



"There is no chance of welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing."
- Swami Vivekanand

Contents

- The Federation conducted its Annual General Meeting
- Megha Cooperative registered
- Exposure Visits
- Dreams come true, and then they get bigger
- Updates
- Skill....the means of livelihood...

Rapid changes are taking place in most economies across the world. This is due to the process of globalization, and the emergence of new economic structures at the international level.

If cooperatives have to compete in the global market, they have to adapt themselves to the fast changing economic and social realities. They will have to devise market driven business strategies.

Women's cooperatives suffer from various handicaps, including inability to compete in the marketplace due to lack of business skills and weak bargaining positions. A full range of economic services and social facilities for economically disadvantaged women is required.

It will be an injustice to the cooperative movement if this sector is not recognized in the government's planning processes. In earlier plans, cooperatives formed a separate chapter, today they are ignored.

We look forward to a favorable environment that enables government policies to support the development of cooperatives. We hope these policies enable as a vehicle for participation of many more women in the cooperative movement.

Cooperatives play a critical role in India's economy and should be encouraged and fostered.

- Lalita Krishnaswami.

The Federation conducted its Annual General Meeting



Meeting of the Federation in progress

The Federation held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on 20th May. Shree Mandakiniben Parikh, Director, Rural Development and Management Institute, Ahmedabad was the Chief Guest. 40 representatives of its member cooperatives were present at the meeting.

Joint Strategy for Development: Union & Cooperatives, a booklet written by Shri Lalita Krishnaswami, Chair Person, Sewa Federation was launched.

Shri Lalita Krishnaswami said, "A Cooperative is a vehicle for development of marginalized section of society. There are 6 lacs cooperatives in India and the women's cooperatives range from a miniscule 1.3 to 2.1% in more than 100 years, even as the total number of cooperatives grew from strength to strength. It is imperative to bring the vast human resource into the mainstream of cooperative movement for their socio economic development."

Shri Mandakiniben said, "For Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), union is a base and the cooperatives are delicate leaves. One is hard and the other is soft. But both are important for its development. The Federation with its 106 women's cooperatives is a small part of the 2% of only women's cooperatives, but it works like a candle. I hope, these cooperatives grow further and give livelihood to its members."

Shri Mirai Chatterji, Director, Sewa Social Security explained about the integrated program to work in 5 African countries. This program is in collaboration with



Launch of the booklet

Government of India. The main objective of the program is to share livelihood, capacity building, microfinance and social security to alleviate poverty in these countries. The two countries – South Africa and Ethiopia have shown keen interest in Women's Cooperative Bank and forming cooperatives in crafts and in agriculture.

Megha Cooperative registered



The first of its kind in Tapi District, Megha Adivasi Mahila Agriculture Producers' Cooperative, initiated by –Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), was registered with 324 women farmers as share holders. The members were from Vyara, Valod, Songadh, Uccal and Nizhar blocks of Tapi district.

It had its first General Meeting on May 22nd, 2014. 1000 women were present in the meeting and 21 members from different blocks were elected as members on the board of the cooperative.



First general meeting of Tapi Agriculture Coop

Through the integrated approach of Sewa Cooperative Federation, Social Security, Academy, Mahila Housing Trust support the members of Megha cooperative to strengthen their livelihood, financial services, health care, water and sanitation and capacity-building inputs to run their own groups and organizations. Mr. K. B. Upadhyay, District Development Officer, Tapi District; Shri Sushil Chaudhari, Program Associate, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Mr. Nikulsinh Chauhan, Program Officer, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Iswarbhai Patel, Vice President and Mr. Suresh Patel, Secretary, Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC), Dr. Verma, Chief District Health Officer, Mr. Khant, District Registrar, Ms. Nileshwari Joshi, Program Officer, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Tarlaben, President, Vedchhi Pradesh Seva Samitee were present.

