



In a unique endeavour,
SEWA Delhi brings the worker
and the buyer together.
Both gain.

WOMEN HOME-BASED WORKERS OF DELHI

Weaving the World

The home-based members of SEWA Delhi stand firm in competitive global markets and have gained visibility and recognition

A common sight in Rajiv Nagar, a resettlement slum located in East Delhi, is women sitting outside their houses with a piece of fabric, tied to a long *adda*, doing beautiful hand embroidery. Their hands dance swiftly over the fabric as they create exquisite garments with large needles and golden and silver threads. These embroidered garments will finally reach the sparkling display windows of high fashion stores on Oxford Street in London or, for that matter, any other showroom in the world.



Threads of Success



These women are all SEWA members. They are home workers, proudly marketing their skills in the global market to ensure a livelihood for themselves and their families. No longer the invisible last link in the long global value chain, these women have eliminated the layers of middlemen to reach markets directly, thus ensuring income and work security for themselves. In the process they have enhanced their capacity, upgraded their skills and built collective strength.

This has been due to the efforts of SEWA Delhi and its unique and innovative initiative of establishing Embroidery Centres for its members. These link the workers directly to the exporters and retailers. At the centres, women home workers are given the support that they need to connect directly to large markets and service bulk orders. These include design specifications, quality control and skill training.

Farida, a SEWA member, says, "Being in SEWA since the last three years, I don't like to take work from the contractors any more. I get work and money on time from the SEWA centre, which is our own centre. I am more happy now."

SEWA has established links with several export houses that bring orders, especially for *aari*, *zari* and *zardozi* work, from global companies



In the past two years, over 500 women have linked up with the SEWA Community Centres and have earned a total income of about Rs 1,500,000. Each of them visits the centre on a regular basis—twice or three times a week—and collects work orders and raw material. On completion of the work, these members submit the finished product and receive their payment from the centre. The centre is open from 9 am to 6 pm and the home workers can come in at any time of the day.

SEWA negotiates piece rates and timelines with the exporters on behalf of its members. The rates are derived from the time-motion study among the members. The final financial agreement is arrived at with the consent of the SEWA members. When an order comes in, a meeting is called. Master trainers explain the work and discuss the rates and the timelines before finalising the contract with the export house. These trainers maintain quality control and timelines. They are

Creating Opportunities



also skilled and talented embroidery workers from the community. SEWA has developed a system of work at the centre level in order to carry out this process smoothly. It involves:

- Sampling at the centre
- Quality control
- Material distribution
- Garment distribution
- Record keeping
- Delivery of the finished goods

The Embroidery Centre is also a 'social meeting place' for SEWA members. They come here and share their personal issues and find solutions among themselves. The centre and the programme is empowering for them as they come out of their homes for changing their lives. Most of them are Muslims for whom SEWA's embroidery programme has opened up the gates of their homes for upward mobility.

Objectives of the Embroidery Centre

- Empowering women artisans by bringing them into the mainstream
- Eliminating the middlemen and protecting the workers from exploitation
- Linking the women to mainstream markets
- Enhancing the income level of the women workers
- Making the enterprise self-sustainable and forming a cooperative that could be owned, managed and controlled by the women



SEWA Sathis: They are the grassroots leaders who belong to the same community as the workers and act as an interface between SEWA and the members. They make regular home visits and mobilise more embroidery workers to the programme.

The Process



Trainers and Supervisors: They get the sampling done by the workers, control the quality of goods and train the women on different types of embroidery. They make frequent visits to companies to get the goods approved and help to gear up the production.

Record Keepers: They maintain the daily production record of the members, the inflow and outflow of goods, and are responsible for the overall transaction of goods and raw materials. They also make out the payment details of the workers, every 15 days.

Material Distributors: The person in charge measures the material and gives the average weight to the workers.

Centre Co-ordinator: Keeps a track on the centre production and ensures the quality and timely delivery of the finished products and manages the team at the units.

Poonam, a SEWA member, says, “I could now realise the greediness of the contractors/sub-contractors. I always felt that I am not paid well, but have never had the courage to negotiate with them.”

SEWA is a member of the National Homeworkers Group (NHG). Set up by the Ethical Trading Initiative, the NHG is a multi-stakeholder agency, overseeing the implementation of the guidelines in areas where home workers are based. The NHG is the first of its kind to promote and guide responsible corporate action on home working. It is a groundbreaking initiative that brings together a wide range of organisations that work together to identify what constitutes 'good practice' in code implementation. They then promote and share this good practice.

