

## SEWA's Members' Eleven Questions

In our experience, poor women's growth, development and employment occurs when they have work and income security and food security. It also occurs when they are healthy, able to have child care and have a roof over their heads. In order to ensure that we are moving in the direction of our two goals of Full Employment and Self-Reliance, constant monitoring and evaluation is required. In a membership-based organization, it is the members' priorities and needs which necessarily shape the priorities and direction of the organization. Hence, it is appropriate that members themselves have developed their own yardstick of evaluation. The following eleven questions have emerged from discussions with our members and continually serve as a guide for all members, group leaders, executive committee members and full-time organisers at SEWA. It is also useful for monitoring SEWA's progress and the relevance of its various activities and their congruence with our members' reality and priorities. It also leads to increased accountability of SEWA's leaders and organisers to the members.

The Eleven Questions of SEWA:

1. Have more members obtained more employment?
2. Has their income increased?
3. Have they obtained food and nutrition?
4. Has their health been safeguarded?
5. Have they obtained child care?
6. Have they obtained or improved their housing?
7. Have their assets increased? (like their own savings, land house, work-space, tools of work, licenses, identity cards, cattle and shares in cooperatives and all in their own name.)
8. Has the workers' organizational strength increased?
9. Has workers' leadership increased?
10. Have they become self-reliant both collectively and individually?
11. Has their education increased?

Questions 1 to 7 are linked to the goal of full employment while 8 to 11 are those concerned with SEWA's goal of self-reliance. However, each of these are interconnected to each other.

### The SEWA Movement

SEWA is both an organization and a movement. The SEWA movement is enhanced by its being a 'sangam' or confluence of three movements: the labour movement, the cooperative movement and the women's movement. But it is also a movement of self-employed workers, their own, home-grown movement with women as the leaders. Through their own movement women become strong and visible. Their tremendous economic and social contribution becomes recognised.

All the organizations promoted by SEWA, SEWA Bank, the cooperatives, associations, producers' groups and other such membership-based organizations constitute the SEWA Family. These sister organizations are also part of the SEWA Movement, spread across eleven districts of Gujarat.

But the movement has crossed Gujarat's borders. In 1982, SEWA Bharat was formed. Today there are six other registered organizations, both unions and associations in SEWA. These are SEWA Madhya Pradesh, SEWA Bihar, SEWA Uttar Pradesh, SEWA Delhi, SEWA Rajasthan, SEWA Kerala. SEWA Bharat promotes the formation of these organizations and supports them by way of capacity-building and other developmental programmes. SEWA is now registered as a national union, with the members of the seven sister SEWAs constituting its membership.

Several other national networks are also part of the SEWA movement, SEWA is a co-founder of these and continues to be active in them. These include the National Alliance of Street Vendors of India (NASVI), HOMENET India and HOMENET South Asia.

In addition, SEWA has helped or is associated with workers' movements in other countries in South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Zambia, Turkey, Yemen, Thailand, Cambodia, Korea, Philippines, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. We are also affiliates of the International Federation of Food, Beverage, Tobacco Agriculture and Allied Workers (IUF), International Chemical, Energy and Metal workers Union, International Textile Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF) and the International Building Workers (IBW).

SEWA has also recently joined the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) as an affiliate. This was a major step forward.

SEWA is a founder member of STREETNET, an international organization of street vendors, struggling for their rights world-wide. Its members are unions and other workers' organizations from all continents. Similarly, SEWA is a founder of Women in Informal Employment Globalising and Organising (WIEGO), an organization promoting the issues and campaigning for the right of informal women workers across the globe. Policy-makers, researchers and organizers of membership-based organizations of women workers constitute its membership.

### **Our Rural Union - leading the struggle for Gram Swaraj or self-reliant, holistic village development**

SEWA began organizing workers in the villages of Ahmedabad district in 1979. At that time, the Gujarat government had announced minimum wages for agricultural labourers.

Initially, rural workers of SEWA were organized for minimum wages. Our organizers were attacked in legal cases followed. One fall-out of our struggle for minimum wages was that the village women who constituted 50% of the total village work force lost whatever work they had.

From these experiences, we learned some hard lessons: that the basis for obtaining higher wages is the capacity and power to bargain. However, the workers in these areas had neither the capacity nor the power to bargain. They were vulnerable due to unemployment and under employment; and also because they were not organized. In rural areas there was, and still is, an almost unending supply of labour and limited employment opportunities. Thus the workers are unable to bargain for higher wages.

Given this situation and our early experiences, SEWA decided to focus its rural organizing on livelihood and employment promotion and protection. We resolved to increase rural women workers' bargaining power by creating multiple employment opportunities.

