

# TRANSFORMING



PROTECTING LIVELIHOODS OF  
CONSTRUCTION WORKERS  
& STREET VENDORS  
THROUGH ORGANISING AND  
ADVOCACY

# LIVES

2007



## About SEWA Delhi

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a women's trade union that was started in Gujarat in 1972 by Smt. Ela Bhatt, with the aim of organising women in the informal sector. SEWA represents the convergence of three movements: labour, women and cooperative. In the year 2007, with approximately 10 lakh women members, SEWA is India's largest membership-based organization for women working in the informal sector.

Based on the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, SEWA's goal is to achieve full employment and self-reliance for all its members. These goals are achieved through a strategy of "struggle and development". The struggle is against the many constraints imposed on women by society and the economy, and the development activities are to strengthen women's collective bargaining power and provide them with new sustainable alternatives.

SEWA started in Delhi in 1999, with the support of SEWA Bharat, initially working to form self-help groups. However, it has since grown and diversified its work significantly, with a current membership of over 14000 women workers. Starting from one slum cluster, it is now working in six different parts of Delhi, namely Jahangirpuri (North Delhi), Raghbir Nagar (West Delhi), Sundernagri (East Delhi), Rajiv Nagar (East Delhi), New Sanjay Colony (East Delhi) and Anand Vihar (North-East Delhi).



SEWA Delhi is involved in six broad areas of work:

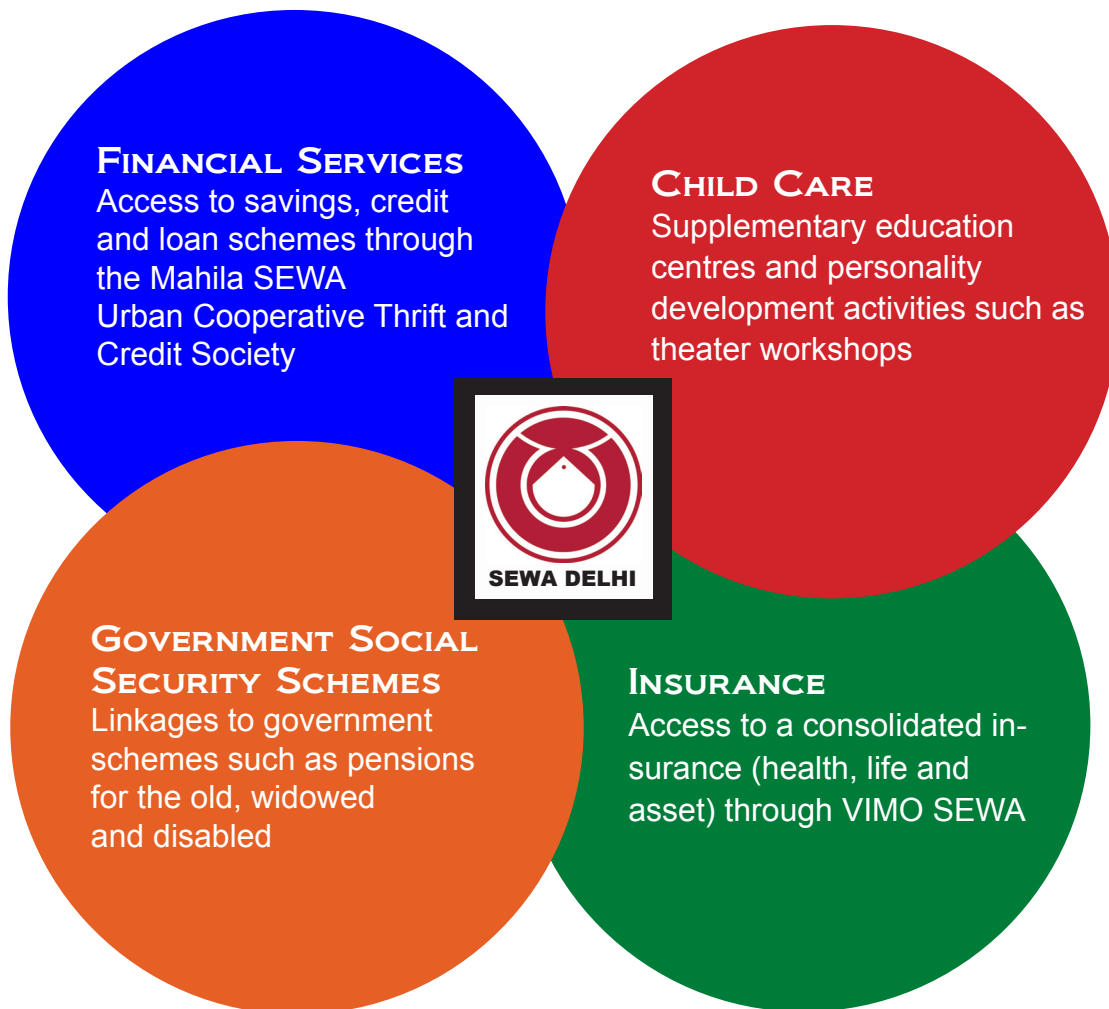
1. Livelihood protection, both of street vendors by providing them with a permanent space and a legal identity, and of construction workers by providing them with a legal identity, social security and skill upgradation.
2. Livelihood promotion, primarily for home-based embroidery workers, by creating direct market linkages and providing skill training in embroidery as well as alternative livelihoods.
3. Micro-finance, to ensure members have access to savings and loans, and are prevented from being exploited by moneylenders.
4. Advocacy, to ensure the implementation of the National Policy on Street Vendors, receipt of adequate benefits due to construction workers through the Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board, and the passing of the Bill demanding Social Security for the Unorganised Sector.
5. Social security, by providing access micro-insurance and linkages to government schemes, such as old age, disability and widowhood pensions, for members.
6. Supplementary Education, Vocational Training and Personality Development Programs for children, adolescent girls and young women members to ensure holistic development and access to alternative livelihoods for children and youth from under-privileged communities.



