SEWA Delhi

Thirteen Year Report
(1999-2012)
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1. SEWA MOVEMENT: Looking Back

To trace the origins of the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), let’s turn the pages of history and go back to 1917, when Mahatma Gandhi led a successful strike of textile workers. This proved to be the inspiration for the setting up of the Textile Labour Association (TLA), India’s oldest and largest union of textile workers. Anasuya Sarabhai, a social and labour activist, founded the union in 1920. This was all the more remarkable for this was the period in India’s history when women’s rights movements were rare. In 1954, the Women’s Wing of the TLA was created to assist women belonging to households of mill workers. The Wing focused largely on training and welfare activities. The scope of its activities expanded in the early 1970s when a survey was conducted to look into the complaints of women workers. The survey revealed that a large number of their issues were untouched by unionizing, Government legislation and policies.

In 1971, when Ela Bhatt was the head of the Women’s Wing, some migrant women cart-pullers came to her office with the hope that the TLA would help them find some housing, for they were living in the streets without shelter. Elaben went with them to their places of work and interacted with other women who were working as head-loaders. In one of the meetings that followed, a woman from the crowd suggested that they form an association of their own. Thus, on an appeal from the women and on the initiative of Elaben, SEWA was formed in December 1971 and registered as a trade union of self-employed women in April 1972.

The first challenge it faced was to obtain official recognition as a trade union. SEWA argued that a union was not necessarily against an employer, but was for the unity of the workers. SEWA is a confluence of three movements—labour, cooperative and women. It was born out of the labour movement with the idea that like salaried employees, the self-employed, too, have a right to fair wages, decent working conditions and protective labour laws. A cooperative movement is important to develop alternative economic systems where the workers themselves can control their means of production. In the 1970s women’s movements took a radical turn with women participating actively in social movements and opportunities in all spheres of life.

In 1977, Elaben won the Magsaysay award, which gave national and international recognition to SEWA. The women’s movement had now become active in India and worldwide and, to observers, SEWA seemed a unique model that empowered women to improve their own income-earning capacity, but also do so through a compelling Gandhian framework. Solidarity between workers in a common trade is the foundation of SEWA’s strength. However, the ‘organised strength’ of SEWA required national support to be effective. Without this, if SEWA organised bidi (a thin cigarette) rollers in Gujarat and negotiated for higher minimum wages, production could simply move to other states in which the women were not organized. By nature, then, the SEWA mission implied that all women workers in the informal sector across India were potential SEWA members. It was the ‘power of one’ that gave strength to all SEWA members.

Over the years, there were several stories that highlighted the phenomenal growth of the association. In 2012, the SEWA movement completed four decades and had plenty to show for it, including 17 lakh informal women worker members spread across 10 states of India. Responding to the needs of these members, SEWA has adopted a developmental, labour union, rights-based approach. Today, the SEWA family of organisations provides finance, markets, training, research, healthcare, child care, housing and, most of all, hope of better days to come.
1.1 ELA BHATT: Showing the Way

It was an honour bestowed on all SEWA members, nationwide, when the International Jury of the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust awarded the 2011 Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development to SEWA Founder, Ela Bhatt. This award recognises Elaben’s achievements in comprehensively empowering women in India through grassroots entrepreneurship, access to shelter, healthcare, microfinance, micro-insurance, skills, legal services, collective bargaining power and other means. It also acknowledges her contributions towards promoting equitable development and peace, following the Gandhian path of self-reliance and non-violence. The award was presented by the President of India, Pranab Mukherjee, in the presence of the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi, Chairperson, United Progressive Alliance (UPA). For SEWA’s women, this was another milestone in its eventful journey that started in 1971 with the aim of empowering the women of India.

Ela Bhatt (left) receiving the 2011 Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development

2. SEWA BHARAT: Coming together

SEWA Bharat, the federation of Indian SEWA member organisations, was formed in 1984 with the intent of harnessing the strengths of the members who were spread across the country, and to address the challenges of the geographical expansion of the SEWA movement. From the very start, SEWA Bharat had its role clearly defined:

Develop new SEWAs: SEWA Bharat has taken over the role previously played by the SEWA Gujarat Spearhead Teams that travelled through India in the early 1980s. After being approached by an interested stakeholder (who may be a local leader or a potential partner), SEWA Bharat investigates the potential for a new SEWA organisation through a survey of livelihoods and women’s concerns, as well as experience sharing between women in related trades from the existing SEWAs. After approval from the SEWA Bharat Executive Committee and consensus on the initial project to be implemented, a new SEWA is formed. However, it is not yet an independently constituted organisation or a SEWA Bharat member organisation with elected representation until the local leadership is ready to run the organisation. Rather, it continues under the direction of SEWA Bharat, which provides monitoring or implementation resources as needed.
Strengthen smaller SEWAs: For small or less developed SEWAs, SEWA Bharat helps plan and execute new programmes. The goal is to create a foundation for future growth as an independent organisation, with a strong membership base, capable staff/grassroots leadership and sustainable programmes and activities. For example, SEWA Bharat works closely with SEWA Bhagalpur to help it develop its staff capacity to undertake microfinance and silk production. Similarly, SEWA Bharat has linked SEWA Munger for marketing *agarbattis* (incense sticks) to the multinational corporation, ITC, and has helped it form a producers’ cooperative and a company for rolling and scenting, respectively.

Facilitate linkages for and between SEWAs: SEWA Bharat helps each SEWA to better support its members through aligning with new services, obtaining expertise, linking with Government programmes and identifying growth opportunities. For example, SEWA Bharat has helped its members get services through VIMO SEWA, Gujarat. It has also enabled SEWAs to develop their expertise in microfinance by linking with the SEWA Bank. SEWA Bharat establishes links between members and Government programmes and policies, such as the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) initiative of the Health Ministry, and rural development schemes and schemes. SEWA Bharat enables SEWAs to connect with each other. SEWA Gujarat and Swashrayee Mahila Sewa Sangh have been sent their teams to newly developing SEWAs such as in Murshidabad and Rajasthan. Swashrayee Mahila Sewa Sangh, Madhya Pradesh, has transferred the Shramik Mahotsav or ‘Workers’ Celebrations’ to each SEWA. The SEWA Academy conducts regular training programmes for SEWA Bharat leaders and members.

Build a national identity and advocate at the national level: SEWA members felt that they should have national recognition. Therefore, the first concern of SEWA Bharat was to build a national identity for SEWA. It does this through frequent meetings of the multi-state Board of SEWA; continuous exposures and trainings for leaders from each SEWA and, most effectively, through Shramik Mahotsav, where women from all SEWAs come together and get to know each other, by talking, playing games, dancing and singing. An important national identity comes from the newsmagazine *Anasuya* published from Bhopal. However, the most effective link is established by building a common ideology, common programmes and common values. At the same time SEWA Bharat supports advocacy at the national level. Currently, SEWA Bharat’s member organisations are based in the following states: Gujarat, Kerala, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh.

3. SEWA DELHI: our journey

The women vegetable vendors in Delhi’s Jahangirpuri urban slum area, faced several problems, arising from the fact that they belonged to the informal economy. SEWA Bharat identified Jahangirpuri as an area that would benefit from SEWA’s intervention. SEWA Bharat grassroots workers mobilised women vegetable vendors into Self Help Groups for collective strength and access to finance. With this small but motivated membership based, SEWA Delhi began in 1999. Soon, street vendors from Raghbir Nagar also joined the movement to find a solution to their problem of a lack of a permanent and legal space to sell their products. Over time, members expressed their concern over the schooling of their children, given that their work and lifestyle required constant movement. Therefore, children’s education has been an integral part of SEWA Delhi’s focus from the beginning. Soon after SHGs of Jahangirpuri were linked to Bank of Baroda, the Branch Manager advised SEWA to work in Sundernagri as well. Taking up the cue, a team was sent to Sundernagri for survey and meetings. The survey results were eye opening. The women in Sundernagri were primarily home-based workers, involved in weaving, embroidery, bangle and bindi making, and numerous other home based activities. These women were being economically exploited by the contractors and moneylenders and had no access to social security. After a number of meetings, the women from Sundernagri also joined SEWA movement, starting with forming SHGs and being part of livelihood interventions.

Starting from Jahangirpuri, Raghbir Nagar and Sundernagri, SEWA Movement has now spread to 10 different urban slums of Delhi, namely, Jahangirpuri (North Delhi); Raghbir Nagar (West Delhi); Sunder Nagar, Gokulpuri,
Rajiv Nagar and New Ashok Nagar (East Delhi); Anand Vihar (North-East Delhi), Nand Nagri, Mulla Colony and Mustafabad. The total membership of SEWA Delhi in 2012 had grown to an impressive 33,000.

As the movement grew, the need was felt for a separate institutional structure for Delhi, and hence SEWA Delhi was registered as a trust in 2007. For the microfinance services being rendered in Delhi, the Mahila SEWA Urban Cooperative Thrift and Credit Cooperative Society was also registered in the same year.

