

Developing our Future Leadership: Education, Capacity-Building, Research and Communication at SEWA Academy

SEWA Academy is the focal point for all of SEWA's capacity building, communications and research efforts. SEWA Academy functions as SEWA members' 'University', providing them with their first introduction to a formal learning environment. It is the organizational wing responsible for member education, leadership training, literacy, print and audio video communications and research.

The Training Unit in SEWA Academy provides SEWA members with education and capacity building aimed at self-development. Through encouragement and support, the women increase their self-confidence and leadership skills as well as unite through a common ideology, thus building the SEWA movement. Poor women have very little opportunity for their own exposure and development. Hence, they capitalize on the learning opportunities provided by SEWA Academy.

1. Training workers to build our movement

At the supportive atmosphere of the Academy, women take the first tentative steps towards gripping a pen and writing their name and address. They stand up before their SEWA sisters to say their name, occupation and place of residence with pride and confidence. They learn how to speak in public, run meetings and also to develop their own campaigns. It is also here that their hidden and not-so-well-known talents are unveiled and encouraged. And the Academy's worker-trainees are never the same again!

In 2006, the Academy organized training sessions for worker-leaders or Aagewans, SEWA's Executive members, organizers and cooperatives' office-bearers and managers. These training programmes included:

- Members education (workers' education)
- SEWA Movement training (for leaders)
- Advanced SEWA Movement training (Kadam)
- Orientation to SEWA (for new organizers)
- Training of Trainers
- Membership training (how to inspire workers to join SEWA)
- Organizers' Training—how to organize, how to build our own workers' organizations
- Leadership and Motivation training
- Video Replay training
- Photography
- Training for Grassroot Researchers
- Adolescent girls exposure training/visits

- Training to develop our writing skills
- Training in profile-writing(profiles of our members)

In addition, SEWA Academy regularly runs an annual course on universalizing socio-economic security among the poor. This is done in partnership with the Centre for Development Studies in Trivandrum and the Institute of Social Studies at the Hague, the Netherlands. This year was the fourth year of our joint collaboration.

Further, the Academy has built up its expertise in a special programme called the Exposure Dialogue Programme (EDP), where policy-makers and academics from various countries share the lives of our members for a few days. After the exposure with the workers, the participants reflect on how the experience touched their lives, and especially, how it encourages them to undertake pro-poor and pro-women worker action for change. EDP is undertaken with the help of experienced partners who facilitate the process.

All these training programmes, and the number of women involved are given in the Table below.

Trainings Conducted in 2006:

Sr. no.	Name of the Trainings	No. of Trainings	No. of Trainers
1.	Membership Education	784	22336
2.	Sewa Movement	80	1796
3.	Organising	3	71
4.	Sampling, Questionnaire, Survey, Coding, Analysis, Writing	10	60
5.	Exposure programs	7	148
6.	SEWA leaders training (Kadam)	25	478
7.	Writing	1	16
8.	Training of Trainers	1	30
9.	Grassroots Research	1	22
10.	Orientation to SEWA	2	32
11.	Video replay	1	27
12.	Profile writing	1	37

13.	Social Security Course	1	16
14.	EDP	2	18
15.	SEWA Executive Committee	1	20
16.	Leadership & Motivation	1	17
17.	Self-Help Group	1	25
18.	Adolescent girls exposure	2	50

This year we had several organisations requesting us for exposure to SEWA’s approach and for an understanding of our activities. They came from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, our neighbouring state of Rajasthan and our own state of Gujarat. As mentioned in the table above, 148 persons from 7 organisations came for such exposure training programmes. In addition, 446 persons from 28 organisations from both India and abroad came for shorter overviews of our work at SEWA.

This year our training team prepared several training manuals. Some of these have already been published and others will be ready shortly. The manuals prepared are:

- SEWA Movement
- Workers’ Education
- Kadam (leaders advanced training)
- Organising

Further, our training team participated in several training programmes and workshops to augment their own training knowledge and skills. Finally, the team undertook documentation of several special events at SEWA Academy and our training programmes.

2. Literacy—learning to take charge of our movement, our lives

Literacy originally was never high on SEWA members’ agenda. Our members said: “What is the point of knowing how to read and write if this doesn’t get us work and income? Can just literacy fill our stomachs?”

