



Strengthening African People's Organizations and NGOs

SETU AFRICA

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"It gives me immense pleasure to share with you all the first issue of SETU Africa news-letter. This issue is mainly focusing about introduction of SETU Africa programme and different activities held till date.

In coming issues along with latest updates of programme we would also like to share about different activities in SEWA and about happenings in different African organisations associated with this programme.

I hope this newsletter will be a great tool to share our views and mutual learning under this SETU Africa programme."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mirai Chatterjee'.

Mirai Chatterjee
Chairperson,
National Insurance VimoSEWA Cooperative Ltd.

I. Introduction

Over the last fifteen years, SEWA has developed close associations with people's organizations in South Africa, Ghana and Namibia to promote the rights and well-being of informal workers in those countries, especially women. Based on these interactions, it was felt that there is a lot of scope for exchange of ideas, and also a need for a platform for regular interaction and mutual learning between SEWA and our colleagues in African continent.

Background of this programme:

Vimo SEWA's proposal of Strengthening African People's Organizations and NGOs, called SETU- Africa, is being supported by the Ministry of External Affairs, GoI for implementation in the following five countries in Africa under their cooperation with African nations called IAFS-II:

- a. Tanzania
- b. South Africa
- c. Ghana
- d. Senegal
- e. Ethiopia

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This project is an initiative to build solidarity with sisters and brothers in Africa and to share SEWA's approach of organizing women workers into their own organizations for self-reliance and economic empowerment. Vimo SEWA is implementing the SETU-Africa programme along with 5 other SEWA-promoted sister organizations.

SEWA hopes to promote exchanges for mutual learning, collaboration and action on the following activities:

1. **Micro-finance**—Promotion of self-help groups to provide integrated financial services (Savings, credit, insurance and pension), their capacity-building and extension of financial literacy.
2. **Micro-enterprise and Livelihood Promotion**- Examining what is feasible vis-a-vis markets and then helping organizations set up their own viable micro-enterprises.
3. **Micro-insurance**---Developing plans for extending micro-insurance to local communities, especially women and capacity-building of local organizations to helping them to implement this.
4. **Health and Child Care**---Developing appropriate systems (tailored to local conditions and needs) to reach local communities, especially women and children, with basic primary health care, including health education and life-saving health information.
5. **Capacity-building for leadership** -Management of their own activities and running their own organizations.

Activities in each African country are initiated by first developing a proper understanding of the needs of the working poor, especially women.

Major Objectives of this programme:

- To promote an integrated approach to poverty reduction and self-reliance for women and families in 5 African countries, through microfinance, microenterprise and livelihoods promotion, micro-insurance, health and child care and capacity-building for leadership and management by local people, especially women.
- To undertake studies to assess local people's needs with regard to microfinance, microenterprise and livelihoods promotion, micro-insurance, health and child care and capacity-building for leadership and management by local people, especially women, with the help of local African and Indian researchers.
- To organize workshops in each country to disseminate the findings of the studies and develop action plans on the five areas of activity mentioned above.
- To provide training, including exposure visits, on the five priority areas for each country.
- To develop future collaboration and support to countries of the African continent, based on the findings of the studies, the workshops and the action plans developed in conjunction with our African partners.

II. Work done under this programme till date

The SETU-Africa programme started with some preparatory work like developing human resources, setting up financial and administrative systems, orientation of the project team and background study of different countries of operation.

A. Need assessment workshop and field visit in South Africa- May, 2013

A.1. Field visit of different community based organization, Government institution and Historical places in South Africa.

South Africa is the first country of operation in this project and to understand the issues from member's perspective a team of SEWA visited South Africa in May, 2013. The main objectives of our field visits were-

- To understand the ground realities.
- To get a community perspective on different aspects of local people's lives and struggles.
- To understand the socio-economic context of the region.

Team visited several community based organization in and around Durban and interacted with them on several issues of their work and life.

To understand the history and culture of South Africa and its people we have visited Constitutional Hill, Vilakazi Street and the Apartheid Museum. When we entered through the women's prison at Constitutional Hill, the struggle of prisoners and their suffering was palpable. To read the accounts of women who were detained here for no offence but having come to buy fish or having demanded their right to work and live is heartrending.

As a part of our visit to government institutions we visited the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH) in Johannesburg. It is a part of the National Health Department working with miners and other workers. This institute has a state of art Infrastructure to study, diagnose and advocate for workers' health. It also houses the largest Data base on occupational health in South Africa and uses this to bring policy-level changes in South Africa. An important aspect of the NIOH's work is achieving international standards in Occupational health, and ensuring this by promoting health awareness, research, and tracking of Workers' health and financing various aspects of occupational health. The NIOH has recently also initiated research on informal sector workers.

