

SEWA Bharat Aagevan Vikas Program: An Evaluation of Women's Grassroots Leadership across Four States of India

September 2023

Submitted To

SEWA Bharat

Submitted By

Nidhi Sen, Anweshaa Ghosh, Jahnvi Andharia with support
from Ashmeet Kaur Bilkhu

The report was prepared by Nidhi Sen, Anweshaa Ghosh, Ashmeet Kaur, with the guidance of Dr. Jahnvi Andharia. The team would like to acknowledge the support and inputs provided by Nalini Nayak, Anjana Sen, Yashika Pathania, and Namita that benefited the evaluation immensely.

The evaluation team also wishes to acknowledge all individuals that participated in discussions with them. Special mention must be made for the contribution and support of colleagues at SEWA Bharat, particularly, Harsharan Kaur in Punjab, Lata behen in Delhi, Wekoweu Akole Tsuhah in Nagaland, and Anshu Kathrine in Jharkhand, at various stages of the evaluation process.

New Delhi

Acronyms

ABHA	Ayushman Bharat Health Account
AGM	Annual General Meeting
CSC	Common Service Center
GBV	Gender-based Violence
MAS	Mahila Aarogya Samiti
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
NEN	North East Network
POSH	Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment
SEWA	Self Employed Women's Association
SSK	SEWA Shakti Kendras
ToT:	Training of Trainers
ToC:	Theory of Change
TVC	Town Vending Committee
ILO:	International Labour Organization
C-177	Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177)
C-189	Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)
C-190	Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)

Executive Summary

The Aagewan Vikas Program, supported by Ford Foundation, was initiated in 2018 and concluded in June 2023, with two distinct phases that ran from November 2018 to December 2021 and January 2022 to June 2023. An aagewan is a women leader in SEWA (belonging to at least one trade), who takes charge of various community and trade-related matters on behalf of SEWA's members. These women play a crucial role in SEWA, as they lead by example and inspire others to strive for recognition and well-being through their own struggles.

The program sought to train such leaders with a basic understanding of the SEWA union, its values, structure, and organizing processes. The training included both input sessions and involvement in direct action supported by SEWA's organizers locally. The focus was to assist aagewans to grow as leaders, and through this process, not only widen and strengthen the base of the union but also to become the face of the union in the public eye.

The strategy employed by the program was the following:

- Development of training modules so that there can be a uniform understanding developed across SEWA states
- Training of aagewans and hands-on involvement in organizing through local meetings, taking up of issues, planning of campaigns
- Training of trainers so that there are a group of trainers across SEWA states to sustain long-term awareness and education processes
- Training of organizers to support aagewans in community action

Under the program, a total 410 aagewans were identified by their local groups or by organizers across four states—Punjab, Nagaland, Delhi & Jharkhand. In the first phase of the program (2018-2021), 170 aagewans were trained, while in the second phase (2022-2023), around 90 aagewans were trained on the basic modules. The aagewan training program was initiated at different times in the various states.

The purpose of the evaluation is to account for the progress under the Aagewan Vikas program, and the extent to which the program achieved its intended goals as well as to identify key lessons and recommendations for the future sustainability of the program. A user-focused, participatory, qualitative, and theory-of-change (ToC) led evaluation design was used. The evaluation methodology included a document review, in-person and virtual in-depth interviews, and in-person focus group discussion (FGDs) ensuring that a range of stakeholders participated in the evaluation process including SEWA program staff, aagewans, state leadership, trainers, and organizers.

Below are highlighted the key findings from the evaluation according to program objectives.

Creation of basic training modules to build a uniform understanding across SEWA states:

The evaluation found that the creation of unified, basic modules was crucial to building a foundational understanding of SEWA, its values and ideology; union building and leadership; role and responsibilities of aagewans; and planning campaigns and public actions across all states. What worked was modifications and customization of the modules as per the local context and needs of aagewans.

The localization of the Aagewan Vikas modules resulted in a process of applied learning among aagewans through the inclusion of state-specific examples and practice exercises. The freedom and flexibility to adapt and break down the core modules into smaller, capsule-sized parts was especially useful during COVID-19, when online training of aagewans was underway.

Capacity strengthening of organizers in providing strategic, needs-based support to aagewans on community and trade issues:

Organizers have greatly supported aagewans in building their leadership capacity on community and trade issues. Examples of hands-on, field support provided by them to address mohalla issues include government engagement, organizing *Jan Sunvais* with local officials, running 'Signature Abhiyaans' to

register citizens demands. This back-up support has helped establish the credibility of aagewans as community leaders, who can service members' needs. But it is organizers' strategic support to aagewans in organizing trade groups and mobilizing members via state-wide campaigns such as My Fair Home Campaign (highlighting domestic workers rights) that has helped strengthen their ability to represent and articulate workers' interests and to bargain collectively for their rights. Moreover, the evaluation found examples of aagewans who have become organizers, thereby, serving as a role-model and coach to aagewans.

Improving training capacity of trainers to sustain awareness and knowledge-building across the union:

The evaluation also found that the training of trainers led to their own self-development as skilled facilitators who have designed modules that can be used by other state teams, thereby facilitating both intra-and-cross-learning. As a result of the ToT process, trainers gained the confidence and skills to develop their own modules, thereby, becoming internal resource persons on specific subjects and were able to interlink Aagewan Vikas modules and topics with other ongoing program-linked trainings within SEWA. The evaluation noted an improvement in the ability of trainers to conduct trainings in a structured and time-bound manner, using a variety of interactive training methods and tools to engage aagewans, and in adapting their session plans based on aagewans' level of understanding.

Strengthened leadership capacity of aagewans in organizing trade groups, taking up community issues, planning of campaigns:

The evaluation noted that aagewans, as community leaders, are engaged local membership drives, last-mile scheme linkage support, conducting community surveys and signature campaigns, drafting letters of appeal, organizing camps etc. In fact, aagewans enjoy a direct, personal connect with members, which enables them to serve as bridge between SEWA and the community—informing them about their rights and entitlements and knowledge about different government schemes.

Moreover, the evaluation found COVID-19 to be a key turning point in the development of aagewans' leadership skills, wherein they played a leading role in community relief efforts such as distribution of food rations and medical kits and coordinating with local authorities on field operations.

The evaluation takes special note of the strong sense of self-identity cultivated among aagewans, manifesting in their increased independence, mobility, self-confidence, communication, and negotiation abilities. Linked to this is the strong sense of worker identity built among aagewans including a recognition of their common predicaments and struggles as women informal workers, a deeper understanding of their own specific trades, and clarity about their role in furthering the collective interests of women workers and promoting social dialogue.

In fact, evidence from the evaluation points to an increased ability of aagewans in organizing women workers into local (sub)trade groups, in planning state-wide campaigns like the My Fair Home Campaign, in registering workers for different schemes and skilling programs (e.g., PM SwaNidhi Scheme), in successfully negotiating with contractors for an increase in home-based work piece-rates, in sensitizing employers and women on rate charts for domestic work etc.

Overall, the evaluation found that the program to be growing in strength. The key strategic pillars of the program were well-constructed and contributed to the effectiveness of the program. The strategic choice of contextualizing and redesigning the core Aagewan Vikas modules facilitated greater learning and knowledge uptake among aagewans, while the other strategic choice of developing a cadre of local trainers was one of the key enablers for deepening the conscientization process among aagewans and members in each state.

Further, the decision to involve organizers in the leadership capacity strengthening of aagewans was a crucial one, since their hand-holding and mentoring support gave aagewans the confidence to put their skills into practice by organizing different field activities with members and taking the lead on addressing community and trade issues. It is therefore expected that the program will continue to contribute to the growth, vitality, and sustainability of SEWA as an all-women's trade union of informal sector workers.

Contents

Table of Contents

Acronyms	3
Executive Summary	4
Contents.....	6
Program Overview.....	7
Methodology and Sample:	8
I. SEWA Delhi Context:	12
Key summary of findings:	12
SEWA Delhi Trainers:.....	13
Key summary of findings:	14
SEWA Delhi Organizers:	17
Key summary of findings:	17
SEWA Delhi Aagewans:	21
Key summary of findings:	21
II. SEWA Nagaland Context:	30
Key summary of findings:	30
SEWA Nagaland Aagewans:	32
Key summary of findings:	32
SEWA Nagaland Organizers:	38
III. SEWA Punjab Context:	39
Key summary of finding:.....	39
SEWA Punjab Trainers:.....	43
Key summary of finding:.....	43
SEWA Punjab Organizers:	47
Key summary of findings:	47
SEWA Punjab Aagewans:	51
Key summary of findings:	51
IV. SEWA Jharkhand Context:.....	58
Key summary of findings:	58
SEWA Jharkhand Aagewans.....	59
Key summary of findings:	59
SEWA Jharkhand Organizers:	66
Recommendations:.....	67
Conclusion	70
Annexure I: SEWA Aagewan Vikas Program Theory of Change.....	72
Annexure II: Sampling Matrix of Aagewans	74

Program Overview

The Aagewan Vikas program was designed to build the leadership capacity of women grassroots leaders or aagewans who are the mainstay and face of the SEWA union. They embody SEWA's philosophy and help advance SEWA's organizing and advocacy efforts with workers and the communities they belong to.

Aagewans are elected leaders who represent SEWA members in the community and advance their rights as workers. They serve as a link between SEWA's staff and its membership base, building solidarity amongst women workers based on a recognition of themselves as both workers and citizens. Since SEWA members work in the informal economy as micro-entrepreneurs, home-based workers, manual labourers, and producers and service providers, aagewans, too, belong to these four categories.

STRATEGIC PILLARS OF THE AAGEWAN VIKAS PROGRAM

1. **Development of training modules** so that there could be a uniform understanding developed across SEWA states
2. **Training of aagewans** and hands-on organizing involvement through local meetings, addressing mohalla level and trade issues, launching campaigns
3. **Training of trainers (ToT)** so that there would be a group of trainers across SEWA states to sustain the conscientization process
4. **Training of organizers** who could support aagewans when engaging in community and trade action

To nurture and develop aagewans as leaders, a series of training modules were developed under the program to build their understanding and skills on the key features and characteristics of the informal economy, rights, and laws applicable to informal workers including those specific to each trade, mechanisms to take-up and resolve trade issues, and identifying community issues and mechanisms to resolve them.

The training modules were developed by the SEWA Bharat Training team in collaboration with SEWA Academy Gujarat, SEWA Madhya Pradesh, and SEWA Kerala. Existing training material used by different state chapters on leadership development was collated and fine-tuned to cater to the program needs.

Four themes were decided upon for module development: SEWA values and ideology; union building and leadership; role and responsibilities of aagewans; and planning campaigns and public actions. In addition, there were basic and advanced modules designed for home-based workers and farmers, given their sizeable number across state chapters.

The intent behind the creation of these foundational modules was to build a common, union-wide understanding of SEWA and its organizing work among members and state teams. They were designed to be easy to understand and adaptable to state needs. The modules were both theoretical and practical, with a balance of information and participation and drawing upon audio-visuals, storytelling, energizers, role plays, and simulation exercises.

The module content was developed in the first six months of 2019 and went through several iterations and modifications based on feedback received from aagewans and organizers at trainings. The training process of the program involved selection of aagewans by state teams based on certain guidelines provided, actual module execution via trainings, then handholding of aagewans between training modules, since each module contained field activities that aagewans would have to undertake to develop their leadership skills.

The modules were rolled out in four states, namely, Punjab, Nagaland, Jharkhand, and Delhi. There were certain strategic reasons for their inclusion. Punjab was a new state and operating largely in an urban context, while Nagaland was also a new state along with being a tribal dominated one. Further, Delhi was

one of the oldest states with considerable experience in unionizing, while Jharkhand was a predominately rural state with many members being tribal and engaged in agriculture.

The roll-out of the modules were carried out in two phases of the program: Phase I (November 2018 to December 2021 and Phase II (January 2022 to June 2023). In both Phase 1 and Phase 2, decentralized or state-wise trainings were held with aagewans and included both residential and online trainings (because of COVID-19).

In total, 260 aagewans were trained under the program--170 aagewans in Phase 1 and 90 aagewans in Phase 2, although a total of 410 were identified. In addition, a total of 50 aagewans went through the trade-specific modules. The hope was that these trained aagewans would organize women workers, expand union membership, resolve community issues, and use their collective bargaining power to negotiate and secure the rights of members as citizens and workers in the unorganized sector.

Further, to strengthen SEWA's base of facilitators, 21 trainers were trained across all the four states, who were expected to facilitate short, capsule modules with new aagewans at the local level using the training manuals developed. Similarly, to provide hand holding support to develop aagewan capacity, 21 organizers from the four states were trained on the modules, so that they can execute them in their local areas of operation. Details for each state can be found in the Annexure II.

MODULE STRUCTURE

Module 1: SEWA values and ideology

The focus of this module is about SEWA and its ethos. This module talks about history of SEWA, its values, the need of organising, SEWA's 11 points, the identity of a women worker, issues experienced as a women worker and understanding trades within SEWA. As a part of the module training, an aagewan is tasked with reaching out to members and explaining to them the objective of SEWA.

Module 2: Union-building and leadership

This module centers on understanding the informal sector, structure of the union including trade committees, mohalla and trade group meetings, leadership, membership and organising in the union. At the end of the module, an aagewan is tasked to facilitate community meetings among members.

Module 3: Role and responsibilities of an aagewan

This module covers the key responsibilities of aagewans, discussion on specific trades including relevant laws, identifying the commonalities and differences in trade issues, and learning about how these issues can be taken up. At the end of the session, an aagewan must be able to identify community issues through the mohalla meetings held.

Module 4: Planning campaigns and public actions

The focus of this module is on the components of a plan, its importance, and processes of planning. It also looks at what is a public event and how to plan for one, public speaking and mobilization skills of aagewans. At the end of the module, the aagewan has to take a leadership role in the planning and execution of a campaign.

Methodology and Sample:

The purpose of the evaluation is to account for the progress under the Aagewan Vikas program, and the extent to which the program achieved its intended goals of developing the leadership capacity of aagewans as well as to identify key lessons and recommendations for the future sustainability of the program. The primary users of this evaluation are SEWA program staff and its network of supporters. A user-focused, participatory, qualitative, and theory-of-change (ToC) led evaluation design was used.

The evaluation methodology included a document review, in-person and virtual 33 in-depth interviews and 4 focus group discussion (FGDs with aagewans) ensuring that a range of stakeholders participated in the evaluation process including SEWA program staff, aagewans, state leadership, trainers, and organizers.

The secondary data collection included a comprehensive review of key program documents such as, monthly reports, module documents, technical reports, annual reports, and other project outputs. A document gathering key state-level program information was developed and filled-up by state teams. Primary data collection included qualitative interviews (key informant and semi-structured interviews) and focus group discussions (FGDs).

The evaluation has elaborated on the outcomes of the program in a more qualitative way by providing illustrative examples from interviews and documentary sources. The evaluation team worked in consultation with and in a participatory way with Aagewan Vikas program stakeholders in the evaluation implementation process.

The sample was purposively selected together with SEWA to include the most knowledgeable stakeholders about the program in each state. For aagewans, among the sample of those trained, only those who had completed all four module trainings were selected to capture the growth in their leadership skills. Thereafter, factors such as representation from each trade group, diversity in membership tenure (those aagewans with more than 3 years of association and those with less than 3 years of association), age and education levels were considered in deciding the final sample of aagewans to interview under the evaluation. A pool of approximately 10 aagewans were shortlisted in each state and who were invited to participate in FGDs and IDIs based on their availability and convenience.

For trainers too, the sample selection was based on those who had participated in all the three ToT held in July 2022, October 2022, and February 2023. Similarly, for organizers, only those organizers who participated in the central-level workshop held in Ranchi and Delhi in August 2023 were included.

Separate interview tools were developed for state leadership (coordinators), aagewans, trainers, and organizers and interviews were recorded with the consent of participants. In each state, three days of fieldwork was carried out in the months of August and September and all interviews took place in a centralized location.

Table: Methodology – Sample structure

	Punjab	Delhi	Nagaland	Jharkhand	Total
IDIs with Trainers	3	3	1	1	8
IDIs with Organizers	3	2	2	2	9
FGDs with Aagewans	1 (6 participants)	1 (8 participants)	1 (8 participants)	1 (6 participants)	4
IDIs with Aagewans	3	3	4	3	13
KIIs with state leadership	1	1	1	1	4
KIIs with SEWA program staff and leadership	NA	NA	NA	NA	3

Evaluation Matrix:

The evaluators use a Theory of Change to anchor the evaluation analysis (see Annexure I). Some of the key outcomes of the program are:

- **Creation of foundational modules to develop a uniform understanding** across SEWA states

- **Strengthened leadership capacity of aagewans**—demonstrable knowledge and skills in resolving mohalla issues, collectivizing trade groups, organizing campaigns, and mobilizing women to take collective action on citizen and workers’ rights.
- **Capacity strengthening of organizers** in providing strategic, needs-based support to aagewans on community and trade issues.
- **Improving the training capacity of trainers** to sustain awareness and knowledge-building across the union.

Some of the key evaluation questions to assess the program’s outcomes holistically include:

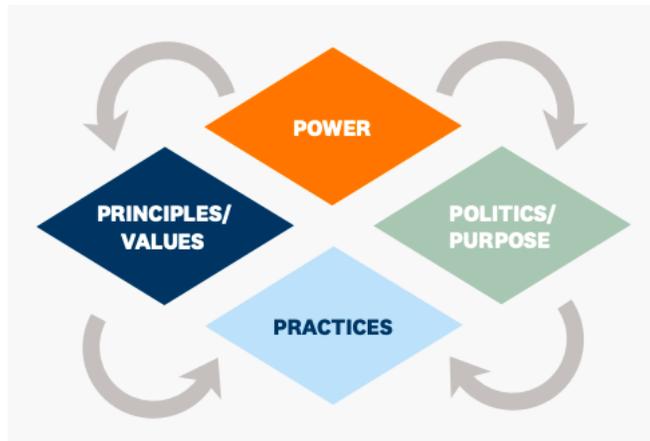
- **Relevance:** To what extent did the program’s design and implementation processes respond to state-specific needs for strengthening grassroots leadership on trade and community issues? What strategic decisions were taken towards ensuring program outcomes?
- **Effectiveness** – How has the program contributed to leadership capacity strengthening? To what extent is the program making a difference in the lives of aagewans and their organizing skills?
- **Impact** – To what extent has the program generated significant intended or unintended, higher-level outcomes? What are the main enablers and barriers to success?
- **Sustainability** – To what extent will gains made by the program in developing the leadership skills of grassroots women leaders likely to last? What should the program do further to strengthen grassroots community leadership and union-building?

The questions are based on the [OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation’s framework](#) and form the broad areas lines of inquiry. The key stakeholders that have informed the evaluation, the tools of data collection and the focus on inquiry are presented in the table below:

Stakeholder	Data Collection Tool	Focus of Inquiry
SEWA program staff	Key informant interviews	Background to the program and understanding key progress milestones, strategic decisions, and lessons learned
State leadership (Coordinator)	Key informant interviews	Status and degree of implementation in the state, strategic decisions, challenges, and lessons learned
Aagewans	Key informant interviews	Extent of leadership capacity strengthening in the field, behaviour changes (<i>power with, to, within</i>)
	FGDs	Examples of significant changes or higher-level outcomes under the program
Organizers	Key informant interviews	Extent of leadership capacity strengthening in the field, behaviour changes (<i>power with, to, within</i>)
Trainers	Key informant interviews	Effectiveness of the trainings in capacity strengthening

In addition, the evaluation draws on **Srilatha Batiwala’s [Transformative Feminist Leadership framework](#)** to understand the core elements of leadership-building within SEWA’s Aagewan Vikas program. In particular, the evaluation will examine the extent to which the program represents a move towards empowering, enabling, inclusive, and collective forms of leadership—**power with, to, and within**. Specifically, it will throw light on how aagewans embody the values and principles of SEWA in their leadership practice and how they are advancing the collective goals of the union, which are both practical and strategic in nature.

In short, the evaluation will unpack whether aagewans’ actions have resulted in mutual support, solidarity, collaboration among members (*power with*); whether their capacity (knowledge and skills) to take joint action has increased (*power to*); and whether they perceive any changes in their sense of self-worth, self-knowledge, self-confidence, and commitment (*power within*).



Source: [Gender and Health Hub \(DOI: 10.37941/RR/2022/2\)](https://doi.org/10.37941/RR/2022/2)

As shown in the diagram above, we will examine the normative values or principles that underpin the work of aagewans, their practice or the aspects of trade and community work that aagewans are advancing, and their sense of purpose or the larger cause or mission for which they are leading.

The report is divided into four state-specific chapters with a contextual background and key summary of insights provided for each state. A detailed set of recommendations have been provided in the concluding section of the report.

I. SEWA Delhi Context:

Key summary of findings:

- When the Aagewan Vikas program rolled out in Delhi in 2018-19, the state leadership noted that it was a formalization of the organizing work that aagewans were already undertaking in the state since early 2000s. In fact, access to financial inclusion through savings and loans was the foundation of SEWA Delhi's work with aagewans.
- A key objective of the program in Delhi was consolidating all various trainings and modules that aagewans were familiar with and giving a clear structure to their learning by drawing on lessons from other states.
- Some of the upcoming plans under the program include in-state capacity building of all SSKs coordinators and a continuation of the batch-wise, residential, module-focused trainings of remaining aagewans. In addition, the plan is to identify and develop a cadre of master trainers among aagewans who can provide handholding support to other aagewans and carry out follow-up activities and learning assessments as needed.

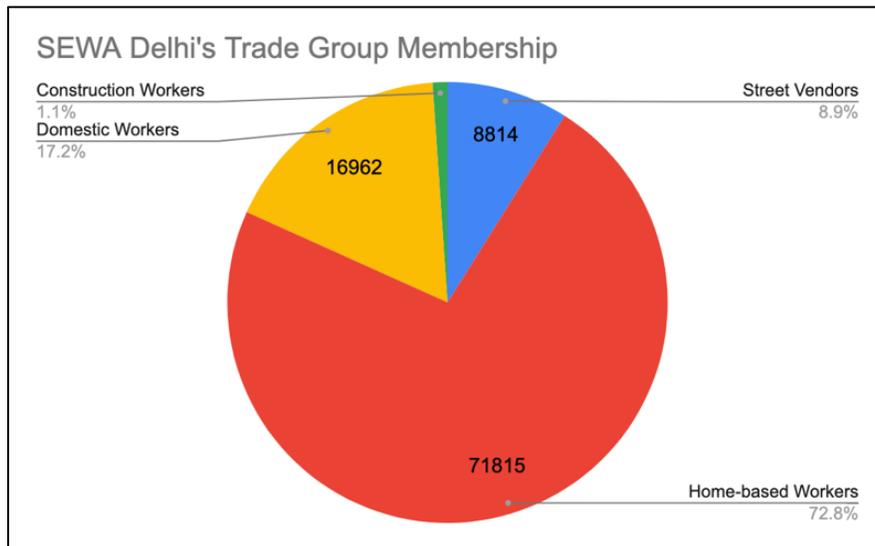
SEWA Delhi first began collectivizing women vegetable vendors in the Jahangirpuri area as a part of its community microfinance work in 1999. Subsequently, it organized women street vendors in Raghbir Nagar and thereafter its membership organically grew among women of the unorganized sector in different parts of the city. Currently, SEWA operates in 11 areas including: Jahangirpuri (North Delhi); Raghbir Nagar, Sonia Vihar (West Delhi); Sunder Nagari, Gokulpuri, Rajiv Nagar and New Ashok Nagar (East Delhi); Anand Vihar (North-East Delhi), Nand Nagri, Mulla Colony and Mustafabad.

Access to financial inclusion through savings and loans was the foundation of SEWA Delhi's work with women domestic workers, home-based workers, street vendors, and construction workers. In 2007, SEWA Delhi established the Mahila SEWA Urban Cooperative Thrift and Credit Society— a women owned and operated financial institution that provides women with saving schemes and access to affordable credit via loans and trains them on financial literacy. It also offers door-to-door services via its bank saathis or agents for its 8000 active members.

With a membership base that now stands close to a lakh (i.e., 98,700) **SEWA Delhi takes a holistic approach to unionizing by catering to the diverse life cycle needs of women.** While promoting financial inclusion, SEWA leadership became aware of the trade-linked struggles of women and its intertwining with community issues. This led SEWA Delhi to work on livelihoods support for its members through technical skills development and direct market linkages along with ethical and transparent supply chains by setting up a women's owned producer company, Ruaab SEWA. In addition, it established SEWA Shakti Kendras (SSK) or Empowerment Centers¹ in each area to facilitate and strengthen government scheme linkages and public service delivery.

When the Aagewan Vikas program rolled out in 2018-19, SEWA Delhi **was already engaged in core union-building work** and state leadership thought it was a good opportunity to **formalize the organizing work of aagewans. A key objective of the program in Delhi was to consolidate all various trainings and modules that aagewans were familiar with and to give a clear structure to their learning by drawing on lessons from other states.** The state leadership was keen to leverage the trainings to strengthen the work of trade and mohalla groups and to further the union's goals of "*purn rozgar*" or full employment and self-reliance of members. In short, they viewed the Aagewan Vikas program as promoting "*mahila sashaktikaran*" or women's empowerment wherein women self-identify themselves as workers ("*har mahila kaamgar hai*") with legitimate rights and entitlements.

¹ SEWA Shakti Kendras are convergence and coordination centers for SEWA and focus on strengthening members' access to entitlements – through mobilization, building awareness, initial application support and hand-holding and nurturing grassroots leadership



Future State Plans:

Based on conversations with the state leadership, some of the upcoming plans regarding the Aagewan Vikas program include **in-state capacity building of all SSKs coordinators** to build their leadership capacity.

Secondly, is **to continue the batch-wise, module-focused trainings of remaining aagewans** so that they have a thorough understanding of SEWA and its ideology, union-building and leadership, their role and responsibilities, and campaign planning. More importantly, they would like to groom these leaders so that they can stand up for their rights (*“apne muddo ke liye lad sake”* - *“to be able to fight for our issues”*).

