

Women's Collective Businesses SEWA-promoted Cooperatives and their Women's Cooperative Federation

Our strategy for organizing involves mobilizing and uniting women workers into our union, SEWA, and also helping them form worker-owned and run cooperatives. Constructive action and building alternative economic organizations of and by the poor is an integral part of the movement for social change, and was suggested years ago by Mahatma Gandhi, who continues to be our inspiration.

Thus the cooperatives within the SEWA movement, promoted and developed first by SEWA and now the Federation, are a very important aspect of our work. Cooperatives also offer a platform for workers to develop and test out their own economic activities, to hone their management skills, to practice grassroots democracy through their own elected boards and to develop cadres of worker-leaders.

The SEWA-promoted cooperatives are also part of the world-wide cooperative movement, building collective businesses based on cooperation, collaboration, team-building and collective leadership, rather than the current model of top-down leadership and competition.

Perhaps most importantly, through cooperatives, workers obtain continuous work and income in a non-exploitative manner, and are transformed into worker-owners.

In order to promote the cooperative movement within the SEWA family and beyond, SEWA established the Gujarat State Women's SEWA Cooperative Federation, a state-level organization of 96 women co-operatives, in 1992. The Federation believes that women's bargaining power, capacity and ownership can be increased by organizing them into co-operatives, thereby building their own collective businesses which can stand firm in the market place and provide work and income to poor women.

In order to make the members competitive and compatible with market demands, the Federation provides need-based trainings, guidance, marketing and design services. It also runs a special shop in the main wholesale market where producers get a remunerative price for their produce. In addition, producers are linked to sellers also SEWA members so that women workers control the entire production and selling chain.

Table 7.1
Co-operatives in SEWA Federation

No.	Type of Cooperative	No. of Cooperative	Membership	Activities
1	Dairy Cooperative	58	25,535	Milk producing
2	Landbased cooperative	7	4,000	Tree growing, Vegetable producing
3	Artisan Cooperative	12	10,000	Block-printing, Chindi, Embroidery, Patchwork
4	Service Based Cooperative	7	29,435	Healthcare, Childcare, Midwife, Video, Cleaning, Construction
5	Vendor's Cooperative	11	10,000	Vegetable, Fish
6	Mahila SEWA Coop. Bank	1	34,835	Savings and credit
	Total	96	1,13,805	

Some of the Federation's main activities are outlined below:

1. Training

Capacity-building, through structured training sessions on different aspects of cooperative education, is a major activity of the Federation. These training sessions are focused on the ideology of cooperatives "All for One and One for All"--, their structure and functioning, and also on specific skills like management, book-keeping, minutes-writing, running meetings and public-speaking. The Federation also provides training in marketing for our members.

These training sessions not only help to build up workers' knowledge and skills, but also their self-confidence and leadership, thereby enabling them to run their own cooperatives. The table below shows the different types of training undertaken by the Federation, as well as the total outreach.



Table 7.2
Trainings for Co-operatives

Sr. No.	Training Name	Cooperative Name	Programme	Days	Women
1	Education Training				
1a	Member education	Shaishav, Shramshakti, Shramlaxmi, Krishna Dayan, Lokswasthya, Sangini, Bhagyalaxmi	49	98	1,494
1b	Member education	Rachayita Construction Workers Cooperative	29	58	751
1c	Training of Management Committee	Shaishav, Shramshakti, Shramlaxmi, Krishna Dayan, Lokswasthya, Sangini	3	8	126
2	Management Training	Shaishav, Shramshakti, Shramlaxmi, Krishna Dayan, Lokswasthya, Sangini	4	8	63
2a	(Management of Cooperative) Udaybhansinhji Institute	Shaishav, Shramshakti, Shramlaxmi, Krishna Dayan, Lokswasthya, Sangini	1	3	40
2b	Minutes - writing Training	Shaishav, Shramshakti, Shramlaxmi, Krishna Dayan, Lokswasthya, Sangini, Vanlaxmi, Contration, Video	2	4	60
3	Accounting Training				
3a	Accounts Training	Surendranagar Mahila Balvikas Association. (Jivika)	1	2	20
		Kutch Craft Association (Jivika)	1	2	16
		Banaskantha Association (Jivika)	1	2	52
		Vanlaxmi Cooperative	1	2	26
		Shaishav Balsewa/Shramshakti Dayan	1	2	20
3b	Audit Training	Shaishav, Shramshakti, Shramlaxmi, Krishna Dayan, Lokswasthya, Sangini, Vanlaxmi, Contration, Video	3	3	30
4	Marketing Training	Shaishav, Shramshakti, Shramlaxmi, Krishna Dayan, Lokswasthya, Sangini	1	1	15
5	Workshop	Shaishav, Shramshakti, Shramlaxmi, Krishna Dayan, Lokswasthya, Sangini, Tupti Video, Saodaya, Matsayghandha, Abudana, Sabina	1	1	70
6	Awarness Programme about Government Schemes	Saodaya, Matsayghandha, Abudana, SabinaSaodaya, Matsayghandha, Abudana, Sabina	1	4	43
7	Rural cleaning campaign training	Saodaya, Shafai Mandali, Karysiddh Kagalkam Mandli	1	2	20
	Total		100	199	2,846

2. Marketing Support

The Federation is a state-level organization promoting and supporting women's efforts to achieve work security. Hence, support in marketing of its member cooperatives' products and services is one of its main activities. It assists in marketing through its shops one for wholesale, fresh farm produce in the main vegetable market of Ahmedabad and the other, SEWA Kalakruti, for artisans' products.

In addition, it helps the cooperatives and producers' associations export their products. Last year, it exported goods to the U.K., Hong Kong and Pakistan.

Further, the Federation helps members participate in exhibitions in different parts of the country like Delhi and Mumbai. It also organizes its own exhibitions at its shop Kalakruti to help with the marketing of workers' products.

3. Design SEWA

Artisans constantly need to develop and use new designs, in accordance with the demands of the market. They also try to preserve their traditional designs and skills, and to find new markets for these. Design development is essential for increased sales. Thus, in order to create products and designs which would have a competitive edge in the market, the Federation created Design SEWA.

Design SEWA has an excellent library and samples of craft by master crafts persons. Documentation of designs and processes are also undertaken. All of these are open to any artisan, and the Design SEWA team also shows them how they can use and adapt the designs for their products.

The Table below shows the sales from the Federation's marketing support initiatives.

Table 7.3
Sales in Co-operatives

Sr.No	Particulars	Sales (Rs.)
1	Vegetable shop	50,99,852
2	Matsayghandha (Fish Shop)	5,70,000
3	Design Sewa	5,25,000
4	SEWA Kalakruti	15,41,789
5	Export work	6,04,000
	Total	83,40,641

Other highlights of the Federation's work and achievements in the year 2005 are given below:

Organised a joint programme with the National Cooperative Development Council (NCDC) and felicitated six member cooperatives' for their work. Each of these was given an award of Rs 5000 and a certificate for excellence in the cooperative sector.

Undertook video documentation of four member cooperatives with the national Cooperative Union of India (NCUI).

Two member cooperatives were awarded prizes by the district cooperative federation.

Prepared training material and manuals for cooperatives.