

# Report on Exposure visit of Uttarakhand team



Training By:



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## Summary Report of Uttarakhand team Exposure Visit

**I. Duration of Visit:** May 7 to 12, 2012

**II. Background of Participants:**

Seven participants from “Uttarakhand Livelihood Improvement Project for the Himalayas”, a programme supported by International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) visited SEWA from May 7 to May 12, 2012. Three project staff and four federation leaders came for this six day exposure visit. The major activity of the participants is agriculture and dairy.

**III. Objective of the Training:**

The objectives of the training programme were to:

- Exposure visit to SEWA and its various activities
- Interaction with the farmer groups of SEWA
- To understand the organizational structure, the management practices and involvement of members in planning and implementation.



#### **IV. Summary of Training:**

The six day training was structured to make the participants fully aware and learn from the institutions and organizations that SEWA was able to build in the past forty years. The objective was to understand how after being organized at SEWA, the livelihoods of the women have increased, thereby helping the quality of life of their families to improve.

The emphasis of the visit was to have an overview of SEWA and interact with various structures formed by women - groups, associations, federations, dairy cooperatives food processing groups, bank, garment and embroidery workers' company, farmer groups, agro produce company, tree growers' coopearatives etc. During this exposure, the team also interacted with members of Swashryee Mandals/Groups, artisans, farmer groups, women shareholders of companies promoted by SEWA. This also enabled them to know more about their trades.

The team also learnt about the training process at SEWA and interacted with the master trainers at the Community Learning Centres. They also learnt about about SEWA and SEWA's sister organization like, Mahila SEWA Cooperative Bank, RUDI which is Rural Distribution Initiative for Agro –commodities; SEWA Trade Facilitation Center (STFC) which is a not for profit company owned and promoted by the artisan women and visited their shop Hansiba; a cooperative of agriculture labourers at Devpura, Anand; three Community Learning Business Resource Centers which are owned and managed by tobacco workers, small and marginal farmers & artisans; a women run Milk Cooperative; and a cooperative owned and managed by landless agriculture labourers, which is now as an eco tourism centre.

In all the visits, participants learnt about the struggle faced by members to reach the stage where they are today and the efforts that they have put in and sacrifices they have made to achieve the success. The participants were amazed to see the oneness and unity amongst SEWA members. By the experience sharing of the members at all Community Learning Business Resource Centres (CLBRC), they understood that this unity comes from the mutual trust and the strong bond that they share.

The group was very much impressed by the huge membership base that SEWA has and the network SEWA members have. They shared that once they go back they would organize more and more people and try to form a network with maximum number of members.

During different visits, they interacted with members and they learnt about the different scientific agro practices and farming techniques that are being used by the farmers, supply chain of RUDI, structure of District Association and also learnt about backward and forward linkages, supply chain of all the activities the groups undertook.

The visiting team also shared techniques they use in their state and shared that they would also adapt some of the similar techniques that they have seen in this visit to SEWA and share with all the members there.

The participants were taken to CLBRC, Pij where they could learn about RUDI processing center and understand processing work of RUDI by SEWA members. They also interacted with RUDI sisters and understood the whole supply chain. They had few questions and wanted to understand the benefits that the farmers get through selling their produce to the RUDI. They could understand that RUDI ensures the fair market rates to farmers' produce. The structure of District Association and all the activities in the district were also explained to them.

The participants were very impressed by interacting with the cooperative members from the milk cooperative and tree growers' cooperative. They were impressed to know that all the members of the cooperative were very clear of their five years' vision and were part of the planning, implementation and monitoring process. In the milk cooperative, they particularly liked the fat testing machine, which was used by women to measure the fat content. They shared that members are into dairy activity in their area too, but they are not measuring the fat content, but are simply selling it at the pre decided rates. They would surely go back and introduce this concept amongst the members which would enable the members to get more prices for better quality of milk.



The participants had also visited CLBRC and Salt farm at Surendranagar where they could interact with farmer members of farmer groups and also backward and forward linkages of

agriculture. The participants had asked about the benefits that they get after setting up CLBRC. It was explained by the members that they now use certified seeds and also orient maximum farmer members to use the certified seeds. As the association has the license to sell the certified seeds, the members can purchase seeds at a reasonable rate and they also shared that people now recognize them as Entrepreneurs. The participants were also explained the structure of Kisan Vikas Mandal (Farmer Group) and different agriculture practices including mixed cropping.



The participants were also taken on a visit to Hansiba museum, which is a museum set up by artisan members of SEWA. This museum has revived all the traditions followed by the various communities of Banaskantha district, Gujarat. They were very happy to see how everything was well organized and age old traditions were revived. The new generation would come easily come to know about this. When they came to know that the museum was named on Hansiba, who is the very first embroidery member of SEWA, they said that as long as the museum would be in place, memories of Hansibaben would also be with every one till then. They also interacted with embroidery members and understood the whole supply chain. They had several questions and keenly understood each process and aspect of the supply chain, with major interest on knowing the quality control process and profit distribution mechanism. The participants wanted to know the functions of fodder bank. Members explained that the main objective of fodder bank is to sell fodder at a reasonable rate to the farmers of 15 to 20 villages surrounding the CLBRC. The participants were even curious to know the difference between the lives of women before joining and after joining SEWA.



