



SAHAKARITA

Gujarat State Women's Sewa Cooperative Federation

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"Leaders do not create followers, they create more leaders."

- Tom Peters, American Writer

Special Issue

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"A big thank you!"

Having worked for SEWA from its inception, I am honored to receive the recognition from Sewa Cooperative Federation. I take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation for the support, encouragement and collaboration of our sister organizations. It has been an exciting fulfilling journey at SEWA. I am proud to say the 33 SEWA promoted cooperatives came together in the cooperative spirit to form the state level cooperative federation in 1992. The Federation today has grown in membership to 106. This has only been possible because of the hard work of my team members. A sincere thank you to Elaben, who has been a great support and mentor for all the activities, I have been involved in. I plan to make myself available to support the ongoing activities of the organization, whenever needed.

Congratulations to Mirai Chatterjee, the new President of the Federation."

- Lalita Krishnaswami.

AGM of Sewa Cooperative Federation held



Smt Lalita Krishnaswami and Smt Mirai Chatterjee with Smt. Elaben Bhatt

The Annual General Meeting of the Federation was held on 22nd September 2015, wherein new board of directors and the president were elected.

Smt Lalita Krishnaswami has been working with Self-Employed Women's Association since its inception and is the Founder of Sewa Cooperative Federation. She has been President of the Federation since last 16 years. She took voluntary retirement as a President. Smt. Mirai Chatterjee of Lokswasthya Healthcare Cooperative was unanimously elected as the President of Sewa Cooperative Federation. She has been part of the SEWA movement for last 31 years. She has years of experience in SEWA promoted health care, child care and the national insurance cooperatives.

The newly elected board consists of 15 representatives from different cooperatives for 5 years according to the Gujarat Cooperative Act.

- Labhu Thakkar



Outgoing and incoming Board of directors

(Jayaben Patel of Miroli Milk Coop, Geetaben Senma of Vanlaxmi Coop, Jyotsnaben Chauhan of Trupti Catering Coop, Lataben Gamit of Pethapur Milk Coop, Daxaben Mehta of Video Sewa Coop - from left-down; Subhadraben Patel of Lokswasthya Coop, Labhuben Thakkar, Managing Director of The Federation, Manjulaben Vaghela of Saundarya Cleaning Coop, Jayshreeben Vyas of Mahila Sewa Coop Bank, Lalita Krishnaswami of Abodana Block printers' Coop, Kamiben Ahir Moti pipli Milk Coop, Jashiben Patel Vanlaxmi Coop, Miraiben Chatterji, Lokswasthya Coop, Geetaben Ahir, Moti Pipli Milk Coop, Deepikaben Shah, Surat Credit Coop and Lataben Patel, Pethapur Milk Coop - from right up)

Cooperation between cooperatives - Cooperativisation (Sahkarita) Celebrating National Cooperative Week

“The work of a cooperatives is successful only when, it works for the joy of an individual, commitment for the society and responsibilities towards our nation. I say it as cooperation (Anubandh)”. The words of Elaben explains the SEWA movement of full employment and self – reliance when she addressed the leaders of the various member cooperatives. SEWA has been working with the joint strategy of forming union for rights and visibility of the workers in informal sector; whereas cooperatives are formed for their full employment and self-reliance. The movement of ownership and self-reliance through cooperatives is parallel with SEWA movement. The faces of the representatives of the cooperative members indicates the struggle and development along with SEWA movement (Organization).

A two-day workshop on “Towards Sustainability of Cooperatives – Future Directions”, organized by Sewa Cooperative Federation with the support of National Co-operative Union of India as a part of celebration of national cooperative week. The cooperative spirit was visible when the representatives wished each other. They were not the representatives of any corporate, but they were the leaders, working for the sustainability of the poor - grassroot women’s cooperative. They all were presidents and managers of their cooperatives.



Members at the workshop

“For four decades, our members have been working together.” Elaben continued and said, “Though we are illiterate; through our hard work, the turnover of our cooperatives is in crores. Number of shareholders have increased and we distribute the dividends. Whether recognized or not, we are in mainstream of the economy. The world (society) continuously demands change. How can we bring about the change? We all want peace in our homes. Society, country and cooperatives also need peace. That’s why our work is creative. The weakest person has voice in democracy. The board should be democratic and have active members.”

She further emphasized and said, “We should not be dependent on the grants and subsidies as we believe in hard work. We have to train our next generation to be self-reliant in the era of on-line and digital world. But, we have to teach them our traditional skills and values.”

The faces of the women had a unique shine. Shine of struggle...satisfaction of success...energy and readiness for new challenges, whether they were from rural or urban cooperatives. The new generation, inspired by the senior leaders (some of them very old), were looking forward for more and more innovative work.

Shri K. G. Mehta, an agricultural expert said, “the key is that unless the farmer is a producer and trader, there can be no sustainability. Animal husbandry, which has been in hands of women, must be linked with agriculture.”

