

GUIDANCE ON GATHERING INFORMATION ON HOMEWORKERS

BACKGROUND:

Suppliers are at the front line of implementing the John Lewis Homeworker Policy. They have the ability to influence and effect change in working conditions of homeworkers in their supply chains. The first step in effecting change is for each supplier to map their supply base and gather accurate and relevant information regarding homeworkers.

In some cases where suppliers directly work with homeworkers, they can use their direct access to gather quality information and set up systems for improving their working conditions. In most cases, where suppliers work through one or more contractors in getting work done from homeworkers, they have to use a variety of methods to access information.

SIMPLE AND DIRECT SUPPLY CHAINS

Where homeworkers directly pick up work from the suppliers premises and are managed by the suppliers' staff, suppliers should ensure that a random sample of homeworkers are asked questions based on the attached data sheet. The responses need to be recorded and shared with the management. Based on the findings, appropriate actions can be taken to improve working conditions.

COMPLEX AND INDIRECT SUPPLY CHAINS

Where suppliers use one or more contractors to get work done from homeworkers, they may not know where homeworkers are situated, may have never visited homeworker sites and generally have very little information on their working conditions. In such cases, suppliers have to use a variety of sources and methods to gather information. In complex chains, it is better to map your supply base first, establish which homeworker locations are important from your business point of view and then start gathering information on them.

Sources of information

1. Your own staff – Most suppliers have their own QC staff or staff who are responsible for following up work. They are likely to visit homeworkers locations. On such visits, staff could collect information by speaking directly with homeworkers. They should use the questions in Appendix 1 as a guide). These responses need to be recorded and shared with the management so that appropriate actions can be undertaken for issues that are identified.
2. Your contractors – Where there is a have a high level of trust and understanding with your contractor/s, you may want to ask them to take responsibility for gathering information. This may work in cases where you have long standing relationships with certain contractors and you are able to explain the need and benefits of improving working conditions of homeworkers in the long run. Refer to Appendix 1 for questions.
3. Local NGOs and government agencies – Where appropriate, collaborate with local NGOs and government agencies where homeworkers are based. These agencies could be a valuable resource not only in gathering information but also in implementing your chosen actions at a later stage. It may also be possible that some of these agencies may already be working with or having knowledge of homeworkers' conditions in the area. Government agencies such as Development Commissioner of Handicrafts (DCH) and District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) are good sources of information on homeworker groups and local NGOs. To find out about any local NGOs, you can also check websites like
http://www.oxfamint.org.in/wwd_work.htm
<http://www.homenetsouthasia.org/>
<http://www.actionaidindia.org/contact.htm>

Appendix 1: Questions to ask homeworkers

Please note that these questions are only a guide. Ask for more details as appropriate. You can use these questions on an individual or with a group of homeworkers. Avoid using this sheet in front of homeworkers as this may make them wary, keep the discussion as informal as possible. Note the responses on a separate sheet after the discussion is complete. The idea is to get some information at first and then build on it on regular intervals.

1. What are the advantages of this work for you?

2. What problems do you face?

3. Working hours

- a. When the demand is good, how many hours do you work in a day? Add up hours worked during different times of the day (homeworkers do not work long stretches but rather work few hours at different times of the day)
- b. When the demand is low, how many hours do you work?
- c. How many days/months in a year do you get little or no work?

4. Wages

- a. When demand is good, how much do you earn per day?
- b. When demand is low, how much do you earn per day?
- c. How many people in your family work together?
- d. How much does your family earn in low season/ low demand time?
- e. How much does your family earn per day in high season/ high demand time?
- f. How often do you get paid?
- g. Are there any delays in receiving full payment for your work? If there is delay, how many days/months?
- h. Do you keep any records of payments made to you? If not, who keeps these records?

5. Working conditions

- a. Do you face any health problems (minor and major) related to your work?
- b. How much do you spend on medical expenses in a month?
- c. What the main illnesses you and your family suffer from?

6. Child labour (children below 14 years)

- a. How many children in your family are going to school/college and how many are not going to school/college?
- b. For those who do not go to school, what do they do at home? If they work, how many hours per day?

7. Forced labour

- a. Can you choose which contractor to work for? Can you refuse to work with any contractor if you don't want to work with him/her?