

ISSUE 1, AUGUST 2021

# OUR WORK, OUR LIVES

## A DAY'S WORK





**Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women**

## OUR WORK, OUR LIVES

Many members and partners of the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) work closely with women workers to support and strengthen their organising. The women earn their living from domestic work, sex work, agriculture, weaving, entertainment work, garment sector work, home based work and any available daily wage work. Except those who are working away from home, all women also carry out much of the care work in their families. While some workers are affiliated with trade unions, others are part of informal collectives or community groups linked to local NGOs.

Since March 2021, some GAATW members and partners have been part of an online initiative called *Women Workers for Change*. The group has held discussions to understand what women workers who engage in unpaid and paid labour define as ‘change’ in their lives, how do they want to participate in creating change and what the CSOs can do to improve their accountability towards women workers.

*Our Work, Our Lives*, a monthly E-Magazine, is born out of those discussions. Published on the last day of the month, each issue will take up a simple theme that resonates with the everyday lives of low-wage women workers, their joys, sorrows, struggles and most importantly, their agendas for change.

While this English language E-Magazine will act as a bridge among CSO colleagues (and the few workers who can communicate in English) in different countries, each group will create publications in their own language. Where the workers have no formal literacy, they will use other innovative techniques. GAATW Secretariat will do all it can to democratise digital technology and facilitate knowledge building and sharing from ground up.

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## ISSUE 1, AUGUST 2021: A DAY'S WORK

Dear Friends,

In February 2021, GAATW Secretariat initiated a discussion on women and work with its members and partners. We wanted to understand how our colleagues in different countries work with migrant and local women workers in rural and urban areas. We wanted to know what role the workers are playing to set and steer the agendas for change. Following one-on-one conversations, 35-45 colleagues from twenty-five organisations in Africa, Asia and Latin America met every week between April and July 2021. The online discussions under the **Women Workers for Change** banner were lively, rich and inspiring. We heard about the range of paid and unpaid work that women workers perform and how some of them have taken steps to organise themselves and advocate for their rights. We learnt about the creative strategies that our members and partners use to enhance their accountability towards women workers. Colleagues from **Srijan Foundation-India**, for example, shared with the group the discussions they had in their focus villages on women's paid and unpaid work. They told us that as each woman's list of work tasks kept getting longer and longer, the women themselves were amazed at how many tasks were packed into a single day.

Inspired by **Srijan**, we chose the same topic for the inaugural issue of **Our Work, Our Lives**. We invited women workers to talk about everything they do in a day, from the time they wake up until they go to bed. We encouraged colleagues to have these discussions within the workers groups. Although COVID-19 restrictions have made in-person discussions impossible in several places, some of them were able to hold online discussions with their members. They also had one-on-one calls or phone interviews with members or

women they work with. Those who are part of groups with literacy asked their members to write short pieces. And all this was done in two weeks!

### **Why talk about *A Day's Work*?**

Globally, there is a lot of discussion on the lack of recognition of women's unpaid work and gender disparity in paid and unpaid work. Feminist economists have carried out time-use surveys to calculate the hours women spend working each day. Started by Selma James in 1972, the **International Wages for Housework Campaign (IWFHC)** is a grassroots women's network that campaigns for recognition and payment for all caring work, in the home and outside. The **Global Women's Strike** is a movement that seeks to value women's work and women's lives around the world. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reiterates that women's unpaid care work should be recognised, redistributed and reduced.

The first step towards change is to RECOGNISE the disparities. The woman herself needs to recognise how much time she spends working all day. This simple exercise can lead to strategic discussions on how to effect changes within families. Unions and CSO supporters can join ongoing campaigns or build new campaigns to bring about policy changes.

### **Getting women workers to write for the magazine**

Putting together the first issue of **Our Work, Our Lives** has been an interesting experience for us at GAATW International Secretariat. While a few sisters (from Uganda, Kuwait and Sierra Leone, for example) wrote in English and sent a photo of the text via WhatsApp, many either wrote or just spoke to colleagues of theirs in other languages which were then transcribed and translated into English. We have translations from seven languages in this issue and we are grateful to all colleagues who translated the women's words. We also express deep gratitude to Tanuja Sethi at Kala aur Katha for designing the cover pages of the magazine.

Unsure if our sisters would like to have their names and photos displayed, we had told them that they could send a representational picture and we would anonymise their names. We should have known better: most women wanted to have their own photos and rightly claimed authorship.

The first issue features 21 essays from eight countries – Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kuwait, Nepal, Sierra Leone and Uganda. Our authors are domestic workers – both migrant and local, weavers, garment workers, sex workers, farmers, entertainment workers and daily-wage workers.

All of them do both paid and unpaid work. Some juggle a number of tasks to earn a small amount of money.

Reading these real-life accounts has been a very heart-warming and humbling experience for us. We hope that worker-leaders, union and community organisers will be able to find a way to share these stories and continue the discussion with the workers who cannot read English.

If you are a GAATW member or partner or friend working with women workers and would like to join these conversations or contribute to the magazine, please write to [bandana@gaatw.org](mailto:bandana@gaatw.org). Comments and suggestions are most welcome.

Warmly,

GAATW-IS Team





# A DAY'S WORK



# My Favorite Place is My Little Home

ALEYA BEGUM



My name is Aleya Begum. I am 37 years old. My husband Ramjan Ali is deaf and mute. He works as a woodcutter. He fells trees, cuts big logs of wood into smaller pieces for the carpenters. I have three lovely children – one son and two daughters. We live in Lakhirchar, Keraniganj, Bangladesh.

I was working in Saudi Arab for five years. During that time, my mother-in-law and husband managed our household and looked after the children. I came back to Bangladesh in 2019. Upon return, I started to work in a small local factory.

My day starts at 5 AM with a quick bath and morning prayer. Then I sweep the floors of my two-room home and courtyard, fold the beddings, wash the dishes and boil our drinking water. I then water the plants that I have in our courtyard. After that I take our cows to the field, I leave them there to graze and come back home. Cleaning the cowshed takes some time. By then it is 6.30 AM, and I start preparing breakfast and lunch for all of us. I cook both meals very early as I must leave for work before 8 AM. It is very hard to wake up my children in the morning, so I keep calling them out from the kitchen and finally pull them out.

I eat my breakfast quickly after others have eaten. I set aside lunch for the family and pack my lunchbox to take to work. I don't like keeping unwashed pots and pans so I quickly clean them before leaving for work.

I work from 8.30 AM to 2.30 PM in the factory with a short lunchbreak. Coming back home, the first thing I do is bringing our cows home and feeding them with some soaked grains and rice water. I also check on the shed and make sure that there are no insects and mosquitoes there. This is very important during monsoon when there is not much sun. I don't want our cows to fall sick. I then sweep the house and yard again.