SEWA's approach to rural organizing is area-specific and demand driven. Under the leadership of SEWA's members, the community itself designs and implements all community-based activities. SEWA helps women members in rural communities to build and operate their own organizations, by

forming cooperatives and district level federations, as a result of which the members develop collective bargaining power and create alternative sources of employment, and thereby, livelihood security for their families.

Livelihood activities are structured according to local needs and regional characteristics. SEWA members have formed cooperatives or producer groups for a variety of activities like water conservation, dairy production, craftwork, reforestation and salt farming, with involvement tailored to local conditions.

SEWA believes in the primacy of local ownership and knowledge. Village women are trained to augment the skills necessary to competently administer their own organizations and cooperatives. Spearhead teams which comprise of local organizers are formed, which take charge of all of SEWA's activities and lead each cooperative. The spearhead team consists of 80% local leaders and 20% SEWA organizers. The team leaders (aagewans) are selected on the basis of their long experience in working with SEWA. Spearhead team members, or 'barefoot managers' undergo intensive training in administration, financial management and the technical aspects of their activity or trade.

The focus of our rural organizing this year was on consolidation of our collective strength. This meant being in contact with our members and ensuring that they remained with our union. The table below gives the membership profile in the year 2005.

Table 4.1  
Membership and main activities of the districts

District	Membership in 2005	Main Activities
Ahmedabad	37,488	Dairying, Agro- Forestry
Gandhinagar	16,134	Dairying, waste paper picking
Mehsana	30,436	Dairying, Agro-Forestry
Sabarkantha	28,163	Agriculture, Nursery- raising
Vadodara	30,080	Poultry, Nursery-raising
Kheda-Anand	1,02,905	Tobacco processing, Agro-Forestry , weaving
Kutch	20,002	Embroidery, Animal Husbandry
Patan	34,831	Embroidery, Animal Husbandry, Agro-Forestry, Salt Manufacturing
Surendranagar	20,246	Salt Manufacturing, Construction
Panchmahal	40	Agro-Forestry
Surat	2	
Saurashtra	4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,20,331</b>	

In addition, we worked on ensuring that our members obtained both livelihood and social security, as well as education for overall awareness. We did this by promoting an integrated approach, where each rural worker obtained regular work and income, as well as the services she needed health care, child care, savings and credit, housing insurance, literacy and leadership-training among others.

The rural union bore the brunt of the discontinuation of all partnerships with the state government. This is because the major partnership for livelihood in three Districts Kutch, Patan and Surendranagar--was with the state government.

The joint government-SEWA Project Review Committee of this programme, called “Jeevika”, regularly assessed all progress and financial statements and released the funds. It was a routine process. But to our surprise in mid 2004 no funds were released for Rs. 2 crores worth of activities undertaken. Our members waited patiently for months for payments, as did local suppliers and others who had undertaken work in good faith. From October 2004, SEWA entered into a period of intense negotiation and constant dialogue with the state government which was not releasing funds for work already undertaken by our members in the above three districts. In the previous two years.

This whole struggle is described at greater length elsewhere (see our website: [www.sewa.org](http://www.sewa.org)). But here it is relevant to note that after months of patient negotiation, repeated audits and meetings with government officials, SEWA was forced to withdraw from the “Jeevika” programme and all other partnerships with the state government.

Despite the situation described above, “Jeevika” reached thousands of village families. A special effort was made to identify very poor families the poorest of the poor in their villages. In addition, village development committees called “Jeevika SEWA Mandals” were set up, where local women and men took the leadership for the development of their communities. The table below shows the progress achieved.

Table 4.2  
**Membership in Village Development Committees**

<b>Progress</b>	<b>Total no. of Members</b>
Land and Water Covered village	188
Covered Family	68
Jivika Sewa mandal	15,846
Poorest People	155
Preparing micro plans	2,607
Sanskar Kendra (Integrated Community Centre)	56

The situation with the Jeevika partnership did not affect our overall rural membership. All of SEWA rallied to support our sisters in the three districts affected by the cessation of the partnership. Members contributed in cash and kind to support their sisters. Again, they demonstrated through concrete action the power of organizing and building solidarity among poor women workers.

In addition to the above struggle, members in several districts Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Kheda, Anand, Vadodara, Mehsana and Sabarkantha suffered heavy losses during the floods of 2005. Valuable assets like land, cattle and even homes, carefully garnered after years of hard work, were washed away. SEWA supported its members in this crisis as well, as can be seen from the table below.