While local-level, capsule-based trainings of aagewans have happened of those who were not part of the program, state leadership observed that these have been disjointed in nature with gaps in their learning and follow-up. Therefore, **they want to systematically train all aagewans under a common platform so that they can move forward together in one direction** (*“ek disha mein aagey bade”* - *“move towards one direction”*).

Thirdly, they would like to **identify and develop a cadre of master trainers among aagewans** who can provide handholding support to other aagewans and carry out follow-up activities and learning assessments as needed. This would also help ease the load on organizers and trainers.

SEWA Delhi Trainers:

Key summary of findings:

- Among the three trainers who were a part of the ToT, only two were engaged in regular trainings with one of them engaged as a part-time facilitator under the program
- The biggest takeaways for trainers were their own self-development as skilled facilitators and in designing modules that can be used by other state teams, thereby, facilitating both intra-and-cross-learning. As a result of the ToT, the trainers gained the confidence and skills to develop their own modules, thereby, becoming internal resource persons on specific subjects. They were also able to interlink Aagewan Vikas modules and topics with other ongoing program-linked trainings within SEWA.
- Among challenges, trainers noted that taking out dedicated time for trainings of aagewans and members has been a challenge for those trainers not directly linked to the program.
- Trainers shared was that since SEWA's work is so vast and diverse, they themselves don't have a full and comprehensive understanding of its work, union structure, and functioning.
- Also, in the absence of no pre-or-post assessment work built in, trainers are unable to gauge the prior knowledge and understanding of aagewans and members on an issue. Linked to this has been gaps in post-training field activity assessments of aagewans.
- Trainers noted that was no formal process of follow-up after the February 2023 ToT session to finalize their modules and to share feedback from their training experiences, which resulted in gaps in their own training engagement.
- The trainers agreed on the need to further strengthen their facilitation skills through refresher and a follow-up ToT training along with focusing on more trade-specific trainings. Further, to ensure higher participation in trainings in general, trainers suggested compensating for wage loss and provision of creche facilities.

Profile of trainers:

The three trainers who participated in the training of trainers (ToT) under the Aagewan Vikas Program were SEWA program staff with varying levels of skills and experience in conducting training. Their inclusion in the ToT was primarily to develop their capacity as trainers within SEWA since a large part of their program work involves trainings with aagewans and members. **Among the three trainers who were a part of the ToT, only two were engaged in regular training.**

One of the trainers supported the Aagewan Vikas Program as a part-time facilitator and co-led the module trainings of aagewans in Delhi, Punjab, and Jharkhand and the basic and advanced trainings for home-based workers. Another trainer was managing SEWA Delhi's work on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act but wasn't formally a part of the Aagewan Vikas and had no prior experience as a trainer before joining the ToT.

The third trainer had previous experience in trainings (prior to SEWA) and was now engaged in capacity building trainings within SEWA on ILO Convention No. 190 pertaining to gender-based violence and harassment at the workplace. In addition, they had conducted trainings with aagewans from the Aagewan Vikas Program on gender-based violence, POSH Act, and C-190.

In SEWA Delhi, along with trainers who were a part of ToT, there are master trainers identified among aagewans and who are conducting area-wise, capsule-sized trainings with aagewans using the Aagewan Vikas modules.

Learnings from ToT and Personal Growth as Trainers:

The main takeaways for trainers was their own **self-development as skilled facilitators**, i.e., how to engage participants and build a rapport with them, time-management, summarizing module content, breaking down key concepts or terms for easy understanding, creating a safe environment when discussing sensitive topics, using different interactive tools and methods in trainings (e.g. case study, power walk, role play, violence tree etc.), planning follow-up activities to ensure applied learning.

One of the trainers pointed out how the ToT made them realize **the power of communication and the impact of their words**. “*Hamare shabd behno ko jor bhi sakte hai aur bikher bhi sakte hai*” (Our words can bring sisters together and can also cause a rupture).

The trainer engaged with the Aagewan Vikas program found the mapping exercise introduced in the ToT extremely helpful in identifying different schemes, public facilities, social infrastructure, and organizations working in an area. They shared the mapping tool with aagewans in the Delhi and Jharkhand trainings and with Delhi SSKs for further action.

Because of the ToT, trainers became conscious of their role as trainers in sustaining grassroots community leadership and in building a common, union-wide understanding of organizing. Since SEWA Delhi’s training work follows a union-building approach, **the trainers were able to interlink Aagewan Vikas modules and topics with other ongoing program-linked trainings**. For example, one of trainers borrowed material from the basic and advanced home-based workers training held under the Aagewan Vikas Program for developing their module on GBV amongst home-based workers.

As a result of the training, the **trainers gained the confidence and skills to develop their own modules, thereby becoming internal resource persons on specific subjects and to conduct trainings on their own**. Applying the learnings from the ToT, the trainers mentioned how they are able to undertake a state-specific needs assessment by speaking to local organizers and to follow a systematic process of module development. For instance, reviewing SEWA’s prior work on the topic to see if there are existing training materials that can be modified and updated.

On module building, one of the trainers involved in the Aagewan Vikas program has developed a one-day **training module on leadership building**, although it is yet to be implemented.

Another trainer is in the process of **developing a comprehensive training on the POSH Act**—a 15-hour training spread over three days. The first module on the POSH Act covers topics such as gender, discriminatory gender roles and norms, patriarchy, gender violence, and harassment in the workplace. The second module unpacks what is a workplace, especially in the context of home-based workers whose homes constitute an informal workplace. And the third module centers on the POSH Act’s key provisions and redressal mechanisms. The training modules which are still being finalized includes storytelling and role play exercises (a day in the life of a girl and boy), power walk, and audio-visuals (a film on feminist activist Kamla Bhasin).

Along with this, they have identified and trained 10 aagewans on the draft POSH Act modules. The plan is to develop these aagewans as master trainers, who can further train other aagewans and staff.

Another trainer who was a part of ToT has **developed a four-module training on GBV amongst home-based workers** to be rolled out in day-long trainings in North-East and East Delhi, which has a high concentration of home-based workers. The objective is to help identify issues of violence and harassment among home-based workers (*ghar-khata kamgar*) and to act against it.

The modules focus on home-based work (types, supply chain, piece-rate system, role of contractors), violence and harassment against women (types of violence against women and how to identify it), redressal mechanisms for GBV in the workplace (POSH Act and its implications for home-based workers), and key provisions of C-177 (Homework Convention) and C-190.

All the four modules include follow-up activities like organizing a meeting with home-based workers in their area to discuss certain key messages (recognition of one’s worker identity as a *ghar-khata kamgar* and that their home is their workplace, observing and reporting any incidence of violence and harassment against a member) as well exercises such as campaign planning, violence tree etc. Five trainings on GBV

amongst home-based workers have been conducted so far—two led by trainer and the remaining three by master trainers identified among home-based workers whom they have trained.

Moreover, **the ToT helped trainers design these modules as internal knowledge resources of SEWA that can be used by other state teams as well, thereby facilitating both intra-and-cross-learning.** In fact, the two trainers from Delhi plan to collaborate on how the POSH Act module being developed can feed into the GBV amongst home-based workers modules.

In fact, through the ToT, **the trainers learnt about the work of the other states, helping break down work silos, and fostering networks of sharing among SEWA teams.** For example, one of the trainers utilized the modules developed by the West Bengal team on Gram Sabha and MNREGA for their project. Similarly, states teams in Punjab and West Bengal approached one of the Delhi trainers regarding their POSH Act module.

Challenges of Trainers:

One of the learning outcomes of the ToT was that trainers would identify a small subset of aagewans to train on both existing modules and on a module of their choice that they develop as a part of the ToT process. However, since trainers are involved in other training and project activities of SEWA, they haven't been able to either finalize the content of their chosen module or to implement trainings with aagewans as planned under the ToT. In fact, **taking out dedicated time for trainings of aagewans and members has been a challenge for some trainers, especially those not directly linked to the program.**

The trainers pointed out that while online follow-ups took place after the July 2022 and October 2022 ToT sessions where they discussed their progress and challenges; there was **no formal process of follow-up after the February 2023 ToT session to finalize their modules** and to share feedback from their training experiences. As a result, **there have been gaps in their own training engagement.** For example, none of the trainers had recorded their training sessions to see if there was scope for improvement nor had they observed each other's trainings for sharing feedback.

Another challenge shared was that **since SEWA's work is so vast and diverse, trainers themselves don't have a full and comprehensive understanding of its work, union structure, and functioning.** Further, since aagewans and staff a part of several other training initiatives, it is difficult to know what trainings have been conducted or modules developed on a given topic, and **in the absence of no pre-or-post assessment work built in, trainers are often unable to gauge the prior knowledge and understanding of aagewans and members on an issue.**

Linked to this has been challenges in **tracking post-training field activity assessments and in following-up on aagewans**---an area that was acknowledged as being the weakest. As trainers, they have also faced practical challenges in the field such as dropping topics due to time constraints resulting in **incomplete training sessions**, limited revision, and follow-up with aagewans to ensure retention in learning, handling sensitive topics like GBV, distractions due to the presence of infants, convincing aagewans and members to spend 4-5 hours on trainings, and addressing the varied learning needs of aagewans.

Further Areas of Support and Next Steps as a Trainer:

The trainers unanimously agreed on the **need to further strengthen their facilitation skills through refresher and a follow-up ToT training.** In terms of their own growth, the trainers wanted to develop different versions of their modules to avoid content fatigue among members and to create diverse modules that can be adopted to state contexts. In particular, the trainers wanted to **develop the capacity of aagewans and organizers as master-trainers** so that they can conduct local-level trainings.

For organizers in particular, the trainers were of the view that they needed gender-sensitivity and communications trainings since they directly interface with members and aagewans and are often privy to

confidential, sensitive information. **Post-training follow-up of aagewans by organizers (both in-person and online) needed to be strengthened, as trainers are reliant on them for feedback.**

In terms of training needs specific to the state, all the trainers unanimously agreed on the **need for trainings of aagewans to continue**, especially of those who were not a part of the residential trainings of the Aagewan Vikas program. This would ensure continuity in their learning and strengthen collective leadership since several hadn't completed all the four module trainings.

They also recommended that **pre-and-post training evaluation of all the four module trainings to gauge the extent to which aagewans have practiced what they have learnt.** In fact, the Aagewan Vikas module trainings were identified by trainers as most critical in instilling the core values of SEWA and for nurturing community leadership. As one trainer put it, "even if SEWA isn't there tomorrow, still aagewans can run the work of SEWA."

Specifically, the trainers felt that since members in Delhi were engaged in more than one trade and organizing work on new trades such as waste-picking has just begun, **more trade-focused trainings are needed** to build the understanding of aagewans on work-related matters.

Further, to ensure higher turnout in trainings in general, the **trainers suggested compensating for wage loss and provision of creche facilities.** Lastly, since some of the trainings delved into sensitive topics, the trainers felt that provision of counselling support was necessary.

SEWA Delhi Organizers:

Key summary of findings:

- All the 10 organisers in Delhi participated in the four-module trainings, while two among them were a part of residential trainings. Organizers in Delhi have a long association with SEWA working as community field mobilizers under different programs and even as aagewans.
- Organizers were of the view that the leadership traits and qualities of aagewans and organizers are similar and that they both work to organize and unionize women in the unorganized sector.
- Organizers consider themselves to be multi-taskers, primarily engaged in meetings (mohalla, trade, health), campaign planning, scheme linkages, forming trade and sub-trade groups, and government engagement. They support aagewans in gathering signatures from members, filling out applications, writing letters to government authorities, organizing Jan Sunvais.
- Organizers stepped up to their role during COVID-19 and trained aagewans on the use of smartphone (WhatsApp) and digital technology (Google meets).
- Examples shared by organizers indicate that they provide aagewans with constant, on-the-field support in organizing trade/sub-trade groups and in building a collective voice among them.
- With domestic workers, organizers are helping aagewans put together rate charts for different domestic tasks and with street vendors, they are conducting a survey of women street vendors with aagewans to connect them to government loan schemes. Further, with homebased workers, they are working with aagewans in mapping piece-rate home-based work that is locally available, and which pays decent rates.

- Organizers often coach aagewans on balancing their trade and aagewan responsibilities and noted that the ability of aagewans to devote time towards their duties as community leaders depends to a large extent on their trade profile
- The Aagewan Vikas trainings provided organizers with a systematic understanding of SEWA as a union and its pyramidal structure of trade groups, trade committees, state committees, and national committees. They also learnt how to strategize and plan their work better keeping in mind short-term and long-term nature of issues and the jurisdiction and remit of different government ministries and departments.
- A major challenge of organizers was in record-keeping and documentation of the work done by aagewans. Further, since role of an aagewan is voluntary in nature and offers flexibility of time, it is difficult for organizers to ensure their sustained engagement on trade and community issues. There is also the challenge of reviving existing trade groups, strengthening existing ones, and creating new trade groups as per the local need.
- Another significant challenge pertains to addressing the diverse needs of trade and sub-trade groups within different areas of Delhi, making it difficult for organizers and aagewans to unionize and collectively bargain for worker rights.

Profile of Organizers:

There are **10 organisers** in Delhi, all of whom have participated in the four-module trainings as well as the basic and advanced trainings for home-based workers under the Aagewan Vikas program. Two organizers were part of the residential trainings in August 2022 in Ranchi and March 2023 in Delhi with organizers from other states. One of the organizers who took part in the residential trainings was an aagewan at the time of COVID-19 and was involved in relief work (distribution of medical and hygiene kits, ration), while the other was a skills trainer prior to becoming an organizer. **Organizers in Delhi have a long association with SEWA working as community field mobilizers under different programs** related to skilling, health, community microfinance and as aagewans.

Roles and Responsibilities of Organizers:

One of the organizers described their role as “*behno ka saangathan banane ka kaam karti hu*” (I work to **organize and unionize women**). They mentioned that as organizers in Delhi, they know their target groups and areas well including different trade and subtrade groups that exist within a specific area. Since organizing involves extensive fieldwork and rapport-building, organizers felt that it is important to have their identity and presence recognized in the community (“*community mei humari pehchan honi chahiye*”).

Organizers were of the view that **leadership traits and qualities of aagewans and organizers are similar** (“*dono ka ek jaisa roop aur charitra*”) and that they both should possess the ability to reassure community members that their issues will be resolved (“*santushti dena*”).

Organizers consider themselves to be **multi-taskers, primarily engaged in meetings (mohalla, trade, health), campaign planning, scheme linkage support, and government engagement**. Specifically, organizers are work with aagewans in identifying issues among different trade and subtrade groups within a specific area and in implementing strategies to address their variegated trade challenges.

Further, organizers work closely with aagewans in each mohalla of an area. Typically, all mohallas in an area are divided among aagewans based on their familiarity. Organizers were of the view that **daily interaction with community members in a mohalla is key to building community trust in aagewans**.

At the start and end of each month, the **aagewans and organizers discuss together the monthly plan** for conducting meetings on trade, mohalla, maternal and child health, and adolescent health issues. During these meetings, aagewans share progress made on trade and mohalla issues and those that need redressal, and together they **engage in joint problem solving**. Often, organizers work with a group of aagewans concerned to build collective action on civic issues (e.g., garbage collection, park maintenance, installing street lights, road repair, cleaning of clogged drains).

As a part of their weekly field visits, organizers also meet aagewans at the mohalla meetings led by them. At these meetings, the **organizers support aagewans in gathering signatures from members, filling out applications or writing letters to government authorities**. Further, organizers in each area have created a **WhatsApp group with aagewans for sharing of updates**.

In addition, organizers are working on **fast-tracking the process of election of aagewans by trade groups** as shared during the Aagewan Vikas trainings.

Organizers' Engagement with Aagewans on Community and Trade Issues:

Organizers mentioned that they stepped up to their role during COVID-19 when online training were held with aagewans. It was at this time that **organizers trained aagewans on the use of smartphone (WhatsApp) and digital technology (Google meets)** and thereafter coordinated with them on what relief and medical support was needed by community members in the area.

In their role as organizers, they often **coach aagewans on balancing their trade and aagewan responsibilities**. It was shared by organizers that **the ability of aagewans to devote time towards their duties as community leaders depends to a large extent on their trade profile**. Home-based workers, given the flexible and seasonal nature of their work can devote more time to aagewan activities than street vendors or domestic workers, who are self-employed and can't devote as much time due to wage loss incurred.

Specifically, on mohalla issues, organizers shared two recent examples of how aagewans resolved community issues with their support. In Mustafabad, (North East Delhi), members were had repeatedly highlighted the lack of an anganwadi center in the area. As a result, pregnant and lactating mothers had to travel outside the area to avail nutrition support and young children were missing out on their early-childhood education.

Organizers and aagewans together launched a "**Signature Abhiyaan**" and submitted a letter to the Dept. of Women and Child Development, Govt. of NCT Delhi for action. Thereafter, they regularly followed-up with government authorities to take timely action. Finally, in 2021, an anganwadi center was set up in Mustafabad benefitting all women in the community.

Similarly in Nand Nagri, aagewans raised the issue of the decrepit condition of the MCD toilet, which services approximately 1200 slums in the area. Women were adversely affected by the lack of a common toilet facility and petitioned the ward counsellor for its maintenance. A meeting was organized with all members and signatures were gathered from the community. Thereafter, organizers with aagewans regularly met with the ward counsellor and Delhi Jal Board officials to press for provision of piped water in the toilet and lighting near the toilet. As a result of their collective efforts, a fully functional toilet was established in the area.

Further, **organizers and aagewans are a part of MCD WhatsApp groups** that have been set up in some areas (Mustafabad, Nand Nagiri, Jahangirpuri, New Ashok Nagar) for grievance redressal. Through these WhatsApp groups, aagewans share photos and highlight local-level issues with ward counsellors and local MCD officials.

In addition, **organizers support aagewans in organizing Jan Sunvais or public hearings**, a strategy that is now being adopted in areas where SEWA has established its presence in the community. In these hearings, aagewans and members share their local issues and challenges with MLAs, ward counsellors, MCD and Delhi Jal Board officials, and local NGO representatives. Public statements are recorded, and a commitment is sought from stakeholders for timely action.

The *Jan Sunvais*, organizers opined, have been effective since it gives visibility to the work of aagewans as community leaders in the eyes of the government and provides officials a first-hand account of the pressing problems in an area. Thereafter, it becomes easier for aagewans to follow up with the concerned authorities on action taken.

Organizers provide aagewans with constant, on-the-field support in organizing trade groups and in building a collective voice among them. Since SEWA Delhi has the largest base of home-based workers, many aagewans are working on trade issues linked to their lives. For home-based workers, the organizers support aagewans in organizing eye and health camps, who suffer from occupational health hazards like poor eyesight, skin issues, backpain etc.

They also **work with aagewans in mapping piece-rate home-based work that is locally available**, and which pays decent rates. For example, in Jahangiripuri, organizers helped women to switch from rakhi-making to button-stitching, since it offered a higher rate. Similarly, in Mustafabad, organizers and aagewans successfully organized women in *chunna bharna* work to bargain for a better piece-rate. They stood firm against the local contractor and refused to work for them unless rates were increased by one rupee.

Linked to this, organizers are **preparing rate charts for certain categories of home-based work with aagewans** and encouraging workers to **maintain a daily record of their work** (date, time spent, work done) to reduce incidences of exploitation and cheating by middlemen and contractors.

In addition, **organizers conduct sensitization sessions with aagewans and home-based workers on sexual harassment and the need to both report it immediately.** They also engaged in forming smaller sub-trade groups within home-based work (e.g., trade group of women engaged only in embroidery) to discuss and address challenges unique to their sub-trade.

With domestic workers, organizers are helping aagewans put together rate charts that lays down hourly rates of work for different types of domestic work (cleaning, cooking, laundry, washing dishes) and to disseminate those among the domestic workers trade groups. They also support aagewans in planning activities under the My Fair Home Campaign, which is organized every year in June. This includes sensitizing Resident Welfare Association members and employers about the basic demands of domestic workers for decent wages and conditions of work, weekly offs, toilet facilities and other demands. Further, organizers also inform aagewans of different SEWA initiatives to upskill domestic workers like the SEWA Sangini skills training and social welfare schemes that they can avail.

Similarly, **for street vendors, organizers are currently conducting a survey of women street vendors with aagewans to connect with them government schemes.** Thereafter, they plan to approach ward counsellors and MCD officials for issuance of letter of recommendation in lieu of vending certificates and identity cards. This would enable women street vendors affiliated with SEWA to avail the PM SvaNidhi Scheme, under which they can get a working capital loan of up to Rs. 10,000 repayable in monthly instalments over a one-year tenure.

Learnings from Organizers' Training:

The organizers in Delhi were already engaged in programmatic and unionizing work with aagewans for several years. However, the Aagewan Vikas training provided them with a **systematic understanding of SEWA as a union and its pyramidal structure of trade groups, trade committees, state committees, and national committees.** For the first time, they gained insight into the union's multifaceted nature of work and their contribution to its goals and objectives.

Specifically, the organizers learnt **how to strategize and plan their work better keeping in mind short-term and long-term nature of issues** (e.g. widow pension has a long time horizon for resolution unlike garbage collection, which is near-term). This in turn has helped them identify strategies and tactics that aagewans can use depending on the type of issue and to set targets accordingly.

Further, **organizers also learnt about what procedures to follow when filing applications** (e.g. ensuring all applications have SEWA's stamp) **or submitting letters of appeal or signature campaigns** (e.g. must be on SEWA's letter head and have the signature of Delhi state coordinator).

In addition, some of the other key takeaways were how to surface community issues (“*mudde kaise nikalte hai*”), the **jurisdiction and remit of different government ministries and departments** (e.g. window pension is handled by the Dept. of Women and Child Development, while old age pension is dealt by the Dept. of Social Welfare), **different labour laws and codes applicable to the unorganized sector** (e.g. Minimum Wages Act), provisions of different trade-specific legislations (e.g. C189, C190, Street Vendors Act, 2014). Moreover, at the basic and advanced trainings of home-based workers held in June and December 2022, they learnt about the e-Shram card and different training and social security schemes linked to it.

Challenges of Organizers:

A major challenge of organizers was in **record-keeping and documentation**, which is time-consuming and cumbersome. Aagewans due to time and literacy constraints do not systematically document their work and even when they do share their monthly reports, it is scant with details and there are information gaps that organizers must fill out.

Since the role of an aagewan is voluntary in nature and offers flexibility of time, it is difficult for organizers to ensure their sustained engagement on trade and community issues. Follow-up and handholding support as proposed under the training modules in some instances has not happened as planned, especially post-COVID when the imperatives of recovering from severe wage loss took precedence over their work as aagewans.

There is also the issue of **flagging levels of interest and motivation among aagewans** which affects organizing efforts and trade group activity. Linked to this is the **challenge of reviving existing trade groups, strengthening existing ones, and creating new trade groups as per the local need.**

Another significant challenge pertains to **addressing the diverse needs of trade and sub-trade groups within different areas of Delhi, making it difficult for organizers and aagewans to unionize and collectively bargain for worker rights.** In fact, there are more than 20 sub-categories of home-based workers in Delhi (e.g. stitching, embroidery, sticking bindi, envelope making, weaving, garland-making, darning, toy-making, food packaging, sewing buttons, vegetable peeling, thread cutting, sticking patches on jeans, bangle making) and a variety of work arrangements within each of these sub-categories.

Some engage in piece-rate work, while others are self-employed with variations in skills-levels within home-based work. The supply chain for home-based work is complex with multiple intermediaries and contractors with organizers having to negotiate and bargain with different actors. Not to mention that **many women have overlapping trades and switch as per need, which is turn hampers collectivizing efforts.**

Further areas of support:

The organizers wanted **computer skills training for maintaining digital records of their work and documentation training** for capturing field developments and progress in a short and succinct manner.

SEWA Delhi Aagewans:

Key summary of findings:

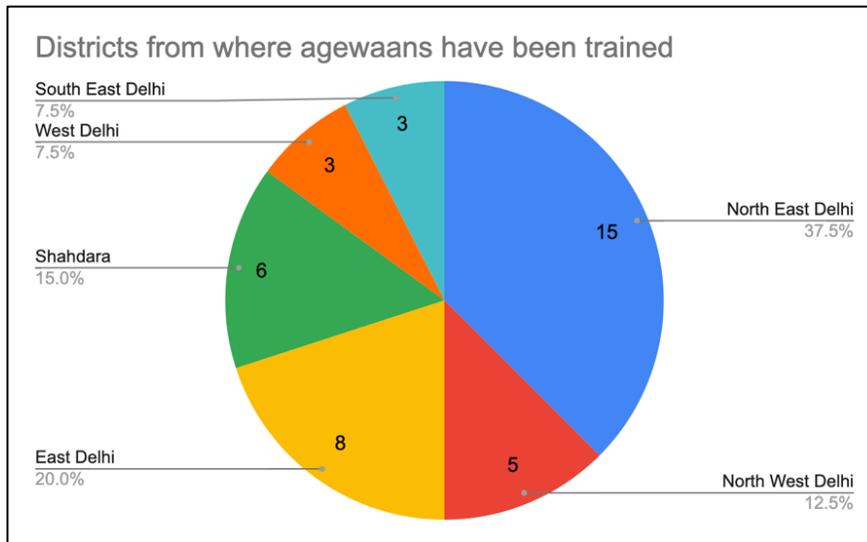
- In Phase 1 of the program, there was greater participation of aagewans who occupied leadership positions with the union as “karyakarnis” and from different trades. While in Phase 2, a majority of aagewans were home-based workers and had fewer years of association with SEWA.
- SEWA, for aagewans, represented the collective voice and interests of women in the unorganized sector, who remain invisible in the eyes of the government. Aagewans were well-versed with SEWA’s history and journey, pan-India presence, and work with different trade groups.
- Aagewans, especially those with a long association with SEWA, grew into their roles as community leaders and had no prior knowledge about their day-to-day responsibilities. They described becoming aagewans as a gradual journey of learning and self-discovery.
- Aagewans recognized that unionizing and trade union membership accorded women in the unorganized sector with a legitimate voice and identity for securing their rights as workers.