I sweep our rooms again and wash myself before performing my evening prayers. We have some plants and trees around the house so we have to be careful about insects. I fold the dried clothes and put them away. My husband and I take turns to wash clothes. I usually prepare some light snacks for us to eat because we eat dinner only around 9 or 10 PM. I make sure that my children study and finish their homework before dinner. Sometimes my children help me in cooking dinner. This is something they have learnt while I was away in

another country. After we have all eaten, I wash all the dishes and prepare our beds with the mosquito nets. Before going to sleep my husband and I list all the expenses of the day. We discuss what groceries or other things we may need to buy the next day. We talk in sign language.



This is my typical day. On some days, I have to do errands like going to the market or to the doctor or to the house of my children's teacher. Sometime I visit my parents who live not far from our house. I also go to the government employment office, as I am interested to go abroad again. Working in a foreign country enables us to have savings for the future.

My favorite place is my little home. This little place holds all my memories – both happy and sad ones. I started my adult life here. My children are growing up here. I miss this dilapidated place when I am in the fancy house of my employer in a foreign country.

(Transcribed and translated from Bangla by Lipi Rahman, Badabon Sangho)

# I have a Busy Schedule

BISHNU



My name is Bishnu Sripali. I am 27 years old. I am a singer in Gudhuli Dohori Sanjh, Butwal, Nepal. I live with my sister and brother.

I have a busy schedule because I am managing our home, working to earn some money and also learning some new skills.

I start my day very early. After cleaning the house and making breakfast for everyone, I eat, get ready and go for my dance classes. After my class, I come home, cook lunch, clean everything and then go for my tailoring classes. Sometimes, I have orders for my tailoring work so I do that.

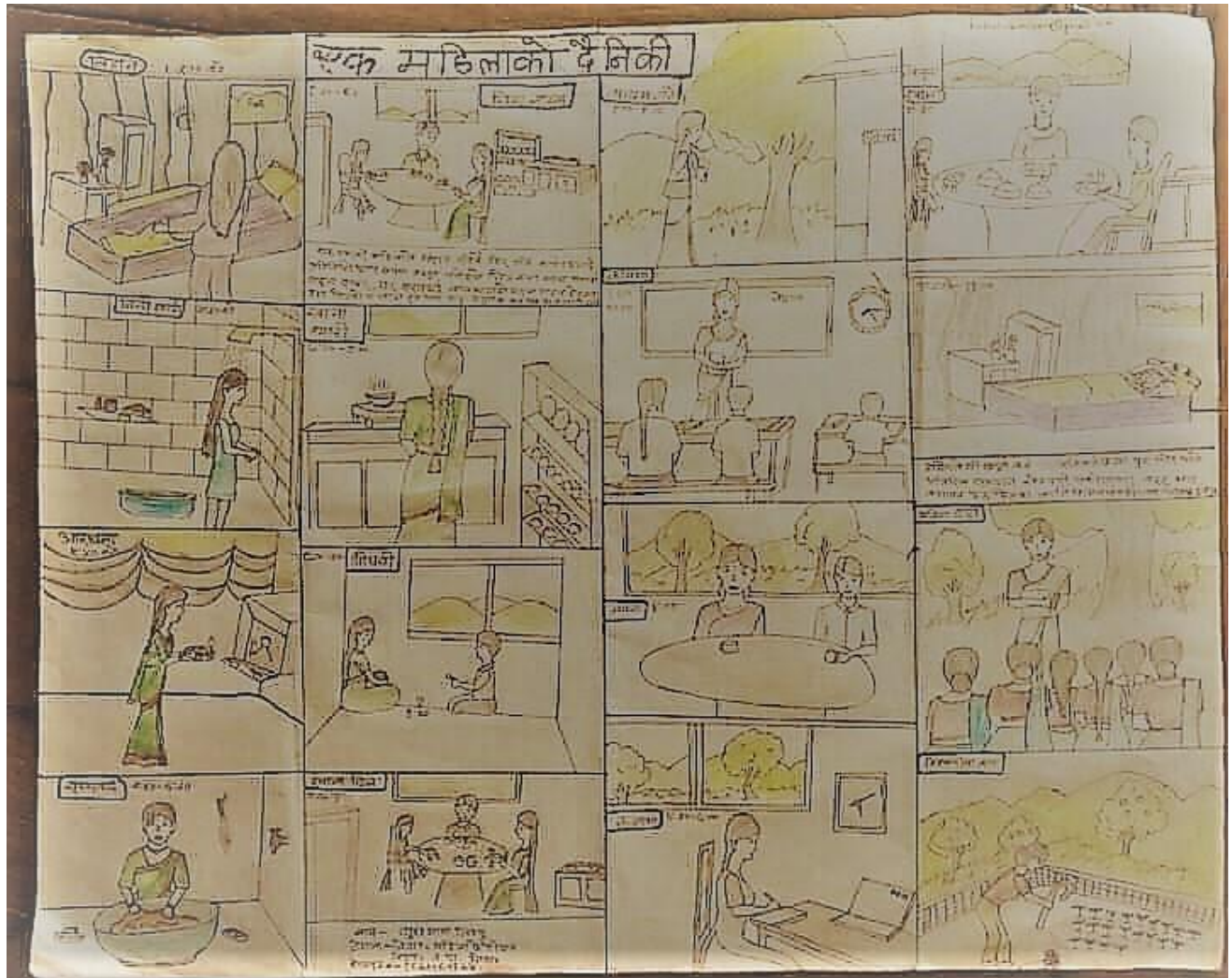
By 5 PM, I have to start doing my make-up, put on the costume and go to work at the Dohori Sanjh. My work goes on until late and by the time I come back home it is well past midnight. I cook something, eat and fall sleep around 1 AM. My sister and brother are studying and they also do some work to earn some money. As the older sibling, I do all housework.

(Transcribed and translated from Nepali by Pooja Choudhary,  
WOFOWON)



# My Day in a Picture

BUDDHA MAYA



I am Buddha Maya Limbu, from Letang Municipality, Nepal. I am a home maker, a teacher, the Vice President of the women's federation and a farmer. In the drawing, I have tried to show everything that I do in a day. From the time I wake up until I go to bed.



# Not Everything That I Do Makes Money

ERI HANDAYANI

Assalamualaikum.

My name is Eri Handayani. I am 40 years old. I live in Wedoro Village, Penawangan District, Grobogan Regency, Indonesia. I live with my two daughters and my elderly parents. My husband works out of town.

I will tell you about the work I do on a typical day. Not everything I do makes money.

