

ADVOCACY BRIEF: STATE OF HOME-BASED WORKERS IN THE GARMENT AND FOOTWEAR SECTOR IN UGANDA, 2025



A homemaker from Uganda working outside her home.
 Photo credit: AYSO.

Background	
Study location	Bugiri, Bugweri, Jinja, Kamuli, Wakiso
Data collection period	April to June 2024
HBW respondents	61: 8 men, 53 women; 60 associated with AYSO or its groups, 7 leaders
Product activity	Tailoring, stitching, sewing/embellishing shoes, cutting patterns, repair, embroidery, sorting & packaging, weaving
Employment status	Purely homeworkers – 11%, Purely self-employed – 66%, Working on dual basis – 23%; over 80% engage in other work like farming, street vending, domestic tasks
Key informants	Senkumba James and AYSO team; Trade Unions ATGWU and UTGLAWU; and CBO TACDA
Organization	Afri-Youth Support Organisation (AYSO – registered as NGO)

As per the ILO¹, over 95 per cent of employment in Uganda is informal. Though Uganda aims to expand the presence of its garment sector at the global stage, it is able to use only 20% of its considerable cotton production domestically. The sector is dominated by informal micro-enterprises and individuals working from or near their homes - broadly categorised as home-based workers (HBWs). Over 20% of all labour in the country is employed in the textile sector, including large numbers of HBWs most of whom are women. The sector mainly serves the domestic market through individual and bulk sales. All study respondents work as HBWs; 7% also do some factory work, but informally.

¹ ILO Statistics on Informal Economy, Reference year 2021, ILO.

Key Challenges

- **Lack of comprehensive and regularly updated information on HBWs**, makes:
 - HBW contributions to the labour market and the national economy invisible
 - Policy formulation for HBWs challenging
- Low and precarious earnings result from insufficient work, low wages/piece-rates and delayed payments. In March 2024, average weekly earnings reported were **UGX 54,440 (USD 14.1)—less than half (47.7%)** of the living wage estimate of [Global Coalition for Living Wages](#).
- **Work is irregular, uncertain, and insufficient** due to acute competition from cheap, mass-produced second-hand clothing imports, poor access to raw materials and modern technology, and seasonal fluctuations in demand, for example for school uniforms. Additionally, women struggle with managing domestic responsibilities leaving them fewer hours for paid work than men. Work-related health problems like back pain and eye problems are reported widely (93%) and impair the ability to work.
- **Limited social welfare and lack of social protection** makes HBWs vulnerable. Informal workers are ineligible for national social security, health insurance, or maternity benefits. Public health services are limited and, if available, in remote areas could be understaffed.
- **Borrowing is an important coping mechanism** to cover essential expenses - over 77% borrowed to meet basic needs mostly for work inputs, children’s education, or food with limited access to formal credit, high interest charged by informal lenders. Average outstanding debt of all borrowers stood at UGX 672,171 (USD 174), equal to over 2 months of their March 2024 earnings.



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Key Recommendations

- **Strengthen data systems for evidence-based policy environment:** There is a need for data and research at national and local level across the sector to make visible the contributions of HBWs to the labour market and to the nation's GDP. Regularly count HBWs through census and other methods such as labour force and enterprise surveys; use data from these to develop a national registry of informal textile and garment workers for design and delivery of targeted programs; and support research on HBW issues including training needs, and access to raw materials, machinery, and markets; childcare support; and health services.
- **Build productive capacity of HBWs through training** in organization/business management, financial literacy and financial management skills, workers' rights, digitalization and marketing skills, needs to be emphasized and made accessible to strengthen HBWs and their organizations. Capacity-building design and pedagogies should evolve as per the existing and emerging needs of HBWs and include experiential learning, exposure, and refresher training.
- **Legal Recognition and Inclusion**
 - **Ratify ILO Convention 177** and formally recognize HBWs as workers for suitable change under national labour legislation.
 - **Formalize and encourage formation of HBW groups** to be the representative voice for design and implementation of HBW policies, such as: **Establishing fair payment mechanisms, Extending social protection schemes** - health insurance, maternity benefits, pensions - to informal HBWs and **Customizing policies and schemes** - credit, social protection and welfare, child care services, etc. - to address needs of HBWs, especially of women workers.
- **Strengthen Informal Worker Collectives and Representation:** Only 10% respondents report any understanding of worker rights. No specialised HBW organizations exist in Uganda as yet and traditional unions find it difficult to engage with informal workers to raise such awareness. Fund and facilitate the organization of HBWs into cooperatives, producer groups, or unions; support their training needs; and support collaboration between HBW groups, existing trade unions, and NGOs as a platform to facilitate capacity building of the informal HBWs to aid modernization of the sector.
- **Enable ease of business and access to finance:** There is a need to simplify compliance and documentation requirements for grassroots HBWs organisations/ groups/ individuals, to allow ease of doing business for growth. Additionally there is a need to make access to finance easier for HBWs to obtain working capital, suitable loan products with affordable interest rates and insurance, which can support them in building more resilient and self-reliant enterprises.
- **Support for market linkages:** Promote sale of HBWs products in government ministries, departments, agencies and local governments, through priority in government procurement systems and by simplifying public tendering processes. Market these products globally too. Further, organising exhibitions for marketing will not only serve as a forum for sale of products, but also a way for potential buyers to place orders.



A worker making footwear at her home in Uganda.
Photo credit: Afri Youth Support Organization (AYSO)

Conclusion

By adopting these recommendations, Uganda can create inclusive and equitable policies enabling a conducive environment for home-Based workers to contribute fully to the national economy.

This briefing is a publication of AYSO in partnership with HomeNet International and HomeBased Workers Network Uganda (HomeNet Uganda) and draws from HNI's global study.