- A defining characteristic of an aagewan is their direct, personal connect with members, which enables them to serve as bridge between SEWA and the community. As community leaders, they inform women about their rights and entitlements and share knowledge about their trades and relevant labour codes, conventions, and regulations applicable to them.
- As a part of their union building responsibilities, aagewans in Delhi are engaged in membership drives, forming area-wise sub-trade groups, sensitizing women on the need for rate charts, surveying those who can be registered under different government schemes like PM SwaNidhi, organizing campaigns like the My Fair Home etc.
- Aagewan in Delhi are a part of different collective forums both within and outside SEWA where they regularly interface with community members and local government representatives. As recognizable faces and trustworthy members of their community, they have helped address mohalla issues like establishing an anganwadi center in NorthEast Delhi, clean and functioning MCD toilets for women, maintenance of local parks etc. and supported women with their paperwork for applying to government schemes
- Aagewans unanimously spoke about the strong sense of self-identity cultivated upon becoming community leaders, manifesting in their increased independence, mobility, self-confidence, communication abilities.
- One of the major takeaways from the trainings was the strong sense of worker identity built among aagewans, a recognition of their common predicaments and struggles as women informal workers, and an understanding of the purpose and role of SEWA as a women's trade union. They also gained a deeper understanding of their own specific trades and clarity about their role and responsibilities as aagewans.
- A key challenge highlighted was dedicating time towards their roles as aagewans. This was especially true for street vendors and domestic workers, both of whom are self-employed and for whom loss of daily income or wages is a constant worry. In fact, in many cases, aagewans struggle to balance their trade and unpaid care work with their responsibilities as aagewans, and often leave it for a while.
- Aagewans expressed the need to refresh their understanding of the union's structure and its multi-level committees based on the diverse trade group membership within Delhi

Profile:

There are 40 aagewans who completed all four module trainings under the program—21 in Phase 1 (November 2018 to December 2021) and another 19 in Phase 2 (January 2022 to June 2023). A majority of aagewans are married and belong to the 35-44 years age group. A little less than two-third of aagewans trained, i.e., 62.5% have been members of SEWA Delhi over 5 years, while the remaining 37.5% have been associated for less than 5 years. Less than half of aagewans (45%) have completed their secondary education, while 32.5% have no formal education, and the rest have a primary school education. **In terms of their trade profile, 72.5% were home-based workers**, 15% were domestic workers, and the remaining 12.5% were street vendors.

In Phase 1 of the program, there was greater participation of those aagewans (18 out of 21) who had more than 5-years' association with SEWA Delhi, while in Phase 2, more aagewans (12 out of 19) who only a few years of association with SEWA Delhi participated.



It is important to note here that **those who participated in Phase 1 of Aagewan Vikas trainings occupied leadership positions or were “karyakarnis”** such as board members or bank saathis of the Mahila SEWA Urban Cooperative Thrift and Credit Society, board members of SEWA Sangini, President of Delhi SEWA union, steering group members of the National Platform for Domestic Workers, members of Town Vending Committees in designated zones. This was a deliberate decision as the state leadership wanted to train its office-bearer aagewans first. They also and they belonged to different trade groups.

In fact, in **Phase 2 of the program, a majority of those who participated had fewer years of association with SEWA, i.e., less than 5 years and all except one aagewan were home-based workers.** The preponderance of home-based workers in the program trainings was because women from trades such as domestic, construction, and street vending work couldn't commit full days' time to be a part of the Aagewan Vikas trainings due to wage loss incurred.

What is SEWA?

SEWA, for aagewans, represented the collective voice and interests of women in the unorganized sector, who remain invisible in the eyes of the government (*“jo asangatith chetra mein mahila kaam karte hai, woh sarkar ki nazar mein nahi hain...sarkar ko usse koi matlab nahi hai, iss liye SEWA ki zaroorat hai.”*)

Aagewans recognized SEWA's role in highlighting their issues, which remain neglected and overlooked by others (*“hum log ko itni pareshani hoti hai...koi humari aawaz uthane wali hai toh woh SEWA hai.”*)

As a trade union (*“kaamgar mahilaon ka sangathan”*) that works with women of the unorganized sector (*“asangatith chetra ki mahilaon ke saath kaam karta hai”*), SEWA ensures their full employment and well-being, i.e. *“purna rojgaar ke liye kaam karta hai, matlab roti, kapda, makaan.”*

In sum, **all aagewans felt a strong sense of ownership towards SEWA** as evidence by their use of *“humari SEWA”* (our SEWA) and were drawn to its ethos of self-reliance or atmanirbharta (*“apne upaar nirbhar raho, kisi aur pe yaani apne pati ya apne bacche kisi pe bhi nirbhar mat ho”*). They were **well-versed with SEWA history and journey, pan-India presence, work with different trade groups.**

Motivation to join SEWA and become an aagewan:

A bulk of the older aagewans first became acquainted with SEWA through the Mahila SEWA Urban Cooperative Thrift and Credit Society bank saathis who were helping women open savings accounts and who impressed upon them the need to be financially independent. Several visited the SSKs that had opened in their area out of curiosity and got to know about SEWA's scheme-linkage and documentation

support (e.g. government identity cards). In fact, SEWA helped them avail the benefits under different government programs (“*humme jaankari aur sahyog milta hai*”).

Thereafter, they became involved in SEWA’s work by participating in savings group meetings, attending skills trainings and information sessions on different topics, and joining mohalla meetings with other women of the local area. Gradually, they became familiar with SEWA’s work as a trade union which upholds their rights as workers and began mobilizing women through word-of-mouth. They were drawn to the fact that **SEWA was an all-women’s association, representing their collective interest, and it was this sense of belonging to a collective that motivated them to become active members.**

Aagewans, especially those with a long association with SEWA, **grew into their roles as community leaders. They had no prior knowledge about their day-to-day responsibilities, which evolved organically over time.** They described it as a **gradual journey of learning** with support from SEWA. Initially, they were involved in membership drives, connecting members with SSKs for support with their identity proofs and documents to access government entitlements and with the Mahila SEWA Urban Cooperative Thrift and Credit Society for opening bank accounts.

It was SEWA field staff who then approached them to take on role of aagewans based on the success of their community outreach and mobilization efforts and the community recognition and trust that they gained for their efforts (“*log humme dua dete hai*”). In fact, a lot of older aagewans in Delhi started their journey as leaders of their self-help groups, while the newer aagewans were identified at the time of COVID-19, when they came forward and led relief activities in their community. In both cases, **they were recognized by other behens as possessing leadership qualities and were later elected to formally take on their roles as aagewans.**

Importance of unionizing working women:

The aagewans opined that as **women of the unorganized sector, they remain outside the government’s social security net** and lack access to minimum wages, decent working conditions, weekly offs, and other benefits. **Unionizing represents the collective struggles of women across trades to secure their rights as workers.** As one home-based worker aagewan put it, “*ghar-khata kaamgar sarkar ki nazar mein “adrishya” hai, isliye humara sangathan SEWA se banana zaruri hai*” (in the eyes of the law, home-based workers are invisible, therefore, it is important for us to be a part of SEWA).

It is only as a part of a trade union with SEWA that they have been accorded a legitimate voice and identity—one that the government is bound to listen to and reckon with (“*SEWA jab humari muddo ko aage le kar jaati hai, tab sarkar humari baat sunegi.*”)

Aagewans were categorical that a union provides collective strength to its members by giving them a **platform to be heard and recognized as workers with rights.** As one aagewan put it, “*mahila ka sangh hona chahiye kyunki akele koi aawaz nahi sunta hai*” (women need to unionize as nobody listens to a single voice). It is the union that supports members in negotiating better terms of employment with employers or better rate with contractors and which intervenes in times of crisis such as false accusations of theft made against domestic workers by employers.

Who is an aagewan and why is an aagewan needed:

Aagewans were of the view that **since they belong to the same community as members, women find it easier to approach them for advice, guidance, help, and support as needed.** In the words of one aagewan, “*aagewan zaroori hai kyunki behne kisi se apni baat kehne mei hichkichi hai...aagewan se baat karne ka mauka milta hai aur jaankari bhi milti hai*” (Members hesitate to share their problems with anyone but with an aagewan, they can speak to them and get the necessary information).

The aagewans engaged in home-based work mentioned that their fellow trade workers are ensconced within the domestic sphere and have very limited mobility outside of their homes. As one fellow home-based worker aagewan put it “*bahut si behne bahar nahi nikal paati hai, toh uska kaam karavte hai*” (we help many women who are unable to step out their homes to get their work done). For these women,

aagewans serve as a link to the outside world, informing them about their rights and entitlements, and share knowledge about their trades and relevant labour codes, conventions, and regulations applicable to them.

A defining characteristic of aagewans is their direct, personal connect with members, which enables them to serve as a **bridge between SEWA and the community**. They are not only able to surface and identify issues (*"mudde nikal kar lati hai"*) but possess a resolve to take it forward (*"humari baat aage pahuchati hai"*).

An aagewan has been described as having the following leadership traits: integrity (*"imaandari se kaam karna"*), empathetic listener (*"behno ka dukh sunti hai"*), someone who takes initiative (*"aage baad ke kaam kare"*), energetic and willing to run around (*"bhaag daur karti hai"*), a good problem solver (*"samsya ka samadhan kare"*), raises the collective voice of members (*"jo sabki aawaz uthaye, woh aagewan hai"*), supportive (*"dusro ka sahara bane"*), **works in a self-less manner** (*"nihsvarth bhav se sewa kare"*), has the ability to take all women along (*"behno ko ek saath le kar chale"*), and most of all has a driving passion (*"aandolan ka jazbaa hona chahiye, kabhi to jeet hogi"*).

Aagewans in Delhi knew that they are elected community leaders and as per the union structure, there should be one aagewan for 100 members (*"100 behno mein se ek aagewan...behne hi chunti hai"*). In fact, **the process of selection and election of aagewans has been an organic and evolving process**, with aagewans who joined well before the Aagewan Vikas program being selected and later elected over time, while the newer aagewans were elected by members of their trade group.

Roles and Responsibilities of an Aagewan: Handling Community and Trade Issues

Aagewans in Delhi mentioned that their **primary role is union building or "sanghathan banana"**, as it only through a strengthened membership that they can collectively struggle for their rights as workers and citizens. In their **membership drives**, aagewans explain the role of SEWA, programs that it runs for the benefit of members, services offered at SSKs, how to avail government schemes, and support in getting relevant government IDs and proofs (PAN card, Aadhar card, birth certificate) etc.

They were of the view that **being an aagewan is a responsibility**, whether one receives a stipend or not (*"paisa le ya na le, par aagewan ki zimmedari nibhana hai, kaise nibhana hai woh humare upar depend karta hai"*). As one domestic worker aagewan put it, *"aagewan kaam nahi, seva hai"* (it is not work, it is doing welfare). Even those that were receiving a stipend for 10 days of work (a demand that came up at the time of COVID-19 when women were under immense financial stress) were clear that it was a compensation for their time and not a salary, and to be undertaken side-by-side with their ongoing trade work. It was pointed out by a home-based worker aagewan that they had the flexibility to decide how they devote their time (*"10 din ka kaam hai, par jitna maan kaare utna time laga sakte ho"*).

Moreover, since their **role as aagewans is self-driven, voluntary, and accords flexibility of hours**, they were able to juggle their trade work alongside. However, the **ability of aagewans to give dedicated time differed by trades**. Many domestic worker and street vendor aagewans were carrying out their responsibilities as aagewans as and when they had time on their hands (*"jab time miley"*) or as per the situation (*"jab zaroorat hai"*). For home-based workers, the situation is different since they decide their own work schedules and work orders and have more leeway in how they spend their time. In either case, aagewans ensured that they were prompt with their support whenever members needed them (*"behan jab bolti hai, hum kar dete hain"*).

Currently, there are approximately 30 out of the 110 aageawans who receive a stipend, i.e., 2200 INR for 10 days (about 1 and a half weeks) of service, in which they **organize 4 different types of meetings in a month on trade, mohalla, maternal and child health, adolescent health issues**. In these meetings, they share information on different government schemes (e.g. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram, Sukanya Samridhi Yojana), provide scheme linkage support to eligible women and their families, and prepare monthly reports on their overall progress. They are also engaged in six days of mobilization work such as membership drives, **planning campaigns** like the My

Fair Home Campaign with domestic workers and launching local-level campaigns (e.g. *safai abhiyaan* or cleanliness drives).

Community issues:

Aagewans **regularly interface with community members and local government representatives** (nigam parshad officials, MLA, ward councillor and members) on community issues and **are a part of different collective forums both within and outside SEWA**. These includes the state level group of aagewans, office bearer aagewans group, mohalla group of local aagewans, Nigam Parshad group, different trade and subtrade groups (which includes 10 subtrade groups of home-based workers, 2 subtrade groups of street vendors, domestic workers, and construction workers trade groups).

As **recognizable faces and trustworthy members of their community**, they are approached by both community members and local officials for resolving mohalla specific issues that pertain to clean living conditions such as clogged drains, garbage collection, dirty water from taps, water shortage, laying of *pakka* roads etc. One of strategies used by aagewans to address pressing issues brought up by members in monthly mohalla meetings is **organizing a signature campaign** with a letter of their key demands and thereafter visiting Nigam Parshad offices with a group of members to meet with authorities. For example, in Raghbir Nagar, aagewans and members made repeated visits to the ward councillor office and finally got the only women's toilet in the mohalla cleaned and repaired.

In addition, some aagewans in select areas have organized public hearings or *Jan Sunvais* in which public officials such as the Nigam Parshad councilor and members, local MLA etc. are invited to discuss and resolve mohalla-level issues. At *jan sunvais*, aagewans showcase SEWA's work in the community and highlight grievances and complaints of members.

Further, **aagewans support SSKs in last-mile scheme linkages and accompany women to different government offices with their paperwork**. Some schemes which aagewans in Delhi have facilitated include window and old-age pension, ration cards, opening of Sukanya Samridhi Yojana for their children. They also organize different rallies with women on important days like Women's Day, Labour Day, and trade-specific campaigns like the My Fair Home Campaign with domestic workers in their work locations.

In terms of the power of organizing, aagewans shared how in Mustafabad, a Muslim-dominated area they have collectivized close to 500 women in a month, who have gone on to change the political landscape of the area. As a result of their organizing work, women are now actively participating in local politics and have even prevented the locally elected MLA from defecting to another party by "*gheroing*" or encircling him. This was a huge win for women, many of whom had never stepped out their home or engaged in public affairs.

Trade issues:

Aagewans in Delhi as a part of trade linked groups of domestic workers, street vendors, and home-based workers are attuned to their specific issues and challenges. However, they are also **working on forming area-wise sub-trade groups** among street vendors and home-based workers to address their peculiar work arrangements and to identify targeted strategies for the same.

In the case of domestic workers, aagewans mentioned that their main challenges pertaining to their work are lack of minimum wages, lack of leaves in a month, no overtime pay, discrimination ("*bhedbhav hoti hai jaise humara bartan aalag karte hain*"), lack of toilet facilities ("*toilet nahi use karne dete hai*"), implicated in false cases of theft, sexual violence and harassment in the hands of employers ("*gharelu kaamdar jab ghar mein kaam karne jaati hai, toh woh surkashit mahasoos nahi karti hai... housing society mein jaane ke baad uske saath kya hothi hai, kisi ko pata nahi rehta hai*").

Currently, **aagewans have prepared a rate chart for different domestic tasks and are sensitizing members on the use of the same through the My Fair Home Campaign**. They have even met the District Labour Commissioner, MLA, Ward Councillor for implementation of the rate chart system in the area. **Aagewans in Delhi have been trained on the provisions of the POSH Act and are informing**

members about its key provisions and how to report cases of sexual harassment and violence under the law. In New Ashok Nagar and Vasudhara Enclave, aagewans through the My Fair Home Campaign highlighted the lack of separate toilets with the Residents Welfare Association and local MLA and have now secured access to the same in their work locations.

In the case of street vendors, aagewans mentioned that while SEWA had a pivotal role to play in the promulgation of the Street Vendors Act, a lot of their problems remain including non-functioning town vending committees, harassment, and evictions in the hands of the police, lack of designated zones for vending, loan refusal by banks, lack of toilet and creche facilities near their place of work. In fact, SEWA members are only a part of the town vending committees in Northeast Delhi. Further, COVID-19 imperiled the livelihoods of street vendors, who are still recovering from the losses incurred. Some of the key actions being taken by aagewans include **conducting a survey of street vendors who can be registered under PM SvaNidhi Scheme** and working with the town vending committees and MCD for issuance of ID cards whereby they can access government schemes and loans.

For home-based workers, **aagewans are working on identifying local suppliers and contractors at the local level who can provide home-based workers a steady flow of work orders at a decent rate.** Since home-based work is ubiquitous in certain parts of Delhi, contractors enjoy an upper hand in deciding rates. The presence of many middlemen in the supply chain makes collective bargaining and negotiation harder. As one home-based worker aagewan pointed out, *“thekedar kahega karna hai to karo, nahi to koi aur karega...hum nahi karenge to khaali baithna parega”* (Contractors tell us either do the work or someone else will. If we don't accept, then we will be empty-handed). Nonetheless, they have had small wins because of their organizing efforts such as an increase in the thread-cutting rate from Rs 0.50 to Re 1 in Raghubir Nagar and an increase in the garland-making rate by Rs. 0.25 in Mustafabad.

Moreover, aagewans engaged in home-based work have undergone a specialized training on home-based work and are **now mapping the wide variety of sub-trades within it and are forming smaller sub-trades of members across SEWA's field areas.** They are also organizing eye and health camps for home-based workers who suffer from poor eyesight and back pain. In addition, at trade group meetings, aagewans are sensitizing home-based workers about their trade identity as many of them still don't recognize themselves as workers and on ILO Convention No. 177. Aagewans are working on issuance of SEWA IDs to home-based workers and plans are under way to register self-employed home-based workers under e-Shram scheme.

Challenges of aagewans:

One of the challenges highlighted was **dedicating time towards their roles as aagewans.** This was especially true for street vendors and domestic workers, both of whom are self-employed and for whom loss of daily income or wages is a constant worry. In fact, in many cases, **aagewans struggle to balance their trade and unpaid care work with their responsibilities as aagewans, and often leave it for a while.** The pressures of being a homemaker engaged in wage labour takes precedence over their role as community leaders. Linked to this is the aspect of a stipend, which has emerged as a bargaining lever for some home-based worker aagewans, who can now argue with family members about how their time is being compensated. However, some street vendor aagewans were of the view that they should not take any money, since this is a selfless service (*“nihsvarth bhav se jo jore hai, woh paise nahi lena chaiye”*).

Aagewans, especially those who receive a stipend mentioned that sometimes it is difficult to meet the targets set such as enfranchising 100 new members in a month and that reporting requirements can be onerous.

At the time of COVID-19, **aagewans mentioned that they faced community backlash for not providing ration support to all members** but only to the needy such as widows, people with disabilities, households with no ration card. This was a difficult situation to navigate for aagewans, with some members pressing for the inclusion of their names in the list of potential beneficiaries.

Aagewans also face challenges in sustained mobilization of members and follow-up with government officials to resolve mohalla issues like setting up a ration shop in the area. Such issues

involve long and protracted processes and multiple visits to the state department offices, with members often losing their patience and interest along the way. In such situations, aagewans reassure members that the issue will be resolved eventually (*"sab ho jaayega, time lagta hai...tasaali rakho"*).

Further, aagewans expressed the **need to refresh their understanding of the union's structure and its multi-level committees based on the diverse trade group membership within Delhi**. Linked to this was how to prioritize the needs of different trade groups within each area and what sub-trade group strategies to employ to resolve their issues.

Transformation in becoming an Aagewan:

In terms of their own personal transformation and development, aagewans shared how they have become more independent (*"atma nirbhar"*) and mobile (*"pehle kabhi ghar se nahi nikle, ab hum har jagah khud jaate hai"*). As public-facing members of the union, **they have come to recognize the importance of self-presentation** (*"khud mei saadgi aa gayi hai, ab suti saree pehanti hu"*), **how to introduce themselves** (*"apna parichay dena"*) and **communication** (*"bolna sikha"*). Among the older aagewans, some spoke of how they have learnt how to read and write *"padhai karna sikha"*.

Aagewans unanimously spoke about the **strong sense of self-identity** or *"apni khud ki pehchaan milli"* and the pride that they take in being community leaders. **This was more pronounced for home-based workers, who considered themselves as housewives and not workers or leaders, and often trivialized their own trade work as "timepass"**. Aagewans agreed that having their own IDs has given them a stamp of recognition and made it easier for them to interface with police, government officials, and community influencers.

As a result of the trainings, **newer aagewans experienced an increase in their self-confidence in managing trade and mohalla issues**, i.e., in taking the lead on issues (*"khud aage ho jate hai"*), while in the past they would have to be coaxed by organizers to do so (*"humko aage karte the"*). Also, online trainings provided an impetus for some aagewans to **learned digital skills** such as using WhatsApp, Google Meets and they even bought smartphones with their stipend.

Impact of the Aagewan Vikas Trainings:

Prior to the Aagewan Vikas program, aagewans noted that were working in an informal capacity, helping members whenever needed. In their role as community leaders, they had received trainings by SEWA on a wide variety of subjects. However, it was the Aagewan Vikas trainings that, for the first time, gave them **a comprehensive overview of SEWA's mission for "purna roozgar" or full employment and self-reliance among women informal workers, information about its different programs in Delhi, and knowledge about the union structure**—something that was beneficial both to new and old aagewans.

One of the major takeaways from the Aagewan Vikas trainings was that it built a **strong sense of worker identity among aagewans** (*"mein ghar-khata kaamgar hun aur yeh humari pehchan hai"*, i.e. I am a home-based worker and this is my identity), **a recognition of their common predicaments and struggles as women informal workers** (*"kaamgaar mahilaye shram karti hai par unko paisa nahi milta hai... kaamgaar mahila ko purush se kam paisa milta hai"*), **an understanding of the purpose and functions of SEWA as a women's trade union** (*"SEWA kya hai aur kya kaam karti hai...sangathan kya ha aur kaise banta hai"*).

Aagewans also gained a **deeper understanding of their own specific trades**, how it operates, different laws and conventions applicable to them, and what actions they can take to further their rights as workers. For example, **home-based workers learnt that about ILO Convention No. 177**, role of global supply chains and the chain of contractors and intermediaries within it, and different sub-trades prevalent within home-based work. Similarly, they learnt about POSH and Domestic Violence Act and the process for reporting and seeking redressal on sexual harassment and domestic violence cases.

The trainings also **instilled a sense of self-respect in their own work and that no work is inferior or demeaning** (*"kaam mei koi sharam ki baat nahi...koi kaam chota nahi hota hai...kaam kaam hota hai"*).

This was especially true for domestic workers, who face social shame and stigma (*“hum naukar hai paar jiska kaam karte hai woh bhi kisi ka naukar hai”*).

Moreover, it gave them **clarity about their role and responsibilities as aagewans**, how to conduct membership drives, **how to systematically resolve mohalla and trade issues in the community, and which government officials to approach for help**. For instance, they got to know about the role and functions of the local MLA and ward councillor’s office and the remit of different government departments. The training boosted aagewans’ self-confidence and communications skills, since they now how to introduce themselves and SEWA’s work before government and community stakeholders.

Since several trainings happened at the time of COVID-19, many aagewans picked up digital skills and received **basic paramedical training** (how to use the oximeter, check temperature and heart rates, what are the safety protocols) and connected members to teleconsultation services that were being offered by SEWA. The online paramedical trainings helped aagewans to identify cases of members needing urgent medical attention and to serve as first-response agents in the community.

II. SEWA Nagaland Context:

Key summary of findings:

- NEN engagement with SEWA leadership led to an integration a right-based approach within their ongoing programs and an examination of women's trade and employment challenges from a worker's rights and identity standpoint.
- The coming together of NEN and SEWA in Nagaland was a good strategic fit with their shared goals of women's empowerment. Specifically, NEN possessed knowledge about Naga social mores, ways of working, community issues, while SEWA had expertise in unionizing.
- When the local SEWA chapter was established in 2013, a conscious decision was taken by NEN and SEWA leadership to build membership and community leadership first, before registering as a trade union.
- A significant milestone in SEWA Nagaland's journey as a union was when the Street Vendors Act, 2014 was finally implemented in the state, resulting in the inclusion of street vendors aagewans in the Town Vending Committees of Kohima and Chumudedam.
- A key focus of SEWA Nagaland's work is on sustainable livelihoods, skills development, facilitating market access and linkages, providing financial assistance to micro-entrepreneurs, trainings on financial literacy.
- At the time when the Aagewan Vikas Program launched in Nagaland, the state leadership was already engaged in community building and leadership work with aagewans.

SEWA began its work in the state through its association with the North East Network (NEN), a women's rights organization working in the region for more than two decades. As NEN grew in the region, they gradually forged connections with SEWA's senior leadership, who gradually became involved in their work by providing strategic inputs on sustainable, community-led development. In their discussions with SEWA senior leadership, they learnt about its experiences in unionizing women workers across India and their struggles for an independent identity, voice, and recognition.

