

## Women actions through FPAR

Through the Labour FPAR, the Home-based Workers Union (HBWU) worked to: 1) strategise ways to advocate for the prompt implementation of the Sindh Home Based Workers Act; 2) build capacity and increase women workers' knowledge of their legal rights; and 3) attract and recruit new members to the union in order to continue to foster movement building.

The Labour FPAR was conducted in five communities in Hyderabad and in one location in Karachi. Through the Labour FPAR, women home-based workers (HBWs) were able to share their lived realities and identify major problems that they face within the industry, specifically regarding the consequences that this line of work has on their health and safety.

Government action is required in order to end the continuous exploitation of the labour of women HBWs, increase their bargaining power and ensure that women workers receive fair wages in line with ILO standards on decent work.

## Recommendations

### To the Government of Pakistan:

- **Implement the 2018 Sindh Home Based Workers Act<sup>1</sup> without any delay. Make a clear and transparent process of registering women HBWs under the new law.**
- **Ratify the International Labour Organisation's (ILO's) Home Work Convention No.177 and the Domestic Workers Convention C189.**

### To the private sector:

- **Increase the wages for piece-rate work and work towards upholding national minimum wage rates for women HBWs.**

### To HBWs groups at the regional level:

- **Come together in solidarity and develop common and holistic strategies to address joint health and wage concerns of HBWs.**

<sup>1</sup> It is a law in the province of Pakistan, Sindh, which protects the rights of workers who carry out remunerative work within their homes or in their surroundings.

### About the Home-based Workers Union (HBWU)

The Home Based Workers Union is an informal union of home based women workers and domestic workers in Hyderabad, Pakistan. Its aim is to empower and organise home based women workers for better labour practices.

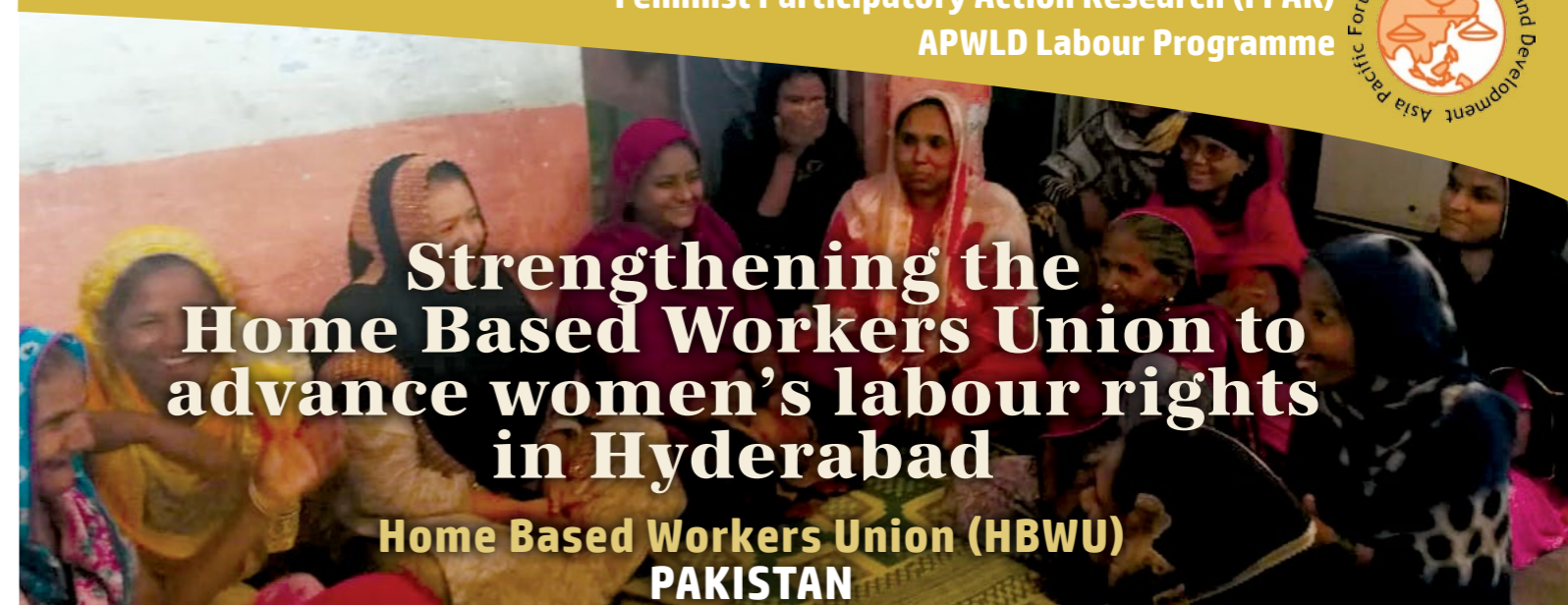
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### Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