The participants were taken to Shree Vanlakshmi Tree Growers' Cooperative, Ganeshpura which is a cooperative and an eco tourism center, run and managed by women on 10 Acre land. The participants had questions about number of members registered under the cooperative and number of members regularly working in the cooperative. When they heard the struggle story of the women who now work and manage the cooperative, participants asked how they overcame this phase. It was then shared by the Manager of the cooperative that through the time to time guidance provided by SEWA and the skill up gradation trainings by SEWA Manager Ni School, members of the cooperative could reach till here. The participants understood how the center functions and how the members could achieve sustainability.

On the last day, during the wrap up session, when asked what biggest learning they would they like to take back after this visit, all of them unanimously said that organizing and sense of ownership is what we would immediately share with everyone there. They said that they are very keen to go back and share with other sisters and can hardly wait to get back. They also mentioned that there were many learnings to take back and each day has been a great learning from them. When asked whether they would be interested in becoming SEWA members, they all immediately said yes and started asking how they and other sisters from Uttarakhand could start becoming SEWA members. They were also happy to know that we are already working with some partners in Uttarakhand and wanted to join hands with us.

They shared that with the support of the Ajeevika programme, they have reached this level and would now want to take the benefit of growing further and achieve sustainability. The bottom up approach of planning undertaken by SEWA promoted groups helps the activities become sustainable. They would also like to take this approach. They would also like to take integrated approach in their implementation strategy. The SEWA Manager Ni School's training approach

is to hand hold the members till they are confident and the trainings are not limited to one time trainings, but involve regular monitoring, period follow ups and continuous handholding.

The team understood the management structure of SEWA in deep and was highly impressed by the same.

#### **V. Feedback from Participants:**

##### **Ms. Sombala Sharma, District Management Unit, Aajiveeka Pariyojana, Uttarakhand**

During our Exposure visit and interaction with members, I could learn that SEWA acts as a mother. If there is any problem faced by the members or the structures created by the members at the grassroot level, then SEWA holds members' hands and provide them support in terms of trainings and gives inputs and direction as and when required. We also would like to work with our members in the same way rather than staying bounded by regulations of the projects. This approach would surely help our members in becoming sustainable.

##### **Ms. Kosha Bhatt, Chair person of the federation, Tihri, Uttarakhand**

After visiting SEWA, I can say that I have learnt so many things here. If we can replicate even 20% of what we have learnt here, then we will consider our visit as successful. I am very impressed seeing the organizing and strength of women here. We right now have membership base in few villages. But once we go back we would try to organize more people from every possible village of our district. I got immense pleasure seeing how illiterate women can run and manage a Tree Growers' cooperative. We always believed that managing structures is a task that educated people can only do. But this is a learning that I take back and would like to invest in training the grassroot members and turn them into managers, just like SEWA Manager Ni School does.

##### **Munnidevi Semwal, Chair person of Alman Swayat Sahmahiti, Chamoli, Uttarakhand**

I am amazed to see how women treat SEWA as their family. They carry out the activities under the guidance of SEWA, just like they do any other routine activity for their family. The three things that impressed me are; 1) Milk cooperative, 2) STFC and 3) Strength of organizing. Once we go back we would also organize more people. One more thing that I was happy to see is that there is no problem of drinking and abusing women and children. In our part, this is a big problem.

##### **Mr Shankarsingh Samant, Manager, District Management Unit, Aajiveeka Pariyojna, Uttarakhand**

The most motivating aspects during the visit were unity amongst members, understanding and the bonding that members' share and their confidence level. During the interaction I could learn that members themselves are involved in Business Planning process and therefore are in a better position to implement the same, which leads to success of their enterprises. The trainings that

members are provided here are not bookish but they get practical training which SEWA Manager Ni School provides and the training support stays with them till the time they implement it. Once we go back we would also start working with integrated approach and try to strengthen our business plan.

**Mr Bhupinder Singh, District Management Unit, Aajiveeka Pariyojna, Uttarakhand**

The every center I visit, I see the miracles everywhere. I had recently visited Badrinath and Kedarnath. But the joy and pleasure that I got after visiting SEWA is definitely more than I felt after visiting Badrinath and Kedarnath. The women here are so empowered and the story of the struggle of each woman has taught us the different lessons. As I am too closely involved in working with Milk Cooperative, I would also apply the same mechanism that we learnt here at SEWA in our cooperative.

## **VI. Way Forward**

The team proposed that following the visit, the team would carry out the follow up activities wherein SEWA could provide support as a resource person.

- Share their experiences with other sisters in Uttarakhand
- Hold a vision building workshop
- Strengthen their business plans and marketing strategies
- Become members of SEWA
- Training on different activities by SEWA Manager Ni School
- Set up a Center in Uttarakhand
- Improve the milk practices using the fat testing machines.
- Participate in the study for Market Integration for small and marginal farmers
- Discuss with their project authorities on partnering with SEWA on NRLM