In 1992, however, some of our urban members insisted that we start literacy classes for them. They said that it was high time that they learned to read and write their own names, addresses, bus numbers, their wage cards and their own savings account

balances, to mention a few practical uses of literacy. They recognized that being able to read and write bolstered their efforts to be self-reliant and independent.

Then in January 2000, just as we entered the new century and millennium, our worker-leaders (Aagewans) identified education, including literacy, as their number one priority, especially for their children.

All of this gave a big boost to SEWA's fledgling education and literacy work.

This year, our literacy work spread to more villages and urban neighbourhoods. SEWA Academy's literacy team worked closely with our union and cooperative leaders, health, child care, insurance and housing Aagewans to bring literacy to our members doorsteps.

In 2006, 64 teachers, all SEWA members, taught a total of 1020 women how to read and write. Their efforts are given in the table below.

Literacy trainings

No. of classes	No. of Women & Girls	No. of Teachers
48	1020	45

Enthusied by their new literacy skills, some members asked for "advanced" literacy classes, where they could read more books and write more than a few sentences. We call these "New Literacy Classes". The outreach of these classes is given below.

"New Literacy" Class

Area	No. of Classes	Number of women
City	07	90
Village	03	135
Total	10	225

In order to encourage our sisters to read and develop their literacy skills further, we have developed libraries. One of them is located at SEWA Academy. The rest are all community libraries—located right where our members live for easy reach. These community libraries are running in five urban, working class neighbourhoods of Ahmedabad city.

On completion of their literacy class, our sisters get a special certificate. This year, 1020 women obtained literacy certificates—for many the very first document of their progress

Celebration of Literacy Day

Our literacy team celebrated Literacy Day on September 8th, 2007 by organising a rally to promote literacy. The rally of 400 women workers started at SEWA and went on to several working class neighbourhoods nearby, culminating at SEWA Bank's extension counter. All present resolved to end the era of "thumb imprints" and to ensure that all women can sign their own name, in addition to reading and writing skills.

This effort was not limited to the celebration of Literacy Day. SEWA Academy is spearheading SEWA's education campaign, including literacy, of course. 800 women have benefited from this campaign which includes other SEWA teams like the Bank, Social Security and our urban organising team.

Computer Literacy

Our members are always open and enthusiastic about learning new things, exposing themselves to new technology and new opportunities for possible employment and enhanced income. SEWA Academy started computer classes for the children of our members to keep them abreast with the Information Technology (IT) Revolution and in response to their demands.

This year 76 girls completed the MS Office course. 50 of these girls took an advanced course. 30 girls are currently enrolled in the next batch of MS Office. These courses are organised in partnership with the Academy of Computer Training (ACT). And thus, our SEWA sisters and their daughters have begun to boldly bridge the digital divide.

This year a special training class was arranged for the children of women who were widowed in the communal violence of 2002. 9 children took the MS office course and 6 the advanced DTP one.

Many of the adolescent girls and children mentioned above obtained employment after their training. 17 of them got work at different sister organisations of SEWA like SEWA Bank and SEWA Social Security.

The girls also visited SEWA, SEWA Bank and SEWA Social Security and are taking English classes to help them in their computer work.

1. Communication for Change

Communication is a very important aspect of poor self employed women's lives and struggles. There is the need to develop and strengthen communication between members within the SEWA movement, and also between poor women and the world outside. Different media for communication are used by the women, so that they are both seen and heard.

a) Anasooya—our own newsletter

SEWA has explored several channels to support members in their communications efforts. Anasooya, the newsletter, is the newspaper of our members which is published fortnightly. It gives visibility to self employed women. It portrays their lives and work. Creating an understanding of their issues and ensuring that their reality is reflected in development planning and programme.

It voices the constraints faced by poor self employed women's as well as success stories. This is a medium through which we are able to spread their concerns to policy makers.

Anasooya is focused on its readers and their development. It helps to increase their awareness, self confidence and knowledge. Knowing about the activities and achievements of other SEWA –sisters inspires and encourages them. Anasooya gives a voice to their activities, achievements and also the problems of SEWA members.

As Mumtazben of Ingoli village from Ahmedabad districts says, "Our own experiences and facts are inspiring and encouraging. When they are published in Anasooya, they boost up our spirit. All of us feel happy. We can do a lot through this medium."

Anasooya completed its 25th year of uninterrupted bi-monthly publishing for change. We have a total of 2840 subscribers, of which 1198 are lifetime subscribers.

