

Stories and Demands of HBW members
of
SEWA BHARAT



Muktara
Murshisdabad, West
Bengal
Bidi roller and garment
worker

Story - Among developing countries, India was the worst affected with polio prior to its decline in the 1990s though India achieved polio free status in January 2011. **Muktara** was born in 1986 in Murshidabad. At the age of two, she contacted polio in her hand along with 14 other children in her community-a small village Ranjitpur in Murshidabad, West Bengal. Muktara never gave up on life. With full determination she studied till class seven, until she was married off to her first cousin at the age of 15. She became a mother at the age of 16 and thereafter had three more children. She learnt how to roll bidis within her community. The whole district practically had only one trade for women –rolling bidis . In 2006, she joined SEWA, and enrolled into a stitching class in Murshidabad. Muktara was one of the early students and attended a six months course. She managed to spin the wheel in the sewing machine with her polio affected hand. Her husband never approved of her attending skills training, let alone making a living out of it. Without antagonizing him , she continued the classes and saved in her SHG. She could barely save INR 30 from the house each month. She was regular in her savings. She waited till she could buy a second hand machine. She started by using a small space in SEWA office gradually getting orders at her home too. Early morning she would come and display her products. Slowly, women started buying her product. She increased her savings to INR 100 p.m. She started saving from her income. Her husband still discouraged her, yet she continued.

Six months back she lost her husband due to electric shock in a pole. She continued her business with determination. She has set up a small shop and displays outside her house with great pride. She doubled her savings and borrowed from her group to buy a new machine and material. She has no complaint about her polio affected hand as she does not find it difficult to stitch, though she prefers to hide it.

“I know I have the skill to be an entrepreneur. I want to open a tailoring shop and employ two-three women in my shop. I need livelihood loan at low interest to start my shop.”



“My name is Dolly Das. I am 33 years old. I live in Raghunathganj, Piarapur village, West Bengal. I work as a weaver and a beedi roller. I have been working as a weaver for over 17 years. My husband is also a weaver. Though he lost one leg in an accident and since then he can't work for long hours. As home-based workers we have to keep looking for work, as we don't get the same work throughout the year. And, if we don't constantly search for work, we would be unemployed. There is no minimum wages for us.

“My demand from is from the government to ensure minimum wages and work through out the year. I also urge them to provide us with weaver's card and timely benefits.”



“I am Mehu Tajo bibi. I am 45 year old. I am a beedi roller. I live in Raghunathganj, Sanmatinagar village, West Bengal. I have been working as a beedi roller for the past 30 years. I was married at the age of 14 years. A few years back my husband met with an accident and lost his vision. Since then, he is unable to work. I financially support my husband and two daughters.”

“On the eve of International Home-based Workers Day, I demand government, to provide the all welfare schemes for beedi workers on time.”



Hasina
60 years
Bandhej Worker

“My name is Hasina. I am 60 years old. I work as a *bandhej* worker. I live in Sanjay Nagar slums in Jaipur. I have been working as a *bandhej* worker since I was 16 years old. There is little money in this work. Due to the continuous work over the years, my eyes and my back hurt constantly. I have brought up nine children doing this work. Despite my poor health, I continue working to cover my own personal expenses. I receive old age pension of INR 500, which barely covers my health expenses.”

“On the eve of International Home-Based Workers’ Day, I urge the government to provide substantial pension and medical insurance for home-based workers like us. I would also like to request the government if they could provide us with interest free loans to open small shops, so we don’t have to continue doing strenuous work in our old age.”



Boondi Beba
50 years
Bandhej Worker

“My name is Boondi Beba. I am 50 years old. I work as a *bandhej* worker. I live in Rajiv Nagar slums of Jaipur. I have been working as a *bandhej* worker for over 35 years. 15 years back my husband passed away. Since then I had to take the financial responsibility for the family. I have five children. I have no other means of income apart from making *bandhej*. Now, there is lesser work and more workers in the sector. I barely earn enough to feed my five children.

As a home-based worker I demand the government to provide us with quality subsidized medical facility and old age pension. I don't want to be dependent on anyone, once I can barely work.”



Mubina
45 years
Bangle maker

“My name is Mubina. I am 45 years old. I live in the slums of Shastri Nagar, Jaipur. I work as a bangle maker. I have been making bangles since the age of 10 years. These bangles are made in a furnace. Therefore, the expenses on making it are more than the selling price. I spend about INR 30-40 on coal every two days. I have been trying to shift to another type of bangle making in which the contractor provides us with the material and we stick decorative material on it. Though by making these sort of bangles, we are exposed to chemicals which give us headaches and skin allergies.”

“As a home-based worker I want my work to be recognized. We make excellent products and work very hard, we want recognition and promotion of our work.”