

## Empowering women homeworkers from invisibility to leaders: Experiences, good practices and lessons from North Sumatera in promoting decent work for homeworkers

### The Story

On 14 January 2015, the Serikat Pekerja Rumahan Sejahtera (SRPS, Prosperous Homeworkers' Trade Union) was established as the first trade union of homeworkers in North Sumatera, Indonesia. As of August 2015, it has 433 member homeworkers (including 1 man) coming from 10 groups categorized according to types of work and they work together to improve their living and working conditions. They have gained knowledge, voice and representation, have successfully negotiated with their employers to improve their working conditions (e.g. increase in piece-rate, and coverage of production cost, etc), are advocating for a regulation to provide appropriate legal and social protection to homeworkers, and reaching more women homeworkers to join to strengthen their collective efforts.

Prior to early 2014, these homeworkers had not even imagined that these positive changes could happen. Despite the difficult working conditions of long work hours with very low pay and no health insurance, they had been working as homeworkers for a long time without questioning the situation that they were in.

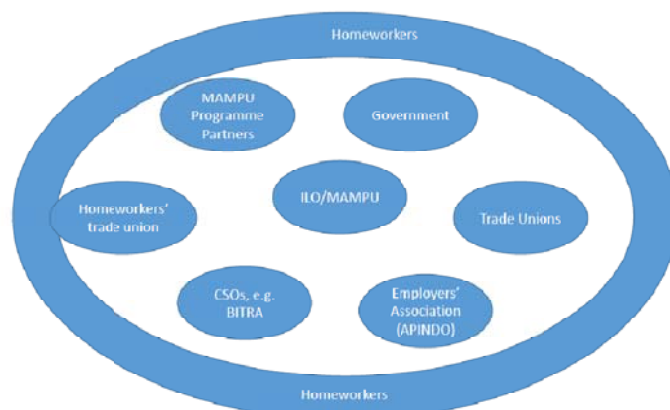
Many of them had been working for over 10 years and they had accepted that it was their fate. Nobody paid attention to them and they worked to support their family. But the situation started changing for better in early 2014 with support provided by the Australian funded ILO/MAMPU Project to promote decent work for women in Indonesia. The ILO/MAMPU Project partnered with selected Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in May 2014 – May 2015 to promote decent work for homeworkers – one of the most disadvantaged workers, recognizing the importance of working with homeworkers in efforts to improve the welfare of women in various parts of Indonesia. In North Sumatera, Yayasan BITRA Indonesia (BITRA) was selected as a partner

#### Box 1: What is home work and who is a homeworker?

Home work is a type of work that is carried out by a person, homeworker, who works at home or at a premise other than that of the employer. They work to produce goods or service which results in products as specified by their employer, and they receive remuneration, often wage based on a piece-rate.

Homeworkers are not domestic workers who work in or for households carrying out household tasks. They also differ from home-based self-employed worker who work at home with

#### Box 2: Mapping of the project's key stakeholders



organization to provide direct support to homeworkers. The project first raised awareness on homeworkers' issues and provided technical support to the key stakeholders including the CSOs, trade unions and employers' organization and the government so that they can be equipped with knowledge to promote decent work for homeworkers. The project also facilitated knowledge sharing and learning from each other and from other countries with many achievements in advancing the rights of homeworkers through workshops, study trips and participation in the international forums. The engagement of the government and employers was ensured to enhance visibility and promote shared understanding on the homeworkers' issues to encourage action. (See Box 2 on the mapping of the project's key stakeholders).

In North Sumatra, BITRA has been identified as a partner for their long experience in their community empowerment work. BITRA had not worked on homeworkers' issues prior to working with the ILO/MAMPU Project, but BITRA made important progress in empowering homeworkers in a relatively short time. With advocacy work, the North Sumatra Manpower Office is planning to include homeworkers' issues in the upcoming local labour regulation to be adopted in 2018. While the homeworkers' fight to gain legal recognition and access decent work is not easy and will take a long time with many challenges ahead, these homeworkers now have hopes and the determination to continue making the improvements for a better future.

So how did these women homeworkers experience the shift from invisibility to increased representation and voice to access decent work? What were the key steps taken by support organizations? The following pages introduce the key steps, good practices and lessons from BITRA which contribute to the successful progress made by homeworkers in North Sumatra. Experiences of FSB KAMIPARHO in North Sumatra, that collaborated with the ILO/MAMPU Project to promote decent work for homeworkers during late 2014 – early 2015, are also introduced.

