

We the Self-Employed

SEWA'S electronic newsletter

No. 23

November 2009

SEWA

Dear Friends,

We hope you are receiving and enjoying the SEWA newsletter. Your comments and responses would be appreciated. You can reach us at mail@sewaacademy.org.

SEWA Celebrates the Women's Co-operative Movement

VimoSEWA goes National

SEWA in Pakistan- Launch of Sabah Pakistan and Elaben's Book in Urdu

SEWA's community radio service begins

"There is no end to our struggle"*: SEWA members, bootlegging and police

Some Sad News :

The passing away of two SEWA founder members-Arvindaben and Mahalaxmiben

SEWA celebrates the Women's Co-operative Movement

SEWA celebrated the strength and energy of women's co-operatives on International Co-operative Day at a function organized by Gujarat State Women's SEWA Cooperative Federation Ltd on 16th November, 2009 at Town Hall, Ahmedabad. There are 102 co-operatives sponsored by SEWA which are members of the Federation, with a total membership of around 300,000 and a turnover of Rs 15 billion. 75% of the co-operatives are making surpluses.

Speaking on the occasion Elaben Bhatt said that the importance given to Cooperatives should be at par with corporate sector. She emphasized on the need for reform in the cooperative sector. Currently, self-employed workers are not legally protected, creating a need for appropriate laws.

Ms Lalita Krishnaswamy, president, Gujarat State Women's SEWA co-operative Federations Ltd, said, "Social business is the future. The women in the unorganized sector are major contributors to the GDP of a country which must not be ignored. SEWA Co-operative Federation is the first of its kind in India for its uniqueness as it sets an example of Self Employment." She said, " Women's cooperatives formed 18 percent of the total cooperatives in the state whereas the resultant national figure is merely 2 per cent, which indicates the strength of women's co-operatives in Gujarat. SEWA co-operative federation is the first co-operative federation in the country where the members are self employed women.

Prizes for the best co-operatives were given to:

- Shri Mahila SEWA Sahakari Bank Ltd

- Shri Pethapur Mahila Doodh Utpadak Sahakari Mandali Ltd
- Shri Sonarda Mahila Doodh Utpadak Sahakari Mandali Ltd
- Shri Moti Pipadi Mahila Doodh Utpadak Sahakari Mandali Ltd
- Shri Muhammadpura Mahila Doodh Utpadak Sahakari Mandali Ltd
- Shri Gujarat Swashrayi Mahila Lok Swasthya Sahakari Mandli Ltd
- Shri Saundarya Safai Utkarsh Mahila SEWA Sahkari Mandali Ltd
- Shri Seshav Bal SEWA Mahila SEWA Sahkari Mandali Ltd
- Shri Gujarat Mahila Video SEWA Information Broadcasting Cooperative Ltd
- Shri Karyasiddhi Mahila SEWA Sahakari Mandali Ltd
- Shri SEWA Vastralaya Mahila SEWA Sahakari Mandali Ltd

VimoSEWA goes National

Accidents, disasters, illness, death are common in the life of SEWA members and are a major cause of death and getting into the spiral of poverty. At present, VimoSEWA has 1, 30,000 insured members and more than Rs. 14 crores have been given as claims to more than 70,000 members.

Till today VimoSEWA was run as part of SEWA Union but there was a growing feeling that it should be separated into a separate social business which would serve SEWA members and poor women all over the country.

The inaugural function and the first general meeting of National Insurance VimoSEWA Co-operative Ltd was held on 23rd November, 2009 at Town Hall in Ahmedabad. A total of 2500 individuals, a majority of them SEWA share holders and a number of observers attended the function.

Elaben Bhatt in her speech appealed to IRDA to review the issues like equity requirements specifically for micro insurance. Miraiben Chatterjee, Director of SEWA Social Security and the chief promoter of National Insurance VimoSEWA Cooperative Ltd. addressed the audience on "Integrated financial services and social security - and the way forward for the cooperative".

[READ MORE..](#)

SEWA in Pakistan - Launch of Sabah Pakistan and Elaben's Book in Urdu

A team of organizers and artisans from SEWA visited Pakistan to launch the Sabah Pakistan and to unveil the Urdu translation of Elaben's book "We are Poor, but so Many".

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) comprising India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives, has initiated an innovative project for strengthening the livelihoods of poor home based workers. The project is called SABAH (SAARC Business Association of Home based Workers) and will be implemented in all member states of SAARC, except India. The expert institution in this project is the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and HomeNet South Asia is the implementing partner.

HomeNet South Asia was created in 2007 and includes over 300 organizations from Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bangladesh. Looking to the spread of HNSA the SAARC Development Fund has awarded this project to SEWA and HNSA.

The project envisages the setting up of a Trade Facilitation Centre (TFC) for equipping the home based workers with modern technical facilities, design inputs, skill up gradation, production techniques and forward market linkages. It will be modelled on the Trade Facilitation Centre set up by SEWA, where artisans are empowering themselves by understanding the 'value' of their inherited skills and training, getting aware of the market and what sells, and most importantly, empowering themselves through economic self dependence and ownership of their assets.