A.2. Durban Workshop

This workshop was organized as a part of our South Africa visit, aimed at exchange of ideas for enhancing mutual understanding and strengthening relationship with different unions, cooperatives and civil society of South Africa. The two-day workshop was organized on 7th and 8th of May 2013, at Glenmore Pastoral Centre, Durban, South Africa.



Inauguration of workshop in Durban

This workshop was attended by more than 34 community based organizations including NGOs, cooperatives and cooperative federation. On this occasion government representative and councilor Judaline Mulqueeny was also represented views of Government of South Africa.

As a chief guest of this workshop the Consul General of India, Durban, Mr. Vinod Kumar Sharma shared his perspectives on the scope of the project and India's perspective on strengthening cooperation and collaboration with South Africa. He felt that the project was aptly titled SETU which Means building bridges in India. Remarking on the long cooperative history in India beginning with the first law in 1904, he underlined how India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, wanted to make the cooperative movement the basic activity of India in every village, as also elsewhere and finally to make the cooperative approach the common thinking of India. Since then, there Have been legislative as well as policy measures to provide encouragement and support for cooperatives.

B. Need assessment workshop and field visit in Ethiopia- August, 2013

Ethiopia is the second country which was visited under the project. Ms. Mirai Chatterjee of SEWA Social Security had met with Ms. Tsigie Haile of Women in Self-employment (WISE) and Ms. Tegeste Belayneh, a journalist and poet on earlier occasions. Ms. Haile in fact Visited SEWA in 1996 and incorporated many of her leanings when she set up WISE in Ethiopia in 1997. WISE expressed an interest in partnering with SEWA for the SETU-Africa project, and this led to the plan to visit Ethiopia in August 2013.

A team of nine persons from SEWA visited Ethiopia from 18th-29th August, 2013. The visit had three main components. These included a three day workshop, field visits to civil society organizations and meetings with senior government officials.

B.1. Field visits and meeting with Indian Ambassador to Ethiopia, in Addis Ababa

We have visited and appraised the Ambassador, H.E. Mr. Bhagwant Singh Bishnoi, in Addis Ababa about this project. We asked for his suggestions. He shared some of his experiences with civil society and social organizations in Ethiopia and about the strong historical relationship between India and Ethiopia.

We have done comprehensive field visits in and around Addis Ababa. We visited different community-based organizations like co-operatives and NGOs in urban and rural areas of Ethiopia. These organizations are engaged in different economic and social activities, and in organizing and mobilizing of communities.

We have interacted with members engaged in different economic activities like weaving, agriculture, dairy, and microfinance. During these visits, we tried to understand their socio-economic conditions and their perception about policies and government services. These field visits have provided in-depth ideas about ground realities and we have discussed these experiences with different stake-holders.

Our visit to different historical places and churches in Addis Ababa helped us to know about the people, culture, their long association with India, different issues and eventually their aspirations. We have visited some of the oldest orthodox churches in Addis Ababa and it was helpful to understand and connect with their culture and history.

We visited the office of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Cooperative Agency in Addis Ababa. Mr. Bedru Dedgeba Ejabo, Deputy Director-General of this department appraised us in detail about cooperative laws, status of cooperative and government vision about cooperative in Ethiopia.

We also visited office of Federal Micro & Small Enterprise Development Agency and learned of its activities, especially with unemployed women and youth. Mr. Bekele Mengistu Tesema, Deputy Director-General of Facilitation shared about the structure of the department and the commitment of their government for this sector.

B.2. Workshop in Addis Ababa

We organized a workshop in Addis on 22nd to 24th August, 2013. There were about 44 participants from 20 organizations. Participants were from different types of organizations like cooperatives, federations, insurance companies and microfinance institutions.



Inauguration of workshop in Addis Ababa

The workshop was inaugurated by H.E. Genet Teshome, Director General, Asia & Oceania Directorate General, FDRE, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and H.E. Jayshree Kundu, First Secretary, Indian Embassy in Ethiopia.

Shri Teshome shared about the relationship between India and Ethiopia in different fields: trade, line of credit, and technology exchange. He appreciated the role of India in the development of Ethiopia. Ms. Kundu highlighted the strong people-to-people contact between our two countries and our long and cordial history.

During this three-day workshop, issues pertaining to every activity areas were discussed in a participatory way and we tried to build a common understanding based on discussions among participants and SEWA's experiences. Participants very much appreciated the story of one of our colleagues, Padmaben, who is a second generation worker-leader in SEWA, and the impact of integrated approach of SEWA from a member perspective. Participants mentioned a range of issues that they had learned from the workshop. They also mentioned that they would like to know more about the support received by SEWA, the challenges it confronted and more examples of practical experiences. Participants were positive about the interactive methodology but felt that more time should have been given for discussion.