### Key steps towards recognition and decent work for homeworkers

This documentation introduces the key steps applied by support organizations and challenges encountered in each step, and strategies used to overcome challenges as good practices.

1. Locating homeworkers
2. Developing relationship and trust and facilitating formation of groups

#### Box 3: Socio-economic context of North Sumatra

North Sumatra is characterized by strong economic performance, with the provincial GDP growth rate normally and provincial GDP per capita above the national average. In 2013 the economy in North Sumatra expanded at a growth rate of 6.01 per cent. The province contributed to 5.33 per cent of Indonesia's GDP in 2013. The reason for North Sumatra's strong economic performance relates to its diversified economic structure, which includes manufacturing, as well as a port and airport that services international markets. The industrial structure of large and medium firms in North Sumatra is dominated by the manufacturing of food, beverages, and tobacco, such as crude palm oil and rice, as well as wood processing and rubber processing. Micro and small enterprises in the manufacturing sector tend to be more diverse, covering food processing, textiles and garment and a range of auxiliary functions for other industries, such as packing.

Based on the BPS data, the population in North Sumatra for August 2014 is 13,590,300 people (49.89% men and 50.11% women). Based on the data from 2013, there were 1,390,800 poor people in North Sumatra or 10.39 per cent of the population. This is the highest number of poor people in a province outside Java. Of all districts, the highest level of poverty is found in Gunung Sitoli (30.84 per cent) on Nias Island, which is isolated from mainland Sumatra. The lowest level of poverty is found in Deli Serdang (4.78 per cent). This is largely associated with the existence of industry within Deli Serdang district. The poverty line was estimated at IDR 330,517 in urban areas and IDR 292,186 rural areas in 2013.

Source: North Sumatra homeworker mapping report, ILO (2015)

3. Building capacity of homeworkers to organize into groups
4. Building solidarity and strengthening their negotiation power
5. Advocating for homeworkers' issues
6. Formalizing groups

## 1. Locating homeworkers

**Challenge:** Homeworkers are working at home, therefore, they are hidden from outside and it is not easy to locate them.

**Response:** Door-to-door visit to locate homeworkers in communities where homeworkers have been observed.

**Good practice:** Identify homeworkers through word of mouth and personal connection and neighbourhood familiarity.

Unlike factory workers who can be found at factories, it is not easy to locate and find homeworkers as they are working at home – hidden from public eyes, so the first challenge in organizing homeworker is to find out where homeworkers are. To prepare for locating homeworkers, BITRA recruited field facilitators to locate homeworkers and support them in the process of improving the living and working conditions. Their work was arranged around mainly three areas of identifying homeworkers, facilitating group development, and coaching homeworkers' leaders (See Box 1 for the roles and responsibilities of the field facilitators).

### Box 3: Roles and responsibilities of field staff (field facilitators):

- Organizing and assisting (establish contact, conduct discussion with homeworkers group)
- Responsible for daily contacts with homeworkers
- Facilitate discussion, education, and training, organizing seminar and workshop
- When necessary, assist in litigation and non-litigation process required by group.
- Assist groups in action plan and work delegation accordingly
- Assist homeworkers in lobby, courtesy meeting, and negotiation with relevant institutions
- Develop relationships and network with other organizations relevant to programme for advocacy work
- In coordination with programme officer, prepare term of reference for each activity
- Conduct bi-weekly coordination meeting for planning and implementing activity
- Collecting data of homeworkers with the provided tools
- Data entry on homeworkers

Source: BITRA Indonesia Technical Progress Report to ILO, Quarter 1 (01 May – 31 Jul 2014)

For locating homeworkers, the field facilitators collected the information on the locations where homeworkers can be found from colleagues by word of mouth. BITRA is a civil society organization (CSO) working on community development by promoting a participative, sustainable, and social transformation towards the creation of egalitarian and democratic societies, so the BITRA staff had a long experience working at the community level, and some of them have seen or encountered women working at home or in front of their houses in the past. Others also shared about homeworkers who lived near them. The field facilitators noted the locations where the BITRA staff had seen homeworkers which guided the facilitators to the industrial areas, and went to the suggested locations and started checking from door to door until they found the homeworkers.

Through this process, the facilitators found that homeworkers are often confused with domestic workers and home industry workers that operate their own micro and small enterprises. The easiest way to distinguish homeworkers was to use the term 'piece rate worker' or 'pekerjaborongan' in the local language.

