Cambodia Home-Based Workers Association (CHWA)

Policy Brief 2025-2026

Supporting Home-Based Workers in Cambodia's Garment and Footwear Sector

Homeworkers from Cambodia working together at a workshop. Photo credit: CHWA

July 2025

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Executive Summary

Home-based workers (HBWs) in Cambodia's garment and footwear sector constitute a vital yet vulnerable workforce. Their ability to fully contribute to sector growth is hampered due to informal working conditions, low and irregular earnings, poor health, and limited access to social protection (HNI, 2024). This brief highlights key research findings from 2024 and proposes policy actions aligned with CHWA's mission and the principles of the Social Solidarity Economy (SSE) to improve their livelihoods and rights (CHWA Statutes, 2024; HNSEA, 2024).

Background and CHWA Mission

The garment and footwear sector is a cornerstone of Cambodia's economy, accounting for over 62% of exports and employing millions (HNI, 2024). Over 89% of employment in Cambodia is informal, with many HBWs—mostly women—engaged as subcontracted workers without formal recognition or social protection. The Cambodia Home-Based Workers Association (CHWA) was established to support these workers in achieving sustainable livelihoods, decent incomes, and social protection access (CHWA Statutes, 2024), absence of which makes sustained growth of the garment sector risky. CHWA promotes democratic governance, social solidarity, and capacity building to empower HBWs and transition them toward formal economy participation in line with Social Solidarity Economy principles (HNSEA, 2024). While traditionally focusing on own-account workers in handicrafts and garment sectors, CHWA has increasingly expanded its support to include home-based workers in the footwear sector, reflecting emerging opportunities in this important industry (CHWA Statutes, 2024).

Key Findings from 2024 Study

- HBWs predominantly work informally under subcontract without social protection, earning only about 31% of the minimum wage which is reflected in hunger reported by respondents for 28% adults and 16% children (HNI Study, 2024).
- Irregular work orders and household responsibilities cause income instability, leading many to rely on supplementary activities to sustain their families.
- The health burdens are significant, with widespread reports of back pain, eyesight problems, and respiratory ailments caused or worsened by their working conditions.
- The average debt burden is alarmingly high, with 93% borrowing to cover basic needs and debts equaling nearly four years of March 2024 earnings (HNI Study, 2024).
- Limited awareness of worker rights and the absence of organization restrict HBWs' ability to collectively bargain or advocate for better conditions.
- Moreover, government social protection schemes have limited reach to HBWs due to high contribution costs and administrative barriers (HNI Study, 2024; CHWA Statutes, 2024).

Policy Recommendations

1. Formal Recognition and Inclusion

   Recognize home-based workers in labor statistics and national policies to accurately capture their numbers and needs, to establish employer responsibility for formal contracts, fair compensation, suitable working conditions. Support regular research on homeworker issues.

2. Inclusive Social Protection

   Expand and adapt social protection programs to cover informal workers affordably, simplifying access and lowering contribution barriers.

3. Health and Occupational Safety Interventions

   Develop targeted health programs to address prevalent ailments and ensure access to affordable healthcare.

4. Income Stability Measures

   Promote fair payment practices and support HBWs' collective organization to negotiate better terms.

5. Recognition and support for homeworker organizations

   - Collaborate and consult with HBW organizations to represent homeworker interests in policy formulation and implementation, in collective bargaining with work-providing brands and companies; and in identification of research issues relevant to homeworkers, for instance, time and motion studies of specific activities to determine minimum wages.
   - Facilitate the formation of HBW organizations and savings groups to strengthen collective voice, improve rights awareness, and enhance market and social service access.

6. Multi-sectoral Government Collaboration

   Encourage coordinated government action among relevant ministries to holistically address HBWs' needs.

Conclusion

Home-based workers are integral to Cambodia's garment and footwear sectors but face significant socio-economic vulnerabilities. CHWA calls on government agencies, industry stakeholders, development partners, and allied organizations such as Oxfam, IDEA, and others working in related sectors to adopt inclusive policies that formalize HBW work, provide social protection, and strengthen worker organization. Such coordinated actions, grounded in the principles of the Social Solidarity Economy, will not only advance decent work, social justice, and sustainable livelihoods for Cambodia's HBW community but also ensure risk-free sustained growth of the sector.

References

- *Home-Based Workers in the Garment and Footwear Sector, Global Research Study 2024, HomeNet International (HNI Study).*
- *Statutes of Cambodia Home-Based Workers Association (CHWA), April 2024.*
- *HomeNet Southeast Asia (HNSEA) Policy Brief on Social Solidarity Economy, 2024.*
- *Exchange Rates Data: USD-KHR average March 2024, https://www.exchange-rates.org/.*

HomeNet Cambodia (HNC/CHWA) is affiliated with HomeNet Southeast Asia (HNSEA), *a sub-regional network of membership-based organizations representing informal home-based workers across Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Its mission is to empower organized home-based workers to democratically govern and manage self-sustaining organizations and networks at both national and sub-regional levels.*

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