My day begins at 4:30 AM. I wash myself and do my dawn prayer. Then I start cooking breakfast for the family. After that, I clean the house and wash the dishes from the previous night. Around 7.00 AM, I iron the clothes that I will wear to work. I teach in a kindergarten.



I leave for the school at 7.30 AM. At the school, I tidy up the classroom and prepare assignments for the children and their parents. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students are not coming to school but teachers continue to go to school to take online classes and carry out other administration work. My colleagues and I are also visiting the homes of our students. We have formed small study groups of five students who live near each other. In addition, my colleagues and I are also encouraging parents to support their children in playing and learning.

By 10 AM, I return home and immediately check if my two children have finished their schoolwork or not. Usually my younger daughter needs help from me. I stay with my children until 11.30 AM while they study and then attend to some housework like sweeping and folding yesterday's laundry. I do my prayer and then we have lunch and take some rest.



By 2 PM, it is time to wash our clothes and clean the pots, pans, plates and glasses from breakfast and lunch. My daughter helps me in this work. I take a bath at 4 PM, do my prayers and go to my mother's fruit shop at Truko Market. I manage the shop until 8 PM.

It is usually 8.30 PM by the time I return home. When I am at the shop, my kids cook our dinner. As soon as I get home, I eat, wash myself and go to sleep.

(Translated from Bahasa Indonesia by  
Yaya, LRC-KJHAM)





# Our Family Runs on My Income

KADIATU

My name is Kadiatu. I live in Makeni city, Sierra Leone. Following my divorce, I am the single parent for my 7-year-old son. I live with my mother, younger sister and brother, my sister's son and my son. Our family of six people runs on my income. I took my Secondary School Certificate examination this year.

My day begins around 6.30 AM. My family and I usually spend 15 minutes in morning prayers.

After prayer, my next duty is to clean the house and prepare food for my family and pack my son's school lunch. Mornings are very busy for me as I must finish all my work and drop my son at school before reaching my office at 8 AM.

We start our work in the office with a prayer. My day at the office is filled with trainings these days because following last year's traumatic return from Lebanon, we are now trying

to stand on our feet and support each other in our home country. We discuss and plan strategies for advocacy, we learn skills such as clothes-making and bead crafts. My colleagues and I eat our lunch at the office. We leave office at 5.30 PM.

Upon reaching home, I eat food prepared by my little sister under my mother's supervision. Then I prepare my son's school uniform for the next day. Finally, around 6PM, after nearly 12 hours of non-stop activity, I get some time to rest. I go to the back of our house and rest under the mango tree. It is then that I have some time with my phone, to connect with people via social media. Sometimes, friends and relatives from the neighborhood join me at this time.



At 8 PM, I sit with my son to help him with his homework. My family and I end our day with a prayer and go to bed by 10 PM.

At home, my mother and sister help me with housework. At the office, there are my colleagues. As a single mother, I have a lot of responsibility.

But God willing, my hard work will yield good results in future.



# I'm Surprised How Many Things I do

KRANTI

My name is Kranti Kumari. I am 27 years old. I live in Neerugattuvaripalle village of Chatte Vari Palam Gram Panchayat in Andhra Pradesh. We are six people in my family: my parents-in-law, my husband, our two sons and myself. My elder son is nine years old and the younger one is five.

I am a busy person. I carry out all care responsibilities as a daughter-in-law, wife and mother. I am also a student; I have enrolled in an undergraduate programme through Distance Education. Then there is my work as a farmer, a volunteer with the Women



Farmers Forum and one of the Board Directors at Surabhi Cooperatives Society. My days flow with the clock. When I list everything, even I am surprised at how many things I do.'

I wake up at 4.30 AM, wash my face and read my college books until 5.00 AM.

From 5 to 5.30 AM, I brush my teeth and clean myself.

From 5.30 to 6 AM, I clean my house and do a *rangoli* (a floral decoration with rice flour) at the entrance of our house.

From 6 to 7 AM I am in our farm to water the plants and weed the paddy, peanuts and vegetables.

From 7 to 9 AM I take my bath and help my kids to get ready for school. I prepare rice and curries and serve all family members. I also eat at this time. Then I quickly wash the dishes.

At 9.30 AM I leave home for house visits as a part of my volunteer job in the Women Farmer's Forum. I carry some packed lunch with me. Our Field Centre is 15 minutes



walking. Sometimes I take an auto rickshaw to get there. I cover several villages in a day and meet the women farmers. Each village is about 5 to 10 KM from my village. All women farmers practice organic farming. We discuss different problems and share tips with each other. I train new farmers who want to change to organic practice.

At 1 PM, other volunteers and I eat our lunch. We often share food with each other. Our field visit continues until 5.30 PM. I visit farms where women farmers are members of the Surabhi Cooperative Society. It is usually 6 PM when I return home. I give a bath to my children, heat the milk and give it to them.

By 7 or 7.30 PM, I finish cooking dinner.

I take a shower with warm water at 7.30 PM, and then heat water for my husband's bath. We have our dinner together at 8.00 PM. After dinner, I clean the dishes. Before going to bed, I write my field reports in my diary. That helps me when I do follow-up visits.

I go to sleep at 10.30 PM.

This is a typical day in my life. On special days, like on festivals, there is more work. During some seasons, there is more work in the farm. If anyone is sick at home, there is a lot of stress. But life goes on.

(Translated from Telugu by R Meera, WINS, Tirupathi, India)

# My Fellow Domestic Worker Sisters are My Lifeline Here

LEIGH

I am Leigh. I am 40 years old and a widow. I have studied up to college level. I am a domestic worker in Kuwait. I live in my employer's house. I am a single parent to my four daughters in the Philippines. They live with my two grandmothers and my mother-in-law. Our entire family is dependent on my wages.

In my employer's house here in Kuwait, my days are long. Tasks are lined up neatly, one after the other. I work alone, without any help from anyone. I try my best to do my job so that there will not be any complaint from my employers.