As a labour union, SEWA has adopted the methodology of working on issues that are brought to it by its members, due to which it is constantly engaging with new problems as they arise with changing times. In SEWA's years of working at the grassroots level as well as with policy makers, it has found that poverty is inextricably linked to both economic and social structures. Hence, to ensure that people are raised out of poverty, both these issues would have to be addressed. The economic structure is closely linked to the social structure. Not only are avenues to economic opportunities blocked by social structures such as caste, gender or class; but even social needs such as health, child-care, education and housing are linked to economic capabilities.

This understanding of the inter-dependence and inter-relation of these structures, has led to the development of the integrated approach of SEWA's work. SEWA's integrated approach to poverty alleviation comprises:

- (a) Organizing for collective strength to ensure adequate representation and participation in all programs meant for them as well as in the matters of the nation;
- (b) Capital formation through access to financial services to build up and create assets;
- (c) Capacity building to enable sustainability in the competitive market and
- (d) Social security to ensure that sudden crises are not a drain on their fragile economies.



## Program Background

The informal sector encompasses various categories of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, who are mostly migrants in search of income earning opportunities. 93% workforce of the population of India is in the unorganised sector and the workers in the unorganised sector contribute 62% to the GDP which constitutes 50% of the national income.

The number of street vendors in Delhi is estimated to be about 3 lakhs and they are major contributors to the city economy. According to a conservative estimate their sales turnover in Delhi would be about Rs 3500 crores. But street vendors in Delhi have to deal with hostile surroundings and a very competitive market. As the Commonwealth Games are approaching, the Government has started a clearance drive to remove vendors from streets and pavements, to transform Delhi into a 'World Class City'. Although the Central Government has adopted the National Policy on Street Vendors in January 2004, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi took a decision to implement this in 2007.



In Delhi, there are an estimated 800,000 construction workers. Almost 50% of them are migrant workers, the numbers of which are going to substantially increase in the coming months with growing work of the Delhi Metro and the Commonwealth Games. Construction workers are employed on a daily-wage basis and hence do not have access to a stable income. Additionally, being one of the poorest sections of society, they are highly marginalized and exploited. Therefore, without access to any form of social security, they are extremely vulnerable to any changes in their living conditions and the smallest difficulty can endanger their families.



## Program Activities

SEWA Delhi has consistently struggled to bring about profound changes in the life and conditions of street vendors and construction workers. The developments in various activities, which we undertook are as follows.

