 per cent reported that they received payment regularly, while 52 per cent cited irregularity of payment. The question of payment is closely tied to market supply and demand. When there is great demand and orders come in, mahajans pay regularly, sometimes on the same day or within a week, depending on sales. In lean seasons, payments can be delayed by a few months if the mahajan is unable to sell the saris. The fixing of piece rates

is also closely tied to the mahajan's ability to store the final products. The women weavers are painfully aware that in the lean season, while they are compelled to work for lower wages, this does not necessarily mean that the mahajans incur a loss or sell at a lower price. They can stock products and, when demand goes up, sell for a sizeable profit.

When asked how they would be affected if they gave up weaving,



SEWA Bharat facilitates participation of its member HBWs in government-organised trainings and certifications

55 per cent of the respondents declared that the loss of income would affect their household, while 28 per cent specifically said that it would affect their children and 12 per cent declared that it would affect their personal consumption. Only a few women (5 per cent) reported that it would affect their

savings. One respondent stated: *“Women have to work nowadays despite doing all household work. Nobody has any agricultural land to fall back on. Everything is dependent on weaving...Everyone here just weaves.... Women who get married and come here also learn how to weave, because this is our only*

work and if we do not do this, then what will we eat?” In discussions with the respondents, the issue of children’s education and welfare came across strongly. Respondents insisted that they were engaged in such hard and arduous labour only to educate their children and give them a better life.

EXTENDING SOCIAL PROTECTION

Most of the respondents (59 per cent) had BPL (Below Poverty Line) cards and about 37 per cent had APL (Above Poverty Line) cards. While 97 per cent of the women had voter identity cards (a fact that all political parties work actively to ensure), only 3 per cent held artisan cards.³¹ Fully 98 per cent were in possession of Aadhaar cards, and 83 per cent had weavers’ cards.³² This likely reflected the emphasis that SEWA Bangla has placed on facilitating such registration. Women weavers had heard of and were accessing various schemes. The MGNREGA,³³ Health Insurance and the Samajik Suraksha Yojana³⁴ (SSY), respectively were accessed by 21 per cent, 26 per cent and 22 per cent of the respondents, while 16 per cent received monetary benefits from Kanyashree scheme³⁵ but only 4 per cent had received

weavers’ loans.

To access social security schemes, 72 per cent of respondents reported that they had received help. Of these, 25 per cent reported that they received help from the local panchayat, 19 per cent reported that they received help from SEWA Bangla, and 6 per cent reported receiving help from both. Others reported that neighbours, self-help groups or school officials helped them to access social security schemes.

A SEWA Bangla community leader said that SEWA had helped her to register for the pehchan card. The significance of this card is that various benefits as well as compensation at times of disasters, such as flooding, are given only to those who are registered as weavers. SEWA Bangla

had also provided information about government schemes like the SSY, which most people did not know about. Another respondent similarly said that she had been associated with SEWA Bangla for a year. *“At that time we were running around trying to enrol for the Samajik Suraksha Yojana and we were not getting much help. They helped us get our names registered, they held regular meetings...They also helped us get PAN cards, pehchan cards, etc. They took us to trade fairs.”*

The vast majority of respondents (88 per cent) reported that their health was affected due to weaving. Weaving has largely affected eyesight, led to backache, and caused severe chest pain. More than half (53 per cent) had stopped working for a period of time due to ill health in the

³¹ The Artisan Identity Card is a photo-identity card issued by the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Government of India to artisans. The card facilitates easier identification of the artisans. It also acts as an official proof of their identity when they deal with various government schemes related to skill training, access to credit, marketing, and insurance, among other things. It carries the photograph of the artisan and denotes the craft he/she is engaged in. All artisans and craft workers are eligible to apply for the card. The card is issued free of cost, through different agencies selected by the office of the DC(H).

³² The Weaver Credit Card is meant to make easier the process of financial assistance to artisans to meet their credit requirements for working capital requirement as well as purchase of tools and equipment required for carrying out weaving activity. Under the Union Ministry of Textile - Office of Development Commissioner (Handlooms), Government of India.

³³ Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 provides for 100 days of manual labour at minimum wages to be provided to each rural household that demands it.

³⁴ Samajik Suraksha Yojana or SSY is a flagship scheme in providing Social Security to the workers in the un-organised sectors.

³⁵ Kanyashree is an initiative taken by the Government of West Bengal to improve the life and the status of girls by helping economically backward families with cash transfers for their daughter’s education.

last six months. SEWA Bangla has been active in holding health camps including eye check-ups and yoga classes.

A field mobilizer with SEWA Bangla reported that health is an important expressed need of the women and that the women appreciate health camps and nutrition information. Arsenic in water is a particular problem in the area and drinking water solutions have been experimented with. SEWA Bangla has also been active in providing support in collaboration with global brands and other local organisations to the community of weavers. For instance, water filters installed in schools and communities has been supported by the global brand as part of their corporate social responsibility and implemented by SEWA Bangla.

Another respondent says that SEWA Bangla *“told us about Kanyashree which is applicable in schools. Then they took us to Murshidabad for training in leadership.”*

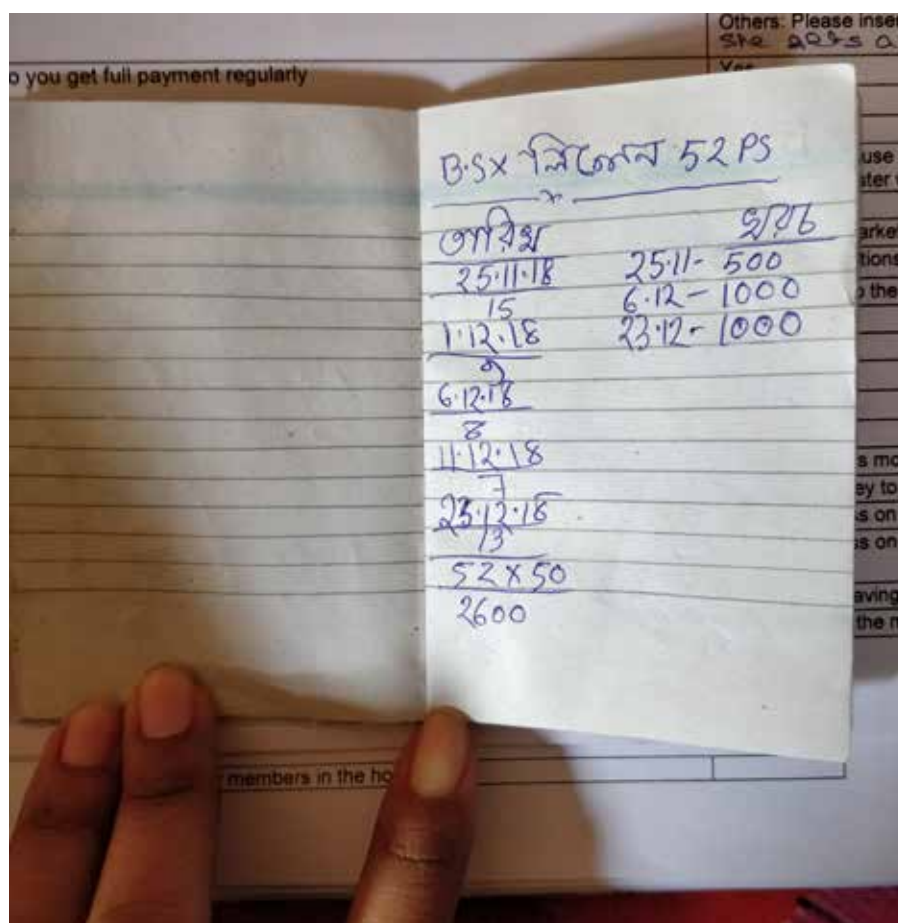
Although SEWA Bangla has been in Phulia for a short period of time, these examples suggest that it has already been quite successful in facilitating linkages of women to government social protection programmes and in organising its own health camps.

Promoting Social Dialogue

SEWA Bangla organises platforms for social dialogue between women weavers, representatives of a global brand, and master weavers to discuss matters around wages, maintenance of records and more. By organising women, giving them information and

training, SEWA Bangla expects that over time women’s voices will be heard in these work negotiations. By 2019, SEWA Bangla had organised 4000 women weavers and ancillary workers as members in the district of Nadia. The first important step has been to elevate members who are weavers from being recorded as ‘allied workers’ to being recorded as ‘weavers’, bringing about a change in women’s sense of self or personal identity. SEWA Bangla’s activities have also included skill upgradation, motivating members to form their own weaving cluster and to access weaver benefits, enabling access to government social protection schemes and organising health camps.

In addition, SEWA Bangla has been sensitising their members who are sub-master weavers to address women’s issues, as well as sensitising brands about the prevalent poor working conditions. For instance, SEWA Bangla has a trade committee comprised of 20 representatives, each representing 200 weavers from Nadia, which meets every three months to discuss issues such as minimum wages. Representatives of global brands, vendors who supply to global brands, and master weavers have also joined some of these meetings at which wages and working conditions have been discussed. These trade committee meetings which started in October 2019 have led the concerned global



With SEWA Bharat’s intervention, HBWs have begun to maintain a written record of pieces and piece rates

brand to pressuring their vendors/suppliers to ensure master weavers provide minimum wages to weavers.

These meetings have started a process, where women have gained confidence, and are able to

raise issues with master weavers around minimum wages and with government officials around identity cards, such as the weaver's cards. They have also had the additional consequences of women weavers maintaining records. In that context,

SEWA Bangla designed and made formats showing how records can be maintained by both sub-weavers and master weavers. The registers maintained by both master-weavers and sub-weavers are counter-signed and copies kept by both.

CONCLUSION: AN ALTERNATIVE 'GOOD PRACTICE' MODEL

Phulia is an example of a well-organised complex production structure where women who were traditionally concentrated in ancillary activities are now weaving on handlooms as men migrate out in search of more remunerative employment. SEWA Bangla does not directly intervene in the value chain. The global brand that supports SEWA Bangla's work expects its value chain partners to create viable work opportunities for weavers, and

supports NGOs/collectives (SEWA Bangla and other NGOs) in providing credit support, community health services and other services as needed, to the community of weavers.

SEWA Bangla does not provide design and marketing services to women weavers like the other organisations participating in this study do but, rather, creates platforms for negotiations and bargaining with master weavers,

suppliers and a global brand company. SEWA Bangla also organises health camps to provide health information and services to its members and helps them gain access to government social protection schemes. The change in the membership, from seeing themselves as part of a household enterprise to having the identity of independent weavers, lays the foundation for unionisation and the emergence of workers' voices.

Chapter 5

SABAH Nepal and Sana Hastakala: Home-Based Work in the Kathmandu Valley

INTRODUCTION

The Kathmandu Valley is situated in the northeast of Nepal, at an average height of 1350 metres above sea level. Located between the Indian sub-continent and the broader Asian continent, the valley's location has stimulated its economic and cultural development as it has served for hundreds of years as a gathering place for traders. It is also a pilgrimage centre, with several ancient Hindu and Buddhist monuments, many of which are on the banks of the Bagmati River. The river flows through the Kathmandu Valley and is considered holy by both Hindus and Buddhists (Weiler 2009). The Newars are the indigenous inhabitants of the valley but residents now include people from most of Nepal's ethnic groups (UNESCO 2015).



For much of its history, Nepal has been a closed nation. The opening up of the economy in 1990 was accompanied by rapid urbanisation, which has transformed the valley into a metropolitan region: an urban system concentrated in the city core surrounded by suburban areas and satellite cities and towns, together forming a highly integrated economic system (Muzzini & Aparicio 2013). Kathmandu Valley has three major cities: Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. Economic growth in Nepal has been influenced by that of its neighbours. As Shakya puts it, “even splinter effects of the rapid economic growth of China and India can transform Nepal” (Shakya 2009: 2).

The majority of Nepal’s population lives in rural areas, with around 20 per cent being urban (World Bank 2018). High levels of (primarily male) out-migration have led to 29 per cent of households nationally being female headed; in urban areas, it is slightly higher at approximately 31 per cent (NFLS, 2017-18). Gender disparities are observed within occupations, with men being mostly employed in construction, manufacturing and transport industries while women are mostly employed in agriculture, forestry and fishing, wholesale and retail trade and education industries. The economy of Nepal has been heavily dependent on aid inflows, and the average aid to GDP ratio of 2 per cent during the 1960s grew to around 10 per cent by the 1990s. Tourism contributed 4 per cent of GDP by the 1990s. Carpets and garments combined accounted for 80 per cent of Nepal’s total exports (Shakya 2009). Nepal had the highest quota in South Asia under the Multi-Fibre Agreement; and the ready-made garment sector

grew rapidly but collapsed after the MFA expired in 2005. By 2010, garment exports had virtually stopped (Shakya 2018: 24). While the ready-made garment factories had to close down, small enterprises and home-based production have continued to grow, and are attempting to develop a niche market for hand-made Nepali products within and beyond the country.

Economic growth in Nepal has been Kathmandu-centric, although micro-enterprises and home-based workers are distributed across the country. In 2008, about 30 per cent of the non-agricultural workers aged 15 and above were home-based workers (Raveendran and Vanek 2013). Home-based work is a major source of employment for women. In 2008, nearly half of women non-agricultural workers (47.6 per cent) in the country were home-based workers, compared to 21.6 per cent of men. Three-quarters of home-based workers were in rural areas. The manufacturing industries with the largest shares of home-based workers were food and beverage products (12.3 per cent), garments (7.2 per cent), textiles (5.7 per cent),

wood products (4.7 per cent), metal products (3.1 per cent), and furniture (1.1 per cent). The other industries with a significant proportion of home-based workers were service industries such as hotels and restaurants (7.5 per cent) and collection, purification and distribution of water (6.2 per cent). There were relatively small numbers of home-based workers in services. The manufacture of food and beverages was a more important source of employment for women in non-agricultural home-based work than for men: 20.6 per cent of women. The manufacture of wearing apparel and textiles as well as the collection and purification of water were also a greater source of home-based employment for women than for men (Raveendran and Vanek 2013).

The Nepal Labour Force Survey Report 2017-18 estimated home-based workers (including those whose place of work was the home or a structure attached to the home) at around 19 per cent of the total workforce. It estimated that 30.9 per cent of all women workers were home-based and 12.2 per cent of all male workers were home-based.



SABAH Nepal members gather for an FGD at one of the SABAH CFCs

TABLE 5.1: PLACE OF WORK (PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF NON-AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE)

Place of Work	Men	Women	Total
At home	7.7	21.7	12.9
Structure attached to the home	4.5	9.2	6.3
At the client/employers home	7.6	1.9	5.4
At an office, shop, factory or other fixed place of work	5.8	4.4	5.3
Fixed stall in the market	6.9	5.0	6.2
Land forest, river	9.0	17.2	12.1
Without fixed location	5.9	1.3	4.2
Construction site	11.9	2.8	8.5
Other	1.4	0.5	1.0
Domestic workers	20.8	17.6	19.6
Government/SOEs/International organisations	10.7	8.5	9.9
Incorporated company	7.4	8.6	7.9
Unspecified	0.4	1.2	0.7

Source: Nepal Labour Force Survey Report, 2017-18

SABAH Nepal and Sana Hastakala are Fair Trade organisations headquartered in Kathmandu that have been able to link home-based workers spread across the country with global brands. Through their work, both have supported the growth of craft-based skills and the creation of livelihood opportunities for women living in remote parts of the country. This study has looked at the approach and experiences of these two organisations.

Sample and Methodology

A sample of home-based women workers in the Kathmandu Valley engaged in knitting woolen garments or in weaving, and associated

either with SABAH Nepal or Sana Hastakala, was selected for this study. A few independent home-based workers were also surveyed to enable a better understanding of changes brought about by these social enterprises in the lives of home-based workers.

In all, 122 home-based workers who are members of SABAH Nepal, 60 who are members of Sana Hastakala and 60 independent home-based workers were surveyed. The latter included those not associated with any social enterprise or who have become associated with SABAH Nepal within the last year. Out of the total of 242 respondents, in-depth interviews were conducted with 55 respondents using a semi-structured questionnaire:

40 members of SABAH Nepal and 15 members of Sana Hastakala. For SABAH Nepal, the sample locations were chosen depending upon the presence of Common Facilitation Centres (CFCs): home-based workers who are members of the organisation and reside near the CFCs were purposively sampled. For Sana Hastakala and independent workers, the locations were chosen randomly based on the availability of home-based workers engaged in knitting. Qualitative interviews were also conducted with management staff, five from SABAH Nepal and two from Sana Hastakala, to get an overview of the present conditions, future prospects, challenges faced by the textile industry of Nepal and the problems of the home-based workers.

TABLE 5.2: FIELD SURVEY LOCATIONS

Location	SABAH Nepal	Sana Hastakala	Independent
Banepa	17	0	7
Basundhara	29	0	1
Bungmati	10	0	13
Byasi	17	0	1
Gokarneshwor	1	0	5
Gothatar	0	9	7
Hadigaun	0	0	2
Khokana	13	0	1
Kumbeswor	0	0	5
Kusunti	20	0	2
Mulpani	5	0	5
Nakhipot	1	0	4
Nala	9	0	7
Budhanilkantha	0	10	0
Jyatha	0	7	0
Kupondole	0	25	0
Nepaltar	0	9	0
Total	122	60	60

It needs to be noted that women home-based workers who are members of SABAH Nepal or Sana

Hastakala also take work orders from other sources. Therefore the data presented for home-based workers

reflect their overall experience as home-based workers and not only as members of these organisations.

SABAH NEPAL

SABAH Nepal started as a livelihood project in 2008 with technical support from the SEWA and HNSA, and financial support from the SAARC Development Fund (SDF). The aim was to develop a livelihood initiative to support women home-based workers. The SABAH model was inspired by the approach of SEWA in India, and was initiated in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Through an integrated approach SEWA strengthens women's leadership, their confidence, their bargaining power within and outside their homes and their representation in policy-making and decision-making.

SABAH Nepal is registered as a 'profit not distributing company', which allows it to operate like any other business entity but mandates that profits are reinvested in the development of the organisation and for social purposes. It is also affiliated with the Social Welfare Council of Nepal and is monitored by the Social Welfare Council Act. This gives SABAH Nepal a dual status as a business entity and as an NGO.

The first phase in SABAH's evolution saw a close partnership with SEWA and HNSA, with SDF support for five years, after which SABAH was expected to be self-sustaining. Soon after, in 2015, Nepal was hit by a devastating earthquake. Nearly 8000 people died, and others lost their jobs and livelihoods. Some

of the community centres set up by SABAH Nepal were reduced to rubble. The next period saw SABAH Nepal actively engaged in the process of reconstructing livelihoods. As Mukta Shrestha, head designer of SABAH Nepal told the Business Standard in August 2015: *"Initially, [women] were in complete shock. They had lost their homes. But with psycho-social counselling, they started to overcome that trauma. To keep them engaged and take their minds off the tragedy, the women were given the task of stitching tents and kit bags.... We received orders for 5,000 kit bags which were distributed as dignity kits for women. Since we didn't have regular orders to give them, as business was completely down, they were occupied in stitching these relief materials.... At that time, many couldn't come back to work. There was no way to communicate. But now, they are ready to start and more and more women want*

to do something to strengthen their livelihoods post the quake."³⁶ Several organisations came forward to offer support at this time, which SABAH Nepal was able to use effectively. This collective effort to help its members recover from the tremendous trauma built a strong solidarity among the women. With gradual recovery from the impact of the earthquake, SABAH Nepal has been able to expand considerably. By 2018, it had 3459 members and an outreach to 23 districts of Nepal.

In addition to its earnings from its business operations, SABAH Nepal is also able to earn from services it offers for a fee: mainly training and other services offered in partnership with others. As shown in Table 5.3, business operations (food and textile business) accounted for 53 per cent of its total annual income in 2017, and training and other services for 47 per cent.



SABAH Nepal's members create Dhaka weave products in a SABAH CFC

³⁶ "Home-based women workers keep alive tradition weaves post Nepal quake." *The Business Standard*, August 20, 2015. Available at https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/home-based-women-workers-keep-alive-traditional-weaves-post-nepal-quake-feature-115082000207_1.html

TABLE 5.3: SABAH NEPAL: MEMBERSHIP AND FINANCES

Particulars	2016	2017	2018
Total Members of SABAH Nepal	2586	3084	3459
Number of districts covered by SABAH Nepal Centres	14	20	23
Common Facilitation Centre	8	8	8
Number of clusters	26	51	53
Annual income (NPR)	65,066,266 (USD 577,597)	73,961,380 (USD 656,599)	Unavailable due to COVID-19 disruption
a) Livelihood Programme fund	23%	7%	
b) Food business	31%	36%	
c) Textile business	22%	17%	
d) Training income	5%	10%	
3) Leadership Programme Fund	19%	30%	

Source: SABAH Nepal Annual Report, 2017

A quarter of the total textile production is exported, and three quarters is sold in the domestic market. SABAH Nepal has its own retail outlet where it sells the product domestically. 'Dhaka'³⁷ products are mostly sold in the domestic markets where the demand for these products is high, whereas the knitted products are mostly exported. Around 95 per cent of the total knitted products produced by SABAH Nepal is exported to different countries including Denmark, United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, France, Germany and India.

Demographic profile of the respondents

The mean age of the SABAH Nepal respondents was 39 years: a 48 per cent were in the age group 31-40 years and 25 per cent in the age group 41-50 years. No case of child labour was found. Almost all respondents (93 per cent) were married, only 4 per cent reported being unmarried and 2 per cent were widowed. A majority of the respondents (53 per cent) belonged to the Newari caste followed by 33 per cent from the Janjati caste. Around 14 per cent of

the respondents reported having had no education at all. The mean number of members in a household was five, with a care dependency ratio of 0.42.

Only 9 per cent of respondents reported home-based work as the primary source of household income, while 64 per cent of respondents reported that income from home-based work was the second most important source of household income. The monthly household income of half of the respondents was between NPR 10,000 (USD 89³⁸) to NPR 25,000 (USD 222),

³⁷ Dhaka is a traditional handmade fabric of the indigenous Limbu (indigenous and native Himalayan) people of eastern Nepal that represents Limbu cultural dress. It is gaining popularity around the world. The art of making dhaka is taught by one generation to another. (Source: https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Dhaka_fabric)

³⁸ Exchange rate used throughout this paper: NPR 1 = USD 0.008

and for 30 per cent it was within the range NPR 25,000 (USD 222) to NPR 50,000 (USD 444). Home-based work earnings did not suffice for running the household but did give women their own independent income to spend on personal expenses or on household expenses. As one respondent said, *“Before, I had to ask my husband for my expenses. I had to depend on him. Now, I don’t have to ask him for this. That is one of the major changes. Now I can bear my children’s expenses, whether it be a small amount or big. Before, my husband used to tell me not to go outside the home for work. But now after I started my work here, he is happy with it.”* For SABAH Nepal members, income from home-based work represented, on average, 21 per cent of total household income. Most women reported that their family members supported their work, as they were able to continue to take the full responsibility of household chores. Respondents were asked what would be most affected if they were to stop doing this work: 34 per cent of responses were that the main effect would be on women’s own expenses, 21 per cent on savings, 19 per cent on household expenditures and 13 per cent on spending on children.

Creating Employment Opportunities

SABAH Nepal has succeeded in forming a value chain reaching out to groups of home-based workers across the country. These include women with different skills such as knitting, embroidery, tailoring, weaving, food processing and

cooking. The groups selected for this study were workers in knitting and weaving in the Kathmandu Valley.

The SABAH Nepal business model has three important nodes. The first is the Trade Facilitation Centre (TFC) in Kathmandu, which is responsible for capacity building, leadership development, entrepreneurship development, design development, resource management, brand building and market linkage. All the business development support is done through the TFC. The second node consists of CFCs that have been built in remote areas and villages. The CFCs distribute work orders to home-based workers but also provide a workspace for women. There are no fixed timings and women can work at the centres at their convenience. Women who live within walking distance from the CFCs can use this as a workspace, while women living further away come to the CFC for training or other specific purposes only. When a new order is received, workers go to the centres to learn the sample and collect the raw materials. Advantages of working from the centres, according to the women workers, include socialising and learning new skills from peers as well as reducing mistakes, which can be immediately repaired with help from other members or the community leaders. Women with young children generally reported that they prefer working from home. The third node is the cluster. At present there are 53 clusters. Each cluster consists of a small group of members who at times gather in the community leader’s home or any other convenient place where they can work together, though they can also work from their own homes. The designs that

are developed in TFCs are replicated in CFCs and clusters with the help of community leaders. This enables production on a larger scale.

