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SEWA'S WATER CAMPAIGN

Reema Nanavaty, Director of Rural Development, foresaw a bright future for SEWA's Water Campaign. She expected that the campaign would expand rapidly. Water from the Narmada dam would open up a whole range of opportunities, such as providing water to places where there had never been any. However, she also foresaw that the campaign's biggest challenge lay in ensuring that the local water supply was governed and managed by poor women in an increasing number of villages.

Women and Water

In early 1995, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) decided to rally its rural members in a statewide campaign around one single issue that was affecting the majority of them. During a meeting with the district coordinators, Elaben Bhatt, founder and former General Secretary of SEWA, proposed that the issue should be identified by SEWA members themselves.

Thus a meeting of SEWA workers and SEWA grassroots leaders, representing around 250 villages and eight districts, was organized in May 1995. During this meeting, the growing water crisis emerged as the most important issue. The water shortage not only denied a major part of SEWA's rural members, and their families, the basic right to safe drinking water, but also hampered women in achieving full employment and economic self-reliance, the *leitmotiv* of all of SEWA's activities. Hasiben Ramsibhai Thakar (female), a salt worker and SEWA member, commented, "We spend our days thinking about water, looking for water, and collecting water. We cannot go to the saltpans for work. Looking after our kids and sending them to school is impossible".

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At the start of the campaign, SEWA knew that they had to overcome some formidable challenges. Though women, and girls, were the main users of the domestic water supply, the water sector was a male domain. Resources needed to be mobilized, as water-related interventions often require large investments and many of SEWA's rural members were affected by water problems. Moreover, SEWA had limited experience in the sector and needed to build its capacity, and that of its members, from scratch. SEWA decided that the water campaign was to be managed by the women themselves.

The Water Situation in India

India had made major strides in providing its people with safe drinking water: 92% and 86% of the urban and rural population respectively had been covered [United Nations Statistics Division, 2002]. However, as a result of the target-driven approach, water was supplied at places inconvenient to the local population, schemes were poorly designed and maintained, and the sustainability and quality of the water supply were issues for major concern [World Bank; 1998]. Increasing population pressure, falling ground water tables—the most important water source for a major part of the population—increasing competition from the industrial and agricultural sector, and unsustainable water management practices were pushing India towards a major drinking water crisis.

Of the 17,188 villages in Gujarat, 11,339 suffered from a drinking water shortage, according to the Official Master Plan of the Government of Gujarat (GoG [Kapoor et al, 2001]). The 2002 drought affected more than 100 million people in India. That year, 13 of the 25 districts in Gujarat received less than 40% of the normal annual rainfall. Some of these districts had not witnessed normal monsoon rainfall for the previous four years.

In some villages, women spent up to six hours a day fetching water, on average, adversely affecting their health, economic productivity, and the social well-being of the entire household. Often girls were taken out of school during the summer to fetch water or take care of their siblings while their mothers searched for drinking water. Tensions in the communities increased as a result of the water scarcity and sometimes entire villages were forced to migrate in search of water, work, and fodder for their cattle.

The main development responsibilities and part of the legislative powers in the water sector rested with the state governments. Though the central government had some leverage in general, it did not have enough power to coordinate institutional issues. The problems of ensuring the sustainability and quality of the drinking water supply and enhancing the participation of local communities were further hampered by the fact that “legislative power, technical capabilities, planning skills, and operational responsibilities are dispersed across government layers [which is why], water institutions in India remain legally weak, functionally disjointed, sectorally biased, and regionally uncoordinated.” [Saleth and Dinar, 1999: 28].

In Gujarat the responsibility for domestic water supply was shared between the elected local governments—the *gram panchayat* (village council) and *zilla panchayat* (block council)—and the Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board (GWSSB). The GWSSB was responsible for the construction and maintenance of large-scale piped water supply schemes. Small water supply schemes were built either by the *gram panchayats* or the GWSSB but were operated by the local *gram panchayat*. Over the last three to four years, participation

and decentralization strengthened and more responsibilities were transferred to the local water boards and *pani samitees* (village water committees) or *gram panchayats*.

SEWA

Founded in 1972, SEWA had grown into a membership-based movement and trade union with the goal of obtaining full employment and economic self-reliance for its 700,000 self-employed women members¹. SEWA was not a typical non-governmental organization (NGO) but a “confluence of three movements—the labor movement, the co-operative movement and the women’s movement. It is a movement of self-employed women—their own home-grown movement in which they themselves are leaders, and through which their tremendous economic and social contribution gets recognized ...” [SEWA, 2002: 8].

SEWA’s programs combined two elements: struggle and development. The struggle was against the constraints imposed on women by their communities, society, and the economy as well as against the injustices faced by women. Development activities sought to augment the (economic) alternatives available to women. A third element of SEWA’s programs was well-targeted campaigns, such as the water campaign, that responded to pressing concerns raised by the women. These campaigns sought to improve the situation at the grassroots level as well as press for policy changes at local, national, and international levels. Most of SEWA’s programs and campaigns consisted of four types of activities: organizing women; capacity building; asset building; and social security.

*SEWA’s Organizational Structure*²

SEWA was governed by a two-tier level of elected representation of its grassroots members:

- The trade council was elected by the members of each of the trades — such as salt workers, traditional crafts women, dairy groups, and so on — in the ratio of 1 representative per 100 members.

In addition, and in parallel to the general Trade Council, each trade had its own Trade Committee with 15 to 50 members, that met monthly to discuss specific trade-related problems and solutions. All Trade Council members were also members of their respective Trade Committees.