I tried to list my day's work and this is what it looks like:

6-6.30 AM: Wake up

6.30 to 7 AM: Exercise

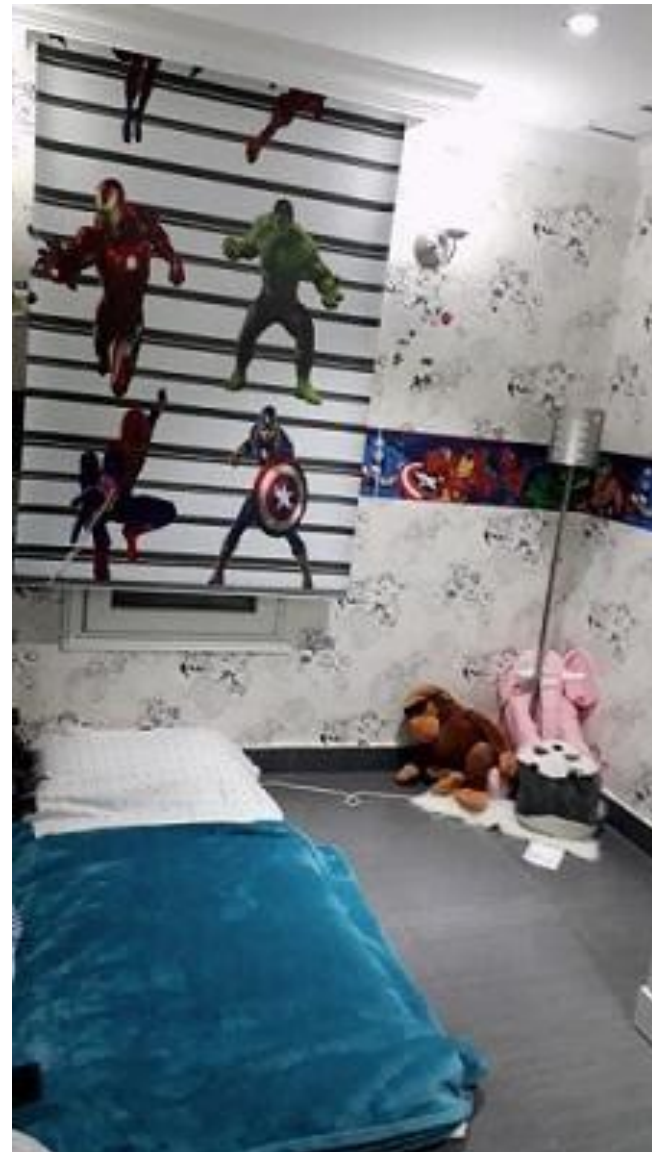
7 to 8 AM: Take a bath

8 to 8.30 AM: Prepare breakfast for my employer and myself, eat breakfast quickly

8.30 AM to 10.30 AM: Clean living room, kitchen, play room, bathroom and toilet

10.30 AM to 11.30 AM: Wash clothes

11.30 AM to 12 Noon: Start preparing for lunch







12 Noon to 1.30 PM: Cooking time

1.30 PM to 2 PM: Clean room for Madam and Sir while cooking

2 PM to 2.30 PM: Set the table and serve lunch

2.30 PM to 3.30 PM: Clean kitchen, wash dishes

3.30 PM to 5 PM: Clean the two rooms of the kids, clean living room again

5 PM to 7 PM: Iron clothes

7 PM to 8 PM: Make food for kids

8 PM to 9 PM: Set table and serve dinner, clean kitchen

9 PM to 9.30 PM: Clean again the room of Sir and Madam

9.30 PM to 10.30 PM: Make sauce and boil potato or other preparation for next day's meals

10.30 to 11: Clean play room

11 PM to 12 Midnight: Time for myself, take a bath, prepare for bed time

This is a normal day. On days when my employer has guests, a child is sick, or I travel with them, things become more hectic.

I get a weekly day off which I look forward to even if I have to do a lot of work the day before so that no one is inconvenienced. I am a member of Sandigan-Kuwait. My fellow domestic worker sisters are my lifeline here.



# I Manage All the Weaving Process

LOBHABATI



I am Lobhabati Sahoo. I am 40 years old. I live in Malanda village of Jagasinghpur district of Odisha, India. My family is small – my husband, our son and I. I am a weaver.

My day starts early. I wake up around five in the morning. The first thing I do is go to the *guhala* (cattle shed) and fold my hands to worship them because they are important for us.

I clean the house including the front and backyard of the house. After washing the dishes from the previous night, I make tea for the three of us – my husband, son and myself – and we eat flattened rice with sugar.

We live in my godfather's house. I do not have any help at home. I do all the housework. My morning's work is done around 7 AM.

I start weaving around 7 AM and do it for two hours. At 9 AM, I take my bath and pray to our Gram Devi (village Goddess). I prepare lunch for my family after *puja*. We eat together around 1:00 -2 PM. I don't take any rest after lunch. After lunch I weave for three hours continuously till 5 PM as it the only source of income for us. Around 5 PM our cattle return from the field. I feed them and tie them back in their shed. This is when I have some time for rest. I talk to our neighbors. Before it gets dark, I clean around our house. Then I wash myself, light the *sanja*, the evening light for the Gods, and do my evening payer. I switch off my mobile phone and weave for another two hours – from 7 to 9 PM. We usually eat what is left over from lunch. Sometimes I fry a little vegetable to add to our meal.

I have to weave in order to run my family. We do not have any land.

I eat around 9:30 PM. By 10 or 10:30 PM I go to sleep.

Once a week or once in two weeks when I go to the Cooperative Society to deliver my products. My husband helps with cooking.

My husband does not know weaving. He works as a daily labourer. I manage all the weaving process – from warping, spinning bobbin to weaving. On some days when I don't feel well, I ask my relatives to assist me in the warping process.

(Transcribed and translated from Odia by Pankaja Sethi, Kala aur Katha,  
Bhubaneswar, India)

# I Dream of Studying Law at the University

MAI

I am Mai. I am 36 years old. I am from Jambi in Sumatra, Indonesia. I have studied up to C packet, an informal education programme which is equivalent to high school level. I have two children, the elder one is in 2nd grade junior high school, the younger one is in 2nd grade of elementary school.

I am a freelance worker in karaoke bars.

I got married when she was 16 years old. It was not a good marriage. I experienced domestic violence and torture on a regular basis. My husband pushed me on to the burning stove, hit me repeatedly and chained me. He did not give me any food or water for days and tried to strangle me. He brought another woman to our home and she started living with us. A doctor we went to diagnosed my husband as a psychopath and said my life is in danger. I lived through hell for seven years and realised that this will not change. I felt afraid that he might harm our son. So I decided to get a divorce. At that time, our son was only 5 years old.

After two years, I remarried. I gave birth to my second son and life was normal. But tragedy struck when my second husband died of TB in the fourth year of our marriage. I became a single parent of two children. I still feel traumatised by things that have happened in my life.

So what are my days like now?

I wake up at 7 AM, prepare some food for the children, get them ready for school or online class. Then I go to the market to buy things that we need for the day. After that, I clean the house, cook lunch and we eat. At 1 PM, I take my children for their tutorial lessons. I wait there until they finish at 3 PM and then we come home together. My afternoon is spent in washing, cleaning and cooking food for the evening. We finish our evening prayers at home and around 7 PM I leave for the karaoke bar. Unlike the pre-pandemic time, I don't have a regular job in one bar now. I arrange it day by day. Often there is no work because the bars are closed most of the time.