There are eight CFCs covering 23 districts of Nepal. These are semi-autonomous bodies, structured as cooperatives, with each one catering to over 200 home-based workers. CFCs are encouraged to obtain work from local markets as well as to produce for global retailers; the relationship with global brands is managed by the TFC. Some CFCs have been able to get work from local markets and are no longer completely dependent on the TFC for work; these include: Khokana, Bungamati in Lalitpur; Byasi, Bhaktapur; Banepa, Nala, Khawa in Kavre; Khandbari, Sankhuwasaba and Khar, Darchula. This advances the objective of regionalising business activities that SABAH Nepal had envisaged from the beginning.

With B2B orders, designs are given by the buyer, and finalised in consultation with the designers at SABAH Nepal. In case of domestic orders of dhaka weaving or woolen knitted products, the designs are made by the designers at SABAH Nepal. The raw materials used for the dhaka weave are bought domestically as well as from India, while the wool for the knitted products is mostly imported from different countries like New Zealand and Australia as the brands require special varieties of wool that are not available domestically.

Becoming a member of SABAH Nepal requires that the person have some knowledge of the chosen skill set. Women with some basic

knowledge of knitting and stitching prior to approaching SABAH Nepal can become members easily, while women without such knowledge are required to take three to four months of training, after which they can become a member. Home-based workers register for membership with their citizen cards, which makes it easier to keep track of the members and provide them with work on a regular basis. SABAH Nepal has three categories of membership: primary, secondary and general members. Primary members work directly with SABAH Nepal. Secondary members are those who

received training from SABAH Nepal and are working independently but wish to remain associated. They are the 'graduates' of SABAH Nepal who have established themselves as entrepreneurs and continue to be associated through various events and programmes such as home-based workers' day, group formation and awareness, technical and non-technical training, and exhibitions. General members are a subset of primary members who attend the General Assembly. Besides voting rights, General members are eligible to be nominated to the Board of Directors. They are entitled

to benefits such as maternity benefit, health benefit and festival allowances. Together they form the governing body and have the right of selecting members of the Board of Directors. For any major decision like amendment of bylaws, approval by a majority of the Directors is required.

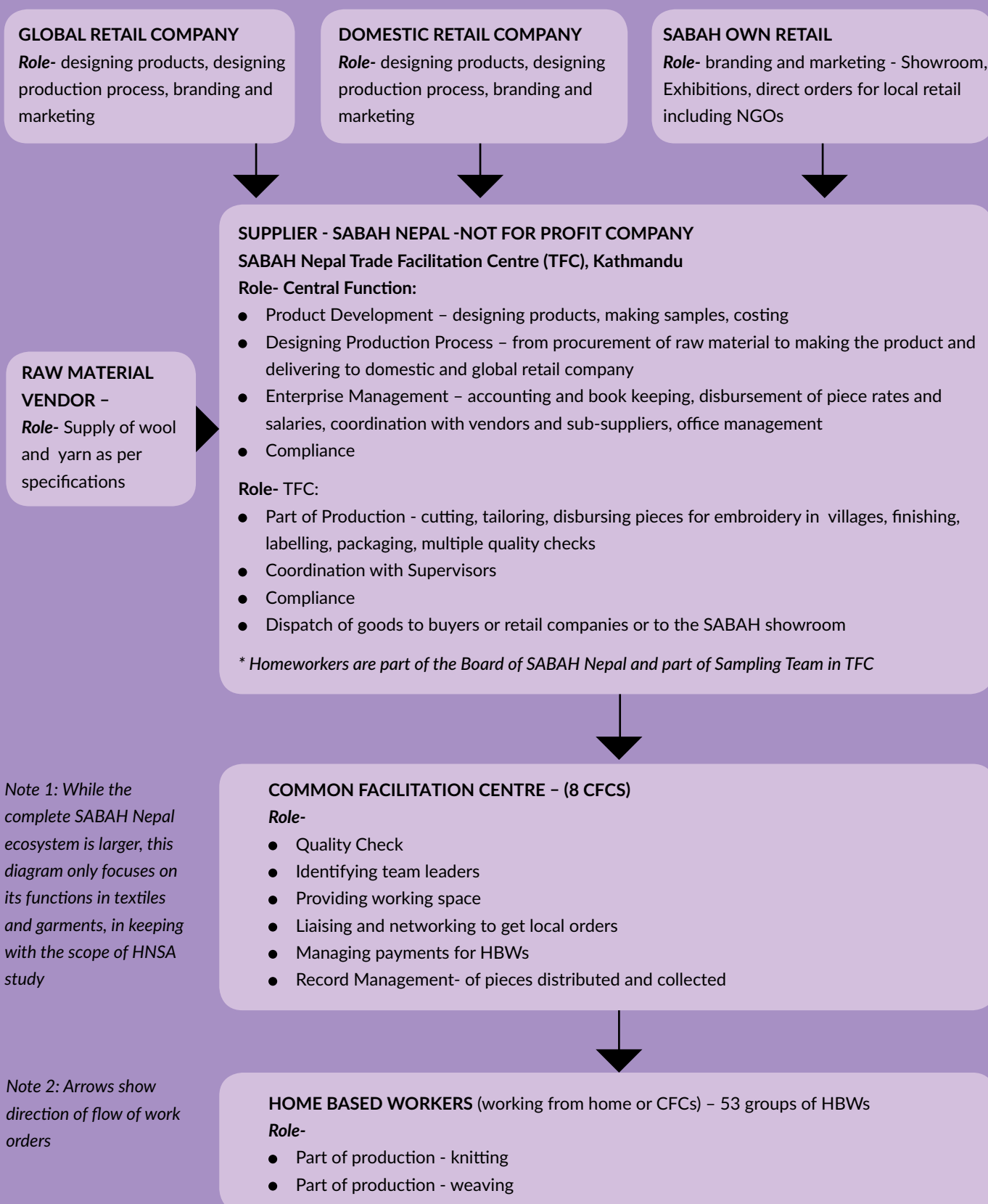
The annual membership subscription is NPR 100 (USD 0.88) for primary members and NPR 25 (USD 0.22) for secondary members. General members make a one-time payment of NPR 500 (USD 4.44) in addition to the annual subscription of NPR 100 (USD 0.88).



A glimpse of SABAH Nepal's campaign for recognition of the work and skills of HBWs. Picture Courtesy: SABAH Nepal

FIGURE 5.1: VALUE CHAIN OF SABAH NEPAL (2020)

VALUE CHAIN – SABAH NEPAL (2020)



Skill Development

Training given by SABAH Nepal ranges from skills needed to make simple products for personal use to more advanced skills for marketable products. These include sweaters, caps, gloves, socks, bags, dhaka weave textiles, as well as shawls and garments. Changing fashion trends require continual design development and corresponding training. Training on entrepreneurship and leadership training is also given. Master trainers may be from the enterprise or from outside; for example, in the case of dhaka weaving, the trainers are usually outsiders.

The contribution of SABAH Nepal to building up skills of home-based workers is seen in the fact that only 35 out of 122 respondents, or 29 per cent, reported that their skill was traditional and learnt in homes; for all the others, it was an acquired skill. Many home-based workers passed on the skill: 41 per cent of respondents said they had taught it to other members of the family. The survey showed that 58 per cent of SABAH Nepal respondents would like to establish their own micro-enterprise.

Apart from linking global brand orders to home-based workers, SABAH Nepal also encourages its members to establish micro-enterprises for sustainable self-employment and provides some initial finance through the cooperatives (CFCs). In 2017, marginalized women from Darchula, Udayapur and Taplejung districts were supported to establish various entrepreneurial ventures and a total of 44 new enterprises were

developed (Annual Report 2017-18). So far, about 10 per cent of the total membership has successfully established micro-enterprises. Apart from training and finance, SABAH Nepal offers help for starting these new enterprises by providing information about local markets, product pricing and outreach to customers in the initial start-up period. As one respondent said *“I took basic training from Mahaguthi³⁹ and advanced training from SABAH Nepal. After receiving training from SABAH Nepal, I could do my work more like a business. Even if there were to be no SABAH Nepal in the future, our products can reach out to consumers if the quality is maintained. Their suggestions have motivated me to start my own business.”*

Earnings and Conditions of Work

SABAH Nepal has developed a Code of Ethics based on Fair Trade principles; this frames the earnings and working conditions of its members (see Table 5.4).

Around 42 per cent of respondents reported getting work 12-months a year and around 22 per cent reported getting work for five months or less. SABAH Nepal attempts to cost production in such a way to guarantee a daily earning of NPR 250 (USD 2) for home-based workers who put in 8 hours of work in the day. Not all respondents provided complete details about the hours of work and earnings in the peak and lean seasons. From the in-depth interviews, it was noted that the usual time allocated by women

for home-based work was between 11AM and 3PM. The working hours increased or decreased depending on the amount of work. During the peak season the mean working hours were reported to be 6 hours a day with an average monthly earning of NPR 4756 (USD 42). During lean season the mean working hours reduced to 4 hours a day and the average monthly income to NPR 3000 (USD 27). The peak season was reported as being the months of Asad (June-July), Sharawan (July-August) and during the festive season of Dashain Tihar (a festival of Nepal celebrated in the month of September). The lean season is the winter months when there is less work. At times, community leaders are able to get local work orders for some members during the lean season. As one respondent put it: *“For SABAH Nepal the peak season is mostly during summer. In winter there is not much work but Manju-didi (CFC leader) gets us work from somewhere...so there is always something to do.”*

The peak season for home-based work corresponds with the time of peak workload in agriculture, adding to the seasonality of overall workloads: *“During Asad and Shrawan there is agricultural work to be done on my field and at the same time this is the season of knitting. I don't have time to do anything else during that season. During the winter season, I am free as in winter there is no work.”*

Around 60 per cent of respondents said they had taken work only from SABAH Nepal. Among the women who knit at home, 56 per cent reported that they deliver their

³⁹ Mahaguthi is another organisation promoting crafts from Nepal. See <https://mahaguthi.com.np>

completed products to community leaders who in turn delivered the products to TFC or have them collected by the TFC. Over two-thirds (69 per cent) of the respondents reported being paid within 30 days of product delivery and fewer than one-third (31 per cent) said payments took longer. The vast majority (85 per cent) reported being paid in cash and 6 per cent received payment directly into their bank account; the balance received payments in both ways. Most respondents (83 per cent) reported having a bank account; and 60 per cent reported maintaining a workbook diary.

Although only 30 per cent said there was a centre in their locality, half of the respondents said they worked at a centre, as they lived within easy walking distance, while the other half worked from home. Around 48 per cent said they prefer working from home, only 14 per cent said they preferred working from the centre; and 39 per cent said they are indifferent about working at home or at the centre.

When asked whether they would like to see their children do the kind of work they do, most respondents answered “no”, stating that children should be educated and could earn more from other types of work, or that their children were not interested in knitting or weaving.

Raw materials are mainly provided to the home-based workers, according to the specifications of the buyer. The vast majority (88 per cent) of respondents said that they received the materials, while 12 per cent reported buying from the market. Only 25 per cent said they knew the name of the brand that



SABAH Nepal has reinvented traditional weaves for international markets, with the help of professional designers. Picture Courtesy: SABAH Nepal

had given the order.

During the peak season when work orders are at a peak, strict deadlines have to be adhered to. Ensuring on-time delivery and quality products is essential for repeat orders. SABAH Nepal has instituted three levels of quality checks: first, by the community leader at the CFC, then at the TFC, and finally by the global brands, in the case of global orders. At any step, if mistakes are found, the product is sent back to the home-based workers to be repaired. More than 90 per cent of respondents confirmed that most defects can be repaired. According to the production manager, usually only a part of a consignment, not the whole, is rejected and this part is repaired and then sent by air, if necessary, to meet deadlines. For

weaving, there are different steps of quality checks. First, the thread is checked. Only certain specific threads can give a unique look to dhaka weaving. Pattern and consistency in weaving is checked, and the weaving strokes are checked. The number of patterns in a metre of fabric are counted. Despite the strict quality checks adhered to by SABAH Nepal, which increase the time taken for order completion, respondents reported that the payment received from SABAH Nepal was higher than that from other local organisations. *“It’s difficult to work with SABAH Nepal. It’s very hard to please the quality checkers. It should not exceed one line and it should not be one line less also. While working with others it’s very easy, but money is less. We get more money from SABAH Nepal.”*

TABLE 5.4: SABAH CODE OF ETHICS

Principles to be followed	Organisational response
Create opportunities for economically disadvantaged producers	SABAH Nepal is a community based social-business organisation which works towards creating opportunities and strengthening the livelihoods of financially deprived and marginalized home-based workers/artisans in Nepal.
Transparency and accountability	SABAH Nepal has been transparent in its management and commercial relations. It involves its employees, members and producers in the various decision-making processes of the organisation. The organisation is internally and externally transparent and participatory. Pricing is public and transparent with no hidden costs. There is public disclosure of all ingredients or materials used and their source location. There is complete disclosure of the names of suppliers
Fair Trade practices	SABAH Nepal is a 'profit not distributing' organisation, where the profits are reinvested for the socio-economic and environmental well-being of marginalized small producers. SABAH Nepal maintains long-term relationships with suppliers and service providers; ensures that suppliers and service providers are paid at the agreed time; offers credit or advance payment to suppliers and service providers that require it; and supports and invests in projects by suppliers and service providers.
Payment of a fair price	SABAH Nepal seeks to provide a fair wage for producers that can be sustained by the market. Piece rates are decided based on the price of the product in the market and the amount of time taken to complete the work. For dhaka weavers, the piece rate of a metre depends on the pattern and design. There is equal pay for equal work. Wages are based on performance, not gender or other social categories. Wages are paid that enable all workers to live comfortably within the community. An attempt is made to maintain a minimum wage of NPR 250 per day for 8 hours of work. The piece rate for dhaka weaving is higher than the market rate, on the basis of being a higher quality product. There is a pay ratio within the organisation of less than 5 to 1, and the highest paid worker earns no more than 5 times the lowest paid worker.
Child labour and forced labour	There is no child labour or forced labour. Members are all over the age of 18.
Commitment of non-discrimination, gender equality, freedom of association	Home-based workers are primarily women. SABAH Nepal gives leadership training to women and also provides for health and safety needs; a maternity allowance to pregnant mothers and a provident fund has also been started. The right to organise is assured. There are policies and procedures to prevent, report & respond to discrimination and harassment.

	<p>SABAH Nepal preferentially hires or includes people from disadvantaged groups like people with disabilities, urban poor, indigenous people, at-risk youth, minorities, rural poor, and religious minorities.</p>
Ensuring good working condition	<p>The organisation provides a safe and healthy working environment for employees and members; provides safe and healthy working conditions for all workers such as clean drinking water, on-site toilets and washing facilities, tools and work stations that prevent pain and injury, fresh air and adequate ventilation. Regarding safety measures SABAH Nepal ensures that workers who use equipment or machinery or who are in contact with hazardous materials wear appropriate Protective Gear. Workers are trained in basic first aid. The community leaders in the CFCs keep a first aid box and ensure first aid and safety equipment are easily accessible and regularly maintained.</p>
Providing capacity building	<p>SABAH Nepal provides capacity building, leadership training, vocational skill development and upgradation training to the home-based workers and encourages them to become entrepreneurs. It facilitates the establishing of bankable and sustainable enterprises by rural and marginalized women home-based workers, and provides access to finance from cooperatives to start new enterprises.</p>
Promoting Fair Trade	<p>SABAH Nepal takes part in different fair trade forums and also takes its home-based workers to these forums, which gives them the opportunity to learn and boosts their confidence. It provides customers with information about the organisation and the products made by the home-based workers.</p>
Respect for the environment	<p>SABAH Nepal tries to minimize the environmental impact of production and trade as much as possible. Products are developed to minimize environmental impact. SABAH Nepal recycles pre-consumer waste, and uses 100% plant-based, renewable materials. Product are made from organic certified materials or ingredients which can be recycled in at least 80% of communities with recycling facilities and decomposes with no toxic residue. It has a solid waste management plan and solid waste is separated at all facilities to enable recycling of paper and cardboard, fabric and textile waste, plastic, glass, metal wastes. Water reduction techniques such as rain water harvesting, on-site water treatment are used. Energy reduction techniques such as natural lighting during daylight hours and energy efficient CFL or LED bulbs and solar heating are used. There is reduced use of fossil fuel for transport and priority is given to local suppliers and market.</p>

Extending Social Protection

All respondents confirmed having valid citizen cards; 70 per cent had voter ID cards and 33 per cent had 'earthquake-affected' cards. These documents enable access to government schemes, and SABAH Nepal facilitates such access for its members. It also makes available to all SABAH members help with loan applications, registration of business units, orientation and training on gender-responsive budget, 7-step planning process, and other skills.

The most common occupational health hazards reported by respondents included weakening eyesight, chest pain, frequent headaches and hand pain due to long hours of work. Since knitting, stitching and weaving require minute details to be followed in patterns and designs, most women complained about worsening eyesight. Moreover, working in poor light increases eyesight problems. SABAH Nepal

provides health checkup camps from time to time for eye check-up, whole body checkup, child health check-ups and also cancer related camps. However, it does not cover treatment expenses. Very recently, a provident fund has been created for home-based workers. SABAH contributes 10 per cent and the individual home-based worker contributes 10 per cent from her monthly earnings. General members who have been continuously associated with SABAH Nepal for 150 days are eligible for maternity benefits (primary members are not, at the moment).

Promoting Social Dialogue

With home-based workers, breaking social isolation is the first challenge to developing solidarity and voice. With its CFC and clusters, the SABAH model encourages women to come together for training and, if they wish, for working too. This helps to increase interaction and

strengthen social networks among the women. During the wedding season, home-based workers who may not have known one another previously come together for celebrations now. Community leaders mobilise women into groups. These groups become a space for sharing all kinds of problems that the women face, including violence against women. One community leader says: *"In case of any domestic problem we contact the husband and family and try to solve the problem. There are so many women who were married young, without knowing much about the world, some are not even given enough to eat, and we show our power by threatening police intervention. This may sound like we have taken the law in our hands, but we are doing this to help solve the problems that women face."* Groups are active in many ways: *"We are also teaching women to do terrace farming, waste management, compost fertilizer, how to dispose of plastic used inside the home."*



A SABAH CFC - creating convenient spaces for HBWs to work and learn

SANA HASTAKALA

Sana Hastakala (literally, 'small handicrafts') was established in 1989 with financial and technical support from UNICEF. UNICEF supported the initial efforts by several producer groups to open a shop; including rent for the initial two years; legal fees (for the institutionalization process only); running expenditures for the first six months; and consultants' fees for decoration, management training, and product development. The key objective was "To meet the marketing requirements of Nepal's handicraft producers, who are mainly women operating at a very small scale, often from their homes."⁴⁰ As stated in the project document, the attempt was 'to establish a retail outlet to be able to fully address the marketing requirements of different producer groups, particularly the most needy. Concurrently the project will also provide support in areas of product selection and development, quality control, presentation, and accountancy and administration. Emphasis will be placed on the development of a strong domestic market and on marketing exchanged with similar ventures such as this. These objectives will further enhance the earning capacity of the producers and directly improve the overall living conditions of the families concerned.' Within two years the enterprise became self-sustaining and Sana Hastakala was registered as a non-profit organisation in 1991. Until 2001, products were only sold in the domestic market or at exhibitions in India. Sana Hastakala was part of the



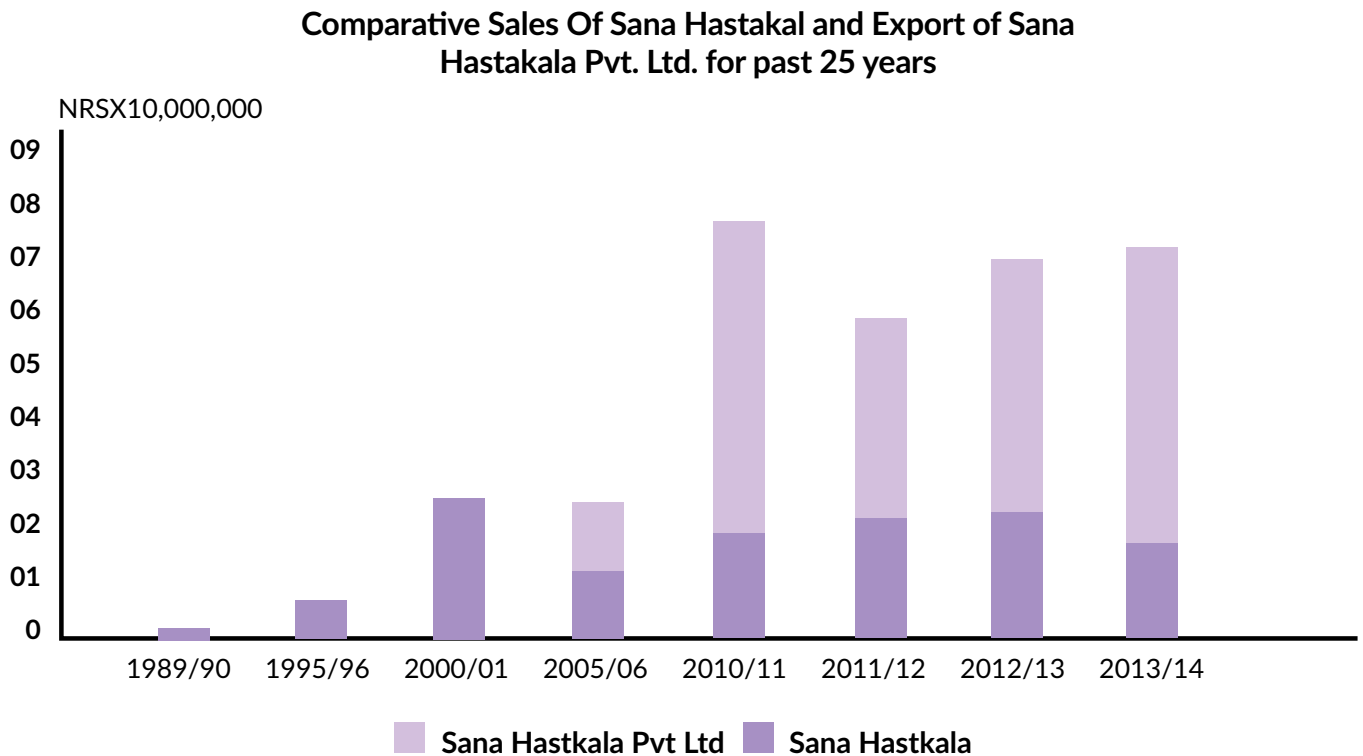
Sana Hastakala specialises in a variety of handicraft products created by its wide network of artisans. Picture courtesy: Sana Hastakala

initial meetings to form a Fair Trade network in Nepal, and became one of the founding members of Fair Trade Group Nepal. Having organised a workshop with handicraft producers to find solutions to the problems they faced, a training and information centre was opened in 1996. An in-house production unit was started in

1998. Sana Hastakala Private Limited was established in 2001 with equity participation of Sana Hastakala to enable direct export. In 2015, it became a WFTO Guaranteed Member, which allows the organisation to use the WFTO logo. By this time, two-thirds of its total sales revenue came from exports.

⁴⁰<http://sanahastakala.com/our-story/>

FIG 5.1 COMPARATIVE SALES OF SANA HASTAKALA AND SANA HASTAKALA PVT. LTD



Source: Sana Hastakala, 25 years at a glance

After the devastating earthquake of 2015, Sana Hastakala was associated with relief and rehabilitation efforts, as shown in the table below.

TABLE 5.5: RELIEF FUND PROVIDED BY SANA HASTAKALA

Group	Activity	Amount
Staff and producers	Immediate relief	NPR 60,000 (USD533)
Staff and producers	Support for temporary shelter and repair	NPR 185,000 (USD 1642)
Partners/Outside producer groups	Immediate relief to its staff	NPR 202,000 (USD 1793)
Nepalese	Food distribution	NPR 50,000 (USD 444)
Total		NPR 497,000 (USD 4412)

Source: Sana Hastakala update, August 2017

Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 60 women home-based workers from five clusters were surveyed. Of these, 35 per cent were in the age group 31–40 years and 32 per cent were between 41–50 years, with the mean age of 40 years. Most respondents were married, with just three being unmarried and six being widowed. The respondents are primarily from the Newari caste (60 per cent) with others are from the Brahmin, Janjati, Chettri and Dalit castes. Regarding educational level, three respondents reported having no education at all and 22 per cent were educated beyond Class 10. The average number of household members was four with a care dependency ratio of 0.36.

Home-based work was reported as the primary source of household income by 17 per cent, and as the second most important source of income by 79 per cent. Regarding the level of monthly household income, 60 per cent of the respondents reported earning between NPR 15,000 (USD 133) to NPR 25,000 (USD 222), 20 per cent under NPR 15,000 (USD 133), and 20 per cent above NPR 25,000 (USD 222).