In the first three months, BITRA facilitators were able to identify 226 homeworkers (225 women and 1 man), well beyond the target of 100 homeworkers initially planned because there were more homeworkers present than expected. The identified homeworkers were engaged in many different types of jobs. For the purpose of

providing support to homeworkers, BITRA decided to select 10 types of jobs with higher number of homeworkers, with a view to support the organization of 10 groups according to the types of jobs. The types of jobs selected were patchwork/sewing cloth for cleaning machine, cutting roots/cleaning onion, cutting sandals, peeling shrimps, and cutting chili in Kota Medan, and sewing baby seats, weaving fish grill, packing prayer paper, sewing wallet, and sewing plastic floor mattress in Deli Serdang.

The plan to group the homeworkers according to the job, rather than grouping them according to the broad category of “homeworkers” worked well for building solidarity as it was easier to share work-related issues with other homeworkers doing the same job rather than sharing issues with homeworkers doing different jobs.

#### **Box 4: Experience of FSB KAMIPARHO in locating homeworkers in North Sumatra**

FSB KAMIPARHO, a trade union (TU) present in North Sumatra, also started extending support to homeworkers in Deli Serdang and Pematang Siantar, North Sumatra in November 2014. FSB KAMIPARHO, like BITRA, also started locating homeworkers by word of mouth by members of the trade union. The trade union members have heard of cases where homeworkers lost jobs or seen homeworkers working in front of their house. FSB KAMIPARHO started approaching homeworkers, and started providing support to homeworkers that showed interests in working with the trade union. Those homeworkers were categorized according to 7 types of jobs as follows: 1. Separating waste of plastic floor mattress by colour (Deli Serdang), 2. Cutting roots/cleaning onion, 3. Cracking candle nut shell, 4. Weaving traditional scarf “ulos”, 5. Making tassel of “ulos”, 6. Twisting/wringing threads of “ulos”, and 7. Embroidery (Pematang Siantar).

## **2. Developing relationship and trust to facilitate group formation**

**Challenge:** Suspicion, hesitation and refusal from homeworkers and their families.

**Response:** Developing personal relationships, addressing their concerns, and identify and link existing government programmes with homeworkers for improving their living and working conditions.

**Good practice:** Develop relationships, gain trust and address the concerns of homeworkers using a combination of support responses.

Once the homeworkers were located, it was the time for the field facilitators to approach them to establish relationships so that they could start the process of facilitating group formation. In the beginning, the women homeworkers were suspicious and hesitant to talk to the field facilitators because:

- (1) In the government’s poverty reduction programme, poor families including women homeworkers had been considered as the target beneficiaries and they had been approached to share information about their livelihoods. They had expected to receive the government assistance but they had not received any benefits. Since then, they were doubtful about being involved in what they considered as a development programme.
- (2) In general they feel suspicious and uncomfortable when a stranger visit their house and ask a lot of questions.
- (3) They fear that they would lose their job if their employer found their association with CSO/TU.
- (4) Their husbands or other family members (parents or in-laws) do not allow them to talk to strangers.
- (5) They are busy with household chores and home work. If they chooses to leave their work for several hours, it directly results in income loss.

Understanding the reasons for hesitation and suspicion, the field facilitators decided to focus on developing relationships with the homeworkers through casual conversations and they established a personal connection to gain trust. The facilitators often approached the homeworkers when they could see that they were working, and initiated a conversation. The facilitators showed respect by addressing the women accordingly. Occasionally the facilitators helped the women homeworkers with their work while having conversations to develop relationships and gain trust. The facilitators also often initiated a conversation around the kinship-based connections, which is known as 'bertutur' locally, when they found that homeworkers had the same last name, implying the same clan. The homeworkers were interested in knowing the origin of a facilitator to search for family connections.

Then, the facilitators introduced their organization and the project's plan to improve women's lives. When the women showed positive response and interests, the facilitators introduced the plan to organize women into groups and carry out learning activities such as training and discussion to improve their lives.

However, the women homeworkers were not yet convinced to join the project because they remained concerned mainly about losing their jobs, managing household responsibilities and the economic activity, and creating potential conflicts with family members if they joined the project. To overcome their concerns, the facilitators continuously encouraged the homeworkers by explaining that the activities were meant to improve their living and working conditions, and the project started providing training on lobbying and negotiation skills to the interested women homeworkers to enable them to negotiate better working conditions with their employers.

Transportation fees, enough to cover transportation cost and replace a portion of their lost income, were given to homeworkers to join the capacity building activities so that they can join activities without losing the income needed to support their family. The training was conducted at various venues such as a government's hall, a restaurant meeting room, BITRA office, or private school meeting room. Group meetings were also held at homeworkers' house but they also received transportation fees to replace a portion of their lost income.

