

# We the Self-Employed

SEWA'S electronic newsletter

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SEWA

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## Food Security and SEWA Members

### **SEWA Members in Delhi present study to Chief Minister**

It was an unusual experience for SEWA members in Delhi on 4th December, when they met one of the most popular Chief Ministers of India, Smt Sheila Dixit, to talk about their problems with food security and possible solutions. The experience was unusual because they spoke from their heart and the Chief Minister too, reciprocated in the same way. The SEWA members described how they had to go many times to the fair price shop to get the rations due to them, thereby losing their days earnings. They rarely received full rations, and often the wheat and sugar was of very low quality. They also told the CM about the small study undertaken by SEWA entitled "**Do Poor People in Delhi want to change from PDS to Cash Transfers**".

**Read more..**

### **A SEWA study of impact of Food Inflation in Gujarat**

A study was conducted in Gujarat "**Impact of Price Rise on Poor Households**" with 240 poor families in rural Gujarat.

**Read more..**

### **SEWA celebrates 'Ananta' festival**

Ananta, was the outcome of a process where two designers of international repute - Graham Hollick - a British textile and fashion designer and Corine Forget, French sculptor and designer worked with the women artisans of SEWA to re-invent the ethnic stitch to appeal to the international market. Their collaborative collection 'Ananta', "The flamboyant stitch" - was presented at the two day festival. 'Ananta' was conceptualized by Annick Chandra Pelle of Alliance Francaise and was jointly organized by the SEWA Trade Facilitation Centre (STFC) and Kanoria Centre for Arts on 18th and 19th December, 1629 at Ahmedabad. 'Ananta' covered a fashion show, an exhibition of home furnishing and sketches, films, folk music, dance, workshop for children and rural cuisine. The models for the fashion show were local and homegrown, some of them, the young daughters and daughters in law of women artisans.

Elaben Bhatt along with designer Graham Hollick walked the ramp with grace as the audience cheered. Elaben shouted the slogan 'Hum sab khoobsurat hai' (We are all beautiful) to her fellow sisters. By which she meant, that a woman's beauty is not merely skin deep, it comes from her confidence to understand and deal with life in all its manifestations and with the capacity to carry on when the going gets tough. Take on life and make it beautiful. The world needs a woman's touch!!'

**In the photo:  
Mrinalini Sarabhai,  
Graham Hollick, Ela  
Bhatt along with  
young daughters of  
women artisans who  
walked the ramp**

### **Launching of SEWA Union in Kerala**

SEWA Kerala a new trade union was launched in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum) on 13th December, 1629 by Sri. P.K. Gurudasan, the Labour Minister of Kerala, with the enthusiastic participation of over 800 women members of SEWA from different parts of Kerala. The Minister announced that Kerala had just started a number of social security schemes which would benefit women in the unorganised (informal) sector. These included a maternity benefit scheme covering six weeks of paid leave; Health insurance scheme upto Rs. 30,000 (RSBY) which is free for all BPL and APL (former BPL) families, and extended to all families for a yearly premium; and he also announced notification of State Rules for the new Unorganised Workers Social Security Act.

Representatives of HMS, AITUC and INTUC felicitated SEWA and said that this all-women's union was both a challenge to them, but also an opportunity. They said that in most trade unions there are many women members but the leaders are men. They said that when their women members heard about SEWA, they too would want to take leadership and perhaps this would give a push to the trade unions to encourage women's leadership. Mridul Eappen of the Kerala State Planning Board said that many new infrastructure projects were coming into the States and she was trying to get the projects to include women's interests.

The names of the office bearers of the new union with their trades are as below:

President Ms Suneeta  
Vice president Ms Raxy  
Secretary Ms Sonia George  
Treasurer Ms Padmina

In the next day at the delegates' seminar, the women members spoke about their issues. Vaneja, a domestic worker said that earlier they were made to work long hours and treated in a humiliating way. After joining SEWA she has got dignity and is treated with respect. Rekha a mat maker said that after she joined SEWA, she was able to get Bamboo from the forest at lower prices. She has also diversified into other handicrafts. Sunita a coconut-shell spoon-maker said the market for her products has declined after aluminum spoons flooded the market, so SEWA has helped her with markets. Bharati, a weaver said that she joined SEWA because she does not get any social security benefits as she works for a very small employer; SEWA helped her join the handloom board. Vijayamma, a street vendor, said earlier they would suffer in silence when their goods were taken away and they were removed from their place. After joining SEWA they protest collectively and have gained an identity.