Website: [www.apwld.org](http://www.apwld.org)  
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APWLD, a regional feminist and women's rights organisation with 252 members in 27 countries in Asia and the Pacific. This FPAR is part of APWLD's Labour Programme. APWLD worked with and supported 11 partner organisations from nine countries to conduct FPAR on women's labour rights in Asia and the Pacific between 2017 and 2019.



## The situation of home-based workers (HBWs) in Hyderabad, Pakistan

There are approximately 20 million home-based workers in Pakistan, out of which, 12 million workers are women. Home-based work usually refers to work that is sourced by big factories through middlemen and contractors, and conducted within the confines of the home.<sup>1</sup> This line of work involves various types of tasks including stitching, fusing, embroidery, packaging and the production of bangles, clothes and plastic toys. Women HBWs are not part of the formal economy and are therefore not covered by existing labour laws and accompanying entitlements such as a minimum wage or welfare services. Furthermore, wages are paid on a piece-rate basis or per unit of production. When compared to national minimum wage rates, the daily wage of HBWs amounts to less than one-tenth of the national minimum wage. As a direct result of chronic low wages and the lack of social protection, a majority of women HBWs live in poverty.

After years of advocacy on the part of trade unions and activists, the Sindh province recognised home-based work and enacted the 2018 Sindh Home Based Workers Act. The act is an important development because it is the first of its kind to recognise home-based work as actual work and it further serves to provide women workers with a legitimate basis to continue to advocate for their rights. The Act aims to roll out a registration system which shall make women HBWs eligible for various grants and benefits. Under the new law, the state may set up an arbitration committee that considers any queries or disputes that HBWs may face, i.e. occupational safety and health or wage related issues. Furthermore, the law aspires to set up a fund to finance welfare projects for HBWs. However, the Sindh Home Based Workers Act is yet to be implemented and the practical aspects of its enforcement to serve the HBWs still remain a concern.