The facilitator started with the interested homeworkers and did not make extra efforts in the first month to recruit women who were not allowed by family members to join because of the limited project time frame. Gradually the women learned more about the training and group meetings and they were encouraged to join the group by other homeworkers who were already members. They convinced their husband/family member to give their approval to join the group by telling them that the activities were to improve their knowledge and lives.

***Comment by a  
homeworker:***

***'highlight benefits for the  
family, then the husband  
agrees for his wife to join  
training'***

**Box 5: Experience of FSB KAMIPARHO in recruiting homeworkers and organizing them into groups.**

In Pematang Siantar district, the level of suspicion was very high. Mr. Darius, a trade union member who started reaching out to homeworkers, found that the homeworkers had suspicion about trade unions (association with strikes, etc) too, and despite his explanation that fighting individually is less effective than groups, and the trade unions can help to advocate for their issues, the homeworkers were not convinced to join his union. They wanted to see immediate benefit such as cash or training to start a business with grant support for the initial start-up cost if they were to join his trade union.

In the beginning of 2015 the District Manpower Office of Pematang Siantar received a programme from Ministry of Manpower to organize vocational training. The target beneficiaries of this programme were former factory workers who were dismissed. The 21 homeworkers from six types of work identified in Pematang Siantar qualified for this programme. FSB KAMIPARHO used the opportunity to gain homeworkers trust by proposing their names as participants of embroidery training to the District Manpower Office. The training required that the participants to form a group to receive a free embroidery machine as a grant after the two-week course. FSB KAMIPARHO Pematang Siantar then worked with the homeworkers to form a group and to become part of the trade union. In case the homeworkers are not interested in becoming a member of trade union, FSB KAMIPARHO encouraged the homeworkers to at least form groups, so that they can be trained on various topics and they can share their experience and help each other to improve their living and working conditions.

In total, 21 women homeworkers from 6 types of were identified and organized into a group in Pematang Siantar and 85 homeworkers (including 1 man) with 4 types of work were identified were

**3. Building capacity of homeworkers to organize into groups**

**Challenge:** Lack of knowledge and understanding related to gender equality and workers' rights

**Response:** Placing homeworkers in the learning environment and transfer knowledge through informal conversations, training, and regular group meetings using simple words, pictures, and interpreters as appropriate.

**Good practice:** Training and educating women homeworkers for social realization and empowerment

Since the homeworkers started joining the project activities, the next step was to organize the homeworkers into groups. The homeworkers had had no prior experience in organizing themselves as a group and they were often illiterate and were using only local languages that were not spoken by the facilitators, sharing the information on organizing and for the homeworkers to understand about the concept of organizing was a long process.

The facilitators first identified several key women homeworkers who were willing to participate in the project to initiate the group formation. The level of awareness of these homeworkers on organizing into groups was still limited, but they were willing to invite other homeworkers to join learning activities. They were assigned to help the facilitators in identifying other homeworkers from similar types of work, approaching them and

inviting them to join the learning activities. Sometimes when women needed a permission from their husbands or family members, the key women homeworkers accompanied the women to talk to the family member and explain the purpose of the project which was to learn new knowledge which can contribute to improve the family's livelihood.

An initial meeting was organized when the number of women from the same type of work reached around 10. This meeting introduced about the concept of home work, discussed a common goal, introduced the idea to form a group, selected group leaders and shared the project's training plan (See Box 6 for the list of training topics provided to the women homeworkers). Some of the homeworkers preferred to participate in activities intermittently and thus, did not become members of group. However, gradually many of these homeworkers became a member after learning more about their status as workers and their rights as workers. After about 1 month of working with the homeworkers, homeworkers were organized into groups with BITRA's support. For FSB KAMIPARHO, this process took between one and four months since FSB KAMIPARHO did not focus so much on organizing homeworkers' groups but on awareness raising for its members and public in the beginning. However, the interests and concerns of FSB KAMIPARHO to improve the working conditions of homeworkers were ascertained, and two groups of women homeworkers, one in Deli Serdang and the other in PematangSiantar, were formed and recruited.

Following the group formation, the homeworkers with support of the facilitators met a few times with their group members to select leaders and members to attend training. In the beginning the training participants were only the group leaders but over time it included members. Then, the leaders or the selected members attended training organized by BITRA. The group meetings were held at the house of a group member while training was conducted at a designated venue such as a government's hall, BITRA's office, or private school meeting room.