Table 4.3  
Relief Outreach

No.	Vadodara District		Anand District		Sabarkanta District		Ahmedabad District	
	Family	Items	Family	Items	Items	Family	Items	Family
1	610	610 Utensils kit	610	610 Utensils kit	176	176 Utensils kit	-	-
2	3090	4024 kg. Food grains	3090	4024 kg. Food grains	600	1200 kg. Food grains	-	-
3	3540	7729 biscuit packets	3540	7729 biscuits	300	100 biscuits	2500	2500 food packets
4	1469	1469 blankets, mattresses	1469	1469 blankets, mattresses	257	257 blankets, mattresses	-	-
5	385	385 plastic sheets	385	385 plastic sheets	500	500 plastic sheets	1240	1240 plastic sheets
6	950	1835 clothes	950	1835 clothes	150	450 clothes	-	-



We were able to reach out quickly to our members because our local union leaders or Aagewans conducted detailed house-to-house surveys of the damage suffered by our members. Based on their assessments, we were able to provide food grains, biscuit packets blankets, mattresses, utensils and clothes for our members in seventy villages.

In addition, we linked up with the local government authorities to ensure that they actually obtained the relief and rehabilitation packages that were their due. We also helped distribute chlorine and chloroquine tablets to prevent disease outbreaks. 1,000 mosquito nets were also distributed to our members.

Despite these two major crises this year, significant efforts to help members obtain work and income were undertaken, as can be seen in the table below.

Table 4.4  
Employment and Income generated

No	District	Employment	Income
1	Ahmedabad	1,165	1,84,10,397
2	Gandhinagar	3,051	5,75,07,169
3	Mehsana	284	11,92,108
4	Sabarkantha	60	3,56,764
5	Vadodara	7,488	3,78,767
6	Kheda-Anand	105	14,67,063
7	Kutch	6,755	83,62,452
8	Patan	14,981	72,63,097
9	Surendranagar	6,255	89,75,318
	<b>Total</b>	<b>40,144</b>	<b>10,39,13,135</b>

Members also began to save from their earnings towards their own livelihood security funds.

The water and forestry campaigns, longstanding campaigns led by our rural members, made new and significant strides this year. As part of our water campaign, hand-pump repair training was organized with the government's water supply board in three districts. This not only ensured that hand-pumps became functional and thus water supply reached rural communities, but also proved to be a new source of employment for rural women. They have become the barefoot engineers of their villages, repairing and maintaining hand-pumps, laying down water pipes and ensuring that water is available for all. The table below show the number of women trained in this activity and their earnings from it.

Table 4.5  
No. of women trained and income earned

District	Talukas	Villages	Number of Women	Number of Handpumps	Income in rupees
Anand	3	130	50	968	4,84,000
Sabarkantha	2	80	30	200	1,00,000
Vadodara	1	50	25	1,430	7,15,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>2,598</b>	<b>12,99,000</b>

In addition, in Surendranagar district, 25 women in four villages earned a total of Rs. 2,21,930.

In addition to our grassroots-level campaign, at the policy level too, SEWA's experiences were recognized. We were invited to be on various committees and boards involved in water-related issues, like the South Asian Committee of the Global Water Partnership and The India Water Partnership.

For some time now we have initiated an agricultural workers campaign where we focus on the issues of women agricultural labourers and small and marginal farmers. In our country, most people still live off the land. And most of this work is done by women. Yet, their contribution is not recognized, nor do they have much say in matters pertaining to their own livelihood agriculture. Our campaign thus seeks to put their issues up front and with rural women in the lead. It also provides information, training and the latest technology to women, and also serves to link them up with the market for better prices for their produce.

In Ahmedabad and Mehsana districts, we helped workers form 5 farmers' groups and in these and other districts, they linked up with government programmes to obtain saplings, seeds and urea.

As part of our forestry campaign which seeks to protect and preserve our environment through employment generated from forestry and nursery-raising (this is the raising of saplings which are then sold), women collected 1,232 kilos of seeds in Anand and Vadodara districts, earning Rs. 25,616 as supplementary income. In eight districts, 80 women earned Rs. 54,924 from preparing 22,620 kilos of vermicompost.

In nine districts, 413 women workers from 106 villages raised 15,94,000 saplings of different types earning Rs. 60,000 from this activity.

In addition, in Gandhinagar district, women raised 1,65,000 saplings which were then sold. We also planted 2,18,163 saplings of trees to increase our green cover and thus, to regenerate the environment. Further, this year, 107 women from 27 villages in eight districts prepared 30,038 kilogrammes of manure and earned Rs. 59,879 from selling 20,337 kilogrammes of this.

In three districts, we helped women and men form environmental committees which then undertook the cleaning of their own villages, especially after the floods. They worked closely with the local taluka (block-level) committees.

### **Education and Capacity-Building**

SEWA has been running an educational programme for rural women for some years now. We call it “Jeevan Shala”. Our members recognize that if they are to be self-reliant, they have to be literate. Thus, they devote two hours every day to literacy. They learn the alphabet through innovative methodology and specially developed manuals. The latter develop literacy through topics of interest to our members.

