

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

Our strategy for organizing women 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 with better bargaining position, 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 98 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 interventions like trainings, cooperative education and management, marketing and design services. It also runs a special shop in the main wholesale vegetable 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.

Member Co-operatives of SEWA Federation

Category	Types of Cooperatives	No. of Coops.	Activities
A	Dairy Cooperatives	58	Milk & Dairy products
B	Artisans Cooperatives	11	Block printing; embroidery; patchwork; weaving; stitching and zari-work.
C	Service & Labour Cooperatives	08	Healthcare; midwives; childcare; video; cleaning; catering and construction
D	Land-based Cooperatives	07	Tree-growers & Agri – farm activities
E	Trade /Vendors' Cooperatives	11	Vegetable; Fish & Kerosene
F	Credit Cooperatives	03	Savings & Credit
Total		98	

Gujarat State Women's SEWA Cooperative Federation Limited**Activities – At a Glance****1) Cooperative Education & Development Services**

- a) Members' Education
- b) Board of Directors' Education
- c) Other Educational & awareness activities like linkages with SEWA & Sister organizations; government schemes etc.

2) Business Development Services

- a) Pre-registration & Registration procedures
- b) Governance
- c) Trade facilitation
- d) Accounts
- e) Legal procedures & advice

3) Institutional Development services

- a) Revival of Cooperatives
- b) Review and Monitoring
- c) Promotion of Cooperatives based on 5 point parameters

4) Human Resources Development services

- a) Capacity building & enhancement
- b) Technical Trainings & workshops
- c) Vocational Trainings
- d) On the job trainings
- e) Special trainings in support with governmental and non-governmental organizations
- f) Administrative support

5) Market Support Services

- a) Sales & Marketing outlet
- b) Buyers-Sellers interface
- c) Exports
- d) Exhibitions
- e) E-commerce
- f) Design & Product development
- g) Customized orders

6) Policy Advocacy services

7) Research & Publications

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

1. Trainings

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.

Types of Trainings conducted by SEWA Cooperative Federation for the Co-operatives

Sr. No.	Type of Training	Cooperatives Participated	Programmes	Days	No. of Women
1	Cooperative Education				
1a	Member education	Shaishav, Shramshakti, Shramlaxmi, Krishna Dayan, Lokswasthya, Sangini, Bhagyalaxmi, Matsygandha, Trupti, Saundarya, Sabina, Kadi Khudaar	28	52	1281
1b	Training of BOD	Shaishav, Shramshakti, Shramlaxmi, Krishna Dayan, Lokswasthya, Sangini, Bhagyalaxmi, Matsygandha, Trupti, Saundarya, Sabina, Kadi Khudaar	4	7	125
2a	Management Training (Financial Management)	Trupti, Aabodana, Saundarya, Sabina, Kadi Khudaar	4	9	128

2b	Accounts Training	Trupti, Aabodana, Saundarya, Sabina, Kadi Khudaar	1	2	21
2c	Audit Training	Shaishav, Shramshakti, Shramlaxmi, Krishna Dayan, Lokswasthya, Sangini, Vanlaxmi, Video, Racheta	1	2	20
3	Minutes - writing Training	Shaishav, Shramshakti, Shramlaxmi, Krishna Dayan, Lokswasthya, Sangini, Vanlaxmi, Video, Racheta	1	1	38
4	Marketing Training	Trupti		1	40
5	Technical trainings Home managers				
a	training	Trupti	1	20	41
b	Cleaning Table	Saundaryaa	1	2	30
c	arrangement/décor	Trupti	1	5	20
d	Making snacks	Trupti	1	4	22
e	Vegetable dyeing	Aabodana	1	20	5
f	Sewing	Sabina	1	20	20
g	Livestock-raising	Milk Coops	21	21	727
h	Pisciculture	Matsyagandha	4	120	116
6	Skill upgradation				
a	Crochet	Aabodana	2	25	20
b	Henna designs	Surendrangar	1	5	20
c	Block printing	Valsad Vatsalaya,	1	7	25
d	Tie and dye	Valsad	1	7	25
e	Zari work	Kadi Khudar	1	25	20
f	Cutting	Urban Shantipath centres	2	25	10

7	Exposure visits	Mother dairy Vasundhara dairy and other cooperatives in Gujarat	6	6	356
	Total		3	16	130
			187	459	4945

1) Cooperative education and Training.

a) Members' education

1281 members of different cooperatives participated in trainings that aimed to create an understanding and awareness of cooperative principles and laws.

b) Board of Directors training

This year 125 directors of different cooperatives' boards participated in trainings that helped to create an understanding of their roles and responsibilities, information on how to run meetings, how to plan for self-reliance of the cooperative and discussion of administrative and financial matters.

2) Financial management training

128 women participated in training on financial management, including financial planning, preparing a business plan and costing. This training was conducted in collaboration with the Indian School of Microfinance for Women.

