

# SELF EMPLOYED WOMEN ASSOCIATION

## INTRODUCTION

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), is a trade union of 50,000 members working for poor and self employed women in urban and rural areas. SEWA strives to provide a worker-producer status to self employed women through a joint struggle of union and co-operatives. In 1988 SEWA launched a regional development programme which now covers 60 villages of Radhanpur and Santalpur talukas of Banaskantha district. The Government of Gujarat, under the Indo-Dutch bilateral programme, launched the Santalpur Regional Water Supply Scheme (SRWSS). The programme aims at providing assured water supply, health, sanitation, and income to the local communities through their active participation in its implementation, thereby improving the living and working conditions of the communities.

The project is in a desert region. The hostile climatic conditions and frequent droughts have reduced the communities from subsistence to survival level, often compelling them to migrate to other areas. Women and children are the worst sufferers of this forced and involuntary migration.

SEWA was invited to get involved in the socio-economic development under the SRWSS. The programme, Banaskantha Women's Rural Development Project, is an outcome of the initial action-research of the Foundation for Public Interest (FPI). The project aims to provide full employment to women, i.e. assured work and income which would ensure better nutrition, shelter and social security, and thereby stem the forced migration of the communities.

To achieve this, SEWA has initiated income-generating activities based on available local skills and assets, for women who live below the poverty line, or marginally above the poverty line. Around 6000 women from 60 villages are receiving sustained work as well as employment opportunities:

## THE ACTIVITIES

### • WOMEN ARTISANS SUPPORT PROGRAMME:

Women in Banaskantha have a rich heritage of crafts; the Aahirs are known for their fine embroidery, the Rabari women for beautiful mirror work, the Mochis make attractive leather items and the Harijans do patchwork and beadwork. A craft development centre was set up at Radhanpur, which provides skill training, design documentation, product development, supply of raw materials and marketing. A Delhi based organisation, Dastakar, has played a committed role in developing the Craft Development Centre with support received from the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts) of the Government of India.

### **Banas Craft - a direct marketing outlet :**

To build up a good market for their products, SEWA has set up a direct marketing outlet, Banas Craft, in one of the main commercial areas of Ahmedabad.

### **Special Employment Guarantee :**

Under the Gujarat Government's special employment programme, 3000 women artisans enjoy sustained employment from SEWA. The programme also provides them support in the form of raw materials, tools, equipment and design consultancy.

### **Local Group Formation :**

The women artisans have been organised into local groups under a government programme called Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA). Out of 42 women-managed DWCRA groups, 22 have achieved self sufficiency.

### • **ECO-REGENERATION PROGRAMME (Nursery and Plantation) :**

The women of this region are being introduced to antidesertification activities. Around 300 landless women are engaged in raising 10 lakh fruit and non-fruit saplings annually. Training and technical input is provided by the Gujarat Agriculture University (GAU). SEWA trains them in plant grafting which provides additional income. Some 70 acres of panchayat wastelands have been afforested under an agro-forestry and silvipasture programme.

### • **DAIRYING AND FODDER SECURITY SYSTEM:**

Cattle breeding is the next major occupation in the region. SEWA, in co-ordination with Banas Dairy, has revived 75 defunct primary milk co-operatives. Today, the daily collection of milk is around 8,000 liters. The Radhanpur Chilling Centre which had been closed for several years has also been revived. SEWA is now concentrating on involving women to form women's co-operatives in villages in the area. More than six such women's co-operatives have been registered for the first time in the entire district.

**Fodder security System:**

A detailed study by FPI resulted in the launching of the Fodder Security System (FSS). Fodder, (dry stacks of Jowar and BaJara), is purchased and stored during the harvesting season and distributed to members of the co-operatives during the lean summer months. With the assistance of SEWA, a committee of representatives of local communities manage the purchase, storage, distribution and financial activities. Some 2,000 cattle heads from six villages are supported by the FSS. The migration rate from the six worst affected villages has come down by 60 per cent.

• **SALT FARMING:**

Salt farming is another major activity in the area involving around 10,000 people. Based on a study conducted by SEWA and FPI, SEWA has launched two major programmes for salt workers.

Co-operativisation of salt workers :

In 1991, a women salt producers' co-operative was set up and its annual production now is 2,000 tonnes of salt worth Rs.3 lakhs. The average monthly income of a member is Rs.700.

**Salt Workers' Welfare Programme :**

Based on the recommendations of the FPI study, SEWA proposed to the Rural Labour Commission to initiate welfare programmes for salt workers. As a result, the Mobile Health Unit was launched in 1991. Based on the outcome of this pilot project and SEWA'S recommendations, the Government of Gujarat launched welfare schemes for the salt workers of the entire state - the first of its kind in the country, which includes:

- \* Mobile Health Unit                      \* Worker's Health unit
- \* Day Care Centre and Creche       \* Recreational Programmes
- \* Shelter for Salt workers

The schemes became operational from March, 1993.

