

SEWA: Self Employed Women's Association

<http://www.sewa.org/padmashri.asp>



Padmashri Conferred to Reemaben Nanavaty

Reema Nanavaty leads Self Employed Women's Association's (SEWA) economic and rural development activities reaching out to seventeen million women and their families across India.

Since 1989 she has pioneered revival, restoration and innovation of rural livelihoods from district to global level. Reema is being recognized across India and in the neighbouring countries as a champion of making livelihoods of the poor women reach markets they deserve. May they be women artisans, salt pan workers, farmers, or labourer, she has made efforts over two decades to mainstream amazing diversity of skills and knowledge of India's citizens into national mainstream. Her effort has created more dynamic local economy and fairer and equal society for thousands of SEWA sisters, citizens of India.



Born on May 22, 1964 in Ahmedabad, Reema graduated in science from Gujarat University and was selected to IAS services of Government of India..

She joined SEWA's rural wing in arid districts of Gujarat and took up issues of women, water, and work that the most poor 30000 women faced in these districts. Her work with SEWA sisters is now formed into Hansiba, a brand of best of artisans of Gujarat and also a unique museum of the artisan, for the artisan, set up by the artisans. Throughout her work Reema has cooperated, confronted, and when needed created alternative economic and governance structures, and in the process she has made these structures more responsive to the needs and concerns of poor women.

When elected as SEWA's General Secretary in 1999 she expanded SEWA's work in more districts in Gujarat where women had skills and enterprise but no access to markets or raw material. By forming hundreds of Self Help Groups and a string of viable cooperatives of dalit, tribal and minority women workers she has given hope to women workers that India's economic system can be penetrated by the poor with cooperative efforts and that the political system can be influenced by those without money.



She built institutions that help women reach the markets. Rudi is a direct retail and distribution network of goods produced by SEWA sisters for SEWA sisters, and owned by SEWA's sisters reaching out to 40000 rural households. SEWA Trade Facilitation Centre is a partnership with International Finance Corporation making Indian women's voice and contribution central to world trade decisions. She is replicating this model in SAARC countries to create a common market of poor women. Dealing with both, market forces and government machines she has tried to tame the markets to advantage in ways that also benefit those at the bottom of the growing economy of India.



Reema conceived and lunched Jeevika project after 2001 earthquake with Government of Gujarat and Government of India and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Twelve thousand women victims lead their families to not only earthquake recovery but also on path to sustainable economic growth. Her efforts have accelerated economic growth, raised household income, and greater economic stability across families and firms in the lowest income women.

Reema reached out to 2002 riot victims of Gujarat, Hindu and Muslim widows and orphans with work, work that binds the women, bonds the families, and to an extent heals the wounds that can hardly ever be healed. It was the innovative rehabilitation programme called "Shanta" developed by the government of Gujarat and Government of India with SEWA.

Reema expanded SEWA's work to other states of Jammu and Kashmir in the north and Meghalaya and Assam in the north east as women there demanded access to markets and assets similar to their SEWA sisters. Business Rescue Centres and related services are coming up.

Currently in war torn Afghanistan and conflict recovering Sri Lanka by invitation of local women and the national authorities she is building peace through work. In Bhutan she is taking SEWA's work to help build economic and ecological assets of women. The 5000 war widows have built their own Bag-e-Zanana to make income to support families. To the citizens she has shown that India is and will be a land of opportunity not only for the Indians but also for the citizens of SAARC.

Reema is spearheading green livelihood campaign of SEWA across India to make poor women's work adapt to climate change and is conceiving Green Economy Social Impact Bond called Hariyali to mitigate the reasons of climate change by reaching out to 200000 rural women and their household. Both initiatives are owned by poor women.

Since 1986 Reema's efforts have aimed at bringing economic freedom for millions of poor women of India.

Self Employed Women's Association

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