



## The welfare provision model of a homeworker network: A case study of the HomeNet Thailand Association

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### Abstract

The objective of this research was to develop a welfare provision model of a homeworker network using a qualitative research method in the form of a case study. The sample unit of the study involved a homeworker network, specifically the HomeNet Thailand Association (HNTA). The target group of 36 people consisted of network leaders, network committee members, network members, representatives from various sectors participating in welfare provision and other experts concerning informal worker welfare. Data were collected using in-depth interviews, group discussions, and observations. These research findings were used to develop a model for the welfare provision of a homeworker network using careful consideration and reliability confirmation by said experts. The derived model showed that the welfare provision of the homeworker network was based on the concept of welfare pluralism derived from the cooperation of homeworker network with other various sectors in a social movement to empower the homeworkers to be able to demand their rights and to develop new forms of welfare appropriate to the challenges faced by homeworkers. The model can be adapted to other informal workers networks by giving importance to creating diverse working partnerships, expanding the membership base in order to be representative of informal workers in making demands and advocating policies, raising awareness and co-responsibility of members in order to participate in welfare provision, and creating new learning processes of members.

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### Introduction

As part of the development of the economy and society of Thailand over the last several decades, activities in the informal economy have gradually gained importance as a source of revenue for a great number of people, especially the disadvantaged. Along with the trends in globalization, employment has become more flexible. Businesses have

started hiring outside sub-contractors to replace full-time workers, thus pushing the workforce into the informal economy. Members of the workforce in the informal economy are called "informal workers". Information from the [National Statistical Office \(2016\)](#) indicate that Thailand had an informal workers ratio of 55.6 percent while the ratio of formal workers was 44.4 percent.

However, most informal workers still do not have social protection and work insurance under the Labour Protection Act of 1998 and the Social Security Act of 1990. The government has tried to expand protection to informal workers by issuing the policy of Social Security Section 40

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and creating a National Savings Fund. However, the benefits from these policies are few compared to the Social Security Act Section 33 for formal workers. Information from the Ministry of Labour in 2016 indicates that only 10.5 percent of informal workers were covered under social security Section 40 (Ministry of Labour, 2017), and that exposes the majority of informal workers to socio-economic and health risks.

At the same time, the direction of welfare provision in Thailand was already heading toward pluralism by having the people, community, local administration, NGOs and business sector integrate welfare into the government services. That movement has mobilized the cooperation of every sector within society to support welfare provision to address the needs and problems of each group in each area (Kumhom, 2011; Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, 2005). This welfare provision is based upon the concept of working as a network, with cooperation between various organizations to resolve shared problems that cannot be resolved by a single organization. In this view, knowledge, resources, and personnel must be mobilized from various organizations in order to solve the problem together (Apakaro, 2004; Kaewthep, 1995 as cited in Nirathon, 2000; Kreuthep, 2007).

While problems of informal workers vary by group, networks were organized and created to promote cooperation of various organizations to provide appropriate welfare which benefits informal workers, the government, and related organizations. Most informal workers networks were organized according to an occupational group such as a homeworker network, contractual farmer network, and domestic workers network, among many others. Registered and non-registered networks have been organized as foundations, associations, cooperatives, clubs or membership-based organizations (MBO). These organizations often have two main goals: To develop their own economic potential within the group and to claim the rights to labour protection and welfare development (Bonner & Spooner, 2011).

For Thailand, the homeworker network is considered successful. Its success was due to the support of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in providing protection for homeworkers by issuing the Home Work Convention (C177) and Home Work Recommendation (R184). Moreover, other supporting organizations include Women in Informal Empowerment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), working on a global scale to research the informal economy; Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), representing the largest informal workers network in India; the Ministry of Labour; and the Thai Health Promotion Foundation (Meesit & Tulaphan, 2006). This support has enabled the homeworker network to successfully drive policies such as the Homeworkers Fund Regulation of 2002, and the Homeworkers Protection Act of 2010. Furthermore, the homeworker network has helped society to acknowledge the existence of homeworkers and informal workers as legitimate part of the labour force who deserve support policies.

The HomeNet Thailand Association (HNTA) stands out for having played an important role in advocating policies which have led to support and protection of homeworkers.