Mr. K. B. Upadhyah said, "I am sure that you will focus on the activities in agriculture and animal husbandry, but it is imperative to give direction and support to the women in the cooperative." He suggested several trainings for the women and he offered to link them with the government schemes. He further added, "You have already sowed the seed and we can see the flowering of the leaves and over a period of time, it will become a tree, which will give shade to the women."

Shri Miraiben Chatterji, Director, Sewa's Social Security said, "Our intervention in Vyara was through health activities. Gradually, the need for other support services was felt by the members." She emphasized that the tribals were rich in culture, music and dance and we should help them preserve it.

Lataben, Chief Promoter said, "I am very happy and elated that adivasi (tribal) women in Tapi District have been able to register a cooperative. The cooperative will work towards development of agriculture and animal husbandry to generate employment and enhance income. We will also work in the area of health and insurance and saving groups. But, the most important would be to build toilets for the women."



Badshahmijan, showing his product, for which he won national award in tie & dye

Exposure Visits

- 11 master crafts women from six cooperatives participated in exposure visit to Jaipur to see the activities of different crafts to enable them to adapt and adopt the new methods and concepts in their own activities. The group visited Jaipur Rugs Foundation, leather unit, Jewelry unit, Indian Institute of Crafts & Designs (IICD), Friends of Museums and various design and crafts outlets. They also met the National Award Winners in tie & dye and block printing.

Mariamben, a master crafts woman in block printing said, "It was an honour to meet Mr. Santosh, a National Award Winner in block printing. I learnt about specific colours and binders, which should be used for dyeing. I will now start the vegetable dyeing at Design Sewa. I have promised myself that I will try to match my quality of work with him. I hope, I will get an award some day!!"



- Three exposure visits of 123 women members of Megha Cooperative were organized at Suruchi Organization, Bardoli. The purpose of the exposure is to reduce drudgery in agriculture and to promote viable small farm mechanization for the members. The women were highly motivated and purchased hand tools. Looking into the demand, a local tool kit has been developed, which will be helpful to take these technologies at the village level.

- A team of 26 members from Ethiopia and South Africa from cooperatives, unions and NGOs visited SEWA. The teams included national-level cooperative federation members, grassroots level women's urban and rural cooperatives, women's associations, NGOs working on microfinance, microinsurance, environmental issues, health and child care, including those working on HIV/AIDS, and colleagues working on issues of street vendors. The team also included an official from the Ministry of Women, Child and Youth in Ethiopia, Zinash Mengesha.

The participants from Africa were exposed to all aspects of SEWA's work and its major activities: livelihoods especially through cooperatives, social security like microinsurance, health care and child care, financial services and capacity-building.

During the Exposure Dialogue Program (EDP), they stayed at the homes of SEWA's grass-root leaders, and interacted with them to understand their lives and how to build up democratically run, membership-based organizations with women in the lead.

African colleagues shared their experiences and lessons learnt. It is important to organize workers and communities for their rights, for basic services, for reduction of poverty and ultimately for self-reliance. They will apply the lessons learned from their SEWA sisters to their own conditions and situation in their countries. Following this visit of Ethiopian and South African colleagues to SEWA, which includes SEWA Cooperative Federation, Sewa Bank, Sewa Academy and Sewa Social Security, leaders will support their African sisters to organize and build their own sustainable organizations, and gradually their own movements of informal women workers, like SEWA movement.



African women with a leader at Vimo Sewa



African team visited Kheda Women's Vegetable Producers' Sewa Cooperative

Dreams come true, and then they get bigger



Before construction

Kailashnagar, a small settlement of megacity Ahmednagar is a home for many self employed, marginalized people for more than 6 decades. A world – their world, in which many of them were born. They are residing here without getting essential facilities –like water and sewage. They tried for water and sanitation facilities through the Slum Networking Project (SNP). But they were not entitled to get the facilities due to uneven topography. Mahila Sewa Housing Trust (MSHT) extended its helping hand to these families.

The representatives of MSHT visited them several times to develop trust that new houses will be built on their own land once they were demolished. Initially they did not believe them.