- The Executive Committee of 25 members was elected every 3 years by the Trade Council. Representation on the Executive Committee reflected the proportion of the membership. The office bearers of the trade council were elected from among the Executive Committee members.

In 1976 SEWA’s Rural Development Department was formed. Recently, Reema Nanavaty, director Rural Development, who had the final responsibility for all SEWA’s rural development programs as well as the Water Campaign, had taken over this department. The

¹ Refer to **Exhibit 1** and **Exhibit 2**.

² Refer to **Exhibit 3**.

regular rural development programs were organized by district; for each district there was a coordinator in Ahmedabad and a local coordinator, who was based in the district. They reported directly to the Director of Rural Development. Although Reema Nanavaty was not directly involved in the day-to-day implementation of the activities—such as the water campaign—she provided guidance to her colleagues working at the district level. The weekly team meetings and field visits were her main sources for up-to-date information on the situation in the field.

As the Water Campaign spanned all rural districts where SEWA was working, the structure of the campaign differed from SEWA's regular programs. In each of the districts, one or two SEWA organizers were responsible for all water related activities. They reported to the coordinator of the water campaign as well as the two district coordinators. According to Bharti Bhavsar, coordinator of the water campaign, she spent a considerable amount of time coordinating water campaign activities with the district coordinators. In addition, because most of SEWA's programs were organized by district, the water campaign was drawing resources from a large number of different programs. This further increased the workload in terms of coordination and administration.

SEWA's Spearhead Teams

About five years previously, at a time when the SEWA membership base and programs started growing rapidly, SEWA realized that something needed to be done to ensure that in the future poor women remained in charge of their own programs. Hence, spearhead teams were formed for each district and exclusively for water issues. These spearhead teams consisted of SEWA grassroots members with proven leadership qualities who had acquired immense practical experience in a particular field such as water, savings-and-credits, and so on. These members were paid an honorarium by SEWA.

Continuous capacity building, formal and on-the-job, and strong local social networks had been the key to success for these teams. These teams played a pivotal role in SEWA's activities, as they were familiar with local conditions, related easily to poor village women, and could mobilize their social networks to involve other women in villages where SEWA was not working yet. Spearhead teams took care of a large part of the implementation of SEWA's programs.

A spearhead team in each of the districts supported the water campaign. There were 14 such teams with 108 members in total. Each of the spearhead teams was headed by one of its grassroots members while a SEWA organizer, who was responsible for the water campaign in the respective district, provided continuous guidance. These teams, together with the *pani samitees* (see next section), formed the backbone of SEWA's water campaign, as they were responsible for the actual implementation of the campaign activities.

All spearhead team leaders and organizers met once a week in Ahmedabad to coordinate activities and exchange information. In addition, all spearhead team members involved in the water campaign met bi-monthly so as to enhance lateral learning and exchange their successes and failures.

The Water Campaign

*SEWA's Introduction to the Water Sector*³

Before the start of the water campaign, SEWA's experience in the water sector was limited to the district of Patan⁴. However, this experience brought out valuable lessons and models for the future Water Campaign.

In Patan, the Gujarat Water Sewerage and Supply Board (GWSSB) invited SEWA to strengthen the *pani samitees* (*panchayat*-level water committees) so that these could play a stronger role in the operation and maintenance of the Santalpur Regional Water Supply Scheme (SRWSS). This piped water supply scheme was supposed to provide water to 75 villages in Radhanpur and Santalpur blocks.

In order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the local situation and problems, SEWA invited the Foundation of Public Interest (FPI) to conduct an action research in the project area. FPI found that:

- Most of the committees were defunct. *Sarpanches* (elected village leaders) would provide the GWSSB simply with a list of names and declare that these people formed the *pani samitees*. Often they did not even know they were part of it.
- In the committees that were functional, women were members only in name, and had no say at all in the decision making process, although they were the main water users.
- Villages were facing continuous water problems and some of the villages were completely deserted during the summer, as villagers were forced to migrate in search of water, work, and fodder for their livestock.

In a series of meetings between SEWA, FPI and GWSSB, guidelines were worked out on how the operation and maintenance of the piped water supply could be decentralized and the GWSSB agreed on SEWA members joining the *pani samitees*. Thus SEWA, assisted by FPI, started reviving the village *pani samitees*.

Despite all SEWA's efforts and the support of the GWSSB, the operation and management of the piped water supply could not be handed over to the *pani samitees*, as the state government issued an ordinance that only committees consisting of village-level government functionaries would be recognized. Participation of local communities was not considered. However, in many villages these committees had already initiated a wide range of activities to augment the existing water supply. For instance, village ponds were repaired and improved, and in some cases were lined with plastic to halt the intrusion of salt water. These activities were the first initiated under SEWA's Water Campaign.

³ This section is based on Kapoor Aditi et al, 2001.

⁴ Patan district was formed recently after Banaskantha district was split up in two parts. However, for reasons of consistency the name Patan has been maintained throughout.

Pani Samitees

Importantly, *pani samitees* emerged as one of building blocks of the Water Campaign from SEWA's experience in Patan. The *gram sabha* elected members of these committees, who provided honorary services. However, SEWA made it mandatory that at least of 70% of the members were women and the committee's president had to be a woman as well before it could actively support initiatives taken by these committees. In most cases, the secretary was a man, as literacy rates amongst women were low in most districts in Gujarat. SEWA was able to revive or establish more than 200 *pani samitees*, which in many cases proved to be successful in implementing, operating, and maintaining community-based water sources.