The local village council or panchayat provides the space for our literacy classes. Often women offer their homes or courtyards for this new learning. The teachers themselves are local women called “Vidya Gauris”. Their modest stipends come from the fees that women pay for the classes. New modules are constantly being added to our teacher's manuals, including modules on self-reliance and cost-cutting to achieve this.

Table 4.6  
**Number of Jivanshalas and Vidyagauris**

<b>District</b>	<b>Number of Jivanshala</b>	<b>Number of Jivanshala village</b>	<b>Number of Vidya Gauris</b>
Surendranagar	22	21	25
Patan	23	23	38
Kutch	11	12	18
Anand	22	16	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>109</b>

### **SEWA Managers School**

As part of our quest for self-reliance, SEWA began a managers school which focuses on developing grassroots-level women as managers. When women manage and own their organizations, then these grow and ultimately are self-sustaining. Our managers school provides training on organizing and leadership development, developing managerial skills, technical training and satellite-aided training (SATCOM). We also have the SEWA-AMA centre which offers a variety of training programmes in

management, accounting and administration. We also linked up with the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) to provide special training to 59 SEWA organizers.

Finally, as part of our capacity-building activities we organized special workshops on Gandhian thinking. As this is the guiding philosophy of SEWA, we arranged for exposure to Gandhiji's life and work. 129 organisers and local leaders participated in this.

Our rural team also provided social security services: health care, child care and insurance to members and their families. This is described in the section on social security at SEWA.

### **Information and Technology (IT)**

Bringing information and technology to our members, including those in far-flung rural areas, has been an important part of our activities for some years now. This year we strengthened our IT centers in four districts. We call these "Gyan-Vignan Kendras" or Knowledge and Science Centres. In Surendranagar, Kheda, Anand and Patan districts, members obtained important employment-related information.

### **Marketing linkages**

#### **1. SEWA Gram Mahila Haat**

SEWA Gram Mahila Haat, our rural marketing network, provided four important services to rural women this year:

It developed market linkages; it sold members' produce within the SEWA family. It also took the help of corporates like ITC, Godrej, HLL, TVS, Bajaj Electricals and Hero Cycles.

Gram Mahila Haat also provided rural producers with working capital and linked up with various banks like ICICI, SIDBI, State Bank of Saurashtra and State Bank of India.

It provided technical services to producers.

It provided management training to producers so that they truly become the owners of their production processes.

The sales of various products are given in the table below. These quality-controlled products were sold under our own brand name: "Rudi". Gram Haat set up a network of sales outlets in the villages and registered its logo Rudi. We also obtained the official Agmark certification for our agricultural produce, thus giving our customers quality assurance. In Sabarkantha district we obtained orders for providing food grains and other essential items to the mid-day meal programme in a total of 115 schools.

Table 4.7  
**Total sale of products**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Particulars</b>	<b>Total Rs.</b>
1	Agricultural produce, including sesame seed	29,00,000
2	Wheat	7,31,219
3	Supplying to mid-day meal programme	20,17,072
4	Seeds	79,586
5	Edible Gum	71,588

## 1. SEWA Unnat Bazaar

SEWA Unnat Bazaar is a company owned by 15,000 artisans mainly embroiderers. Earlier these highly skilled workers sold their beautiful products to middlemen who paid them a pittance. Today they have registered their own organization and are able to support themselves and their families from the income obtained. They are very particular about quality control and are aware of the competitive market outside their villages. Hence, they have developed their own quality control systems, whereby women obtain income according to the quality of the product that they produce.



Unnat Bazaar is today the main link between village-based embroiderers and outside markets, both national and global. The women have cut out the middlemen with SEWA's support. They also obtain technical training to enhance the quality of their work, management training and social security services like insurance.

This year 2,500 artisans obtained an average of Rs 500 per month by way of income from embroidery. The total sales this year were Rs 1,42,00,000. About thirty per cent of these sales were by way of orders. The latter included retailers like Fab India, Shopper's Stop and Arvind Mills. It also included top fashion designers like Rohit Bal and Paul Smith.

This year Unnat Bazaar created 695 new designs. 555 workers were involved in skill upgradation training. We also obtained new machines so that quality products can be made and all from one common work space Vastralaya based in Ahmedabad city.

Further, to enhance quality we developed a performance rating system which has brought down our order rejection rate to 11%. We aim to bring this down to 5% in 2006. Finally, we developed our own MIS and trained 800 rural women in the use of computers.

Unnat Bazaar also launched its own brand 'Hansiba', named after the first worker who joined our union from among the embroiderers. We also opened a new shop in New Delhi's Connaught Place to market our products. In addition, our Handicraft Park in Radhanpur called Banas na Aana was almost completed. Thus, this year our Unnat Bazaar made significant strides towards self-reliance of both individual artisan women and their own company.