

Great Challenges, Greater Solidarity
Power of Community and SSE as a Path for Transformation

GSEF Global Virtual Forum
19 – 23 October 2020

Report format

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Title of the session:	Women in SSE Organizations, A Driving Factor for Resilient Communities and Economies: Best Practices, Challenges, and the Way Forward
Type of session	Thematic session
Language:	English
Date:	20 th of October
Time:	120 minutes
Participants	<i>Zoom participation: 35</i>

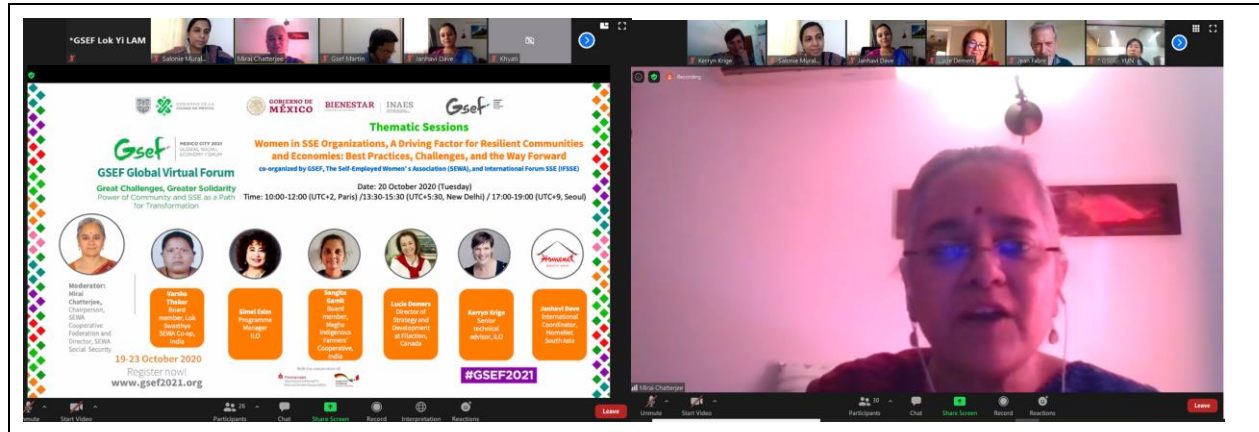
Name of moderator

Mirai Chatterjee, Chairperson, SEWA Cooperative Federation and Director, SEWA Social Security

Speakers

1. **Varsha Thakor**, Board member, Lok Swasthya SEWA Co-op
2. **Sangita Gamit**, Board member, Megha Indigenous Farmers' Cooperative, SEWA
3. **Janhavi Dave**, International Coordinator, HomeNet South Asia
4. **Simel Esim**, Programme Manager (Senior Technical Specialist), International Labour Organization (ILO)
5. **Kerryn Krige**, Chief Technical Advisor International Labour Organisation (ILO)
6. **Lucie Demers**, Director of Strategy and Development at Filaction

Screenshot of the zoom session



Summary of presentations:

PART 1

Successful cases of initiatives by women's organizations or targeted at women during the COVID-19 crisis.

1. **Varsha Thakor**, Board member, **Lok Swasthya SEWA Co-op**

From their experience during the Covid, they see people were afraid because of lack of knowledge.

People did not know what is covid and what is the caution that they need to take, that addressed the importance of proper information on health. At the same time, many were not able to earn a living and to get access to resources.

Some things have been done for the alleviation of the crisis' impacts on the most vulnerable groups.

For example, they help distribute napkins and sanitizers to the young girls, link the vulnerables to other organisations and tell them the needs of their members. The needs could be small services, information, new technology and marketing services etc.

2. **Sangita Gamit**, Board member, **Megha Indigenous Farmers' Cooperative, SEWA**

The speaker has been promoting sustainable organic farming. As she understands chemical farming is bad for land, she has brought information to farmers and promoted organic farming. A number of members, villagers and shareholders have actively engaged in related activities. She shared her experience of accomplishment of work in which she handled many things by herself like meeting the government and she gained confidence during the progress.

On the other hand, young girls have been provided training on how to farm and participate in farming. Lastly, she hoped that the government would provide subsidy and greater support.

3. **Janhavi Dave, International Coordinator, HomeNet South Asia**

The speaker shared about the impact of Covid-19 on women home-based workers by using a study taken from 7 countries in South Asia, 11 locations, a total of 394 respondents (all women). Based on the result, it reflected the situations of huge decrease in income, income difference between own account worker and piece-rate worker etc. Notably, the number of respondents with zero work showed a 33% rise during lockdown and 70% of the respondents reported received no cash or food under government relief.

Furthermore, she shared about the efforts made by Bhutan which relief effort has been wide and targeted and their government procurement of masks made by home-based workers (HBWs).

In the last part, she gave some recommendations for the current crisis, which food supply is the main priority. For more information: <https://hnsa.org.in/>

PART 2

Open Dialogue

4. **Simel Esim, Programme Manager (Senior Technical Specialist), International Labour Organization ILO**

The speaker stressed on the essential role of local government and the actions they take should not be a onetime gesture, but a long term one. They should consider allocation of budget and finance, increase resilience, and help SSE gain public recognition, so that it could help the sustainability of SSE.

Next, government support is important, however, we should also note the importance of policy makers or governments to respect the autonomy of SSE enterprises and ventures.

Organisations could provide a platform for vertical integration between parties and help advocate for international standards for domestic workers, grassroots, women and workers. There are countries which we can learn from for how financing is connected to the initiatives.