The committees were responsible for the planning and executing of all water-related activities in the village including financial matters, accounts, and monitoring of activities. The plans prepared by the committee were submitted to the *gram sabha* for discussion and approval. Finally, a resolution was passed by the *gram sabha* so as to officially approve these plans.

To overcome the resistance of the men, ample attention was paid in building the capacity of the women members of the *pani samitees* through a formal training program in accounting, planning and monitoring of activities, how to conduct meetings and keep minutes, and so on. Initially, SEWA organizers provided on-the-job support and backing to the *pani samitees* and women in particular, by being present during meetings, and giving advice and guidance whenever needed. However, after the formation of water spearhead teams, these tasks were gradually taken over by these teams.

Despite SEWA's support, women had to overcome stiff resistance from the village men who felt threatened and thought that women were not capable of bringing such complex matters to a good conclusion. Jammuben recounts, "There were many problems. We used to quarrel with our husbands if we had to go for a meeting. No matter what they would say, we went. Now, after seeing the results, they are happy".

SEWA's Water Campaign

After the meeting in May 1995, the Water Campaign quickly gained momentum. Initially, the campaign focused on semi-arid and arid districts such Patan, Surendranagar and Kutch, as water problems were most obvious in those desert-like areas. Two years later, in 1997, women from water-rich districts such as Kheda and Anand made it clear that they also faced an array of water problems: the poor did not have access to water even when it was abundant. By 2003, more than 200,000 women spread over 500 villages and 14 districts in Gujarat were involved in this campaign.

SEWA initiated the Water Campaign activities with its grassroots members and the spearhead teams. They, with backing from SEWA organizers, decided what was needed. Hence, the campaign was driven by the women themselves and not centrally planned and implemented.

Broadly speaking, the following three categories of water campaign activities could be distinguished.

- Augmentation of existing community water supply systems, for instance, through the construction of roof rainwater harvesting systems, upgrading and repair of traditional water sources, and micro-watershed development.
- Improvement of the water supply provided by GWSSB through the repair and maintenance of hand-pumps, operation and maintenance of piped water supply schemes, and monitoring of the performance of government water supply activities.
- Building capacity and increasing awareness of women—and their families—regarding water related issues such as saving water, hygiene, functioning of the government apparatus, leadership qualities, and so on.

Augmenting the Existing Water Supply: Rejuvenating Traditional Water Sources in Patan District

To augment the existing water supply, SEWA initiated a number of activities such as micro-watershed development, the construction of roof rainwater harvesting tanks, and the revival and upgrading of traditional community water sources.

In the district of Patan, community ponds were used to provide drinking water for people and livestock, and recharge nearby wells. During the monsoon and winter seasons, these ponds and wells were a valuable water source. While most ponds dried up at the start of summer, wells remained an important water source even in the peak of summer. An important advantage was that well water was available round the clock while piped water often broke down and was available only at some, often unpredictable, hours.

Traditional sources of water often faced neglect with the establishment of piped water supplies to many villages. This was what happened in Patan, with the initiation of the Santalpur Regional Water Supply Scheme in 1987 to supply piped water to 98 villages in the district. While the facilities provided were found to be in poor condition by studies in the early 1990s, the traditional sources had been neglected or had gone dry due to negligence (James et al, 2002). Most of them could not be repaired without outside technical, managerial, and financial assistance.

Falling groundwater tables and high soil salinity further exacerbated the situation. The story narrated by the women of Datrana village is illustrative: “During the summer we hardly slept as we had to collect our drinking water from small *viridas* [shallow pits in the pond], each of which would take an hour to fill up with a pot of salty water. This would go on for the entire night; during the day the water would evaporate immediately. There were always quarrels over water.”

When SEWA decided to revive or upgrade the traditional community water sources it was confronted with some stiff challenges:

- Being community assets, these sources required a community-based approach and a long-term commitment to maintaining the pond or well was required from the entire community.
- Women, the main water users, were traditionally not involved in the management of local water sources. Hence, effective management of traditional water sources, and an equal distribution of the benefits, entailed a

change in existing power relations in favor of the poor, and poor women in particular.

- Most government programs either focused on piped drinking water supplies or on watershed development for agricultural purposes. Hence, no government program covered reviving traditional water sources and funds were hard to come by.

To start with SEWA organizers and spearhead teams started visiting the worst affected villages to persuade the *sarpanch* to organize a *gram sabha*. Often they had to visit the village several times before the *sarpanch* would give his support. In some cases, it proved impossible to work in a village due to political differences within the village or a total lack of cooperation from the *sarpanch*.

In the *gram sabha*, the entire village discussed water problems and concrete solutions and elected a *pani samittee* as discussed earlier. The water committees were made responsible for the actual execution of the repair work, including financial and organizational matters. SEWA organizers and engineers only provided the necessary logistical and technical support. If innovative technologies were called for, SEWA organized additional training and exposure visits. For instance, the water committee in Maduthra village was inspired to construct a plastic-lined pond after an exposure visit to a nearby village with a similar pond. Programs were also organized to raise the villagers' awareness on important issues such as hygiene and saving water.

In case a pond needed to be repaired, the pond and feeding channels were desilted, bunds were improved, and an outlet was constructed. In six villages, ponds were lined with plastic to block the entry of saline water. Wells were desilted, cleaned, and a new border and a concrete platform were constructed around them. A large number of wells were fitted with pulleys to make fetching of water less strenuous.