SEWA Delhi was desperately needed in the nation’s capital. Delhi, home to over fifteen million people, was undergoing a significant transformation as it prepared to host the 2010 Commonwealth Games. In order to beautify the city and make room for the event, many of the working poor had been displaced and evicted from homes and markets where they sold goods. Meanwhile, the construction of the Delhi Metro had called upon migrant labourers from some of the poorest sectors of Delhi, offering minimal wages and atrocious working conditions. SEWA members’ intervention on behalf of other women in informal sector jobs has offered new hope in a rapidly changing urban environment.

SEWA followed a right-based approach, and hence various campaigns were launched for advocating the rights of street vendors, home-based, domestic workers and construction workers. However, over a period of time, SEWA Delhi also organized its work under programmes to meet the growing needs and demands of members and the scale of work. Each programme was significant as it envisaged better delivery of services in a focused manner. The main programmes of SEWA Delhi include Advocacy, Health, Microfinance, Skill Development & Education, Livelihoods Promotion, and Information Centres.

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<tr>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>PROGRAMMES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Raghubir Nagar</td>
<td>Livelihood Protection for Street Vendors, Domestic Workers and Construction Workers, Education, Health, Information Desk and Microfinance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jahangirpuri</td>
<td>Microfinance, Health and Information Desk</td>
</tr>
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<td>Rajiv Nagar</td>
<td>Livelihood Promotion and Livelihood Protection for Construction Workers, Information Desk, Microfinance and Skill Development and Education</td>
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<td>Anand Vihar</td>
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<td>Livelihood Promotion and Livelihood Protection for Domestic Workers, Microfinance, Skill Building, Education and Health</td>
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<td>Mulla Colony</td>
<td>Livelihood Promotion, Information Desk, Microfinance and Health</td>
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<td>Mustafabad</td>
<td>Livelihood Promotion, Microfinance, Health and Information Desk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunder Nagari</td>
<td>Livelihood Promotion, Livelihood Protection for Street Vendors and Construction Workers, Education, Health, Information Desk and Microfinance</td>
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Table 1: SEWA Delhi Areas and Programmes

4. SEWA DELHI: Flagship programmes

The journey of SEWA Delhi has been eventful, the passing of years highlighted by several milestones and achievements. The initial intent has, however, remained unchanged—to take up issues related to women workers in the informal sector and represent their concerns to the policy-makers at both, the national and state levels. These include:

- **Livelihood protection.** Providing street vendors a permanent space and a legal identity; providing construction workers a legal identity, social security and skill upgrading and advocating for domestic workers (ensuring decent wages, work conditions and paid leaves).
• **Livelihood promotion.** Creating direct market linkages and providing skill training in embroidery as well as alternative livelihoods, primarily for home-based hand embellishment workers.

• **Microfinance.** Ensuring that members have access to savings and loans, especially loans for working capital needs, and are prevented from being exploited by moneylenders.

• **Social security.** Creating linkages with Government schemes, such as old age, disability and widow pensions, for members.

• **Skill development and education.** Offering programmes for children, adolescent girls and members.

• **Better quality of environment.** Working on civil issues and problems related to water and sanitation in collaboration with sister organisation, the Mahila SEWA Housing Trust (MHT).

### 5. SEWA DELHI: Manifold Achievements

SEWA Delhi’s women vendors have made several breakthroughs in the struggle for their rights. Years of hard work paid off when SEWA was registered as a trade union in early 2012. The increase in membership to over 33,000 is encouraging. The path to growth has been paved with several challenges and campaigns, among which are:

**Victory in ‘Gainda Ram and others vs. MCD and others case.** In 2006, SEWA members intervened in the ‘Gainda Ram and others vs. MCD and others’ case before the Supreme Court where the Court directed the MCD and the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) to draft schemes keeping in mind the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors 2004 (see section on vendors).

**Victory in court case to prevent displacement of Qutub Road Market.** Due to Commonwealth games, and in the name of beautification of the city, the MCD displaced the vendors of the Qutub road market. On urgings from its members, SEWA lodged a case to prevent the displacement, and finally won in 2010.

**Reinstatement of the Velodrome market.** SEWA Delhi continued working with the Public Works Department (PWD), the police, unions and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) for the proper functioning of the Velodrome market in the midst of several challenges. An illegal market had emerged at Subhash Park, near Jama Masjid, which was affecting the flow of customers in the Velodrome market. Follow-up was done with the police as well as the office of the Lt Governor of Delhi. The Government department recognised SEWA’s role in organising the market in a planned manner, where the aspects of cleanliness, genuineness of vendors, unauthorised payment, interference of unwanted elements and so on had to be controlled. SEWA members, along with a few other vendors, are now selling their products in this market every Sunday.

**SEWA information centres.** These centres have been set up in the community to provide a single window access to members for all SEWA Programmes and Government schemes.

**Collaborations.** Among the recent collaborations that help SEWA further its programmes are those with Gangaram Hospital, Red Cross, Lok Swasthya Mandali, VV Giri National Labour Institute, Tata Institute of Social Studies, Pearl Academy of Fashion, State Bank Academy, Pratham, NMIMS, Amity Law School and OP Jindal Global University.

**Microfinance.** Since August 2011, SEWA Delhi has been partnering with the Mission Convergence department of the Government of Delhi to further strengthen its microfinance programme. As its name suggests, Mission Convergence has been formed to join various social welfare schemes and services with the objective of making entitlements reach the poor through a single-window system in a hassle-free manner. Financial inclusion is one of the focus areas of Mission Convergence (See section on Microfinance pg. 19).

**Pilot cash transfer study.** This was undertaken to explore possible methods of assured Food Security. Despite having allocated funds for the Public Distribution System (PDS), a sizeable amount does not reach the intended
beneficiaries. SEWA, with support from the Delhi Government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), tested the effect of substituting PDS rations by cash transfers for Below Poverty Line (BPL) families so that they have the option to choose either food or cash. Through the study, a policy of choice was recommended for the poor consumers.

**International Domestic Workers’ Day.** SEWA Delhi members celebrated this day by organising a rally on June 16, 2012. One hundred domestic workers took part and demanded better wages, decent working conditions and weekly off-days. Ninety-six meetings were held with domestic workers to raise awareness on ILO Convention 189, which supports rights of the domestic worker.

**Youth Festival.** To commemorate 40 years of the SEWA movement and motivate the students linked within its programmes, SEWA Delhi members decided to celebrate its maiden Youth Festival in 2012 (See section on Cultural Activities pg. 46).

Many hurdles have been crossed; many aspirations fulfilled. The years ahead will, no doubt, bring their own challenges but SEWA Delhi is more than ready to overcome any problem, big or small, to ensure that its members see better days. SEWA Delhi’s campaigns are proving to be effective, with its initiatives in myriad fields making a significant difference in the lives of its members.

### 6. SEWA DELHI INITIATIVES

#### 6.1 Street Vendors

You see them everywhere—displaying a large variety of goods for sale—for street vending is an important source of self-employment for the poor in India. The number of these vendors in Delhi is estimated at about 600,000 and they contribute largely to the city’s economy, simultaneously catering to the needs of the people. Although the Central Government adopted the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors in January 2004, so far no city has implemented it effectively. According to municipal laws, it is illegal to vend without a license, which is issued at the sole discretion of the municipalities. Yet, the municipalities in India have stopped issuing licenses to street vendors’ decades ago, consequently trapping more than one crore vendors in a web of illegality and making them an easy target of extortion rackets.

Since the time of its inception, SEWA has played a significant role in influencing policy-level decisions and today works with 6,000 street vendors. The National Policy on Urban Street Vendors was largely the outcome of an initiative taken by Elaben and it was owing to the efforts of the women of SEWA, that the Government of India set up a Task Force to formulate policy on street vendors. SEWA was a member of this Task Force as well as a member of the Drafting Committee, which tirelessly struggled to ensure that street vendors are given their rights. Efforts fructified in the form of the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors, delineated by the Department of Urban Employment and SEWA Street Vendors of Delhi
**Poverty Alleviation, Ministry of Urban Development & Poverty Alleviation, in 2004.** Implementation of this policy, however, was not found to be too effective and SEWA Delhi, once again, set out to rectify matters. In 2006, SEWA intervened in the ‘Gainda Ram and others vs. MCD and others’ case before the Supreme Court where the Court directed the MCD and the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) to draft schemes keeping in mind the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors 2004. Subsequently, the NDMC and the MCD drafted a detailed scheme pertaining to the rights of the street vendors, which was approved by the Court with just a slight modification.