Creating Employment Opportunities
Starting with three producer groups, today Sana Hastakala is connected to over 67 producer groups representing 1200 artisans (of whom around 80 per cent are women) from different districts of Nepal who produce around 2000 craft

items under different categories. It also has a production unit at one of its retail outlets in Kathmandu. Sana Hastakala connects with producer groups that make different products, so as to avoid competition between groups, and also requires an assurance from these groups comply with Fair Trade principles within a period of two years, if not already doing so. Products are made only against orders, to minimise risk, and 50 per cent of the payment for export orders is taken in advance.

For this study, woolen knitted products which are made by home-based workers were selected. All the respondents were members of Sana Hastakala. Being a member helps access work on a regular basis, as well as information about any training that is being organised by Sana Hastakala. Regular workers who work directly with Sana Hastakala can buy shares in the

sister organisation, Sana Hastakala Pvt Ltd. They continue to take work from other sources when needed. Supervisors who are in direct contact with the home-based workers give any required training for each order, provide them with raw materials and collect the completed products and deliver them to Sana Hastakala.

From the beginning, Sana Hastakala had identified the need for training women home-based workers to ensure quality of products. During an FGD, women said that they could become members after receiving training. They appreciated that the training did not just give them a certificate but was followed by work orders. Four of the women had passed the CTEVT (Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training)⁴¹ examination. Seventy-one per cent of the respondents confirmed that they received regular training.

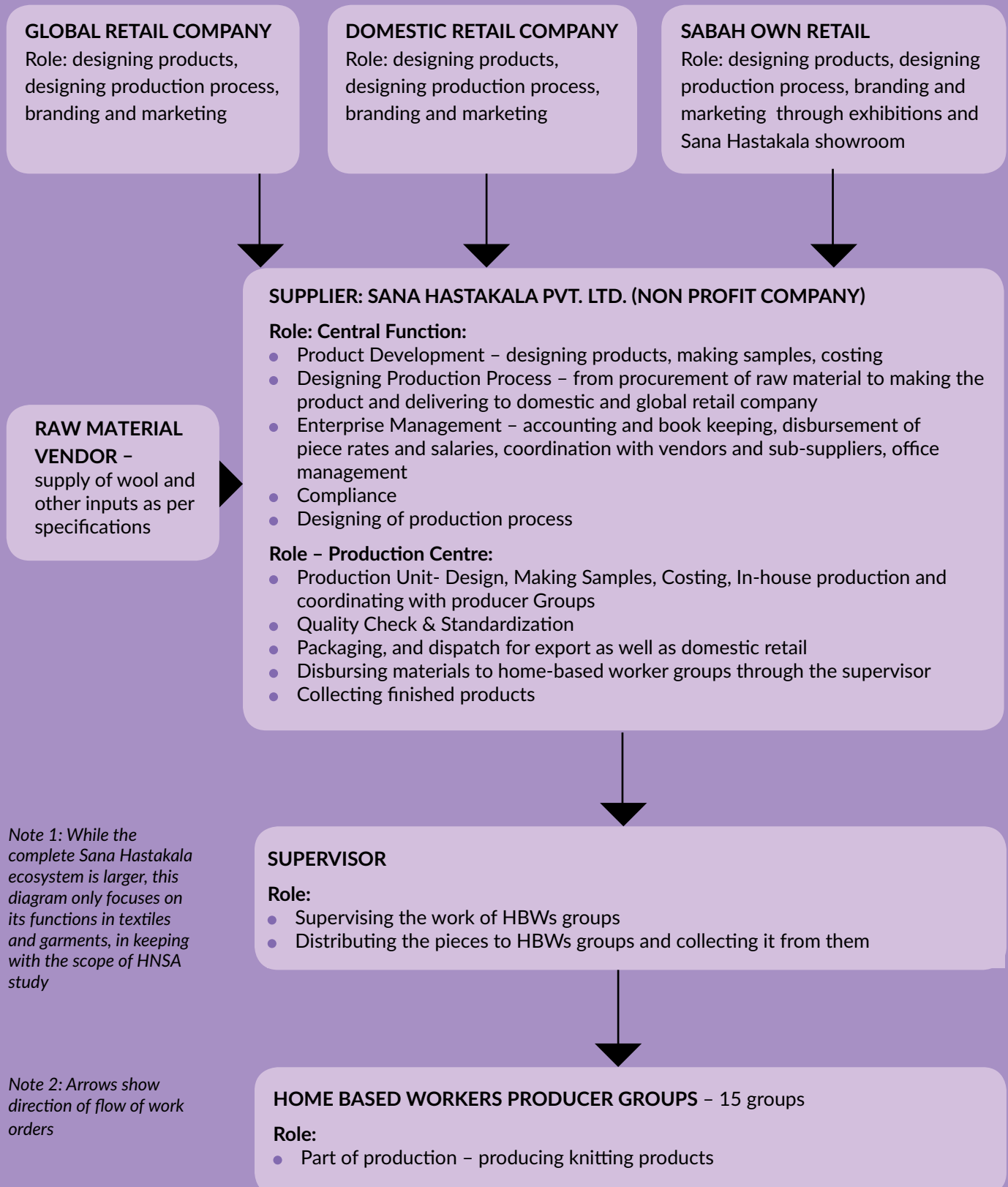


The Sana Hastakala team has adapted to Covid19 restrictions to re-boost their business. Picture Courtesy: Sana Hastakala

⁴¹ The Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), constituted in 1989, is a national autonomous body of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector. CTEVT is committed to enabling the development of technical knowledge and skills among people that will benefit the nation.

FIGURE 5.2: VALUE CHAIN FOR SANA HASTAKALA (2020)

VALUE CHAIN, SANA HASTAKALA (2020)



Wages and Conditions of Work

As one of the first groups in Nepal to be a certified Fair Trade organisation, Sana Hastakala attempts to fulfil all

associated requirements. The mean working hours and earnings during peak and lean seasons are shown in the table below, based on responses received.

TABLE 5.6 MEAN HOURS OF WORK AND MONTHLY EARNINGS IN PEAK AND LEAN SEASON

	Sana Hastakala
Mean working hours a day in peak season	7
Mean monthly earning in peak season	NPR 10471 (USD 93)
Mean working hours a day in lean season	6
Mean monthly earning in lean season	NPR 8203 (USD 73)
Ratio of home-based workers' income to household income (average across lean and peak seasons)	45%

Respondents said that if they were to stop doing this work it would mainly affect own expenses (35 per cent), savings (30 per cent), household expenditures (15 per cent) and expenditures on children (10 per cent).

Respondents reported that the peak season for home-based work orders is the summer months of *Asad* and *Shrawan*; the lean season is during the winter. The work starts from the month of *Chaitra* (March-April) and the work continues until the month of *Kartik* (October-November), after which the work reduces. However, respondents reported getting some work throughout the year. Though women could distinguish between the peak and lean season, not much

difference was reported in the average working hours and earnings.

Most respondents (58 out of 60) reported that the wool or raw materials was provided by the organisation. Two-thirds (66 per cent) reported getting paid within 30 days of product delivery; 22 per cent within 15 days; and 12 per cent after more than 30 days. Fully 95 per cent said they were regularly paid in full, and 75 per cent maintained a workbook diary of some form. Over half (53 per cent) received payment to their bank accounts, and 44 per cent in cash. Among respondents, 90 per cent have at least one bank account. Saving was common, with 76 per cent reporting that they have

saved some part of their earnings, mostly in banks or cooperatives. Also, 40 per cent said they would like to start their own business.

While 75 per cent of the respondents reported working only with Sana Hastakala, while others had done work for one or two other organisations or contractors. So, although the respondents depend on Sana Hastakala for the major part of their livelihood, they are free to take work from other organisations when needed. Fifty-eight per cent did not know the name of the brands for which they were working, while 42 per cent did.

As an additional earning, the Nepal

government offers a tax incentive on products exported from the country, which is passed on by Sana Hastakala to the producer groups.

Extending Social Protection

Along with having a minimum skill level, home-based workers are required to have a citizenship card in order to become a member. In addition, 92 per cent of respondents possess voter ID cards, and 20 per cent had 'earthquake-affected' cards. The latter enables access to government benefits.

The most common occupational health hazards that were reported included weakening eyesight and developing chest pain. In all, 72 per cent of respondents said that their health was affected by the work. In response, Sana Hastakala organises annual health camps with free check-ups.

Promoting Social Dialogue

Members are organised into groups for purposes of work, and as an



Sana Hastakala HBWs create beautiful wool products for the export market. Picture Courtesy: Sana Hastakala

organisation committed to Fair Trade, Sana Hastakala attempts to ensure a reasonable level of earnings, as well as protection from market volatility, to the extent possible, for its members. One example of this is that

for export orders, it takes 50 per cent payment in advance from buyers, most of whom are Fair Trade buyers. Four of the seven Board members are representatives of the producer companies.

INDEPENDENT HOME-BASED WORKERS

A sample of 60 women home-based women taking on knitting work and who were not associated, or had only recently become associated, with SABAH Nepal, was surveyed. The main objective was to understand what are the significant differences between being an unaffiliated worker and being a member of a social enterprise.

Demographic characteristics were broadly similar, although there was a higher percentage of younger women within the age cohort 21-30 years among the non-organised workers. The mean age of the respondents was 37 years and 58 out of 60 were married. On average there were four people in a household with care dependency ratio of 0.38. Eighteen

per cent reported having had no schooling at all. Well over half (58 per cent) of the unaffiliated sample was from the Newar caste and 22 per cent Janjati.

Daily wage earnings from manual work other than construction was the primary source of household earnings for 32 per cent of the

sample of unaffiliated home-based workers, while 15 per cent reported having their own shop or enterprise, 12 per cent were dependent on agriculture as their primary source, 13 per cent reported transfers from a migrant family member, and only 8 per cent reported home-based work as the primary source. However, 77 per cent reported it as the second most important source of household income. In terms of

monthly household income, 41 per cent of the home-based workers earned between NPR 15,000 (133 USD) to NPR 25,000 (USD 222), 28 per cent between NPR 25,000 (USD 222) to NPR 50,000 (USD 444) and 10 per cent above NPR 50,000 (USD 444).

The mean hours of work in the peak season was 6 hours and the mean monthly earning during peak season

as NPR 5310 (USD 47). During lean season the mean working hours was 4 hours and the mean monthly earning was NPR 4151 (USD 37). Work came through different middlemen who mediated between home-based workers and suppliers. While 33 per cent of the respondents said they got work from middlemen, 31 per cent reported getting work from institutions other than SABAH Nepal and Sana Hastakala.

TABLE 5.11: MEAN HOUR OF WORK AND MONTHLY EARNINGS IN PEAK AND LEAN SEASON

	Independent Home-Based Workers
Mean working hours a day in peak season	6
Mean monthly earning in peak season	NPR 5310 (USD 47)
Mean working hours a day in lean season	4
Mean monthly earning in lean season	4151 (USD 37)
Ratio of home-based workers income to household income	21%

If they were to stop doing this work, this would affect their personal expenditure (35 per cent), savings (26 per cent), household expenditure (20 per cent), or expenditure on children (14 per cent).

Most (86 per cent) said materials were provided to them. Nearly two-thirds (61 per cent) reported getting paid within 30 days of product delivery, 17 per cent said it took longer to get paid, and the remaining 21 per cent got paid sooner. More than 90 per cent are paid in cash although 81 per cent of unaffiliated respondents have at least one bank account. Only 32 per cent of unaffiliated respondents maintain a workbook diary of some

form. Income from home-based workers averaged 21 per cent of the household income. About 25 per cent of respondents said their home-based work was a traditional family skill, while for others it was an acquired skill.

Among the unaffiliated respondents, a few were migrants from India and did not have citizenship cards; 89 per cent had voter ID cards and 53 per cent had 'earthquake affected' cards. Regarding health insurance and disability pension, 10 per cent reported having accessed these. Regarding impact on health, 62 per cent said their health was adversely affected by home-based work.

The main differences that emerge between the unaffiliated home-based workers and those associated with social enterprises include that a higher proportion get payment in cash and have no access to social protection. Although the sample is small and these home-based workers had already made contact with SABAH Nepal, it could be surmised that being able to get work regularly throughout the year, and the other advantages of being associated with a social enterprise such as access to regular training and assistance in setting up micro-enterprises, are the motivating factors in wanted to join the enterprise.

GOOD PRACTICES

- For those associated with SABAH Nepal or with Sana Hastakala, the provision of work on a regular basis has been made possible both by training and skill development to ensure high quality of products and by building strong linkages with various brands.
- Both organisations have reached out to workers from across the country and thus have linked home-based workers in remote areas to international and domestic markets.
- In the case of SABAH Nepal, the setting up of CFCs in different places has encouraged a decentralised model of functioning. The CFC model creates the space and resources for various kinds of support, including capacity building, skill upgradation, access to information about markets and training facilities, peer support through being part of a group, social security and solidarity. Community leaders are encouraged to bring in work from local clients. The CFC model allows women home-based workers to keep in contact with each other and with the community leaders, thus expanding their social networks as well as the sources of work. Each CFC connects with about 200 women home-based workers living in remote areas, without any other access to information or distant markets, enabling the women workers to develop a new source of livelihood, become part of a group, and obtain diverse information on a regular basis. The CFCs play a role in stimulating

the local economy as well as providing a conduit for orders from global and domestic brands. Some CFCs have succeeded in becoming self-sustaining and are no longer dependent on orders received through SABAH Nepal.

- Both organisations played an important part in supporting home-based workers after the sudden shock of a devastating earthquake.
- Both organisations have worked hard to train women and to develop new designs so as to improve the traditional products and develop a niche market. For example, SABAH Nepal has been successful in reviving

dhaka weaving. Sana Hastakala has identified training as a need through the discussions it had with home-based workers; it had set up a training and information centre. Both organisations have made an effort to provide some minimal social protection to home-based workers through their own resources, and to facilitate access to certain government schemes such as those who assist in livelihood reconstruction post-earthquake.

- Sana Hastakala has been a pioneer in Nepal in advocating for Fair Trade practices and is active in extending Fair Trade practices within the country.



Sana Hastakala's good practices are empowering its HBW members. Picture Courtesy: Sana Hastakala

CONCLUSION

The home-based workers in Nepal who have been associated with two organisations, SABAH Nepal and Sana Hastakala, have benefitted from this association in numerous ways. Based on the data collected and in-depth interviews, the study has documented their contribution to creating employment opportunities for women home-based workers, training and developing skills to get work and survive in the ever-changing market; and also to provide or access social protection. It was seen that the organisations have been able to create employment opportunities in their own ways. SABAH Nepal has set up a multi-level system. While its TFCs manage brand relations, its CFCs and local clusters bring women together that not only enhance their opportunities for training and producing quality work but allow them to build social solidarity. Sana Hastakala has expanded to many more producer groups and created opportunity for women home-based workers by finding new export markets for their work. Skill upgradation has been another important contribution.



Mittens knitted by groups of HBWs. Picture Courtesy: Sana Hastakala

Both organisations have provided the women with frequent trainings needed to upgrade skills so they can continue to earn and remain competitive in the market. Wage payments are high compared to

the local markets in accordance to the Fair Trade principles, and the organisations have both paid into social protection schemes from their own resources and helped the women to access government supports.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The previous chapters have presented the findings of the field study in some detail for each site. This chapter presents an overview and summary of the main findings as well as the commonalities and differences between the four sites across India and Nepal. It brings together the ways in which different organisations have strategised to link home-based workers, the last and most vulnerable link in global value chains, with domestic and global brands, while securing a certain degree of rights, securities and to a large extent a steady source of livelihood. While this chapter gives us a summary of the data within ILO's Decent Work framework, it also draws out good practices and challenges in the context of social networks, public governance, company codes of conduct/Fair Trade norms, and social governance.



DECENT WORK OUTCOMES FOR HOME-BASED WORKERS:

Summary of Findings from the field survey

As indicated in the introduction, this study has attempted an assessment of the situation of home-based workers in different locations with reference to the dimensions of Decent Work as articulated by the ILO: namely, creating employment opportunities; including skills upgradation; guaranteeing rights at work; extending social protection; promoting social dialogue with gender equality as a cross-cutting theme.

Along these dimensions, Table 6.1 provides a summary overview for the four social enterprises studied, and for the union SEWA Bangla, of some key indicators for which data was collected through a structured questionnaire. It provides an indication of the range of outcomes against each indicator. Since the study samples have been purposively selected, the data will not be accurate for the whole group of home-based workers in each location. For example, the sample in Bikaner was not randomly distributed across all villages where Rangсутra provides work to home-based workers, rather it was concentrated in those villages where Village Craft Centres have been opened. There is a higher percentage of young unmarried women working at these centres, which explains the lower average age and lower percentage of married respondents in this sample.

The actual work that is done by home-based workers varies from place to

place and is not always a traditional skill. While in Bikaner and Phulia, the embroidery and weaving skills have, for the majority of respondents, been traditional skills learnt through family and community, in the case of Sadhna and SABAH Nepal, respondents had predominantly acquired the skill through training received from the social enterprises and other training centres. Thus, training has played an important role in these latter locations in equipping women to be able to do the work. There are other differences across locations, such as the level of household dependence on earnings from home-based work. The share of earnings from home-based work to total household earnings is greatest among the weavers in Phulia, followed by home-based knitting in Nepal (Sana Hastakala). The difference in peak and lean season earnings is lowest in the case of Sana Hastakala, accompanied by little difference in average hours of work in the peak and lean seasons. For most households in the sample, the main source of household income was either agriculture or manual labour with home-based work being the second largest source of household income. While piece-rate earnings have been reported in the table below, in the case of Sadhna, women also earn through annual bonus payments, which can be as much as 35-40 per cent of their total earnings, and as this is received once a year, this amount acts as a saving to be utilised by the artisans as they wish. In the

case of Sana Hastakala, the overall production structure is different from the other enterprises, with around 40 per cent of the artisans from whom it sources being home-based while the remaining 60 per cent work in factories, which may also influence the enterprise overheads; and moreover home-based knitters produce for the complete garment, whereas embroidery workers embellish a product that is stitched at a production centre. Respondents both in Udaipur and in Bikaner reported getting regular payments and were paid through bank transfers. While payments are regular for the sample from Kathmandu as well, the proportion being paid in cash remains high and the shift to bank transfers has not yet been possible. Some selected examples of social protection initiatives include accident insurance for Rangсутra workers; access to Provident Fund and Employees State Insurance for all Sadhna members; access to pehchan cards for women weavers in Phulia; an enterprise provident fund created by SABAH Nepal; and annual health camps organised by Sana Hastakala.

While there is no social dialogue in the conventional sense in which home-based workers linked to social enterprises participate, these enterprises negotiate with buyers to get the best terms possible, and group solidarities have emerged. In Phulia, platforms for multi-stakeholder dialogue and sensitisation have been created.

TABLE 6.1: SUMMARY SURVEY FINDINGS: HOME-BASED WORKERS IN FOUR LOCATIONS

Indicator	India			Nepal	
	Bikaner	Udaipur	Phulia	Kathmandu Valley	
Name of partner organisation	Rangsutra	Sadhna	SEWA Bangla	SABAH Nepal	Sana Hastakala
Type of production (in this study)	Embroidery & embellishment of garments	Embroidery & embellishment of garments	Handloom weaving	Weaving and knitting of garments	Knitting of woollen garments
No. of Members (2019/20)	1500 (in Bikaner)	700	4000 (in Nadia district)	3500	1200
Registration	Public Ltd Co (2006)	Mutual Benefit Society (1998)	Trade Union (2016)	Not for profit company (2008)	Not for profit company (1989)
Years in operation	14	22	4	12	31
Size of sample (survey)	67 ⁱ	171 ⁱⁱ	64 ⁱⁱⁱ	122 ^{iv}	60
Sample Demographic Information					
Average age of respondents	33	38	36	39	40
No formal schooling (%)	49 %	26%	36%	14%	5%
Percentage of respondents who were currently married	76%	99%	98%	93%	90%
Average household size	6	6	4	5	4
Care dependency ratio ^v	0.43	0.45	0.29	0.42	0.36

Indicator	India			Nepal	
	Bikaner	Udaipur	Phulia	Kathmandu Valley	
Name of partner organisation	Rangсутra	Sadhna	SEWA Bangla	SABAH Nepal	Sana Hastakala
Rights at work: Work and earnings					
Location of work					
Work at home (%)	27%	100%	92%	50%	100%
Work at centres (%)	36%	0	6%	50%	
Work both at centre and at home (%)	37%	0	2%		
Prefer working from centre	88%	n/a	n/a	14 %	n/a
Average (Mean/Median) monthly earnings (INR/NPR)	INR	INR	INR	NPR	NPR
Lean season USD	2012/1500 29	522/500 7	1542/1500 22	3058/2500 37	8203/7000 100
Peak season USD	4662/4000 67	1279/1200 18	3022/3000 43	4756/4000 58	10471/10000 128
Mean hours of work per day					
Lean season	3	3	2	4	6
Peak season	8	7	6	6	7
HBW is the primary source of household income (%)	18%	5%	45%	9%	17%
HBW is the second largest source of household income (%)	82%	95%	33%	64%	79%
Ratio of HBW income to household income					
Peak	35%	13%	53%	25%	50%
Average	26%	9%	38%	21%	44%
Lean	15%	5%	24%	16%	38%

Indicator	India			Nepal	
	Bikaner	Udaipur	Phulia	Kathmandu Valley	
Name of partner organisation	Rangsutra	Sadhna	SEWA Bangla	SABAH Nepal	Sana Hastakala
Maintain work diaries/ records (%)	40%	39%	42%	60%	75%
Mode of Payment Paid in cash (%)		1% ^{vi}	100%	86%	53%
Paid through bank transfer (%)	100%	99%		6%	44%
Both				8%	
Receive regular payments (%)	100%	100%	48%	82%	95%
Have a bank account	100%	98%	86%	83%	90%
Days after delivery payments are made: (%)					
On same day			19%	4%	5%
Within 7 days			66%	7%	15%
Within 15 days			10%	6%	2%
Within 30 days	100%	100%	2%	52%	66%
Within 60 days				20%	8%

Indicator	India			Nepal	
	Bikaner	Udaipur	Phulia	Kathmandu Valley	
Name of partner organisation	Rangсутra	Sadhna	SEWA Bangla	SABAH Nepal	Sana Hastakala
Years in this work: Modal value	20	10	20	20	10
Mean	14	10	17	12	13
Skills					
Learnt craft from family/ community (%)	79%	19%	45%	29%	27%
Have taught the craft to others in family (%)	64%	37%	19%	41%	30%
Social Protection					
Highlights	Artisans working at centres are covered by group accident insurance	All members enrolled in PF and ESI schemes	Women weavers enabled to get <i>pehchan cards</i>	PF fund set up by SABAH Nepal	Annual health camps
Social Dialogue					
Highlights	Negotiation with buyers on behalf of HBW	Negotiation with buyers on behalf of HBW Group solidarity	Platforms for multi-stakeholder dialogue and sensitisation	Group solidarity and community strengthening through CFCs	Works only with Fair Trade buyers

- i The sample in Bikaner was not randomly distributed across all villages where Rangсутra provides work to home-based workers, rather it was concentrated in those villages where centres had been opened.
- ii The total sample in Sadhna had 205 survey respondents, which included some new (voucher) members and some non-Sadhna home-based workers. Data presented here is for regular members only.
- iii The Phulia sample included 44 SEWA Bangla members and 20 non-SEWA members, which have been combined here given that SEWA Bangla's interventions did not relate to work orders and market linkages, and because few differences were perceptible given the small sample and the short period of time that SEWA Bangla has been working in the area.
- iv The sample was selected so as to focus on women living near the CFCs.
- v Defined as the ratio of: Household members below 15 and above 65/all members between 15 and 65.
- vi One respondent said she was paid in cash and this likely reflects a temporary problem, as Sadhna facilitates opening of a bank account in each woman's name once they become regular members.

DECENT WORK OUTCOMES, SOCIAL NETWORKS AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

In attempting to identify the factors that help (or hinder) in bringing about improved outcomes for home-based workers in each of the field sites, the role of social networks, government policy and schemes, company codes of conduct and Fair Trade norms, and association with a social enterprise are considered below.

Social Networks

The term 'social networks' is used here to refer to familial and community connections between individuals. It is known that craft skills are often found within particular communities for whom this work has been a traditional occupation. Habitations are often clustered with members of a particular community living together. The question here is whether in accessing work, or in other ways, such social networks have played any role in the observed outcomes.