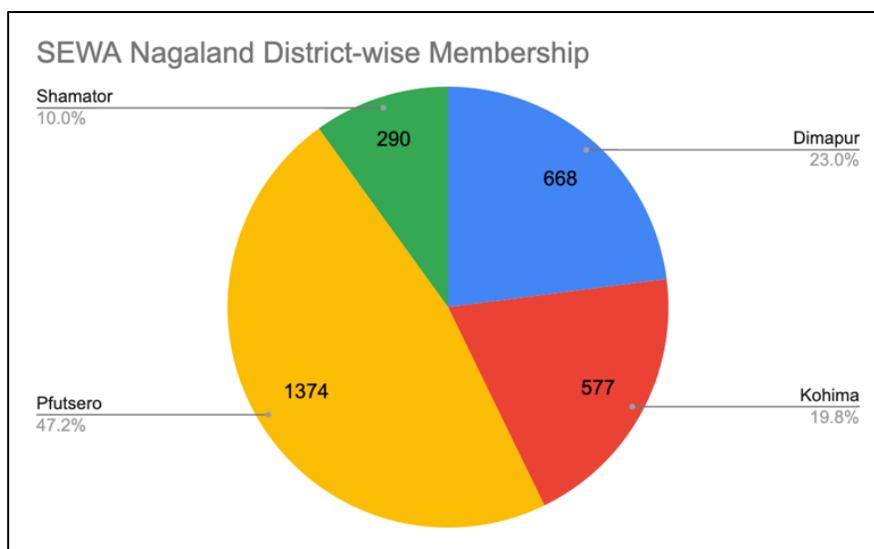
Given that Nagaland is largely agrarian, NEN realized the importance of applying a gender lens and labour rights perspective in addressing farmers' issues such as the need for establishing market linkages. Further, **NEN's engagement with SEWA helped them to integrate a right-based approach within their ongoing programs and to examine women's trade and employment challenges from a worker's rights and identity standpoint.**

In fact, NEN staff realized that most women in the state were involved in street vending—selling agricultural produce in local markets. In 2012, NEN conducted a situation analysis of street vending in Nagaland, which pointed to the need for organize women street vendors, who were divided by their tribal identities. This, then, became the foundation for NEN's organizing work in Nagaland with the support of SEWA.

The coming together of NEN and SEWA in Nagaland was a good strategic fit, both having a shared goal of women's empowerment. Specifically, **NEN possessed knowledge about Naga social mores, ways of working, community issues, while SEWA had expertise in unionizing.** NEN began organizing and collectivizing women workers in 2012, which resulted in the establishment of a local SEWA chapter in Nagaland in 2013.

At the time, a conscious decision was taken by NEN and SEWA leadership to build membership and community leadership first, before registering as a trade union. It was felt that there is a need to bring women to the forefront of decision-making. Some of the initial leadership-building groundwork by NEN included accompanying women to government offices, guiding them on government engagement, training them in skills of communication and public speaking etc.

In 2019, SEWA Nagaland was finally registered as a union with its own constitution and bylaws. Currently it has 2909 members across 6 districts (Kohima, Dimapur, Phek, Shamator, Tuensang, Pfutsero). Both **NEN and SEWA continue to collaborate on advocacy campaigns, livelihood initiatives, and enabling citizen entitlements.**



A significant milestone in SEWA Nagaland’s journey as a union was when The Street Vendors Act, 2014 which aims to promote livelihood rights and social security of street vendors was finally implemented in Nagaland in February 2019, following five years of local advocacy work with the state government.

This was a big win for the state leadership, since it is estimated that about 30,000 women are engaged in street vending across the state². Around **14 SEWA members from 2 districts (Kohima and Chumudedam) are a part of the Town Vending Committee (TVC)**. As a result of their representation in TVCs, street vendors of SEWA have now gained access to street vendors’ ID cards and vending certificates, credit linkages such as PM Swanidhi Program, and designated zones for vending.

Other Key Initiatives of SEWA Nagaland:

Since 2021, SEWA Nagaland has been operating **3 SEWA Shakti Kendra (SSK) in Kohima, Pfutsero, and Dimapur** that provide information and services related to livelihoods and social security to SEWA members. SSKs are a one-stop convergence and coordination centers for SEWA designed to strengthen members’ access to public services and entitlements through mobilization, awareness generation, application support and handholding. Members also get information on different SEWA initiatives and various government schemes at the SSKs.

A key focus of SEWA Nagaland’s work is on sustainable livelihoods, skills development opportunities, facilitating market access and linkages, providing financial assistance to micro-entrepreneurs, and training on financial literacy. Both members and aagewans have been a part of skills development trainings such as basket weaving, food processing, banana fiber making, tailoring, footwear, dish wash, soap making, baking, jewelry, mushroom cultivation.

SEWA Nagaland is also implementing the **Udyami financial inclusion program**, which aims at improving access to affordable credit among grassroots women microentrepreneurs so that they grow their own business and earn a decent income. The program provides women microentrepreneurs with continuous trainings in skill development and mentorship for manufacturing and marketing their products.

² <https://www.cenfa.org/nagaland-street-vendors/>.

In 2021, **SEWA Dukaan** was launched in Kohima, which is a first-of-its kind initiative that provides home-based workers a marketing outlet and platform where they can market and sell their products (e.g., handicrafts, shopping bags, traditional Nagamese shawls, and pickles etc.) at a fair price. SEWA Dukaan has been instrumental in giving home-based workers visibility and recognition.

Most recently, in 2023, SEWA Nagaland in collaboration with the Agriculture Department, Shamator organized the **3rd Millets Festival themed 'Millets for Community Resilience'**, in which millet grinding machines were distributed to some women.

Aagewan Vikas Program and Next Steps:

At the time when the Aagewan Vikas Program launched in Nagaland, SEWA Nagaland was already engaged in community building and leadership work. Women were already being trained in their roles and responsibility as aagewans. **Although the term was new to them, the work of engaging with local communities was well-underway by aagewans in the state.** SEWA Nagaland leadership was in alignment with the goals of the program, which had a long-term outlook, and which gave them the agency to develop the program as per the needs of women. Further, the program offered a more structured and formal process of learning, providing aagewans with concrete know-how and skills for carrying out their specific roles and responsibilities.

The state leadership were unanimous that **leadership-building under the program must continue, so that every member can become an aagewan and further work of the union.** With SEWA Nagaland's work expanding, there is a need for orienting members about SEWA, its ethos, need for unionising etc. For a growing union, the leadership believe that there should be more opportunities for formal and informal mentoring and training of members to happen.

SEWA Nagaland Aagewans:

Key summary of findings:

- One of three aagewans (39%) who attended all the four module trainings under the program were either unmarried, divorced, separated or widows and almost two-thirds (63.4%) of them were home-based workers.
- Aagewans noted that the trade profile of members differs by district, and it is common for women to be engaged in more than one trade to augment their incomes.
- Aagewans in Nagaland were primarily engaged in membership drives; enrolling members for different skills training offered by NEN; providing scheme linkage and documentation support to members (e.g., issuance of vending licenses to street vendors so that they can apply for MUDRA and SwaNidhi loans, FSSAI registration for home-based workers engaged in food production or processing etc.)
- Aagewans highlighted that the urgency of collectivization is directly linked to trade group affiliation and livelihood security. In the case of street vendors, the COVID-19 lockdown brought them to the precipice of disaster and made them realize the importance of collective action, especially in a time of crisis.
- In Nagaland, market vendors and sellers comprise the largest trade group of women, and even within SEWA, they are the most active in government advocacy and engagement. Home-based work as a trade was found to be challenging to collectivize for aagewans, although work has begun on forming home-based workers trade committees.
- With women farmers, aagewans with NEN's support are promoting the adoption of millet farming as a sustainable farming practice among them.
- Most aagewans expressed that transport costs are prohibitory, posing an impediment to their work. Also, aagewans in remote areas find it difficult to look after multiple units in a district because they are spread out.

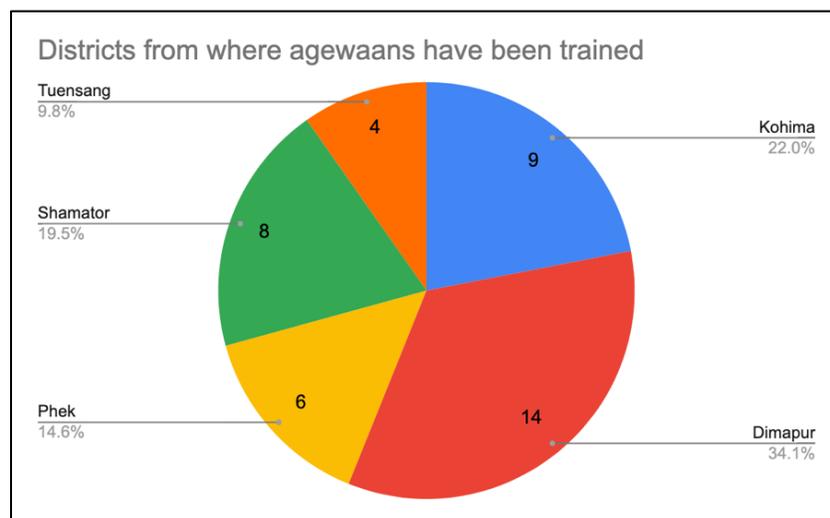
- The module trainings, aagewans noted, helped them especially during COVID-19 crisis when they were able to apply their learnings into action.
- Overall, aagewans experienced an increase in their self-confidence, skills of self-presentation, self-esteem, sense of belonging to a collective in their role as leaders. They spoke of an increased ability to communicate and negotiate with government officials on different issues and a strong resonance with their worker identity.
- Given the geographical challenges coupled with lack of affordable and reliable public transport, organisers shared that it was challenging for them to monitor and handhold aagewans on a day-to-day basis.
- Due to limited staff strength of SEWA Nagaland, the role of trainers and organizers is shared and overlapping in nature.

Profile:

There are **41 aagewans who completed all four module trainings under the program—23 in Phase 1 and another 18 in Phase 2. One of three aagewans (39%) are either unmarried, divorced, separated or widows.** In terms of age, 39% of aagewans trained in Nagaland belong to the 35-44 years age group, 29% fall in the 25-34 years age group, and 24% are above 45 years old.

A little more than half of the aagewans trained (53%) have been members of SEWA Nagaland for less than 3 years, while the remaining 47% have been associated for more than 3 years. In Phase 1 of the program, there was greater participation of those aagewans (14 out of 23) who had more than 3 years of association with SEWA Nagaland, while in Phase 2, more aagewans (13 out of 18) with less than 3 years of association with SEWA Nagaland participated.

Almost 70% of the aagewans have completed their secondary education, with the rest have a primary school education. In terms of their trade profile, **almost two-thirds or 63.4% of aagewans trained were home-based workers**, while 19.5% were street vendors, and 14.6% were engaged as farmers/producers.



In terms of trade profile, 65% of aagewans trained were home-based workers across Phase 1 and 2 of the program, while the remaining aagewans trained were street vendors (19.5%) and farmers (15.5%).

Roles and responsibilities of an aagewan: Handling Trade and Community Issues:

At the time when the module trainings were conducted in Nagaland, it was learnt that aagewans did not possess knowledge about SEWA, its history, ethos, and largely assumed it to be an NGO. They were also unable to discern the differences between the formal and informal sector and what constitutes a

trade union. Further, they lacked guidance on how to conduct unit meetings or to plan local campaign in their areas.

As aagewans, they carried out their primary role and responsibilities in terms of **membership drives; enrolling members for different skills training offered by NEN; and providing scheme linkage and documentation support to members.** In particular, they have assisted members via SSKs on: SEWA ID renewals; issuance of artisan and weavers IDs for home-based workers; e-Shram, Aadhar, ABHA ID registration; FSSAI registration for home-based workers engaged in food production or processing; issuance of vendor IDs for street vendors; opening bank accounts, updating account information and pass books of members, and linking Aadhar with their mobile numbers; forming Joint Liability Groups with a group of members and availing bank loans etc.

Trade issues

In terms of organizing efforts, aagewans mentioned that they are work with three main trade groups—home-based workers, street vendors, and farmers. **Aagewans noted that the trade profile of members differs by district.** In Kohima and Dimapur, street vending of organic and indigenous produce is main trade activity of women along with home-based work such as basket-making, handloom weaving, food processing, knitting. In the rural districts of Phek and Samator, women are primarily farmers and sell vegetables at the weekly markets. They also do home-based work such as weaving on the side.

In Nagaland, it is common for women to be engaged in more than one trade to augment their incomes. For example, many street vendors make home-made pickles, which they sell in the local market. Similarly, women farmers often weave textiles or make baskets which they sell locally. In such cases of overlapping trades, aagewans impress upon women the need for a main worker identity based on the trade they spend most of their time on.

State leadership and aagewans were of the view that the **urgency of collectivization is directly linked to trade group affiliation and livelihood security.** In the case of street vendors, the COVID-19 lockdown brought them to the precipice of disaster and made them realize the importance of collective action, especially in a time of crisis. Farmers, on the other hand, are self-sufficient and don't necessarily see the value in joining a union. For home-based workers, their sense of trade identity is weak since they view themselves more as housewives supplementing household income rather than as workers.

In the words of the state coordinator, “in the case of the street vendors, because of the kind of backlash they faced [during the COVID imposed lockdown], they felt the need to organize and take collective action to improve their situation. But for farmers, it is not a matter of urgency or dire survival. They have land, and hence the question of food-security is resolved. Therefore, there is a reluctance on their part to come under a collective and take a stand...Home based workers still do not identify themselves as workers and their income is secondary and not considered as important, so they also don't see the urgency to collectivize.”

In fact, it is easier to mobilize with street vendors because aagewans can meet all members in a common market space. Some of common challenges facing street vendors in Nagaland include free toilets in public markets, separate vending shed to protect their good, issuance of vending licenses so that they can apply for MUDRA and SwaNidhi loans to grow their business. Aagewans in Kohima are currently negotiating with Kohima Village Youth Organisation for vending space.

In Nagaland, **market vendors and sellers comprise the largest trade group of women, and even within SEWA, they are the most active in government advocacy and engagement.** In 2019, as a result aagewans' and members' campaigning and liaising with the state government, the Nagaland Street Vendors Rule (2020) was passed under the Street Vendors Act of 2004³.

³ It aims to protect livelihood rights and social security of street vendors, designate zones for vending and regulate street vending across India. It also mandates Town Vending Committees (TVC), with stakeholders from municipal authorities to vendor associations, to identify street vendors, issue vending certificates, and keep records of vendors.

Consequently, **SEWA Nagaland's advocacy on the rights of street vendors resulted in the establishment of two Town Vending Committees (TVCs) in Chumudedam and Kohima.** One of the lead aagewans, who spearhead the campaign for the rights of street vendors found a place in the Kohima TVC. Further, SEWA Shamator Marketing Shed for selling the agricultural produce in the area also came through because of the street vendor aagewans' advocacy efforts.

Despite the successes, street vendor aagewans and members face challenges in giving their time towards unionizing activities. A street vendor aagewan, who is a part of the town vending committees shared, *"I must close my shop for almost 2-3 days every week and this leads to wage loss...I also end up paying for transport costs when I have to organise various community and trade meetings which I am not compensated for."*

Home-based work as a trade was found to be challenging to collectivize for aagewans. Not only are they difficult to locate because they are ensconced within their homes, but they cannot be easily mobilized too, since they are scattered in each district. In addition, the invisible nature of their work makes it harder to bring them under the aegis of the government.

To address this, aagewans are now forming WhatsApp group of home-based workers to easily coordinate with them and to connect them to market-linked activities. In fact, home-based workers engaged in food production are being enrolled for skills trainings on food processing, packaging, and labelling, while those involved in handicrafts and weaving are being provided marketing and sales support under SEWA Dukaan.

Moreover, **aagewans from home-based work also underwent basic and advanced trainings in home-based work** in March and April 2022 and November 2022 and January 2023 respectively that gave them insights into the different types of home-based work (piece-rate, self-employed, agent, small employer, and collective entrepreneurs), their trade-specific issues, and the provisions of C-177 Homework Convention that protect their interests. It was first time that they learnt about SEWA being the only trade union in India that furthers their interests.

Post the trainings, **aagewans have formed home-based workers trade committees in Pfutsero and Shamator** to address their specific problems such as congested working space, expensive raw materials, and a price rise in the cost of ingredients, delays in payment, and power outage.

On women farmers, aagewans shared that they are mostly into cash-crop cultivation or mono-cropping, which is causing soil infertility, water scarcity, and reducing crop yields. During COVID-19, women farmers faced a severe food crisis, since they did not even have rice for own personal consumption. Consequently, **aagewans with NEN's support are now promoting the adoption of millet farming as a sustainable farming practice among women.**

Recently this year, SEWA Nagaland did a successful collaboration with the state agricultural department, in which members participated in a local millets festival. Further, SEWA Shamator members have received machines to harvest and grind millets from the agriculture department. In addition, aagewans are now connecting women farmers to the PM Kisan scheme, which will give them minimum income support.

Along with this, **aagewans have been taking the lead in mobilizing women across the district units on events** such as World Environment Day, International Street Vendors Day (November 14), International Home-Based Workers Day (22nd October). During these events, as one aagewan put it, *"we let the public and government know that we are also workers, we contribute to the economy, and we have the right to be recognized."*

Further, in their unit meetings, aagewans sensitize members on the need for reducing use of single-use plastic which is harmful for the environment and discuss various health issues such as the importance of breastfeeding, menstrual hygiene etc. They also **take up area-specific community issues**, for example,

in Phek, which is largely rural and remote, aagewans have been pressing for the establishment of an anganwadi center and affordable public transportation with the Village Development Council.

Challenges of aagewans:

One of the chief reasons for dropouts among aagewans was the COVID-19 pandemic, time management, childcare responsibilities, personal health, imperatives of earning a livelihood, monetary expectation that they will be paid for their duties, and non-reimbursements of travel costs.

Further, **aagewans in remote areas find it difficult to look after multiple units in a district because they are spread out.** As one aagewan in Kohima pointed out *“The wards in Phek are so remote and inaccessible that for me to cover all of them at least once will take me a year. So, I could only concentrate on my ward and a nearby ward, which I could access. For others, I would call on the phone, but the impact is not there over phone than if we meet in person. It is important for members to meet each other.”*

Most aagewans expressed that **transport costs are prohibitory**, posing an impediment to their work. It was found that some aagewans in the state as working as field mobilisers or as Udyami project aagewans where they receive a stipend for their work. In fact, those aagewans engaged in the Udyami project also doubled-up as program aagewans and were holding joint meetings to save on transport costs. Aagewans expressed a strong need to have transport costs for holding community and trade meetings be covered under the program.

Further, **sustaining aagewans and keeping them motivated and active is also a major challenge.** Some active aagewans from Phase I of the program have moved on for personal and professional reasons, and while they support SEWA Nagaland wherever they are, there is a leadership vacuum that has been created by their departure.

Some aagewans also reported that often they get ridiculed by the neighbours or family members for dedicating time so much of their time as aagewans, since it is voluntary in nature. They are often questioned that about their commitment to be aagewans since it is seen as time taken away from their main trade activities.

Transformation in becoming an aagewan:

Aagewans understood their role as being frontline workers, who lead, guide, and show the way forward for women in their community. Overall, **they experienced an increase in their self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of belonging to a collective** because of becoming a leader.

Initially, state leadership noted that aagewans required a lot of handholding support. But gradually with time and experience, **they are taking initiative in organizing and conducting the union’s annual general meetings (AGMs) where they present issues and discuss challenges with members.** This observable shift was due to Aagewan Vikas program, which gave them the confidence and skills to lead such meetings.

Aagewans in Kohima and Dimapur noted **a strong resonance with their identity as workers engaged in street vending and home-based work**—the two dominant trades in the district. They were able to clearly articulate their trade-specific challenges such as the losses incurred due to the lack of storage facilities, which results in fruits and vegetable rotting and decaying. Aagewans engaged as street vendors shared that to attend SEWA meetings, they often have shut their shops and lose a day’s wage—something that they can ill-afford to do. They expressed the need to be paid a day’s wage or to be reimbursed for their travel costs.

In fact, an aagewan from Phek, who is also the ex-President of SEWA and a mobilizer with NEN Nagaland highlighted how she liaised with government officials in the agricultural and horticulture departments for distribution of seeds to women and even approached the state transport department in Phek to provide a bus service for women in the area. Lack of affordable and regular public transport is a big issue in interior districts like Phek because of which women cannot sell their agricultural produce and handicraft items in nearby markets.

In fact, **their public speaking and communication skills** were recognized by the state leadership, who invited them to lead a few training sessions with aagewans during the Phase 2 of the program. They shared, *“I would tell the women farmers in the community to sell their vegetables in the local market at Chizami (30 minutes walking from her village), but they would not do so. So, one day I went to the market with my vegetables, and everything was sold out by 9 am! This inspired women and now many of them sell their vegetables in the weekly market.”* It is these persuasive examples of leadership that tell the story of transformation under the program.

Impact of the Aagewan Vikas Trainings:

In Nagaland, due to the hilly terrain, poor road connectivity, and prohibitive cost of road travel, a decision was taken by the state leadership to economize and modify the training plan of aagewans. As a result, **Modules 1 and 2 module trainings were clubbed together and similarly, Modules 3 and 4 were combined, thereby having two rounds of the training instead of four.** The trainings were 3 days long each and were held in an interval of three months with handholding support provided by organizers in the interim period.

In the first set of trainings, aagewans shared that got a basic orientation on the informal economy, its main characteristics, specific trades within it, and the adverse socio-economic impact of informality on women’s lives. This enabled them to identify and understand key trade risks and livelihood challenges faced by women in the state. In addition, the trainings helped build their own identity as workers in the unorganized sector. As one aagewan in Dimapur shared, *“I came to know about the various occupations... now I can identify and introduce myself as a home-based worker. Earlier I introduced myself as only a housewife.”*

The trainings were critical to building the leadership skills of aagewans, who helped members to secure loans to expand their business, to participate in different livelihood trainings on basket weaving, soap making, baking, jewelry, mushroom cultivation, and to develop their skills in food processing, packaging, and labelling. It also gave them the wherewithal to speak and negotiate with government officials on their issues and interests.

Further, it **aided in their own personal growth and self-learning.** This was experienced in terms of a sharp rise in their own confidence, **an improvement in their self-presentation, and an increased ability to communicate and negotiate with government officials** on community and trade matters. Most of all, they earned the respect from their family and community members.

Aagewans could especially relate to module 3 and 4, which were more practical in nature, and which provided them with concrete skills in communication, public speaking, and self-presentation. In the words of an aagewan in Dimapur, *“...my confidence went up, and now I can approach government officials. I was so shy but now I feel proud of who I am...”*

Covid-19

The module trainings, aagewans noted, helped them especially during COVID-19 crisis when they were able to apply their learnings into action. They emerged as huge pillar of support in their communities and engaged in relief efforts with the support of organizers and state leadership such as distribution of dry rations, medical help (e.g. an aagewan in Phek arranged for a nurse mid-wife to help with a member with their childbirth) etc.

A street vendor aagewan who has been vending for 17 years at the Chümoukedima town and was formerly the vice-president of SEWA Nagaland shared that women vendors were in a state of panic and desperation due to the economic distress caused by the COVID-19 national lockdown. The situation was so dire that members felt that *“we would rather die by COVID-19 than starvation.”*

In fact, **it was in COVID-19 that their community leadership skills under Aagewan Vikas program were put to the test.** One aagewan from Chümoukedima shared, *“I and some of the women vendor members had a meeting with the Chümoukedima municipality and asked for the vending space for*

vendors with necessary COVID protocols and licenses to vend. Some 75 licenses were given out. Eventually, I was also able to become a member of the Chümoukedima Town Vending Committee (TVC)."

Similarly, an aagewan from Shamator and now an organizer with SEWA at Shamator mentioned how she started an online service for sale and delivery of vegetables in Shamator town using digital platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. Their efforts in supporting women sustain their livelihoods during COVID-19 was appreciated by community members and was a moment of pride for them.

Additionally, **one of the aagewans from Pfütsero spoke of how the trainings and their engagement as an aagewan helped them become the first elected woman member in the ward.** In fact, as an aagewan, they had organised a farmer's fair for organic produce with members in Phutsero town in 2019, which brought visibility to their work and resulted in the Additional Deputy Commissioner approaching them for ferrying vegetables during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020.

SEWA Nagaland Organizers:

Due to the limited staff strength of SEWA Nagaland, the role of trainers and organizers is shared and overlapping in nature. Organizers noted that aagewans in Nagaland are liaising with government departments, resolving community and trade issues, and conducting SEWA membership drives in their districts. **Aagewans primarily approaches organizers for support in documentation** such as monthly reports, writing memorandums to submit to government departments etc.

Given the geographical challenges coupled with lack of affordable and reliable public transport, organisers shared that it was challenging for them to monitor and handhold aagewans post the training process and on a day-to-day basis. As one organizer put it, *"we keep in touch with aagewans over the phone and give them refresher trainings as otherwise they will forget. But the poor connectivity issues makes it difficult to keep in touch. We also have to remind them and support them in submitting monthly reports and it becomes difficult to do all this over the phone."* They also face challenges related to legal procedures or what strategies to use to address community and trade issues brought up by aagewans.

Both organizers and trainers felt that training of aagewans has been beneficial in strengthening the leadership capacity of aagewans and believed that this should continue. They also felt that reading materials on all the modules, either in the form of videos or graphics, should be made available to aagewans for easy reference.

III. SEWA Punjab Context:

Key summary of finding:

- The Aagewan Vikas program began in 2018 with the understanding that this was an opportune moment to build the core union work in a new state and to test the efficacy of the modules in a state with a largely urban membership base.
- Punjab, as a new state within SEWA Bharat, experienced a unique dialectic between learning and doing under the Aagewan Vikas program. With the Aagewan Vikas program, SEWA Punjab gained experience of both “*seekhna aur karna*”, i.e., learning and doing. The Aagewan Vikas training modules served as a blueprint for SEWA Punjab, since it distilled the key learnings and experiences of other states and contributed to its learning curve on advancing community leadership and union-building.
- SEWA Punjab’s experience of MAS had a bearing on the program’s trajectory, including choice of aagewans. Since organizing was still in its infancy, state teams neither had the proper experience nor knowledge of aagewan elections. Consequently, aagewans who were included were grassroots community leaders under MAS but who weren’t necessarily engaged in trade work.
- The three key pivots under the program included COVID-19, which acted as a litmus test of aagewans’ leadership skills; farmer protests, which had a powerful influence on the members’ psyche and understanding of the value and role of a union; and the reworked training modules that were in Punjabi and had more activity-based exercises and local examples for easy understanding.
- State plans under the program include an in-state capacity building of all organizers and aagewans for strong union-wide leadership; streamlining the election process so new aagewans emerge, get elected, and work alongside existing aagewans; organizing home-based workers using a cluster-based approach; and resolving the philosophical debate among team members on whether all aagewans should be paid, since some aagewans left the program because of no monetary benefit.