The women homeworkers had to find ways to manage between group activities and family responsibilities to join training activities. Those with small children usually asked their husband, family members or neighbours to look after the children. When they could not find anyone, they brought their children with them. They would also work extra hours or get help from other family members to finish their job so they would not lose income when they need to join group activity. They also started to discuss gender equality with their husbands and family members and experienced positive changes. Several women homeworkers reported how they shared their work including domestic tasks such as cleaning, washing and looking after the children with their husbands. Many of them also reported that they no longer needed to ask permission when joining activities.

The women homeworkers who participated in training were required to share the new knowledge with their group members after the training. This was first supported by the facilitators who coached the leaders in sharing the new knowledge in the first two to three meetings. However, the group leaders over time became capable of facilitating meetings and sharing the new knowledge independently. Pictures and drawings related to home work or women's lives

**Box 7: List of training provided to homeworkers:**

BITRA Indonesia:

1. Organization
2. Gender
3. Legal literacy
4. Lobbying and negotiation
5. Advocacy
6. Leadership
7. Facilitation
8. Occupational safety and health
9. Financial education
10. Management
11. Facilitator



were used to explain information to illiterate women or women with limited understanding. In addition, an interpreter was occasionally arranged where the women only spoke their local language, but usually a member of group took the responsibility to interpret for members who only spoke the local language.

To maintain and manage their group, the women shared that it is important to regularly share information with the members and ensure regular attendance by the members. They also consulted the facilitators for advice especially when faced with challenges from homeworkers outside their group who were often discouraging. For example, some of the groups received a negative comment on how they lost their job (chili group) after joining the project or a sarcastic remark about how fancy the homeworkers have become now that they have an office (SPR Sejahtera's secretariat, which is at BITRA's office). The women homeworkers usually ignored these discouraging comments but sometimes they took time to explain their struggle to improve their living and working conditions which required a lot of efforts and the attention of the government and parliament to seek legal protection.

Over time solidarity among homeworkers became stronger, and the homeworkers started reaching out to recruit more homeworkers to join their groups by sharing their experience and new knowledge. When they face problems, they discuss to find solutions. For example when the membership fee was established, there were mixed opinions concerning accountability, an amount affordable for all, and the members' willingness to pay. In the end they decided on a low membership fee to accommodate all. The leaders and facilitators persistently explained that the collected fees would be used to fund their activities to improve their life such as transportation fee to join training, etc. Gradually women homeworkers understood the purpose of membership fees and as of August 2015 over 300 women out of 433 homeworkers regularly pay their membership fees.

**Comment by a homemaker:**

***'In the past, my world is my house,  
now, my world is wider'.***

**Box 8: Key messages used by the homeworkers to reach more workers:**

- Homeworkers are workers, not cheap workers.
- No one will change the condition unless you change it.
- Fight for homeworkers to achieve common goals.
- Fight for yourself to improve the livelihoods.
- Homeworkers are not domestic workers.
- If you do not want to pass the same situation to your children, need to act now.

**Box 9: Things to avoid when recruiting homeworkers as shared by the homeworkers:**

- Be careful with words: do not make promises you can't keep (e.g. the wage will be similar to that of a factory worker if you join the group).
- Losing temper: Have to be patient.
- Think about your own interest only.

Homeworkers were highly appreciative of the learning activities which provided them with awareness on their status as workers and knowledge on their rights, organizing and representation, negotiation skills, gender equality and safety and health at home as a work place. Training on occupational safety and health was also mentioned as a useful training which could bring immediate improvements to their household. They mentioned that regular group meetings and continuous coaching by the facilitator was essential to build their capacity and solidarity. They also shared that they gained confidence through exposures to other places and workers made through the project. Through group meetings their working conditions and life issues were discussed which often resulted in actions such as negotiating for pay increase with employers, which they had never tried before joining the project. While a number of training was provided to homeworkers and they have increased awareness and knowledge to improve their living and working conditions, these women



homeworkers need continuous support to strengthen their groups to effectively advocate for their issues and to continue to make positive changes in their lives.

**Box 10: List of training topics on the wish-list of the homeworkers**

- Income generation skills.
- Group management.
- Cooperative development.
- Managing and solving problems.
- Social dialogue.

#### 4. Building solidarity and strengthening their negotiation power

**Challenge:**Intimidation from employers.

**Response:**Initiated discussions on working conditions directly with the employers to negotiate better working conditions and involve the intermediaries/employers in the project activities to raise awareness on homeworkers' issues.