SEWA expected the community to make a contribution of 10% of the total cost, either in free labor or cash. A community maintenance fund was set up with the cash contributions. However, during the summer of 2002, villagers were unable to contribute as a fourth consecutive drought left them with little means of income. To create some employment, local communities were paid to desilt their ponds, 10% of the wages were deducted as their contribution.

As rejuvenating wells and ponds was costly, and government programs generally did not cover this kind of activities, SEWA struggled to mobilize sufficient funds. In most cases, financial support was obtained from international funding agencies but this was insufficient to respond to all the needs of its members. Therefore, SEWA was forced to take up villages on a priority basis and in a phased manner.

By 2003, more than 190 village ponds, including six plastic-lined ponds and 105 wells, were repaired by local *pani samitees* with support from SEWA organizers. After the repair and upgrading of the ponds and wells, 95% of the respondents stated that the quality of the water had improved and 98% were spending less time on fetching water. As far as the quantity of water was concerned, 55% of the respondents stated that more water had become available⁵.

⁵ Data collected from 40 respondents in 7 villages (May 2002) and from 25 respondents in 4 villages (May 2002) by Joep Verhagen and SEWA.

The leading role of poor women, in combination with extensive capacity-building efforts, thus ensured that women became effective managers of the community water sources and were able to govern the community fund for the upkeep of these sources. In many cases, the *pani samittee* also laid down rules for the use of the pond and imposed fines on whoever broke these rules.

Improving the Existing Water Supply: SEWA's Barefoot Water Technicians in Sabarkantha⁶

In many villages in Gujarat, hand-pumps were the sole source of drinking water. Around 10,000 hand-pumps were provided by GWSSB. Until 2003, GWSSB also bore the responsibility for the repair and maintenance of these pumps. However, GWSSB found it increasingly difficult to maintain these pumps for the following reasons:

- GWSSB's shrinking number of maintenance gangs (as they are called in Gujarat) could no longer cope with an ever-growing number of hand-pumps.
- These gangs were not affected by the malfunctioning of the hand-pumps and hence felt little compulsion to react to complaints immediately and/or to maintain high standards.
- Longwinded bureaucratic procedures often led to long delays; complaints had to travel via the local *panchayat* (village council) and *zila panchayat* (block council) offices before reaching the local GWSSB office.

In some cases, it took six months before GWSSB attended to complaints of malfunctioning hand-pumps. At those times, women were forced to fetch water, often of an inferior quality, from distant locations, losing up to six hours a day.

Policy changes at the central government level and the mounting complaints about the hand-pumps' maintenance resulted in a drastic policy change by GSSWB. Local contractors and NGOs were now invited to bid for contracts for the maintenance of hand-pumps. Contracts were granted by the district water board to the lowest bidder.

Under these contracts, hand-pumps had to be overhauled annually, a monthly check was carried out, and if needed, repairs were carried out. GWSSB paid Rs. 582/-⁷ per pump and provided spare parts. As contracts were granted by bidding, the actual compensation was around Rs. 463/- per hand-pump. Local contractors and NGOs were responsible for the maintenance of 90% of GWSSB's hand-pumps.

Prompted by its own members, who felt they would be able to do a much better job than the GWSSB, SEWA submitted a bid to maintain 41 hand-pumps in Sabarkantha district. This was the beginning of a long haul for SEWA's barefoot water technicians as water supply management proved to be a male bastion that could be broken into only through a long, hard-fought battle. This process had the following features:

⁶ Parts of this section were published before as: 'SEWA's Barefoot Water Technicians' [Verhagen, 2002]

⁷ Currently, the exchange rate is 1 US\$ to approximately Rupees 46

- SEWA had to fight the commercial contractors’ lobby, especially since the GWSSB was not willing to grant the contract to SEWA’s local association, Khedu Mandal. However, SEWA did not give in and kept on visiting GWSSB-officials at all levels to push their case. In 2000, after much pressure, the GWSSB granted Khedu Mandal a contract for the maintenance of 41 hand-pumps in 11 villages. These struggles became recurrent phenomena and due to decentralization of the GWSSB, SEWA had to win them in each and every district.
- Even after granting the contract to SEWA, the GWSSB did not allow the women to participate in their training program because they did not meet the required educational standards. Therefore, SEWA called in an NGO from Rajasthan to train their first batch of hand-pump mechanics.
- This was by no means the end of the struggle for the women and SEWA to become involved in the maintenance of their own water supply. The villagers showed even less faith in the women’s skills than GWSSB’s engineers. The women were not even offered water when they visited a village to maintain or repair a hand-pump. Some of the women were even threatened.
- Initially, GWSSB only paid Rs. 183/- per hand-pump annually, which was nowhere near enough to inspect the pump monthly, overhaul it annually, and carry out all necessary repairs.

SEWA and the women realized that the only way to change the attitude of the GWSSB and the villagers was to prove them wrong by outperforming them. Because of the lack of funds, SEWA barefoot mechanics had to travel by bus to the villages. This was not only very time-consuming but also very difficult as the women had to carry all their tools. This difficult first year, however, proved to be a watershed for the barefoot water mechanics as they managed to gain the trust of the GWSSB on the basis of their performance alone. In 2001, SEWA was granted a new contract for 200 hand-pumps in 51 villages.