With respect to job creation, it was observed in Udaipur that Sadhna members mobilise women within the neighbourhood in ways that may or may not reflect caste or kinship networks. Women's motivation for the work stems from their need to increase household earnings. Group leaders are given incentive payments based on the size and performance of their groups. For unorganised women, the coming together as a group tended to be around geography or neighbourhood, rather

than around caste, community or kinship ties.

Rangsutra started with groups of artisans associated with URMUL in Bikaner and many extended families are involved with the work. The family bonds do create a sense of comfort. During a group discussion in one centre, when asked if any major challenges crop up in the course of working together, one respondent pointed out that since so many of the co-workers are tied by familial bonds, it reduces the scope for arguments and an unpleasant working environment. Young children are looked after by family/ neighbours given the close bonding. In the Shantipur-Phulia belt, weaving was originally restricted to the tanti (weaver) caste. However, due to a shared experience of poverty, the caste determination of who weaves is eroding; although most large-scale entrepreneurs continue to emerge from the Basak community (OBC), while the weavers come from the tanti community. In that sense while social networks remain important in accessing work, they have been weakening over time, particularly for the weavers.

In Nepal, SABAH Nepal has mobilised women who either already had the relevant skills or were willing to undergo training to acquire these. The study found that a majority of the respondents (53 per cent) belonged to the Newari caste

followed by the Janjati caste (33 per cent). Sana Hastakala reaches out to producer groups and also offers training. The respondents associated with Sana Hastakala were again primarily from the Newari caste (61 per cent) and 13 per cent were Brahmins. Caste-based solidarity is likely to be present among these women, predating their association with the social enterprises. However, the solidarity created through membership in the social enterprise has strengthened cross-caste bonding among members, reflected, for example, in joint celebrations, not just of traditional festivals but also of birthdays and marriages.

Private Governance and Good Practices

There is an increasing consciousness among consumers in high-income countries – "Who made my clothes?" – and thereby pressure on brands to follow ethical and Fair Trade practices, leading to the articulation of company codes of conduct, CSR initiatives and other attempts to influence private governance within global value chains.⁴²

Rangsutra follows the Code of Conduct of the global brand it supplies to. It has streamlined its production processes and organisation so as to be able to expand the scale of its operations while ensuring this compliance. As a result, it is unique in having been able to ensure that

⁴² For more on codes of conduct, see Lin Lim (2020).

the obligations under the Code of Conduct are fulfilled right down to the last link in the global value chain. One part of the Code's requirements was not acceptable to Rangсутra: that there be no home-based work; this has been creatively resolved through the establishment of Village Craft Centres . With this mutually satisfactory compromise, a long-term partnership could be developed.

The other enterprises follow Fair Trade principles. Sадhna is a member of the Fair Trade Forum – India,⁴³ and the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO). Sana Hastakala was one of the founding members of Fair Trade Group Nepal and in 2015, it became a WFTO Guaranteed Member. The Fair Trade movement originated as a civil society initiative and has traditionally sought to facilitate the engagement of small-scale producers in international trade (Barrientos 2019: 239). The enterprises studied here have extended the Fair Trade philosophy to link home-based women workers with large retail buyers. The negotiations between the social enterprises and the buyers take the form of what Barrientos (2019) describes as 'collaborative contestation'.⁴⁴

A global brand sourcing from

West Bengal has developed a programme offering credit support and community health services to a community of weavers in West Bengal. This programme is the brainchild of the brand's Social Consciousness Department which, among other initiatives, is paying attention to vulnerable populations outside of factory walls, especially the home-based weavers in rural India (Lim 2019). SEWA Bangla has been able to advance its goals of strengthening a union of informal women weavers and ancillary workers through its partnership with this company.

Public Governance and Good Practices

Government laws and regulations, as they apply to home-based workers and social enterprises, form the basic frame within which activities are conducted. Company codes "are no substitute for national laws and, in fact, most of the codes indicate that suppliers and subcontractors are expected to comply with national and local laws and regulations at all times" (Lin Lim 2019: 38).

The legal form of registration of the social enterprise determines the compliance requirements.

Recent policy changes that had some impact include, in India, the demonetisation policy in 2016 and the introduction of the GST in 2017. Both were reported by respondents as having adversely affected the weaving sector in Phulia. At the lower end of the chain, all transactions were being carried out in cash with some, but not complete, recording of transactions. Both demonetisation and GST affected this cash economy. The ability to set up the procedures for compliance with the GST have varied. While the social enterprises have been able to do so, and Rangсутra which sources from various sub-suppliers has conducted trainings to help its suppliers make the required changes, in an unorganised market as in Phulia, many small entrepreneurs have been negatively impacted due to inadequate information about procedures and time taken to comply with the GST procedures.

On the positive side, the social protection schemes of the government enable some coverage of home-based workers especially for health care and old age support. Access to these schemes has been facilitated by the social enterprises, especially in India. The enterprises help the women to understand and make use of national or local laws

⁴³ Fair Trade Forum – India (FTF-I) is the National Network for Fair Trade in India. It works with more than 200,000 producers – artisans and farmers – through more than 100 member organisations. FTF-I is a not-for-profit organisation, registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860. World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) prescribes 10 Principles that Fair Trade Organisations must follow in their day-to-day work and carries out monitoring to ensure these principles are upheld. As a member of WFTO, Fair Trade Forum – India upholds these principles and works to ensure a dignified income and overall development of artisans, farmers and workers in the unorganized sector. See <http://www.fairtradeforum.org/>. As explained on the WFTO website, 'In contrast to commodity certifiers, the WFTO Guarantee System assesses the entirety of a business, not just a specific product, ingredient or supply chain. It includes an assessment of the enterprise's structure and business model, its operations and its supply chains. (see <https://wfto.com/our-fair-trade-system>).

⁴⁴ 'Collaborative contestation relates to the ability to form coalitions of NGOs and/or trade union organisations to counter corporate power at local, national and global scales...collaborative contestation can take different forms, ranging from cooperative to adversarial forms of engagement with companies. Collaborative contestation involving a more cooperative approach is found among NGOs focused on supporting informal workers in developing countries. These include HomeNet organisations working with home-based workers...' (Barrientos 2019: 238).

and regulations.

Social Governance and Good Practices

The enterprises studied have used a range of strategies to bring about positive changes for women home-based workers. These strategies are briefly summarised below.

GENDER JUSTICE AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT:

While the stated goals of the enterprises located in Rajasthan and Nepal is to create employment generation opportunities, building solidarity among members has also empowered them. For instance, Sadhna members are forthright about how working with Sadhna over the years has enabled them to negotiate gender norms around mobility and seclusion as well as become more self-reliant. Women have also been able to come together on spontaneous issue-based mobilisation and campaigns, even if these have been short lived. Some Rangсутra respondents reported that their enhanced earnings had inspired support from others in their households to take on care responsibilities. Further, some women reported that they used a large part of the money they earned for their own expenses, suggesting positive impacts on female agency. The CFC model of SABAH Nepal has been instrumental in bringing women together and creating a platform where they can discuss social issues including domestic violence. Apart from other forms of social protection, SABAH Nepal provides maternity benefits to its 'general'⁴⁵ members,

thus strengthening gender rights at work. SEWA Bangla organises women weavers to press for their rights, and this has started a process through which women have gained confidence and are now able to raise wage-related issues with master weavers, as well as issues about their entitlements to schemes with government officials.

SOCIAL INTERMEDIATION – BUSINESS WITH A SOCIAL PURPOSE:

The social enterprises studied here are business entities with an 'ethos' that distinguishes them from conventional business – that is, a commitment to working in a particular region or with particular groups that are disadvantaged socially and economically. This commitment has been kept alive either through a very strong personal commitment of the founder, or through values continuously re-affirmed by members of the Board. Home-based workers themselves, while they depended on the enterprise for work, had a sense of ownership and belonging that came from being members or shareholders of the enterprise. For example, Sadhna was set up as a Mutual Benefit Trust; all women home-based workers who join become members of the General Body and can serve on the different management committees. The CFCs set up by SABAH Nepal are cooperatives. Rangсутra is a public limited company, and two-thirds of the artisans it works with are shareholders in the company. All four enterprises subscribe to the ideology of a social enterprise, expressed in different ways – 'balancing profit

with purpose'; 'addressing social challenges through the market mechanism'; or 'making markets work for the poor'.

VALUE CHAINS AND PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT:

This study has been able to throw some light on the value chains of the enterprises studied. In all cases, parts of the production process have been centralised, allowing them to reap economies of scale. The functions that have been centralised include liaison with the buyer to get orders and repeat orders, product development (designing, making samples, costing); designing the production process (from procurement of raw materials to making the product and delivering to buyers); enterprise management (accounting and book keeping, disbursement of piece rates and salaries, office management); and portions of the actual production including cutting, tailoring, finishing, quality checks, labelling and packaging. In all places, the overall management of the social enterprise was being handled by professionals. The number of staff and workers who make up the centralised production team ranges from being 5–10 per cent of the number of home-based workers. The distribution of cost/earnings across the different stages/functions of production varies across products and locations, but as a rough estimate, based on this study, the centralised parts of the production process and marketing (including management and design) accounted for around 40–50 per cent; piece-rate payments to home-based workers for 20–30 per cent;

⁴⁵ 'General' members are those who attend the General Assembly, have voting rights, are eligible to be nominated to the Board of Directors, and are entitled to benefits such as maternity benefit, health benefit and festival allowances.



and raw materials for 10–30 per cent of the value of the total order. It should be noted that the raw material costs are generally a higher proportion, and the share reported here reflects partial provision by the global or domestic brand.⁴⁶

OUTREACH: The outreach to home-based workers extends over varying geographic areas, and in all cases has tried to draw in women from vulnerable groups and remote locations. Sadhna has reached out to tribal and rural women and women living in slums in Udaipur and Rajsamand district and has succeeded in creating work opportunities for them. This target

group has remained constant since it was set up. For Seva Mandir and Sadhna, while the need for a livelihood focus was clear, the choice of work was based on an assessment of what would be feasible. Since most women had some knowledge of stitching, it was possible to build their skills in applique, patchwork and simple embroidery. The increase in membership from an initial 15 artisans to roughly 700 today is a measure of the direct work opportunities that have been created. It should be noted that Sadhna did not mobilise women already engaged in home-based work: it encouraged women who were hidden within their homes and

not engaged in income-generating activity to improve their skills and become home-based workers.

Rangсутra began with home-based workers from border villages in Bikaner and has continued to provide an expanding volume of work to this group, while it has also extended its reach to different states (although in this study, the focus was on home-based workers in Bikaner, and not all of the artisans linked to Rangсутra in other areas would qualify as being 'home-based').

SABAH Nepal has built a value chain extending to home-based workers in over 20 districts of the country, while

⁴⁶ These calculations are based on discussions with the organisations studied and need to be seen as indicative only.

Sana Hastakala is likewise linked to producer groups across Nepal. Each CFC linked to SABAH Nepal was connected with about 200 women home-based workers, many of whom were living in remote areas without any other access to information or distant markets, and who have been enabled to develop a new source of livelihood, become part of a group, learn about legal rights and have access to psycho-social counselling.

MANAGING MARKET VOLATILITY

– RISK SMOOTHING: In order to expand opportunities and contain market volatility, enterprises have attempted to develop multiple sources of work for home-based workers. In addition to having successfully obtained large orders from global and national brands for B2B sales, all four of the social enterprises studied had their own retail outlets for B2C sales. In the case of SABAH Nepal, the CFCs have also been encouraged to develop local contacts and get orders independently from the local market. The CFCs have thus played a role in stimulating the local economy as well as providing a conduit for orders from global and domestic brands. SABAH Nepal also encourages its members to establish micro-enterprises for sustainable self-employment and provides some initial finance through the cooperatives. So far, about 10 per cent of members have successfully established micro-enterprises. Apart from training and finance, SABAH Nepal offers help for starting these new enterprises by providing information about local markets, product pricing and outreach to customers in the initial start-up period. Diversification of markets has played a key role in

mitigating volatility in orders and smoothing risks for women home-based workers.

TRAINING AND SKILL

UPGRADATION:

One of the key interventions has been in training. Most of the enterprises have drawn in new members from among women who were interested in the work but may not have had much experience producing for distant markets. The enterprises have strict quality control mechanisms; training enables women to meet the required standards. Similarly, the significance and need for timely delivery is communicated effectively through training on the production process and expectations from the buyers and customers that need to be met. Further, by giving value to traditional embroidery/weaves, the enterprises have enabled women to build on their known skills. There has been a level of ‘screening’ to ensure that women who joined the enterprise were able to do quality work and were also willing to commit time to it. The study also noted that with training and experience, some women home-based workers have been able to take on new roles with greater responsibility or higher earnings, such as being the group leader or the centre supervisor, being part of the sampling team, or contributing to design development or moving into salaried positions within the enterprises. Mobility outwards has also been enhanced, and some women have set up as independent entrepreneurs.

For example, at Sadhna, an initial training is given by the most skilled artisans to all women expressing interest in joining the enterprise. These trainings are usually held

within the village/cluster, at a community centre or panchayat area or other common space. The basic skills around stitching and embroidery require just a one-time training, although skill levels will change with experience. The training includes teaching embroidery, patch work and applique, some of which may already be known to the women, as well as new designs. Women also learn the system of getting work and the expectations of the buyers and customers regarding quality and timely delivery that need to be met.

Becoming a member of SABAH Nepal requires only that the person has some knowledge of the chosen skill set. Training ranges from making simple products for personal use to professional training on knitting and stitching for making sweaters, caps, gloves, socks, bags, dhaka weave, as well as making shawls and other garments. Changing fashion trends require continual design development and corresponding training. Entrepreneurship and leadership training is also given. Master trainers may be from the enterprise or from outside; for example, in the case of dhaka weave, the trainers are usually outsiders.

Training extends to guiding producer groups to comply with Fair Trade principles. After starting with three producer groups, today Sana Hastakala is connected to over 67 producer groups representing 1200 artisans (roughly 80 per cent of whom are women) from different districts of Nepal; they produce around 2000 craft items under different categories. Sana Hastakala connects with producer groups that make different products, so as to

avoid competition between groups, and also requires an assurance from these groups that they would comply with Fair Trade principles within a period of two years if not already doing so.

REJUVENATING TRADITIONAL SKILLS: In some cases, the work that is outsourced to home-based workers has used traditional skills, reinforced by training and combined with new designs, thus it has succeeded in reviving the demand for these skills. This has been the case especially in Bikaner, where traditional embroideries have been used, and in Nepal with dhaka weave and allo.⁴⁷

EXPOSURE TO DISTANT MARKETS: Introducing women to consumer tastes and the nature of urban demand through participation in fairs and exhibitions in different locales has also helped to build the understanding of women home-based workers on the need for quality production and on the tastes and preferences of urban consumers. Further, this exposure has contributed to transparency, as women have been made aware of the price of the final product in the market.

BUILDING SOLIDARITY: Mobilising women into groups has enabled greater efficiency in distributing and collecting work, quality checks and other supervisory inputs. It also has had the effect of reducing the isolation of women working from home and



increased their mobility outside the home. It has also improved their sense of identity as a worker and developed their overall confidence. Given the strong patriarchal constraints on women's mobility in Rajasthan, many women were confined to the house until they became members of self-help groups formed by Seva Mandir and started working with Sadhna. Similarly, community leaders at SABAH Nepal have mobilised women

into groups, and as reported by them, these groups have become a space for sharing the problems faced by the women, including violence against women.

ORGANISING THE WORKSPACE: While most women continue to work from their homes, innovations in workspace were observed.

Rangсутra has set up Village Craft

⁴⁷ Allo is a plant from which natural fibre can be extracted and made into garments and other products. SABAH Nepal has been able to develop a value chain within Nepal to source aloe and make different products, and create a wider market for these, although this was not included in the present study. For more, see: <https://hnsa.org.in/resources/understanding-role-women-home-based-workers-value-chains-large-cardamom-and-allo-nepal>

Centres to remain compliant with the Code of Conduct of the global brand, including by ensuring no child or forced labour, but still allow women flexibility to go home during the work day if needed. Toilets are provided, as is fire safety equipment, registers to note how many hours have been put in by each worker, a first aid box. Working from these centres is mandatory in the case of orders from the global brand, except for women with children under the age of five; Rangсутra has negotiated that they can be allowed to take the work home. From the production perspective this has enhanced efficiency and reduced rejections as any mistakes can be spotted and corrected right away. Centres also provide a safe space for storage of raw materials, tools, and finished goods. While it took time for the shift from home-based work to centre-based work to be fully accepted by the women, the higher level of earnings has meant that other household members have been willing to share the responsibilities of child care and other household responsibilities in order to allow women to work without interruptions, as reported by some respondents.

Similarly, the CFCs of SABAH Nepal provided a workspace to women who could work here if they wished to do so. CFCs have been built in remote areas and villages. There are no fixed timings and women who live within easy walking distance can work at the centres at their convenience. When a new order is received, workers go to the centres to learn the sample and collect the raw materials. The centres act as a shared space that encourages socialising and learning new skills from peers, while

reducing mistakes, as they could be immediately repaired with help from other members or the community leaders. With home-based workers, breaking social isolation is the first step in building solidarity and voice. The SABAH model of CFCs and clusters, which encourages women to come together for training and if they wish, for working too, helps to increase interaction and strengthen social networks among the women. For example, it was reported that during the wedding season, home-based workers who may not have known one another previously now come together for celebrations.

EXTENDING SOCIAL PROTECTION: This has been done either by linking home-based workers to government social security schemes, which requires ensuring that the women have the required identity cards and helping them to register for the schemes; or through programmes developed for the home-based workers using the organisation's own resources. All Sadhna members have been enrolled for both the PF and the ESI schemes. Very recently, SABAH Nepal has created a Provident Fund for the home-based workers, contributing 10 per cent of the monthly earning while the individual home-based worker contributes another 10 per cent.

Protection from shocks has been a significant contribution. In 2015, Nepal was hit by a devastating earthquake which caused huge damage and loss of lives, also affecting the workers associated with SABAH and Sana Hastakala. Both enterprises were deeply involved in reconstruction and revival of livelihoods post-earthquake. In

India, women home-based workers linked to social enterprises were less affected by sudden policy changes such as demonetisation in India in 2016, in comparison to home-based workers who did not have the umbrella of protection provided by a social enterprise.

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH – SEWA BANGLA: As a union, the activities of SEWA Bangla offer an alternative approach to that of the social enterprises studied here. By organising women, giving them information and training, SEWA Bangla expects that over time women's voices will be heard in work negotiations. By 2019, SEWA Bangla had organised 4000 women weavers and ancillary workers as members in the district of Nadia. In addition, SEWA Bangla has been sensitising their members who are sub-master weavers to address women's issues, as well as sensitising brands about the prevalent poor working conditions. For instance, SEWA Bangla has a 'trade committee' comprised of 20 representatives, each representing 200 weavers from Nadia, which meets every three months to discuss issues such as minimum wages. Representatives of global brands, vendors who supply to global brands, and master weavers have also joined some of these meetings, at which wages and working conditions have been discussed. These trade committee meetings, which started in October 2019, have led the concerned global brand to pressure their vendors/suppliers to ensure master weavers provide minimum wages to weavers. SEWA Bangla has designed a format showing how records can be maintained by both weavers and master weavers.



Challenges

Overall, this study has argued that the presence of social enterprises to mediate between home-based workers and domestic and global retail buyers has been a 'good practice'. But there are challenges to be faced too.

SEASONALITY: The mediation by social enterprises has enabled a reasonably steady flow of work to home-based workers, and this has been possible because they have secured orders from multiple buyers and have their own retail outlets. However, piece-rate earnings remain low and seasonality in work orders has

been reduced, but not removed. The peak season for garment work orders coincides with the peak agricultural season, adding to stress of work in those areas where agriculture is a major source of household income. **Global brands and payment terms:** All the enterprises have been able to settle into long term relationships with one or more global buyers who understand, for example, the small variations that are a feature of hand-crafted garments, and work together with the enterprise to manage design and quality to ensure that products are repaired if required and to avoid rejections. However, even such a cooperative approach has succeeded

only with a few global brands. There remains limited room for negotiation of the value of the order and consequent piece rates.

DOMESTIC MARKETS AND COMPETITIVE PRESSURES:

Domestic markets can be more stable and better synchronised with handloom and hand-crafted products (e.g. consumer acceptance of minor variations such as in the shades of the dye). However, the popularity of handloom garments and embroidery among domestic buyers has led to increased competition from fast fashion brands who have incorporated hand work in various

ways. Consequently, there has been a downward pressure on prices as well as an increased demand for new designs. While the domestic brands may be long-term buyers, there is little or no surplus for the enterprise and earnings may not even fully cover overheads.

B2C AND INVESTIBLE SURPLUS: The B2C component has been highly valued by the social enterprises as it offers independence in design development, develops awareness of and loyalty to the social enterprise brand, and allows work to be distributed to workers in lean seasons when there is no work from brands. Expansion of B2C sales requires availability of resources to be invested in design development and streamlining of both back-end and front-end operations, and there is some trade-off between enhancing piece rates in the present and securing work for the future.

HOME-BASED WORK AND NEXT GENERATION ASPIRATIONS: As noted previously, the majority of respondents were married adults and for most women, the attraction of home-based work is precisely that it allows them to take on paid work while

leaving them with some time flexibility to also manage their household and care responsibilities. However, the next generation of daughters in these families are better educated and aspire to a different kind of work. The challenge to social enterprises is how they might re-structure production processes to meet the aspirations of younger women.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH: There is a high incidence of some occupational health issues, particularly weakening eyesight and back pain, reported from all areas. Current interventions such as health camps and access to hospitals helps in treatment, but the challenge of prevention remains.

GENERATING INVESTIBLE RESOURCES: In the initial start-up years, the enterprises received financial inputs in different ways. Sadhna started as a livelihood project of SEVA Mandir. Corporate funding has been received for training. While Sadhna has been able to make some surplus from its sales every year, it has found it difficult to make investments in design and designers. Rangsutra chose to register itself as a for-profit company which enables infusion of equity, and its substantial

profits have allowed investment to be made to increase the scale of its operations. SABAH Nepal, in addition to its social business work, provides a range of services for a fee, and these and other partnership projects account for just under half of its annual income, enabling some cross-subsidisation and adequate investment in managerial capacities. While all the enterprises studied here established themselves and became self-reliant over 2-5 years, finding resources for continuous upscaling and design development and investing in staff and equipment remains a challenge. Apart from these business costs, there are additional costs of social intermediation. All the enterprises have reached out to poor informal workers who are vulnerable and susceptible to shocks. Their need for livelihood support has to be complemented by other support programmes, such as access to savings and loans, social security in the form of health, insurance, child care, and access to basic services and housing, etc. In addition, enabling women to continue to work from home in remote and scattered habitations requires investment of time and money to mobilise and organise the women.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this report has documented details of earnings, work patterns, employment opportunities, etc. for home-based women workers linked to global or domestic brands in the garment sector, namely in embroidery, knitting of woollen garments, and weaving. The study has also explored what are termed ‘good practices’ – that is, the strategies and innovative practices that have been put in place by the social enterprises, leading to an improvement in the conditions of work. The strength of these social enterprises is that they have been able to reach out to women from poor households and/or living in remote areas, who may

or may not have learnt traditional skills from the family; to impart new skills and/or strengthen older ones; and to integrate them into global or domestic value chains. The social enterprise is able to negotiate terms of work orders on their behalf.

Bringing women together as groups has also had the additional benefit of creating and sustaining solidarities. While the stated goals of the enterprises located in Rajasthan and Nepal is to create employment generation opportunities, their programmes have also had the added benefits of strengthening gender rights, which include negotiation of gender norms around mobility and

seclusion. Extra earnings have also had the additional effect of impacting positively on women’s agency. Organising women around their work has contributed to women’s empowerment by enabling women to voice their concerns.

Some persistent challenges, briefly summarised above, were also identified. One limitation of the study is that it did not attempt to map the value chain from the enterprise to the final buyer, nor could it explore perceptions and pressures that brands have to deal with. It is hoped, however, that the identification of challenges faced by social enterprises will help in shaping future strategies.