**Good practice:**Build solidarity among homeworkers and work collectively among the homeworkers to initiate a dialogue with the employers.

The extreme poverty, a lack of employment opportunities for women, and gender roles that keep women home-based encourage destructive competition between homeworkers across communities. This condition permits employers to seek cheap labour and move the jobs easily to new areas in search of cheap labour especially when the jobs are unskilled jobs. Therefore intimidation and termination threats are a constant challenge in organizing homeworkers. For example, a group of homeworkers packing straws into plastic bags in Kota Medan withdrew their participation in the project after two months because they received threats from an employer who discovered their involvement in the project. The facilitators could not change the homeworkers' withdrawal from the project and they could not access the employer to explain the purposes of the project.

After several training, the homeworkeer groups became solid enough to independently discuss their working conditions with their intermediaries/employers. Several homeworkers started a dialogue with the employers by utilizing the negotiation skills they learned from training. They explained that they have not received any pay increase despite the increasing utility costs that the homeworkers must cover in their work and the higher living costs. Other homeworkers started asking their intermediaries to negotiate with their employers.

The results from the negotiations were not always positive. A group of homeworkers making barbeque grills was intimidated by their employers and did not receive any jobs for a month when they negotiated for increased pay. In total, 27 homeworkers including non-group members making barbeque grills did not receive job orders. However, all of the 27 homeworkers did not give in to the threat of the employer. And after an open discussion between the homeworkers and the employer to understand the mutual benefits of maintaining the working relationship, the employer and the homeworkers agreed with the new arrangements (e.g. work by homeworkers must be neat, the employer is responsible for dropping off the materials and picking up the finished products), and the employer started giving job orders again with a pay increase.

**Comment by a homeworkeer:**

***'Now the employer respects homeworkers and acknowledges that the employer needs these workers'***

In a different location, the intermediaries responded rudely to a group of homeworkers making baby seats and refused to give a pay increase while continuing to give work to the group. A group leader met the employer personally and presented an argument to justify the requested pay raise, which was that the utility costs have increased several times while their wages stayed the same. After several weeks the group received a pay increase.

There were also groups that lost jobs. For example, the group with the job of cleaning chili lost their job after negotiating because the employer moved the job to other areas with cheaper labour. The group (28 women) working on sewing plastic mattress lost their job in August 2015 because the employer relocated the production back into factory, though the factory still engaged and paid workers on piece-rate basis. Although they lost their jobs, they are continuing to work together as a group as they realized the benefits of working together. The members can help each other not only with jobs but also with family matters, e.g. death of a family member.

**Box 11: Types of improvements gained by homeworkers**

<b>Medan</b>		
<b>Type of work</b>	<b>Improvement</b>	<b>Monthly income before/after</b>
Sewing cloth/patchwork	Product delivery cost waived (used to be Rp2,000/delivery)	300,000-350,000/400,000-500,000
Cutting onions	Pay increased by Rp50/kg, from Rp100/kg to Rp150/kg	100,000-200,000/230,000-300,000
Cutting sandals	Pay increased by Rp500/sack, from Rp5,500/sack to Rp6,000/sack	75,000-100,000/150,000-250,000
<b>Deli Serdang</b>		
<b>Type of work</b>	<b>Improvement</b>	<b>Monthly income before/after</b>
Sewing baby seats	Pay increased by Rp1,000/dozen from Rp7,000/dozen to Rp8,000/dozen	500,000-700,000/800,000-1,000,000
Weaving fish grills	Pay increased for small sized grill to Rp1,500/package, middle sized and big sized to Rp2,000/package	150,000-200,000/200,000-400,000
Packing prayer papers	Pay increased by Rp300/package, from Rp2,000/package to Rp2,300/package	100,000-200,000/200,000-300,000

Other groups did not face strong resistance from their intermediaries and employers. They received pay increase and/or other types of improvements such as costs for delivery of products to be covered by the employer which had been paid by the homeworkers. The pay increase was relatively small but the homeworkers considered it a success because they had never negotiated for pay increase as a group before. The most significant success for the homeworkers was that the pay increase (and other improvements) was also given to non-members doing the same type of work.