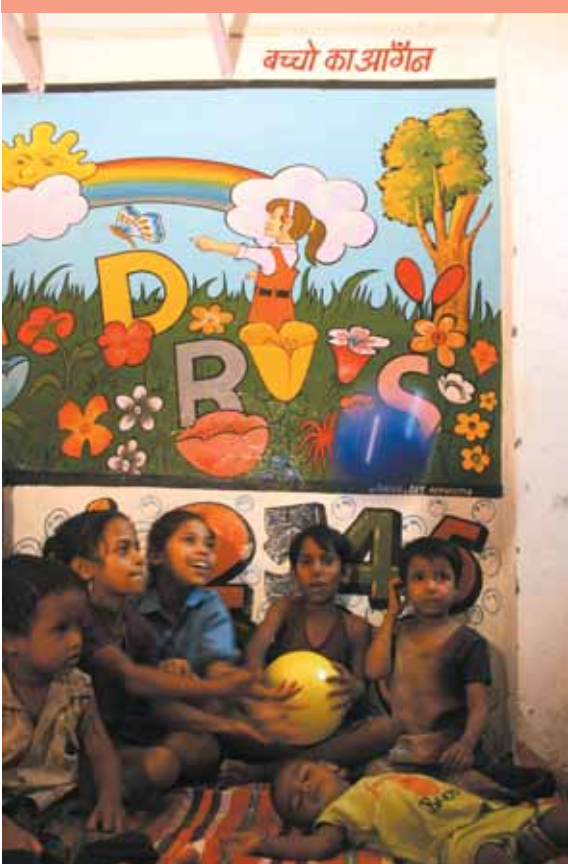


Most of the women are from migrant families of western Uttar Pradesh and are familiar with the rudimentary skills of zari embroidery. Their skills are enhanced through training given by master trainers in the existing locations.

The objective is to build the skills of the women home workers, both as an alternative employment strategy as well as to hone their existing skills to service a global clientele. In this way, SEWA addresses the barriers that women home-based workers face in building skills—household and childcare responsibilities, restrictions on mobility and interaction with the male members and lack of education.

The SEWA staff also strives to develop a 'business culture' among members, constantly interacting with the women workers to emphasise the need for the timely completion of

SEWA Support



work in order to earn a steady income. They are educated about design patterns and embroidery details. SEWA runs the government-supported Gender Resource Centre to conduct skill building classes for new members.

Other SEWA support services:

- Access to financial services through SEWA Thrift and Credit Society (savings, credit, insurance) to build and create assets
- Provision of social security—healthcare, childcare and insurance—to combat the risks faced by them and their families
- Designing special corners for children at the centres
- Supplementary education is provided for the members' children
- Building collective, organised strength (through their associations) so that members can actively participate in the planning, implementation and monitoring processes of the programme
- Assistance in civic issues



The SEWA Delhi experience of linking poor women home-based workers to the global market through the establishment of Embroidery Centres runs on several key principles:

- The basic assumption behind the Embroidery Centre is the acknowledgement of home-based workers and the reasons why women prefer home-work. It thus makes a conscious attempt to include the flexibility and advantages of home-work in this model
- It is run like a work distribution centre where home workers choose to work or take work home
- It is located close to the home workers' homes
- It is flexible in its working hours

Linking Lives

- More than five hundred women home-based workers are benefitting from this initiative
- The women have earned a total income of about Rs 1,500,000 in two years
- Established links with 10 export houses

- It is a community-based initiative and remains responsive to the community needs of 'women only' staff or restrictions on mobility of the women members
- It eliminates middlemen and links directly with the suppliers and retailers to access global markets
- It addresses fluctuations in the market by establishing a wider link with export houses and building diversity and scale of skills
- It is a local platform for training and skill development of SEWA members
- It addresses child labour issues by building awareness, close community monitoring and promoting educational linkages
- It adopts an approach of building the members' capacity and ensures self-reliance among the members

SEWA plans to scale-up its programme by establishing links with more export houses. It will strive towards converting the centre into a self-sustainable enterprise and register a cooperative that would be owned, managed and operated by the SEWA members.

SEWA has started sub-centres in these areas with the objective of reaching out to more workers. It is important to match the production orders with the total capacity of the area. Similarly, SEWA has started training in members' areas for the women. The aim is to train the workers and then link them to the SEWA Embroidery Centre. There are plans for further expansion in the NCR region in the next three years.



SEWA plans to scale-up its programme by establishing links with more export houses

SEWA Delhi



Promoted by SEWA Bharat as part of its mandate to develop new SEWAs, SEWA Delhi began promoting self-help groups in 1999 and has been working since with women workers of the informal sector in the city. Currently SEWA Delhi has a presence in five slum clusters: Jehangirpuri, Raghubir Nagar, Nandnagri, Rajiv Nagar and Anand Vihar.

Currently, SEWA Delhi is involved in:

- Unionising women members, especially street vendors, construction workers and home-based workers
- Employment generation activities such as embroidery
- Development activities such as micro finance and micro insurance
- Working with government departments to ensure the successful delivery of services and government schemes such as pension schemes to poor people
- Conducting non-formal education and personality development programmes for children



SEWA Delhi has set up Embroidery Centres for its members, which link the workers directly to the exporters and retailers. This innovative model has already attracted 10 export houses that turn to these talented women for their embroidery expertise, leading to a win-win situation for all.



www.sewadelhi.org
www.sewabharat.org