Since 1992, HNTA has continuously provided welfare for homeworkers. HNTA has members in all five regions of the country to support the movement including Bangkok, Central, Northern, Northeastern and Southern regions for a total of 4,130 members (data since August 2015). Members are from various occupations such as the garment workers, weavers, doll makers, and leather processing, among many others. The operations of HNTA involve cooperation with various domestic and international partners, especially with domestic partners such as the Foundation for Labour and Employment Promotion (FLEP), and international partners such as SEWA, WIEGO, and HomeNet South Asia. These organizations provide assistance in terms of academic knowledge, operational strategy, funding sources and various other supports creating welfare for homeworkers. The welfare provision is in the forms of conducting policy campaigns and the providing welfare to members such as improving working efficiency, finding market sources, and creating health and safety awareness in the workplace. The work of the HNTA results in creating networks trusted to join cooperatively in working with the government such as when representatives of the HNTA are appointed to the Board of National Informal Workers.

Therefore, developing the welfare provision model of homeworker network focused on the case study of the HomeNet Thailand Association to benefit other informal worker networks by adapting the model to their own network's welfare provision, leading to a higher quality of life for informal workers as a whole.

## Literature Review

This study used the welfare pluralism concept as the main concept and gives importance to the participation of every sector in society in welfare provision by giving consideration to the diverse needs of people, working methods, and various organizations that join on the basis of equal partnership and under the status of "co-hosts" in welfare provision. Moreover, in giving meaning to social welfare, the emphasis is on developing and empowering the target group rather than providing aid. This gives importance to human rights, equality, and equal opportunity for the target group. In that sense, social welfare is more about preserving and protecting rights and letting the target group participate more in their own welfare provision. In addition, social welfare is considered to be a social service that reflects the basic needs of the target group, such as in having a job and access to health services and social stability so that the target group can have a better quality of life (Wechayachai, 2003 as cited in Kumhom, 2011). Therefore, the welfare provision of the homeworkers network in this study operates through a social movement in order to demand rights and provide services to homeworkers through the cooperation of the network with various related partners such as NGOs, the government, local administrators, scholars, funding organizations, and the international informal worker network.

The meaning of homeworker network in this study was defined in the dimension of relationships among the members in the network to exchange knowledge, help, empower and build the power of negotiation to solve the

problems of homeworkers. In addition, the dimension of social development was included by considering a network as a social movement driving society towards change. Moreover, the meaning of network was defined as cooperation at work having connections with other alliances in society to share resources, knowledge, and methods to provide welfare to homeworkers (Apakaro, 2004; Phongphit, 2005). Therefore, homeworker network was formed by homeworkers of the 5 regions in Thailand with the objective to help each other, to exchange knowledge, to build the power of negotiation and to solve problems so as to create a new form of the welfare provision to deal with the problems and needs of the homeworkers.

Defining the term 'homeworkers' involves determining the characteristics of informal workers in an informal economy where activities in the economy are not considered to be official. These activities are not illegal but they are unprotected or limited under the protection of the law and without social security. Most workers work just for family subsistence. They might be freelancers or hired workers not including migrant workers. Homeworkers are people working outside of the workplace usually working at home and obtaining their work from contractors, hirers or subcontractors (Kantawit, 1997; Nirathron, 2012).

## Methods

### Participants

The study used the qualitative research method in the form of a case study and chose a specific area setting the criteria as 1) a network providing welfare to homeworkers with the participation of various sectors, 2) achieving successful operations, and 3) operating continuously. The participants involved welfare provision of a homeworker network consisting of 36 people. These were divided in 5 groups: 4 network leaders, 9 network committee members, 8 network members, 13 representatives from various sectors participating in welfare provision, and 2 experts on informal worker welfare that provided recommendations to the research model.

### Data Collection

This research used discussion guidelines for in-depth interviews and group discussions, and observation guidelines to observe the processes and activities of the network. The process of data collection ended when no new research issue emerged. The researcher spent approximately seven months in data collection (May–November 2015).

### Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data from related documents and field data using the following processes: 1) data organization by arranging data into categories according to the conceptual framework; 2) data display by connecting the various issues as categorized; and 3) synthesizing findings from discoveries and interpretation to explain the conceptual framework and the connection to theory. Finally, the researcher provides policy recommendations

(Mile & Huberman, 1994 as cited in Podhisita, 2011). In checking the validity and credibility of the data, the researcher used a triangulation method in that the same data were collected by using different methods and sources (Trimonkolkul & Chatraporn, 2010). The study results were returned to the main sources to affirm data correction. The researcher then presented the model from the study to experts to consider and make recommendations so that the model will be more complete.

## Results

### The Working Structure of the HomeNet Thailand Association

The HomeNet Thailand Association (HNTA) was officially registered and set up as an MBO which is based on the principle "Of the members, By the members, and For the Members." The MBO is managed and owned by members for the benefit of the members. HNTA is a partner with the Foundation for Labour and Employment Promotion (FLEP) which acts as an advisory organization to provide support in knowledge, organizational development, and cooperation with external organizations, and especially as a representative of HNTA in working with international organizations. The joint operations of HNTA and FLEP are known as the "HomeNet Thailand Network".

HNTA has a working structure that is divided into group committee, regional committee, and national committee. The work can be divided into two sectors: 1) The central sector is the policy operation of the national committee. It works in cooperation with national and international partners to advocate welfare policies for homeworkers and supports the operations of sub-networks. 2) Sub-networks in the five regions (Bangkok, Central, Northern, Northeastern, and Southern). These operate in the field by working with partners in the area to directly provide welfare to the members. Figure 1 shows the coordination links as a network of HNTA with cooperation from many sectors in order to provide welfare for homeworkers.

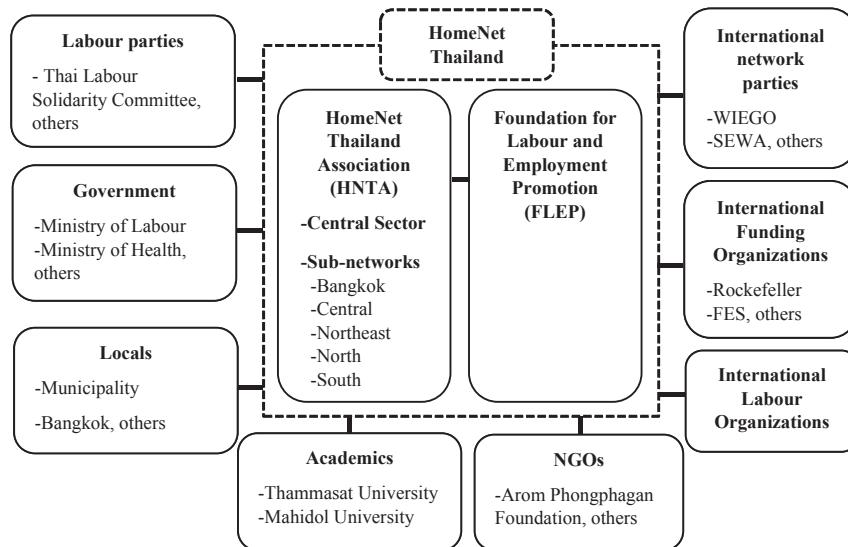
### The Welfare Provision Model of the Homeworker Network

The welfare provision of the homeworker network in this case study operates through social movements for homeworkers. That has led to awareness and participation in the welfare provision of homeworkers and other sectors in society in the form of direct and indirect welfare provision. This welfare impacts homeworkers at the individual, group, and policy levels. The process of welfare provision is shown in Figure 2.

From the process of welfare provision above, the researcher was able to develop a model of welfare provision of a homeworker network consisting of three parts: 1) the thinking basis of welfare provision, 2) the operations, and 3) the outcome of welfare provision. Details are as follows:

#### Part 1: The Thinking Basis of Welfare Provision

The thinking basis of network members regards to welfare pluralism, human rights and social movements due to the fact that they see themselves as informal workers with a diverse set of problems. Therefore, welfare provision



**Figure 1** HNTA coordination network

should have many forms according to the context of the informal workers, and there should be participation from many sectors. Furthermore, members believe that they do not receive enough welfare and protection from the state as labourers so they have become more vocal about rights. As observed by a network leader:

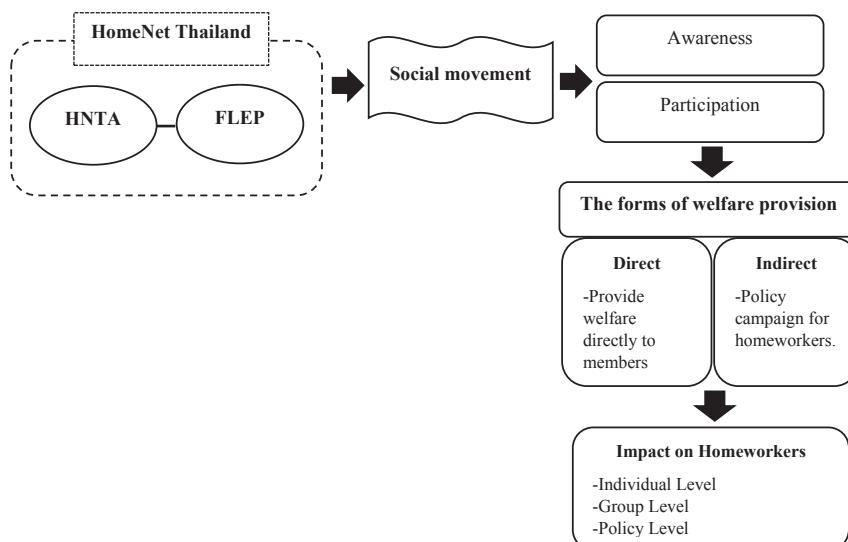
*“Currently we have very few rights. We are trying to fight for equality so we don't have to say that this person is a formal worker and that person is an informal worker.”*

#### Part 2: The Operations

The operations in welfare provision consist of five sub-parts: 1) operation partners, 2) welfare provision

methods, 3) welfare provision processes, 4) strategy in welfare advocacy, and 5) welfare types. Details are as follows:

1) Operation partners: Welfare provision comes from the participation of many sectors including the homeworker network, NGOs, government, local authorities, scholars, workers networks, international organizations, and funding organizations. The operational roles can be divided into three: (1) Acting team: Which operates by sub-network in the five regions to provide welfare directly to members in each area; (2) Leading team: Which operates through the central sector with the role



**Figure 2** The welfare provision process of the homeworker network from the case study

of policy advocacy for homeworkers, and support for the operations of the sub-networks; and (3) Supporting team: Which operates in various sectors in terms of funding, knowledge, resources, social services or policy advocacy.

2) Welfare provision methods: The homeworker network has two methods of welfare provision: (1) Direct welfare provision: In which welfare is provided directly to members in each area in the form of joint welfare provision by members, such as cremation or savings groups, and cooperative services. There is also welfare from related partners by setting up projects for members in occupational development, health promotion, and work safety. (2) Indirect welfare provision: This involves policy campaigns for homeworkers by working with related partners such as workers networks, international informal workers networks, the government, scholars, and international funding organizations.

3) Welfare provision processes: Welfare provision of the homeworker network and its partners from various sectors is mostly in the form of welfare policy campaigns and creating projects to develop and empower members. Policy campaigns for homeworkers have the following processes: (1) creating awareness of the status and problems of homeworkers, (2) creating an identity for homeworkers, (3) empowering homeworkers, (4) creating working alliances, (5) making policy proposals, (6) proposing policy to the public sector and accelerating the process, (7) participating in policy making with the public sector, and (8) campaigning to move the policy into action. The process of creating projects for members has the following components: (1) survey of the problem, (2) set the working guidelines, (3) determine the project and activities, (4) coordinate with partners for fundraising and resources, (5) put the project into action, (6) create the operating mechanisms, and (7) follow up and evaluate.

4) Strategy in welfare advocacy: The homeworkers network has the following key strategies: (1) strengthening of the network through membership expansion in order to solve problems and demand welfare from the government, (2) developing member's capability in order to campaign in their area, (3) coordinating with related partners to obtain funding, knowledge or resources, especially from international informal workers networks who can help locate funding sources, spark new working guidelines and present the problems of homeworkers to international forums, (4) supporting network representatives to be on the policy-making committee of the public sector to be able to present problems and advocate for members' demands, and (5) disseminating homeworkers' problems to the public. As stated by one NGO leader:

*"Why did we establish a membership base? It was in order to solve economic problems, health problems, and*

*welfare problems. The actual number of members made us substantial in the eyes of the government when we make demands"*

5) Types of welfare: There are three types of welfare provided to homeworkers: (1) Work and income welfare, as a way to improve the labour potential of members by encouraging members to form groups to assist one another in their work, and to coordinate with external organizations to improve members' potential; (2) Health welfare, as a way to provide knowledge and create awareness about healthcare and work safety by coordinating with partners to provide knowledge, sanitary services, and jointly push for health policies; and (3) Social security welfare, as a way to advocate policies with related partners in order to create social insurance for homeworkers.

