

SEWA Delhi

Promoted by SEWA Bharat as part of its mandate to develop new SEWAs, SEWA Delhi began setting up Self-help Groups (SHGs) in 1999, and has since then been working with women workers in the city. Currently, SEWA Delhi is working in five slum clusters of Delhi, viz. Jahangirpuri, Raghbir Nagar, Nandnagri, Rajiv Nagar and Anand Vihar.

The membership details of SEWA Delhi are given in Table 5. –

Table 5
Membership Profile of SEWA Delhi

Location	No. of Members
Nandnagari	2574
Raghbir Nagar	7189
Jahangirpuri	992
Rajiv Nagar	1556
Anand Vihar	989
Book Bazaar	270
Total	13,570

In 2007, SEWA Delhi registered itself as the SEWA Delhi Trust under the Delhi Trust Act. The members of SEWA Delhi belong to various professions like embroidery workers, *bindi* makers, vendors and construction workers.

Although the organization is still in its nascent phase, SEWA Delhi currently undertakes the following key activities:

- Organizing women members, especially street vendors and construction workers;
- Developmental activities like micro-finance and micro-insurance;
- Employment generation activities like embroidery;
- Working with government departments to ensure successful delivery of services and government schemes to households in the operational areas; and
- Conducting non- formal education and personality development programmes for children of SEWA members.

1. Organizing and Advocacy

Street Vendors

The number of street vendors in Delhi is estimated at about 3 lakhs, and they contribute largely to the city's economy, while simultaneously catering to the needs of the people. According to a conservative estimate, their sales turnover in Delhi would be worth about Rs. 3500 crores. However, in spite of this contribution, the street vendors in Delhi have to deal with hostile surroundings and a very competitive market. They have to face clearance drives and eviction by the government in the light of certain big events being hosted by the city such as the forthcoming Commonwealth Games. Even though the

Central Government adopted in few cities, but the progress is very slow. The National Policy on Street Vendors in January 2004, it is being implemented till date.

SEWA Delhi has consistently endeavoured to bring about profound changes in the life and conditions of street vendors. The details of various activities, which have been undertaken as part of the street vendors' programme, are given below.

a. Advocacy for Women Vendors:

Acting on the Supreme Court order in *Gaindaram and Others vs. MCD*, the MCD drafted a scheme based on the National Policy for Urban Street Vendors, and presented it before the court in 2007. However, the scheme overlooked some major interests and demands of the street vendors of Delhi. Recognizing the urgency of the situation in terms of the security of women vendors in the city, SEWA filed an intervening application in the court on the April 3, 2007. The Supreme Court passed its judgement took into consideration all the issues raised by SEWA.

In compliance with the Court's order, the MCD has finally come out with a scheme based on the national policy, along with the application form for the registration of hawkers and vendors in the city. SEWA has already started its the process of mobilizing its vendors in Raghbir Nagar, Jahangirpuri and Nandnagri, so that they can get themselves registered and gain a legal identity.



b. Model Market:

As New Delhi prepares for the Commonwealth Games, the likelihood of large-scale clearance operations that will destroy the meagre livelihoods of lakhs of vendors looms large on the horizon. SEWA has taken an initiative to develop Vellodrome Road Bazaar as a "Model Market" to demonstrate that vendors can also beautify their vending places and can be protected from the demolition drive. Proper architectural guidance has been sought to redesign space allocation to these vendors in such a manner that they do not

obstruct the residents, pedestrians and the traffic. Shri Pradeep Sachdev, who has designed Dilli Haat, is also involved in this endeavour.

Till date, women vendors have contributed Rs. 550/- each for umbrella shades and a *dari* (rug) of size 6*4 to be spread on the ground. Similarly, posters and dustbins have also been organized for the markets to make the area attractive. The women members have been given eight huge banners to put up and make the market attractive and disciplined. Various meetings are also being organized with these vendors to stress the importance of maintaining discipline and cleanliness.

c. Ladies' Market:

The concept of a 'Ladies Market' is also an initiative undertaken by SEWA, which is envisaged to empower women vendors both socially and economically. The three exclusive ladies' markets that are being proposed would be located near the Delite cinema on Tagore Road, near the New Delhi railway station, and at Jahangirpuri.

SEWA has been handed over the responsibility of setting up, running and maintaining the ladies' markets by the authorities. These ladies' markets would have the following benefits:

- Ensuring a place for the women to sell their wares without harassment and with dignity;
- Providing livelihood for hundreds of women, thereby giving them security;
- Empowering the women by giving them their 'own' market space;
- Fixing of a designated spot for the markets so that women can develop a regular clientele; and
- Ensuring the availability of a variety in goods in one composite location.

d. Rehabilitation of Outab Road Market:

In 2006, a 35-year old weekly market at the Qutab Road in the Old Delhi area was under threat when the MCD officials asked the vendors to vacate the marketplace. This is a weekly market, held on every Sunday when the regular market of that area is closed, and about 350 vendors sell old and used clothes here. Many poor and even lower middle class people buy these clothes at cheaper rates from this market. SEWA reacted strongly against this action by the MCD officials and visited the concerned corporation offices with these women vendors.