### Street Vendors Program

#### a. SEWA's intervention and success in 'Gaiinda Ram vs. Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and Others' case

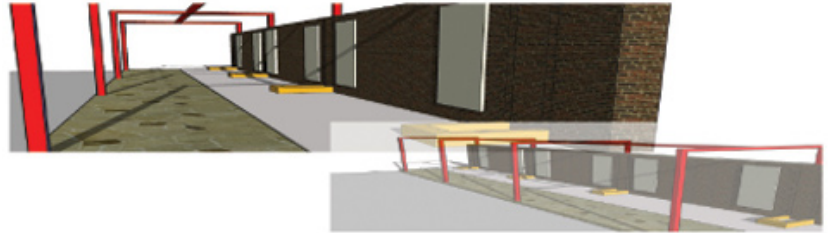


On the Supreme Court order, the MCD in the Gaiinda Ram case drafted a scheme based on the National Policy for Urban Street Vendors, which overlooked some major interests and demands of the street vendors of Delhi. Recognizing the urgency of the situation for the security of our women vendors in the city, SEWA filed an intervening application in the court on the 3rd of April 2007. The Supreme Court passed its judgement on 17th of May 2007 and took into consideration all the issues raised by SEWA.

In compliance with the Court's order, the MCD finally came 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, in Raghubir Nagar, Jahangirpuri and Sundernagri, filed for 7000 licenses. Currently, SEWA is advocating for gaining representation on the Ward and Zonal Vending Committees that will decide the implementation of the licensing process, and has already achieved this in the city zone.

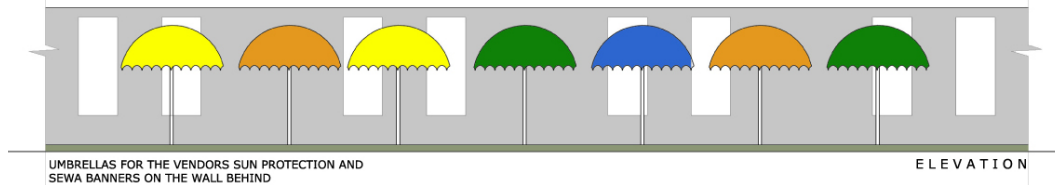
### b. Ladies Market

After a prolonged struggle, SEWA succeeded in its effort to develop a Ladies Market in Delhi. On 22nd August 2007, SEWA's proposal to develop 'exclusive ladies market' at Tagore road was considered by MCD and passed by Zonal vending committee.



This market will provide our 250 women vendors following benefits -

- Dignity and freedom from harassment, as it will be legally recognised vending space
- Social security, due to the allotment of a permanent space and regular income
- Empowerment, as the women will have their 'own' market space
- Regular clientele development, as they would have designated spots



### c. Removal and Rehabilitation of Qutub Road market

Qutub Road Bazaar is the oldest weekly market in Delhi, but the police officials removed it in the month of July without any legal ground. SEWA reacted strongly against this action and went to the concerned corporation offices with these women vendors and informed them that it's against the Supreme Court judgment to remove this market. The corporation acted very positively and finally gave the permission to restart this market at Qutub Road. This order has protected the livelihood of around 300 vendors who have been linked with this market for over 30 years.



### a. Registration



Currently, there exists a Welfare Board for Construction Workers that has given SEWA the mandate to sign for the workers for the issuance of their identity card. Until now, a mere 3000 workers in Delhi have been registered with the Board. Therefore, one of the major objectives of SEWA Delhi is to register as many workers as possible, to create a strong union that can then represent construction workers and make demands for their rights and accrual of benefits. SEWA Delhi, since February 2007, has registered over 300 construction workers with the Welfare Board. SEWA has been able to leverage this success, for important negotiations with the Labour Commissioner regarding better implementation of the benefits.

### b. Skill training

Government-certified skill-upgradation 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.



### c. Exposure visit



Women from the training visited SEWA in Ahmedabad. The aim of the exposure visit was for them realize that women can learn work that has typically been defined as a man's job, as trainings by the Mahila Housing Trust at the Karmika School, in Gujarat, range from plumbing and wiring to carpentry. Additionally, they were taken to the SEWA Union where they were made aware of SEWA's work at a national level, why they are part of a Union and what can it do for them. This enabled the women to see beyond their microcosm, understand the capabilities of women and how they can achieve things that are currently unimaginable for them.

