

Case study: Sabramem Mem, 28; Jodhpur; skill building and SSK linkages



Sabra speaking about her needs as a women bandej worker from the informal economy at a tripartite meeting held by SEWA Bharat and supported by UN Women (left). Mr. Y.S. dubey, General Manager, District Industries Centre (center). Raviveer Choudhary, the Government of Rajasthan's Development commissioners' handicrafts promotion officer (right). Jodhpur, 13 May 2014. (Photo: Anika Bahra/SEWA Bharat).

Sabramem is a bandej worker, mother of three, SEWA aagewan, and most importantly, an active role model for women everywhere regardless of class, caste, or religion. Sabramem is engaging in two SEWA skill-building courses to enhance her capacity to be financially independent and open her own business. Sabramem is also benefitting through the SEWA Shakti Kendra's social security support system for poor working-women. Through the SEWA Shakti Kendra in Jodhpur, Sabramem gained information on bandej 'artisan cards' that motivated her to apply. Sabramem took direct support from SEWA saathis for the application process, and says that she is happy to be a member of SEWA.

Sabramem has only studied until 8th standard, roughly until she was 13 years old. Perhaps it is for this reason, she says, that she cares so much about her children's education. Sabramem emphasizes that, "my children's education is the most important thing to me, [but] giving them a good education is my biggest challenge." Sabramem has decided to put her son (14 yrs.) and two daughters (10 yrs. and 5 yrs.) into English Medium Schools instead of the local government school, despite the huge financial burden. The admission fees are a onetime sum of Rs. 3,500 for each child – a total of Rs. 10,500. Additionally, the monthly fees for each child are Rs. 1,000, Rs. 900, and Rs. 600 in ascending order of the children's age. Sabramem's income from *bandej* work (Rs. 50/day) combined with her husband's earnings, (Rs. 300/day: for both the night and day shift) as a delivery driver for a local company, do not make ends meet.

Sabramem's community is keeping her financially afloat, while she pursues training and skill development through SEWA to enhance her earnings. Being part of the Muslim community, taking loans on interest not allowed – a concept known as 'haram'. For this reason, Sabramem's father is supporting her with Rs. 3-4,000 per month, but she would like to be financially independent. Sabramem is currently taking stitching and tailoring and fashion design courses at the SEWA Shakti Kendra (SSK) in Jodhpur. Both of these classes give her skills to make her more competitive and proficient in the market.

The SSK is a safe place for women to access information and application support for government schemes, and also engage with skill development classes. The vast majority of women from Jodhpur's Muslim community do not leave their neighborhoods and rarely even venture out of their homes. SEWA grassroots leaders (saathis) encourage women to first leave the house and then to access information and engage with programs at the SEWA SSK.

Sabramem says, "It is good to have a place [SEWA Shakti Kendra] where I can learn things and I can become better." Sabramem is determined to open a boutique with fashionable clothes that are appropriate for her community. In order to support her children's future and pursue her own dreams, Sabramem humbly acknowledges, "I need to be *very* hard working."

Sabramem is engaging with many of the programs that SEWA offers to poor women workers in order to improve her life. Through the SEWA Shakti Kendra, Sabramem found out about a range of entitlements under the Handicraft Development Scheme of the Government of Rajasthan. In particular, SEWA saathis help link women to the artisan card scheme through which women involved in bandej work are entitled to health and social security and scholarships for artisans' children's education.

After gaining awareness on the entitlements she could claim for her children's studies, Sabramem sought support from Jodhpur's SEWA saathis and successfully submitted her artisan card application two months ago (around March 2014). Sabramem is still waiting for the government to confirm the status of her card, and brought this issue up with Raviveer Choudhary, the Government of Rajasthan's Development Commissioners' handicrafts promotion officer at the SEWA Bharat's tripartite meeting on Bandej worker wages held on 13 May 2014 in Jodhpur (pictured above).

The SEWA Bharat – UN Women – Government of Rajasthan tripartite meeting was a platform for women to voice their testimonies, concerns, and questions on issues relating to bandej worker rights. Sabramem shared her experience of earning a devastatingly low daily income that is Rs. 50 or less, and her struggle to support her children. Other women shared their experiences dealing with middlemen and subcontractors who suppress their wages. Mr. Choudhary, Development Commissioners' office, shared information on additional benefits of the artisan scheme and other relevant programs that women could access.

After the meeting, Sabramem expressed her happiness for going to the meeting. She said, "After going to the meeting she learned about how she could start a business by connecting to the [Artisan Credit Card Scheme](#)." As an aagewan and proud member of SEWA Bharat, Sabramem's message to other women is that they first need to go out of the house and see the world. She says, "I tell them to see what is happening in the world, sitting in the house you wont learn anything. And once you think I will learn, you should know you *can* learn."