Vendor members of SEWA interacted with the MCD for demarcating space for vendors and the issuance of licenses. A high-powered committee under the MCD Commissioner was formed but in vain. Through SEWA members’ persistent efforts, however, 13,000 vendors eventually received licenses. In 2008, ahead of the 2010 Commonwealth Games, a beautification drive was launched where the street vendors of Qutub Road and Velodrome Road were displaced. This led to the banishment of their livelihood with no respite in sight. The vendors then began a long-drawn struggle with the MCD. During 2009, a model Act for the welfare of street vendors was formed. 2010 proved to be a fruitful year as SEWA won the case pertaining to the displaced markets of Qutub Road and Velodrome Road. Following this, SEWA, on behalf of its vendor members, began a dialogue with the officials of the Government of India for the relocation of the Velodrome market. Soon after, SEWA began discussions with the PWD and street vendors (Velodrome Road) were allocated designated space.

A judgment from the Apex Court in 2011 asked for a Central Act to be drafted. SEWA was in favour of this, as no provision has been made for street vendors in city or town plans and licenses have not been issued to vendors, deeming them illegal. Further, there is continuous harassment at the hands of the police and local goons. Street vendors ought to be seen as an integral and valuable part of city life. Thus, SEWA is spearheading the cause of its members by striving for an Act for the protection of the rights of street vendors and believes that such an Act will change the societal image of the street vendors. Having identified the problems faced by the street vendors, SEWA Delhi works with them to:

**Organise the vendors and unite them so that they can fight for their rights.** This involves bringing all SEWA members together, thus strengthening their union and, it follows, their bargaining powers with the Government/municipal authorities. The livelihood of the vendors is protected by safeguarding their markets and not letting them be removed under the guise of beautification of the city. SEWA helps vendors develop leaders and empowers them so that they can advocate for the rights of their community. The SEWA team also assists in improving the working conditions or work areas by developing ladies’ markets and beautifying them.

**Implement the National Policy on Urban Street Vendors 2004.** SEWA helps procure licenses for the street vendors through the municipal authorities in order to get a legal identity for them. It also assists in creating adequate and well-planned hawker zones for the vendors where they can vend legally with dignity. SEWA acts as a body for vendors to come forward and present their issues to the town-vending committees and protects vendors from harassment and exploitation at the workplace.

**Create more livelihood opportunities for the vendors.** When SEWA members highlight issues, they also work together to create unique solutions. For example, SEWA members established innovative markets such as the ladies’ markets, exclusively for women vendors; developed old markets for improving the working condition of the vendors and maintained hygiene in public spaces and streets. SEWA street vendors have demanded enhanced welfare, and today, over 1,160 street vendors have gained access to better living. Among the initiatives are:

**Mohalla meetings.** Through meetings, women create the space to discuss their problems and mobilise other member such as for the ladies market. SEWA members plan their advocacy activities in self-held Mohalla meetings.

**Interacting with the MCD.** Urban vendors know that they deserve a legal identity so the government will recognise and respect their livelihood. To get a legal identity for urban vendors, SEWA is working as a union of women vendors, sometimes in collaboration with the MCD and, at other times, protesting against their actions, as and when required. The main objective here is to ensure that the MCD implements the National Policy in a fair and transparent manner without hampering the livelihood of the vendors. SEWA Delhi is a member of the Zonal Vending Committee of Qutub Road and Velodrome Road.
Committes (ZVCs) of the City Zone and the SP Zone and of the Ward Vending Committee of the Shahdara Zone where it represents the women vendors and raises their issues. It also ensures the participation of the vendors in the process of the implementation of the National Policy. In addition, it is a member of a high-level committee that has been set up by the MCD Commissioner and has been actively participating in finalising issues related to vending zones, licences and so on.

**Liaising with the police.** For the protection of the livelihood and dignity of vendors, SEWA Delhi works with the Delhi Police. The aim is to ensure that the vendors are not harassed in the marketplace and the police do not remove their markets.

**Advocacy through the Court and appellate authorities.** While the National Policy was being implemented in Delhi, SEWA realised that the process followed by the MCD is not fair and transparent. The aim of the National Policy is to protect the livelihood of vendors and provide them space to vend with dignity, which was not happening. On behalf of it's members, SEWA filed an intervening application in the Supreme Court in the ‘Gainda Ram and others vs. MCD and others’ case.

**Advocacy through the media.** SEWA Delhi constantly tries to take support of the media, both print and electronic, to highlight the issues of the vendors and gain visibility for them.

**Networking with other organisations.** SEWA Delhi has been networking with key stakeholders such as the MCD and the PWD, alongside other organisations such as the National Association of Street Vendors, India (NASVI) who are also working on similar issues like SEWA, in order to provide support to them as well as gain support from them.

**Right To Information (RTI).** SEWA filed an RTI demanding information on the chairpersons of ZVC in all the 12 zones of the MCD. The 2007 scheme of MCD for squatters/hawkers provides for the ZVC in all the zones, to be presided over by a judicial officer of a rank not less than that of an additional district judge. In reality, all 12 zones in Delhi were headed by the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of the MCD. SEWA received a reply, informing that Rekha Rani is the presiding officer of all the ZVCs of the 12 zones of the MCD, and to whom all complaints will be addressed once the database gets completed.

**Supreme Court case.** In February 2009, SEWA filed an intervening application in the ongoing case, ‘Gainda Ram and others vs. MCD and others’. Indra Jaisingh, appearing on behalf of SEWA, raised issues concerning the arbitrary removal of the Qutub Road and Velodrome Road weekly markets, the improper functioning of the ZVC, the negligent attitude, approach and apathy of the MCD in taking steps towards the implementation of its own policy. The judgment of this case got relief for all the street vendors and the trade unions as the Supreme Court, in its order dated October 8, 2010, declared that street vending is a fundamental right under article 19(1) (g) of the Indian Constitution with some reasonable restriction thereupon and ordered that the appropriate Government shall enact a legislation for street vendors by June 30, 2011. The Supreme Court mentioned in its order: ‘The fundamental right of the hawkers, just because they are poor and unorganised, cannot be left in a state of limbo nor can it be left to be decided by the varying standards of a scheme which changes from time to time under orders of this Court.’

**SEWA Delhi’s intervention in markets:**

**Ladies’ market at Tagore Road.** After a struggle of four years, SEWA Delhi street vendors established India’s first-ever ladies’ market (Mahila Bazaar) at Tagore Road in 2009, where over 200 women vendors from different parts of Delhi vend with dignity, without facing any harassment. The SEWA Delhi vendors have been making consistent efforts to beautify this market. To develop it into a model market, SEWA members undertook the task of cleaning, construction and development of the site under the supervision of the well-known architect Pradeep Sachdeva. A security guard and a cleaner were also appointed, dustbins installed and
shades put up to protect the vendors from heat and rain. Besides, the basic facilities of toilet and drinking water were also secured for the women vending in the market, after a long and tedious dialogue with the MCD.

Women vendors from different areas of Delhi were mobilised for coming to the market through regular meetings and home visits, which also proved as a platform to unionise them and address their concerns. Further, various efforts were made to diversify the sales of the members with the objective of enhancing their profits. Small-scale surveys were conducted in the market and in another nearby weekly market to assess the demands of the customers. Consultations were subsequently held with the members, some of whom were also assisted in buying a greater variety of products through loans. To increase the profits of the underprivileged vendors, the market was promoted by SEWA to reach out to both Indian as well as foreign tourists, private tour operators and embassies. An extensive publicity campaign, in television and print, fairs and festivals and presentations at Delhi University all helped bring in the crowds. In 2012, about 40 members used this weekly market as a vending space to sell old clothes and shoes; the annual turnover for the year was Rs. 390,600.

Market at Qutub Road. This market was declared a non-hawking and non-squatting area in 2006. However, the vendors were still able to vend their goods here every week as the police was allowing them to come to the market. In 2009, the police undertook an eviction drive, which led to the expulsion of the vendors from Qutub Road. SEWA Delhi filed a case in the appellate tribunal, the ZVC. SEWA brought to the notice of the Court the latest circular of the MCD, along with the list of 268 weekly markets in Delhi, which included the Qutub Road market, based on which the Court had reserved the matter for a final order. Meanwhile the vendor members of SEWA met the District Commissioner of Police (DCP), North District to apprise them of the order of the court. SEWA ensured that every Sunday market is functioning properly. The Station House Officer (SHO), Sadar Thana was roped in to maintain the traffic movement. The total number of members in this market is around 600 and, on an average, the sale value of each member is Rs. 2,000 per day. The turnover of the market in 2012 was Rs. 57,600,000; the annual tax paid from the market to the Government was Rs. 432,000.

Book Bazaar. Delhi has a tradition of weekly markets, which are usually held at empty places or in a regular marketplace on a day when the market is closed. One such extremely popular market is the Daryaganj Book Bazaar that has been in existence for over 40 years. It has a varied clientele including students, journalists, academicians, tourists and so on. In 2004, this market was displaced by the MCD. To protect their livelihood, Book bazaar vendors joined SEWA and started lobbying for their market. They lodged a case in the Supreme Court and were successful in getting their market reinstated. In 2011, again the police did not allow the market to function, giving reasons of traffic congestion and theft. The next day, SEWA went to meet the DC to discuss the matter but he was unavailable. They later met the Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) who, after some arguments, said the market would resume. Besides taking up the cause of these vendors to the higher authorities, SEWA also guides the market committee for its smooth functioning. Now, the MCD is taking tehzib fees from the vendors every week and the market is running smoothly. It has some 200 members, each earning around Rs. 1,500 per Sunday. In 2012, the turnover from this market was Rs. 14,400,000; the average annual income of one member is Rs. 78,000.