### d. Advocacy

After a year's struggle, the first benefits were given out to construction workers in Delhi, working on a Commonwealth Games (CWG) Site. SEWA being a key player in this process was invited to the event hosted by the Delhi Government. The benefits included a life insurance policy, a temporary ration card and a passbook/identity card. Currently, SEWA is working to ensure that these benefits are extended to all registered workers, and is therefore in collaboration with the Labour Commissioner helping to design the implementation process of these benefits, as well as others, such as the educational scholarship for children.

#### e. Advocacy for Common Wealth Games (CWG) Workers



SEWA Delhi is a core working member of the CWG Citizen's Initiative for Workers, Women and Children, which has been able to gain a lot of headway into making better provisions (specifically for social security, safety and equity) for CWG workers and their children. The alliance has met the Chief Minister of Delhi and the Labour Department Officials on several occasions regarding this, and is currently setting up crèches in labour camps and CWG sites.

The key issues being raised by the alliance are:

- a. Workers registration needs to be taken to scale to ensure social security reaches all
- b. Immediate benefits must be implemented
- c. Decent living and working conditions must be provided at all CWG sites
- d. Publicity/Awareness campaigns for the benefits should be taken up by the government

## Tools

For organizing and advocating for the issues of both street vendors and construction workers, SEWA Delhi prepared and utilized a wide variety of tools, keeping in mind local relevance, acceptability and effectiveness.

### Posters and Pamphlets

Poster and pamphlets were developed that were distributed in the communities, markets and labour chowks highlighting the rights of workers and ways to access them.

### Mohalla Meeting

Monthly mohalla (community) meetings were held in all areas to identify the key issues and barriers to sustainable livelihoods faced by members. These also enabled SEWA to ensure community participation in its activities by involving them in the struggle for their rights.

### Video

Videos highlighting the importance of a union, what it can do for its members and the need for members to be active participants were screened in the communities. Additionally, two videos were made documenting the work and lives of street vendors and construction workers, and SEWA's efforts in improving them. These will aid our continuous efforts in motivating the members to become a part of the struggle, while at the same time making them aware of their rights.



### SEWA Newsletter

SEWA's fortnightly newsletter, Anasooya, is distributed among the community members, which often carries articles on the achievements made with regard to their work in Delhi and across India. In addition, to this lives of some of our members are also profiled in the Anasooya. This enables them to realise that their voice is heard and their struggles recognised by SEWA.

### Ideology Training

Ideology training is a means to make members aware about their rights, strengthen the union and build the capacity of members to collectively bargain and develop effective community leaders who can represent their problems and demands. The training utilises innovative means like songs, games, videos and discussions.



- Livelihood protection of vendors through the Supreme Court Judgement and rehabilitation of Qutub Road Sunday Bazaar Vendors.
- Livelihood promotion of vendors through the development of the exclusive ladies market and of construction workers through skill-upgradation.
- Access to social security through the implementation of the benefits by the Construction Workers Welfare Board.
- Enhanced women's empowerment through an increased awareness of rights and participation in SEWAs work through exposure visits, community meetings and ideology trainings.
- Increased voice of vendors and recognition of their needs through SEWA's representation in the Ward and Zonal Vending Committees



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### Community Mobilisation

Community members as SEWA Sathis and Aagewans are vital to mobilising members, as they help SEWA work as an insider of the community and not as external agencies.

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### Advocacy

Successful advocacy depends on not only establishing linkages with the government but also on rigorous follow-ups on the issues and including more stakeholders, especially the community, in the process.

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### Community Participation

It is essential to involve community members in the various interactions with the government officials, so that they are aware of the bureaucratic delays and hence do not have a loss of trust in SEWA and its efforts.

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### Localised Communication Channels

Reaching out to the community requires the utilisation of innovative means that are locally specific. Hence, communication channels in each community need to be designed after having analysed the key sources of information in each area. SEWA used the local barber for Anand Vihar, the Mosques and Rickshaw Pullers for Sundernagri and the Temple Announcement Service for Raghubir Nagar.

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### Intracommunity Dialogue

Even though activities may be community-centric, it does not necessarily imply that the members will be willing participants in the process. It requires a consistent effort of creating a dialogue and deliberating with the community in order to make them understand how critical they are to making the struggle a success.

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**SEWA DELHI**

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