Anasooya primarily publishes articles on the SEWA movement—issues, struggles and achievements, what works and what doesn't when women workers organize for change. We also publish articles written by others on issues faced by the poor and women, in particular. We also re-produce articles from other publications.

In 1996, we set up a separate organization to bring out our newsletter and reach it to increasing numbers of workers. Thus, the Shri Mahila SEWA Anasooya Trust was established.

Some examples of articles published in Anasooya, affectionately called "Aapnu Chhapu" or "Our Newsletter" this year are listed below.

1. Solar Urja Garibo Sudhi Pahonchi

2. Ilaben ne Human rights Award
3. Karmika school ma Kadia Majoor behno
4. Radhanpurthi Washington – Be Caikano panth
5. SEWA na Karigar Hansiba ne Shabashi

b) Our Members Daughter's Magazine: Akashganga

Akashganga means Milky Way in Gujarati. Through their own magazine, Akashganga, our daughters reach for the stars! Started in 1998, this magazine prints stories, poems, riddles and songs for young girls in the 11 to 16 age-group. We also print information on women leaders, science, culture, home remedies and information of interest to girls.

Most importantly, our girls write in with their own pieces: poems, songs, puzzles, drawings, stories, questions and information which they would like to share with others. Akashganga is a monthly.

In addition, it has given rise to Akashganga clubs, where girls read the magazine together, read other books and magazines, learn new things on science, health care and other topics. 300 girls participate in 15 clubs. Many of them visit our community libraries, others sign up for our research training and still others for our computer classes.

This year the girls in our Akashganga clubs joined hands with our literacy team and celebrated national holidays as well as festivals of all religions.

c. E-Newsletter

In 2006 issues of our Electronic Newsletter "We The Self Employed" were brought out and accessed by 870 subscribers.

c) VideoSEWA: Our communications cooperative

Video SEWA has been involved in the production of programs which are directly connected to the issues of poor self employed women since 1984. It makes simple, appropriate programs which are often used for the purpose of development, for organizing other women and raising awareness. Their productions are used to mobilize policy makers and planners at regional, national and international levels and the public in general. Video SEWA's experience shows that poor, self employed women can use the latest technology to further their movement and obtain visibility of their issues and programmes.

VideoSEWA produces programmes on the lives and struggles of self-employed women, undertakes documentation of major events in the lives of our movement, inspires women to join SEWA or be more active in the union through re-plays and offers its services to the sister organizations in the SEWA family. The outreach and achievements of VideoSEWA in the year 2006 are given below.

i) Video re-plays

353 re-plays were conducted for 10184 viewers, our members and others. The breakdown of the number of re-plays and for whom these were undertaken are given in the table below.

No. of re-plays			
No.	Viewers	Video re-plays	No. of viewers
1	Leadership training in districts and Ahmedabad city	83	2531
2	Visitors from other organisations	223	2482
3	Health Cooperative	24	987
4	SEWA Insurance	15	239
5	Workshops, rallies, seminars	8	3945
	Total	353	10184

In addition to these re-plays, several SEWA organisers showed our films at various workshops, seminars and meetings, both in India and abroad.

ii) Production of video films

VideoSEWA did 210 shootings this year, including documentation of major events, rallies, workshops and special programmes. A sample of the titles of our productions are given below.

1. The inauguration of SEWA Bank's new pension programme with the United Trust of India by the Finance Minister of India.
2. HIV/AIDS programme with SEWA's health team.
3. Exposure-Dialogue Programme.
4. Training of Trainers.
5. SEWA Movement training.
6. SEWA Bank's special celebrations.
7. Visit of the Commerce Minister of India to SEWA.
8. Rudi na Radio's radio programmes.

9. Video festival and our cooperative's annual general meeting.

In addition to our own productions, we provided our footage to several TV channels and production companies. These also shot films on our work. Some of the channels were CNBC, ETV, ZTV and GSTV.

iii) Logging and Duplication

We systematised 496 of our video cassettes in registers—this is called logging. This included DVDs and U-Matic cassettes. We also undertook duplication—683 CDs and DVDs were prepared of our films. These included CDs and DVDs on our leadership training, insurance (SEWA Insurance) and some for the Indian School for Microfinance for Women.

iv) Editing

VideoSEWA edited a total of 23 programmes this year including on streetvendors and tobacco workers, smokeless stoves, water, slum upgradation and basic amenities, HIV/AIDS and 6 programmes of SEWA Samachar—SEWA's internal, electronic news programme.

v) Training

VideoSEWA also organised two training programmes for

SEWA members and aagewans (union leaders)—one on how to do video re-plays for 27 women workers and the other was on production of videos, including editing for 10 aagewans.

