

Developing our Future Leadership: SEWA Academy's Education, Capacity Building, Research and Communication in 2005

1. Training workers to build our movement

SEWA Academy is our union's university. It is here that workers learn together, develop their leadership and try out new technologies to further communication within the workers' 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 2005, 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
- 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
- Training for Jeevika SEWA Mandals local village committees
- 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.

Table 10.1
Trainings Conducted in 2005

Sr. No.	Name of the Trainings	No. of Trainings	No. of Trainers
1.	Membership Education	935	24,996
2.	Sewa Movement	99	2,660
3.	Organisation	43	1,295
4.	Sampling, Questionnaire, Survey, Coding, P.E.W., Analysis, Writing	8	128
5.	Exposure programs	5	66
6.	EDP	4	51
7.	Membership Training	4	133
8.	Training of Trainers	3	72
9.	Grassroots Research	2	36
10.	Orientation to SEWA	2	51
11.	Video replay	1	19
12.	Growth from below	1	21
13.	Social Security Course	1	21

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 2005, 64 teachers, all SEWA members, taught a total of 1,020 women how to read and write. Their efforts are given in the table below.

Table 10.2
Literacy trainings

No. of classes	No. of Women & Girls	No. of Teachers
68	1,020	64

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.

Table 10.3
“New Literacy” Trainings

Area	No. of Classes	Number of women
City	06	90
Village	09	135
Total	15	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, 1150 women obtained literacy certificates for many the very first document of their progress.

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.

60 girls between the ages of 13 and 19 signed up for our first course. They learned English along with computer skills. Many of them obtained employment after this, eight of them in SEWA. After this first attempt, word spread fast 300 girls came for the second course's interview. 105 girls were accommodated in the second course, with promises to include others subsequently. And thus, our SEWA sisters and their daughters have begun to boldly bridge the digital divide.

3. 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) Our own newsletter Ansooya

SEWA has explored several channels to support members in their communications efforts. Ansooya, 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. There are total of 2616 subscribers to Ansooya.

Ansooya 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. Ansooya 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 Ansooya, they boost up our spirit. All of us feel happy. We can do a lot through this medium."

Ansooya entered its 25th year of uninterrupted fortnightly publishing for change. We have a total of 3255 subscribers, of which 1242 are lifetime subscribers.

Ansooya 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 Ansooya SEWA Trust was established.

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

1. SEWA gets recognition as a national union.
2. Working women meet with industrialists.
3. Celebrating 100 years of the cooperative movement.
4. The Rural Employment Guarantee Act work security for the rural poor?
5. Will informal workers really get social security and pension?
6. Financial services are urgently needed by the poor.
7. The poor in solidarity with each other.
8. SEWA's rally for truth and accountability.
9. Our artisans link up with global bazaars.
10. Jeevika Programme's difficult path.

b) Our Daughters' Magazine Akashganga

Akashganga means Milky Way in Gujarati. Through their own magazine, Akashganga, our daughters reach for the stars! Started in 1996, 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 19 clubs. Many of them visit our community libraries, others sign up for our research training and still others for our computer classes.

c) E - Newsletter

In 2005 Five issues of Electronic Newsletter "We The Self Employed" were brought out, 480 subscribers accessed that.

d) Video SEWA: Our communication 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.

Video SEWA 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 Video SEWA in the year 2005 are given below.

Table 10.4
No. of re-plays

No.	Viewers	Video re-plays	No. of viewers
1	Leadership training in districts and Ahmedabad city	101	3,278
2	Visitors from other organisations	228	1,927
3	Health Cooperative	4	144
4	SEWA Insurance	5	160
5	Workshops, rallies, seminars	7	3,945
	Total	345	9,454

i) Re-plays

345 re-plays were conducted for 9454 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.

ii) Production of video films

Video SEWA did 240 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. Cleaning Campaign in Surendranagar
2. Dialogue with the international trade union leader, Dan Gallin
3. Midwives' meeting
4. Flood havoc
5. Worker-leaders meet Pratinidhi Milan
6. WHO's Commission for the Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) visit to SEWA.
7. SEWA Leaders awarded for their leadership in the World Women's Summit.
8. Educating ourselves on HIV/AIDS.
9. Fish vendors organize
10. Dialogue with Ahmedabad's Municipal Commissioner.

In addition to these productions, we shot films for other organizations, did editing for them and our own productions. A full list of our films, both in-house and for other organizations is available at Video SEWA.

e) Rudi no Radio: Our members' own radio programme



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.

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 first year of Rudi no Radio, we had 35 programmes. These include programmes on solar energy, insurance, health and organizing. Our audience wrote back to us regularly, giving their feedback. We received 642 letters from our listeners.

We are conducting a study to assess the impact of our radio and how we can serve our members better, bringing the outside world to their doorsteps.

4. Research

Research has always been an integral part of SEWA's work. It is the method by which self-employed women become part of the world of knowledge. They receive knowledge from the outside world and give the knowledge of their experience to 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 a total of 35 studies, of which 15 were completed during the year and 20 are still outstanding. The list of studies is given below.

Studies completed in 2005 are:

1. Information-Technology needs of self-employed workers.
2. Poorest of the Poor workers in our Jeevika Livelihood Programme.
3. Base-line of skills evaluation of our computer class.
4. End-line of our Computer class.
5. Midwives Role and contribution
6. Bidi Workers of Murshidabad.
7. SEWABank's education
8. Businesses assisted by SEWABank
9. School going pattern of children in our creches
10. Socio-economic study of women blacksmiths and carpenters.
11. Socio-economic study of cotton wick makers.
12. Jeevika Livelihood Programme: study of cleaners
13. Jeevika Livelihood Programme: impact study
14. Upscaling our work
15. Laid-off mill workers' study.

The research team participated in six workshops to disseminate the findings of these studies and wrote 19 reports of the 15 studies and of the workshops we attended.

The twenty studies still underway include one on urban infrastructure, socio-economic study of agricultural labourers of Ahmedabad district, impact of hand-pump repairing, impact of loanees of SEWABank and asset-building, impact of SEWA's radio programme and health expenditure.

Our research team also provided 12 training programmes to several teams within the SEWA family, including special ones for grassroot researchers. In turn, we participated in 14 training programmes to strengthen our own knowledge and skills as researchers.

Documentation Centre

SEWA Academy's Documentation Centre became functional in the year 2005. There are 8,000 books and 25 periodicals in Hindi, English and Gujarati. During the year 2005, we had 179 visitors.