CASE STUDY: Market at Velodrome Road

In 2001, the historic market of Red Fort was displaced by the MCD arbitrarily without any rehabilitation. This left more than 4,000 street vendors in extreme difficulty; women were the worst victims as many of them were the sole earning members in their families. They also became more vulnerable to harassment from the police and other local hoodlums. SEWA instantly took up the cause of these vendors, and after constant follow-up with the Lt Governor's Office and with support from the MCD Commissioner, Rakesh Mehta, enabled the reestablishment of this market at the Velodrome Road in 2005. In the wake of clearance operations due to the Commonwealth Games, SEWA took the initiative to develop the Velodrome Road Bazaar as a model market to demonstrate that vendors can beautify their vending places and can be protected from the demolition drive. However, the market was again evicted on January 26, 2009; SEWA has since then been trying for its relocation by liaising with various MCD officials.
Over the years, vendor members of SEWA have approached the DC of the City Zone, interacted with the Mayor and the Commissioner, and took up the cause of the relocation of the market and the issuance of licenses for the vendors. SEWA vendors met the Chief Secretary of the Delhi Government, PWD, to discuss the issue of their reinstatement beneath the flyover at Velodrome Road itself. SEWA also contacted the architectural firm and explained the idea of the vendors’ market beneath the flyover. The firm appreciated the idea and meticulously added it to its model. The Chief Secretary directed that the vendors would be reallocated to Velodrome Road after the Commonwealth Games were over. SEWA was informed that the market could be allowed to be reinstated only after the final approval of Delhi’s Chief Minister. Accordingly, on January 6, 2011, the vendor members of SEWA met with Sheila Dikshit and made a presentation expressing the idea of making a model market, which was well appreciated.

After several meetings with the concerned authorities, SEWA and the PWD executed an agreement on May 13, 2011; SEWA also gave a security deposit of Rs. 50,000. The site plan reflects that approximately 1,200 vendors could sit at the site. SEWA decided to give priority to the 1,167 khaki cardholders of the Sunday Bazaar, as recorded by the MCD. Another bottleneck now arose: the so-called unions, who earn illicit money by exploiting the poor vendors. The market began functioning in February, with 160 cardholders and some pink slip vendors (single bread earners, physically challenged, widows and so on). They have all been informed that the place has been allocated to them on a temporary basis, awaiting the order of the High Court. The place for cardholders is vacant and SEWA is still waiting for them to come, record their names in the register that is being maintained in order to prevent encroachments, and start selling their goods here.

SEWA’s aim in this whole exercise has been to help preserve the means of livelihood of these poor vendors in a proper and systematic manner and also free them from the clutches of the so-called unions. SEWA vendors envision setting up a model market that could serve as an example for other weekly markets.
6.2 Construction Workers

They are among the capital’s most exploited. Seen busy at work at various sites spread across Delhi, these construction workers are one of the most vulnerable sections of the workforce. Estimated at around eight lakh, they were behind Delhi’s fast-expanding landscape during the Commonwealth Games and at the Delhi Metro construction sites. Yet, they are subjected to pitiable circumstances with no implementation of minimum wages. Women construction workers are particularly vulnerable with a lack of regular work opportunities and no social security; increasing mechanisation has resulted in diminishing employment opportunities for them.

A strong group of construction workers joined SEWA Delhi in 2005 with the objective of becoming organised, securing legal identities for themselves, and gaining social security. The SEWA Delhi construction workers felt the need to upgrade their skills in order to demand better wages in the labour market. The main activities of the Construction Worker programme are called, ‘Linkage with the Welfare Board’ and the ‘Advocacy Campaign’.

Construction Workers Associated with SEWA Delhi

Linkage with the Welfare Board

The Building and Other Construction Workers Act, 1996, was a major breakthrough in providing a legal framework for the provision of social security for construction workers who remained completely exploited in the hands of employers and contractors. The Act created a Welfare Board, a worker registration process, and access fund. Although the Delhi Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board (DBOCWWB) has so far collected over Rs. 1,000 crore, the amount disbursed as benefit to registered worker is a very small proportion of the total funds. Thus, SEWA Delhi’s construction workers have been struggling for their rights, and have become linked with the Welfare Board and to demand the disbursal of social security benefits and scholarships for their children.

Registration of the workers with the Board legalises their presence in the city by providing them with a passbook-cum-identity card, a necessary pre-condition for the accrual of benefits. Registration also entitles the workers to social security benefits including life insurance, scholarship for children’s education, medical assistance, maternity benefit, accident relief, pension and loan advance for the purchase or construction of a house and tools. Through SEWA Delhi around 3568 construction workers have become linked with the Welfare Board of the Delhi Government. In 2011, some of these women also secured scholarship for their children worth a total of Rs. 2, 40, 000.
Advocacy Campaign
SEWA Delhi is a platform for women to advocate for their livelihood social security rights. The advocacy campaign involves regular meetings with Labour Commissioners and other Government officers. Through SEWA's intervention, issues of construction workers have been able to gain visibility in the media. Construction activities during the Commonwealth Games brought forth several challenges for the rights of these workers. SEWA was a part of an alliance known as the Commonwealth Games-Citizens for Workers, Women and Children (CWG-CWC), comprising other trade unions and non-profit organisations such as Mobile Crèches, Nirman Mazdoor Panchayat Sangam (NMPS), Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR) and Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI). As a core-member working of the alliance, SEWA Delhi actively worked towards improving the lives of the construction workers.

These construction workers give a voice to SEWA through diverse activities and initiatives:

Protests
SEWA workers organised a dharna (protest) on Labour Day (May 1, 2009) near the Labour Commissioner's office at Shamnath Marg. The workers raised their voices against the dysfunctional status of the DBCOWWB and its inability to provide benefits. Apart from construction workers, other SEWA members also gathered at the venue to lend support to the cause of construction workers. A group of construction workers led by Dr. Sanjay Kumar (Managing Trustee, SEWA Delhi and Director, SEWA Bharat) marched to the office of the Labour Commissioner to submit a memorandum demanding social security benefits including scholarships for children's education, medical assistance, maternity benefit, accident relief and pension. The Hindustan Times reported on the ineffectiveness of the DBOCWWB and the lack of initiative on the part of the Government to disburse any benefits to the workers. Following this report, the Chief Minister of Delhi held a meeting with various departments, including Health and Education and declared that the fund will be immediately deployed. She announced the disbursement of education scholarships to one-lakh children of construction workers through Government schools. It was also stated that 20 mobile dispensaries would be set up within a month to cater to these workers.

Hindustan Times reports about the Dysfunctional nature of the Welfare Board for Construction Workers in Delhi.

The registration process has involved various challenges for SEWA as well as for the workers. The officials at the Labour Commissioner and Deputy Labour Commissioner's office are often unwilling to cooperate with either the SEWA representatives or with the workers themselves. SEWA Delhi had submitted the application forms for the registration of over 200 workers at the office of the Deputy Labour Commissioner of East and North-East districts in March 2009. However, there was a persistent delay in their registration with the Board as the officials kept saying that the passbooks are out of print. The passbooks arrived in September but the officials refused to hand them to SEWA representatives on the ground that they would give the passbooks only to the workers themselves. This was not acceptable to the workers as coming to the Deputy Labour Commissioner's office means a long wait and losing out on their daily wage, which severely affects their income as they are not able to find work on all days of the month and have no security of employment. Thus, to protest against this unfair
practice of the Deputy Labour Commissioner, SEWA Delhi decided to demonstrate outside his office. SEWA construction workers’ team members along with over 50 construction worker members went on a day-long hunger strike on October 8, 2009, which got extensive media coverage. When a television news channel questioned the Deputy Labour Commissioner, he had no choice but to agree to the demands of the workers. The workers thus emerged victorious in their struggle; SEWA representatives were finally handed over 246 passbooks.

SEWA Delhi construction workers organised a dharna at the District Labour Commissioner’s office in February 2011, to demand the renewal of the registration of construction workers in the North-East district that was getting delayed because of non-cooperation. The strike helped in hastening the renewal process.

SEWA Delhi participated in a press conference organised by the CWG-CWC on June 17, 2010. The members highlighted the problems they faced while getting the workers registered such as the unavailability of passbooks and claim forms and the slow process of the disbursements of benefits. One of the SEWA members, who has been an active leader, spoke at the conference and gave voice to the resentment of the workers.

