

SEWA Bharat – building solidarity and spreading an all-India movement

SEWA's experience in Gujarat encouraged workers in other states as well. Thus, SEWA organizations were set up for informal women workers in other states. Currently SEWA is active in nine states of India. Together these sister SEWA's form SEWA Bharat, a Federation, with the mandate to highlight the issues of women working in the informal sector, and to strengthen the capacity of the different organizations that serve them. SEWA Bharat is an All India's Federation of Membership - based organization for women working in the informal sector. It is committed to strengthening the movement of women in the informal economy by highlighting their issues at the national level and building its member organizations' capacity to empower them.

1. Promoting Union Action:

The major activities undertaken by SEWA Bharat in the year 2006 are as follows:

- SEWA Bharat has taken up the responsibility of developing SEWA Munger and SEWA Bhagalpur into strong unions. Various programs of the two SEWAs are assisting in this process.

Through union action our Delhi members who are street vendors obtained significant support for their livelihood. The main achievements were:

- Obtained support from the M.P.'s fund for developing a women vendors' market.
- Reinstated vendors on two busy streets, enabling them to continue with their livelihood.
- Surveyed all the main markets where members are selling their wares and submitted the list to the municipal authorities.
- Developed a plan for creating a market for women vendors.
- Began a campaign to obtain identity cards for vendors, enabling them to sell their wares without anyone stopping them all over the city.

In Delhi, efforts were initiated to organise construction workers whose numbers are anywhere between 5 to 8 lakhs in the city. A survey of the socio-economic conditions of 200 such workers was undertaken, and organising was started in two neighbourhoods where large numbers of them live. Some of the issues emerging from the survey are:

- 34% of women construction workers under 30 years of age were pregnant and continued to work till the last stages of pregnancy, thereby undergoing considerable risk.
- Most of the workers are migrants and 64% of them are illiterate.
- 86% of the workers toil for 8 to 9 hours per day; only 2% obtain enough work all year round.
- 31% of the workers had suffered accidents at the workplace but none had received any sort of compensation from the builders and contractors.

- None of the workers were registered in the board constituted for their welfare.

In addition, in Rajasthan, slum upgradation work was started in two neighbourhoods of Bikaner city, with the support of Rajasthan Urban Infrastructure Development Project-RUIDP. The 3000 residents of these areas will obtain water connection, sanitation and sewage connections. The roads in their areas will also be paved.

A new office was opened in Jaipur and organising work in the state of Rajasthan is expected to increase.

Other activities include surveying flood-affected areas of Murshidabad and submitting a list of the families to the district authorities, and starting up a new office for organising workers in Uttarakhand state.

2. Microfinance

Microfinance activity in SEWA Bharat

Microfinance	Bhagalpur	Munger	Rajasthan	Murshidabad	Delhi	Total
Number of groups	56	38	49	30	26	199
Number of members	930	1436	569	320	307	3562
Savings (Rs.)	347342	539784	855300	186610	1083645	3012681
Loan disbursed (Rs.)	180600	971230	985350	336140	852000	3325320
Outstanding Loans	141350	545996	407815	209900	707900	2012961

In addition to the outreach shown in the table, our sisters in Murshidabad undertook internal lending from their collective savings of Rs.2,37,140. They also arranged for Rs. 90,000 worth of loans from banks.

Further, a number of training programmes on microfinance were organised by the Indian School of Microfinance for Women (ISMW), Ahmedabad. An agreement for ongoing training of members and leaders of the self-help groups (SHGs) in different states was signed last year. Consequently, several training programmes were held:

- Training for SHG leaders
- Training for SHG leaders of Munger, including on monitoring

- Exposure visit for the organisers (staff)
- Training for SHG leaders of Bhagalpur
- Training of trainers (TOT) with MCriI's support
- Training for organisers involved in microfinance through MCriI.

3. Employment

As in previous years, a SEWA Mela was organized this year in the Aga Khan Hall of Delhi on the 21st, 22nd and 23rd of November. Products from all the various SEWAs were exhibited there. A total of RS. 1,55,068 worth of our products were sold, giving members income, as well as exposure to urban markets.

- Munger:

Women workers earned Rs.5,94,144 through rolling of agarbattis (incense sticks) and Rs.11,844 through vermicompost work. Thus, a total of Rs.6,05,988 were earned by women.

- Bhagalpur:

Women worker rolling agarbattis earned Rs.4500 while those engaged in food-processing (masala and sattu preparation) earned Rs.7555. A total income of Rs. 12,055 was earned by the workers in this area.

- Delhi

Women embroiderers earned Rs.2,15,608 , catering and canteen workers obtained Rs.1,22,400 and screen-printing workers (this activity was started in November 2006) earned Rs.13,000.

Through our union negotiations, 400 vendors obtained space to sell their wares on two busy streets in Delhi. Their total earnings were Rs 1 crore. Thus, the total income obtained by our Delhi members was Rs.1,03,51,008.