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ORGANISATIONAL WEBSITES

Directorate of Textiles (Handlooms, Spinning Mills, Silk Weaving & Handloom Based Handicrafts Division), Government of West Bengal: <https://westbengalhandloom.org/>

Fair Trade Forum – India (FTF-I): <http://www.fairtradeforum.org/>

Mahaguthi Craft with Conscience: <https://mahaguthi.com.np>

Rangсутra: <https://rangсутra.com/>

SABAH Nepal: <http://sabahnp.org/>

SADHNA: <https://www.sadhna.org/>

Sana Hastakala: <http://sanahastakala.com/>

Santipur Handloom Cluster, Directorate of Textiles (Handlooms, Spinning Mills, Silk Weaving & Handloom Based Handicrafts Division), Government of West Bengal: https://westbengalhandloom.org/htm/ihcdp_santi.html

SEWA Bharat: <https://sewabharat.org/across-india/sewa-in-west-bengal/>

ANNEX I

INDIA AND NEPAL SAMPLE OVERVIEW- SURVEY AND INTERVIEWS

India		
Udaipur	Quantitative Survey	255
	Qualitative Interviews	83
Bikaner	Quantitative Survey	67
	Qualitative Interviews	49
Phulia	Quantitative Survey	64
	Qualitative Interviews	58
Kathmandu, Nepal		
Sabah Nepal	Quantitative Survey	121
	Qualitative Interviews	40
Sana Hastakala	Quantitative Survey	60
	Qualitative Interviews	15
Unorganised	Quantitative Surveys	60
Other stakeholders (qualitative)		25
Total qualitative interviews		265
Total quantitative surveys		628

UDAIPUR

a. GROUPS COVERED

Sadhna Groups ¹		Unorganised Groups	
Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Ambavgadh	Bhinder 1	Indira Colony	Aaloo Factory
Badgaon	Bhinder 2	Pahada/Paira	Bhuwana
Bedla	Delwara 1 (a)		Rajnagar
Khanjipir	Delwara 2 (b)		
Manoharpura	Delwara 3 (b)		
Pulla 1	Delwara Godwa		
Pulla 2 Kacchi Basti	Fateh Nagar		
Ratakhet 2	Kamli ka Gooda/ Delwara 4 (b)		
Ratakhet 4	Kelwa		
	Madar		
	Tasol		

b. SAMPLE SIZE

Quantitative Survey		Qualitative Interviews	
Organised Artisans	172	Focus Group Discussion	19
Unorganised Artisans	50	Indepth: Sadhna Group Leader	17
Voucher Artisans	33	Indepth: Sadhna Organised Artisan	25
Total	255	Indepth: Unorganised Artisan	3
		Indepth: Contractor (Unorganised)	17
		Indepth: Contractor	1
		Indepth: Govt. Official/Interested Bystander	1
		Total	83

c. KEY MANAGEMENT STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

1	Seema Shah	CEO, Sadhna
2	Seema Thirora	Social Coordinator, Sadhna
3	Ria Chakravarthy	Social Manager, Sadhna
4	Ronak Shah	CEO, SEVA Mandir
5	Sanjida Mansoori	Supervisor (Embroidery)
6	Shazia	Supervisor (Embroidery)

BIKANER

a. GROUPS COVERED

Rangсутra Groups ¹
Phugal
2 A.D. (a)
2 A.D. (b)
2 D.O. (a)
2 D.O. (b)
7 A.D.
8 A.D.

b. SAMPLE SIZE

Quantitative Survey		Qualitative Interviews	
Total Organised Artisans	67	Focus Group Discussion	7
		Indepth: Centre Manager and Craft Manager	9
		Indepth: Artisan	13
		Indepth: Rangсутra Management & Staff	15
		Indepth: Napasar Weaving Centre	5
		Total	49

c. KEY MANAGEMENT STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

1	Sumita Ghose	Managing Director and Founder, Rangсутra Crafts India Ltd
2	Omprakash Sahu	Region Head – West, Rangсутra Crafts India Ltd
2	Dhuli Chand Solanki	Director, Rangсутra Crafts India Ltd
4	Devendra Kumar Sharma	Director, Rangсутra Crafts India Ltd
5	Babita Gahlot	Operations Manager- Bikaner, Rangсутra Crafts India Ltd
6	Ravikant Choudhary	Quality Manager
7	Priyanka Kumawat	Compliance Manager - Bikaner
8	Monica Barasa	Category Manager
9	Veena Soni	Operations Manager –global brand

PHULIA

a. GROUPS COVERED

Villages Covered ¹
Gobarchar/Majherpara
Belgudiya
Biharia mothpara
Guraliya (Khapradanga)
Kalipur

b. SAMPLE SIZE

Quantitative Survey		Qualitative Interviews	
SEWA Organised Artisans	44	Focus Group Discussion	6
Unorganised Artisans	20	Indepth: Master Weavers and Sub-Master Weavers	12
Total	64	Indepth: Non-SEWA Bharat Women Weavers	5
		Indepth: SEWA Bharat Community Leaders	10
		Indepth: SEWA Bharat Women Weavers	10
		Indepth: Auxiliary Artisans	10
		Indepth: Govt. Official/Experts	5
		Total	58

c. KEY MANAGEMENT STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

1	Sanchita Mitra	National Coordinator, SEWA Bharat
2	Moumita Chakraborty	State Coordinator, SEWA Bangla

NEPAL

a. GROUPS COVERED

Places covered ¹	
Banepa	Kumbeswor
Basundhara	Kusunti
Bungmati	Mulpani
Byasi	Nakhipot
Gokarneshwor	Nala
Gothatar	Budhanilkantha
Hadigaun	Jyatha
Khokana	Kupondole
	Nepaltar

b. SAMPLE SIZE

Qualitative		Quantitative Survey	
Experts/Ward Members	4	Sabah Nepal	121
Community Leaders	6	Sana Hastakala	60
Home-Based Workers	55	Unorganised	60
Management Staff/Production/Quality	15	Total	241
Total	80		

c. KEY MANAGEMENT STAKEHOLDERS INTERVIEWED

1	Srishti Joshi Malla	Chairperson, SABAH Nepal
2	Robin Man Amatya	Chief Executive Officer, SABAH Nepal
3	Santosh Acharya	Program Manager, SABAH Nepal
4	Aashma Bhatta	Manager, Community Development and Capacity Building, SABAH Nepal
5	Bini Bajracharya	Manager, Design and Production, SABAH Nepal
6	Shree Prakash	Marketing/Logistic Manager, Sana Hastakala

ANNEX II

QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTED FROM SURVEY

SECTION 1

Individual

- Age
- Marital status
- Caste/ Community (Phulia/ Nepal)
- Literacy levels
 - *Formal education level*

Household-level

- No. of members in the household
 - Information on member(s)
 - *Age*
 - *Relation to respondent*
 - *Marital status*
 - *Education level*
 - *Occupation*
 - Avg. monthly household income
-

SECTION 2

Work-related

- Primary and secondary source of income
 - *Name of trade*
 - *Location of work*
- Data on peak and lean seasons of home-based work
 - *Hours of work in a day*
 - *Daily earning*
 - *Monthly earning*
- Data on other paid work
 - *Hours of work in a day*
 - *Daily earning*
 - *Monthly earning*

Shareholding

- Whether the respondent is a shareholder of the collective (wherever applicable)
 - *If yes, then did she get additional earnings from shares in the last one year*

Product-related questions: collective and/or contractor (where applicable)

- Source of materials for work
 - *Where applicable, the amount spent on extra material*
- Source of tools for work
 - *Where applicable, the amount spent on tools*
- What happens if product is defective
- How is the finished product disposed of?
 - *Where applicable, how does the respondent sell the product*

Payment

- Mode of payment
- Regularity of payment
- Frequency of payment
- Whether the respondent maintains a time diary

Others

- Where applicable, how many additional contractors does the respondent work with
- Who provides for the workplace?
 - *Does the respondent prefer working from the centre (wherever applicable)?*

SECTION 3

Skill acquisition

- Is this traditional work for the respondent?
- Since when has the respondent been engaged in this work?
- How did the respondent pick up the skills for work?
 - *If through a training center, then specification of type of training center*
- Does the respondent get regular skill training?

Aspirations

- Does the candidate want to improve her skills?
 - *If yes, what type of skills required*
- Does the candidate want to establish her own business?
 - *If yes, what support does the respondent require for her own business promotion*

SECTION 4

Social Security

- List of Govt. identity card/documentation that respondent has
- Whether the respondent has a bank account in her name?
- List of Govt/pvt. social security schemes that the respondent has heard of and accessed.
- Whether the candidate was supported by any individual/organisation in accessing the scheme
 - *List of schemes accessed by above-mentioned support*

Health

- Whether the work has affected the candidate's health
- Types of health problems faced by candidate due to work.
- Whether the candidate was supported by collective/organisation to get medical help
- Has work stopped in the last 6 months due to illness?

ANNEX III

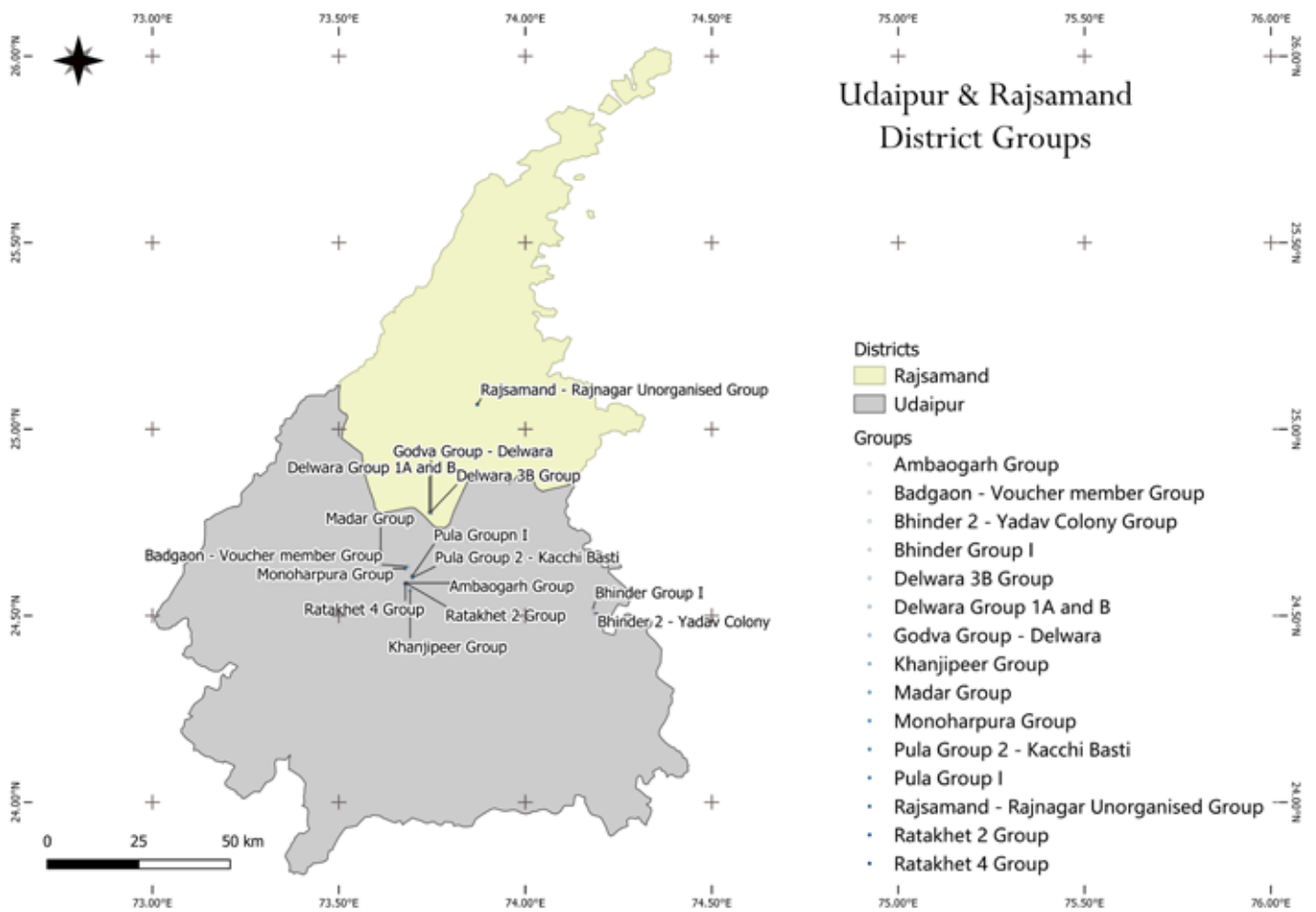
TABLE A3: WOMEN HANDLOOM WORKERS (PERCENTAGE SHARES)

States	Share of women handloom workers who are rural	Share of women handloom workers who are urban	Share of women handloom workers to total state handloom workforce	Share of state women handloom workers to all India women handloom workers	Share of state handloom workers to total workers
Assam	98.33	1.67	98.96	48.98	38.57
West Bengal	83.01	16.99	62.45	13.85	17.29
Manipur	84.37	15.63	99.23	6.76	5.31
Tamil Nadu	59.04	40.96	53.10	5.64	8.28
Andhra Pradesh	61.65	38.35	51.09	5.22	7.97
Tripura	99.33	0.67	98.81	4.34	3.42
Uttar Pradesh	55.73	44.27	49.62	3.59	5.64
Nagaland	98.99	1.01	87.93	1.92	1.70
Orissa	96.07	3.93	50.41	1.73	2.68
Karnataka	91.32	8.68	53.97	1.38	2.00
Mizoram	78.65	21.35	95.30	1.31	1.07
Arunachal Pradesh	91.37	8.63	99.02	0.98	0.77
Rajasthan	68.38	31.62	80.91	0.81	0.78
Bihar	83.03	16.97	60.25	0.76	0.98
Jammu & Kashmir	74.79	25.21	72.16	0.50	0.54
Meghalaya	100.00	-	99.25	0.43	0.34
Kerala	78.93	21.07	74.29	0.36	0.38
Uttarakhand	63.29	36.71	56.06	0.27	0.38
Jharkhand	84.61	15.39	43.82	0.27	0.48
Madhya Pradesh	30.31	69.69	54.59	0.24	0.34
Himachal Pradesh	99.83	0.17	68.64	0.18	0.20
Gujarat	81.12	18.88	53.21	0.17	0.25
Chhattisgarh	85.08	14.92	45.35	0.07	0.13
Haryana	7.75	92.25	20.66	0.05	0.20
Puducherry	64.96	35.04	58.54	0.05	0.07
Maharashtra	29.74	70.26	44.49	0.05	0.09
Delhi	-	100.00	38.78	0.03	0.07
Punjab	72.39	27.61	38.40	0.03	0.07
Sikkim	100.00	-	97.10	0.02	0.01
All India	88.18	11.82	77.94	-	-

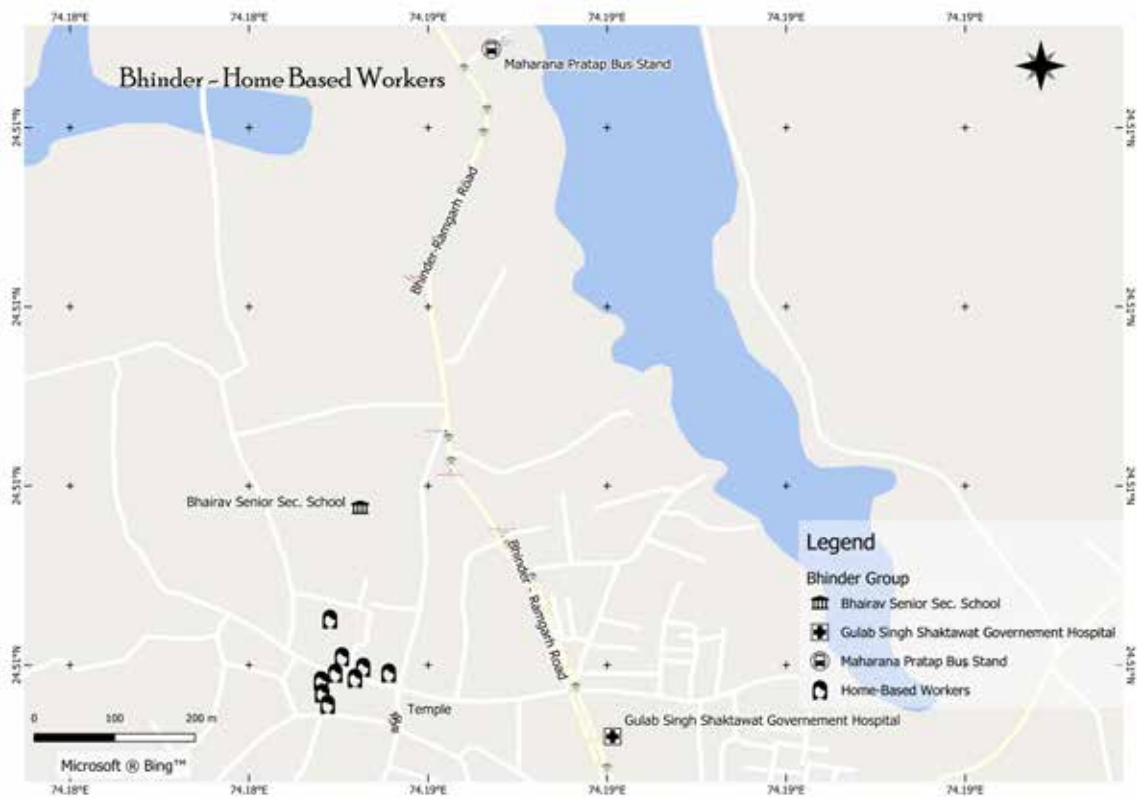
Source: Author's calculation from the Third Handloom Census of India, 2009-10, published by National Council of Applied Economic Research

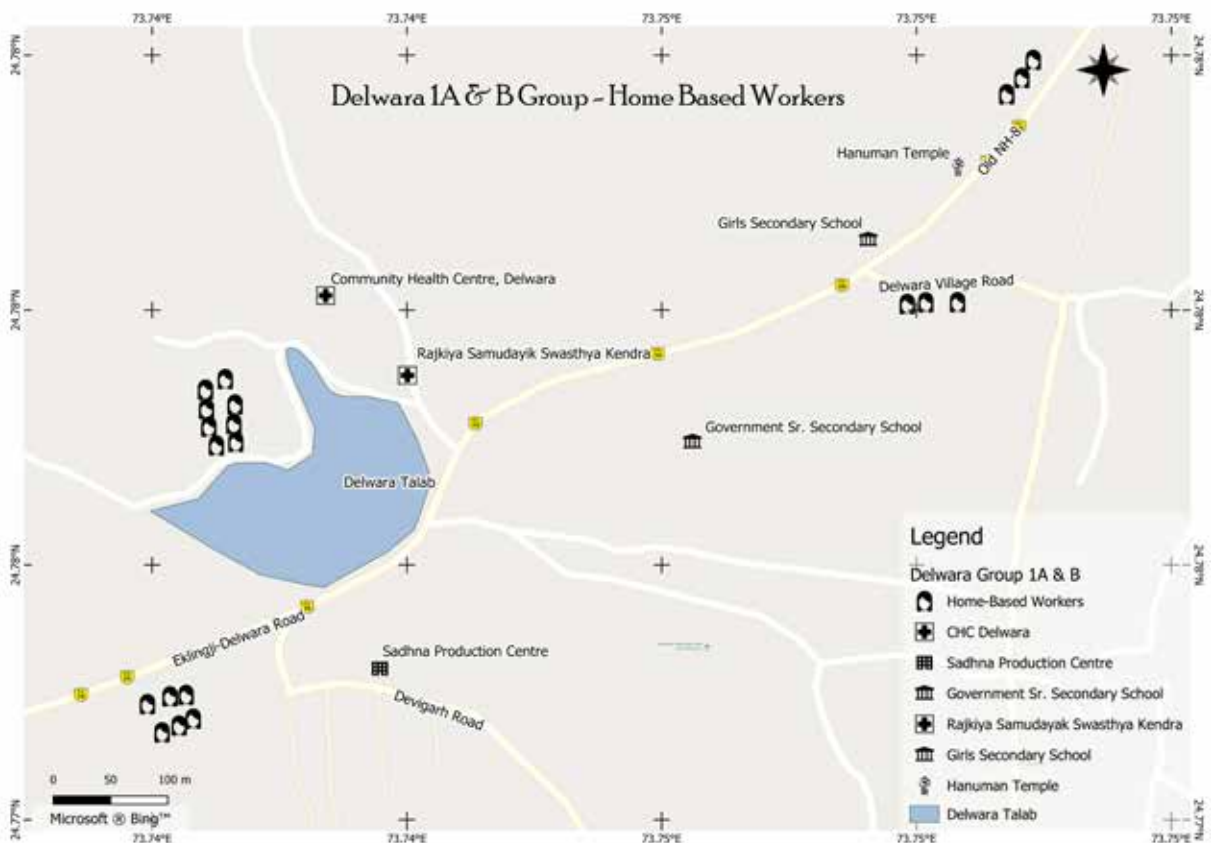
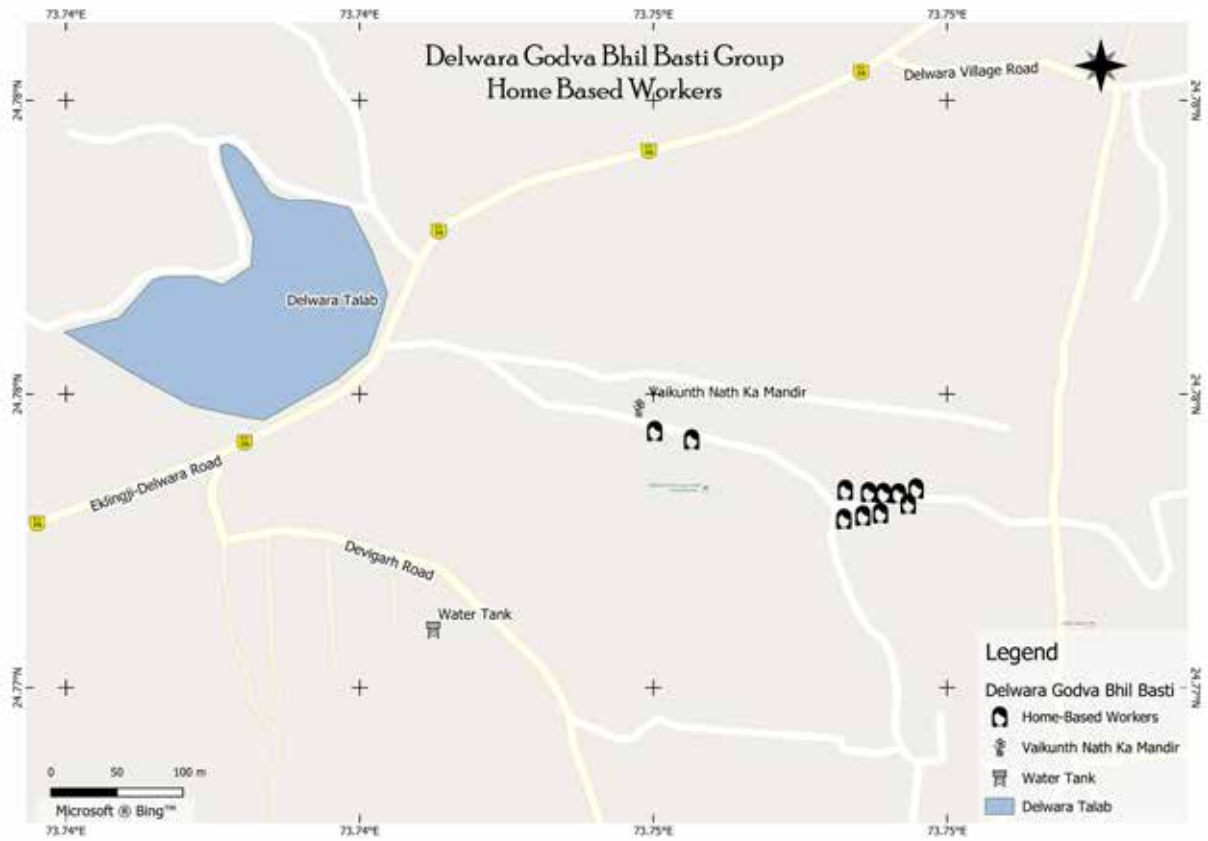
Annex IV – Maps of the Surveyed Locations

