

A. News from SETU Africa

Dissemination Workshop-Durban, South Africa

In the month of June, 2015 Ms. Mirai Chatterjee, Director, SEWA Social Security and Ms. Susan Thomas, Coordinator, Health and Child Care Programmes visited Durban. During this visit a dissemination workshop was organised to bring together women's groups, MBOs, NGOs and grass-root organisations representing informal women workers on 24th June, 2015. The primary focus of the workshop was to lay out a roadmap to take forward the initiative already taken up through the SETU-Africa Programme in South Africa. The emphasis was to encourage the women leaders to take the lead in planning and developing strategies for this idea.

The participants came from urban, peri-urban and rural areas around the city of Durban and represented a wide spectrum of trades and organisations. The workshop brought together around 24 participants representing diverse trades, women's groups, NGOs, Cooperatives, MBOs and grass-root organisations.

The workshop started with all-faith prayer from India and a Zulu song by all the participants followed by a prayer in Zulu, and a round of introduction of all participants. The participants observed a moment of silence to remember Sister Judy Mulqueeny who was actively involved with the SETU-Africa team in the initial days.

Ms. Mirai Chatterjee initiated the discussion by a power point presentation highlighting about the progress till date in SETU Africa programme and the further way-forward. It includes:-

- a) South Africa-Updates under the SETU-Africa Programme.
- b) Emerging needs in South Africa.
- c) Major learning's from the SETU-Africa Programme, which would give the direction for the future to address the emerging needs.
- d) Finally a few questions for discussions were put forth for all the participants to take this engagement forward.

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- Are we ready to take this initiative forward?
- If yes, who will do it?
- How should we move forward?

A detailed open forum discussion were held and everyone shared their ideas and experience till date. Finally with the consensus of all present, it was decided to form a committee representing all organisations present. It was felt that the presence of nearly all who were invited for the workshop illustrated their commitment to taking the SETU Africa work forward, and their solidarity and strength. This workshop built on the first one organised by VimoSEWA two years ago. Some of the major issues that emerged from this workshop mirrored those of the earlier one. These are:

“I learned about working as a collective from SEWA. Then I came back and set up a national umbrella body of informal workers called South Africa Informal Traders Association, SAITA. We need to be heard by our government.”

- Phumzile(SAIWA)

- Strengthening cooperatives
- Providing financial services
- Trading and marketing

The new committee, it was decided, would be broadly based on the following principles:

- It would offer support to each other and strengthen the groups.
- Representatives from all sectors and groups would form the committee.
- It should not be too large and would be restricted to Durban for now, as it would be difficult for people from far off to attend the meetings.
- It would organise frequent dialogues between the members, and between them and SEWA.
- It would be based on the principles of self-help i.e. if someone in the group asks for capacity-building of their members; the committee should take initiative to arrange it.
- One person would be the convenor and would communicate with everyone about meeting dates, arrange the place and circulate the minutes of meetings.

Mr. Muzi Phewa from SANACO was unanimously nominated as the Convener. The first meeting of this committee is scheduled for the 1st week of August, 2015. A Zulu name for this committee would be decided by the committee later.

“In India, at SEWA, we learn about self-help. They are strong on self-help. I was very impressed by SEWA’s four pillars: Capitalisation, Social Security, Capacity-building and Voice and Representation. We learned that all these together lead to self-reliance.”

- Muzi (SANACO)

The members who volunteered to serve on the newly-formed committee are:

1. Muzi Phewa-SANACO (Convenor)
2. Thandiwe Xulu -Silwa Nobuphofu
3. BongekileMhlongo- Kwa Swayimami Cooperative
4. Doris Ngidi- KhulaKahle
5. Joyce Fikile Mphili- Thandolwethu Community Centre
6. Thandi Muthwa- PhilaSandle
7. Thokozani Ollatunde- Ubumbano Alliance
8. Zodwa Khumalo- Muti Market
9. ZandileSibisi-SASEWA
10. Den Sibisi- Isongololo
11. Phumzile Xulu-SAIWA

How can VimoSEWA support?

- VimoSEWA and the SETU Africa team will continue the sisterhood and partnership.
- Regular communication will be undertaken to pass on information on new developments, the newsletter and including news from SA.
- All will be linked via Facebook and our website links will be sent to all.
- Government of India will be approached for funds for capacity-building.
- We will meet the South African High Commissioner in New Delhi and share the outcomes of our discussions and this report.
- In the Africa-India summit later this year, a short film on this partnership will be screened and VimoSEWA will also talk about people- to-people partnerships.
- We will keep in touch through e-mails.

Her Excellency, DrGennetZewide, Ambassador of Ethiopia to India, in conversation



Dr Gennet Zewide recently published a book: ‘Resistance, Freedom and Empowerment’ about women in prison in Ethiopia. Dr Zewide has been a leader in her country and served as its Minister of Education. In discussing her book, she explained how empowerment of women in Ethiopia could only occur if they had more employment opportunities, the ability to make choices, access to resources, and access to health care, education

and other essential services for self-reliance. She explained that she wrote the book to celebrate women’s contribution to Ethiopia’s development. She also recalled the immense contributions and struggles of many women and men for a democratic Ethiopia and that there is still unfinished business—the struggle against poverty, disease and for gender equality. She

said that Ethiopian and Indian women need to hold hands and fight patriarchy together and also against poverty.

I interviewed Her Excellency, Dr Gennet Zewide, in late May 2015 in New Delhi so that her journey in her own country and India could be better understood by us, her SEWA sisters.

Dr Gennet shared that she was born in Dessie to an Amhara family, and it was in high school in Addis Ababa, that her political activism developed. She explained: "I am a creation of that period. All over the world in the 60's and 70's students were involved in political action, civil rights movements, especially the women's and socialist movements. I first became active in the student movement and then the women's movement."

Ethiopia's revolution was a "socialist" one and saw the end of the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. It brought in the military government called the Derg for seventeen years, which ushered a Red Terror in the country. Dr Gennet was at the university at that time and was arrested as an activist of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, and jailed for three and a half years. Her husband was also arrested but jailed in a different prison. Her mother raised her two daughters at that time. In the first year of her detention, she was not permitted to see any family members. She was also subjected to torture.

When I asked her about those difficult years, she smiled and said:" When you are young, anything is possible." After her release from prison, she went back to the university where she had been an assistant lecturer at the time of her arrest. She then obtained a Ford Foundation scholarship to do her Masters in Business Education in America.

After the Derg regime ended, she was appointed the Minister of Education for thirteen years by the new government. She crafted and implemented the new education policy in Ethiopia which was to have far-reaching impact.

In 2006 she was appointed Ethiopia's Ambassador to India, a post she holds till today. She is also the Dean of all African Ambassadors in New Delhi, as its most senior and experienced diplomat. She is also grandmother to three grandchildren of her two daughters who themselves are professionals.

I asked Dr Gennet how we in India, and at SEWA, could support our Ethiopian sisters. She replied without hesitation: "By sharing our experiences, by supporting each other and also by sharing our knowledge and technologies."

Mirai Chatterjee
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