When there is work, my fellow bar workers and I meet each other at the bar and try to find a guest who will be interested to spend time with us. If I am lucky, I find someone and we go to a hotel. On a good night, I can work with two guests and earn around 14 US dollars.

I get back home at 3 AM. Often I don't get any sleep. I watch the *ceramah* (Islamic lectures) on TV and cry. Sometimes I fall asleep only after the morning prayers, after 5 AM. If I get two hours of sleep, I am happy.



My children's health and education are my main concern. I don't think of myself. No, that's not true. I do think of myself and dream. I dream of going to the university, to study more. I want to study law. I want to work to end violence in the lives of women. Becoming a member of OPSI, the Sex Workers' Rights Group, has been one of the most wonderful things in my life. Meeting other women like me, learning new things and supporting each other has given me hopes for future.

(Transcribed by Liana, OPSI, Indonesia and translated by Dewi Nova, GAATW-IS)

# My Household Runs on My Energy

RAJYALAKSHMI

My name is Mekala Rajyalakshmi. I am 32 years old. I live in Dasaripalem village in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. There are four of us in our family – my parents, my daughter and myself.

My day starts at four o'clock every morning. I do half an hour of yoga and then clean the whole house. I like a neat and tidy house. My parents are old and not well so I help them brush their teeth. I make tea for them, sometimes I have to help them drink their tea. I prepare breakfast for our family and also send to my father-in-law who lives nearby.

At 10.30 AM, I leave home to go to the tailoring shop. I teach tailoring to some students. I also teach embroidery work, glass painting and fabric painting. I can do my tailoring work on order while also teaching the students.







I am also a sex worker. If I get a phone call from a client, I talk on the phone, fix a place and go to meet him. I take a lunch break from 1 to 2 PM. Another batch of students come for the 2 to 4 PM classes.

I close the shop around 5 or 6 PM and go home. On my way back home, I do my shopping. I buy vegetables and fruit and also thread and other material for the shop. I reach home around 7 PM.

I give milk to my father and to my daughter and then start preparing dinner. I feed my parents and my daughter and I eat too. We like to eat by 8.30 or 9 PM. I wash the dishes and take a bath before going to sleep. My household runs on my energy.

(Translated from Telugu by R Meera, WINS, Tirupathi, India.)

# These Days, I Feel Tired in the Evenings

ROBYARNI

My name is Robyarni. I am 64 years old. I live in South Tangerang City, Banten Province, Indonesia. I am a member of Rumpun Tangsel Domestic Workers Union.

So what is my typical day?

Nothing special. Just everyday work.

In the morning, I prepare breakfast for my family members before going to work.

At my workplace, I make bread. The process of making bread takes three hours. While the bread is baking in the oven, I wash dishes and clean the house. After everyone has eaten breakfast and all cleaning is done, I start cooking lunch. In between, I run the washing machine.

I set the table for lunch. After the kids and employers have eaten their lunch, I eat. Then I wash the dishes, clean the kitchen and put out clothes to dry.





After that, I have a little time for rest. I prepare everything for dinner and then leave for my home at 5 PM.

On my way home, I do some errands like buying things for the family. It takes me half an hour to reach home. In the evening, I gather with my children and grandchildren and we watch the TV show “Ikatan Cinta”.

These days, I feel tired in the evenings. Sometimes, I just fall asleep with my grandchildren in front of the TV. I wake up in the middle of night and move to my bedroom.



That is my day. Apologies if there are some errors. My writing is not good.

(Translated from WhatsApp Notes in Bahasa Indonesia  
by Aida Milasari and Lita A, Jala-PRT-Indonesia)

# We Prepare for Online Campaigns by Making Videos and Posters

SABARINAH

My name is Sabarinah Muji Rahayu. I work as a domestic worker in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. My husband does various kinds of work, whatever he can. He has worked in a parking lot, as a construction worker and as a gardener. We have two daughters.

I started work as labourer in a factory in 1989. It was a pulp factory in Tangerang, Banten Province. When I came back to my hometown Yogyakarta, I decided to work as domestic worker. I have been a domestic worker since 2006.

Let me tell you about my day.

My day starts at 4:30 AM with the dawn prayers. Then the daily chores start. The first task is cooking. I boil some water and my husband makes coffee or tea for both of us. I steam rice, cook some





vegetables and fish or chicken. My husband is the first one to eat because he has to rush for his work.

After he leaves, I proceed to do my household work such as washing the dishes and washing the clothes of all family members. Then I take my bath, eat breakfast and get ready to go to work.

Before leaving home, I wake up my daughters and remind them to eat on time. I prepare milk for them and pack some snacks for myself. One of my daughters has already passed her Senior High School examination and by God's grace she has also qualified to enroll in Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta.



I have two cats. I give them their breakfast, clean their litter box then I check all rooms in my house before going to work to make sure that everything is okay. My employer's house is only 10 minutes away from my house and I need to be there by 8 AM. My work finishes at 2 PM.

Back at home, I cook lunch and eat it with my daughters. After lunch, I sit with my daughters when they do their online classes. I help them, if I can. Otherwise, my husband helps them at night. I make sure that they do all their assignments.

My little daughter plays with toys after her online class and makes a mess in the house. While she is playing, I wash clothes and do other housework. I usually heat some food from afternoon for dinner and we eat it when my husband comes home. On days when I am too tired to wash the dishes, I leave them for the next day.

I usually take a bath after dinner. As a member of the Domestic Workers Union, I also have some other work. I do that before going to bed. I interact with colleagues from the Union via WhatsApp, sometimes attend Zoom meetings, we prepare for online campaigns by making videos and posters.

As you can see, I am busy. But I like it.



(Translation from WhatsApp Note in Bahasa Indonesia by Aida Milasari and Lita A, Jala-PRT-Indonesia)



# One of My Happy Days

SABITRI SUNDI

My name is Sabitri Sundi. I am 35 years old now.

I got married in 2004. My husband died of TB in 2017, so I became the single parent of our four sons. My husband has 4 *Bighas* of land and he used to run the family by farming and doing daily wage labour.

After his death, I moved to my father's house in Chaibasa. I fell ill there and became partially paralysed from weakness. It became difficult for me to manage things so I left two of my sons with my mother and returned to my husband's house in Bakulchanda village. Initially I found it very difficult to run my family, but I did not give up. I opened a small shop and started working in our land. I was determined that disability will not be a barrier for me.





Today I want to talk about 14 July, one of my happy days. That is the day, I added a new feature to my shop, I opened a Pakoda and tea shop.