SURVEYED POINTS – UDAIPUR



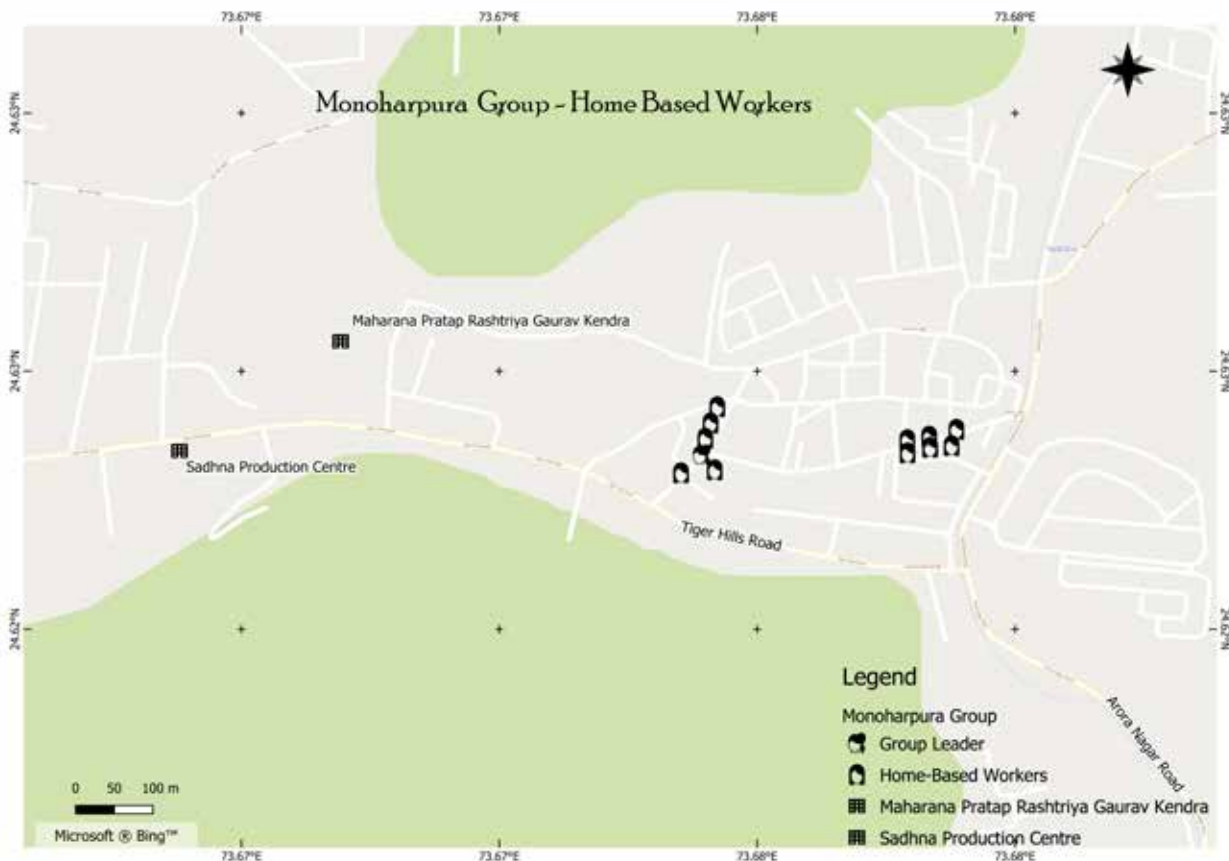


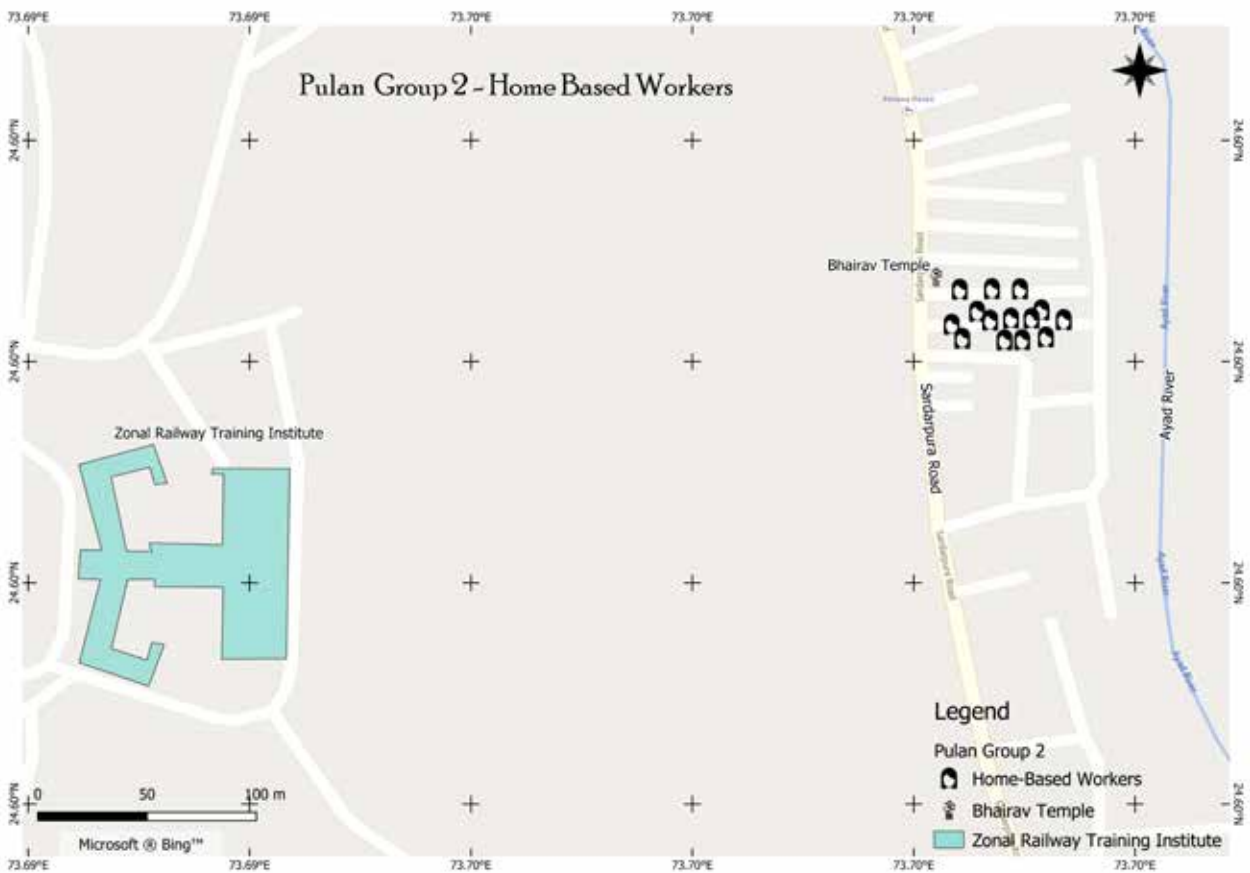


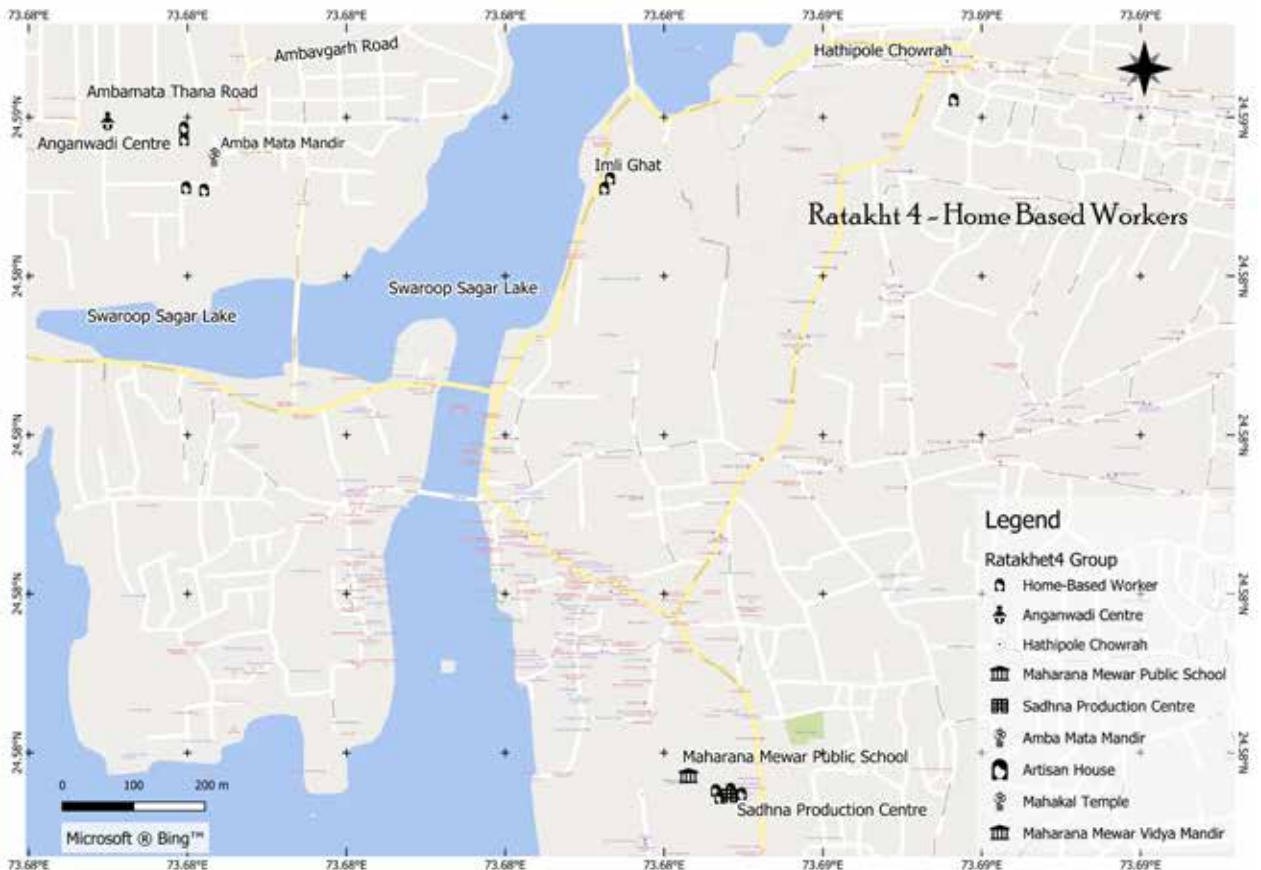


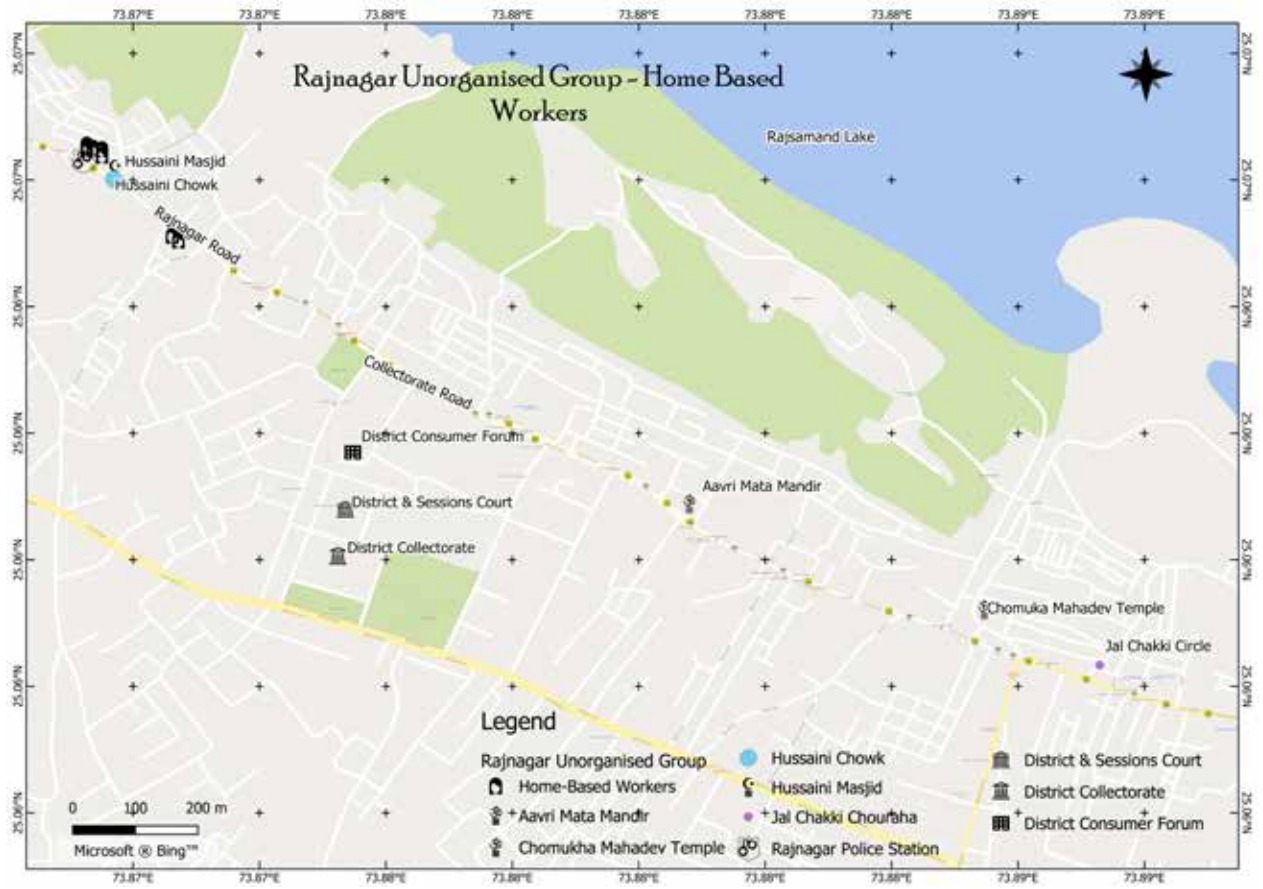




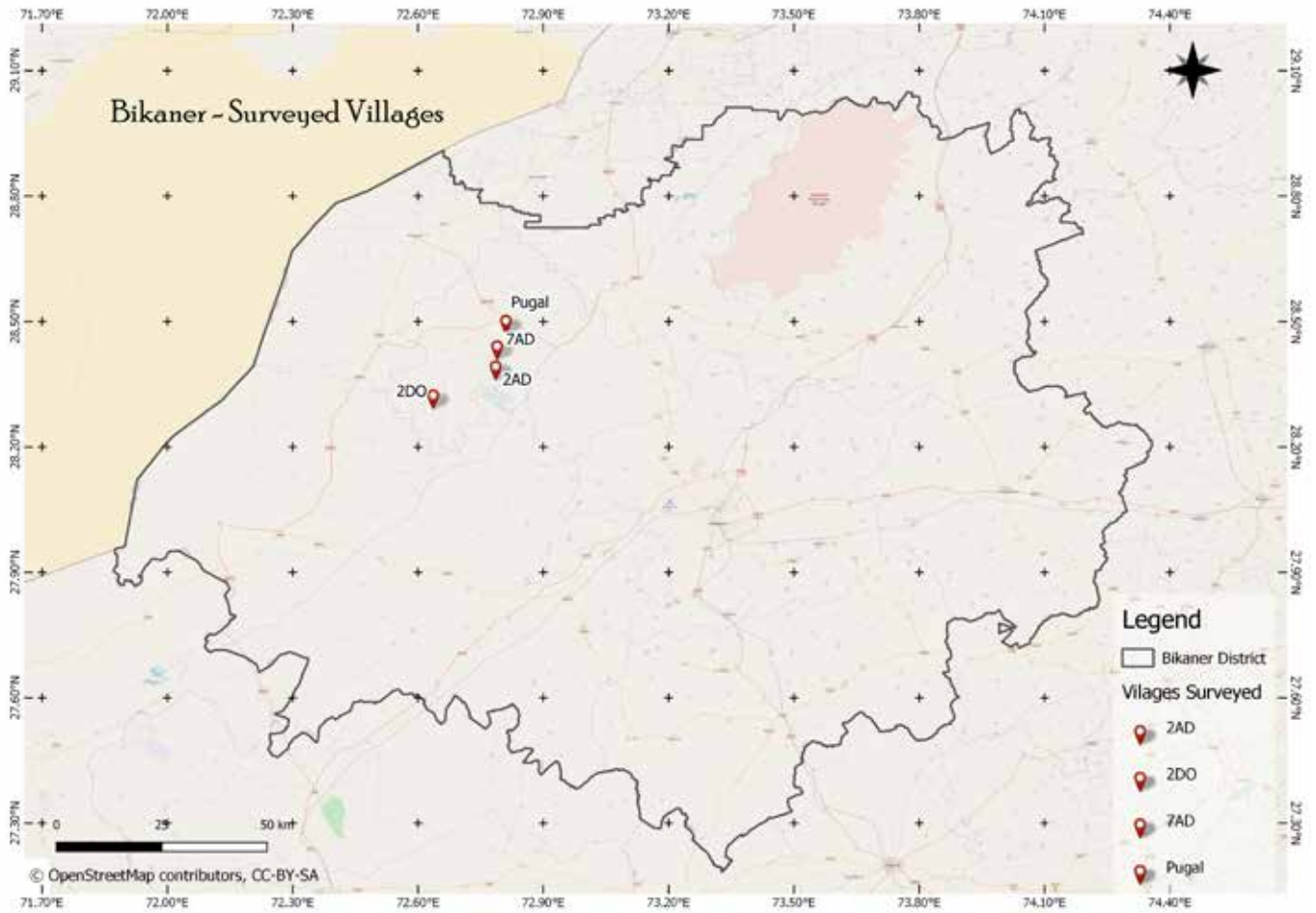


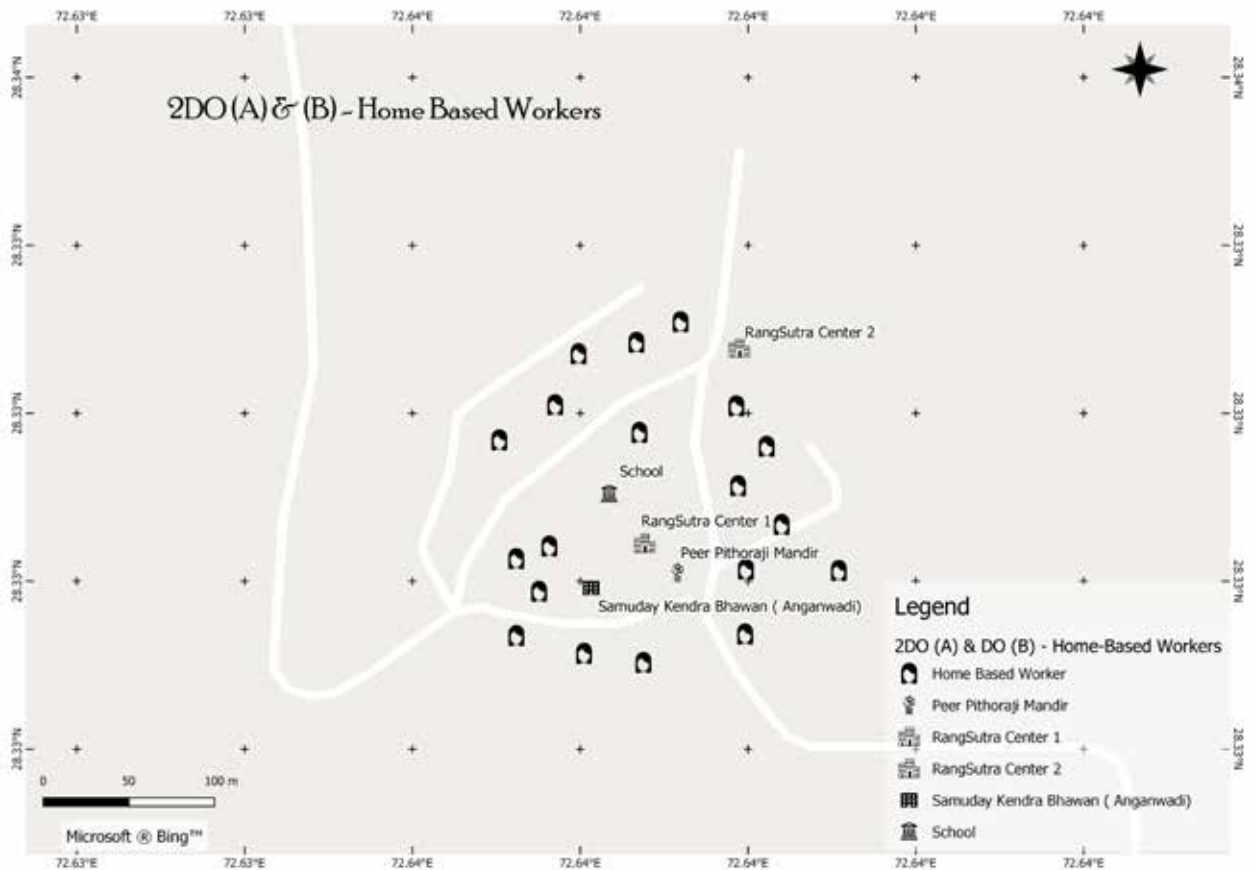
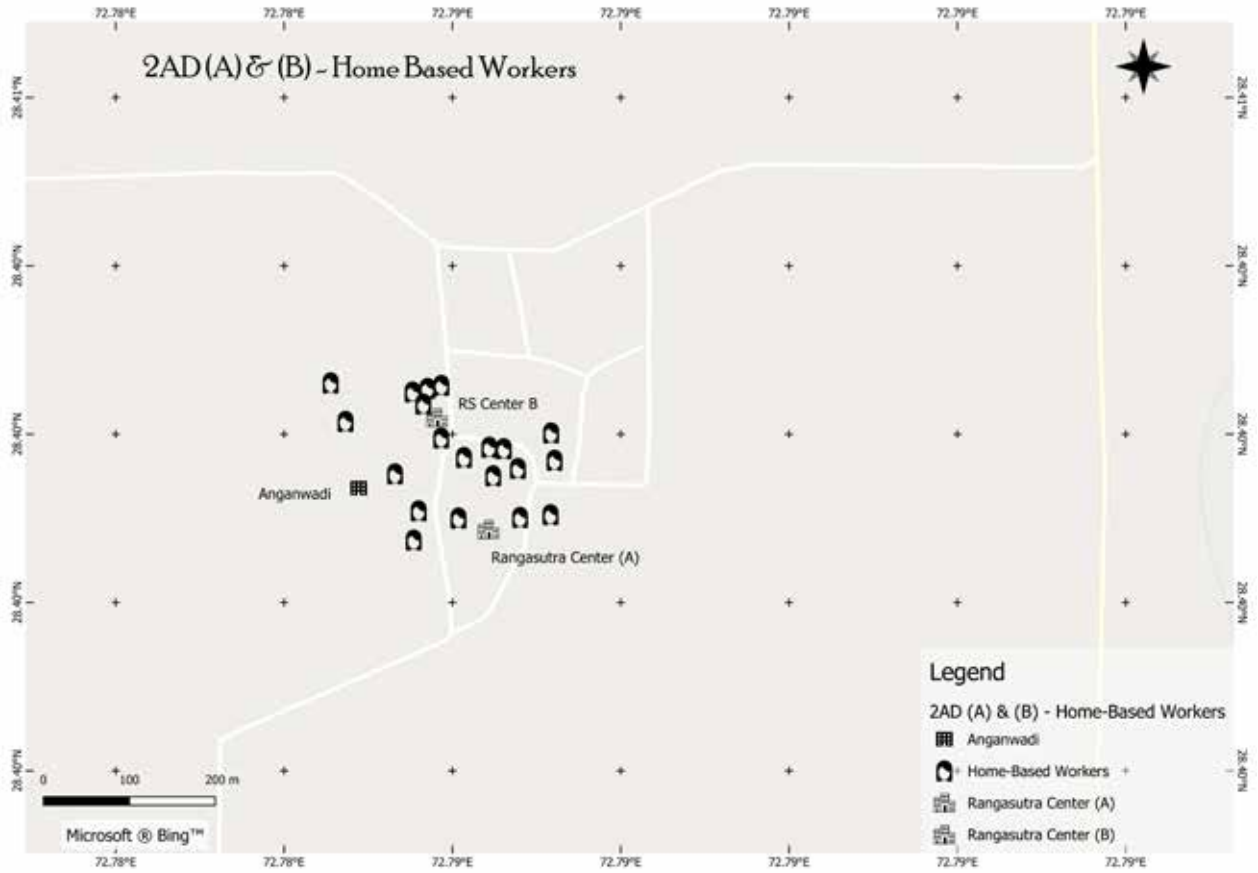