Shri Armanbhai Oza, CEO, National Vimo Sewa Cooperative said, “What is important today is to change the mind set of customers. We should create products based on market demand and make and implement the strategy to sell it. We have to find our target group to enhance our business.

Smt. Deepaben Shah, President, FICCI-FLO organization said, “It was a learning experience for me to learn about cooperatives. All the cooperatives are varied in trade, but they are the members of the Cooperative Federation. Today, it is imperative to link with market and our organization will be happy to support you.”

For Lok swasthya Healthcare Cooperative, there was a question, “How can women provide healthcare service?” Today, starting from managing the 24 hours medical store, the cooperative has created a brand in the medicine market. It manufactures the ayurvedik medicines and sales in to the rural and urban areas through the health workers.

It was said, “Only professionals can make videos and shootings.” The women learnt to use more modern tools and equipments for shooting. They produced the films, showing the struggle of our members and presented them at national and international policy level through Video Sewa Cooperative.

The struggle of the poor women workers’ cooperative starts with the registration as their occupations belong to different categories.

- *Tender and deposit system in service provider cooperatives*
- *Difficulty in cope up with the market*
- *Difficulty in understanding the technical points*
- *Non acceptance of the only women’s cooperative by the society*
- *To get its own space/office*
- *Rigid attitude of the mainstream people*

It is out dated, if we say, "Only men can be owner of the construction industry." Rachayeeta Construction Workers' Cooperative today competes with the builders and has successfully completed the work of riverfront, hospitals and other buildings.

Vimo Sewa Cooperative is the first National level Insurance Cooperative to link the poor women with the national insurance companies. It helps our members during their difficult times.

Saundarya Cleaning Cooperative provides cleaning services in the reputed organizations in Ahmedabad.

The waste land was converted to green land by the hard work of the members of Vanlaxmi Cooperative. Today, it is known for its organic farming and eco-tourism.

Women take care of the animals who give milk; whereas the milk cooperatives are run by men! Our members broke their myth and formed women's cooperatives. Today, 55 milk cooperatives are run by women and the total turnover is 35 crores (35 millions).



Members of Geetanjali Cooperative presenting their planning

"I am from Geetanjali Stationary makers Cooperative, formed by paper picker women. We received an order of stationary from a national level company, with a condition that we were not allowed to use our logo on the products. We argued that we do not work only for money, but to give visibility to the work done by the women. Eventually, they agreed. Finally, we supplied the stationary with our logo." Jyotsnaben, Gitanjali Coop

"Our cooperative has a turnover of Rs. 30 million. This pinches the men in the village. They have never been happy with the success of our cooperative. We struggled for many years to acquire our own building from municipality, but our efforts were thwarted every time. We were successful only when our President Sitaben was elected as the President of the municipality (nagarpalika)."
Lataben, Pethapur Milk Coop



Seetaben Patel, discuss the struggle faced by her cooperative



Daxaben Mehta, sharing the gender issue at the workshop

"Along with the journalists, professionals and media photographers, I was ready to capture the moment of the visit of Shri A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, then President of India to SEWA. Suddenly, somebody from a TV channel pushed me aside. He said that it is important to capture this for his channel. But, very confidently I pushed him back and captured the visit on my video from right in front of the President. Though, we have to fight for gender and poverty issues, we consider ourselves in main stream." - Daxaben Mehta, President, Video SEWA Cooperative

“After a long struggle, our cooperative got the job to work on the River Front development. But the men did not allow us to work peacefully. How can sari wearing women run the big machines in the construction industry? One day, we had to run a big machine for cutting the grill. The men never lost a chance to discourage us. I tied up my saree, put on the shoes and started working on the machine with equal aggression. This encouraged the women. The women put the men to shame. Why should we lose our courage? Other women followed.”

Ramilaben, Rachayita Coop.



Ramilaben and Ratanben, presenting their activities

The journey started with 33 SEWA promoted cooperatives, culminating into a Federation in 1992. Today the Federation has 106 cooperative, 5 lakh members, who are moving ahead with the cooperative values and successful management.



Shri Elaben felicitated Shri Lalita Krishnaswami

Elaben felicitated Lalitaji for her leadership in the Federation for more than two decades. She is the Founder of the Federation. Lalitaji brought together all the cooperatives on one platform. She said, “SEWA is our identity and we cannot be isolated from SEWA. My journey with SEWA is very long. I will never forget the love and affection of Elaben for me and the warmth of my colleagues.” Health worker, Ayeshaben expressed her appreciation through her shairi.

Elaben said, “The cooperative spirit and SEWA values are visible when Lalitaben nominated Miraiben as the President of the Federation.”

The workshop concluded with the vote of thanks by Labhuben Thakkar, Managing Director, Sewa Cooperative Federation.

The newly elected Chair Person, Shri Miraiben Chatterjee was welcomed with best wishes by the members.