Visit
**SEWA Madhya Pradesh:** The representatives of the advocacy programme visited SEWA Madhya Pradesh to learn about its activities and the functioning of the Welfare Board in the state. The team found that the Board was working effectively; the workers had to contribute only Rs 10 every year to the Board unlike in Delhi where they were paying Rs 20. The mechanism of the disbursement of benefits was also timely and effective in Madhya Pradesh. The Delhi team has started working towards putting pressure on the Delhi Government to implement an effective mechanism of registration and disbursement of benefits based on the model of the Madhya Pradesh Welfare Board.

**Meetings**
**Director of Education:** construction worker organized by SEWA Delhi met the Director of Education to highlight the fact that a large number of their children had not received scholarship benefits. A detailed list of the children of registered workers was handed over to him and he gave the assurance that he would make all efforts to ensure that the children are given scholarship benefits. He also asked for suggestions in designing a pamphlet for the children of construction workers. The pamphlet would inform the parents of the children regarding the process of registration and the benefits they would be entitled to once they are registered with the Board. He also gave the assurance that he would be sending a letter to the principals of all schools, informing them about the Delhi Government’s scheme under which the construction workers can register with the Board. The form for scholarship beneficiaries would also be enclosed with that letter.

**Public meeting at Gokulpuri:** The SEWA team organised a public meeting of construction workers at Gokulpuri in August 2010. The event marked the initial success in the struggle of construction workers, with the aim of motivating a large number of other workers to register themselves with the Board. Eighteen children of construction workers from Gokulpuri who are registered through SEWA have received scholarship benefits of Rs. 1,200 each for one year. The meeting was attended by the parents of the beneficiaries and other workers from the area. A film on the construction workers of Delhi, a SEWA production, was screened. SEWA Delhi team members and two of the workers whose children had received scholarship benefits addressed the gathering. These workers, Prem Chand and Balla Ram, shared that it was a great joy for them and their children to have received these benefits and that they were thankful to SEWA for coming forward to advocate for their rights. Media persons from a local newspaper were present at the event.

**Monthly meetings with construction workers:** Regular monthly meetings were organised with the members. The meeting served to update the members about the recent developments such as the meeting with the Director of Education, advocacy efforts for reduction of registration fee and so on. The meetings also offer a platform where the construction workers are able to share the problems and challenges they are facing as well as discuss the problems of other members in their areas. The members collectively decide and plan activities for advocacy.

**Public Hearing**
As a core-working member of the CWG-CWC alliance, SEWA Delhi had been actively advocating for the construction workers. The coalition organised a *Jan Sunvai* (Public Hearing) where the workers spoke in front of the
jury members as well as Government representatives. The Joint Labour Commissioner, Piyush Sharma, who is also
the Member Secretary of the Welfare Board and Rashmi Singh, Director, Mission Convergence, Government of
Delhi, were also present on the occasion. The session on ‘Women’s Issues’ was conducted by SEWA Delhi; the
team raised various issues faced by women construction workers and urged the jury members to take action for
securing equal rights for them. SEWA Delhi’s members spoke about the various problems they have faced with
the process of registration. They informed the Member Secretary that though the Board has taken the decision to reduce
the registration fee to Rs 25, the Deputy Labour Commissioners were not willing to cooperate.

Collaboration with Government Schools
In its efforts to ensure that the construction workers receive tangible benefits from the Welfare Board, SEWA Delhi
provided support to the Government schools located in the areas where it is working. The team helped the school
authorities with the compilation of a list of children whose parents are registered construction workers and also
assisted with the submission of applications for fresh registrations. The schools had been facing difficulties in
identifying the children who would be eligible for the benefits and in verifying construction workers. SEWA helped
in the verification and also gave an orientation to the schools regarding the entire process of applying for
scholarship benefits. In all, the team filled up 206 scholarship forms for the children.

6.3 Home-based Workers

A substantial proportion of home-based workers do embroidery work for a chain of contractors and suppliers.
Although highly skilled, the women work on piece rates for contractors who exploit them by giving low returns. As
most of these women are poor and illiterate, it is difficult for them to voice their concerns or stand up for their
rights. They have no choice but to depend on the middlemen or contractors. The fact that these women workers are
not collectively organised makes them all the more vulnerable to exploitation. It is thus imperative to empower
the women to collectively demand for their rights, including fair wages and markets for their products. In 2006, SEWA
Delhi intervened to remove the chain of middlemen and directly link the women workers to production houses so
that they are able to receive fair piece-rates for their work as well as recognition of their skill and effort.

Embroidery work of a home-based worker

Around 350 women are a part of SEWA’s embroidery centres; their income has subsequently doubled and they even
manage to save a considerable part of their earnings. Most of these women are from migrant families of western
Uttar Pradesh and are familiar with the rudimentary skills of zari embroidery. Their skills are enhanced through
training given by master trainers from time to time. SEWA has secured work for its embroidery members from
highly-reputed export houses such as Gap, Monsoon and Next; linkages have also been formed with a number of
other retailers and export houses such as Rainbow, MAC, VNS, V&S, Modesty Garments, Paramount, Debenhams,
H&M and George.
Formation of Producer Company
SEWA Delhi promoted a producer company named Ruuab SEWA Artisans Producer Company Limited in December 2010 under para IXA of the Company Act 1956. Ruuab SEWA has been exclusively designed to carry on the business of embroidery work by providing regular work to these home-based workers. It is owned and managed by women producers and works through the same embroidery centre model that ensures an ethical and transparent supply chain. This company has 10 Board members—six are the producers itself, two representatives of SEWA and two from outside—and 194 shareholders.

Ethical Trading Initiative
The SEWA Delhi Trust is a member of the National Home-Workers Group, promoted by the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI). The UK-based ETI aims to understand how to apply, implement and monitor the working conditions of home workers involved in international supply chains. The ETI is an alliance of retailers, garment companies, trade unions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and works to actively to promote good practices in the implementation of company codes of conduct on labour standards.

SEWA was already engaged in the issues and concerns of embroidery workers living in the Sundernagri and Rajiv Nagar areas in Delhi before the ETI. However, since SEWA came into contact with various international companies including Monsoon, GAP and NEXT, joining ETI helped to get genuine and sincere support from these companies. SEWA members started receiving embroidery work at reasonable rates. SEWA, as an active member of the ETI, has put forward the issues and concerns of embroidery workers.

STRUCTURE OF THE COMPANY

Through this innovative model, SEWA in addition to providing employment, ensures that:
- Women artisans are paid a higher level wage
- No exploitation through middlemen takes place
- No child labour is involved

Embroidery Centre
The embroidery centre is a unique model that provides work to the home-based workers by linking them directly to the mainstream market.
Before taking up any production assignment, a proper time and motion study is conducted by the sampling team for quoting an accurate rate to the exporters. This study is done under proper supervision and is well documented. Once the rates and the samples get approved by the exporters, the production gets rolling. The members collect the pieces from the centres once, twice, three times or sometimes on a daily basis, depending upon the provided lead-time. Members are educated about the quality parameters and the delivery time while distribution. The collection of pieces is done as per the required quality standards. The members’ transactions of pieces are recorded properly in their individual record books and the payments are done on a monthly basis in each centre. The exporters provide materials and garments for beading to SEWA, which is first received at the Issue-Receipt Department (IR Dept) and from there it is channelised to the three centres and sub-centres. The women workers collect pieces and materials from the centre and take them home for beading work. After the distribution of pieces to women members, the field supervisor of each centre visits every individual’s homes regularly to check the quality. The pieces are then dispatched to the IR Dept from all centres. The finished pieces are collected in the IR Dept and a quality checking is also conducted there before dispatching to the exporters.

In 2011, Ruaab SEWA collaborated with different suppliers and worked in close association with international brands. Representatives of the United Kingdom Parliament and of brands such as New Look, Monsoon, and Marks & Spencer visited the centres and congratulated SEWA on its efforts to promote livelihoods through this programme. Monsoon placed its first order with Ruaab SEWA in April 2011; embellishment work was also started in Bareilly and a survey was undertaken in 12 villages to study the feasibility of such a livelihood programme. Bareilly
got its first order from Zara the very next month and, since then, there has been no looking back for embellishment production work in either Delhi or Bareilly.

The embroidery workers also have access to other programmes of SEWA such as social security services of healthcare, child care and insurance, financial services of saving and credit through the microfinance programme, supplementary education for their children and assistance in civic issues. SEWA has recently begun the process of linking the embroidery workers to the Government scheme of Artisans’ Insurance, which provides them with a legal identity under the Ministry of Textiles, along with medical benefits, compensation in case of any injury and scholarships for their children. The linkage of 117 embroidery workers has been facilitated with this scheme so far. SEWA encourages the members to be more competitive by constantly interacting with them, stressing the importance of timely completion of the work, and by upgrading their skills. Ruaab SEWA is presently involved with 20 export houses, and SEWA is also working towards making the producer company self-sustainable. Ruaab SEWA has started in-house production and the sales of its products, ranging from kurtis, bags, dupattas, salwars and skirts, has proved extremely encouraging—an amount of Rs 73,891 was raised in 2012. Total production in Delhi during that year was worth Rs. 4,084,639; Rs. 2,737,856 was disbursed as payment to the home-based embroidery workers. The figures are impressive, indicating how these embroidery workers have woven their own success story.