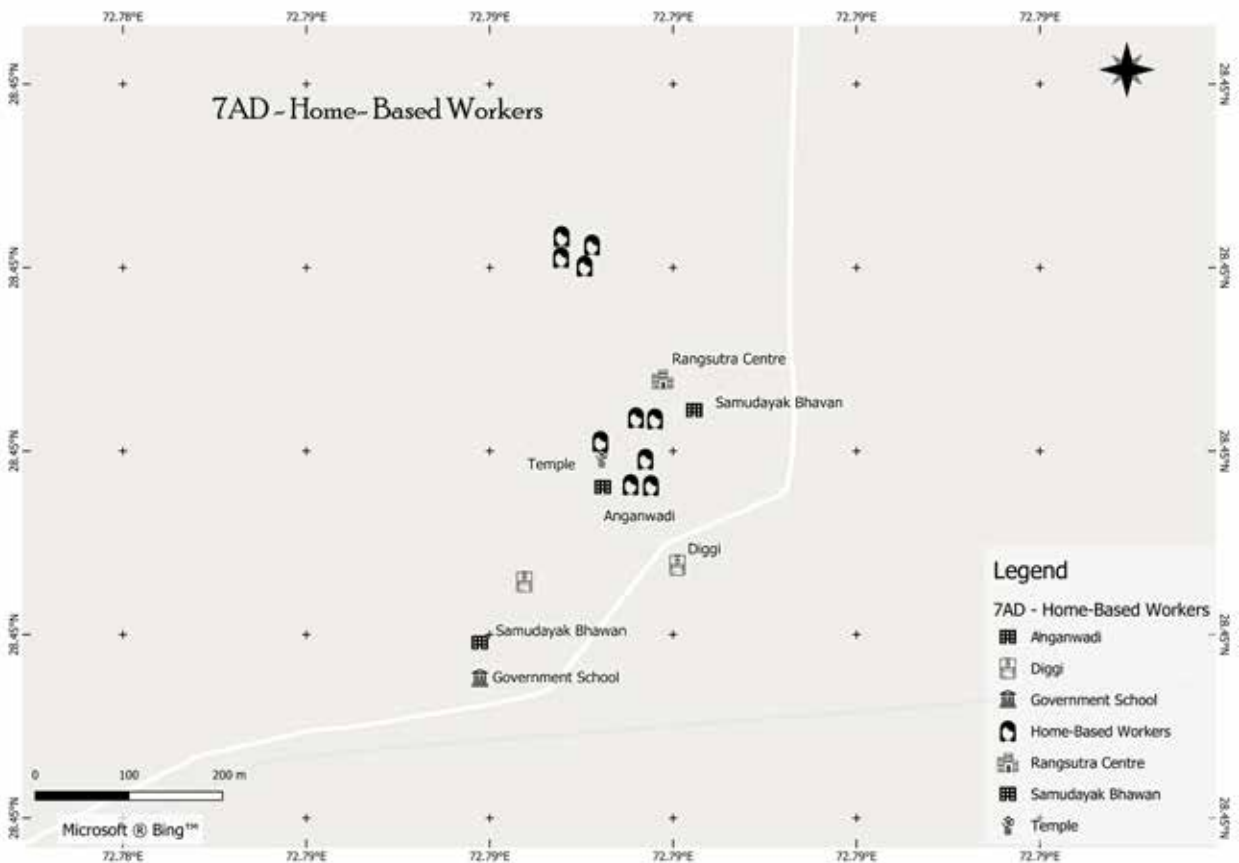


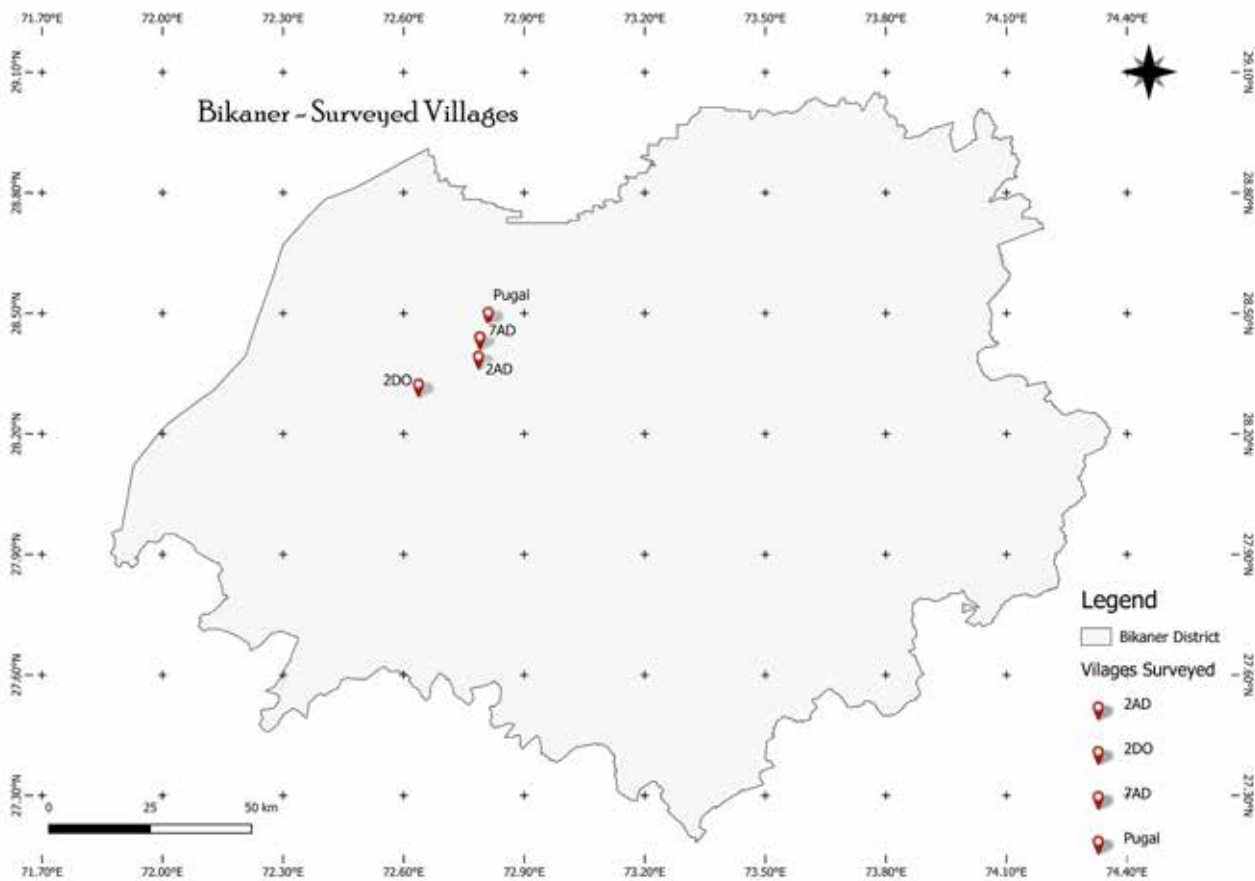
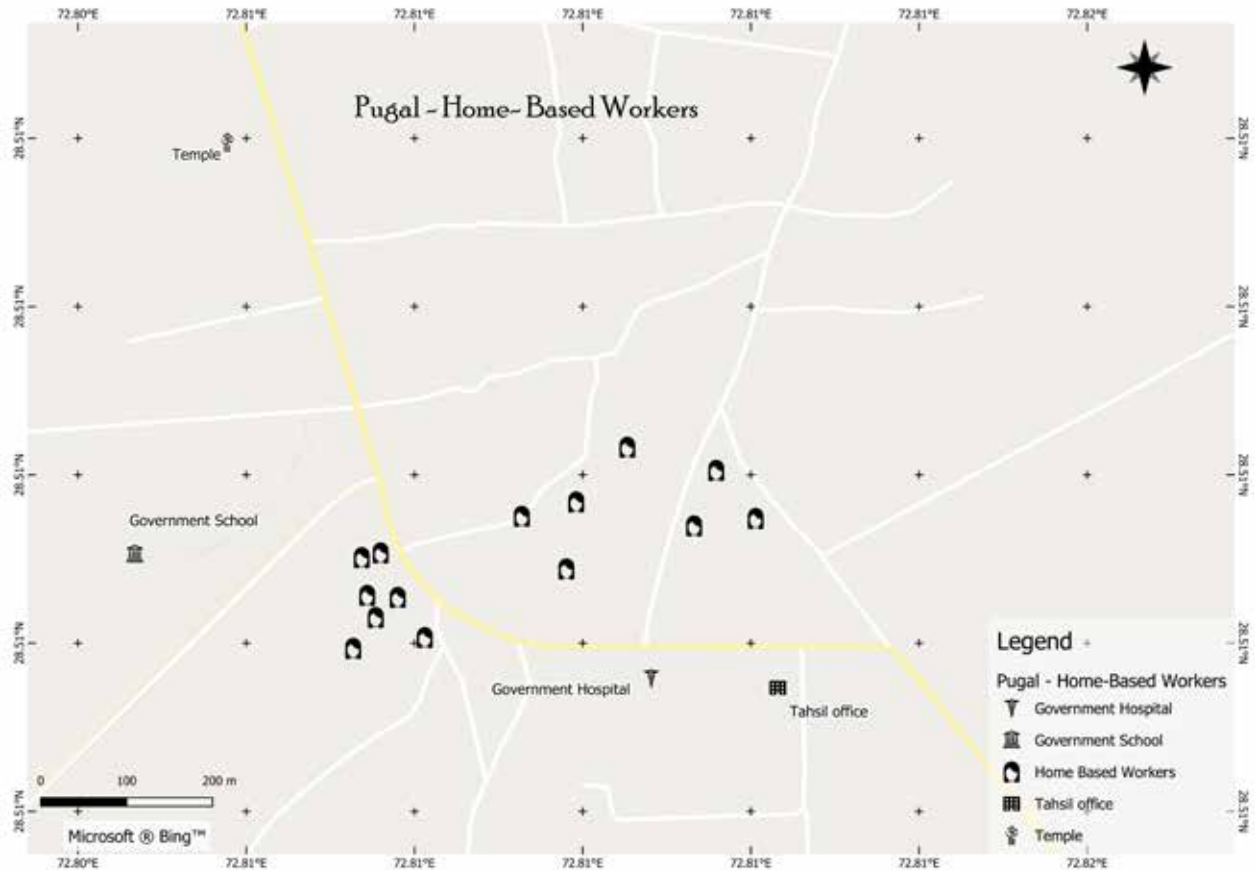


SURVEYED POINTS – BIKANER

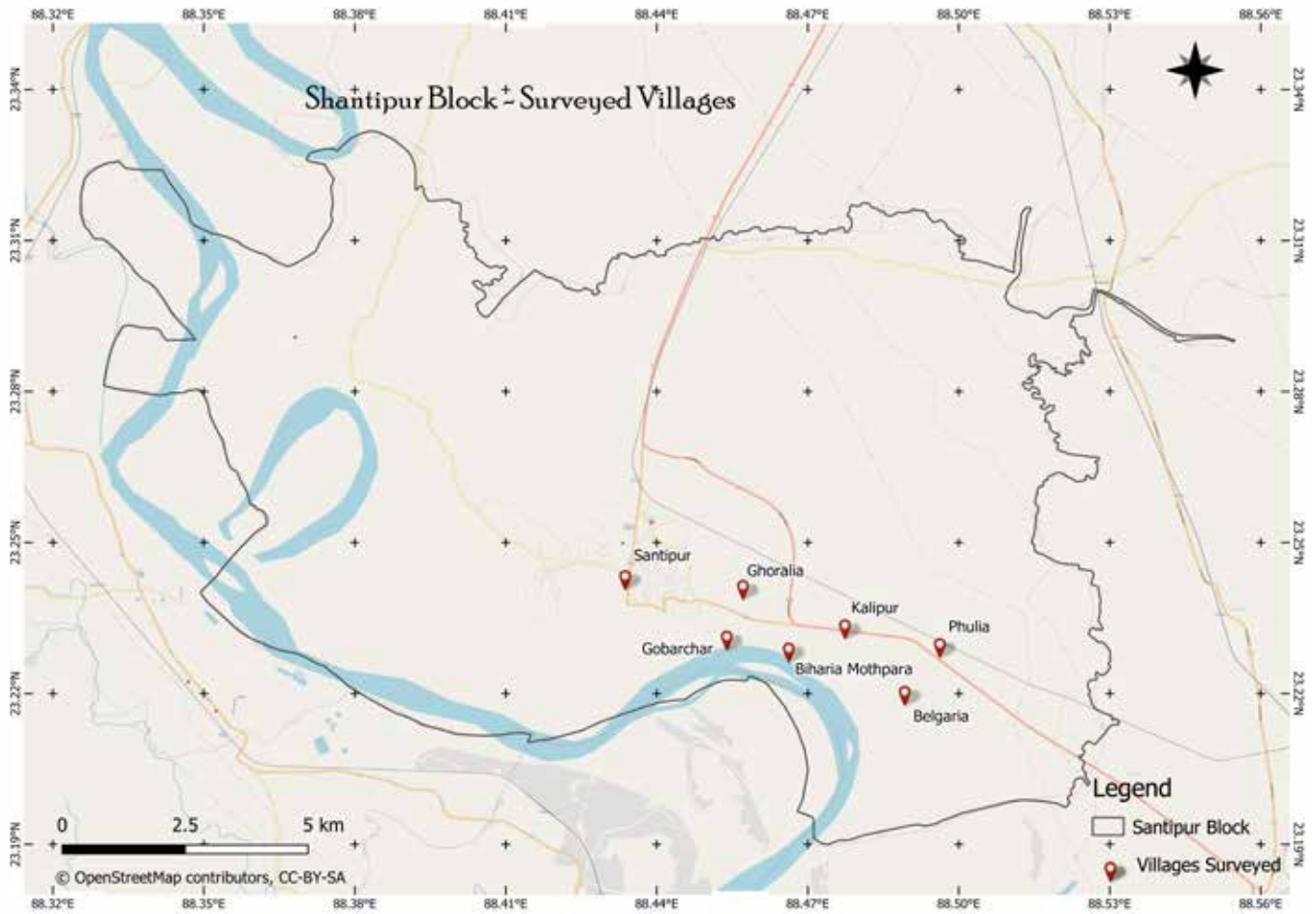


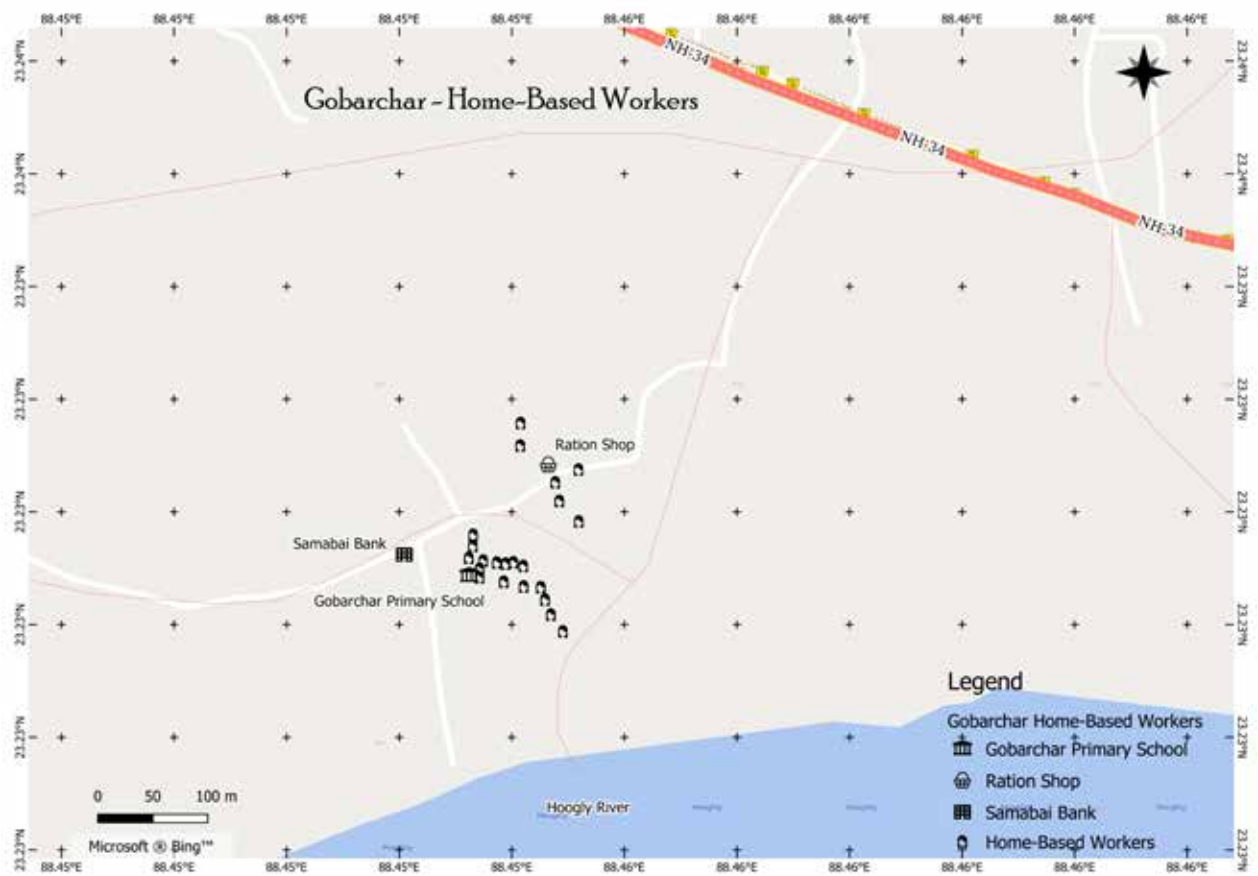


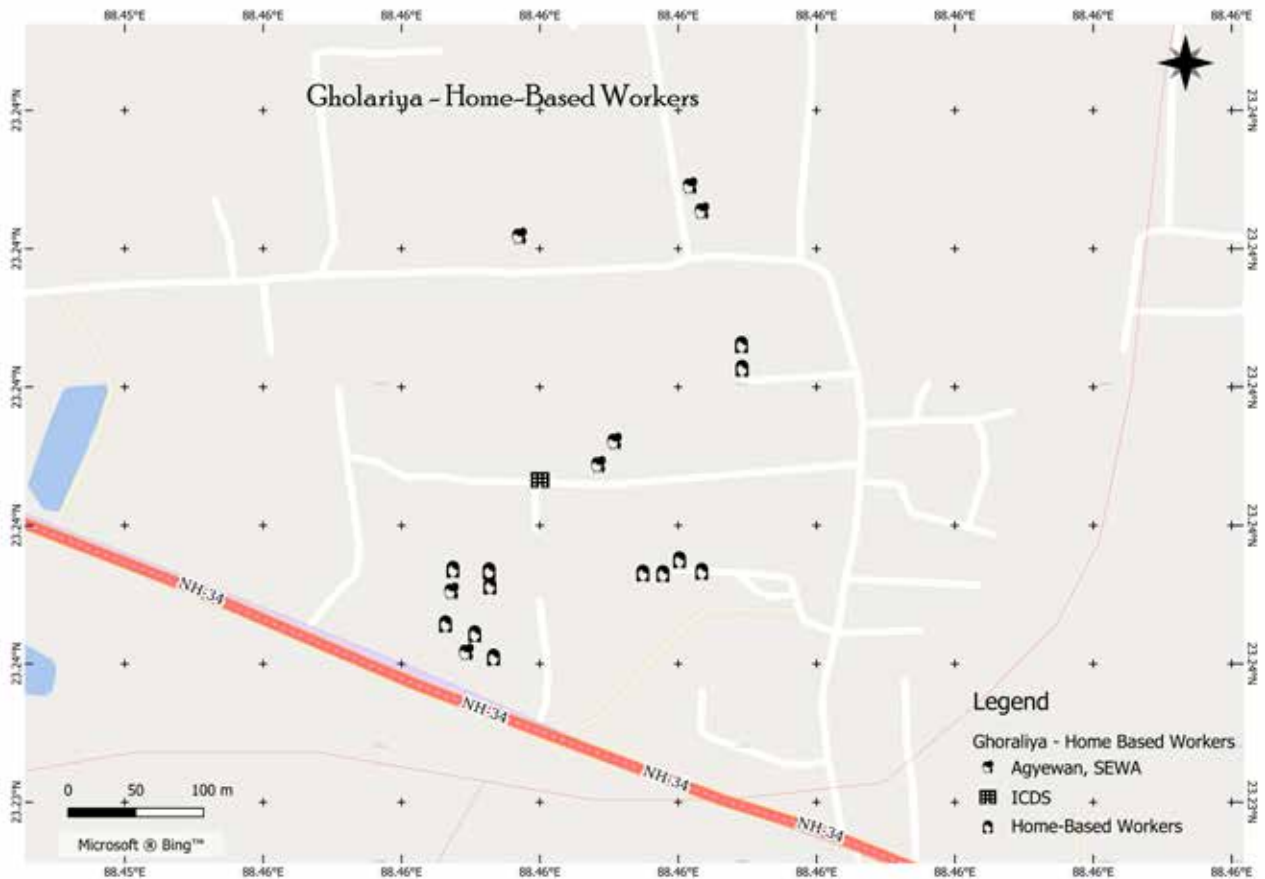
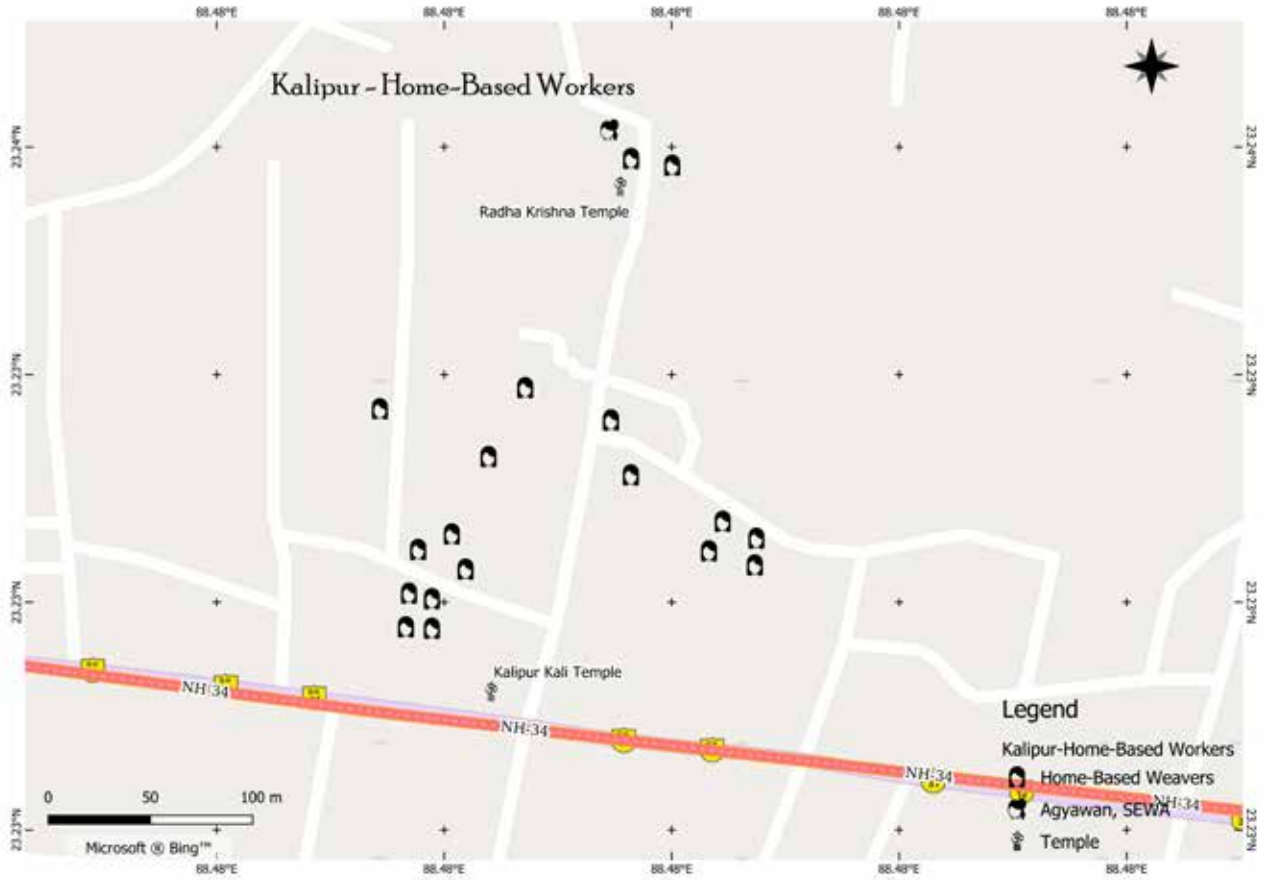