SEWA was invited by the then state government in 2016 to lead the capacity building program of the Mahila Aarogya Samiti (MAS) under the National Urban Health Mission which laid the genesis of SEWA Punjab. It conducted state-wise trainings on health and civic issues across 11 districts and helped activate Mahila Aarogya Samitis—or urban slum-based health committees of women leaders at the local level. However, when the MAS training program ended, a state-level evaluation was conducted that showed the need for strong leadership at the community level. In fact, various influential stakeholders felt that SEWA Punjab’s work must continue, and it was in 2018 that the state chapter began its membership work with a cadre of active and trained MAS leaders on the ground.

The Aagewan Vikas program began in 2018 with the understanding that this was an opportune moment to build the core union work in a new state and to test the efficacy of the modules in a state with a largely urban membership base. The districts where SEWA’s Punjab’s work commenced included Mohali, Patiala (3 blocks- Sanour, Patiala city, and Nabha), Malerkotla, Moga, Firozpur and Gurdaspur (2 blocks- Gurdaspur city and Batala)

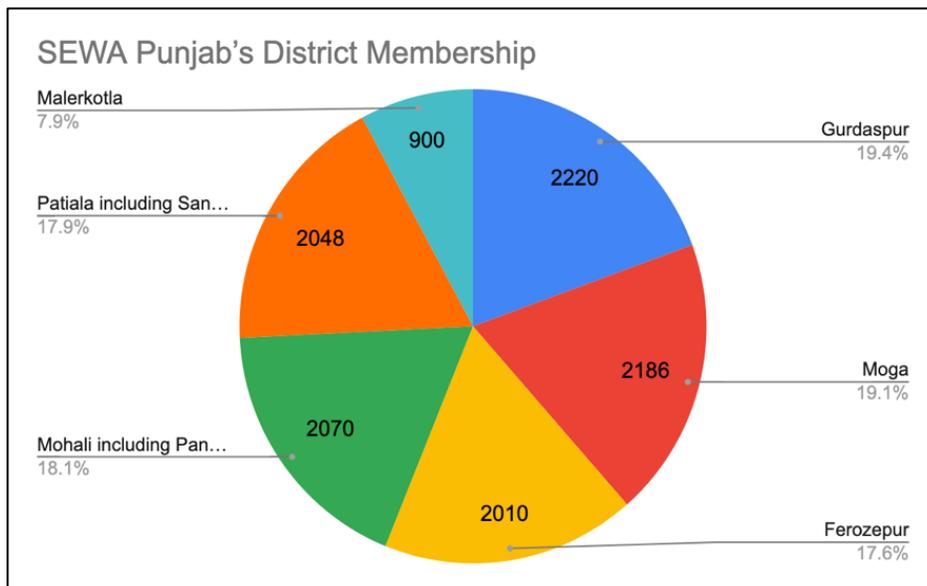
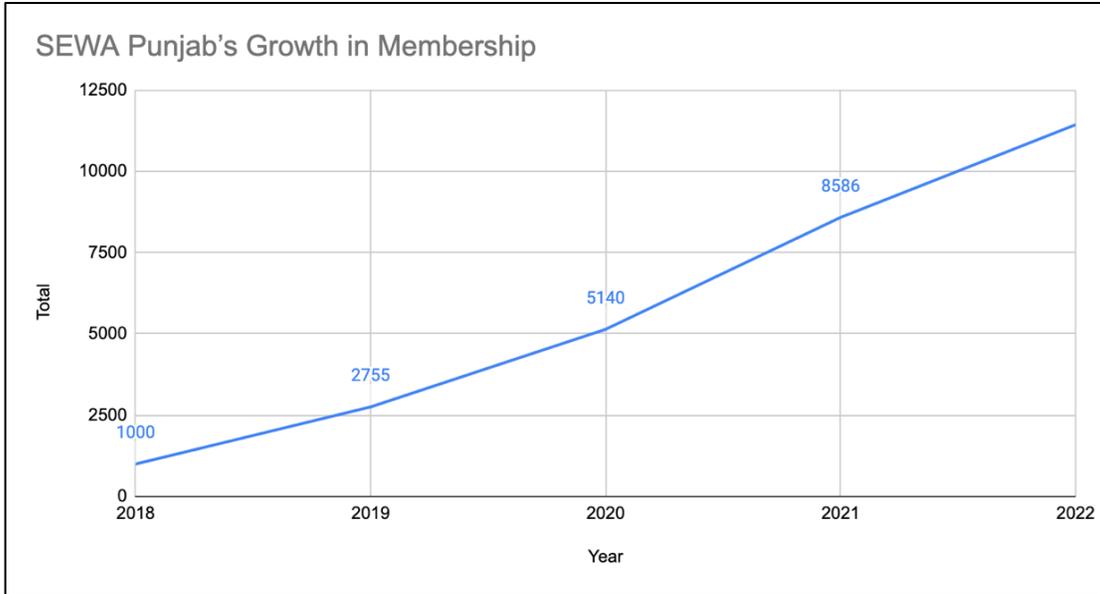
Punjab, as a new state within SEWA Bharat, experienced a unique dialectic between learning and doing under the Aagewan Vikas program. Initially, it was a case of “*seekho aur karo*”, i.e. learning preceding doing, whereas for other states, it was “*karo aur seekho*”, i.e. doing preceding learning. However, with the Aagewan Vikas program, SEWA Punjab gained experience of both “*seekhna aur karna*”, i.e., learning and doing. In other words, a dynamic interplay was underway in the state, in which learning informed doing or action and vice-versa.

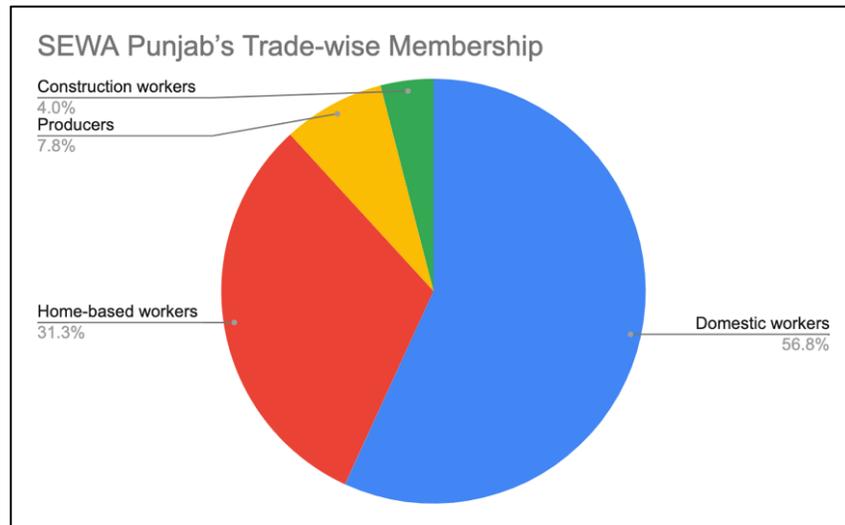
In fact, **the Aagewan Vikas training modules served as a blueprint for SEWA Punjab, since it distilled the key learnings and experiences of other states on advancing community leadership and union-building.**

Role of MAS in Selection of Aagewans under the Program:

SEWA Punjab’s experience of MAS had a bearing on the program trajectory’s including choice of aagewans. Since organizing was still in its infancy, the state teams neither had the proper experience or knowledge of aagewan elections. Consequently, aagewans who were included under the Aagewan Vikas program were mohalla aagewans and not trade aagewans.

The former were grassroots community leaders who oversaw health, sanitation, water, and nutrition activities under MAS; some of whom had a trade and others who did not. The latter are those who SEWA Punjab has begun organizing in their places of work like domestic workers under the My Fair Home Campaign and who are elected based on their trade. Organizing women around their vocation or trade is still relatively new in Punjab, one that will take time and require building the community’s trust.





Key Pivots in SEWA Punjab's journey:

Firstly, there was a big dropout between the first batch of trainees who attended the August 2019 Module I trainings and February 2020 Module II trainings due to **a mismatch in the initial selection of aagewans** under the program. Since the field teams and organizers weren't oriented about the program's objectives, **aagewans who were initially chosen as participants were active MAS members but who weren't necessarily engaged in trade work**. In fact, the number of aagewans who completed all four trainings is the lowest among all the four states.

As a result, the first, four-day residential training on Module I in August 2019 was attended by a mixed group of older women, who were considered leaders in their local areas. Many of them were active MAS members and housewives, who could afford to take the time out to attend these residential trainings. **They faced language barriers in understanding the sessions** that were led by SEWA Gujrat team in Hindi. Moreover, **they found the sessions to be too theoretical for their understanding and were largely "whitewashed" by the end of training**. Also, in the intervening months between the trainings, it was observed that the aagewans selected couldn't carry out their said duties (*"field mein nahi kar pa rahi thi, jo unko bataaya gaaya tha"*).

Therefore, there were few women who attended the February 2020 Module II trainings, which forced the Punjab state team to rethink and reevaluate their approach to the program. For starters, work began on contextualizing and redesigning the modules and having all forthcoming trainings be conducted in Punjabi. But then COVID-19 struck.

Pivot 1: Covid-19

With the advent of Covid-19, the filtering process of who is an aagewan naturally happened. The pandemic saw the emergence of grassroots women leaders who stepped forward and took charge of relief work in their communities. **Since field operations were stalled, it was aagewans who coordinated with local authorities and who mobilized community women**—whether it was for drawing up the list of people who need rations or identifying women in need of alternative livelihood opportunities such as mask-making. Some aagewans who were exemplary in this time of crisis were paid a stipend for their community liaising efforts.

As COVID-19 raged on, online trainings were held with women, which were shorter, capsule trainings focused on specific topics such as COVID-19 prevention measures, domestic violence, mental health. These training were received better, since aagewans could relate the theory to their own lived experience. COVID-19 made aagewans and members realize that **"being in a sisterhood is really helpful"** and it acted as a litmus test of their leadership skills.

However, **post COVID-19, a lot of the aagewans who were active in the community returned to their trade work, as the priority was on recovering from wage loss** and several aagewans dropped out of the program. Those who received a stipend stayed on, while others moved on, focusing on their trades. Thereafter, the district teams and organizers began the process of identifying and electing aagewans, having now both the knowledge and experience of an aagewan as a grassroots community leader.

Pivot 2- Protests for Repealing the Farm Bills

The farmers protests that roiled the state had a powerful influence on the members' psyche and understanding about the value and role of a union in advancing the collective demands of members. The SEWA Punjab team came out with an explainer on the Farm Bills, which were extensively shared by aagewans with community members during mohalla meetings. Members' strong personal connect with the issue meant that there was both **a jump in SEWA membership** and outreach, which in turn made both aagewans and organizers **recognize the strength of union-building** and in SEWA's credo of "unity is strength". In fact, work on the Farm Bills helped SEWA's Punjab's make inroads with women farmers in Sanaur, a rural town in Patiala district.

Pivot 3- Contextualizing the Training Modules

The huge dropouts between Module I and II forced the state team to go back to the drawing board. It was evident that **aagewans were not grasping the key concepts in the modules**—"unko concept samajh nahi aata hai." Therefore, to overcome this roadblock, the state teams needed the freedom and flexibility to modify, adapt, and break down the core modules into smaller, bite-sized parts for the benefit of aagewans.

As a part of that contextualization process, the training modules were written in Punjabi and redesigned to promote applied learning among aagewans. The learning goalpost was whether aagewans could apply what they have learnt in the field ("woh field mein ja ke kar pa rahe hai ki nahi"). To enable their learning by doing, session plans were tweaked to include **more activity-based exercises and local examples** from MAS, farmers' protests etc. along with a basic orientation about SEWA, its history, and values. And finally, **short, day-long capsule trainings were prioritized over residential trainings.**

Along with reworking the modules to focus on key takeaways and making the trainings more interactive, the state team also **began the process of identifying the leadership qualities and personality traits of an active aagewan**—someone who has the community's trust, is self-confident, and can volunteer her time towards community and trade matters alongside managing her own trade.

Future State Plans:

Based on conversations with the state leadership, some of the upcoming plans for the state regarding the Aagewan Vikas program include **conducting an in-state capacity building of all organizers and aagewans** so that there is a transfer of knowledge and skills and a building of their leadership capacity.

In addition, they want to **organize another Aagewan Vikas Sammelan** to build unity and solidarity among all aagewans. This is because the last sammelan in 2019 fostered a sense of belonging to a sisterhood among aagewans ("hum itne jaan ek saath hai") and strengthened peer-to-peer networks and connections.

Linked to this is **streamlining the election process so that new aagewans emerge, get elected,** and work alongside existing aagewans, thereby, helping to strengthen the union.

On trade issues, **plans are afloat on using the momentum of the My Fair Home Campaign to involve domestic workers more deeply in SEWA's work.** They also want to **organize home-based workers using a cluster-based approach, conducting on skills trainings** for women engaged in different types of home-based work like stitching, weaving, knitting, parande (tassels), and **fixing rate-cards** for their work. In fact, one of the learnings in Punjab with home-based workers is that starting off with a union-first approach doesn't work. It is only when women start getting orders and earning money that an impetus is created for their coming together and unionizing.

Building off the success of the My Fair Home Campaign, **there are also plans to deepen engagement with NGOs and other unions working with similar constituencies.** And finally, the state leadership is working towards **expediting the union registration process that would cement SEWA Punjab's identity as a local, independent, self-sustaining union** in the eyes of the public and not as an NGO that does "sewa".

Lastly, **the state leadership would like to resolve the philosophical debate among state team members on whether all aagewans should be paid,** since aagewans have left the program because of no monetary incentives. The risk posed is that women will let go of their trade or that their trade will get sidelined in the hope that it will translate into a full-time, salaried job. This in turn might reinforce SEWA Punjab's image as a "sanstha" (NGO) and not "sanghathan" (union) in the minds of aagewans and members.

SEWA Punjab Trainers:

Key summary of finding:

- The 3 trainers who trained under the program had varying levels of skills and experience in conducting online and offline district or area-wise trainings with aagewans and organizers from across the 6 districts.
- The ToT made trainers realize the importance of Plan B and the need to adopt their training plans based on participants' level of understanding. They also learnt the essential qualities of a good trainer and how to undertake pre-and-post training needs assessment to assess effectiveness of their trainings.
- Trainers noted an improvement in their facilitation skills such as conducting a training in a structured and time-bound manner, using a variety of interactive training methods and tools (e.g., role play) to engage participants, and tweaking the modules as per the context and needs of the participants.
- Trainers noted that the module trainings under the program had a cascade effect with a transfer of knowledge and skills across the union membership.
- A key component of the Aagewan Vikas module trainings led by trainers was the incorporation of an action agenda (practice exercises or tasks that aagewans are expected to implement in the field). The content of the sessions was designed keeping the local context in mind and drawing on area-specific examples.
- A key result of the ToT was that trainers developed their own district-specific training modules based on an analysis of local needs.
- Among challenges, a trainer noted that even among active aagewans, the level of involvement in SEWA's work varies, which in turn affects learning outcomes. Those who are more active grasp the content better. There are also some aagewans who do not stay for the full session or skip sessions, which in turn affects their learning. Moreover, the earlier modules of the Aagewan Vikas program were too concept-heavy and needed to be broken-down and contextualized for aagewans.
- The trainers pointed out that the learning curve of aagewans in Punjab is different from other states as union-building is still very new. In Punjab, women's work is considered "non-serious" (temporary, part-time, and stop-gap in nature) with members themselves undervaluing their trade work, making consciousness-raising around workers' rights harder to undertake.
- Trainers expressed the need to set aside dedicated time for their own practice and self-study. They wanted to have more regular check-ins with senior trainers from SEWA to share their progress and gain feedback on their training sessions and plans. They also wanted greater inter-state peer learning to happen. Further, they wanted to provide aagewans with more on-field, practical exercises that they can carry out and learn from.

Profile of trainers:

The 3 trainers who were trained under the Aagewan Vikas program Training of Trainers (ToT) module included two district coordinators and a state coordinator. **The trainers had varying levels of skills and experience**, with the state coordinator conducting more than 7+ trainings as a trainer across all districts with around 60-70 members, while district coordinators have held 3-4 trainings in their areas with approximately 50-55 members.

In addition to the ToT held under the Aagewan Vikas program in Delhi in July 2022, October 2022, and February 2023, **the trainers have also been a part of other state trainings** such as the UN Women trainings on gender, domestic violence and entrepreneurship, project-specific trainings, MAS trainings, and internal capacity building trainings.

Learnings from ToT and Personal Growth as Trainers:

The ToT made trainers **realize the importance of Plan B and the need to adopt their training plans based on participants' level of understanding**. For instance, breaking down modules into smaller, digestible parts or incorporating more practical exercises for applied learning.

Most importantly, **the trainings built their skills on conducting a training in a structured and time-bound manner, undertaking pre-and-post training needs assessment to assess effectiveness of trainings, using interactive training methods and tools (e.g., role play exercises) to ensure everybody's participation, and developing and modifying a module based on an analysis of participants' needs**. In sum, **it gave trainers the self-confidence and practical skills to be able to implement trainings on their own with different kinds of audiences**.

The trainers also **learnt the essential qualities of a good trainer** such as good communication skills, the ability to use practical examples to substantiate key talking points, and maintaining a training flow by recapping previous sessions and incrementally building upon topics and what has been learnt in the field rather than introducing new topics.

Among the ToT modules, the trainers found the discussions on patriarchy, feminism, intersectionality in Module 1 tough, but which, nonetheless, helped with their own self-development. In addition, they found Module 3 on the skills and qualities of a trainer as being practical.

Before ToTs, the trainers considered trainings as a task and were more focused on completing the modules rather than being attuned to the aagewans' learning needs and capacity. Now, they view the Aagewan Vikas program trainings as a process—acknowledging that the leadership journeys of aagewans takes time. The ToT helped orient their training focus towards building the leadership capabilities of aagewans so that they can further citizens' and workers' rights in the community.

Training Experience of Trainers:

The trainers have mostly led district or area-wise trainings with both aagewans and organizers.

The sessions with aagewans center on the core ideas of the Aagewan Vikas modules and those which are most relevant to them on a day-to-day basis. **The trainers noted that the module trainings had a cascade effect with a transfer of knowledge across the union membership**—i.e., a sharing of information by organizers with aagewans who weren't a part of the trainings and a similar dissemination of information by trained aagewans with fellow members and the community.

The trainers used an **accretion or layered approach to train aagewans**. This entailed a recap of the previous sessions' learnings to incrementally build upon their knowledge and understanding. The trainers held both online and offline Aagewan Vikas trainings on all the 4 basic modules with aagewans from across the six districts. The key topics covered in the sessions include basics about SEWA and its history, role and responsibilities of an aagewan, values of an aagewan, different types of trade, difference between mohalla and trade meetings, and campaigns.

A key component of the module trainings led by trainers was the incorporation of an action agenda—practice exercises or tasks which aagewans are expected to implement in the field. For

example, exercises include how to write a letter of appeal to local authorities, steps to be followed for resolving community issues, which local authorities and government functionaries to approach for addressing community demands etc.

While there is a **mix of theoretical and practical aspects in the trainings**, the trainers found that those aagewans who are new and slightly more educated understood both dimensions well, while those who are less educated but have more field experience as aagewans, learn better when practical exercises are incorporated in the training.

The trainings are usually for 3-4 hours and are attended by both old and new aagewans to promote peer group learning, to build bonds between them, and to ensure alignment in their overall learning and action. In fact, new aagewans shadow older aagewans in the field so they can learn the ropes from them.

Moreover, **the content of the sessions was designed keeping the local context in mind and drawing on area-specific examples** that resonate with aagewans. The trainers also **used a variety of methods** such as role play, storytelling to make it participatory and interactive; colours and images to create a visual impact; and relevant videos and case studies to make it engaging.

In the past, the trainers would simply implement the module as is (“module ban kar aata hai”) but now they tweak the module as per the context and needs of the participants. For example, to explain campaigns, the trainers used the My Fair Home Campaign as a discussion point, since aagewans were already engaged in its planning.

In addition to adopting the Aagewan Vikas training modules, **the trainers have also developed their own training modules that are locally relevant.** For example, since Malerkotla has a high incidence of domestic violence cases, the district trainer there has **developed a module on the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005)** and trained aagewans on the different types and forms of violence, redressal mechanisms, one-stop crisis center, helpline number (toll free 181), the roles and responsibilities of different authorities.

Further, to address the high drop-out rates among girls in Malerkotla, the state trainer has designed a **module to sensitize parents of the need for girls’ education.** Similarly, in Moga, the trainer has developed a module on water conservation to address the issue of a sinking water table that is affecting the lives and livelihoods of community members there.

Lastly, the trainers have also trained aagewans and members on gender, domestic violence, and entrepreneurship as a part of the UN Women trainings.

Challenges of Trainers:

The trainers have found that **even among active aagewans, the level of involvement in SEWA’s work varies, which in turn affects learning outcomes.** Those who are more active, participate more in the sessions, have more examples to share from the field, and can grasp the content better. The trainers emphasized that for trainings to be impactful among aagewans, both a desire to learn and to practice what they have learnt is crucial.

Trainers also faced the **challenge of time commitments, with some aagewans not staying for the full session or skipping sessions**, which in turn affects their own learning. Continuity in their learning is also a challenge, with some aagewans attending one module training and not another.

The trainers also mentioned that **earlier modules of the Aagewan Vikas program were too concept-heavy and needed to be broken-down and contextualized for aagewans.** For example, many aagewans found the union structure and characteristics of the unorganized sector to be too complicated for their understanding. In the words of one trainer: *“behn ko itni samaj nahi hai ki woh union jhanja samaj sake”* (aagewans don’t have that level of understanding where they can grasp the union structure fully).

Therefore, trainers gave aagewans a basic orientation on SEWA as a union with the understanding that it is only with experience that they will learn and internalize its concept.

The trainers also pointed out that **the learning curve of aagewans in Punjab is different from other states due to several contextual factors**. In other states, the Aagewan Vikas trainings had a higher impact because aagewans had already done a lot of the unionizing and community-building groundwork and had personally experienced the changes brought about through SEWA's work. Therefore, they could relate to what was being shared and absorb the information in the training modules better.

Whereas in Punjab, union-building is still very new. Initially, there was a sense of disbelief in the power of union-building in transforming lives. In the words of the state coordinator, they felt that "*woh jo bol rahe hai, waisa hai hota hai*" (what they are saying doesn't really happen) but **gradually when they began to put into action what they had learnt in the trainings and gained recognition from community members, that is when the trainings made sense to them**.

In fact, prior to the *kisan anadolan* that galvanized Punjab, there were no examples of unionizing that aagewans and members could relate to. However, when the farm laws got repealed due to state-wide protests by farmers, they realized the value and importance of forming a union.

Further, in Punjab, **women's work is considered "non-serious" (temporary, part-time, and stop-gap in nature) with members themselves undervaluing their trade work, making consciousness-raising around workers' rights harder to undertake**.

Lastly, in the UN Women trainings on gender, the trainers found it extremely difficult to break gender stereotypes in the minds of aagewans and faced backlash from community members, who questioned the intent of these trainings. This made trainers realize that **mindset changes even among aagewans will take time**, especially in a socio-cultural context where patriarchy and caste and class discrimination is deeply entrenched.

Further Areas of Support and Next Steps as a Trainer:

Despite conducting several trainings, the trainers felt that they needed to be more knowledgeable about the local context, plan their sessions in advance, and share more concrete examples in their trainings. In particular, the **trainers wanted to have a more in-depth understanding and clarity on citizen's rights, worker rights, and different laws and conventions relevant to members**.

The trainers also expressed the need to **set aside dedicated time for their own practice and self-study**. In terms of their training and facilitation skills, they wanted to improve their session flows to seamlessly move from topic to another and to be able to implement a Plan B in case their training doesn't go according to plan.

The trainers also found **inter-state peer learning to be useful**, especially in how other trainers were adopting their modules in the field. They wanted to have **more regular check-ins with senior trainers from SEWA to share their progress and gain feedback on their training sessions and plans**.

As trainers, they wanted to **move away from a classroom, residential/online training approach to on-field practical trainings where trainers observe the aagewans in action and provide real-time feedback**. Linked to this, they wanted to **provide aagewans with live exercises** that they can implement in mohalla and trade meetings and, thereby, promote learning-by-doing among them.

The trainers also intend to take-up training requests received from district organizers. For example, organizers want to be trained further on the Right to Information Act (2005), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005), Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act (2008), and Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana (especially in Ferozepur). In addition, there are aagewans who want to understand the administrative hierarchy and structure in government departments along with roles and responsibilities of government functionaries better for resolving community issues.

SEWA Punjab Organizers:

Key summary of findings:

- All 6 district-level organizers were trained under the program with two of them attending the residential training of organizers held in August 2022 and March 2023.
- Organizers possessed clarity about their role and responsibilities and viewed strengthening of the union, increasing its membership, and building the leadership capacity of aagewans as their chief responsibility.
- Organizers handhold the work of the aagewans, especially on government engagement or state-level advocacy. Organizers shared that because of MAS trainings, aagewans have a basic understanding of how to resolve civic issues and lead community meetings on their own.
- Organizers, together with aagewans, launched the My Fair Home Campaign in 2023, a 16-day state-wide campaign launched by SEWA Punjab to educate domestic workers about their rights and advocate for decent work with employers. The campaign was the state's first concerted attempt at unionizing a trade group using an area-wise strategy.
- Organizers are also engaged with aagewans in enrolling construction workers under the welfare board and in signing-up home-based workers for government-sponsored skilling programs.
- Given that unionizing is still in its infancy in Punjab, organizers provide aagewans with hands-on support in initiating trade group discussions, identifying local-level strategies for trade action, and sharing knowledge about different trades and the rights of women workers. Organizers found the group study component of the trainings to be useful since they learnt about workers' rights and entitlements under different state and national laws, schemes, and programs and about collective platforms to advance their interests.
- Key challenges faced by organizers include managing the expectations of aagewans about the voluntary nature of their duties and the need to further their own trade; overdependence of aagewans to support their work, especially when they are unable to dedicate the time needed for unionizing activities; systematic and regular follow-up and monitoring of aagewans' activities; difficulties in multi-tasking and dedicating time towards their own self-learning.
- The organizers were of the view that the process of inter-state sharing of experiences should continue and that there needs to be more in-depth knowledge about the specific provisions in labour laws, codes, and regulations.