5. Advocating for homeworkers' issues	
<p><b>Challenge:</b>The absence of legal protection for homeworkers and lack of understanding on homeworkers' issues among the key stakeholders such as the government and employers.</p> <p><b>Response:</b>Awareness raising and dialogue sessions with key stakeholders, engage stakeholders as resource persons in workshops and trainings</p>	<p><b>Good practice:</b>Engage the stakeholders in activities by homeworkers and raise awareness on homeworkers' issues.</p>
<p>Since homeworkers are working at home, hidden from public eyes and the eyes of labour inspectors and the government officials, the working conditions of homeworkers had been concerns of nobody. Even when people knew about women working at home to produce products for the employers or factories for remuneration, they had different understandings about work and have different misconceptions about home work. For some people, it was an activity done by some home-based women to pass time and receive extra income for the family. For others, it was seen as a self-employed income-generating activity, while in reality, home work was an important source of income for many women who would not otherwise have other income sources to maintain their livelihoods. Since the issues of home work have not received attention, there haven't been research and statistics to understand the prevalence of homeworkers and the working conditions of homeworkers. With no data available on homeworkers, the attention of the government officials and other stakeholders could not be geared towards homeworkers' issues, and even when the homeworkers' issues have been acknowledged as an important issue to be addressed by the trade unions or employers' associations, the issue could not gain sufficient attention as the stakeholders were overwhelmed with other priority issues. The lack of specific regulations or laws concerning home work in Indonesia also made it difficult for the government officials and other stakeholders to work on homeworkers' issues.</p> <p>Therefore, the project needed to apply various strategies to increase the attention of the key stakeholders to homeworkers' issues, including raising awareness on homeworkers' issues, actively engaging them in the project activities as resource persons, participants and observers, collecting evidence-based data, and building the capacity of the stakeholders to work on homeworkers' issues.</p> <p>The project engaged the relevant stakeholders including the government officials, employers, trade union representatives, parliamentarians, and intermediaries in project activities to promote better understanding on homeworkers' issues. The training sessions on legal literacy, occupational safety and health were delivered by the manpower office, while the session on organizing and regulations were delivered by trade unions and parliamentarians respectively. Those who came as resource persons often did not have deep understanding on the issues of home work, therefore, those stakeholders who came to delivery specific technical topics could deepen their understanding on the issues of home work and make a commitment to work on homeworkers' issues through interactions with the homeworker participants in the training sessions.</p> <p>The project also organized an awareness raising workshops, field visit, and a series of dialogue sessions with homeworkers for the relevant stakeholders to raise awareness on homeworkers and promote better working conditions for homeworkers. A study visit to India organized by the project in 2014 have inspired trade union leaders and the official of the Labour Inspection Unit of the Provincial Manpower Office to improve the working conditions of homeworkers. By having the participation of the stakeholders in the project's activities, the stakeholders were able to gain deeper understanding on the situation that these women are placed in and realize the importance of addressing decent work deficits faced by the homeworkers.</p> <p>In order to have the evidence-based data available on homeworkers, the project collected information through various sources. The project first collected baseline information from the 368 identified homeworkers</p>	

to understand their living and working conditions. The project also carried out a mapping of homeworkers to understand the working and living conditions of homeworkers in selected provinces including in North Sumatra. The project also advocated to have the data on homeworkers available from the regular labour force surveys. However, it was not possible to influence and make adjustments to the labour force survey questionnaire to identify home-based workers partially due to lack of strong requests from the line ministries to obtain the data.

With the increased awareness on home work by the stakeholders especially the Manpower office in North Sumatra, the homeworkers issues are planned to be included in the local provincial regulation which is aimed for finalization and adoption in 2018. The absence of a legal framework for homeworkers will continue to disadvantage homeworkers. Therefore, advocacy work needs to continue until home work is regulated in parallel with the work to support and strengthen the capacity of homeworkers to improve their living and working conditions in an environment where the issues of home work tend to be sidelined by other priority issues of the employers and the trade unions.

## 6. Formalizing groups

**Challenge:**Lack of formal representation of homeworkers.

**Response:**Support the establishment of a homeworker trade union, and networking with other trade unions and forums.

**Good practice:**Facilitating the formalization of groups to gain official recognition and status.

Homeworkers were not represented in formal organizations and/or forums when the project started. The project developed a plan for working with trade unions to represent homeworkers. Unfortunately the trade unions were unable to support this plan. They were too overwhelmed with their advocacy work for formal workers and they had limited capacities (e.g. staff and knowledge) to represent and advocate for homeworkers.

During the dialogue sessions with key stakeholders it was recommended by the manpower office and trade unions that homeworkers form a dedicated trade union for two reasons. First, if homeworkers joined the existing trade unions they would be divided into existing sectors within the current trade unions structure based on types of work. The number of homeworkers per sector would be small and therefore, their representation would be limited. When they are minority, their issues would not be prioritized either. Secondly, having a formal registered trade union registered by homeworkers for homeworkers, they would be more likely to take ownership of the trade union and raise their voices to advocate for their issues. The homeworkers were not sure initially because they had no experience in managing an organization and carrying out advocacy work but they became willing to go ahead with a commitment from BITRA Indonesia to support them.