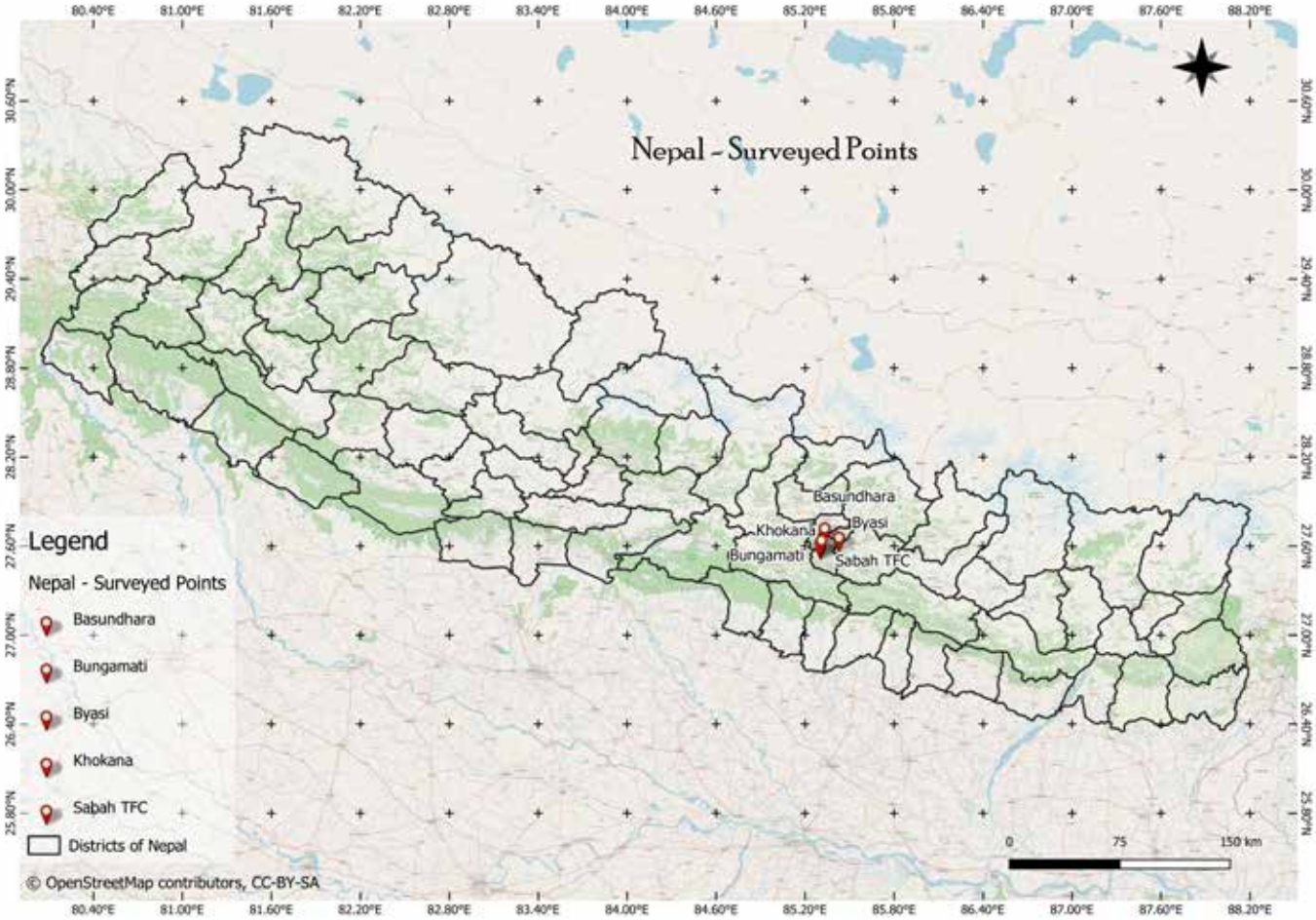
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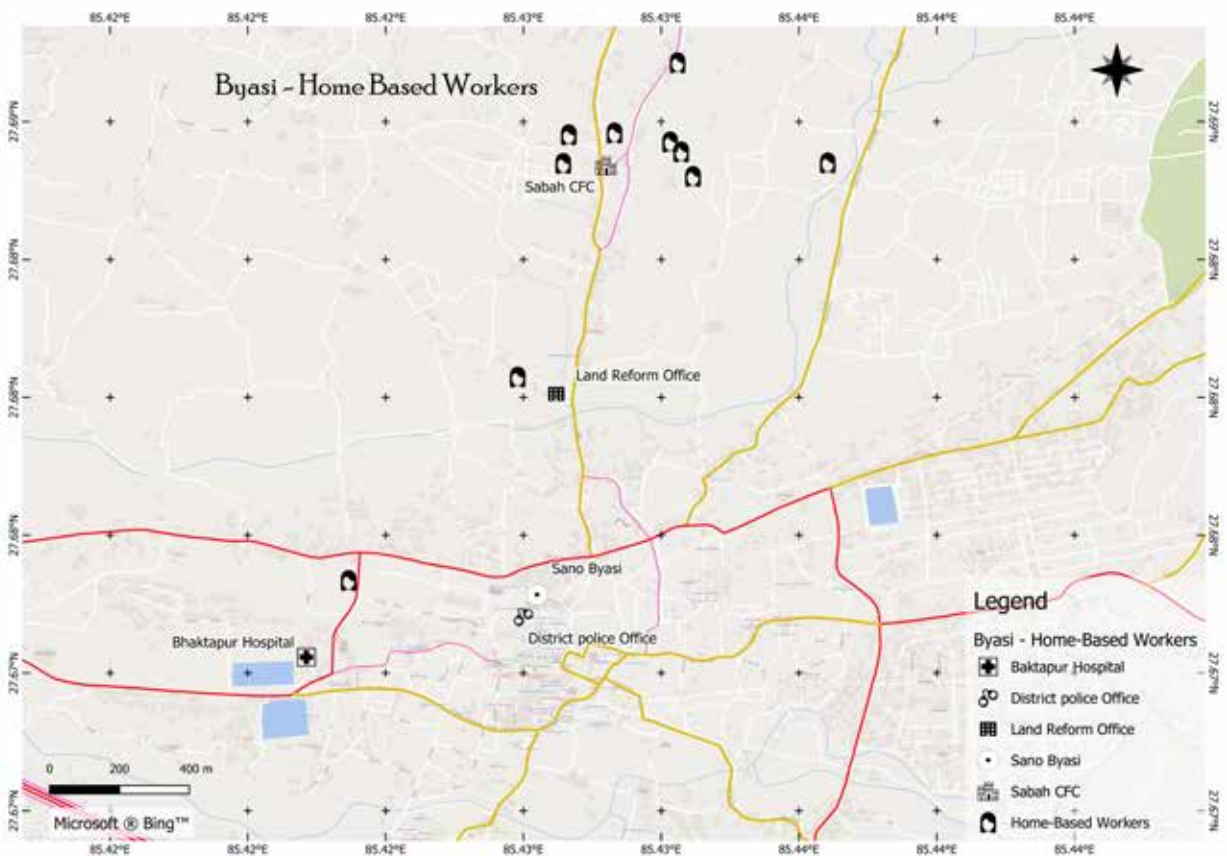
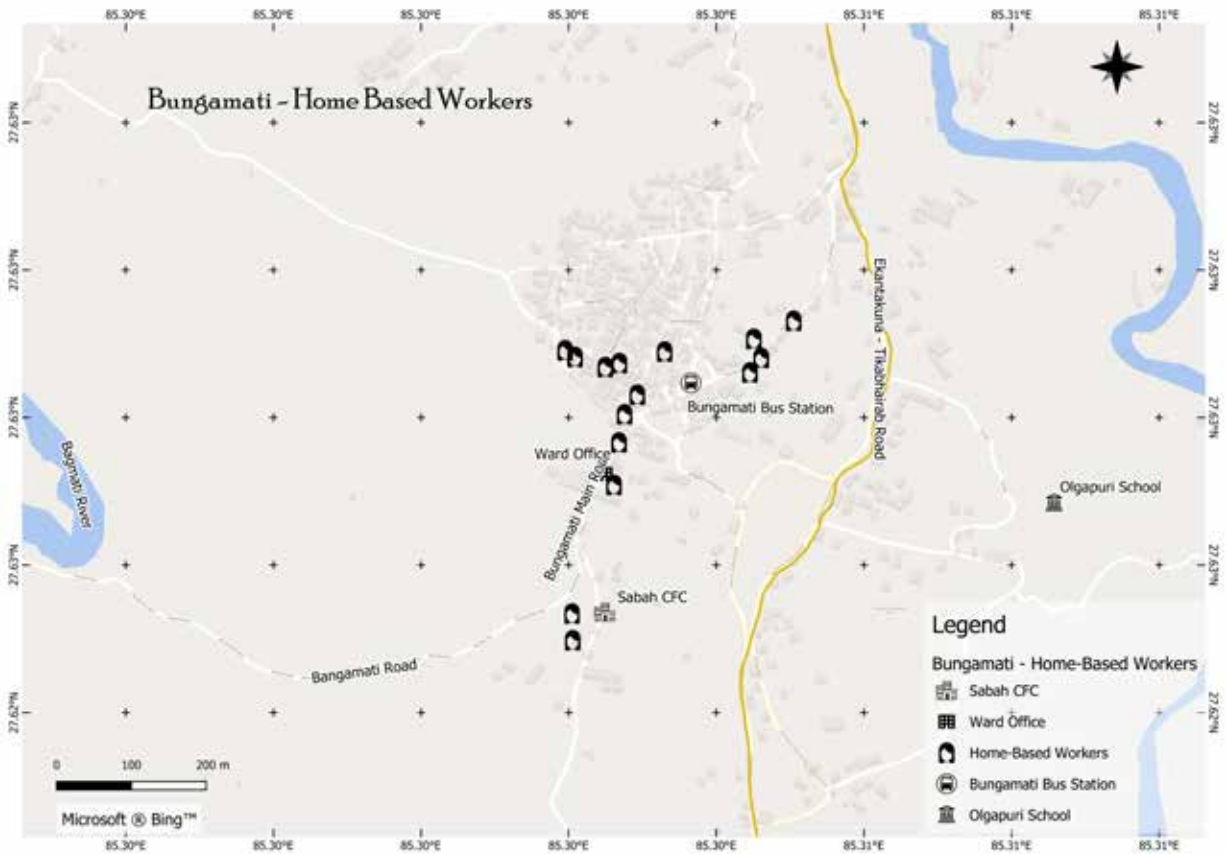


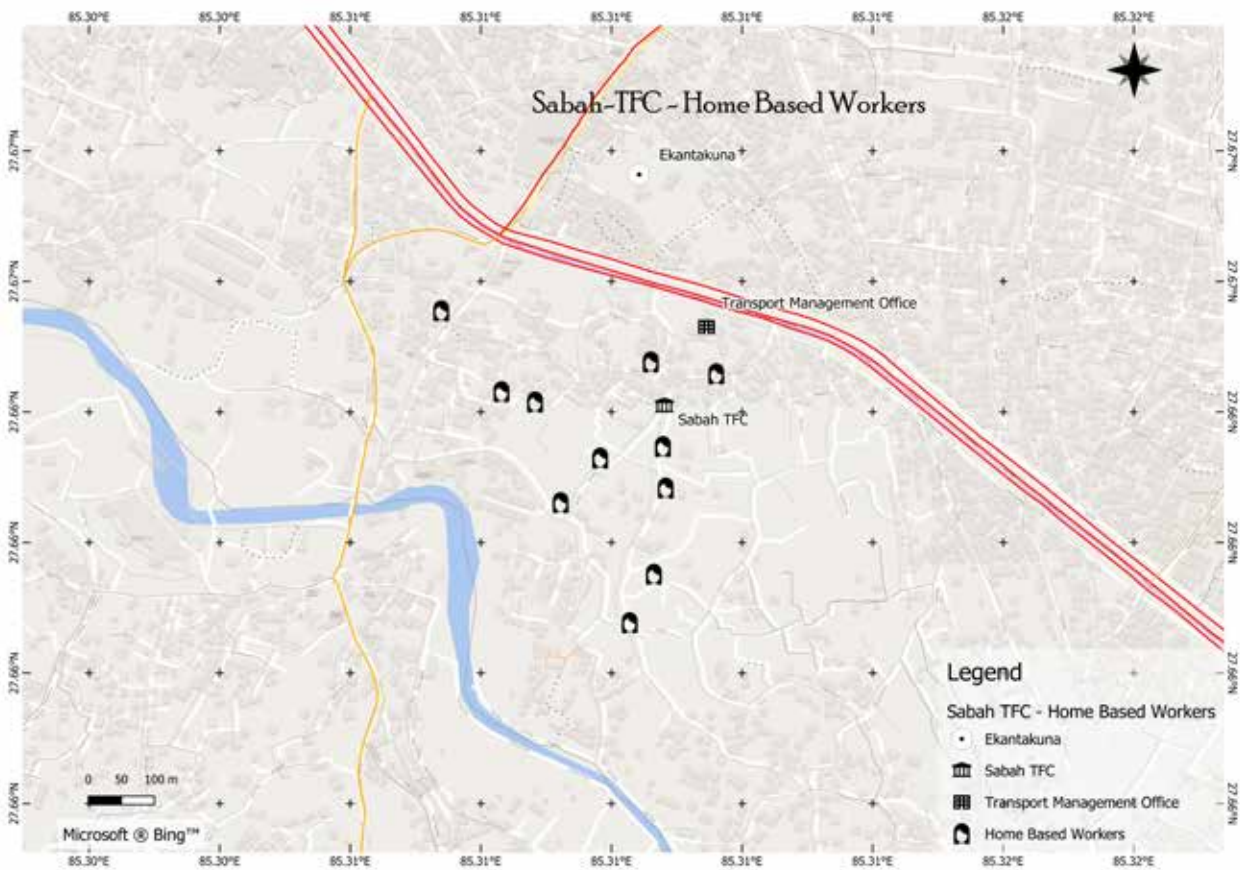
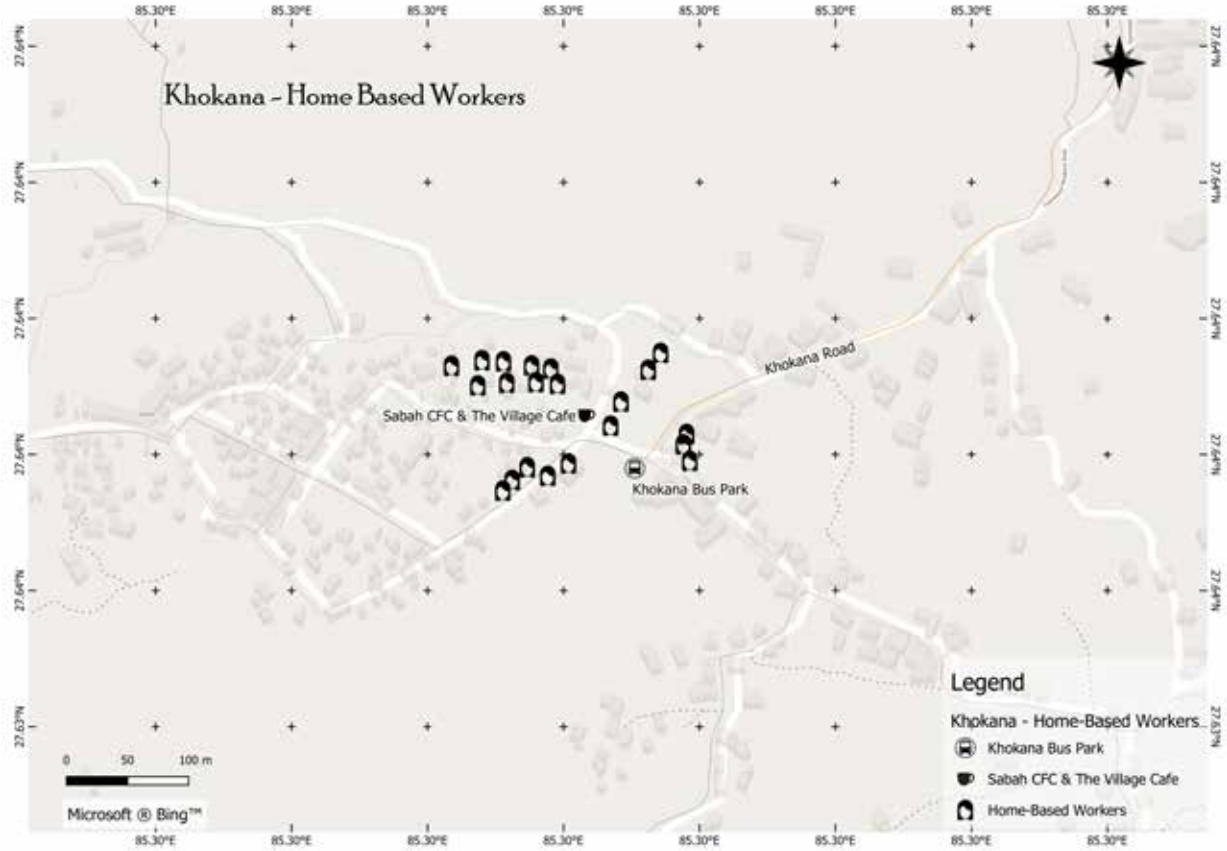


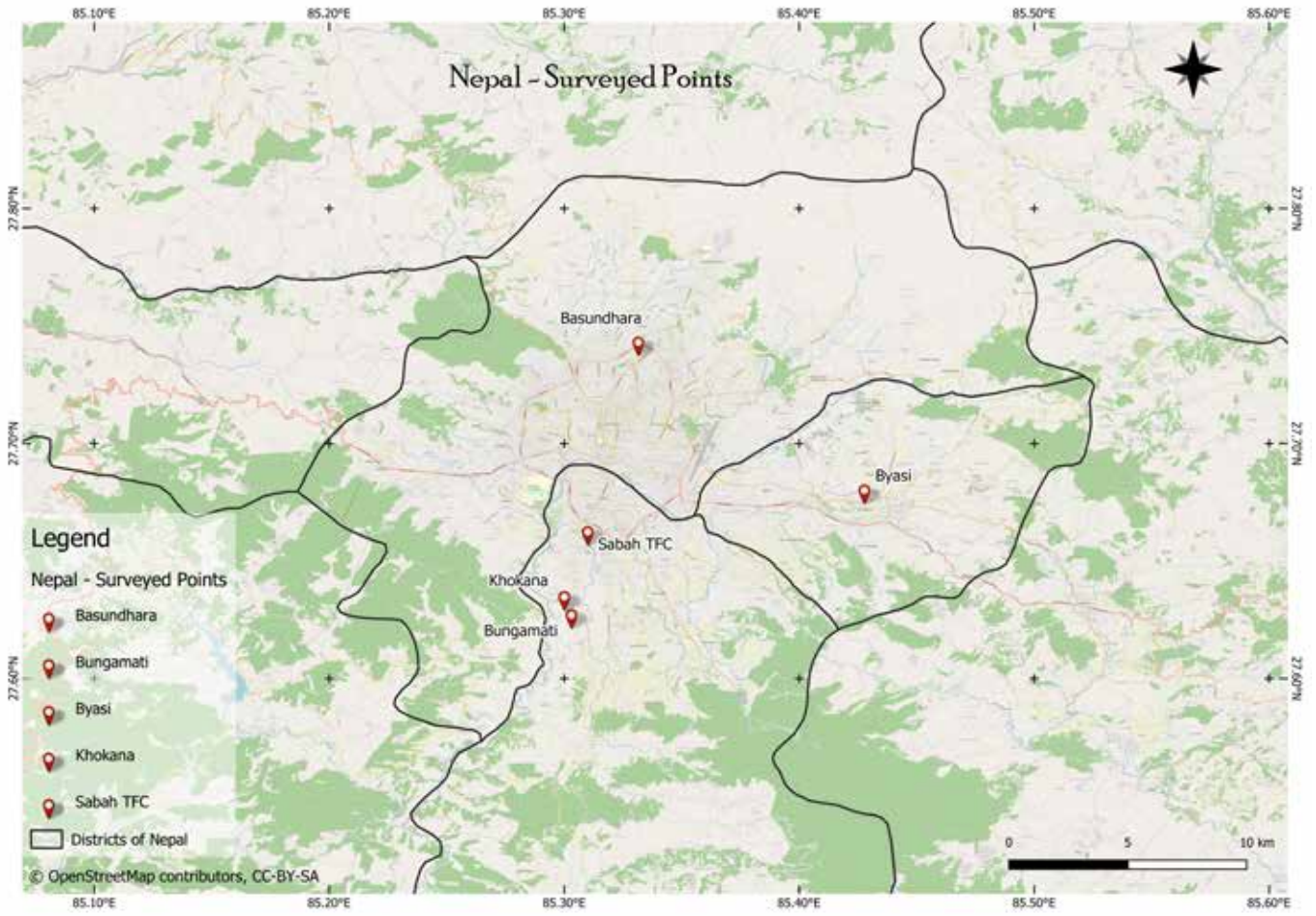


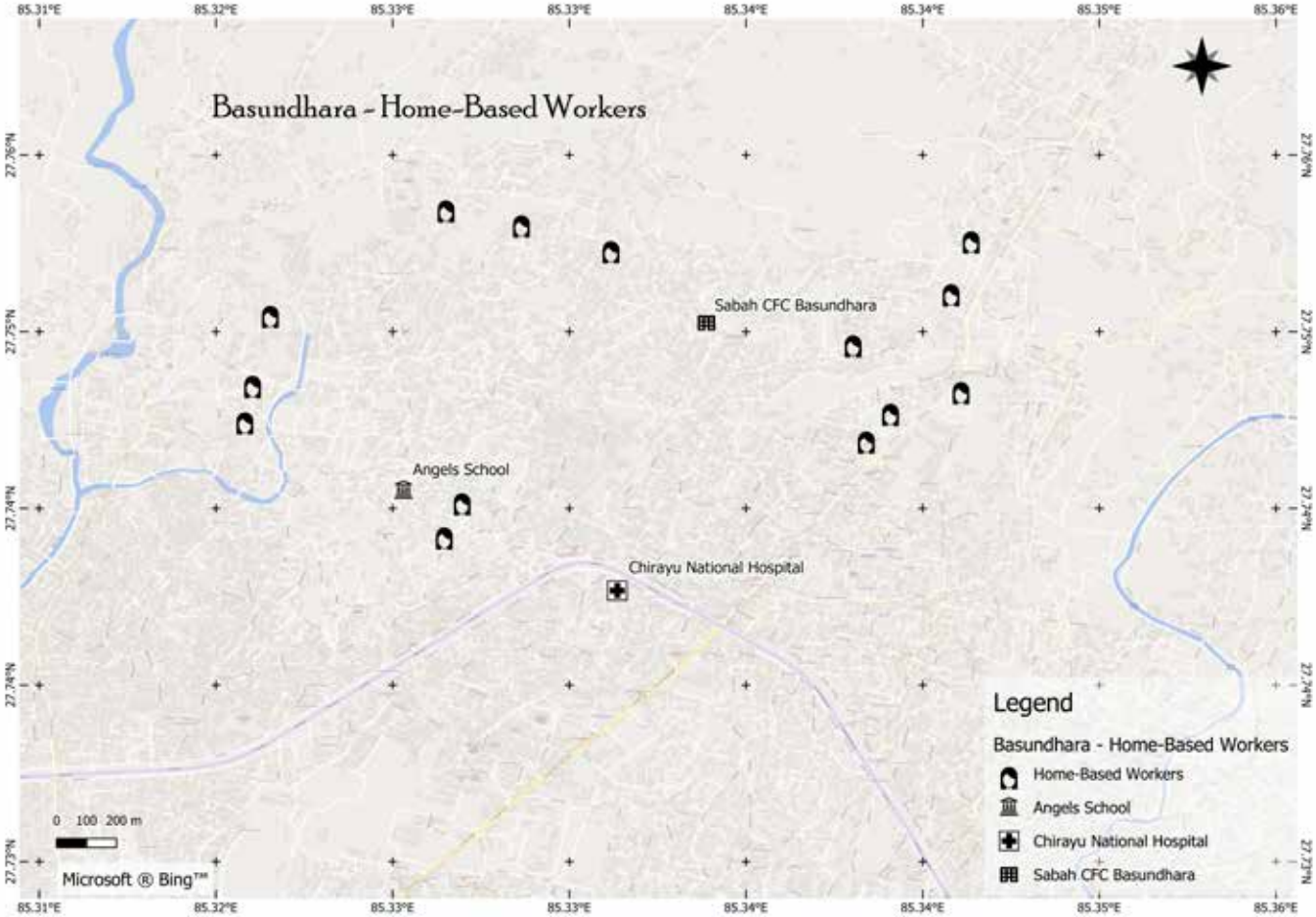
SURVEYED POINTS - NEPAL











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