Our video team also participated in several capacity-building training programmes including on editing, script writing and training of trainers.

Some highlights in 2006

1. We organised a special video festival with re-plays of many of our films. We also recognised the contributions of many members and colleagues by presenting them with awards.
2. We produced a film on HIV/AIDS—the first time that we produced one on such a topic.
3. An article was written on our work in the "Femina" magazine—a women-centred publication with a wide national circulation.
4. Footage of the floods in several districts was taken to advocate with the government for relief and rehabilitation.

d) Rudi no Radio

In April of 2005, we started our radio programme—Rudi no Radio—with All India Radio, our national radio. We had hoped to have our own radio station, but that will have to wait till we sort through licensing procedures. Meanwhile, we have a link with the Ahmedabad and Vadodara city stations, and have air time every Saturday night at prime time. 8. p.m. to 8.15 p.m.

Most of our members listen to the radio. While television has made major in-roads, still more women and their families depend on the radio for both news and entertainment.

During this year, we had 85 programmes. These include programmes on solar energy, insurance, health and organizing. Our audience wrote back to us regularly, giving their feedback. We received 1105 letters from our listeners.

This year we worked with our colleagues in SEWA's health cooperative, Lok Swasthya, to produce a cassette of folk songs about HIV/AIDS and its prevention. We distributed 1500 such cassettes among our members.

We also undertook an impact study of Rudi no Radio, in order to both assess where we had reached and also to serve our listeners better. The outcome was very encouraging and given us many ideas for our future direction.

2. Research

Research has always been an integral part of SEWA's work. It is the method by which self-employed women can be part of the world of knowledge. They obtain knowledge from the outside world and share their own knowledge and experiences with others. Research is used at SEWA to understand the lives and work of self employed women, for the women themselves to learn more about the world around them, for SEWA to represent the point-of-view of self-employed women and to share their experiences with policy makers, like-minded activists, academics and the general public, and to take the movement forward.

This year, our research team undertook total of 34 studies, of which 27 were completed during the year and 7 are still outstanding. The list of studies is given below.

Studies completed in 2006 are:

1. Study on women involved in handpump repair in their villages.

2. Study on bidi workers, tobacco workers and streetvendors.
 3. Traditional midwifery as decent work
 4. Impact studies—on literacy programme, Rudi no Radio, Mahila Housing Trust’s masonry programme, and of SEWA movement training.
 5. Baseline studies of our slum upgradation work, SEWA Bank’s energy loans, and computer literacy classes.
 6. Socioeconomic status of agricultural labourers in Ahmedabad district.
 7. Grassroot researchers training assessment.
 8. Study on the impact of technology on several different trades like carpentry, blacksmithy, pottery, midwifery, cobblers’ trade, diamond polishing and others.
 9. Studies of different cooperatives—Sabina, Milk cooperative in Miroli, Sachana.
10. Study of food intake among workers in Ahmedabad city.

Reports of 23 of these studies are available at SEWA Academy.

The seven studies underway include one on the “Growth of the students of SEWA’s Childcare centre” endline survey of our slum upgradation work, health expenditure of our members, and the impact of technology on some of our members’ occupations.

Our research team also organised three training programmes: grassroots research training, profile-writing and on conducting focussed-group discussions.

We also organised training programmes on how to develop survey questionnaires..

The team also undertook its own capacity-building training, including on the use of SPSS software and plotter training.

The table below summarises the training programmes offered by our research team in 2006.

No.	Name of training	No. of training Programmes	No. of women Participants
1	Grassroot Research	1	22
2	Training under research studies	16	93
3	Profile-writing	2	37
4	Focus-group discussion	1	18
	Total	20	132

Research team organised seven workshops to disseminate the study findings, and prepared five documentation reports. Team in turn participated in 9 workshops of SEWA’s sister organisations in which findings from the joint research studies were shared.

Documentation Centre

SEWA Academy Documentation Centre became functional in the year 2005. There are 8,000 books and 25 periodicals in Hindi, English and Gujarati. 645 Gujarati books and 160 English ones – a total of 2067 – were categorised this year. During the year 2006, we had 646 visitors, out of which 36 national and 25 international visitors. 1174 publications worth Rs. 79,047 were sold (other than from SEWA).