This time, the GWSSB allowed the women to participate in their regular training program. They participated with great enthusiasm, to the delight of the trainers, one of whom had this to say: “When we started training the local communities to maintain and repair their own hand-pumps, we would inform the District Development Officer (DDO) and the sarpanch about our program. Mostly, very few trainees would turn up and they would not be interested in using their skills. Women never attended the programs. Now we ask NGOs to help us. And see, we have a lot of trainees who are very enthusiastic about learning new things”. 210 women were trained by the GWSSB in the Sabarkantha district. In addition, 450 women were trained in the districts of Baroda and Kheda.

GWSSB also upped the annual rate from Rs. 183 to a more realistic rate of Rs. 582. This created more opportunities for SEWA to come up with schemes to provide more support to the women and deal with some concomitant problems. SEWA decided to pay the women a daily wage of Rs. 35/- and to provide them with a vehicle to travel to the villages with their tools and spare parts. Not only did the women repair hand-pumps, they also learnt to fill out weekly and monthly reports and submit them to the district water board.

Women had to get up at 4 a.m., cook for their families, leave their homes around 7.30 a.m. to return at 8 in the evening. Despite these long days, the women were unanimous about their work: “When we went for the first time to overhaul a hand-pump, we were not

sure whether we would be able to do it. We took almost the whole day for one single pump. We had to surmount many problems and the villagers wanted perfect work. They considered it men's work. But now things have changed, we do three hand-pumps in one day and the village people have accepted us".

Barefoot water technicians in the districts of Sabarkantha, Baroda, Kheda, and Anand maintained more than 1,500 hand-pumps. The transfer of the responsibility for hand-pump maintenance from GWSSB to SEWA's barefoot water mechanics reduced the breakdown time from an average of 45 days to two or three days. Moreover, many villagers believed that the hand-pumps were now functioning better and were giving 'better water'.⁸ Finally, the operation and maintenance of the hand-pumps and piped water supply scheme provided the barefoot water mechanics with a regular income of around Rs. 5,000/- annually, an important supplement to the highly volatile incomes from agricultural activities.

However, as the rates paid by GWSSB were not sufficient to cover all of SEWA's costs, additional resources needed to be generated every year thereby making it more difficult to sustain the current level of support to the barefoot water technicians.

Building Local Capacity: Grassroots Water Campaigners⁹

Water problems were not limited to the semi-arid districts. Water simply did not reach the poor, even in water-rich areas, as the poor were at the tail end of the piped water supply or were not served by these schemes¹⁰ at all. In other cases, bore wells or public stand posts were perpetually out of order. Such problems could only be tackled at a local level and often required a long and sustained effort before they could be solved.

To address the ever-growing number of water-related complaints from its members, SEWA started building a cadre of barefoot water campaigners—mainly consisting of spearhead teams and *pani samitees*— who could pressurize local authorities to take up these problems. These barefoot water campaigners did not only address new problems but also played an important role in ensuring the sustainability of the water supply. Often these women were members of the *pani samittee* in their village or of the local spearhead team. Sometimes SEWA organizers supported them but more and more often they took up the fight without any outside support.

SEWA started investing time and resources in building the capacity of these women by:

- Organizing bi-monthly exchange programs between spearhead teams and grassroots water campaigners to enhance lateral learning and share successes and failures of the Water Campaign.
- Technical capacity building programs and exposure programs such as operation and maintenance of piped water supply schemes; maintenance and

⁸ Data collected from 48 respondents in five villages (November 2002) by Joep Verhagen and SEWA.

⁹ This short personal case was presented by Leelaben Jenabhai Parmar—one of SEWA's grassroots campaigners—during SEWA's session on 'Water and Poverty' at the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto (Japan).

¹⁰ In Gujarat, caste was the dominating factor in the outlay of the villages. The dominant caste lived either at the centre of the villages or next to the command areas of village ponds. The lower castes lived at the outskirts and/or on higher—drier—grounds.

repair of Mark II hand-pumps; watershed development and management; construction of roof rainwater harvesting tanks; and pipe fitting.

- SEWA’s general capacity building programs to further develop and strengthen the managerial and leadership skills of the women so that they could manage and monitor their own programs.
- On-the-job capacity building whenever this was needed and possible. The most important impact of this support was that women became more self-confident and were no longer afraid to speak up in the presence of men and high government officials.

The story of Leelaben Jenabhai Parmar illustrates the determination of these women as well as the problems they faced, such as:

- Indifference from government officials in attending to the needs of the poor and women in particular.
- Resistance from powerful interest groups within the village community itself.

“I am Leelaben Jenabhai Parmar from Pritampura village. I am an agricultural laborer. I am also the leader of a SEWA spearhead team. Three years ago, I could work only for 3 to 4 hours a week, as we didn’t have a proper water supply because the pipeline was damaged. Now that we have water, I can go to work every day and earn about Rs. 50 (US\$ 1) per day. Earlier, it was difficult for me to attend SEWA meetings or training programs because I had to go out to fetch water. Now I have time to attend meetings and also visit other villages to help women in these villages with solving their water problems.

During one of the SEWA meetings I spoke about the fact that our village, with 2,000 people, doesn’t have a proper drinking water supply. We organized a village meeting and prepared an application to the district water board for a bore well. We also sent this application to the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA).

For three years, our team of 10 to 15 women would regularly go to meet the district officials. These officials became so tired of us that they finally gave us the money to repair the pipeline. However, the village headman broke our pipeline and because of waterlogging during the monsoon the technicians could not come back to our village to repair it.