#### **SEWA at Cop15**

SEWA has been working both in urban and rural area. Since its inception, it has been organizing waste-picker women in urban Gujarat. These waste-picker members are responsible for reducing the waste at the source level, reusing discarded glass, plastic and cloth, and recycling the plastic and paper by selling it to the scrap shops.

In rural parts of Gujarat, it is striving to build a cadre of 'Green Technicians' who are imparting green skills to 1 million households and creating 'Green Livelihoods'. By building green skills through its extensive network of members, SEWA has taken up several initiatives to make the soil, water and air in its area of work cleaner and greener. They are categorized into four major areas i.e. Farm based, Non-Farm Based, Energy and Water. While working at grass root level SEWA is not only empowering women and generating green livelihood, but is also working on the mechanism and coping strategies for climate change.

SEWA participated at the UN Climate Change Conference 2009 held at Copenhagen. SEWA made a presentation on the contribution of the waste-picker and rural members in reducing the carbon emission. SEWA screened two documentaries there. The first one '[Silent Eco-Friends](#)', highlighted the waste-picker issues and recognized their role as agents to mitigate climate change. While the second documentary, '[Building Sustainable Green Livelihoods](#)', highlighted the work done on promoting organic farming; introduction of usage of cleaner fuels like biogas and solar lights in place of wood and cow dung and water harvesting.

#### **Exposure Dialogue Programme Conducted by SEWA Academy**

The Exposure Dialogue Programme (EDP), commonly known as Taana Baana, witnessed participants from Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nation (FAO), Italy. Through Exposure Dialogue Programme, Sewa Academy intends to disseminate SEWA's experiences of 35 years' of struggle, achievements and strategies adopted through a well integrated approach of field stay of two days to give exposure to the lives of the sisters, the members, who have formed the foundation of SEWA.

The topic of the 42nd EDP was agriculture. It was scheduled from 30th November to 4th December 1629 at Ahmedabad. A total of 17 managers and staff from FAO were present for EDP. The exposure included fields' stay of two days and post field visit experience sharing and a dialogue. Namratiben Bali, Managing Director, SEWA Academy and the main facilitator of EDP flagged off the programme and welcomed participants, host ladies and facilitators to the EDP platform.

### **Read more..**

#### **South Asian Organizations attend SEWA Academy Training on Membership Based Organization of the Poor (MBOP)**

HomeNet South Asia sponsored twenty-five people representing organizations from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and India gathered to learn about Membership Based organizations for three days at SEWA Academy in Ahmedabad.

Although most organizations in the HomeNet Network recognize that the homebased workers should be empowered they do not understand the difference between an NGO and an MBOP. This training was designed to convey SEWA's experiences in organizing many types of Member-based organizations, from co-operatives to trade union, to Self help group federations to producer owned companies.

#### **SEWA Daughters learn IT Skills in Delhi**

SEWA members make a lot of effort to educate their daughters and as they reach middle school and high school, they begin to think about their futures. However, even today there are not many opportunities for girls who have not studied beyond school, there are very few courses for building useful skills and those available are too expensive. "We want to learn computers, we want to be managers and doctors" say the girls, but where and how? Due to lack of opportunity they end up in the same trades as their mothers.

SEWA Delhi tied up with the State Bank of India Academy to teach girls in slums of Delhi whose parents are daily wage labourers, domestic workers, street vendors or home based workers. Every Saturday, for eight months, 35 girls went 30 kms away to the High-tech and sophisticated State Bank Academy to learn computers, accountancy and English, taught by the State Bank managers. At the certificate ceremony the topper Farhana Farooqui, who got 97%, said, "At first my parents would not let me go they do not like me to go out of the house. But after I told them about the big academy and the qualified teachers they did not mind. This course has opened my mind. I never thought of a good future for myself, I thought I will do stitching at home like my mother. But now I think I will have a bright future. I like accountancy and I want to become a banker in SBI"!

At SEWA, we welcome your feedback and suggestions. You can reach us at [mail@sewaacademy.org](mailto: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.

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