I woke up at 4 AM, as usual. I swept the house and around the house. After doing other tasks like bringing water, chopping firewood for cooking, drying paddy and having some food, I opened my small grocery shop. Like every day, I cooked lunch and we all ate. I went to our field to check on the paddy that was planted.



I came home quickly, because I would have to make pakodas and inaugurate my new shop. My friends were going to visit my shop and I had to serve them. So I prepared everything very nicely. They came and ate. It was a good beginning. My sons were also happy.

I closed my shop in the evening and came home. I cooked dinner for everyone. It was a busy day and I was tired but very happy. I gave food to my children, prepared their bed with the mosquito net and put them to sleep. I ate and went to sleep dreaming that someday my shop will be a popular one in our village.



(Transcribed and translated from Hindi by colleagues from Shramajeevi Mahila Samity,  
Jharkhand, India)





# I Worked for Three Years Without Any Salary

SENAIT ADMASU

I am Senait Admasu. I am 24 years old. I have a daughter. I have completed Grade 9 via distance education. I currently live in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I have four sisters and a brother. When I was 12 years old, I had some problem with my eyesight so I had to come from Wollo to Addis Ababa to live with one of the members of my extended family and get medical treatment for my eyes. I received the treatment but I also became a full-time domestic worker in their house. I worked for three years without any salary.

Then I moved out and worked for another family for seven years for a salary of 300 Birr per month. It was non-stop work and no rest. The only difference was that I was getting a little money. When I broke something by mistake, they would cut my salary. Due to the heavy workload, I became ill with severe back pain.

For the last 10 years this is what my days looked like:

**From 5:00 am- 8:00am**

- Clean the house
- Fold the bedding
- Prepare breakfast
- Wash pots, pans, cups, plates etc.
- Clean the children
- Pack breakfast for children
- Take children to school
- Serve breakfast to the family

**From 8:00am-12:30pm**

- Wash the dishes
- Eat breakfast
- Wash clothes
- Prepare lunch
- Serve lunch
- Brew coffee

**From 12:30pm-8:30pm**

- Bake Injera
- Go to the shop
- Clean the house
- Bring children from school
- Prepare dinner
- Serve dinner

**From 8:30pm-11:00pm**

- Give bath to children and put them to sleep
- Wash dishes
- Keep children's clothes ready for next day
- Prepare for next day's breakfast
- Eat dinner
- Go to sleep







Two years ago, I joined the Addis Ababa Serto Melewot Workers' Association as a member. Soon COVID-19 struck and I lost my job. Fortunately, I was among the beneficiaries of COVID-19 affected members of the Association. I received ETB 4,000 from the Association and started my tea and coffee business with that money. Now I earn a profit of ETB 100 per day. I have a plan to expand my business into a café and restaurant.

(Transcription and translation from Amharic by Messie Chekole, CVM-Ethiopia)

# No One Else is Earning in My Family

SUBHADRA



I am Subhadra Patra. I am 21 years old. I live in Nuapatana village in Cuttack district of Odisha, India. Weaving is the traditional occupation of my family. Now I work as a garment worker.

My day starts around 6 AM. I wash my face, brush my teeth and then I go to pick flowers for morning Puja. Then I go to the market to buy some breakfast. After eating my breakfast, I clean the house and take my bath. I change my clothes, comb my hair and get ready for the day.

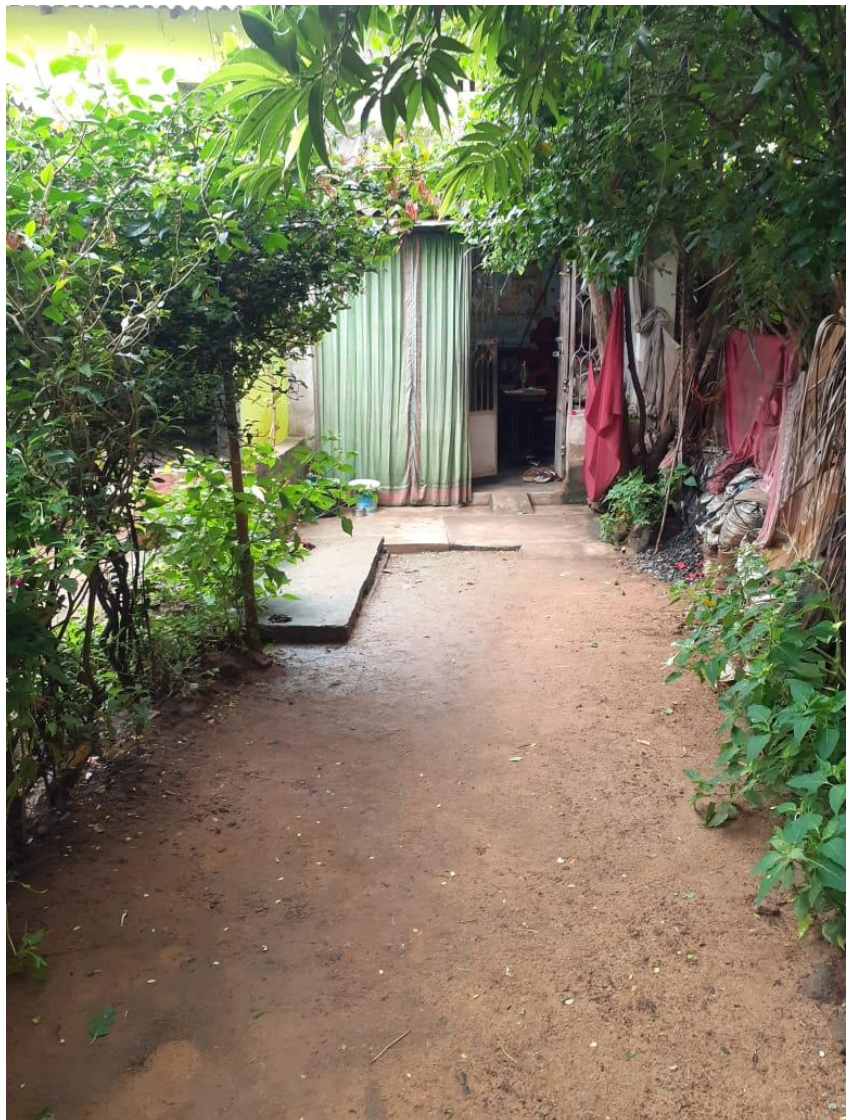
For the last two months I have been assisting my brother-in-law in the saree business as my sister is expecting a child and can't do much work. So after breakfast, I go to their place. I return home at 2pm to eat lunch and again go back to work. I take rest for 30 minutes. At 3:30 PM, I go to the Nuapatna Centre



to do some tailoring work and return home at 5 PM. I collect water from the tube well and sweep my house. If I have orders, I stitch the garments at home or I just practice tailoring. In the evening, I cook with my mother. I try to study in the evening and teach my niece. Around 10 -10:30 PM, I eat dinner and go to sleep.