The change is essential for development and for this change they were breaking their own houses and that also very happily! Because, they wanted to build their future – safe and secured, with their own hands. But it was not easy. MSHT got a letter from Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) that the slums were selected for the reconstruction program as an assurance from the government. This was followed by negotiation with the builders and they notarized the agreement.

Community survey program was undertaken. Family photo IDs and necessary papers were collected, which were approved and authorized by various government departments.

It took one whole year for construction of the homes. Gokuldharm Cooperative Housing Society – a residential complex, awaiting the arrival for its residents with all the basic facilities and amenities to cater the people residing in it. Now their dream has been realized – their own dreamhouse, that also on their own land!



Gokuldharm Society after construction

“We were afraid of not realizing our dream of owning a house, fear of uncertainty occupied our minds and we were constantly worried about our dream, as whatever shelter we had, was broken and god knows when the new houses will be built. It was difficult to differentiate between reality and dream, but finally, our dream came true.” – a member, Gokuldham Cooperative Society.

Updates:

Nirmalaben, an artisan member, who received identity card as an artisan from Development Commission - Handicrafts office, was selected to participate in the Delhi Haat exhibition at New Delhi for 15 days.

Two six months training programs for skill development in tailoring and embroidery were inaugurated. At Design Deals, master crafts women in stitching training will receive the training, whereas, artisans training in embroidery (zardosi) will be conducted at recently restored Design Sewa in collaboration with Development Commissioner, Handicrafts.



Inauguration of the embroidery training at Design Sewa

Skill....the means of livelihood...

Being a Muslim, I was not allowed to go outside for earning. We are staying in a small room, in which our kitchen, bathroom and bed room, all are included. I started to give tuitions to earn some money and my husband was doing some labour work. I used my meager income to run our house but it became worse as I fell severely ill during that time. We fell in deep financial crisis. We had no money for my treatment and my condition was worsening by the day.” Tears filled her eyes. “You know god has his ways to take our test in life. With great difficulty my husband borrowed the sum needed for my treatment. My experience of surviving through this phase somehow brought a change in me. I realized that I had a purpose to fulfill. I took up my stitching job at the Kadi Khuddar Cooperative again and in the remaining time, I started giving tuitions to as many as 60 children.



Muslim men rarely allow their women to move out of their homes. Thus despite being members, the women never came to work in the co-operative and gradually there came a time when the co-op. became dormant. Reviving it was the biggest struggle. It hurt me very much to see that once a successful co-operative becoming dormant like this. I went from house to house, requesting the members to come back. Even they knew how beneficial the co-op. was for them but they could not join. The husbands of the members had to be convinced that their women would be safe and there was nothing to worry. Finally in 2005, Kadi Khuddar Hast Kala Sewa Co-operative was revived. At first women were reluctant but when they started reaping the benefits of their labor, their confidence in its activities strengthened.” Pride lit her face as she said that, “Today, this is one of the most successful artisan co-operatives. I have trained more than 40 women in aari work, patch work and hand work and it gives me immense satisfaction to see that each of them is now earning a living out of these skills. I have just started taking basic English classes for the co-operative members. For long they were telling that they want to learn to speak English. Even I am taking basic computer training at the centre.” – Ayeshaben Marfatiya, Leader, Kadi Khuddar Cooperative.

“I have worked very hard all my life and now I’m seeing all my dreams coming true. My biggest achievement today is that both my children are studying in one of the good schools. I always wanted them to study in an English medium school. I feel very happy when they say they are proud of me. Now my husband allows me to move out without a burqha (veil). I can travel alone without any difficulty. Whenever there are meetings at the Federation or visits, I organize the women and take them everywhere with equal ease. ‘Ab darr nahi lagta’ (Now I no longer feel afraid),” she concluded with a smile.



CONTACT US AT

Gujarat State Women’s SEWA Co-operative Federation Ltd.;

21/22, Goyal Tower, Nr. Jhanvi Restaurant, University Road, Ahmedabad-38015.

Email: sewafederation@gmail.com Phone: 079-26301503/6937 website: www.sewafederation.org