## HBWU's Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR)

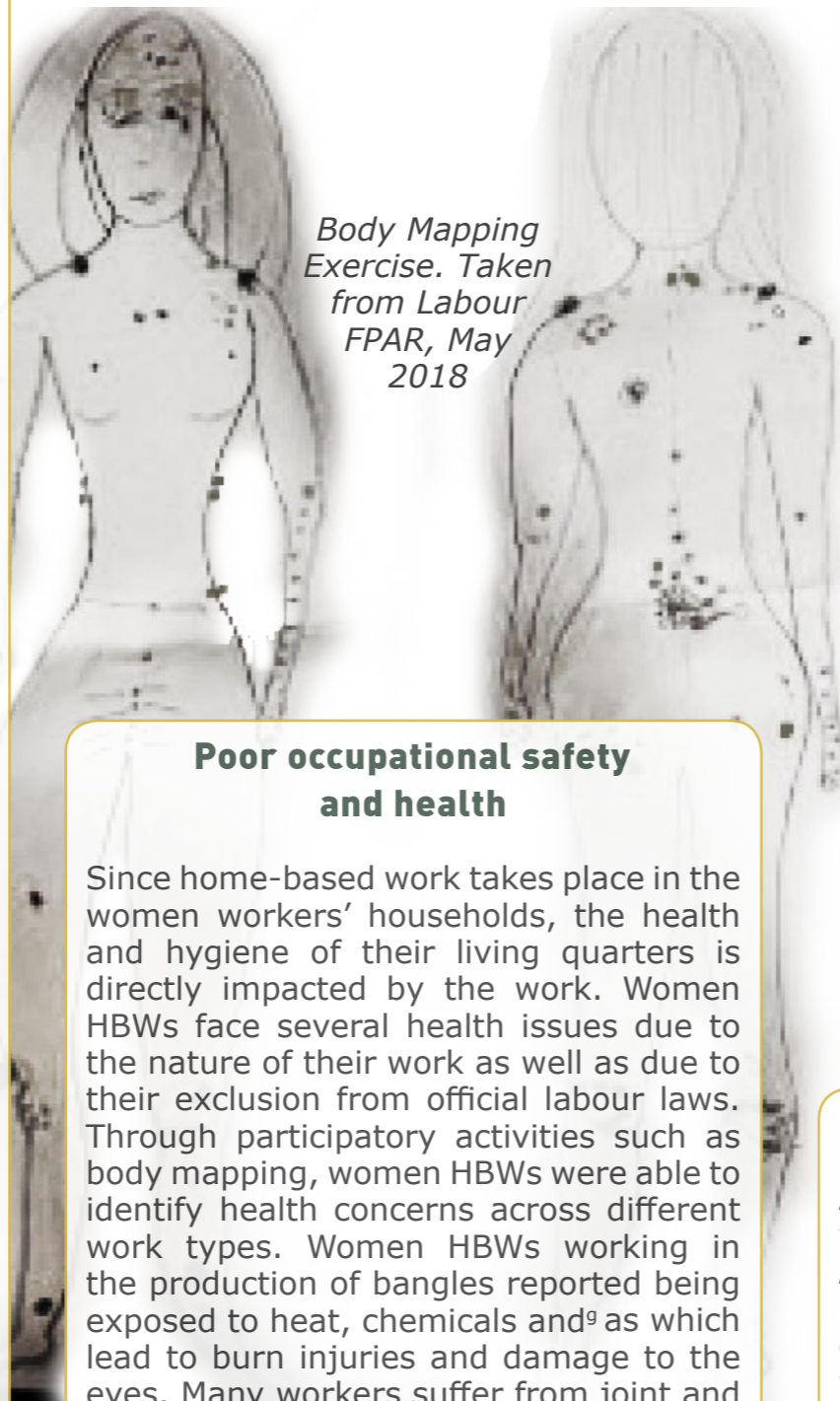
A Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) was conducted to explore the situations of HBWs and the issues that women workers face. Women HBWs from five communities in Hyderabad and one site in Karachi participated in the FPAR initiatives between March 2018 - March 2019. The data was generated through a number of participatory data collection methods including surveys, focus group discussions, interviews, observations, workshops and literature reviews.

<sup>1</sup> Hassan, S.M. & Azman, A. (2014). Visible Work, Invisible Workers: A Study of Women Home Based Workers in Pakistan. *International Journal of Social Work and Human Services Practice*. 2 (2), 48-55. doi: 10.13189/ijrh.2014.020207

**Below-subsistence wages**

The minimum daily wage for 'unskilled' workers in Pakistan is PKR500 (USD3.20)<sup>2</sup>. Since women HBWs belong to the informal labour sector, they are not covered by official labour laws that ensure a minimum wage. In comparison, the wages of women HBWs lie between one-tenth and one-third of the minimum wage standards in Pakistan. The women workers are paid on a piece-rate basis, meaning that they do not get an hourly wage and are instead paid per unit of production. For instance, some women workers involved in bangle-making processes (such as levelling, melding and joining, decorating) recount that the initial minimum wage is a mere PKR1. (USD0.001) per kilogram and the maximum wage is PKR5 (USD0.032) per kilogram. Other women workers engaged in confectionary packaging stated that they are paid PKR1 (USD0.006) per kilogram. These below-subsistence wages are insufficient for women HBWs to provide for themselves, let alone their families. Furthermore, women HBWs revealed that they have been subject to wage deductions, overtime work without pay and threatened with termination whenever they questioned unfair practices by employers and middlemen. Another major issue is that women HBWs have limited bargaining power to negotiate for higher wages as these are decided by contractors and employers whom the women are highly dependent upon.