My parents are very old. Both of them used to weave. Now they are unable to weave or do any kind of work. Both of my older sisters are married. I work at my brother-in-law's house to get a small amount of money because no one else is earning in my family. My eldest sister and my niece stay with us for convenience. There is a lot of financial pressure.

(Translated from Odia by  
Pankaja Sethi, Kala aur  
Katha, Bhubanewar, India)





# My Husband Does Not Bother

SUMITRA DEVI



I am Sumitra Devi from Baghima village in Palkot block of Gumla district, Jharkhand, India. I am 35 years old. I live with my husband and our three children – two daughters and one son. My husband used to go to Punjab as a migrant worker and come home once a year. But COVID-19 has changed that and he is now living in the village for the last two years. Now my husband and I work in our small patch of land. The paddy we get is not enough to feed the family for the year. I, along with other women of the village, go to the nearby forest in

Semra village to bring firewood and other things. We also keep cows, buffaloes, pigs and goats.

What do I do in a day? I look after the house, cook and clean, look after the children and look after the animals. I collect firewood and anything useful that I find in the forest. I do daily wage work, whenever I can get it. Now that my husband is not able to go to Punjab for work, we are always short of money. But he does not bother. He works in the field and drinks or sits around at home. Like all other men.

You want to know my work from morning to evening? Everything? Okay.



I wake up very early. May be at 5 AM or 5.30 AM. Very early. I go to the toilet and wash myself and then get busy – washing the dishes from the previous night, cleaning the house, bringing water, making cow dung cake, cooking food and serving everyone. Then I eat.

Then I feed the animals. On days when there is daily wage work, I leave home by 9 AM to work in someone's field. Around 2 PM, I come home to eat and serve food to others and then go back to work again. It is 6 PM when I return home from daily wage work. On the days when there is no daily wage work, I go to the forest. From the forest too, I come back only by evening. Then again, I start cleaning, bringing water and cooking. By the time all of us, human beings and animals, finish eating, I am very tired and fall asleep. The next day, everything starts again.



(Transcribed and translated from Hindi by to Dhanmyat Singh, Srijan Foundation,  
Jharkhand, India)



# We Can Change Our Situation Only If We Have a Collective Voice

SUSHILA



Namaste. I am Sushila Chaulagain. I am 51 years old. I have been working as a domestic worker for the last 28 years. I respect my profession and hope that someday domestic work will be considered decent and respectable work. Currently, I am the Vice-President of Home Workers Trade Union of Nepal (HUN). I believe that we can change our situation only if we have a collective voice.

We are four people in my family. My husband also works in a house as a cook. He has worked as a security person with several



employers too. Our daughter is married and we have a grandson. Our son is studying abroad. I did not have the opportunity to go to school. I have only learnt to sign my name. My husband also does not have much formal education. But through our hard work we have been able give a better future to our children. We are happy now.

Usually, my day starts at 5 AM. As soon as I wake up, I get busy. I clean my apartment, take bath, worship the Gods and cook something quickly. Then I go to my employer's house. I prepare breakfast for them, wash the dishes, sweep the rooms and wash clothes. I then rush to my house to cook lunch, pack some for myself and take an auto-rickshaw for another job. That job is in the Money Transfer Office. I clean the office and fill drinking water. I serve tea to office staff three times during the day. I eat my lunch at the office.

When I return home, it is usually evening. I make preparation for our dinner and then go to the same employer's house where I had been in the morning. I cook dinner for them and wash the dishes before returning home. I cook our dinner, eat it with my husband and then clean the kitchen. By the time I can relax a little in front of the TV, it is almost 10 PM. At that time, I am sleepy and tired. I do not stay awake till very late because I will need to wake up early next morning.

(Transcribed and translated from WhatsApp video interview in Nepali  
by Gyanu KC, HUN.)

# Online Studies is Not Easy for Children

SUTARMI

Hello, Assalamualaikum.

I am Sutarmi. I come from Wedoro Village, Penawangan District, Grobogan Regency, Indonesia. I am 41 years old and have two daughters who are 8 and 5 years old.

Before talking about how I spend my day these days, I want to tell you about my work experience in other countries. In 1998, I graduated from high school and looked after my little sister at home. Then, in 1999, I started looking for work. My neighbor told me that a car rental company in Semarang needed someone to do their admin work. I went to Semarang but it turned out that there was no such job. Instead of going back home, I looked for other work and found a job as a domestic worker. I stayed in that job for a year. My next job was in a textile factory in Solo for one year. The factory used to give us a day off on Sundays. On Sundays, I used to look for agencies who were registering people to go abroad for work.

I registered with an agency in Solo to go and work in Hong Kong. Instead, I was offered a job in Singapore and I accepted it. In Singapore, I looked after my employer's three children and did all the housework. I was still keen on Hong Kong so I used to look for job information in *The Straight Times*. After my contract period in Singapore ended, I managed to get a new contract in Hong Kong. I flew to Hong Kong in 2003 and worked there until 2010.

I returned to Indonesia in 2010 and got married. Now I am bringing up my two daughters, looking after my family and also running a small business of my own.

So this is how my days look like now:

I wake up at 4:00 AM. I help my mother get ready for her chicken shop in the market. Then I do my morning prayers. After that, I cook our breakfast. At 6 AM, I wake up my husband and children. Then, I take my mother to the market by motorbike because she cannot ride a motorbike.

My first daughter is in the 4th grade and she studies online these days. My second daughter who is in kindergarten, goes to her teacher's house. My husband who works in our field, leaves home at 7 AM.

After I wake up the children, I sweep, mop, wash clothes until 7.30 AM and then take my daughter to her teacher's house. Sometimes she insists that I also stay with her so I wait for her. Back at home, I start preparing bitter melon chips for my shop. I peel the bitter melon and chop it in rings while keeping an eye on my daughter. Online studies is not easy and she gets distracted easily so I have to keep encouraging her and sometimes help her. I pick up my daughter from her teacher's house and continue slicing the melon. It takes me 3 or 4 hours to slice all the bitter melon and then I leave it to marinate until night.

My husband comes home for lunch at 1 PM. My mother also comes back from the market. We eat lunch at 1 PM and take a short break. Sometimes, my children and I play together at home. By 3 PM, I start cooking dinner. After that, I bathe my children and take a shower. We pray in the evening and then I help my children recite the Koran until 7 PM. After dinner, we watch TV together.