Profile of Organizers:

There are **6 district-level organizers** across Punjab, out of which three (Ferozepur, Gurdaspur, Mohali) attended the residential organizers trainings held in August 2022 in Ranchi and March 2023 in Delhi. The organizers began their leadership journey with SEWA Punjab as Mahila Aarogya Samiti (MAS) community leaders, thereafter, as aagewans, and later, as area in-charge of SEWA Shakti Kendras (Empowerment Centers) and have been engaged as organizers over the past three years or more.

Roles and Responsibilities of Organizers:

The organizers **possess clarity about their roles and responsibilities** under the Aagewan Vikas program. **They view strengthening the union, increasing its membership, and building the leadership capacity of aagewans as their chief responsibility.** Put simply, *"humara kaam hai behno ko aagey badana...behno ki shamta badana taki woh aur aagey badey aur sanghatit ho sake."*

One of the ways they seek to build the leadership capacity of aagewans is by **supporting aagewans in conducting trade meetings** with domestic workers, construction workers, home-based workers etc. Along with this, **organizers supervise and handhold the work of the aagewans, especially in undertaking state-level advocacy** such as conducting meetings with high-level government officials.

Organizer opined that an understanding of their role has evolved over time and was largely due to the organizers' training, where they were oriented about the pivotal role and value of an aagewan in serving as a link between SEWA and the community and in championing trade issues.

Typically, one organizer manages approximately 10-15 aagewans and one aagewan is expected to interface with 50 members but organizers noted that the current reality is such that one aagewan engages with 100-150 members. As a result, aagewans' trade work takes a backseat and they sometimes are forced to step-aside to focus on their trade.

Organizers acknowledged the need for **streamlining the election of aagewans among active SEWA members in the community**. With the growth in union membership, the emergence and election of grassroots community leaders is a priority so that current aagewans aren't overburdened or burnout. In fact, the election process is currently underway with domestic workers, who are now electing their own trade aagewans; but it is yet to take root among mohalla aagewans, who are active members of their community since the time of the MAS trainings and are solving local citizen issues.

Organizers' Engagement with Aagewans on Trade and Community Issues:

Organizers in Punjab are primarily responsible for mobilization and unionizing around women's trade issues, unlike field mobilizers who engage with aagewans on mohalla or community level issues. In fact, **organizers lead trade-level meetings with aagewans where they discuss workers' rights and entitlements** including the need for legal recognition, minimum wages, leaves and other common demands. These trade meetings are typically for an hour and held at a time that is convenient for workers (usually in the second half of the day). On an average, 15-20 members attend these trade meetings.

It is important to note that SEWA Punjab began its work on trade issues in a focused manner in 2022 with unionizing domestic workers, who are the largest trade group in all the 6 districts. **Given that unionising is still in its infancy in Punjab, organizers provide aagewans with hands-on support in initiating discussions, identifying local-level strategies for trade action, and sharing knowledge about the rights of women workers**. In fact, organizers across different districts are now engaged in mobilizing domestic workers and home-based workers (who are the second largest trade group in the state) in collaboration with aagewans.

For example, in Mohali, Gurdaspur, and Ferozepur, the **organizers jointly with aagewans are holding weekly trade meetings every Thursday with approximately 150-200 domestic workers in their work locations**, i.e., posh areas. Some of the issues raised include exclusion of domestic workers in Punjab from the schedule of the Minimum Wages Act, no separate welfare or social security board for domestic workers, lack of a state law to protect and promote the interests of domestic workers. **The organizers are now also working with aagewans on mobilizing domestic workers in their areas of residence**.

The organizing work with domestic workers **using an area-wise strategy** received a fillip with the launch of the My Fair Home Campaign in 2023, which was a concerted 16-day state-wide campaign launched by SEWA Punjab to educate domestic workers about their rights and advocate for decent work with employers. Some **key demands of the campaign included a minimum of 2 leaves in a month and job security** such as fixed working hours, minimum wage protection (including no cut in wages, withholding of wages, extra wage for extra work etc.). In fact, many of these demands were first propounded at the 2019 Aagewan Vikas Sammelan, a state-level congregation of aagewans.

Regarding home-based workers, who are yet to systematically organized in Punjab, **organizers and aagewans** in Mohali, Ferozepur, and Gurdaspur are **taking a skills-based approach by enrolling them in different government-sponsored skills-training courses and exhibitions like the local "skills fair" or Hunar Haat** where they can market and exhibit their wares. For example, the organizer in Gurdaspur has secured 60 artisan identity cards for home-based workers, which would enable them to access government schemes related to access to credit, skilling trainings etc.

Moreover, in the bimonthly trade meetings held with home-based workers, some of the key issues that have emerged are low rates for work, undercutting of rates due to intra-competition, reliance on contractors for work orders etc. An additional challenge encountered by organizers is that many home-based workers live in conservative families with restricted mobility, making it harder to mobilize and unionize them.

In addition, in Mohali which has a sizeable migrant slum population, the **organizers and aagewans** are conducting weekly or biweekly trade meetings with construction workers and **have secured labour cards for 30 women construction workers, whereby they can access various benefits** like free health insurance, accidental death and disability cover, skills development training, pension, educational assistance etc. They also addressing their workplace issues such as sanitation and the need for a toilet for women workers.

In addition to trade issues, the **organizers also provide back-up support to aagewans on mohalla issues, especially on government engagement.** Organizers shared that aagewans because of MAS trainings have a basic understanding of how to resolve civic issues and lead community meetings on their own. In fact, organizers noted that aagewans regularly meet and follow-up with municipal corporation officers, elected representatives, and local functionaries for resolving civic issues. It is only when they approach senior bureaucrats and state department officials to act on these matters that they rely on organizers for support.

To support last-mile scheme linkages among members, it was learnt that Gurdaspur has got its Common Service Center (CSC) license, Ferozepur has applied for it, and Mohali is already linked to the CSC. The CSC will provide easy access points for delivery of government-to-citizen e-services to members at a nominal fee.

Learnings from Organizers' Training:

Two residential trainings in August 2022 in Ranchi and March 2023 in Delhi were held with organizers from different states including Punjab. **The focus of the training modules was on strengthening their organizing and public mobilization skills** so that they can further support aagewans in collectivizing women by their trade. **A cascade training approach was used, wherein organizers in attendance would train fellow district organizers and share their learnings on trade and community issues.**

In addition to the organizers' training held under the Aagewan Vikas Program, organizers in Punjab have also received various on-the-job trainings to help build their skills in conflict resolution, time management, prioritization, people management.

The Punjab organizers who attended both trainings (August 2022 in Ranchi and March 2023 in Delhi) shared that they **gained knowledge about different state and national laws, schemes, and programs, and were able to apply that knowledge to help aagewans resolve community-level issues and challenges.** For example, in Ferozepur district, the organizer was able to speak to the concerned government authorities for speeding up fund disbursement under Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana, which was adversely affecting SEWA members.

Specifically, **organizers found the group study component of the trainings to be useful** since they **learnt about workers' rights and entitlements and collective platforms to advance their interests** such as National Platform for Domestic Workers, ILO Conventions (C-189 for domestic workers and C-177 for home-based workers), Unorganized Workers' Social Security Board, Minimum Wages Act. They also learnt about the role of the one-stop crisis center under the Protection from Domestic Violence Act and guided aagewans on how to address domestic violence cases in their areas.

The organizers noted that they **found certain training sessions to be technical in nature** such as adult learning, learning cycle, which were later broken down into digestible parts for their understanding. The March 2023 training in Delhi, wherein state organizers shared their experiences of union-building and had a deep-dive discussion on their specific issues or challenges, was found to be most helpful to organizers.

In sum, because of these trainings, **organizers learnt about long-term engagement strategies for union-building among members and how they can support aagewans to advance workers' and citizens' rights.**

Challenges of Organizers:

One of the initial challenges faced by organizers was the **confusion in the minds of aagewans over the purpose of and difference between a trade meeting** (a meeting focused on the trade issues of members) **and a mohalla meeting** (a meeting where women engaged in trade and otherwise discuss community-level issues).

A common concern for organizers is **managing the expectations of aagewans, especially for monetary support**. This is compounded in the case of new aagewans who think that SEWA Punjab is an NGO and not union. It often falls upon the **organizer to explain to aagewans the voluntary nature of unionizing work and the need to further their own trade**. To put it in the words of an organizer, "*unko samjhana padta hai ki apna trade bhi aagey leke jana hai*" (we explain to them that they also need to take their trade forward). This is especially tricky, since there are some aagewans in each district who receive a stipend for certain project-linked tasks and deliverables that they carry out, which in turn creates a rift and conflict among aagewans. In such situations, **organizers explain the meaning of sisterhood and need for unity among members**.

Linked to the voluntary nature of aagewans' work is the fact that **aagewans engaged as domestic workers are often caught up with work and unable to dedicate the time needed for unionizing activities**.

In addition, **organizers also deal with the personal challenges and requests of aagewans**, such as providing financial support for their daughter's marriage or buying a smartphone. There are also instances where organizers need to intervene and speak to the aagewans' husbands or family members so they can continue to work.

It is also the case that **organizers' close connect and regular contact with aagewans sometimes creates an over-dependency on them for handholding support**. While organizers are conscious of the need to build the leadership capacity of aagewans to independently function in their areas, the balance between when to step-in and support aagewans and when to step-back and let them take the lead is still a work in progress.

Further, **organizers themselves acknowledged that they themselves pressed for time, juggling multiple responsibilities, and therefore unable to dedicate time towards their own self-learning**. As one organizer pointed out: "*hum log padte nahi hai*", i.e. "we don't do self-study". As a result, they aren't always able to keep themselves up-to-date with the latest information or be prepared with all the facts when engaging with aagewans on specific trade-level issues.

Lastly, **organizers mentioned that systematic and regular follow-up and monitoring of aagewans' activities is wanting**. While monthly reports to keep track of their progress are being maintained, which provide details on membership drives, community and trade meetings, trade-wise mobilization activities, application support with scheme linkages, meetings with government functionaries etc. there are still gaps in reporting.

Many aagewans remain active in some months and inactive in others. Consequently, **organizers have observed that the information shared with aagewans on trade and community issues, or about new government schemes is not reaching members**. At the monthly meeting of organizers, areas of learning, challenges, sharing of information, planning for next month's field-level activities by aagewans is discussed.

Further areas of support:

The organizers were of the view that process of learning should continue under the Aagewan Vikas Program, especially **inter-state sharing of experiences**. For example, the Punjab organizers learnt from the Jharkhand team on how domestic workers in their states successfully positioned and talked about their demands of leave, pay, working hour with employers as a part of their International Day for Domestic Workers campaign. Similarly, from the West Bengal team, they learnt about the process of setting up self-help groups, and from the Delhi team, they learnt about different membership drive strategies that strengthened their on-the-ground presence in the state.

Further, **organizers felt that they needed to have a more in-depth knowledge of the specific provisions in labour laws** (Minimum Wages Act, Unorganised Workers Social Security Act) and ILO Conventions (C-189 for Domestic Workers and C-177 for Home-based Workers). This is especially crucial to secure workers' rights and to strengthen trade groups. In the words of one organizer, "there needs to be a greater focus on unionising around trades so that members can further these issues on their own and demand for their rights." In addition, the organizers emphasized the need to **conduct more activity-based trainings for ensuring enhanced learning outcomes among aagewans and members.**

SEWA Punjab Aagewans:

Key summary of findings:

- In Phase 1 of the program, a majority of aagewans trained were domestic workers, while in Phase 2, all the aagewans trained were home-based workers. Some were chosen based on their previous association with MAS and have now been unanimously elected by members because of the work they done in the community. It was clear from aagewans that the process of selection and election has been a fluid one in Punjab.
- Most aagewans were able to recognize SEWA as a union that works for the rights of women in the unorganized sector. However, there were still a few who still confused it with a women's organization or "*mahila mandal*" "*mahilaon ki sanstha*"
- Aagewans were drawn to SEWA, since it offered a collective space to discuss their interests and deliberate on their issues, both as women and as workers in the unorganized sector.
- Aagewans knew that they are community leaders and agents of change, but they didn't necessarily see themselves as a driving force for organizing and unionizing women. In fact, it was observed among some aagewans engaged in home-based work that their trade association was weak.
- Aagewans are providing last-mile scheme linkage support in their mohallas along with conducting community surveys and signature campaigns, writing letters of appeal, organizing camps etc. They noted COVID-19 as a key turning point in the development of their leadership skills, wherein they led relief efforts with community women and coordinated with local authorities on field operations.
- Aagewans were categorical that it is only through unionizing that their collective demands can be met as evidenced by The My Fair Home Campaign. Some of the key outcomes of this state-wise campaign was that it gave domestic workers an identity or "*pehchaan*", helped raise their consciousness about their rights as workers, built worker solidarity among SEWA members, and sensitized employers and officials on pledging their commitment towards upholding domestic workers' rights.
- Aagewans noted that trainings were essential to their learning on the job. However, they were still unclear about technical aspects such as the union structure. Nonetheless, they were well-versed with the challenges of the informal sector and the specific trades of domestic and home-based work and possessed basic knowledge of certain labour laws, codes, regulations, and conventions such C-177 for Home-based Workers, C-189 for Domestic Workers, Unorganized Sector's Social Security Act.
- Many aagewans attested to experiencing a transformation in their lives. As aagewans, they are now stepping outside their homes, conducting meetings on their own, meeting different community and government stakeholders, and even travelling to other states on exposure visits. They also have seen their own social networks expand.
- A key change experienced by aagewans is gaining an independent identity for themselves as citizens and workers and recognition from their families and the community.

- Regarding challenges encountered in managing trade issues, aagewans highlighted difficulties in organizing home-based workers due to the very nature of their trade and in organizing domestic workers due to the lack of unity among them. Aagewans also find it difficult at times to maintain their work-life balance, especially managing household care work and their duties as an aagewan.
- There is added complication of organizing members by more than one trade, since in the absence of a steady income, members are juggling two trades—that of domestic work and home-based work, making unionizing difficult. Among domestic workers, aagewans are unsure of how to persuade non-members to uphold the collective demands of members who have been unionized under the My Fair Home Campaign.

Profile:

There are 29 aagewans who completed all four module trainings under the program—17 aagewans in Phase 1 and 12 aagewans Phase 2. Most of the aagewans are married with children and belong to the 25-34 years age group. Close to two-third or 65% of aagewans have been members of SEWA Punjab over the past 1-3 years, while the remaining 35% have been associated for over 4 years. Almost 40% of the aagewans have no formal education, 34% had a high school education, and the rest had a middle school education.

In terms of their trade profile, 55% of aagewans trained were home-based workers, 34% were domestic workers, and the remaining were engaged as service workers (ASHA workers, construction workers) and street vendors. **In Phase 2 of the program, all the aagewans trained were home-based workers,** while in Phase 1, 10 out of the 17 aagewans (58%) were domestic workers.

The aagewans who were selected from the very start of the program mentioned that they were chosen because of their knowledge of the area and community issues as active MAS members. Some aagewans mentioned that they have now been unanimously elected by members because of the work they have done in the community. In such cases, members often back them and ask them to step forward as their representative. In the words of an aagewan, “*aap aagey chalo, aapke peche hum chalte hain*” (you go forward, we will walk behind you). **It was clear from aagewans that the process of selection and election has been a fluid one in Punjab.**

What is SEWA?

Aagewans were able to recognize SEWA as a union of working women (“*swayam rozgar mahilaon ki sanghathan*”). In explaining the meaning of SEWA, aagewans mentioned that it works for women in the unorganized sector (“*jo aurat mehnat karke kamaati hai, un behno ki saath kaam karte hain...SEWA kaamdar behne ke liye hain*”) and for their rights (“*humare haq*”).

However, **a few still confused it with a women’s organizations**—an organization of women, by women, and for women. Some of the phrases used included “*mahila manda*” “*mahilaon ka sanstha hai*”. Some also associated SEWA with “*sewa*” or service work and this partially stems from the relief work that SEWA aagewans had undertaken at the time of COVID-19. As one aagewan put it, “*SEWA garibon ki liye hai*” (SEWA is for the poor). In fact, this points to SEWA Punjab’s past association with MAS and that aagewans are more familiar with its work as a “*sanstha*” (NGO) than as a “*sanghathan*” (union) that organizes women based on their trade.

Motivation to join SEWA and become an aagewan?

Many of the aagewans learnt about SEWA through community meetings led by local area-in-charge/ coordinators or through word-of-mouth from friends and neighbours in the community. It was at their insistence that they joined a few meetings and observed that they were talking about community issues and concerns (health, water, sanitation) that affected their lives but which nobody else including government authorities was paying attention to.

A few aagewans also attended meetings, where work-related challenges were being discussed. **They were drawn to SEWA, since it offered a collective space to discuss their interests and deliberate on their issues, both as women and as workers in the unorganized sector.** Further, many

aagewans had first-hand experience of SEWA's work during COVID-19 and how it helped families in distress.

There was also a desire among aagewans to do something ("*shauk tha*") outside of their routine household work. Most of all, **they gravitated to the idea of belonging to a sisterhood** akin to a family or "*parivar*".

Why is an aagewan needed?

Aagewans shared that one of the chief reasons that they are needed in the community is that women are mostly home bound and have restricted mobility. As a result, they have limited knowledge and information about different government schemes and programs and about their rights and entitlements as citizens and workers.

An aagewan, therefore, serves as link between women and the outside world—updating them about different opportunities such as free courses/scholarships for their children, providing them with application support for availing government services and benefits and so on. Moreover, some **aagewans mentioned that they support government functionaries like ASHA and anganwaadi workers with last-mile service delivery** ensuring that every household is reached with both information and services.

Who is an aagewan?

An aagewan was described as **someone who steps forward and take others along** ("*aage nikal kar khud kaam karna aur dusron ko aage lekar jana*") and who stands in solidarity with women ("*behno ko saath de sake*"). As aagewans, they encourage women ("*protsahit karna*"), reassure them ("*vishwas dilana*"), and ensure their self-independence ("*atmanirbharta*").

Aagewans were clear that as **grassroots community leader they had a duty** ("*zimedari*) **towards their fellow women** and that their primary role is to reach community members with information ("*jaankari dena*") and to connect them to government welfare schemes ("*yojana*"). They serve as **bridge between SEWA and the community**. One aagewan described her role as that of being a helpful guide ("*logon ko kaam mein aa saku aur sahi guide kar saku*") akin to the head of the household.

Some of the key qualities of an aagewan include being trustworthy, having a respect for time, dedicated to the cause of unionizing, diligent ("*jo kaam humme diya jata hai woh pura imaandaari se kare*") and possess a strong connect with the community.

It is to be noted here that a few aagewans mentioned they receive a stipend as health aagewans. In fact, in every district, there are 2-3 aagewans who provide project-linked support and are paid for certain deliverables. These include health aagewans, who receive a stipend (2200 INR per month) for monitoring and following-up on the health and nutrition outcomes of pregnant women and children. However, the role of an aagewan in SEWA is voluntary in nature, with the expectation that their trade continues alongside their duties as grassroots community leaders.

On aagewans who are paid and those who are not, one aagewan remarked that those who get paid are the ones who do good work ("*jo aache kaam karte hain*"). They also remarked that this created greed or "*lalach*" in the minds of some, who expect a monetary benefit for their time and effort and who don't appreciate all the learnings gained ("*humme kya seekhne ko mila*"). In fact, this has created tensions among aagewans, with community members making comparisons between paid and unpaid aagewans.

In sum, **aagewans in Punjab knew that they are community leaders and agents of change with their role in organizing workers having just begun**. It was also observed among **some aagewans engaged in home-based work that their trade association was weak**. This is because home-based work is mostly undertaken by women to supplement household incomes and is part-time and seasonal in nature. Home-based workers do not consider themselves to be gainfully self-employed and consequently prioritize being an aagewan over their own trade.

Importance of unionizing working women:

Aagewans were categorical that it is only through unionizing that their collective demands can be met. In the words of an aagewan, “*ekta zaroori hai...sabko jodna chahiye*”. In fact, **it is strength in unity that gives SEWA its identity and ethos.** As one aagewan put it, union members always stand by each other (“*hum sookh dukh mein rehte hai*”).

The aagewans were well-versed with the challenges of women in the unorganized sector such as having no fixed wages, work timings, and place of work as well as the unique challenges faced by domestic workers and home-based workers in their work.

Aagewans in explaining the value of a union spoke of the My Fair Home Campaign and how that has given domestic workers an identity or “*pehchaan*” and helped raise their consciousness about their rights as workers. One of the aagewans used the metaphor of the “*ladoo*” to explain that the beauty of its round shape is because it is firmly held together. Similarly, women are strong when they are united (“*ekjut hona chahiye*”) and not when they are divided (“*chura chura hona*”).

One of the outcomes of the campaign has been an increased understanding about the power of collective bargaining to negotiate with employers on their terms of employment such as fair pay, fixed working hours, leaves in a month. It has led to a realization that if domestic workers are united, their collective demands can be met (“*unke haq dila sakte hain*”). They shared an example of how the unionized domestic workers used “*dharna*” or protest and “name and shame” tactics with an employer who had withheld the wages of a member for many months.

Aagewans noted that when organizing trade groups at the local level (a process that was initiated this year), there is a common misperception among women that SEWA will provide them steady work orders or access to job opportunities. At the time of paying the membership fees, women expect certain tangible benefits from the union. Aagewans often clarify that they can support them with access to government schemes and programs to help further their trade such as free skilling or training courses, participation in government sponsored exhibitions, setting up self-help groups etc.

Roles and Responsibilities of an Aagewan: Handling Community and Trade Issues

Community issues:

Aagewans support members with last-mile scheme linkage support, i.e., helping women and their families get their identity proofs and documents in order so that they can avail benefits under different government welfare schemes. With schemes application processes getting digitized, aagewans also sensitize members about linking their phones numbers with their Aadhar ID, PAN card, bank accounts etc.

They are also engaged in mohalla meetings, which are held area-wise once a week and serve as a forum for members to discuss community issues such as sewage and sanitation. As a part of this work, aagewans **conduct surveys** to assess community needs and put together a list of people in need of documentation or welfare schemes in the local area and if the numbers are large, they **organize a camp** and invite government functionaries for assistance. In fact, aagewans have organized all manner of camps such as health camps, e-Shram, voter ID, ABHA card, opening bank accounts under Sukanya Samridhi Yojana over the years.

As women who volunteer to represent and lead their communities, **aagewans have resolved several civic issues.** For matters like overhead wires, overflowing sewage etc. that affect everyone in the mohalla or locality, aagewans **gather signatures** from community members, and thereafter **submit a letter of appeal** to the concerned government departments for action. Aagewans frequently liaise and follow-up with local government officials on mohalla-level issues, which can take months to be solved.

Along with this, **aagewans act as an information agent**, updating members about the latest government schemes and courses on skilling and entrepreneurship offered by the government. Since aagewans are continuously being trained by SEWA, they are well-informed. In fact, individual community members approach them for help to solve their issues which could range from application support, access

government welfare schemes, intervening in domestic violence cases, and rehabilitation support for drug abuse cases.

There are also **health aagewans** who work for 10 days in a month and are primarily responsible for the well-being of pregnant and lactating mothers and newborn children. In this role, aagewans keep track of their vaccinations, link them to local anganwadi center for ration and nutrition support, enroll them under the Pradhan Mantru Jan Arogya Yojana, maintain their individual case files etc. Health awareness and service camps are also organized by aagewans in the community on a periodic basis.

Typically, field areas are divided among aagewans and one aagewan is in touch with approximately 100-150 members. Aagewans also work in pairs, wherein one runs the mohalla meeting and the other helps with documentation support (attendance list, minutes of the meeting etc.).

In the discharge of the duties, **aagewans are in close touch with both field mobilizers and organizers**. At the monthly meeting of all aagewans, progress on mohalla issues is shared, challenges discussed, and next steps charted. Aagewans reach out to organizers for needs-based support. For example, when they can't conduct mohalla level meetings due to personal commitments, or when they need to follow-up with senior government officials on community demands, or when explaining a specific scheme or law to members to build their understanding.

Trade issues:

Since organizing and unionizing women by trade has only happened systematically in the case of domestic workers, aagewans mostly spoke about the impact of the My Fair Home Campaign. **The campaign strengthened members' perception of SEWA as a *sanghathan* that fights for their rights and entitlements** (*"woh humare liye laad rahi hai"*). It **helped in raising their consciousness as workers and build worker solidarity among SEWA members, as evidenced by the participation of non-domestic workers in campaign activities** such as street theatre, workers' rally in posh areas, scheme linkages camp, pamphlet distribution in the homes of employers, submission of demands to labour commissioners, awareness sessions on ILO Convention No. 189 etc.

Key results from the State-wide "My Fair Home" Campaign	
Participation of domestic workers	1657
Participation of members belonging to other trades	1060
Campaign outreach and sensitization with employers, government officials, and the public	3500
Scheme linkages camp with domestic workers	529
Membership drive over 16 days (i.e. new members who joined)	461
Pamphlets distributed	4300
Conversations with employers	220

Further, aagewans are also organizing weekly trade meeting with domestic workers to ensure there is continuous engagement on their issues such as lack of job security, leaves, fixed working hours etc. As one aagewan out it, *"bar bar jo baat kehte hain, uska assar hoga"* (reiterating the talking points will take an effect).