Then we were told that a bore well and overhead tanks had been sanctioned by the water board. We found out that the village headman had got this bore well constructed in the main village, 2 kilometers away, where he himself lives. We went to the water board again. They were shocked to hear our story but they wouldn’t give their approval for another bore well and pump.

Many subsequent visits resulted in the promise of a bore well and the hand-pump. The hand-pump has since been approved; we are still waiting for the bore well. We decided on a place for the hand-pump but the village leader overrode us and got the pump installed in the school premises.

Now all of us have to go the school for water. The entire schoolyard used to get muddy but we’ve now dug a soak pit to maintain cleanliness. After three years, we have at least some water from the hand-pump. So I can work at least half the day and I can send my

children to school. Our struggle for water will continue until we have enough water to meet all our needs.”

Changing Water Policies

From the beginning, SEWA realized that water policies needed to be changed in favor of the poor, women in particular. It focused its efforts on two main policy issues:

- Water as a basic human right, as SEWA felt that priority should be given to drinking water above other uses.
- The recognition of women as the rightful owners and managers of the local community water supply as women were the main users of the local water supply, but were mostly ignored when it came to planning or decision-making regarding these sources.

As SEWA felt that the gap between international water professionals and policy makers, and people at the grassroots level needed to be narrowed, it involved both grassroots women and organizers in policy influencing work. For instance, SEWA’s grassroots women water campaigners presented their case at the World Water Day, World Environment Day, and at the second and third World Water Forums.

In this way, SEWA, together with many other organizations, managed to put women and drinking water on policy agendas and remove some of the administrative obstacles that hindered women in taking up the management of their own water supply.

However, grassroots women continuously accompanied SEWA organizers during their visits to national policy makers and local water departments. Though local legislation did not get much attention in international fora, they were of major importance for the implementation, up-scaling, and replication of drinking water activities such as SEWA’s water campaign. For instance, the procedures for tender approval adopted by the GWSSB did not give priority to the maintenance of the hand-pumps by community members themselves. As a result, SEWA lost the bid for the maintenance of 100-odd hand-pumps to a commercial contractor.

Initially, SEWA members were scared to speak up in the presence of high-ranking government officials. However, they lost their inhibitions rapidly and no longer hesitated to plead their case. SEWA managed to up the annual rate for the maintenance of the hand-pumps from Rs. 183/- to Rs. 582/-.

Outputs and Impacts of the Water Campaign

After nine years, SEWA’s water campaign had resulted in a large array of outputs, both tangible and intangible. The most significant output was a network of barefoot water campaigners across 14 districts comprising 108 water spearheads team members, 1,036 barefoot water technicians, and 200 village *pani samitees*.

The network of grassroots water campaigners combined with the continuous focus on capacity building formed the foundation of a decentralized and participative water governance model that was operated by the water users, the women, themselves. Village water committees no longer waited for assistance from SEWA organizers but independently took up drinking water related issues with local administrators.

Secondly, the water campaign resulted in a wide array of tangible outputs. In addition to outputs mentioned in previous sections, they included:

- Around 2,000 individual and 40 community rainwater-harvesting tanks constructed by the women themselves in the districts of Patan, Kutch, and Surendranagar.
- More than 20,000 women participated in a ‘save water awareness’ campaign that sought to reduce wastage of drinking water and instill better hygiene practices.
- Watershed development activities completed in eight villages in Patan and watershed programs in 21 villages implemented currently.
- Barefoot water managers made responsible for the operation and maintenance of a local water supply scheme in Surendranagar district.

SEWA felt that its water campaign was leading to a substantial improvement in the quality of drinking water supply. The improved drinking water supply significantly reduced women’s drudgery of fetching water over long distances, freed their time for other productive and personal activities, improved hygiene, and reduced health related problems. Moreover, it built their capacity to cope with the frequent droughts. For example, the rainwater harvesting structures were not only used to harvest rainwater but also to store water that was brought by tankers to the villagers during the summer and droughts. Thus safe drinking water was available at the doorstep even in times of severe water stress. Women no longer had to carry heavy loads of water over long distances, nor did they have to stay at home to wait for the water tankers to turn up.

Moreover, the network of *pani samitees* supported by barefoot water technicians and spearhead teams had a significant impact on the governance of the drinking water supply. Local communities started accepting women as the governors of local water supply after the women proved themselves honest, capable, and dedicated managers of local water supply. For instance, more than 90% of the local community members accepted SEWA barefoot water technicians as compared to less than 10% prior to SEWA’s initiative.

As the water campaign was not a stand-alone activity but was implemented alongside a number of other activities, it had several important secondary impacts:

- Women were empowered to play a more prominent role in the management of the water supply, and their increased contribution to household income led to greater gender equity [James et al, 2000].
- The improved water supply resulted in time savings that were, amongst other things, used for income-generating activities. It was found that the repair and/or plastic lining of ponds improved the women’s monthly income by more than Rs. 100. [Verhagen et al, 2000]. The construction of roof rainwater

harvesting tanks resulted in an increase of daily income from Rs. 12/- to Rs. 17/- [Verhagen, 2003a]¹¹. The increased income reflected the combined impact of SEWA micro-enterprise activities¹² and the improved water supply. Without economic opportunities women would not be able to use their time savings to generate more income.