We go to sleep at 9 PM. I wake up at 1 AM to fry the bitter melon. It finishes around 3.30 AM or sometimes even at 5 AM, depending on the number of orders I have. I fry it alone without any help from others. I do this only on order so I don't have to worry about marketing.

Some of my friends and I are part of community Batik group. So when there is order, we have to work on our Batik. My days become very hectic when there are family events such as the commemoration of the haul (death ceremony) or the planting and harvest season.

(Translated from Bahasa-Indonesia by Yaya, LRC-KJHAM, Indonesia)





# I'm the First One to Wake Up and the Last One to Go to Bed

TARA BAI

My name is Tara Bai. I am 44 years old. I live in Bazardand village of Gorela district in Chhattisgarh, India.

There are five of us in my family – my husband, our two daughters, our son and I.

I am the first one in my family to wake up in the morning. I finish some of my cleaning and washing work before others wake up. When everyone is awake, I make tea for all of us. Part of our house has a mud floor so it needs a coat of cow dung paste every morning. That keeps our floors smooth and shiny. We do not have running water at home.

My daughters and I walk 500 metres to a public tube well to fetch water for our daily use.

I finish cooking by 8 AM and after we have all eaten, I leave home with our goats at 9 AM. While the goats are grazing, I collect some grass to bring home for them. I come back home at 1 or 2 PM, the goats rest in their shed and our family sits down for lunch. I rest for about an hour after lunch and again take the goats to the field for grazing. I return home before it



gets dark. I usually have a bath in the evening. Then another round of cleaning, cooking and washing starts. I am the last one to eat in our family and then I go to sleep.

During the planting and harvesting time, my days are very hectic. I have to do all the work at home and then also do the work in the field. Festival time is another busy time. Guests come home and stay with us. I have to make special food and look after them. When MGNREGA daily wage work is available in our village, I do it to earn some money. I go to the nearby forest to collect firewood and Mahua flowers, Tendu leaves, Chironji berries and some medicinal fruits. I sell the forest produce in the local market and earn some money.

After the rice and other crops are harvested, I have a lean period. When children don't have school, they help me with the house work.

The goats are a good investment. The money that I get from selling goats, I keep it with me. I use that money when a sudden emergency comes. Like an illness or some social obligation. I am very careful with money.

(Transcribed into Hindi by Reena Ramteke, Nav Nirman Manch, Chhatisgarh, India.

Translated from Hindi by Bandana, GAATW-IS)



# Sometimes I Have Regular Work, Sometimes Not

VICTORIA

I am Victoria. I am 47 years old. I live in Kampala city, Uganda. We are seven people in my family.

I am a domestic worker. Like every other day, I woke up at 5.30 AM today. The first thing I did was pray. All our family members joined in the morning prayer. After my prayer, I started cleaning the house. During the COVID-19 lockdown I started a new business selling charcoal. My charcoal shop opens early in the morning because that is when people come to buy it.

By 7 AM, I was out of the house. There is no school for children now because of the pandemic. So, I have some help in the house. One of the children also accompanies me to work to help me there. When they had school, I used to do all housework and paid work by myself.

In the house of my employer, I started by cleaning all the rooms including the toilet and the compound. I washed the dishes and clothes. My employer is Somali. I don't cook in their house. I just prepare everything ready for cooking and then I leave. I work in their house for almost 4 hours, i.e. till all the cleaning and washing and some preparation for lunch is done.

Today was Thursday. I had a meeting with the Domestic Workers Group. We met and discussed a case of abuse by an employer. We decided to refer it to Platform for Labour

Action. After the meeting I went to the market to buy some lunch and a few things for the family.

At 3 PM, I went to another house for work. I only clean their house and wash clothes as they are young and single. I put out the clothes to dry. Tomorrow, I will iron them.

Today I worked in two houses. Sometimes I have regular work, sometimes not. If I get more work, I will do. At 5 PM, I was back in my house.



Every evening after I finish cooking and all other work, I discuss religious lessons with my family members and other members of the Church via WhatsApp. At 10:00 PM after a prayer with the family I go to bed.



# Men Think That Doing Household Work is Not Manly

YASMIN

I am Yasmin Akter. I am 35 years old. I live in Kalyandi village in Narayanganj district of Bangladesh. I live with my husband and 4-year-old daughter. Currently I work in a garment factory in Araihasar that is established by OKUP specifically for returnee women migrant workers.

Before leaving for the factory, I need to do all my household chores, so I get up early in the morning, say my prayer and start my work. While my husband is still in bed, I sweep the floor of my house and prepare food for both breakfast and lunch. We live in a rented house with a shared kitchen space so I try to finish all my cooking in one go. But my daughter is



small so I need to make some special food for her. I have to sweep and clean the kitchen as soon as I finish so that other tenants do not complain.

My husband and daughter wake up at 7 AM. I make their bed. It is quite a struggle for me to manage all house work by myself. But my husband, who works in a local power loom factory, does not offer any help. This is very common in our society. Men think that doing household work is not manly. But I work at home and also outside.

We eat our breakfast together around 7.45 AM. Sometimes my husband feeds our daughter while I pack our lunch boxes. I wash the dishes immediately after we finish eating and then give a bath to my daughter. I do all our washing in the morning, very quickly. The handle of the tubewell in the washroom often gets jammed and I have to keep pressing the handle again and again to get some water. When this happens, I get late for work and I don't like it.

My daughter and I arrive at the factory by 9 AM every morning. I take an auto rickshaw to the factory because my daughter can't walk all the way there. There is no childcare facility at the factory, but at least my daughter can stay near me and play somewhere nearby. We eat our lunch together at the factory.



At the factory, I sew the brims of scarves and stoles. I often take overtime work as it gives me extra income.

My daughter and I return home by 7:30 PM. Without taking any rest, I start the second round of

housework. My husband buys the daily groceries and vegetables while returning from work and I cook it. We can't store most things, because there is no facility. It takes me more than an hour to cook dinner by which time my daughter is very hungry and sleepy. I feed her before she falls asleep. By the time my husband and I finish our meals, it is already 10 PM. I am tired but I have to wash the dishes and mop the floor before going to bed. Tomorrow will be the same as today.

I don't have any free time for myself. I am just too busy managing things all the time. For me, Friday when we have a day off is even worse as it comes with a bulk of weekly chores. My daughter is growing up. I can't find time to teach her the alphabet. My dream is to get a good education for her and secure her future. If only my husband lent me a helping hand sometimes...



(Transcribed and translated from Bangla by Sabira Ferdousi, OKUP-Bangladesh)









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