Ayeshaben, speaking shairi

Times Ashwal Walk started at SEWA NI HAVELI

On the last Sunday of September, Amdavadis who converged at Dhal ni Pol to be part of Times of India’s Heritage Walk series – Ashwal Walk- for the revival of the old city, were amazed when they were introduced to the fact that the city was also called Ashwal, the seat of Asha Bhil, apart from Karnavati and Amdavad.



Ustad Shaukat Khan with the other artists

Before the walk began, visitors immersed themselves in rendition of ragas by Ustad Shaukat Hussain Khan (Niyazi) at Sewa NI Haveli. The Ustad belongs to the Agra Atrauli Gharana of singing, which emphasizes ‘wazandar gayaki’ and deftness of delivery. Ustad Shaukat, who is the sole custodian of the Gharana of Gujarat says, “I feel amazed to visit the Sewa NI Haveli in Ahmedabad and feeling proud to see that it is also engaged in the activities to maintain the tradition of India. I wish and pray the people of India know such tradition.”

The specialized heritage walk was developed by Sewa Federation, French Haveli and Mahila Housing Trust and conducted by heritage walk expert, Girishbhai Gupta. From the story of Asha Bhil to the boisterous mill culture of Ahmedabad, visitors to Sewa NI Haveli saw six centuries of history unfold before their eyes.

Open House Meet at SEWA NI HAVELI

An Open House meet was organized at Design Sewa, SEWA NI HAVELI. The purpose was to interact and have a dialogue with Shri Elaben Bhatt, Founder, SEWA with representatives of different sister organizations and also to interact with the artisans. There was a small cultural program, organized by artisans. Elaben appreciated the presentation of three generations and their ideas.

The artisans also show pieced their skills. Jayshreeben Vyas, Managing Director, Sewa Bank appreciated the ambiance and the different hanging lamps in various crafts; especially, the mural, made by the artisans - Sairaben and Khatijaben in patchwork, embroidery, block printing and bandhani.



Amirunben presenting her shairi in *romantic environment*



Elaben visited Sewa Kalakruti at Haveli

Elaben said, “The artisans have generation after generation, are attached to their traditional skills. They use their skills in crafting beautiful products, transforming into a tradition and that becomes a heritage. Today makes way to the history tomorrow. There are many heritage havelis in Ahmedabad. The history of Ahmedabad is older than 600 years. It is our heritage. Lalitaji’s vision and love for the crafts and artisan is to preserve and promote the heritage by generating income through it and pass it on to the next generation. She visualized the concept of Design Library. Design books from various places are purchased, maintained by Design Sewa and used by the women artisan, working at home. This noble action will make a history to maintain the traditional craft.”



Sairaben with the mural made by her



Elaben, greeting the senior artisan - Mami

Member cooperatives covered by the news channels

BBC news (International), DD National and Girnar channels interviewed the members and customers of Homecare and Saundarya Cleaning cooperatives. This was telecast by the news channels.



Coverage of Saundarya Cooperative and Lokswasthya cooperatives by Times of India



Exposure program with dialogue: ROAD, Orissa

8 leaders and staff of Regional Development (ROAD), Bhubneshwar participated in Exposure Program with Dialogue at Sewa Cooperative Federation to understand the concept of women's cooperatives. They were oriented to the formation of the cooperatives, nurtured by Sewa Cooperative Federation, as an intervention to address livelihood need.

ROAD has been working to empower the homebased workers in Bhubneshwar and has organized around 1000 home based workers in paper making, agarbatti, pottery, stitching and bamboo making in 35 groups. These groups are active and have been working on their urban civic and livelihood issues since December 2013.

The visit was facilitated by Home Net South Asia (HNSA). HNSA has conducted capacity building trainings for these leaders. With two years of organizing efforts, groups are ready towards formalization in the form of cooperatives to initiate collective enterprise.

The group visited and studied the homebased artisan and dairy cooperatives. They envisage to form Papad and Agarbatti making cooperatives in Bhubneshwar.



Representatives of ROAD visited Sewa Federation and affiliated cooperatives

Sewa Bank makes technology available to its members

Shri Mahila Sewa Sahakari Bank provides its banking services to the self-employed women since last 41 years. The bank started its core banking since 2006, but today it introduces the latest modern technology to help them purchase products like mobile, computers, laptop, and tablets to its women members.

Shri Elaben Bhatt and Shri Sahu, Reginal Director of R.B.I. inaugurated the Cash Collection ATM and Passbook printer at the Bank. The objective was that women should have access to technology by more and more self-employed women.

Shri Sahu said, "Sewa Bank is providing pension and insurance schemes to the poor women, which the government introduced recently. It is praiseworthy that the Sewa Bank is following the rules and regulations of the cooperative Act. You are lucky that you have Elaben to give you directions."

Smt. Elaben said, "When the bank was registered, most of the women were illiterate. When we introduced the first computer, the women did not trust the machine. We were keeping the records manually as well as computerized for one year. It is our achievement that we got ATM and passbook printer in this bank! I wish the members will learn to use more and more technology for their development."



Shri Sahu and Smt. Elaben Bhatt inaugurates the passbook printing machine

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