The Future of SEWA's Water Campaign

To achieve its goal of women governing the local water supply in an ever-increasing number of villages, SEWA had to overcome a number of internal and external problems:

- To cope with the continuous expansion of its membership-base—while ensuring that all its programs were managed and owned by poor women—SEWA initiated a process of continuous decentralization. For this purpose, SEWA started setting up ‘village development centers’ so as to decentralize decision-making processes and the implementation of programs. Such centers were planned to become focus points for all the development activities that took place in a village, to be governed by the communities themselves, in particular women. Also water campaign activities would be planned, managed, and monitored from these centers as well.

An elected Village Development Committee would run these centers; a village development fund would be created to finance the planned developmental activities. Funding would be sourced from government, the community, and donor agencies.

- As SEWA entered the water sector at the insistence of its members and not on the basis of existing technical expertise, SEWA's technical capacity in the water sector needed further strengthening.
- Water-related interventions often required a lot of financial resources, which were hard to mobilize due to the sectoral character of government schemes. For instance, constructing a plastic-lined pond cost around Rs. 17 lakh. Drinking water schemes did not allow for the repair of village ponds as they were considered unfit for drinking water; whilst most watershed development programs only allowed funding the repair of farm ponds. In reality village ponds were used for a whole range of activities such as drinking water, washing, water for livestock, irrigation of kitchen gardens, and so on.
- Women still faced strong opposition from the men whenever they got involved in the governance of the local water supply, and in particular in matters related to irrigation and agriculture. Moreover, women were not recognized by the government and local line departments as the legitimate governors of local water sources. □

¹¹ Refer to **Exhibit 4** for more detailed impacts of roof rainwater harvesting tanks

¹² SEWA was involved in a wide range of economic activities such as embroidery work, salt farming, dairying, nurseries, collection of minor forest produce, through women's producer groups. SEWA supported these groups through capacity building, quality control, marketing, product development, and so on. To ensure the financial sustainability of this support, part of the revenues were paid to SEWA.

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Acronyms

<i>Gram Panchayats</i>	Elected village councils
<i>Gram Sabha</i>	Village meeting
GWSSB	Gujarat Water Supply and Sanitation Board
<i>Nagar Palikas</i>	Small and medium cities
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
<i>Pani Samittee</i>	Village Water Committee
<i>Sarpanch</i>	Elected village leader
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association
DRDA	District Rural Development Agency

Exhibit 1

SEWA's WATER CAMPAIGN

Districts in Gujarat with SEWA Activities

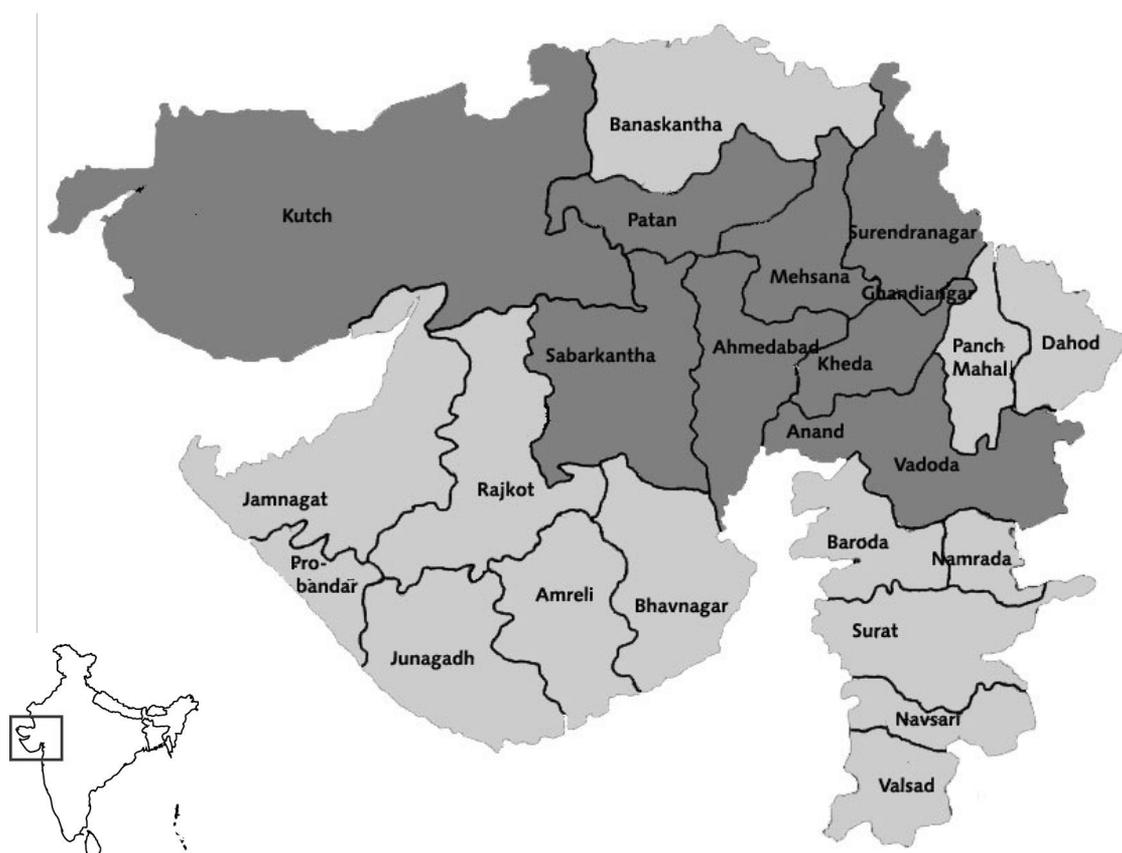


Exhibit 2

SEWA's Membership Base

Year	Gujarat	Other States	India
1996*	162,781	49,235	212,016
1997*	159,204	51,920	211,124
1998*	142,810	66,440	209,250
2000*	205,985	112,542	318,527
2001*	284,317	135,891	420,208
2003**	500,000	200,000	700,000