6.4 Domestic Workers

A large number of workers in Delhi are employed in homes. These domestic workers are mostly women who have to endure a number of hardships. The majority of them work in more than one household and their average monthly income ranges from Rs 3000 - 5000 only. As a result, they barely manage to procure the basic necessities in life. Apart from these financial difficulties, they often have to endure verbal and even sexual abuse. Since a substantial proportion of SEWA members are domestic workers, SEWA Delhi began to unionise and link these members with its various programmes in order to make them self-reliant and aware of their rights. In 2010, SEWA Delhi unionised more than 3,000 domestic workers. A survey was also conducted with a total of 150 women domestic workers in the areas of Anand Vihar and New Ashok Nagar to assess their living and working conditions. The main variables in the study included the family size and literacy level of the family, along with their income pattern, working hours, number of households they work in and so on. It was apparent from the results that the working conditions were not up to the mark and full employment was also a challenge. These women expressed their willingness to unionise with SEWA.

SEWA Delhi celebrated Domestic Workers’ Day on January 6, 2011 and distributed badges to all the domestic workers. A survey was also conducted in New Ashok Nagar, Raghubir Nagar and Anand Vihar to identify the skill gaps, recommend action to address the emerging issues and career development (sample size: 100 in each area). SEWA Delhi is working towards the ratification of Convention 189 of the ILO. A press conference in collaboration with other SEWA sister organisations was convened on December 14, 2011, to build pressure on Government authorities. SEWA Delhi also organised a rally on June 16, 2012, for demanding fair wages, decent work conditions and paid leaves.

Mohalla meetings were conducted in New Ashok Nagar and Anand Vihar where domestic worker members were made aware about the significance of union and different programmes of SEWA. In the course of the various mohalla meetings and discussions carried out with SEWA, domestic workers also pointed out that they lack fundamental entitlements such as ration cards or any other proof of identity and residence, access to widow or old age pension, credit facilities and so on. To address the issue, SEWA started issuing ID cards to members. By the end of 2012, 1,500 domestic workers were issued ID cards enabling them with a proof of identity and status to enroll their children in schools. The SEWA card contains the details of the domestic worker, including the woman’s years of work experience. The Government accepts these cards as valid identity proof, allowing domestic workers to avail of a host of Government schemes. As a result of SEWA Delhi’s efforts, over 800 domestic workers were linked to various Government schemes as well as to the different programmes of SEWA.
CASE STUDY: SEWA to the Rescue

In the summer of 2012, SEWA Delhi was informed that a domestic worker from Ranchi was being held captive in the premises of the household she worked for. Escorted by the police, SEWA workers rescued the distressed girl. Upon medical examination, it was learnt that she had been traumatized with knives, sticks and brooms. She was not getting her salary as her employers claimed that the money had been deposited in advance in the placement bureau. SEWA Delhi, with the help and support of Nirmala Niketan, placed the girl temporarily in their rescue home. A fortnight later, she decided to return to her native land. A written complaint was submitted to the Labour Commissioner of Delhi as well as to other authorities such as the Delhi Police, the National Commission for Women and the National Human Rights Commission.

6.5 Microfinance

Access to savings and loans was one of the primary demands of members. Hence, SEWA started its activities in Delhi by forming SHGs in Jahangirpuri, Raghubir Nagar and Sundernagri. Initially the SHGs also served as a platform to organize members. For a couple of years the members were happy and satisfied being part of SHGs. However, later on, the SHGs were not able to satisfy all of their demands and they started demanding another alternative. SEWA Delhi organized an exposure visit to SEWA Bank in Ahmedabad for the SHG leaders. This proved to be a turning point for the microfinance programme of Delhi. The SHG leaders were very impressed with the work they saw in Ahmedabad and started rooting for their own institution in Delhi as well. Thus, after a number of community meetings, it was decided to form a thrift and credit cooperative society in Delhi, the ownership of which would rest with the members. 234 women came forward and contributed Rs. 500/- each towards the share capital. In total share capital of Rs. 108000/- was raised. However a long struggle awaited members. The Registrar office of cooperative societies was not convinced that a group of semi-educated women could run their own institution. After repeated visits and arguments, which lasted for more than a year, Mahila SEWA Urban Cooperative Thrift & Credit Society Ltd. was finally registered in February 2007. The elected representatives in the board are members of SEWA, and they actively participate in the decision-making.

The uniqueness of the cooperative is that products and services have been formulated that are best suited to the needs of the members. The members receive doorstep services from Bank Satbās who go door-to-door or to the work areas in order to collect savings, loans and interest dues. Depending on their cash flows and incomes, members can choose from a bouquet of savings products. The interest charged on loans is just 1.5% pa as against 5% to 10% being charged by exploitative moneylenders. In addition to this, members are also given financial literacy
trainings to enhance the quality of their financial decisions. The cooperative is providing financial services to over 6,000 women, with a share capital of approximately Rs 40 lakh and savings from members worth Rs 2.2 crore by December 2012; 2,940 loans worth Rs 5.8 crore have been disbursed.

Since August 2011, SEWA Delhi has been partnering with the Mission Convergence department of the Government of Delhi to expand its microfinance programme. Financial inclusion is one of the focus areas of Mission Convergence, with the aim of ensuring this for one-lakh women, spread across all districts of Delhi, by 2016. The plan is to organise financial literacy training sessions for women in order to empower them to make sound financial decisions and to strengthen the operations and financial systems of the cooperative to ensure better service delivery and risk management. In 2012, operations had been extended to 15 areas, with 6,000 members; 7,500 women have been reached through the financial literacy trainings.

6.6 Skill Development and Education

In many of the community meetings which were conducted in the initial years, the members demanded that SEWA should do something for children education as the prevalent tuition fees were not affordable and the quality of education in the government schools were also not up to the mark. SEWA has always believed in the importance of learning, underlining the fact that it is skill development and education that empowers women.
SEWA Delhi has therefore started NFE and supplementary education centres, known as SEWA Shikshan Kendras, for children and adolescent girls. The purpose of these centres is to ensure quality basic education to children between five to 13 years, which would not only transform them into productive members but will also make them socially responsible. Presently, SEWA Delhi has five centres that are operational in Anand Vihar, Sunder Nagari, Rajiv Nagar, New Ashok Nagar and Raghubir Nagar. The classes are conducted in two shifts—morning and evening—by trained and qualified female teachers. A nominal fee of Rs 50 is charged from the students.

The NFE curriculum for non-school going children as well as for dropouts had been specifically planned, based on the needs of the children as per their age as well as stage of development. An important endeavour in this regard has been the collaboration with Sesame Workshop or Gali-Gali Sim-Sim, to develop innovative mechanisms of teaching children by using games and flashcards. Children in the age group of three to six years are being taught in each of the centres with the help of these kits. Life skill sessions on self-awareness, communication, study habits, team work, health and hygiene, good manners, healthy eating habits and so on are an integral part of the curriculum. Other activities such as physical education, sports, puzzles, art and craft, painting and dance sessions ensure the all-round development of the children. In addition, the children from SEWA Delhi’s work areas are sent to Bal Bhavan every year, where they get an opportunity to develop new skills by participating in various activities, including science, creative arts, photography, music and dance. SEWA Delhi also tries to link these children to mainstream education. With the support of a few individuals and institutions, 72 children were given admission in Government schools; 64 girls were linked to the National Institute of Open Schooling in 2011-12.

Monthly meetings are held with the parents to involve them in the process of their child's education. These serve as a platform to sensitize them on issues such as child abuse, child marriage, childcare, immunisation and the importance of a nutritious diet. Legal sessions are conducted with the children enrolled in NFE as well with the women in the community on issues of police functionaries and laws, Right to Information and women helpline services. SEWA Delhi intends to build a separate legal cell in all areas to assist these women.

**Basic Vocational Training**

In one of the embroidery campaigns the members conveyed that they could not demand better wages, as their skills were not in tune with the changing trends. Sometimes getting orders was also a challenge. After due deliberation, SEWA decided that it will work on skill upgradation for its members’ and their families. This would lead to livelihood protection. The following courses were thus started for members, especially for the younger generations.

**Embroidery (aari and zardozi): This was the first course to be offered.** Participants get certificates at the end of the six-month course. They also get linked to SEWA’s embroidery programme, which, in turn, is linked to retailers and export houses for work opportunities. A total of 194 students were trained in basic and advanced embroidery courses in 2010-12.