<sup>2</sup> Set forth by the Minimum Wages for Unskilled Workers Ordinance, 1969 (W.P. Ord. XX of 1969)



*Body Mapping Exercise. Taken from Labour FPAR, May 2018*

**Poor occupational safety and health**

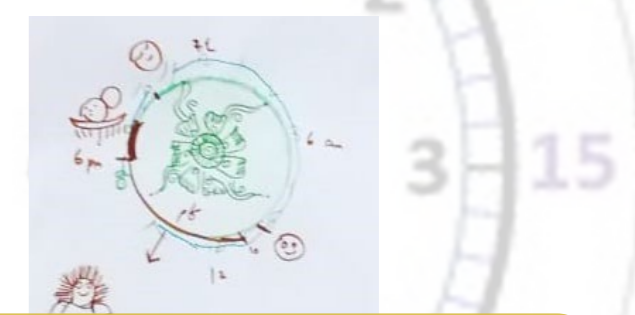
Since home-based work takes place in the women workers' households, the health and hygiene of their living quarters is directly impacted by the work. Women HBWs face several health issues due to the nature of their work as well as due to their exclusion from official labour laws. Through participatory activities such as body mapping, women HBWs were able to identify health concerns across different work types. Women HBWs working in the production of bangles reported being exposed to heat, chemicals and<sup>9</sup> as which lead to burn injuries and damage to the eyes. Many workers suffer from joint and back pain from having to sit in squatting for long hours during work. A majority of women HBWs face two types of health risks - ergonomic risks related to poor posture and exposure risks due to toxic substances.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Chen, M.A. & Sinha, S. (2016). Home-based workers and cities. *Environment and Urbanization*. 28(2), 343-358. doi: 10.1177/0956247816649865

**Time consuming labour**

Through the 24-hour daily activity clock exercise, women HBWs developed a shared understanding of how women spend their time. The data collected through this participatory method confirmed that women workers have very little personal time to take care of their own needs. For instance, women workers engaged in cutting dates reported that cutting five kilograms of dates takes up 24 hours of labour. This work not only requires the assistance of up to two other workers, it also involves time consuming processes such as soaking the dates overnight, crushing the dates to extract the pit in the morning, wiping the date pulp dry, leaving them to dry and finally cutting the dates with scissors for hours on end. The rate for cutting five kilograms of dates during a 24-hour work cycle is PKR50-R60, which is less than USD0.50. The low wages that women HBWs receive do not correspond with the time and labour intensive work that they engage in.

*24-hour daily activity clocks drawn by women home based workers in Pakistan, May 2018*



**Lack of access to social protection and public services**

According to ILO figures, more than 68 per cent of workers in Asia and the Pacific region work in the informal sector.<sup>6</sup> Within the field of home-based work, women workers in South Asia are significantly overrepresented. In Pakistan, 65 percent of total women workers are HBWs meanwhile it is only 4 percent of total men workers are HBWs.<sup>7</sup> Around 80 percent of Pakistan's social protection expenditure is funneled into pensions and social security which disproportionately benefits workers in the formal sector. Since there are more male workers employed in the formal labour sector than female workers, the majority of women workers do not have access to social protection, health coverage or a minimum wage. Yet, women HBWs contribute greatly to the national economy, at the risk of their own health and safety, and should be recognised as labourers and accorded the same rights and entitlements that other workers enjoy.

<sup>6</sup> ILO. (2018). More than 68 per cent of the employed population in Asia-Pacific are in the informal economy. Retrieved from: [https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS\\_627585/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS_627585/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>7</sup> ILO. (2010). Recognising and supporting home-based workers : South Asian Regional consultation on national policy for home-based workers in Pakistan. Retrieved from: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-islamabad/documents/publication/wcms\\_122320.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-islamabad/documents/publication/wcms_122320.pdf)

**Child labour**

Despite the fact that the Constitution of Pakistan<sup>4</sup> prohibits child labour, forced labour and all forms of slavery, child labour remains a rampant problem in Pakistan. According to a national labour force survey from 2010-2011, around 5.7 million children between the ages of 10-17 are in employment.<sup>5</sup> Many child workers work in the informal sector, including in home-based work, which severely restricts the reach of labour laws. Since home-based work affects the health of women workers and often requires the assistance of immediate family members, many young girls are forced to undertake home-based work to assist their mothers. As a result, a majority of girls are deprived of schooling and the gendered inter-generational legacy of home-based work is re-produced.

<sup>4</sup> Article 11, Section 3 of The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan stipulates that 'No child below the age of fourteen years shall be engaged in any factory or mine or any hazardous employment.'  
<sup>5</sup> Khan, S. & Lyon, S. (2015). *Measuring Children's Work in South Asia*. Retrieved from: [http://www.ucw-project.org/attachment/wcms\\_35937120150414\\_124838.pdf](http://www.ucw-project.org/attachment/wcms_35937120150414_124838.pdf)