* Source: SEWA's annual report

** Source: Reema Nanavaty, personal communication

Exhibit 3

SEWA's WATER CAMPAIGN

SEWA's Organizational Structure

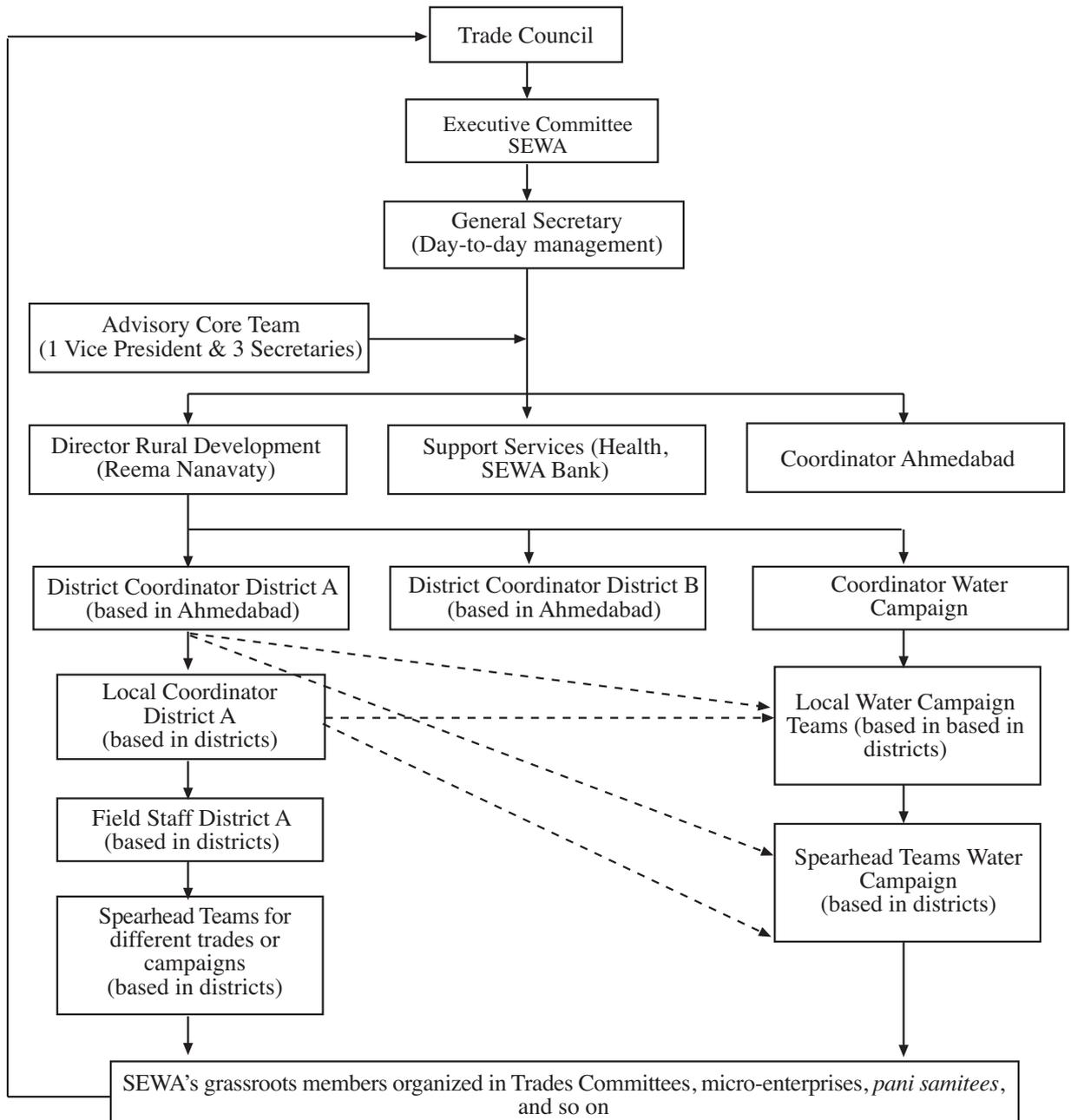


Exhibit 4

SEWA's WATER CAMPAIGN

Time Savings and Impacts on Daily Income of Roof Rainwater Harvesting Structures

Table 1 shows that women saved 4.6 and 3.8 hours in monsoon and summer respectively. Part of this time saving was allocated to income-generating activities. At a daily wage of Rs. 40/- (approximately US\$ 0.80) these time savings translated into an increased income of Rs. 12.50 and Rs. 17.50 daily.

**Table 1: Time profiles before and after the construction of roof rainwater harvesting structures
(N = 6 focus group discussions)**

	Monsoon			Summer		
	Before	After	Difference	Before	After	Difference
Sleep	6.1	7.4	1.3	6.0	7.0	0.9
Household work	6.6	7.3	0.7	6.9	6.3	-0.6
Fetching water	5.9	1.3	-4.6	5.2	1.5	-3.8
Communication and social activities	1.1	1.3	0.1	1.4	1.4	0.0
Income generation	4.3	6.8	2.5	4.5	8.0	3.5
TOTAL	24.0	24.0	0.0	24.0	24.0	0.0