**Cutting and tailoring:** After the success of the embroidery course, the young girls showed their inclination for learning cutting and tailoring as well. This would result in their saving money by doing their own stitching as well as giving more opportunities for supplementing their income. This six-month course was started in Rajiv Nagar in February 2009. A total of 190 girls have undergone training in 2010-12.

**Soft skill training:** In April 2009, SEWA Delhi, in collaboration with the State Bank Academy (SBA), conducted a six-month, soft skill-training programme. The course was started as a pilot project in Rajiv Nagar and Sunder Nagari. Until March 2011, 110 girls had successfully completed a training programme with SBA in Basic Accountancy, Computer Application and Spoken English. To further strengthen the process, SEWA also carried out follow-up sessions with these girls; they were provided career-counseling, linkages with various livelihood opportunities, as well as advanced training in computers and Tally. In addition to the basic courses, the SBA has trained 46 girls for the entrance examination of the clerical course. The students are trained in three main subjects: Mathematics, English and Reasoning; some classes are also held in Marketing and General Knowledge. This training takes place on every Saturday and are conducted by the SBA faculty. Regular tests are also held. 24 girls have been placed in various job profiles. A total of 600 women and girls trained in various vocational skills during 2010-12.
SEWA Delhi Polytechnic

Set up in 2011, SEWA Delhi Polytechnic is an innovative endeavour that is ideal for poor and underprivileged girls and young women. It offers diversified courses that provide knowledge, skills and confidence that are relevant to the market trends for income generation. The underlying principle of the Polytechnic is that employment/self-employment raises the status of women in the society and in her family. Skill building has emerged as a new thrust area for unorganised workers, to adapt to changing technologies and labour market demands. The workers in the unorganised sectors can only achieve the right to work and the rights at work, along with the right to organise, if positive conditions are created and the space provided for them to grow. Women, especially, possess skills; however, the channel towards empowerment is not easily accessible/affordable to them and thus their work remains invisible. With increased participation in income-earning activities, not only will there be more income for the family, but gender inequality could be reduced. The Polytechnic develops mechanisms through which they can be provided a sustainable means of earning a livelihood; this would provide them with a sound knowledge in textiles, communication and other modern and traditional skills.

A series of pilot activities has revealed that the Polytechnic provides policy-makers with an asset of good practices and guidelines to promote the participation of underprivileged girls in technical and vocational education. The SEWA Delhi Polytechnic design courses are technically supported by the Pearl Academy of Fashion, a leading institute in creativity and design. The other technical courses are conducted with short-term affiliations with renowned institutions. To cater to the employment needs of SEWA students in a structured manner, a Rozgaar Kendra was set up in 2011. Other than its own students, the Rozgar Kendra also caters to the youth residing in the communities. The Placement Cell conducts in-house talks and interviews for internships; it aims at 100% placement. In 2012, 176 students got jobs in export houses, beauty parlours and telecommunication agencies.

6.7 Integration and Linkages

Being informed about our rights and benefits is an important aspect of the process of empowerment. With this intent, SEWA Delhi started its information service programme in 2008. Besides providing information about, and access to developmental programmes of SEWA, the SEWA information centre also strives to ensure that members are aware of the various social security schemes provided by the Government, and to help them avail those benefits. Information centres have been set up in seven areas. To further enhance access, the centres also display the addresses and phone numbers of Government offices and hospitals. Around 15,000 members approach SEWA’s information centres every year.

The Gender Resource Centre, popularly known as Stree Shakti Kendra, is the Delhi Government’s initiative to empower the women by means of facilities related to health, legal, social and economic security. In April 2007, SEWA tied up with the Government to manage the GRC in Sunder Nagri. Under this initiative, vocational training in embroidery, cutting and tailoring, mehendi and computer application are carried out along with the dissemination of information about the different schemes of the Government as well as developmental programmes of SEWA.

Medical facilities are provided to the women and their children in the area through weekly clinics and monthly health camps, where a doctor is present and treatment as well as medicines are given for free. Along with the general physician, a gynecologist and a child specialist are also present during the camps. In addition to this, nutrition camps are organised for the women since they are responsible for taking care of their children and the whole family. Health educators or dieticians are occasionally called to deliver lectures at these camps. A lawyer who also does personal counseling conducts legal counseling sessions twice a week. GRCs strive to guide the victims of social stigma and domestic violence and help them out of difficult situations.
The SEWA ideology-training programme makes the members aware about the SEWA movement, its values, the importance and strength of the SEWA union and the position of women in the informal economy at large. Its objectives are to:

- Reach out to the maximum number of members.
- Add more members in the union and strengthen it.
- Provide extensive information about SEWA and its objectives to the people.
- Inculcate SEWA’s values among its members.
- Identify problems faced by the members and solve them.
- Identify grassroots leaders.

Through this programme, SEWA aims to reach out to its entire membership base; ideology training sessions are conducted in the slum and resettlement colonies where members reside. The training is focused on specific programmes keeping the demand from the members in mind. Interactive methods are used, where members are encouraged to participate and share their problems (both individual and community). This not only helps in increasing their confidence but also strengthens their relationship with SEWA. As a result of this training the member’s identity of being a part of the SEWA Sangathan is reinforced, and they are updated about SEWA’s recent activities and achievements.

6.8 Water and Sanitation

It is a well-known fact that the municipal water pipes normally end where the slums begin, forcing the women, men and children to queue up for water and lose valuable livelihood and school time. This often results in disputes and violence. Life is much tougher and more harassing for women and girls where toilets are absent. After a struggle of
few years, SEWA members could ensure that running water is accessible to them in Sundernagri. In Raghubir Nagar the members could not use the community toilet as it was rendered dysfunctional. After a lot of lobbying by SEWA members, the MLA of the area intervened and the MCD repaired the toilet and started maintaining it. Looking at the continued need for such interventions, in May 2008, SEWA Delhi, in collaboration with the MHT, formally started the Water and Sanitation programme. The objective of the programme was to improve the housing and infrastructure conditions of members in Sunder Nagari, Anand Vihar, Rajiv Nagar and Raghubir Nagar. It aimed at increasing access to water and sanitation facilities and developing the leadership and organising abilities of women so that they can emerge as strong unions. The members who require financial assistance for gaining access to water and sanitation facilities were assisted with a loan from the cooperative society.

Mohalla meetings are held to ascertain the problems faced by the members, along with regular surveys and home visits. MHT also interacts with authorities such as the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), other local urban bodies and NGOs to facilitate an access to basic amenities such as roads, public toilets and sewer connections. Mandals or Community Based Organisations (CBOs) are formed in different areas, which are registered as Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), and which simplify the process of addressing the problems of the community members. Over the years, the MHT has expanded its outreach to new areas such as Savda Ghewra and is also providing skill upgradation training to construction workers.

Mohalla Meeting educating members about Water and Sanitation Facilities

The achievements of SEWA’s Water and Sanitation programme include:

- Procuring the tender and beginning the construction of public toilets for the houses in E block of Sunder Nagari, through lobbying with the Government.
- Directing the renovation of a public toilet in H block, Sunder Nagari.
- Helping install additional pipelines in O block, Sunder Nagari, so that water supply reaches individual households.
- Thirty-one loans have been given for toilet construction and sewer connection by the Cooperative Society.
- Eighty-one sewer connection approval slips have been given in Sunder Nagari with the help of the Delhi Jal Board (DJB).
- Sixty-three construction workers have received skill upgradation training under the Karmika Programme of the MHT.
- Sixty-seven pipelines of water have been installed in different lanes of Rajiv Nagar.
- Elections of RWAs for the residents of E block in Sunder Nagari have been carried out, and the registration of their CBO is under process.
- Road construction has been facilitated in Anand Vihar and between B and C blocks of Rajiv Nagar.
6.9 Health

The basic goal of SEWA Delhi’s health programme is to decrease the expenditure on healthcare by strengthening public service linkages and promoting health and well being by providing access to information and health education and, in the process, improving the accountability of healthcare services. The programme lays stress on health education at the preventive level, which is given the name ‘Jagruti’; around 2,395 members participated in the programme in 2010-11. As part of these sessions, women as well as adolescent girls are made aware about the causes of diseases and educated about the home remedies that they can easily opt for. Education and awareness become imperative in the context of these poor women who are often negligent of their health problems.

**Health camps:** At the curative level, camps for both general as well as specialised services are conducted in the community. Members are then provided free medicines or referred to hospitals for advanced healthcare. SEWA Delhi is also in the process of creating a market for the traditional medicine (Jadi-buti), which is being manufactured by SEWA’s trained members. This medicine is not just affordable and without any side effects, but is also made easily available at the doorsteps of the members by SEWA *Satlis.* In 2012, 200 health camps and 470 health awareness sessions were held.

**Referrals to hospitals:** SEWA Delhi, through health camps, refers patients to the Government as well as private hospitals so that they are able to get quality healthcare services and thus save money. Seven hundred and eleven referrals were made in 2012.