**SAVINGS AND CREDIT:**

In December 1992, 22 local savings and credit groups of 830 women were formed with a monthly saving of Rs.10 each. Their total savings in four months were Rs.40,000.

**MINOR FOREST PRODUCE COLLECTION:**

A desert tree, Prosopis Julifora, popularly known as Ganda Baval, is a source of resin gum. SEWA has organised 500 women gum collectors into eight DWCRAs groups. These groups are licensed for gum collection by the Gujarat State Forest Development Corporation (GSFDC), the sole purchasing agency owned by the state for all forest produce. SEWA is now negotiating with the government for a fairer price.

• **WATER AS REGENERATIVE INPUT:**

Water conservation and water harvesting activities call for immediate attention for the eco-regeneration of the desert region. SEWA has mobilised local communities and local resources for water harvesting activities including pond lining to harvest rain water; cleaning of wells and canals; and constructing minor irrigation structures.

• **SOCIAL SECURITY SCHEMES:**

SEWA has launched various social security schemes for its members which include

## Health Care

Some 1,000 women artisans were examined for eye ailments in 1992. Some 876 women were provided spectacles at subsidised prices and 124 members were given medicines.

Some 4,000 members were insured under a social security package which covers a compensation of Rs.10,000 in case of accidental death; Rs. 1,000 as mediclaim in case of illness; and Rs.5,000 towards damage to house or goods due to floods and riots. More than 6,000 members have life - insurance.

Most of the villages under this project are in remote areas with no approach road. Food supply through the Public Distribution Systems (PDS) and Fair Price Shops (FPS) is irregular and inadequate.

SEWA has therefore launched a food security programme called Shakii Packet which provides five villages their daily essential commodities at cost. A participator and local PDS outlet is also in the making.

## A BANASKANTHA DWCRA MAHILA SEWA ASSOCIATION:

The 42 local women-managed DWCRA groups have been federated into a district-level association, the Banaskantha DWCRA Mahila SEWA Association, which was registered on 22nd December 1992. The Association aims to provide infrastructural support in the shape of raw material, training, managerial input, credit, work space and marketing input to individual DWCRA groups. SEWA plans to support the association in building new groups and in strengthening the existing groups. Gradually SEWA would withdraw, when the association is able to manage its programme activities.

### Conclusion :

The Banaskantha Women's Rural Development Project is striving to build up and strengthen local women-managed DWCRA groups for the social and economic empowerment of poor rural women, which enables them to increase their decision making capacity, become financial managers of their own organisations, represent their activities at the district, state and national-level boards, and thus come into the mainstream of the Indian economy as full and rightful participants.

## SEWA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Name	Trade
Ranbai Jemalji	Forest Produce collector
Rauma Sharifaben Habibshah Fakir	Nursury raising Artisan
Jomiben Jairambhai Rajgor	Artisan
Kantaben Jaisinghbhai Chauhan	Artisan

## Banaskantha DWCRA Mahita Sewa Association

### Executive Committee.

Hiiaben Kanjibhai Parmar	: Presiden	Nursury raising
Vimlaben Kalidas Parmer	: Secretary	Artisan
Sharifaben Habibshah Fakir	: Member	Nursury raising
Ranbai Jemalji Rauma	: Member	Forest Produce
Gomiben Kumbhabhai Parmar	: Member	Collecttor
Samuben Ujabhai Thakore	: Member	Artisat
Dahiben Pethabhai Parmar	: Member	Nursury raising
Huraben Dawoodbhai	: Member	Artisan
Jivtiben Ilematbhai Thakore	: Member	Nursury raising
Kantaben Chhaganbhai Barot	: Member	Artisan
Shantaben Harkhabhai Harijan	: Member	Artisan
Andiben Babubhai Harijan	: Member	Artisan
Baluben Vershibhai Thakore	: Member	Artisan
Sonaben Abhubhai Harijan	: Member	Artisan
Jomiben Jairambhai Rajgor	: Member	Artisan

**Project Team**

Project Leader Organisers Reema Nanavaty

Craft Organiser Mona Dave  
Saira Baloch  
Mumtaz Baloch  
Kokila Bhrambhatt  
Chandrika Parmar

Eco Regeneration Manju.la Panchal  
Amina Baloch

Dairy Co-operative Organiser Madhu Patel  
Ragi Desai

Minor Forest Produce Dharmishtha Rathod

Collection Organiser  
Administration Bharati Patel  
Ishwar Bhrambhatt

Marketing Team Arvinda Bhatt  
Rupa Rawat  
Laxmi Parmar

**Kamaladevi Chhappadhyay National Award Winner Hiraben 'Thakersinh Brahman  
Organiser Beena Bhatt**