### *Part 3: The Outcome of Welfare Provision*

The welfare provision by a homeworker network, along with related partners, has had beneficial impact on homeworkers at three levels: 1) Individual level: The network has created a learning process for the members that led to demands for their rights. The members have learned about healthcare and work opportunity along with increased welfare access, and that has led to improvement in homeworkers' quality of life; 2) Group level: By forming an organization and continuously increasing membership, the network has become a more powerful negotiator, and has gained access to external resources in terms of knowledge development, production technology, and markets that have led to economic strength for members; and 3) Policy level: The network's policy advocacy with related partners has resulted in laws that are helping to create social insurance for homeworkers such as the Social Security Law Act 40, and Homeworkers Protection Act of 2010.

### **Discussion**

This model of welfare provision of a homeworker network integrates concepts of human rights, equality and equal opportunity for workers. Most welfare provisions operate in the form of a social movement to demand rights and protection from the government more than emphasizing welfare provision for its members. The concept and working guidelines coincide with the concept by Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004 as cited in [Nirathron, 2012](#)). It gives importance to "process" or "movement" in order to create social protection that focuses on "transformation" to increase social status and individual rights for marginalized people. Importance is given to working processes to create equality, with campaigns to change social perceptions and behavior, and increase the support for social equality.

Furthermore, the forms of welfare provision mentioned are similar to the operations of international informal workers networks which appeared in the study by the [Thailand Development Research Institute \(2015\)](#) which found that most of the international informal worker

networks were MBOs. The MBOs cooperate with various domestic and international organizations to set up training activities and push for policies with the objective of improving the network members' quality of life. There is also the case of an informal worker network in the Philippines ("HomeNet Philippines") with more than 19,000 members who are home-based workers. They have demanded access to social insurance and working protection. They build members' skills, and link with various organizations such as NGOs, labour unions, cooperatives, and international organizations (WIEGO, 2018). In this way, the HomeNet Philippines Network has similar welfare provisions as the HNTA, as both are social movements with diverse working partners.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Because of the various contexts and problems of homeworkers, the model of welfare provision of a homeworker network from this study was developed based on the concept of welfare pluralism. The model stipulates the need for participation of many sectors to jointly address problems and conduct operations through a social movement for homeworkers. This process educates network members about their rights as legitimate labourers, how to access welfare, how to improve working potential, how to access healthcare, and how to gain safety in the workplace. Based on the findings of this case study, the researcher proposes the following recommendations for other informal workers networks in adapting this model to their own network's welfare provision: 1) welfare provision should give importance to the participation of every sector on the basis of equal partnership relations and with the status of "co-host;" 2) there should be working partners from many sectors and levels, both domestic and international, in order to develop new viewpoints and working guidelines, including partnerships with other informal workers networks in order to create and strengthen bargaining power for all informal workers, 3) there should be an official organization with the credo "Of, By, and For the Members" which gives importance to the expansion of the membership in order to be a powerful representative of informal workers in making demands and advocating for policies with the state, 4) there should be greater social awareness and responsibilities for members to be able to participate in welfare provision through social movements, and 5) there should be new learning processes and continuous capacity development of members as an important mechanism in advancing the work and creating sustainability for the network.

Finally, the following are recommendations for supporting partners: 1) the Ministry of Labour should have

laws to support the establishment of informal workers organizations, 2) the Ministry of Labour should work more proactively by determining policies to promote and develop homeworkers that are more consistent with the current situation and coincide with the changing needs of workers, and 3) the process of legislation to create welfare by the Ministry of Labour and related agencies should be continuous, even if there is a change in government. After a law is enacted, it should be widely publicized so that the workers will know that they have new rights to welfare as protected by the law.

## Conflicts of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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