The leaders, who were involved during the struggle of the Lal Qila market, took the initiative and fought their case with the MCD and the police authorities. When they approached the MCD, they were told that the vendors in the market were being evicted on the basis of a Supreme Court Judgment. The leaders asked the MCD officials to show them a copy of the judgment, as they were aware of the fact that the Supreme Court had not yet passed any judgment and that the matter is sub-judice. The leaders also argued with the police on similar lines. When the SEWA team investigated the list of hawking and no-hawking zones in the area, they got to know that the Qutab Road market already existed in the *weekly bazaar* list. The Supreme Court in the Gaidaram case states that

weekly *bazaars* are important, and that it is the responsibility of the MCD to protect these markets. Hence, SEWA brought it to the notice of the concerned officials that the eviction was not only wrong but a violation of the Supreme Court's orders. The Municipal Corporation acted positively and finally gave the permission to re-start the market at Qutub Road. This order has protected the livelihood of around 350 vendors who have been linked with this market for over 30 years.

Construction Workers



In Delhi, there are an estimated 800,000 construction workers. Almost 50 per cent of them are migrant workers. These numbers are likely to increase in the days to come due to ongoing projects such as the Delhi Metro and upcoming projects such as the Commonwealth Games. In this context, SEWA has initiated its work with the construction workers and is working towards ensuring a process by which thousands of workers, who are marginalized and highly exploited, receive adequate social security. To achieve these aims, SEWA has initiated the following measures:

a. Registration:

Currently, there exists a Construction Workers Welfare Board for construction workers in Delhi, which has given SEWA the mandate to sign on behalf of the workers for the issuance of their identity card. Until now, a mere 3000 workers in Delhi had been registered with the Board. Therefore, one of the major objectives of SEWA Delhi has been to register as many workers as possible and to create a strong union that can represent construction workers and raise demands for their rights and accrual of benefits. SEWA Delhi has till date registered over 300 construction workers with the Welfare Board, including 150 each from Anand Vihar and Raghbir Nagar.

b. Advocacy:

Even though workers are eligible for some immediate benefits, the Construction Workers Welfare Board has been quite inactive. SEWA Delhi has been striving to activate this Board and SEWA members have met the Director General of Labour Welfare and the

Joint Labour Commissioner to bring to their notice the key issues in the registration process and the benefits that should accrue to construction workers.

As regards the Commonwealth Games that are being hosted in Delhi in 2010, SEWA is part of an alliance comprising non-profit organisations, such as the Mobile Creche, Nirman and BWI, that would be working with the government to ensure the availability of adequate facilities for the influx of construction workers including registration, childcare and healthcare facilities, and on-site water and sanitation, among others.

Since the process of registration has gained momentum, the work of SEWA Delhi has focussed on the skill up-gradation of the workers to ensure that the registered construction workers receive the benefits due to them, which is essential for carrying forward SEWA's initial work of organizing the workers a step further. Government – certified skill-up-gradation training, specifically in masonry, was held at Anand Vihar for 24 women workers, all of whom have passed the exam conducted by the Construction Industry Development Council. These women, typically unskilled load bearers, were trained to build various kinds of walls, take measurements, plaster walls and also make the appropriate building mixtures. Along with the training, they were given literacy classes that enabled them for the first time to sign their own names.

2. Micro-finance

Co-operatives

SEWA Delhi started micro-finance activities in 1996, on the same lines as SEWA Gujarat, with 90 women members and 3 Self-help Groups (SHGs). Today, it has a membership of 541 women. These women were quick to realize that if all of them organized themselves into a co-operative, it would enable them to take larger amounts of loans. The process of registration of the Co-operative was undertaken in 2006 as SEWA Delhi promoted the Mahila SEWA Urban Co-operative Thrift and Credit Society on March 27, 2006, with a membership of 210 members, and a share capital of Rs. 1,08,000/-.

Table 6:

Thrift and Credit Society

Total number of Depositors	Savings (in Rs.)	Amount of Loans Disbursed (to 58 members). (in Rs.)	Amount of Loans Collected (in Rs.)
541	1617502	890500	399670

Pensions

SEWA is also involved in helping women gain access to the Government Old Age Pension scheme. Although the pension amount under this scheme is a paltry Rs. 350, yet it is a regular source of support for the poor members who are not only financially

deprived but also suffer from social exclusion. In 2007, 143 SEWA members and their family members have been enrolled in the pension scheme.