Accounts Trainings

The main aim of this training was to teach women to maintain the accounts of their own cooperative. It also helped them understand the process of auditing of accounts. In particular, women learned how to work towards the self reliance of their cooperative.

Minutes-writing and Audit-report writing Trainings

This training was for the new cooperatives and focussed on how minutes should be maintained of every board meeting, annual general meeting and other special meetings. Women also learned how to respond in writing to audit queries. This training offered practical training on these issues.

Management Trainings

30 women participated in training in running their cooperatives—how to maintain files, other records, delegate responsibilities and handle the everyday issues that come up in the life of a cooperative.

3) Technical training

a) Home Care training

This training was the first of its kind, and 40 young women participated in it. The idea was to train women in the basics of home care—caring for bed-ridden patients, first-aid, nutrition, measuring blood pressure, temperature and pulse rate, among other subjects. Several of the trainees obtained employment after this training which was conducted by Lok Swasthya Health Cooperative.

b) Training in cleaning services

This training was aimed at women who clean in offices and public buildings. Segregation of waste and maintaining the environment while safeguarding their own health was among the issues addressed in this training.

c) Fruit and vegetable preparation training

This training was for members of our catering cooperative. They learned how to cut vegetables and fruit in attractive ways which would increase their marketability.

d) Training in Block printing (Vegetable dye)

The members of Abodana block-printers cooperative participated in this training to prepare dyes from fruit and vegetables, as an alternative to chemical dyes. Given the increase in demand for natural products, Abodana will now use the skills gained to develop new products using vegetable dyes.

e) Training in Livestock-raising

727 women participated in a total of 21 training sessions on raising livestock, with the aim of increasing milk production and enhancing its quality. The participants learned how to care for the cattle, the calves, about common diseases and how to ensure that the fat content of the milk was maintained, among other subjects.

4) Capacity-building Trainings

Several special training programmes aimed at capacity-building were organised this year, along with partners like the Coady Institute in Canada, National Cooperative Development Corporation in New Delhi and the Ahmedabad Management Association. A team of four organisers went to the Coady Institute in Canada for training.

In addition, training in proposal writing, business plan development, training of trainers and others were organised.

Ongoing Services offered by the Federation

Apart from training programmes aimed at capacity-building, knowledge and skill-building and awareness, the Federation offered various services, many on an ongoing basis. These are outlined below:

1. Assistance to register new cooperatives
2. Management support to run board meetings and annual general meetings.
3. Assistance in preparation of agenda and minutes of the meetings.
4. Assistance in accounts and book-keeping
5. Assistance in internal, as well as statutory audits, including responding to audit queries.
6. Support in framing Memoranda of Understanding and resolutions.
7. Help in linking with government programmes.
8. Support to develop internal linkages with SEWA's different services like banking, insurance and health care.
9. Assistance in obtaining work from government, corporate sector and others, especially in negotiating agreements.
10. Assistance in report writing.

Marketing Support services

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.

The Federation also helps individual cooperatives, like the fish vendors' cooperative "Matsyagandha Fish Cooperative", to develop its marketing plan and also link them with fish producers' in Saurashtra region for continuous supply of fish. Apart from offering various technical training programmes to fish vendors, the Federation helped the

Matsy gandha cooperative to develop linkages with fisher folk in Saurashtra, so that the vendors would have direct access to fish.

Sales figures of Units of Federation (2006 -2007)

No.	Name	Sales in Rs.
1	Vegetable shop	49,53,587
2	SEWA Kalakruti (artisans outlet)	27,01,070
3	Matsy gandha (fish vendors cooperative)	10,07,605
	Total	86,62,262

SEWA Kalakruti – the marketing outlet of the Federation sold products of artisan cooperatives, collectives and associations of rural artisans. It also exported Rs 3, 60,000 worth of products to Hong Kong, London, Geneva and other places.

It organised 3 exhibitions in its own premises, and participated in the exhibitions organized by the Rangoonwala Foundation in Mumbai and in collaboration with SEWA Federation in New Delhi.

In addition, we have been running a vegetable shop—No.40 in the wholesale market at Jamalpur, Ahmedabad for the last five years. This year's sales enabled 800 farmers to get higher prices for their produce. 171 farmers obtained Rs.14,66,600 by way of loans. The Federation also provided relief by way of food grains, vessels and temporary shelter to flood-affected farmers of two villages.

Design & Product Development through 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.

In this year 120 artisan women participated in training in crochet work, block-printing, tie and dye and other skill training programmes. In addition, 125 students from the M.S.University in Vadodara and the School of Architecture in Ahmedabad learned block-printing and screen-printing from the master craftswomen of Design SEWA.

This design unit also developed 90 samples for the cooperatives affiliated to the Federation. It also organised special product development training for two artisan cooperatives. In addition, Design SEWA undertook computerised documentation of its samples and prepared a documentary on its work.