

We encourage the Indian authorities to:

- Implement the Minimum Wages Act, 1948
- Elaborate a piece rate system
- Reconsider the position of a labour inspector, preferably female
- The National Commission for Unorganised Sector should be established
- Start social security schemes and health insurance for Chikan Kari workers
- Establish day care centers for the Chikan women's children



FIAN is an international human rights organisation that campaigns for the realisation for the right to adequate food. FIAN envisions a world free from hunger, in which every person can fully enjoy their human rights and live in dignity. FIAN International has taken up the case on enforcing the payment the minimum wages to Chikan handicraft workers in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.



Presentation of a Chikan worker in Lucknow

Bholi is 25 years old and married. At the age of 15 she started working in the Chikan industry. Bholi learned this work in a center for Chikan Kari production. The center didn't pay her much, therefore she quit after a short time. One main reason for the low payment was that the customers often complained about the work and refused to pay. This is a common problem in the industry.

Whereas men are involved in trading and marketing, women do the production. They manually design a pattern with threads on the cloths. Now as a home-based sewer in the Chikan Kari industry, Bholi earns R 6-8 per piece. For making each piece she normally uses 5-7 hours. Sometimes she only earns R 1,75 and she even has to pay for some of the materials. Usually she receives work from a store. She has to use middlemen and cannot go directly to the shop herself. This gives her few possibilities to bargain for a better payment and makes her feel vulnerable. Bholi and the other Chikan workers in the neighbourhood told that there has not been any labour inspector to



visit them. Actually, the Chikan workers didn't have knowledge about the existence of that kind of reporting system.

This handicraft is very time demanding and creates a lot of stress for the eyes. The result is that finally the majority of workers lose their eyesight. Women workers are unorganised and to some extent unaware of their rights and illiterate so they are unable to demand the minimum wage of Rs. 58.50. The workers are hardly getting Rs.30 per day.

Reasons for campaigning

The local handicraft of Chikan is a delicate artwork performed by women. Five percent of the inhabitants in Lucknow rely on their Chikan skills for survival. For this they receive an income far below minimum wage, and many are unable to feed themselves and their families.

The Minimum Wage Act (1948) entitles the women to a minimum wage. In addition, the Indian Constitution's article 21 guarantees the right to life, and the right to food is a basic element of sustaining life itself. The right to adequate food is also established in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The Central Government of

India and the State of Uttar Pradesh are under the obligation to ensure that the Chikan Kari workers are paid according to a minimum wage. This will protect the women's fundamental human right to feed themselves and their family.

Comparison with the Beedi workers

Female Beedi workers in India are facing similar challenges as the Chikan Kari workers. Mostly women engage in Beedi rolling, and this is a small part of the production. The work is highly labour intensive and it is done manually requiring special skills. This can be compared with the female Chikan Kari workers who also contribute to a small part of the production and have a time consuming and stressful job for the eyes. The Chikan work also requires special skills in handicraft. Working conditions are also comparable as they are home based and unorganized. Many women in the Beedi production, as in the Chikan industry are to some extent illiterate and unaware of their rights to a minimum wage and thus they don't claim it.

The women are therefore often paid below minimum wage.

Many laws have been elaborated since 1948 to protect the Beedi workers, among others the Minimum Wages Act. In addition to this The National Commission on Labour recommended in its report in 2001 that a national minimum wage should be fixed for Beedi rolling and should be adopted by all states.

Today the wages for the Beedi employees are fixed on a piece rate basis (number of Beedis rolled).The traditional measure being per thousand Beedis. For all other activities they are paid on the basis of time-rate system of wages.

There should be established laws that could fix a minimum standard on piece rates for the Chikan workers as well.