Finally, vulnerable groups may need longer incubation. To understand the effectiveness of methods and policies, we need reflection monitoring systems and case study etc. Statistics could be strong evidence to influence policy makers to act.

5. **Kerryn Krige, Chief Technical Advisor International Labour Organisation**

The speaker made a reminder that we should focus on more things that do not work. Problems exist such as inaccessibility of information, which there are people who remain excluded; Gender inequality, which social norms restricted women to work in a certain line of work.

She also discussed the growing gap in South Africa, the importance of social economy research and the role of SSE. After that, she mentioned that the social economy hugely operates on a trust network.

She stated at the end that, what we can do is to help women work out of gender bias and to promote the work that women can do.

6. **Lucie Demers**, Director of Strategy and Development at Filaction

The speaker gave a brief introduction of Filaction, a development fund that supports Quebec SMEs. They promote 1) Financing of SMEs, social economy, culture and businesses in rural and semi-urban areas, and 2) Inclusive finance. They devoted themselves in providing a small fund for women entrepreneurs to finance their project.

She discussed that women entrepreneurs normally have no business network and faced difficulty to get funds. She used examples from Canada that only 16% of women are business owners suggesting there is still a long path to go for the attainment of gender equality.

Lastly, she shared about the lessons learnt and reviewed on excellent performance by women business owners during the pandemic.

Answers to the GUIDING QUESTION:

How to transform the present and build a better future from the SSE?

Janhavi Dave, International Coordinator, HomeNet South Asia

- We have to reduce vulnerability. Topics like social protection, we have to give thought to how to make it accessible.
- Secondly, the government could be doing a lot more e.g. tax exemption. (The difficulty they faced is home-based worker as part of global supply chain, that they have not been pay from Jan onwards)

Relevant Questions and Answers from Audience:

Comments on Simel Esim's point: Importance of policy / governments to respect the autonomy of SSE enterprises and ventures.

From Kerry Krige: This point is so important that longer incubation periods for SSEs versus traditional enterprises is needed. We need to move away from a one-size fits all approach regarding promotion of entrepreneurship and venture creation, and supports that make SSE unique.

Question 1: from Kerry Krige

I am curious with the experience from Bhutan, and the large order for masks. We tried something similar in South Africa, but the co-operatives were overwhelmed. Would appreciate feedback on how this order was placed and managed, and how organizations were supported.

Answer: Janhavi Dave

We got the order from the government, and 11 organizations were involved in mask making, and we decentralized the production as fast as possible. Small cooperatives were involved in the project which was a big solidarity effort.

Question 2: From Mame Fatou Séné

Women are very present in the SSE, but the governance bodies are still majorly led by men. How do we work on closing that particular gap?

Answer: Simel Esim

Gender action plans are important: bring the younger generation on board, prepare them for the management tasks, and encourage them to take more leadership positions. More recognition and support for institutions to scale up is necessary too.

Answer: Salonie Muralidhara Hiriyur, who works with SEWA

Do capacity building, mobilize women in the area, and link them to bigger networks and support them.

Answer: Kerry Krige

Inability for women to really see the potential they have is present because of lack of information and lack of shared information. Letting women share their experiences is so important so that they can relate, be empowered, and get opportunities to network.

Lack of access to skills exists, for example business skills on how to walk in a bank and get funding when the government is a bit remote. Let's normalize things, change the normality that women have to do. / We see that women entrepreneurs do not know their power and we need to change that.

Answer: Janhavi Dave

We take it for granted that the operational, technical staff, key position is full of male. The digitalisation/technology actually provides a chance to Home-based workers as it directly

connects them with the users/consumers. The home-based worker could take the leader position.

Question 3: From unnamed audience

I would like to understand the future of work in connection to women-led SSEs, many of which are not yet high tech.

Answer: Simel Esim

Slowly developing with technology like transition to online application. Future of work could be broad, we could also focus on changes in climate, geographic change and conflicts.

Answer: Janhavi Dave

To answer what is the future for home-based workers, it would be a sustainable supply chain, digital shift etc. Especially for rural areas, we should be concerned about how they can shift.

Answer: Salonie Muralidhara Hiriyur

The future would be mobilising adolescent girls. Apart from technology, we could be focus more on up-cycling platform, how do we extend social protection, simplifying processes? make it more accessible?

Add summary or conclusion of the moderator at the end of the session in case there was no closing remarks per presenter/speaker

Summary by the moderator Mirai Chatterjee

1. Organise (unions, co-operatives, alliances etc. could be at any scale). Bring people together, and then build their organisation.
2. Decentralised approach (Social Economy of Proximity).
 - food, clothing, shelter, primary financial, education and healthcare within 100 mile radius
3. Building local leadership (young people, indigenous people for example).
4. Share our stories. Let the voices be heard - internationally, nationally, locally.
5. The response to COVID-19 has ranged, from poor to mixed.
6. More representation of women and solidarity groups in planning committees.
7. The power of finance can make changes
8. Digitisation - recognise gender gaps, and power / potential of digital. Must focus on equity.
9. Get support from policy makers, do more reach out to them
10. Champions that can challenge the rhetoric.
11. Time of rebuilding. Let's think fresh.
12. Social security, social protection is needed.
13. Research and documentation - we need to document, what works and what doesn't.
14. Upskilling, especially in new sectors of the economy.

Meaningful resources and findings (suggested by speaker)

- ILO resources on crisis responses by cooperatives and the social and solidarity economy (SSE)
https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/areas-of-work/WCMS_740411/lang-en/index.htm
- A study on Advancing cooperation among women workers in the informal economy: The SEWA way
https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/publications/WCMS_633752/lang-en/index.htm