Pension Received In 2007

Area	No. of members	Amount
Sunder Nagari	19	123800
Anand Vihar	1	4200
Raghubir Nagar	45	199450
Total	65	3,27,450

3. Employment Generation and Marketing

The prevalent social structure directly affects the economic development of the under-privileged classes and the availability of associated opportunities for them. Entry into the labour market and product markets is barred to them for various reasons pertaining to gender, caste and class. SEWA strives to overcome these barriers to productivity by promoting the growth of sustainable micro-enterprises that will increase both the productivity and profitability of its members' work.

Embroidery Centre

In order to ensure that women workers consistently get regular work without any work gaps, SEWA started its embroidery programme in Sundernagri, in October 2005. It has since then established linkages with six export houses. Although skilled in embroidery work, the women here still used to receive work on a piece rate basis from the moneylenders or contractors, who did not pay them the fair rates for their labour. Being poor and illiterate, they were literally voiceless.



In this context, SEWA Delhi intervened to remove the chain of middlemen and directly link the members to new companies, due to which the members have started getting work at almost double the erstwhile rates. They are also being provided training for skill upgradation and support in identifying new employment opportunities. Moreover, SEWA is a member of the National Home Workers' Group, promoted by the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) based in Delhi. Hence, it raises at a policy level, the issues and concerns of embroidery workers of

Sundernagri (area of implementation of embroidery programme) and other parts of the country.

So far 290 women have benefited from this programme and women members of SEWA Delhi have earned a total income of Rs 4,12,112 under it. Additionally, SEWA conducts trainings on financial counselling for this group so as to inculcate saving habits among the poor workers. The members are also counselled on other important aspects related to their lives like accumulation of assets, childcare, and health-related issues.

Catering

India has always been a patriarchal society, wherein the roles and duties of males and females are very well stratified and specified. Women have traditionally been made to do housework and males have had the freedom to work outside the home. Even if women are also allowed to work outside their homes, it is only in certain specific types of employment while they are excluded from others. The business of catering falls in the latter category, and is usually run by males only as it involves lots of risks, challenges, and most of all, interactions with all sections of the society.

The SEWA experience in Kerala, where a catering unit is run exclusively by a group of women, has thus proved to be an eye-opener against such prejudices. SEWA Delhi too has attempted to start this unique venture in Vijay Nagar (in the Delhi University area) where a large number of university students stay as paying guests and have a critical need for such a service.

In view of the high demand for this service, SEWA decided to venture into this area and started work with women members of Nandnagri. Currently four of its members are involved in this enterprise, right from planning and setting up the venture, to door-to-door distribution of pamphlets and other modes of advertising this new work in the entire Delhi University area and running the catering unit. Maintaining the quality of food is the first priority for the unit besides ensuring the timely delivery of tiffins to the customers. The unit also has plans to expand its activities from being just a tiffin service to prospecting for other orders like birthday and kitty parties, and marriages.

Screen Printing

Screen-printing is a unique endeavour undertaken by the SEWA members of Nandnagri. Although it has hitherto been seen as a prerogative of men, SEWA envisages making women experts in this field through their will and determination. The women members of SEWA Delhi have acquired training in this work and a screen-printing centre has been set up in the Nandnagri area. The members of the unit print greeting cards, visiting cards and pamphlets. Their products have been exhibited both nationally as well internationally. The printed cards have also been exhibited at various places on different occasions like the SEWA Annual Exhibition at Aga Khan Hall, and Delhi University colleges, besides being displayed at the SEWA-owned shop. Attempts are also being made to add more and more members and expand this work significantly while trying to achieve the basic objective of making the members economically independent and fostering the realization among them that they are the real owners, managers and operators of the enterprise.

4. Educations and Development of the Children of SEWA

Education Centre

As SEWA Delhi's members belong to poor socio-economic backgrounds, they find it very difficult to provide education to their children. SEWA's supplementary education programme thus aims to provide education to the children of poor SEWA members. Currently, SEWA runs supplementary education centres in four areas of Delhi, viz. Sundernagri, Rajiv Nagar, Raghbir Nagar and Jahangirpuri. A total of 126 students are currently enrolled in these centres, which are being run by SEWA Delhi since 1999.

Theatre Workshop

SEWA organised a one-month theatre workshop in collaboration with the NSD (National School of Drama) to enhance and facilitate the creativity and talent of its members' children. Forty children, from Sundernagri and Raghbir Nagar, participated in the workshop and prepared a play called "Shaheedon ki mazaron par" which was performed at the Shramik Mahotsav. The play was based on the life and struggle of freedom fighter Ram Prasad Bismil, and had been contemporaries so that the children could understand and identify with it.

The play was received with great appreciation by the women members, who saw the tremendous impact the workshop had had on their children. Not only were they more self-confident and articulate, but they had developed a zeal to learn. The workshop gave them a platform to nurture their hidden talents and hence motivated them to pursue this self-exploration further.