Some of the **challenges in organizing domestic workers is the lack of unity among them** (*"behno mein ekkat nahi hai"*), **which results in undercutting of wages**. The acceptance of low wages aagewans acknowledged is out of desperation but it also points to the need for remaining united and firm on their collective demands (*"aapas mein ekta karni padegi"*). This remains a work in progress, and it remains to be seen the extent to which organizing by aagewans translates into state actions such as inclusion of domestic workers in the schedule of Minimum Wages Act.

Aagewans confirmed that trade groups of domestic workers and home-based workers are being formed in their local areas. With home-based workers, the focus is on skilling, with an emphasis on quality and standardization. Issues that have come up in discussions include fixing rate charts for their

work, participating in government sponsored exhibitions to showcase and market their wares, and systematizing their own work ("*kaam ka tareeka banao*") by maintaining daily logs of work done.

Challenges of Aagewans:

Regarding challenges encountered in managing trade issues, aagewans highlighted their difficulties in organizing home-based workers. An aagewan commented that their issues can't be resolved easily ("*unki samasya ka hal nahi ho sakta hai*") due to several contextual factors.

Firstly, women engaged in home-based work are isolated and difficult to locate due to strict restrictions on their mobility. Moreover, it is part-time and seasonal in nature with fluctuations in orders and variance in rates that are determined by factors of quality and skill. Home-based workers rely on more than one contractor or client, who each have their own work arrangements, which makes it harder to negotiate with them. Some home-based workers charge low rates to beat the competition in the hope it will secure them more orders. As one aagewan opined that in today's environment, money is everything, even if it is less ("*aaj ki mohol mein, paisa hi chahiye, chahe woh kum ho*"). It is for these reasons that change will take time with home-based workers ("*unme badlav aane mein time lagega*").

There is added **complication of organizing members by more than one trade, since in the absence of a steady income, members are juggling two trades—that of domestic work and home-based work, both of which are unstable in nature.** Among domestic workers, **aagewans are unsure of how to persuade non-members to uphold the collective demands of members who have been unionized** under the My Fair Home Campaign. There is a need for careful handholding on resolving such trade matters.

Aagewans also **find it difficult at times to maintain their work-life balance, especially managing household and carework and their duties as an aagewan.** Trade, for some aagewans engaged in home-based work, does not pose as much of a challenge since it is flexible in nature.

A common challenge experienced by aagewans was the need to keep themselves constantly updated to respond to community demands, which in turn creates a dependency on SEWA district staff for information on new schemes, laws, and policies.

In handling community issues, **aagewans have had run-ins with influential stakeholders** which have blown out of proportion and have required the intervention of state leadership. For example, there was a false accusation made by local ward member of SEWA charging high fees from members, which took months to resolve. In such situations, aagewans wished they had better communication and conflict-management skills.

Transformation in becoming an Aagewan:

Many aagewans attested to experiencing a transformation in their lives. Before their association with SEWA, they were mostly home-makers, with limited engaged with the outside world. They described themselves as being shy and having little self-confidence. But now **as aagewans, they are stepping outside their homes, conducting meetings on their own, meeting different community and government stakeholders, and even travelling to other states on exposure visits.**

Aagewans spoke of how their **own social networks have expanded** ("*saabke saath baat cheet karne ka moka mila... sabse milne ka moka mila*"). Moreover, SEWA has given them an opportunity to learn about different topics such as domestic violence ("*humme haar cheez ki seekhni milli...buhut jaankaari milli*") and have used this knowledge to support citizens in resolving their issues. For example, intervening in domestic violence cases and filing the case with the police, approaching officials in the municipal corporation on civic matters, helping widows get their pensions etc. Some aagewans spoke of the compliments received for the good work they have done ("*humari kaam tarif karte hai*").

One of the biggest changes experienced by aagewans is **gaining an independent identity for themselves** ("*khud ki pehchaan*") and **recognition from their families** ("*ghar se pehchaan mil rahi hai*") and the community ("*itne log se jaan pehchaan ho gaya, log jaane lage*"). Some aagewans spoke of the

rapport they have built with municipal corporation officials, who often contact them directly for undertaking public works such as sewage lines.

Impact of the Aagewan Vikas Trainings:

Aagewans who attended both residential and online trainings were of the view that **the trainings were essential to their learning on the job**. Since some trainings happened online during COVID-19, a few aagewans couldn't attend them due to domestic responsibilities. Those who attended the residential trainings met aagewans in other states, which made them take note of their strength in numbers ("*humari itni behne hai*").

Some of the key takeaways from the sessions included the **importance of union-building and having a collective voice** ("*ek awaak mein baat karna*" and "*ekjut hona kyun zaroori hai*"). **Aagewans were still unclear about the technical aspects of the training** like union structure, trade committees, aagewan to member ratio, definitions of organized and unorganized sector. This is in line with the fact **furthering union-building and organizing is still at an early stage in Punjab** and that these ideas are yet to take root in the minds of aagewans. Nonetheless, conversations on the importance of union-building among women informal workers revealed that **aagewans are well-versed with the challenges of the informal sector and the specific trades of domestic and home-based work**.

In addition, aagewans in each district who are engaged in home-based work went through district-level trainings covering basic and advanced modules on home-based work held over several months in 2022. In these trainings, aagewans noted, they learnt about the different categories of home-based workers, identified their trade-specific issues including those linked to supply chains, specific provision of ILO-177 (Homework Convention), and specific actions they can take to address their issues (e.g., issuance of artisan cards, enrolling them in government-sponsored skilling courses etc.)

IV. SEWA Jharkhand Context:

Key summary of findings:

- SEWA Jharkhand has 7290 members, out of which 50% are engaged as agricultural workers, 25% as domestic workers, 15% as construction workers and another 5% who are home-based workers. More than 80 per cent of the state's labour force is in the unorganized sector as agricultural wage labor, construction labor, and domestic workers¹.
- The program was launched in the state for the empowerment or *shashaktikaran* of Adivasi or indigenous women and to support their collectivization for demanding full employment, benefits, and entitlements.
- Along with building leadership capacity among grassroots women, SEWA Jharkhand has been engaged in trade-specific capacity building and skills development, health and finance related trainings, and government engagement and advocacy.

SEWA Jharkhand began its work in 2016 in two districts Ranchi and Hazaribagh (Churchu, Tati-Jhariya and Daru blocks). Currently, **it has 7290 members, of which 50% are engaged as agricultural workers, 25% as domestic workers, 15% as construction workers and another 5% who are home-based workers.** The trade membership within the state differs by region, with Ranchi having a higher concentration of members engaged in domestic and construction work, and Hazaribagh having members who are predominately women agricultural workers engaged in rain-fed subsistence farming.

As per the Government of Jharkhand data, there are more than 32 tribal groups in the state, who constitute 26.3% of the total population⁴. The state has one of the highest concentration of people living with multidimensional poverty according to the NITI Aayog National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2023 and a high level of inter-state out-migration for employment and work-related reasons⁵. More than **80 per cent of the state's labour force is in the unorganized sector as agricultural wage labor, construction labor, and domestic workers**⁶.

Keeping in mind these contextual realities, **the Aagewan Vikas program was launched in the state for the empowerment or *shashaktikaran* of Adivasi or indigenous women and to support their collectivization for demanding full employment, benefits, and entitlements.** In fact, the program was designed to complement other ongoing state interventions focused on sustainable livelihoods and skills development, organizing of trade groups, and community health action.

Specifically, **SEWA Jharkhand has been engaged in trade-specific capacity building and skills development** such as on livestock rearing. In fact, many households in Jharkhand depend on livestock to earn an income, particularly those who are landless or have very small parcels of land. The Goat Project provides training and support to women *Pashu Sakhis* or goat rearers, helping them earn an income by way of preparing and selling goat feed supplements and treatment of goats.

It also runs the **Udyami program**, which focuses on strengthening financial inclusion and market access for women microentrepreneurs and women-run collective social enterprises.

In addition, **SEWA Jharkhand is training women agricultural workers in Hazaribagh** to adopt System of Rice Intensification (SRI) farming techniques to increase crop yields of rice, maize, mustard, and red gram crops, and to promote food security. It is also linking up women agricultural workers with ATMA, Krishi Vigyan Kendra for soil testing, trainings, and exposure visits.

⁴ <https://www.jharkhand.gov.in/home/AboutTribals>

⁵ <https://migrationaffairs.com/census-2011-snapshot-out-migration-from-jharkhand-madhya-pradesh/>

⁶ <https://iw wage.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SEWA-report.pdf> (Pg. 12)

In fact, women in agriculture lack ownership and control of productive resources such as land and irrigation and access to skills training, extension, and advisory services. They are also primarily involved in pre-production and production activities, and less involved in post-harvest activities, especially in value addition and accessing markets.

Further, since construction workers form a major trade group in the state, SEWA Jharkhand has been **organizing construction workers and registering them under Building and Other Construction Workers Board (BoCW) and the Unorganised Workers Board** in close coordination with the Labour Department to ensure they avail social security benefits.

On the aspect of community health, **SEWA Jharkhand with the support of the State Health Department has been mobilizing and forming Mahila Arogya Samiti (MAS)**, a community-based group formed in urban clusters for promoting health, hygiene, and behavioral change through collective action. Hand-holding support is being provided to MAS groups in Ranchi on fund utilization for offering health service facilities to the community. Likewise, in Hazaribagh, it is working with AWCs and AMNs on village-level health promotion and awareness sessions on timely immunization and vaccination of newborns as well as antenatal and postnatal care of pregnant and lactating mothers.

SEWA Jharkhand Aagewans

Key summary of findings:

- There are 48 aagewans who completed all four module trainings under the program which is the highest amongst all the states under the program
- In terms of their trade profile, a little more than half of the aagewans trained (54%) are producers engaged in agriculture and allied activities. In Hazaribagh, most of the aagewans have been part of the SEWA since its inception, working on state-level initiatives as a *Pashu Sakhi*¹ or *Swasthya Aagewan*.
- Aagewans in Jharkhand combine or dovetail monthly community meetings or “Samudayik Sabha” with other project-specific activities, since this is both convenient for aagewans and members, who do not have the time to attend multiple meetings in a month.
- Most often, women directly contact aagewans for filling out applications for government documents and schemes. The need for assistance to avail of government benefits has become a strong motivator for women to join SEWA as members.
- COVID-19 was a turning point in the development of leadership skills of aagewans, who identified vulnerable families and helped them access ration support available as well as tracked migrant workers to help them as they returned home.
- Aagewans have been working on issuing worker identity cards to members which is the first step to being recognized as workers by the government. They are helping identify women construction workers who can be upskilled under the Karmika project of Mahila Housing Trust of SEWA. They are also supporting members on sustainable farming techniques and practices and as community animal health workers are advising them on taking care of their livestock. Through the My Fair Home Campaign, they are advocating for the rights of domestic workers with elected representatives and have submitted their memorandum of demands to local MLAs for legislative action. And finally, in Hazaribagh, they have launched a local campaign on *Jungle Bacchao* (Save Forests) to raise awareness on the need to protect forest commons and conserve natural resources
- Aagewans felt that the program shaped their identities as workers and gave them a social standing. It played a pivotal role in fulfilling their life-long aspirations and gave them a second chance in life.
- Aagewans shared that they are time-poor, juggling between household chores, childcare responsibilities, and their own trade, which makes it difficult for them to dedicate time towards their duties as an aagewans. In Hazaribagh, availability of public transportation was a huge challenge for aagewans, which adversely affects their collectivization efforts.

- The Aagewan Vikas trainings provided the first structured orientation on SEWA, union activities, and their role as community leaders and helped bring a formal structure and uniformity to the work of aagewans
- Aagewans were able to understand Modules 3 and 4 better, since they were more practical and action-oriented than Modules 1 and 2, which were more information-heavy and covered technical aspects.
- Tracking the progress made by aagewans at the unit meetings on various issues raised by SEWA members was a key challenge for organizers.
-

Profile:

There are 48 aagewans who completed all four module trainings under the program—33 aagewans in Phase 1 and 15 aagewans Phase 2, **which is the highest amongst all the states under the program.** A majority of aagewans are married, with 39.5% belonging to the 25-34 years age group and another 37.5% in the 35-44 years age bracket. **In Phase 1 of the trainings, all aagewans who were trained were members of SEWA Jharkhand for over 3 years (21 out of 33 aagewans had more than 5 years of membership experience),** while in Phase 2 only recent members, i.e., those with less 3 years of association with SEWA were trained. Almost 77% of the aagewans trained under the program have a secondary school education.

In terms of their trade profile, a little more than half of the aagewans trained (54%) are producers engaged in agriculture and allied activities, 20.8% are service workers engaged in domestic or construction work, and the remaining are home-based and street vendors. **More aagewans from Ranchi (54%) were trained than from Hazaribagh (45%).**

Aagewans were selected under the program based on their ability to give time to their duties as grassroots leaders and their previous experience of working with SEWA on different projects. They undertook the role of community mobilizers after being approached by SEWA staff or members and were later trained and nurtured to be grassroots leaders. Moreover, the second batch, which comprised of newer aagewans were identified by aagewans from the first batch based on their leadership potential. **All the aagewans are engaged in outside work and conduct their duties over and above their primary trade or work.**

In Hazaribagh, most of the aagewans have been part of the SEWA since its inception, working on state-level initiatives as a *Pashu Sakhī* or *Swasthya Aagewan*. Typically, they oversee 2 to 3 *tolas* (village units) in their village, while some of them have around 8 *tolas* under them.

Roles and Responsibilities of an Aagewan: Handling Community and Trade Issues

Aagewans as a cadre of trained community flag-bearers are pivotal in strengthening SEWA Jharkhand's on-the-ground implementation of projects and dissemination of information by forming a link between SEWA and the community, between the community and government, and between the community and other networks and organizations.

It is common for aagewans in Jharkhand to combine or dovetail monthly community meetings or “Samudayik Sabha” with other project-specific activities, since this is both convenient for aagewans and members, who do not have the time to attend multiple meetings in a month. For example, in their roles as *Pashu Sakhis* or *Swasthya Aagewans*, for which they receive a project stipend to cover their time and travel costs, aagewans regularly interface with members and organize various activities.

It was learnt that aagewans in Jharkhand play a crucial role in servicing the needs of members—whether that is in terms of health services, livestock rearing, last-mile scheme linkage support, and trade-specific capacity-building. In a sense, **the Aagewan Vikas program in Jharkhand is an umbrella program**

⁷ The Pashu Sakhis advise farmers on how to take care of livestock, and the benefits of rearing them for sale by connecting them to farmers groups and markets.

under which community leaders are being trained to become not just leaders but community resource persons.

A key focus of aagewans in the state is growing SEWA's membership and collectivizing women. As part of these efforts, community meetings are held in specific areas where women are made aware about issues important to them so that they can raise them with relevant authorities for action. Women are encouraged to voice their concerns to local authorities and government officials to address community issues such as improvements in local infrastructure such as road repair, repair of community toilet, laying of sewage drains, maintenance of water tower.

In fact, **aagewans with the support of other women are approaching panchayat heads and ward parshads to resolve issues** of electricity, drinking water, and sanitation. They are organizing signature campaigns with their demands, writing letters, and following-up with local authorities to ensure that the issues raised are solved. A domestic worker aagewan in Ranchi shared how they are collecting donations or *chanda* for building and maintaining community assets such drainage, water taps etc.

Most often, women directly contact aagewans for filling out applications for government documents and schemes. The need for assistance to avail of government benefits has become a strong motivator for women to join SEWA as members. A domestic worker aagewan in Ranchi, who is now a visible face in the community, mentioned that their membership strategy is to sign-up women who reach out to them for help as SEWA members so that they can support them.

Moreover, **at community meetings, aagewans also undertake health awareness sessions** imparting knowledge and information on water and sanitation, menstrual hygiene, anemia, and maternal and child health. Health aagewans, especially, are at the forefront of health service delivery working alongside frontline health and nutrition workers in promoting referral services for women and girls and supporting them with last-mile access to government health centers, schemes, and a range of local health services. Aagewans also organize cleanliness drives with community women and raise public awareness on the need for segregation of waste, designated spots for throwing garbage etc. A common tactic used by aagewans to spread key health messages was wall murals and paintings.

Plans are also underway for strengthening the Mahila Arogya Samitis, building links with the Village Health and Sanitation Committees, and engaging more closely with the self-help groups in local communities. Health aagewans are working on strengthening local health governance through the formation of local oversight committees and supporting women in demanding health action. In Hazaribagh, aagewans have been attending the gram sabha meetings where they have raised the need for establishing more aaganwadi centers that are accessible and the recruitment of helpers or sahayikas.

Covid-19

COVID-19 was a turning point in the development of leadership skills of aagewans. When the national lockdown in March 2020 was announced as an emergency response to the COVID-19 situation, **it was the aagewans who were the crucial link between SEWA Jharkhand and its members.** They disseminated information relating to the lockdown to women in the villages including on preventive measures. They also identified vulnerable families and helped them access ration support available.

In addition, aagewans facilitated and encouraged women in the communities to help each other during this period of crisis, by collectively purchasing dry rations for needy households, sewing masks for members and their families, supporting local groups to cook and serve food to workers. **Aagewans also tracked migrant workers to help them as they returned home, conducted door-to-door health checks for COVID-19 symptoms, and made hospital referrals.** They also worked closely with the state leadership and the community to discuss how migrants could return to work safely. In sum, as one aagewan put it, "*Covid mein leadership skill nikla*" (In Covid, our leadership skills emerged).

In fact, aagewans also picked up key mobile and digital skills (e.g. WhatsApp voice notes, online meeting, video call) during COVID-19, which enabled them to update SEWA staff about ground-level developments and to facilitate community relief and aid for members and their families.

Trade work:

Aagewans in Jharkhand have been working on issuing worker identity cards to members which is the first step to being recognized as workers by the government. These cards enable members to access key government documents such as a voter's card and Aadhar card and social security schemes such as Ayushman Bharat, and banking facilities. Access to social protection benefits is facilitated through the SEWA Shakti Kendras (SSK) or one-stop information desks located in SEWA field offices of Ranchi and Hazaribagh. Aagewans have been providing last-mile support in linking SEWA members to social security schemes and in getting the necessary documentation.

It was learnt that a few trade committees for women employed in domestic work and construction work have been formed in Ranchi and farmer's clubs in Hazaribagh. These are communal spaces for aagewans to discuss trade-specific issues and concerns of women. Through these platforms, **aagewans share information with members on workers' entitlements under different government schemes and programs and on referral services available for skills trainings and workshops.**

A key component of their leadership training under the program was planning local-level campaigns. In Ranchi, aagewans have been actively organizing domestic workers under the My Fair Home Campaign to raise awareness among employers, government officials, and workers about their rights to decent work under ILO Convention No. 189. The campaign also built worker solidarity with women from other trades also participating in outreach and sensitization activities.

As a part of the campaign, aagewans mobilized domestic workers to use their collective bargaining power with employers to request for decent working conditions and fair terms of employment such as minimum wage and one day's leave in a week. In fact, **SEWA Jharkhand is collaborating with Gharelu Kaamgaar Sangathan to advocate for the rights of domestic workers with elected representatives and have submitted their memorandum of demands to local MLAs for legislative action.**

Moreover, in their trade meetings with domestic workers, aagewans motivate other domestic workers to also demand their entitlements. Together, they have agreed that if any of their employers refuse their requests, none of the other women would take up employment at that house or that they will discuss the matter with the employer as a group. Thus, by banding together, aagewans are building the collective strength and resilience of domestic workers. In addition, aagewans are working on developing a rate chart for domestic workers in Ranchi, which would enable them to bargain for basic wage protections with employers.

Further, aagewans are working on registering women construction workers under the Building and Other Construction Workers Board (BoCW) and the Unorganised Workers Board so that they can avail social security benefits. **They are also helping identify women construction workers who can be upskilled under the Karmika project of Mahila Housing Trust of SEWA.** In fact, women are being trained to learn how to do bricklaying, plastering, toilet unit construction and hand-pump repair and to get certification from the National Skill Development Council. This would allow them to become readily employable by established builders and construction companies and help them find better work opportunities and enjoy higher wages.

Most recently in Hazaribagh, one of the more experienced aagewans successfully built a four-week local campaign on *Jungle Bacchao* (Save Forests) to raise awareness on the need to protect forest commons and conserve natural resources. Working closely with the local Sarpanch, panchayat, and forest department officials, different strategies such as public announcements, songs, rallies, wall mural paintings, tree planting drives were used to spread the message among villagers on adopting sustainable forest practices and climate-mitigation strategies (afforestation, reforestation).

Further, in Hazaribagh, aagewans are supporting the **formation of farmer's clubs, whereby members can gain access on sustainable farming techniques through government training centers.** In fact, efforts are underway for the revival of millet production, which despite its high nutrient value and low input costs has been replaced with water-intensive, market-driven cereals like rice. It is hoped that

reintroducing grains like millet into the farming system in tribal areas of Jharkhand will create a sustainable way to achieve food and nutritional security for local people.

Along with supporting members on sustainable farming techniques and practices, aagewans in their role *Pashu Sakhis* or community animal health workers are also advising women on taking care of their livestock, namely, mostly goats and poultry and on the economic benefits of rearing livestock for sale. They provide sessions on livestock hygiene, breeding and feeding, how to keep their farm clean, and how to manage animal waste appropriately. The plan is to thereafter connect women to producer groups and traders, helping them getting better access to markets to sell their produce.

Challenges of an aagewan:

There is a **monetary expectation among some aagewans to be compensated for their time** as community leaders. This view was more pronounced among newer aagewans with fewer years of association with SEWA than among older aagewans, who are more attuned to the program's ethos.

Another challenge faced by aagewans is **people-management and how to effectively manage people's expectations of them**. In some areas, community members are mistrustful and suspicious of collectivization efforts, making it hard for them to form local community and trade groups.

Aagewans also face resistance from their family members such as their husbands and mothers-in-law who are opposed to their stepping outside of their homes as well as from neighbours who sometimes spread rumors about their moral character. Since some aagewans are paid, they also face the envy of community women.

Aagewans also shared that they are time-poor, juggling between household chores, childcare responsibilities, and their own trade. This makes it challenging for them to dedicate time towards their duties as an aagewan. In fact, **those engaged as agricultural labourers and construction workers do not have the time for such leadership roles, since they spend the whole day toiling in the fields or at work sites**. However, those working as domestic workers are slightly better placed, since they mostly work in the morning and have time to attend to aagewan activities in the afternoon.

Often, taking up leadership activities entails loss of a day's wage, which women working as agricultural labourers and/or in livestock farming can ill-afford. In fact, it is quite common for women to be engaged in more than one trade to make ends meet or to switch trades over time (for example, women construction workers in Ranchi as they grow older become domestic workers). It was also shared due to high rates of out-migration among men, **it is women who are the *de facto* head of the household, running the family's day-to-day affairs. This puts pressure on women to both care for and monetarily support their families, leaving them with very little spare time for themselves, let alone for community action**.

Moreover, in Hazaribagh, **availability of public transportation was a huge challenge for aagewans, which in turn adversely affects their collectivization efforts**. Neither are members able to make it for meetings that are not in their *tolas* or areas, nor are aagewans able to visit remote *tolas* to organize women. In fact, the lack of transportation also affects women's livelihood opportunities, since women are unable to travel to towns to sell their produce and to find local work or employment.

It was also learnt from aagewans in Hazaribagh that women in the district are engaged in a multitude of productive (livestock rearing, farming) and reproductive activities, which leaves them with very little time to attend to community and trade affairs. Further, due to the acute water crisis in the district, women must travel 2-3 kms each day to fetch water. In such a situation, **aagewans' and women's triple roles means that in the absence of childcare support facilities or alternative arrangements, they are unable to commit to an even a half-day's meeting**. In fact, there is only one anganwadi center in Churchu block, which is accessible to women of only near-by *tolas*.

Transformation in becoming an aagewan:

Aagewans felt that the program shaped their identities and gave them a social standing. In fact, prior to the program, they were active members in the community, but people did not know them well enough to proactively reach out to them for support. They also lacked confidence to speak in front others. However, because of their community mobilization and trade-specific support, women and their families now recognize them as leaders who can advocate and voice their demands, provide access to government schemes, support linkages with services, and give them exposure to new skills and knowledge through trainings.

A majority of aagewans said they believe that their role as an aagewan has changed the community's outlook about them in a positive way. In fact, aagewans shared that in the initial period of work, when they would visit rural communities and speak to local people, they were sometimes ridiculed as “netas doing netagiri”. But with time and over repeated visits, they have been able to establish a relationship of trust with community members, who directly approach them to register for schemes or benefits, to participate in livelihoods skills trainings, to negotiate wages and other concerns with employers or for any other matter. In fact, they have emerged as focal persons for the community and government officials.

A big part of their transformation as aagewans has been their identity formation as informal workers, who lack job security, appropriate or adequate safety nets, and receive wages that are barely enough to cover their basic needs. In the past, as one domestic worker aagewan in Ranchi shared, they would casually and sometimes derogatorily refer to their work as ‘*yeh jo kaam karti hai*’ (she who works). But now, their own self-perception has changed, and they regard themselves as workers with socio-economic rights. By establishing their common identify as women informal workers, aagewans spoke of the strength of solidarity gained. This has helped them identify their needs, seek solutions to their problems, and explore different forms of collective organizing to overcome the structural disadvantages they face.

One of the aagewans engaged as a street vendor in Ranchi reflected on their own journey under the program in terms of their own personality development, improvements in communication skills, and their forming of a public stance as a community leader. They spoke of how they now intervene when police evict women and other workers from the labour chowks, “*I don't know how I am able to fight off people even when they gherao us. It is all because of SEWA. It has given me the strength to handle all these kinds of situation.*”

According to aagewans, a common challenge while mobilizing women to join SEWA is resistance from family members, which was also a predicament that they themselves faced initially. However, with the support and encouragement of SEWA staff, they were able to attend a few meetings and training where they learnt vocational skills and gained knowledge and an understanding of key issues. **Exposure to the gamut of SEWA interventions for women gave them a perspective on the need to come together and be a part of a union that can represent their interests and fight for their rights.** By drawing their strength from the *sanghathan* or collective, aagewans gradually become involved in community affairs and were noticed by SEWA staff for their leadership potential.