C. Exposure visit to South Africa by SEWA team, August,2013

A 12-member team visited South Africa from August 11, 2013-August 19, 2013. The team visited Johannesburg and Durban and interacted with different organizations and its members to get an in-depth idea about issues from local people, especially women's perspective. The majority of members of this team were associated with SEWA in different capacities and they themselves are workers of the informal economy. They are also experienced organizers and leaders of their organizations. We identified these representatives through discussion with different SEWA sister organizations of this project, considering their association with SEWA and understanding of its work.

The team was encouraged to understand the issues from local people's perspective, and to discuss about people's needs. They were to keep in mind a "bottom-up" approach.

In Johannesburg, the team visited to the different historical places like Constitution Hill, Apartheid Museum, and Vilakazi Street and interacted with a few organizations working in field of Microfinance and livelihood.

In the later stage of the visit, the team visited Durban and interacted with different community- based organizations and their members. Organizations are engaged in different activities like Microfinance, Micro insurance, Livelihood, Burial Societies, Child Care and providing social services to the community. The team was facilitated by a local facilitator and issues were shared through structured Focused Group Discussions (FGDs).

The Team visited the Phoenix Settlement and interacted with Ela Gandhi, granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi, to understand the history of the freedom struggle in South Africa, and his role in it. Our team was part of the flag-hoisting ceremony at the residence of the Indian Consul General in Durban on 15th August.

D. Exposure visit of South African and Ethiopian team to SEWA-March,2014

A team of twenty six participants have visited SEWA for training-cum-exposure visits from Ethiopia and South Africa. Participants were representatives of different community-based organizations from South Africa and Ethiopia. The date was 23rd March to 3rd April 2014 the venue was VimoSEWA, Ahmedabad.



Inauguration of exposure visit of SEWA by team from South Africa and Ethiopia

The objective of this training-cum-exposure visit is to understand and promote an integrated approach to poverty reduction and self-reliance for women and their families through microfinance, microenterprise and livelihoods promotion, micro-insurance, health and child care and capacity-building for leadership and management by local people, especially women. This visit aims to promote mutual learning and sharing about these issues of women to organize, undertake collective action and build their own member-based organizations. It is a tailor-made capacity-building programme, jointly prepared with African colleagues for developing workers' solidarity based on Gandhian values and approach for their holistic development.

III. Meeting with His Excellency Ambassador of Senegal to India, in New Delhi

To share about this project we met with the Ambassador of Senegal, H.E Mr. Amadou Moustapha Diouf in New Delhi and appraised him about our project. He appreciated this effort and asked us to coordinate with Minister of Women, Family and Children, Minister of Trade, Entrepreneurship and the informal sector, Minister of Health and Social Welfare in Senegal and appraise them about this project. He also promised to extend the fullest cooperation during our visit to Senegal.

IV. Meeting with Her Excellency, Ambassador of Ethiopia to India in New Delhi

Ms. Mirai Chatterjee met with Her Excellency, Ambassador of Ethiopia to India Dr Gennet in New Delhi to appraise her about our programme and to find some common ground for action by the women of our two countries, their issues and the overall wellbeing of our people. Dr Gennet shared her views on how we can build further solid bonds between the two countries with women in the lead. They discussed about our SETU – Africa Programme and the role and support by Government of India and the possibilities it holds for Ethiopian and India women in particular. Dr Gennet Suggested that we could focus on the following.

- Marketing and trade of craft and other products made preferably by women's cooperative
- We talked of women's bank in Ethiopia, she felt it could be possible and we should pursue the idea. She is ready to support and guide us
- We discussed about capacity building and training and how we can support each other.

V. Annual review of SETU Africa Programme with senior team of SEWA

The SETU – Africa Programme has completed one year in November 2013. The senior team of SEWA reviewed the program of this program till date, and the Programme Management Unit (PMU) shared its experiences and its future action plan with MEA on 18th December 2013. The major issues discussed in that meeting were:

Review of SETU – Africa Programme and its activities

- Major learnings
- Challenges and issues
- Some proposed concrete outcomes of the programme

VI. Action plan for future

- Possibly setting up of women's cooperative bank – one each in Ethiopia and South Africa.
- Set up system a system or organization to trade between the women cooperatives of our country cutting out any middle men. This would be cooperative-to-cooperative venture where African women will sell their products in India and vice versa.
- Initiate capacity-building (two-way) to help women organize, develop their own union, cooperatives and run these independently. Specific activity-wise capacity building, like for child care in Ethiopia, is also a possibility.



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