**Linkages with Government schemes:** SEWA members are made aware about the different health-related Government schemes through awareness sessions and the distribution of relevant information documents. Members have been linked to various schemes such as Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), MAMTA, handicap benefits and the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana. In addition, initiatives have been taken to link the children with the SEWA Shikshan Kendra and take them for routine check-ups. To deal with the hazards that come from the occupations of its members, SEWA has also initiated work on occupational health. For instance, doctors from Maulana Azad Hospital visited the SEWA Delhi Embroidery Centre in January 2009 and offered suggestions for improving the lighting as it affected the eyesight of the workers. A brochure was given for the prevention of backaches and a questionnaire developed to access in-depth information on the general health conditions of the members. SEWA’s health team has been provided primary level training by Dr. Sethi Nursing Home for identifying the patients suffering from various eye problems, who could be then referred to the clinic.

7. SEWA DELHI: Cultural Activities

In the midst of their struggles, the members of SEWA Delhi assemble every year to celebrate the Shramik Mahotsav. This event symbolises the collective strength of women who come together to share their problems and experiences. It provides a platform to these women workers to celebrate their solidarity by means of music, dance and other cultural programmes.

As SEWA Delhi completed 10 years in 2009, its women members gathered in large numbers to celebrate the success of their struggles. Over 1,500 women from the different areas where SEWA works—Raghubir Nagar, Sunder Nagari, Gokulpuri, Rajiv Nagar, Anand Vihar, Paschimpuri and New Ashok Nagar—got together to celebrate the power of one. The Chief Guest was Ulrich Meinecke, Counselor, Social and Labour Affairs for the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany. The programme began with the lighting of the lamp, followed by the reciting of prayers. The Chief Guest appreciated the efforts of SEWA in enabling the empowerment of women workers in the unorganised sector. Renana Jhabvala, President, SEWA Bharat and Dr. Sanjay Kumar highlighted the achievements of SEWA Delhi women and the SEWA movement in the past decade and urged all the members to move ahead with greater vigour. Members of Anand Vihar presented a folk dance of Madhya Pradesh, the children of members
from Sunder Nagari and Raghubir Nagar enacted two plays. The first play addressed the issue of corruption in Government offices and the second portrayed the various issues and challenges faced by the women members of SEWA who sell their products at the SEWA Mahila Bazaar. The event ended with the performance of garba, a traditional dance of Gujarat, which was presented by the members of Raghubir Nagar and Paschimpuri. The members were joined in the garba by all the members and leaders of SEWA who joyfully danced together and celebrated their victory.

*Celebrating 10 years of SEWA Delhi*

International Women’s Day is another special occasion for all SEWA members. In March 2011, SEWA Delhi celebrated the occasion at the LTG Auditorium; students from SEWA Delhi Polytechnic performed a street play on the theme of sexual harassment. SEWA Delhi’s grassroots leaders joined in the festivities and were honoured during the course of the event. In 2012, SEWA Delhi had plenty of reasons to cheer, so they celebrated International Women’s Day along with union registration and the completion of a year of SEWA Delhi Polytechnic and the Rozgar Kendra. Michelle, the wife of the German Ambassador, was the Chief Guest while the Guest of Honour was AKG Nair, Director General, Pearl Academy of Fashion. The students of SEWA Delhi Polytechnic performed a dance-drama showcasing the lifecycle of women.

*Dr. Sanjay Kumar (left) at Inaugural Ceremony of the SEWA Delhi’s Women’s Day celebrations*
To commemorate 40 years of the SEWA movement and to motivate the students linked with the programmes on the occasion of Children's Day, SEWA Delhi hosted its maiden Youth Festival on November 15, 2012, at Kamani Auditorium. It was a day full of activity—competitions, debate, dance, creative writing and painting. NGOs such as Salaam Balak Trust, Om Foundation, Hope Project, Manzil, Butterflies and Chetna took part in the celebrations. During the second half, students of the SEWA Delhi Polytechnic performed a widely appreciated dance-drama to trace the journey of SEWA in its last 40 years. Products made by SEWA’s home-based embroidery workers and those created by students of fashion designing were displayed at the fashion show.

The Minister for Women and Child Development, Krishna Tirath, who was the Chief Guest, stressed the need for a platform for those belonging to the lower strata of society. In her words: “It is of common knowledge how SEWA has empowered the women of this nation. Young women make for a stronger nation and I salute and congratulate the women who have risen from poor prevalent conditions and ensured that their lives and those of their own improve. I would like for SEWA to show the way forward to many such women. My heartfelt congratulations to SEWA and its efforts! My ministry shall extend full support to SEWA’s novel initiative.”

Appreciative words that only make the team at SEWA Delhi more determined to go right ahead in their intent to empower women, to give a voice to those who have been downtrodden and ignored for far too long. In their smiles lies the future of SEWA and, it follows, the country.
8. CASE STUDIES:

Premben

Premben, 38, resides in Anand Vihar, North-East Delhi, where SEWA women have been organizing for over four years. She is from Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, where her childhood was spent in the midst of many hardships. As her father was visually challenged and her mother had a deformity in her hands, Premben and her older sister had to work extra hard to look after their parents and three siblings. They used to dig wells and undertake other unskilled jobs in order to provide for their family. Premben got married at the age of 14, one year after which she came to Delhi with her husband. Her life in Delhi, too, was marked by many difficulties. For instance, when she was visiting her village a few years ago, the entire slum establishment in which she was residing was demolished by the municipal authorities, as a result of which her family incurred heavy losses.

Both she and her husband, Gyadeen, are employed as construction workers. Gyadeen, 40, works as a mason, while she is a head loader. Both of them have registered with the Construction Workers’ Welfare Board, with SEWA’s help. This not only provides them a legal identity, but also entitles them to social and economic security benefits such as compensation in case of an accident, scholarship for their children’s education, loan to purchase tools, maternity benefits and so on. Premben has also participated in a skill training session organised by SEWA in 2007, where she learnt the tasks of masonry, plastering of walls, laying bricks, along with basic reading and writing skills. She is a member of SEWA Delhi’s Credit Cooperative Society since 2007, and has availed a considerable amount of loan on the occasion of a marriage in her family.

Like many women construction workers, Premben faces many hardships in the course of work. She had to carry heavy loads even at the time of her pregnancy, which severely affected her health. She was compelled to work with her children tied behind her back or leave them on dangerous construction sites, which lacked the availability of basic amenities such as drinking water and toilet facilities. Even after receiving a certified training in highly skilled tasks, she speaks about the contractors’ refusal to provide her with equivalent tasks when there are men present to do the same work. Discrimination in wages has been another significant experience of Premben, with her getting around Rs 100 to 150, while her male counterparts receive around Rs 200. Unavailability of work for the entire year has also been a critical challenge for Premben, and she talks of having to substitute her income during those periods of unemployment through other temporary occupations such as working as a domestic help.

On being asked to throw some light on her association with SEWA, Premben calls it a source of her many aspirations for future growth and betterment. She fondly talks about her visit to Ahmedabad during the course of her training, and she wishes to remain connected with SEWA.
Ramwatiben

Ramwatiben, 50, is a resident of Anand Vihar, North-East Delhi, and has been a member of SEWA ever since it started its work in that area in 2005. Her parents were construction workers who migrated to Delhi from their native place of Chattarpur district of Madhya Pradesh in search of work when she was very young. Her husband Mohan, 55, is a mason whom she married at the age of 12. Her eldest son has also taken up the same profession.

Ramwatiben’s early-married life was marked by various hardships. Since Mohan was the eldest among various children, they had to fend for the entire family, and there were times when they could not obtain two meals for the day. In those initial years, Mohan also manhandled her if she tried to assert her will in any way. She initially took up the job of a head loader, and worked as a daily wage labourer, earning around Rs 50 per day. She was subsequently registered by SEWA Delhi with the Construction Workers’ Welfare Board along with her husband and son and was also imparted training in masonry with the objective of improving her prospects. However, she has started working as a domestic worker for the last few years. She works in three houses and earns around Rs 1,500 in a month. She works for around six to seven hours in a day, performing chores such as sweeping the house and washing the clothes and utensils. Like most domestic workers in India, Ramwatiben faces various problems such as not being entitled to any holidays and no fixed increment in her wages. She also talks about often being made to provide extra help with other household tasks, which do not fall under her duty.

Ramwatiben has been an active participant in SEWA’s endeavour of mobilising the domestic workers to help them secure their social and economic rights. She narrates a memorable experience when one of her employers objected to her attending the meetings and trainings organised by SEWA, and threatened to dismiss her even if a slight delay occurred on this account. Ramwatiben told that lady about SEWA’s extensive work at the national and international level, and spoke about its popularity in her own simple way by referring to the frequent mention of the organisation on television. Her employer realised that Ramwatiben has the support of thousands of women and even increased her monthly wages by Rs 200.

She vividly recalls her exposure visits to Ahmedabad and Patna, which gave her an opportunity to step out of her home and look beyond her familial concerns and duties.