Over 90% of the Indian economy is fuelled by workers of the informal economy, who are deprived of job security, social and legal protection, and above all, a united voice. Since 2001, SEWA Bharat has organised 20,797 informal women workers across Alwar, Bikaner, Jaipur, and Jodhpur districts of Rajasthan for collective empowerment.

PROGRAMMES & ACTIVITIES
SEWA Bharat strives towards vulnerable women’s full employment and self-reliance through five integrated development programmes in organising and mobilising, advocacy, livelihood promotion, health and social security, and micro-finance. Each local area in Rajasthan also runs needs-specific initiatives.

Organising
Mohalla (community) meetings bring communities of women together to voice their concerns and propose solutions to their challenges. SEWA saathis (local community workers) organise mohalla meetings for micro-level agenda setting, and to identify and train aagewans (community leaders). Through livelihood-based trade committees, women workers are enabled to advocate for their own rights.

- Over 150 mohalla meetings engaged 1,872 women across Rajasthan in 2013
- 88 women are empowered as aagewans
- Women workers organised into trade committees for livelihoods in construction, papad rolling, bangle making, and domestic work

Advocacy
SEWA is a member-based organisation of informal women workers that helps push women’s concerns forward to the government and media. Through local and national level advocacy, public demonstrations and campaigns, SEWA women gain identity and bargaining power to ensure that the government understands and meets their needs.

Fair wages for artisan women workers
SEWA is working closely with relevant government departments and contractors, and holding tripartite meetings to secure minimum wages for traditional bandhej (tie and dye) artisans in Jodhpur.

Advocacy achievement in Rajasthan: papad roller rights
- SEWA papad-rolling members’ advocacy work successfully resulted in the inclusion of the papad-making trade on the Rajasthan Minimum Wage List.

Sanitation and waste disposal: issue and strategies
The 69th report of the National Sample Survey Office ranked Rajasthan in the bottom five states with the least access to drinking water and toilets in rural areas. SEWA strategies:
- Partner with Nagar Nigam for waste collection
- Connect the poor and SEWA Mahila Housing Trust for home repair and sanitation loans
- Network with existing NGOs and conduct research

Proper Implementation of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE)
In 2010, the RTE Act came into effect promising free and compulsory education to any child aged 6 - 14. The government’s Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme in Rajasthan found that 12 lakh children were out of school – of these, 7.13 lakh children were girls.

Key SEWA strategies for better RTE implementation:
- Supporting SEWA members towards becoming part of Gov’t School Management Committees (RTE mandate)
- Linking poor members to private schools under RTE mandate for 25% seat reservation for Economically Weaker Section (EWS)
Social Security
Poor working women’s health issues are often seriously neglected because of high costs, administrative barriers, overwhelming workloads, and household responsibilities. Furthermore, while the Indian government has vast social protection programmes, the benefits hardly reach the needy.

SEWA aims to improve the existing government system towards greater efficiency and outreach. SEWA connects marginalized people to healthcare and social security entitlements by providing scheme information, facilitating applications, and government administration support.

Social Security Achievements:
• Over 10,000 major social security scheme linkages between 2008-2013, including: identity cards (voter ID, Adhaar card, Birth/caste certifications), pensions (handicap, old-age, widow), health services (Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY)
• Entitlement monitoring committees formed
• In 2013, 200 people benefitted from a eye-camp addressed at occupational hazards.

Skill building
Underprivileged women and girls are trapped in a cycle of poverty due to lack of accessible, market-responsive, and skill-development opportunities. SEWA Bharat runs high-quality skill building courses and trainings, and provides rewarding job placements.
• SEWA Youth Resource Centers were launched in 2013 and provide training in computers, fashion design and beauty culture for marginalized girls.
• Capacity building for bandhej workers in Jodhpur

Microfinance
Women in the informal sector lack safe, reliable, and non-exploitative sources of financing. SEWA Bharat’s microfinance program in Rajasthan empowers women to become financially literate, have control over their money and assets, and be resistant to financial shock.

Self Help Groups (SHGs)
SEWA SHGs consist of 10-20 women who financially support one another through monthly meetings, savings, internal loan disbursement and repayment. Through SHGs, women have first-time access to capital, reduce their dependency on exploitative moneylenders, inculcate the importance of savings, and build financial credential for mainstream banks.
• 158 SHGs with 2,343 women in Bikaner
• Women workers have total savings worth Rs. 99,73,517
• SHGs have mobilized Rs.1,43,74,335 worth of loans (All SHG figures as of end of 2013)

Looking forward
SEWA is constantly striving to expand its network and empower more women informal workers towards full employment and self-sustainability.
• To increase membership to 25,000 women
• To ensure that all members receive basic formal identification such as Voter IDs, Adhaar Cards, Birth / Caste / Income Certification
• To enroll over 1,200 underprivileged adolescent girls in market-relevant skill building

Livelihoods
Below poverty line wages and hazardous working environments are indecent but regular conditions for informal women workers in Rajasthan. SEWA organises women in common trades and helps them form committees so they understand their legal rights and have collective bargaining power with employers and the government.
• 2,215 bandhej (tie & dye) artisans organised (2013)

Direct market linkages: Loom Mool
SEWA Bharat is setting up direct market linkages through its ethical garment initiative Loom Mool, and other businesses to promote sustainable livelihoods for bandhej workers.

SEWA Bharat
• Over 1.9 million members
• Directly supports SEWA organisations in 6 states (Marked on map: Rajasthan, New Delhi, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Bihar)
• Major SEWA movement organisations active in Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, and Gujarat

Photo: Rajasthan aagewans discuss ground realities, impact and challenges of RSBY and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) implementation, Jaipur (March 2014)