In Hazaribagh, one of the oldest aagewans in the state shared how they overcame personal hurdles to become a member, and thereafter an aagewan. **The program played a pivotal role in fulfilling their life-long aspirations and gave them a second chance in life.** They spoke of their difficult personal circumstances prior to joining SEWA—of being married off at a very young age, dropping out of school, and seeking the permission of their husband for every small decision in their life.

When SEWA began its work in the district, they were initially drawn to the trainings on organic farming practices and innovations, which gave them knowledge on improving agricultural yields and selling their produce in the local market. While their family was unsupportive, they nonetheless persisted, convincing them that these trainings were beneficial for their livelihood.

Gradually, as their interest grew, they became more involved in these agricultural trainings and exposure visits and began mobilizing women farmers for organizing demonstration plots and kitchen gardens for

food and nutritional security. They also began to spread awareness among villagers about the need to tether farm animals to prevent them from damaging crops. Further, they learnt about different government schemes for farmers and indigenous crop and seed varieties that are ecologically sustainable.

In fact, through their engagement with SEWA, they realized that as farmers their trade and community way of life is intertwined, and that both can be addressed in their role as aagewans. As a community leader, they are now participating in local Gram Sabha or village council meeting, raising the issues of women farmers, and demanding for MNREGA as a last resort work option for women during the lean agricultural season.

However, **the flipside to their leadership development was also observed, wherein they used their community influence and standing to reinforce socio-cultural norms on marriage.** They justified expelling a young couple from the same village as a violation of their “sarna” dharma—one that would set a bad precedent among the village youth. The assertion of their tribal identity and local codes of honour in such cases calls into question aagewans’ capacity to rise above their primordial identities and serve the common good and reiterates the need for further trainings on gender and power for all aagewans.

Impact of the Aagewan Vikas trainings:

At the time of becoming aagewans, they were familiar with SEWA’s work but not so much its values, ethos, ideology, and its 11 points of action. They also did not possess any prior exposure to ideas of union-building, trade action, unorganized or organized sector, or the need for organizing. In fact, the Aagewan Vikas training was their **first structured orientation on SEWA, union activities, and their role as community leaders.** As a result, **while their understanding of SEWA’s work is still evolving, the leadership trainings have helped in bringing a formal structure and uniformity to the work of aagewans.**

It was also found that **aagewans were able to understand Modules 3 and 4 better than Modules 1 and 2. This was because the latter two modules were more practical and action-oriented, while the first two modules were more information-heavy and covered technical aspects** like union structure, trade committees etc.

State leadership noted differences in understanding and level of involvement between rural and urban aagewans, *“women in urban areas are more mobile and they are now used to NGOs coming to them for work etc. Life in rural areas is still slow and difficult, and women live a more sheltered life and hence it takes more time to work with them, make them understand, and get them to work...distances in the rural areas are far and scattered with infrequent public transport and this also impacts their ability to come to training and meetings.”*

Further, there were challenges in the conduct of the online training of aagewans in Phase II, which lacked coherence and rigor, and, therefore, did not fulfil the learning objectives. Moreover, some of the aagewans from Phase II were trained by aagewans from the first batch in groups of 2-3 resulting in gaps in their knowledge and understanding. In the words of an organizer, *“samjh bithane mein dikkat hui.”*

One of the big outcomes of aagewan’s leadership journey under the program has been the recognition of their identity as workers alongside their tribal identity. It was observed that while aagewans may be able to clearly define women informal workers, they are able to at least identify them by their trade or economic activities. The hope is that with further trainings and hand-holding support provided by SEWA, their understanding of women workers’ rights deepens.

In addition to the mentoring and training under the program, aagewans have also availed a host of training modules from SEWA on critical areas linked to the trade or work that women are engaged in. These include financial inclusion and literacy; health, nutrition, and hygiene; understanding of workers’ rights and entitlements; how to avail of government schemes; and specific issues like domestic violence.

In addition, aagewans in Hazaribagh have undergone basic and advanced module trainings for farmers in May 2022 and January 2023 respectively focused on Forests Right Act and role of the Van Samitis;

National Rural Livelihoods Mission; Panchayati Raj System and the reservation of women in local elected bodies; Central government schemes for farmers etc.

SEWA Jharkhand Organizers:

In Jharkhand, some organizers also double as trainers under the program. They mentioned that conducting the local-level trainings of aagewans was a daunting task, with the first three modules facilitated with the help of SEWA's program staff. However, after the ToT, their confidence in facilitating sessions grew and they were able to lead the final module training on their own.

Some parts of the ToT were found to be conceptually heavy requiring the support of SEWA program staff in assimilating and processing the information. But overall, they found the ToT to be helpful in them providing practical tips in conducting trainings, which they later incorporated in their own local-level trainings of aagewans.

Organizers noted that aagewans are currently handling community meetings and trade group meetings to a limited extent on their own, although mobilizing local women for these meetings continues to remain a challenge. Aagewans mostly approach organizers for assistance when visiting government offices to follow-up on issues raised by members, or when they need information on a particular government scheme or benefit, or when they talk with employers, contractors or middlemen regarding wages, work hours, and working conditions of members engaged in domestic or construction work. In cases of domestic violence reported by aagewans, it is organizers, who either speak with the family members or file a police complaint. Many a time, organizers placate and cajole the family members of aagewans, who are unsupportive and raise objections to their work.

Tracking the progress made by aagewans at the unit meetings on various issues raised by SEWA members was a key challenge for organizers. Due to their limited proficiency in report writing, aagewans mostly share updates through voice notes and photos, which is then collated and compiled each month by organizers. Documentation of the different activities of aagewans was found to be both cumbersome and time-consuming, since aagewans often miss out on sharing key details, resulting in considerable back and forth coordination and communication between organizers and them. Moreover, several aagewans in certain blocks, like Daru do not have phones, and it is a challenge to coordinate with them on how they are mobilizing women.

Organizers also noted that regular capacity development and hand-holding support is needed to ensure that aagewans understand SEWA's ideology, the importance of collectivization, and concepts around forming unions and trade groups so that they can articulate it to other women. Currently, the four organizers in the state are engaged in a wide gamut of state activities and operations, which make it difficult for them to take time out to mentor, handhold, and follow-up with aagewans on implementing their learnings from the training modules or in deepening their understanding of key issues.

Human resource constraints was cited as a challenge by state leadership and having a dedicated field team might be necessary for sustained efforts under the program such as building relationships with local stakeholders and government, improving aagewans' capacity to engage with parshad and panchayat to resolve issues, and improving their knowledge of various government schemes and benefits.

Recommendations:

Evidence from all the four states points to the unleashing of individual and collective *power* to secure the rights and well-being of members and their families by aagewans as exemplified during COVID-19. The *power with* which aagewans have embodied the collective strength of the union is demonstratable through their organizing and servicing members, by their ability to find common ground among different trade groups, by their speaking and acting as one, and by their promoting social dialogue on issues that affect women workers. This in turn has been driven by aagewans' own leadership transformation or the *power within*, experienced through their sense of self-worth, self-knowledge, self-confidence, and conviction.

However, to sustain this path for inclusive and effective grassroots women's leadership will require further investments in the capabilities of aagewans, trainers, organizers, and most of all members to enable transformative action. Given below are **key recommendations** for strengthening and sustaining the development of the Aagewan Vikas program based on the key stakeholders involved and its key strategic pillars.

Module Development:

- Create **standardized versions of the locally contextualized Aagewan Vikas modules** that can be tweaked and modified as per the needs of the aagewans and the training schedule in each state. For example, create two versions of Module I (SEWA Values and Ideology)—one for a day-long training and the other for a half-day session, keeping in mind both old and new aagewans.
- **Embed more experiential, guided, peer learning techniques and local-level examples within the basic Aagewan Vikas modules** to support aagewans in their learning-by-doing. SEWA Punjab serves a good example of how modules can be redesigned to promote applied learning and leadership in practice among aagewans.
- Create an **online knowledge repository** where both basic and locally contextualized Aagewan Vikas modules, ToT modules, training modules developed by trainers (e.g., POSH Act, GBV among home-based workers etc.), training materials from other SEWA projects (e.g., UN Women trainings on gender, domestic violence, and entrepreneurship), and training reports, manuals, and tools can be archived, meta-tagged, and accessible to all state teams. This would provide state teams with an insight into the wide gamut of SEWA's training work and help interlink Aagewan Vikas modules and topics with other ongoing program-linked trainings.
- **Adult literacy training modules to support the learning needs of aagewans** should be built into the program's objectives. This would improve documentation and reporting of field activities for both aagewans and organizers and their advocacy skills with local authorities and government officials.

Trainers:

- Organize refresher and follow-up training with state-level trainers to further strengthen their facilitation skills.
- Establish a **systematic process for trainers to have regular check-ins with senior trainers and leaders from SEWA** to share progress and gain feedback on their training sessions and plans.
- **Institutionalize pre-or-post training assessments as a standard practice** across all SEWA's training activities to address any gaps in knowledge uptake or field practice by participants. Linked to this is the need for closer coordination and communication among trainers and organizers to ensure that training needs of aagewans and follow-up field activities involving them are carried out, documented, and reported in a systematic fashion.
- **Create a cadre of master trainers among aagewans** like in Delhi, who can lead field-level trainings of aagewans including those who are newly inducted and those who have not completed all four module trainings.

- **Organize trade-specific training sessions** (like the basic and advanced trainings on farm and home-based work) to deepen trainers' knowledge of specific labour laws, conventions, regulations, codes.
- **Ensure compensation for wage loss and provision of creche facilities for sustained participation of aagewans in trainings in general.**
- Form a **dedicated community of practice of trainers** to promote inter-state peer learning and sharing.

Organizers:

- **Create a toolkit for organizers on workers' rights** that can serve as a ready reckoner for organizers on strategies to address the diverse needs of trade and sub-trade groups within their states. Given the uptick in the formation of trade groups and unionizing efforts under the program, it is critical for organizers to be knowledgeable and competent on (sub)trade matters and unionizing and campaigning tactics so that they can guide and handhold aagewans appropriately.
- **Form a dedicated community of practice among organizers** to enable group-study of specific labour laws, conventions, regulations, codes, and to promote inter-state peer learning and sharing.
- Organize a **specialized training session for organizers to deep dive on best practices in documentation, time management, people management skills, and governance practices and management tools within a union setting** to strengthen their engagement with aagewans on vitalizing local unionization efforts.
- Continue with refresher and follow-up trainings of all state-level organizers on the four modules with pre-and-post assessments built in to sustain their handholding and mentoring support to aagewans.

Aagewans:

- The growth in new members across states, the formation of local trade groups, and **the fluid process of selection and election of aagewans under the program necessitates adherence to sound internal governance mechanisms to manage the elections and activities of aagewans.** While a transparent set of rules governing the mandate and management of unions exists in states like Delhi, Nagaland, these need to be operationalized and followed in toto across the union's membership.
- **All aagewans should undergo a gender-sensitization training as a part of their leadership development process.** This would enable them to handle sensitive community issues like domestic violence, marriages more effectively.
- **A strategic decision needs to be taken by SEWA leadership on whether aagewans should be paid,** since it has created confusion in the minds of aagewans about the voluntary nature of their role and raised questions about sisterhood and unity among aagewans. While the request for financial aid came up in the time of COVID-19 when aagewans' livelihoods were imperiled, it has now taken the form of a project-linked stipend for certain tasks carried out by aagewans. While only a small proportion of aagewans receive this stipend or "aid", it has created a ripple effect of monetary expectations among aagewans, i.e., being compensated for their time and effort.
 - **It is critical that the SEWA leadership unequivocally lays down and clarify its strategic position, i.e., for aagewans to continue their trade alongside their duties as grassroots community leaders as a non-negotiable, irrespective of whether they are paid a stipend or not.**
 - In addition, SEWA leadership also needs to account for contextual factors when deliberating this matter, since in Nagaland and Jharkhand the prohibitory costs of transportation pose a huge impediment to aagewans and organizers, who are unable to meet with members of their local units since they are geographically spread out and hard to reach without transportation support.
- **Special effort must be taken by state teams to train all aagewans from trade groups outside of home-based work on all the four foundational modules** so that their learning and follow-up isn't disjointed. In fact, aagewans' engagement with the program trainings has been

largely trade-dependent, with home-based workers being able to dedicate time towards program activities unlike domestic workers, street vendors, and farmers (as seen in Delhi, Punjab, Nagaland).

- **It is critical that aagewans from all trades complete their leadership training** and have a common and uniform understanding of SEWA, union-building and leadership, roles and responsibilities of aagewans, and campaign planning. This is especially critical with the formation of local (sub)trade groups and the launch of workers' campaigns in states. In fact, **the right to organize and to bargain collectively as a union of women informal workers is hinged on all aagewans representing different trades having equal knowledge, capacity, and skills.**
- There has been an ebb and flow of active and inactive aagewans under the program with aagewans stepping away from their roles due to family and work commitments. Given that this is a part and parcel of union-building, **SEWA leadership needs to think about rotating leadership of aagewans.** For this, **it is imperative that every aagewan across different trades participate fully in the leadership trainings under the program and are provided handholding support, so that there is a wide pool of potential leaders, with basic knowledge and skills, at the local level.** This would ensure a continuity in leadership, promote a healthy work-life balance, and prevent only few aagewans from specific trades monopolizing leadership development opportunities.
- Conduct more **specialized training of aagewans on organizing and servicing workers in specific trades** like domestic work along the lines basic and advanced trainings of home-based workers and farmers. Specifically, aagewans need knowledge and skills of both traditional and innovative tactics to ensure that they can meet the variegated needs of women workers and to defend their position and demands with both members and non-members.

Conclusion

Relevance:

At a time when trade union membership has been going down over time, both in India and globally, due to unprecedented changes in the labour markets and the informalization of the economy⁸, the Aagewan Vikas program represents a novel and systematic attempt at strengthening the ability of an all-women's trade union to lead, organize, and service workers in a changing environment. This is especially pertinent since women informal workers in India are triply disadvantaged---as women who face unequal gender norms and relationships, as workers who lack job and income security and access to social protection, and as members of vulnerable communities living in informal and unserved settlements⁹.

The SEWA Aagewan Vikas program by aiming to build the leadership capacity of aagewans has laid the groundwork for a revitalized union that is able to organize, represent, and collectively act on the issues confronting women informal workers.

Effectiveness:

Overall, the evaluation found that the creation of unified, basic modules was crucial to building a foundational understanding of SEWA, its values and ideology; union building and leadership; role and responsibilities of aagewans; and planning campaigns and public actions across all states. What worked was modifications and customization of the modules as per the local context and needs of aagewans.

In fact, the localization of the Aagewan Vikas modules resulted in a process of applied learning among aagewans through the inclusion of state-specific examples and practice exercises. The freedom and flexibility to adapt and break down the core modules into smaller, capsule-sized parts was especially useful and relevant during COVID-19, when online trainings of aagewans was underway.

The evaluation also found that the training of trainers led to their own self-development as skilled facilitators who have designed modules that can be used by other state teams, thereby, facilitating both intra-and-cross-learning. As a result of the ToT process, trainers gained the confidence and skills to develop their own modules, thereby, becoming internal resource persons on specific subjects and were able to interlink Aagewan Vikas modules and topics with other ongoing program-linked trainings within SEWA. The evaluation noted an improvement in the ability of trainers to conduct trainings in a structured and time-bound manner, using a variety of interactive training methods and tools to engage aagewans, and in adapting their session plans based on aagewans' level of understanding.

Organizers were also effective in supporting aagewans build their leadership capacity on community and trade issues. Examples of hands-on, field support provided by them to address mohalla issues include government engagement, organizing *Jan Sunvais* with local officials, running 'Signature Abhiyaans' to register citizens demands. This back-up support has helped establish the credibility of aagewans as community leaders, who can service members' needs. But it is organizers' strategic support to aagewans in organizing trade groups and mobilizing members via state-wide campaigns such as My Fair Home Campaign that has helped strengthen their ability to represent and articulate workers' interests and to bargain collectively for their rights. Moreover, the evaluation found examples of aagewans who have become organizers, thereby, serving as a role-model and coach to aagewans.

Impact:

The evaluation noted that aagewans, as community leaders, are engaged local membership drives, last-mile scheme linkage support, conducting community surveys and signature campaigns, drafting letters of appeal, organizing camps etc. In fact, aagewans enjoy a direct, personal connect with members, which enables them to serve as bridge between SEWA and the community---informing them about their rights and entitlements and knowledge about different government schemes.

⁸ <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Labour-Relations/trade-unions#path>

⁹ <https://www.wiego.org/our-work-impact/themes/womens-economic-empowerment>

Moreover, the evaluation found COVID-19 to be a key turning point in the development of aagewans' leadership skills, wherein they played a leading role in community relief efforts such as distribution of food rations and medical kits and coordinating with local authorities on field operations.

The evaluation takes special note of the strong sense of self-identity cultivated among aagewans, manifesting in their increased independence, mobility, self-confidence, communication, and negotiation abilities. Linked to this is the strong sense of worker identity built among aagewans including a recognition of their common predicaments and struggles as women informal workers, a deeper understanding of their own specific trades, and clarity about their role in furthering the collective interests of women workers and promoting social dialogue.

In fact, evidence from the evaluation points to an increased ability of aagewans in organizing women workers into local (sub)trade groups, in planning state-wide campaigns like the My Fair Home Campaign, in registering workers for different schemes and skilling programs (e.g., PM SwaNidhi Scheme), in successfully negotiating with contractors for an increase in home-based work piece-rates, in sensitizing employers and women on rate charts for domestic work etc.

Sustainability:

Overall, the evaluation found that the program to be growing in strength. The key strategic pillars of the program were well-constructed and contributed to the effectiveness of the program. The strategic choice of contextualizing and redesigning the core Aagewan Vikas modules facilitated greater learning and knowledge uptake among aagewans, while the other strategic choice of developing a cadre of local trainers was a key enabler for deepening the conscientization process among members in each state.

Further, the decision to involve organizers in the leadership capacity strengthening of aagewans was very important, since their hand-holding and mentoring support gave aagewans the confidence to put their skills into practice by organizing field activities and taking the lead on community and trade issues. It is therefore expected that the program will continue to contribute to the growth, vitality, and sustainability of SEWA as an all-women's trade union of informal sector workers.

Annexure I: SEWA Aagewan Vikas Program Theory of Change

Impact	Trained cadre of community women leaders, aagewans, who further the union's goals of self-reliance and full employment among members.		
Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop key foundational modules to build a common understanding among grassroots women leaders or aagewans: a) SEWA and its ethos, b) union-building and leadership, c) roles and responsibilities of aagewans, d) planning campaigns and public actions Identification of aagewans to be trained Conduct trainings of aagewans at the state level Conduct advanced training of aagewans on their specific trades 	<p>Contextualized state modules developed and capsule trainings of aagewans conducted at the state level</p> <p>Increased awareness, knowledge, and understanding of aagewans on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEWA's history, values, ideology, and union structure Key features and characteristics of the unorganized sector, why unionizing is important for women workers in the unorganized sector, trade groups Relevant trade laws and policies related to the unorganized sector Role of an aagewan, their leadership qualities, and why an aagewan is needed <p>Aagewans lead and engage members in public mobilization activities (protests, events, campaigns)</p> <p>Aagewans conduct local membership drives</p> <p>Aagewans volunteer and dedicate time towards union-building activities</p> <p>Aagewans can independently organize mohalla and trade group meetings every month, record the minutes of the meeting, and prepare a plan of action</p>	<p>Aagewan Vikas modules and trainings are holistically integrated and adopted within state programs of SEWA</p> <p>Aagewans collectivize women workers by their trades and instill in them knowledge about SEWA as a union (not NGO)</p> <p>Aagewans are skilled and capable of identifying key community-level issues and mobilize members to resolve them</p> <p>Aagewans are skilled and capable of identifying key trade-specific issues and mobilize members to take collective action on their trade and employment-related matters</p> <p>Aagewans are elected among the membership base (1 aagewan for 50-100 members)</p>	<p>Strong sense of interconnectedness and interdependence among aagewans as members of a trade union</p> <p>Aagewans have a strong sense of worker identity and self-identify as change-agents who drive the union's work forward.</p> <p>Aagewans strategize and plan trade-specific actions that result in an improvement in the terms and conditions of their work (e.g., legislations passed, rules made)</p> <p>Aagewans engage in community action that results in an improvement in the living conditions of members (e.g., community assets built)</p> <p>Growth in union membership, new aagewans, and deepening of SEWA's presence in states and within local communities</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify program trainers at the state level and train them through a ToT model 	<p>Cadre of master trainers created who can facilitate Aagewan Vikas trainings and other relevant trainings among aagewans and organizers at the state level</p>	<p>Aagewans and organizers have the skills, knowledge and capabilities to further trade and community action</p>	<p>Strengthened union leadership and membership that can advocate and champion for the socio-economic rights of women workers</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train organizers at the state level on providing handholding and backup support to aagewans during and after the program 	<p>Increased awareness, knowledge, and understanding among organizers about their role in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proper selection/election of aagewans Sharing government schemes and SEWA programs that aagewans and community members can benefit from Monitoring of aagewans' progress on mohalla and trade issues 	<p>Provide strategic, needs-based support enabling aagewans to resolve community and trade issues</p> <p>Aagewans link members to relevant government schemes and SEWA programs</p>	<p>Aagewans engage relevant government stakeholders and use collective bargaining to secure workers' and citizens' rights.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Forming trade groups and committees• Mapping social infrastructure and institutions etc.		
--	---	--	--

Annexure II: Sampling Matrix of Aagewans

DELHI:

Delhi		Phase 1 (Nov. 2018 to Dec. 2021)	Phase 2 (Jan. 2022 to June 2023)
1.	How many aagewans have been trained on all 4 modules?	21	19
2.	Age Group:		
	18-24 years	0	0
	25-34 years	6	5
	35-44 years	8	8
	45+ years	7	6
3.	Marital Status:		
	Married	20	19
	Unmarried	1	0
	Widow	0	0
	Divorced/ Separated	0	0
4.	Membership Tenure:		
	Less than 1 year	0	0
	1-3 years	0	6
	4-5 years	3	6
	5+ years	18	7
5.	Trade Group		
	Home-based workers	12	17
	Domestic workers	4	2
	Construction workers	5	0
	Hawkers/ Street Vendors	0	0
	Farmers/Agricultural producers	0	0
6.	Districts from where aagewans have been trained		
	North East	7	8
	North West	3	2
	East Delhi	6	2
	Shahdara	2	4
	West Delhi	3	-
	South East	-	3
7.	Educational Qualification		
	Primary education	2	3
	Secondary education	6	12

	Tertiary education	3	1
	Uneducated	10	3

NAGALAND:

Nagaland		Phase 1 (Nov. 2018 to Dec. 2021)	Phase 2 (Jan. 2022 to June 2023)
1.	How many aagewans have been trained on all 4 modules?	23	18
2.	Age Group:		
	18-24 years	1	2
	25-34 years	5	7
	35-44 years	11	5
	45+ years	6	4
3.	Marital Status:		
	Married	14	11
	Unmarried	5	6
	Widow	0	1
	Divorced/ Separated/single parent	4	0
4.	Membership Tenure:		
	Less than 1 year	0	3
	1-3 years	9	10
	4-5 years	5	4
	5+ years	9	1
5.	Trade Group		
	Home-based workers	16	11
	Service providers	0	0
	Street Vendors/ Hawkers	4	4
	Farmers/Agricultural producers	3	3
6.	Districts from where aagewans have been trained		
	Kohima	7	2
	Dimapur	7	7
	Phek	4	2
	Shamator	2	6
	Tuensang	3	1
7.	Educational Qualification		
	Primary education	5	3
	Secondary education	16	13
	Tertiary education (graduate)	1	2
	Uneducated	1	0

PUNJAB:

Punjab		Phase 1 (Nov. 2018 to Dec. 2021)	Phase 2 (Jan. 2022 to June 2023)
1.	How many Aagewans have been trained on all 4 modules?	17	12
2.	Age Group:		
	18-24 years	0	0
	25-34 years	7	5
	35-44 years	6	3
	45+ years	4	4
3.	Marital Status:		
	Married	16	11
	Unmarried	1	0
	Widow	0	1
	Divorced/ Separated	0	
4.	Membership Tenure:		
	Less than 1 year		
	1-3 years	11	8
	4-5 years	6	4
	5+ years	0	0
5.	Trade Group		
	Home-based workers	5	12
	Street Vendors	1	0
	Service workers (domestic workers)	11	0
	Farmers/Agricultural producers	-	-
6.	Districts from where aagewans have been trained		
	Ferozpur	3	
	Gurdaspur	2	9
	Moga	2	
	Mohali	7	
	Nabha and Patiala	3	1
	Malerkotla	-	2

JHARKHAND:

Jharkhand		Phase 1 (Nov. 2018 to Dec. 2021)	Phase 2 (Jan. 2022 to June 2023)
1.	How many Aagewans have been trained on all 4 modules?	33	15
2.	Age Group:		
	18-24 years	1	0
	25-34 years	13	6
	35-44 years	9	9

	45+ years	10	0
3.	Marital Status:		
	Married	30	14
	Unmarried	2	1
	Widow	1	0
	Divorced/ Separated	0	0
4.	Membership Tenure:		
	Less than 1 year	0	0
	1-3 years	0	14
	3-5 years	12	1
	5+ years	21	0
5.	Trade Group		
	Home-based workers	2	3
	Service Providers (domestic workers, construction workers)	7	3
	Hawkers/ Street Vendors	3	2
	Producers (women farmers, livestock rearing, etc)	20	6
	Sahiyaa/sevika (Anganwadi worker)	1	1
6.	Districts from where aagewans have been trained		
	Ranchi	15	11
	Hazaribagh	18	4
7.	Educational Qualification		
	Primary education	4	0
	Secondary education	26	11
	Tertiary education	3	2
	Uneducated	0	2