4. Social Security

a) Insurance

SEWA Bharat links all the SEWAs with VimoSEWA, the insurance unit of SEWA. Details of membership and claims obtained are as follows:

No.		Insured Membership	No. of members receiving claims	Claims (in Rs.)
1	Bihar- Bhagalpur Munger	379 537	18 65	14086 77180
2	Delhi	1207	33	40573
3	Rajasthan	659	25	15363
4	West Bengal (Murshidabad)	61	0	-
	Total	2843	141	147202

b) Health

- Munger

49 patients were treated at our 4 TB DOTS centres and 58 patients treatment is on-going. 809 patients obtained treatment at 20 health camps. In addition, 495 pregnant women obtained health information and were vaccinated against tetanus toxoid by government health personnel. These women also obtained iron and folic acid tablets from the government health centres. 678 children under one year of age were also immunised by government personnel. All of these activities were conducted by developing linkages with the government health system and their services.

- Bhagalpur

Through our primary health care work in Bhagalpur, 75 workers obtained treatment, and 30 TB patients obtained care from our two DOTS centres. 340 workers obtained treatment from 16 diagnostic camps and 515 pregnant women were provided with health information, iron and folic acid supplementation and vaccination against tetanus. 304 children under one year of age were immunised as well. All of this was accomplished, as in Munger, by developing linkages with the government's public health system and services.

- Delhi

164 of our members obtained treatment and 35 of them were provided referral services.

- Murshidabad

55 health camps for diagnosis of common illnesses and 12 health training sessions providing information for health awareness were organised in 2006. Some of these diagnostic camps are organised in the office itself. The latter is equipped with Xray equipment, weighing machines and instruments to check blood pressure. In the villages we organise such camps in some common open space.

In addition to diagnosis and treatment, children are immunised at these camps and other preventive health activities are also undertaken, including provision of contraceptives and advice on family planning.

A special team of Swasthya Sathis, local women health workers, has been developed. These women go house-to-house and provide health information and counselling to pregnant women and ensure that they and their children are immunised.

c) Child Care

In Munger and Bhagalpur, crèches were run for workers' young children. 16 and 65 young children came to our crèches in Munger and Bhagalpur respectively.

In Delhi, three centres are being run to educate young children. 127 children have been attending the classes in these centres. They also participated in drama workshops organised by the National School of Drama.

d) Pension

57 Women workers in Delhi obtained R.3,23,350 worth of pension benefits.

5. Other activities:

- This year SEWA Bharat has developed a system for keeping accounts efficiently. Under this system the person involved with a particular program or project is responsible for it's reporting every month with the help and guidance of our accounts department. This helps in keeping track of the performance and the expenditure of a program or a project.

SEWA Bharat – Role as National Federation

SEWA's joint strategy of struggle and development is carried out by the union and development organizations such as co-operative, SHGs etc. While union is continuously engaged in increasing the collective strength of each SEWA's women members and

thus increases their bargaining power, the SHGs and co-operative provide them opportunity to get engaged in their economic development. This joint strategy lays the foundation of formulation of programme of each SEWA. The integrated approach of development is therefore adopted by each SEWA to cater to the “life-cycle needs” of its members.

SEWA as union is the core organization around which several sister development organizations grew at each SEWA to ensure the economic development of members. When SEWA movement got expanded to several other states other than Gujarat in early 1980s, several SEWA registered as independent bodies. However, SEWA Bharat was formed as a Federation of all these SEWAs in 1984 mainly to strengthen new SEWAs by helping them in strengthening their development programmes. Apart from this role, SEWA Bharat was assigned with the task of promoting and developing new SEWAs in order to reach to more informal sector workers.

In the previous years, SEWA Bharat has been playing an important role in developing new SEWAs and currently it is involved in promoting SEWA in Delhi, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Uttarkhand. SEWA Bharat is also involved in strengthening micro finance, capacity building and market linkages programmes of its member organizations. This is done mainly through trainings, exposures and providing them guidance through a team of in-house professionals and external consultants. SEWA Bharat is also involved in implementation of projects in SEWA Bhagalpur and SEWA Munger so that the local team understands the professional methods of implementing the projects. In implementation of projects and programmes, SEWA Bharat always ensures that women members and leaders are involved at every stage so that programmes become more accountable and realistic. Therefore, at each place where SEWA Bharat is implementing programmes or developing SEWA, the implementation team consists of women leaders called SEWA Saathis, organizers and teams of professionals.

In the near future SEWA Bharat will play a similar role and will be involved in strengthening the development organizations such as co-operatives of its member organizations. For example, SEWA Bharat is providing support and guidance to women’s Thrift and Credit Co-operative Society in Delhi and an industrial co-operative in Munger in Bihar mainly involved in incense stick and vermicompost production. SEWA Bharat is also committed to ensure the mature growth of new SEWAs being developed and will also try to start new SEWAs in other states.