BITRA Indonesia in cooperation with Serikat Pekerja Nasional (National Trade Union or SPN) of North Sumatera facilitated the women homeworker members to develop organizational bylaws and select leaders. The preparation to register a trade union took one week and the Serikat Pekerja Rumah Sejahtera (Prosperous Homeworkers Trade Union or SPRS) was formally launched on 14 January 2015 in a congress of homeworkers at the BITRA Indonesia office. The Provincial Manpower Office and Trade Unions attended the launching. Now the membership reached 433 and over 300 members regularly pay a membership fee of IDR3,000 per month. The collected membership fee is divided and one third of the total amount each goes to the local, district and provincial levels to support the operation of the union.

The women gained more confidence and commitment and recruited more members to raise their collective voice through their organization. When the employer reallocated cutting chili work to other area for lower wages and terminated employment of a homeworker group in April 2015 the women continued group activities and outreach to more women. At every opportunity SPRS members invited and encouraged other homeworkers to join group meetings and learn about the homeworkers' movement. As of August 2015, the number of SPRS members has reached 433 homeworkers (431 women, 2 men). Since the SPRS is yet to be registered at the provincial level, which requires representations in 5 districts to qualify as a provincial trade union, the SPRS needs to continue to make steady progress to expand the coverage and membership so that they can further increase their representation and voice to advocate for decent work for homeworkers in Indonesia.

***'We are equal to men. Let's not live as a second citizen. We need a decent life with good wage, protection and social security'***

***A woman homeworker***

## Conclusions and key lessons

There were a lot of challenges to be addressed and it was not an easy to mobilise and organize homeworkers, but the results of the collective efforts by the field facilitators and other staff of BITRA and the ILO/MAMPU Project, which were also supported by the Provincial Manpower Office and trade unions were quite significant. The women homeworkers gained awareness on their status as workers and increased their knowledge on various issues such as workers' rights, gender equality, occupational safety and health, financial management, leadership, and advocacy. They initiated actions to improve their living and working conditions, and established a trade union of homeworkers in North Sumatra.

A combination of factors contributed to the significant progress:

- Although BITRA had had no prior experience in working on homeworkers' issues, their extensive experience in working at the community-level to empower people to take part in the local economy and governance was proven to be a strong basis for locating, supporting and mobilizing homeworkers. The information, experience, and networks related to the organization of homeworkers and the link to the national level forums on labour issues as well as technical knowledge to promote decent work (e.g. training on workers' rights, OSH, etc) were supplemented by the ILO/MAMPU Project through various means such as workshops, coaching and study trips to areas with long history of organizing homeworkers.
- The continuous engagement of the key stakeholders (e.g. government officials, employers and trade union representatives) in activities was ensured throughout the project. This was key in having the homeworkers' issues recognized by the government officials, parliamentarians, employers and trade unions in North Sumatra as it provided the basis for further discussion to include homeworkers' issues in the upcoming local labour regulation.
- The availability of the project funding was imperative especially in the beginning. While it is ideal for the homeworkers' groups to manage their own groups on their own, it is a long way to reach that stage since most of the homeworkers are from low-income families who need the income to support their basic livelihood. Therefore, the project's fund to support homeworkers to join the project activities (by covering the transportation cost and a partial income lost from joining the project activities) supported the process of homeworkers in realizing the benefits of organizing. The training workshops provided by the project also contributed to open eyes of the homeworkers to start taking actions. Without the initial funding support, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to mobilise and organize homeworkers as the benefits of organizing may not be enjoyed by the homeworkers immediately, and without experiencing or realizing the benefits of organizing, the homeworkers would not be motivated to organize.

The struggle of these women homeworkers will continue for a long time to come, but the progress is an important milestone for the movement of homeworkers in North Sumatra, Indonesia where the homeworkers had continued working without recognition for many decades. While there are many priority issues for the government and the stakeholders to address, the homeworkers' issues should not be forgotten but recognized as an important area to address for poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Continuous support to the homeworkers should be provided by building their capacity and linking the available government support programmes to homeworkers. In addition, cooperation among the key stakeholders including groups representing homeworkers, workers' and employers' organizations, the government and other relevant stakeholders should be promoted to promote decent work for homeworkers.



Women homeworkers in North  
Sumatera