As part of the program, SABAH Pakistan was officially launched at a function in Islamabad, Pakistan which was well attended by over 300 artisans, policy makers and business people. The program kicked off with the unveiling of the

Urdu translation of Elaben Bhatt's book "Itney Zayada, fir bhi Ghareeb". Samina Khan of Sungi Foundation giving the welcome address spoke about the need of coming together of South Asian people. Elaborating on the contribution of Elaben for having shown the path on collective power of women she also mentioned the role of Home Net South Asia (HNSA) in economic empowerment of women in South Asia. Elaben said that the countries of SAARC 'need holistic, peaceful regional cooperation. In that case, women are your best allies'. **[Elaben's speech at the Urdu Book Launch and Launch of Sabah, Islamabad, Pakistan](#)**

SEWA's community radio service begins

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) now have their own and India's 49th Community Radio Station (CRS). 'Rudi No Radio' (Rudi's radio), managed by SEWA Academy, became operational on 26th November, 2009.

Based at Manipur village of Sanand Taluka in Ahmedabad district, the station will be entirely run by rural women in local folk style. The episodes catering to rural listeners will focus on developmental issues such as agriculture, health, water and literacy.

On the occasion, Namrata Bali, managing director, SEWA Academy said, "We are happy to launch the community radio station. Rudi no Radio is part of our drive to cover rural audience in an effective manner. The programmes transmitted from the radio station would focus on developmental issues. It will not only encourage local talents and skills but will also have its own listener base."

In April 2005, SEWA began its first community radio programme, entitled Rudi no Radio. A weekly 15-minute programme produced and broadcast by members of the SEWA for a rural audience. An estimated 500,000 listeners tuned in to the weekly show.

"There is no end to our struggle"*: SEWA members, bootlegging and police

The environment in the Hamumanpura chawl of Ahmedabad city is rampant with illegal liquor and gambling spots. On 20th October, 2009 when there was a brawl between a resident and a gambling group. A group gathered and together they went to the police station to get their complaint registered against the gambling and liquor supporter Savita Salat who is proclaimed history sheeter. Residents of this area kept waiting for the police to come and protect them.

Instead on 22nd October, a group of 20-25 armed bad elements went around threatening the residents of chawl with dire consequences. On 23rd October, Baluben a construction worker, and member of SEWA's executive committee and a resident of the chawl informed Manaliben, SEWA's trade union organizer, of the threats and torture they were suffering and living in perpetual fear of their lives. Police expressed their inability to take any action as according to them everything was peaceful in the area.

So an effort was made to seek the help of media for putting pressure on the police to become active and take some action to rest the fear of the people. Simultaneously a group of people went to the police station to ask for protection when at the same time a gang of 25-30 went around beating women and young girls.

Now the police intervened and took Savita Salat and four of her men to the police station and put them behind bars. However, they were freed very soon.

The situation got worse from there on in. Next day, as the workers of the chawl were on their way to work they were attacked and beaten up by the same group of rowdy elements. The women decided to fight back with the Gandhian weapon of Satyagrah and staged a peaceful 'dharna' by lying on the road near Gandhi Ashram. However, this peaceful protest was seen as a 'threat' to the law and order by the same policemen who resorted to lathi charge and teargases to clear the road. The women did not budge and completed their Satyagrah and went back home.

Later in the day the a senior police inspector visited the chawl for inspection and the women made him accountable to questions like why the police hit the peacefully protesting women, did it make them any better than the goons?

In a quick retaliation, several lathi waving plain clothed policemen raided the chawl and started to round up young men

from their houses and threw them into the vans. They were taken to the police station. Soon a group of hundred women went to the police station and asked the

authorities as to why the men rounded up? Why was the retaliation against men when the women staged a legal 'Satyagrah'?

[READ MORE..](#)

**As said by Manaliben, Union Coordinator, SEWA*

Some Sad News:

The passing away of two SEWA Founder Members, Arvindaben and Mahalaxmiben

Arvindaben:

SEWA lost one of its founder members, Arvindaben Indravadan Bhatt who was 71 years old on 14th October, 2009.

She was a stitching teacher in SEWA's mother organization TLA and joined SEWA in 1982. At SEWA, she started organizing women workers who used to sew discarded strips of cloth into useful articles. She joined 'Sabina Co-operative' as its manager. She served on the post of vice chair at SEWA Bank for 25 years and was one of its founders.

She will always be remembered for her integrity, honesty and commitment towards the care of poor women.

Mahalaxmiben:

SEWA lost Mahalaxmiben Panchal, 79 years old, who passed away on 8th November, 2009. Earlier she used to work with Textile Labour Association. After its separation from SEWA she remained with SEWA till the very end. She moved to a village named Dev Dholera and developed SEWA's rural work.

Later she helped develop SEWA's department of membership fees collection.

When the department was computerized in 1995 she continued to train young girls. She gave prime importance to the training of young girls to help built up their future. Even after her retirement she continued spending her time with SEWA. Her work has been a true inspiration for SEWA and a guiding stone for others to follow.

At SEWA, we welcome your feedback and suggestions. You can reach us at mail@sewaacademy.org. If you know anyone who would be interested in getting in touch with SEWA's news, please pass on their contact details to us.

SEWA Academy

Krishna Bhuvan, Near Hariharanand Ashram, Opp Sakar Two, Town Hall Road,
Ellisbridge,

Ahmedabad: 380 006. Gujarat , INDIA .

Phone: +91-79-26577115, 26580474 Fax: +91-79-26587086

Web: www.sewaacademy.org Email: mail@sewaacademy.org