

SEWA case study

Providing the tools for a brighter future



The HP Entrepreneurship Learning Program (HELP) helps Indian women generate new income sources and opportunities through access to technology.

As one of the fastest growing business segments around the world, HP has a firm commitment to working with the smallest of small businesses - micro enterprises – to help job creation and address the estimated 25-30 percent of the world's labour force that are unemployed or underemployed.

Generally started with nominal capital, micro-enterprises typically have limited access to business resources and expertise. The HP Entrepreneurship Learning Program aims to support these entrepreneurs by providing access to IT and other business tools, to help generate income, either through the creation of new businesses or the growth of existing ones.

As part of the program, since 2007 HP has partnered with the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), promoting micro-enterprise as an invaluable means of income generation for SEWA members. Registered in 1972, SEWA is a trade union that helps self employed, often poor women across India develop their own micro-enterprises through information and communications technologies (ICT) training. All are non-regular wage workers, both rural and urban, who work without minimum wages, assured work or benefits.

The key outcome of SEWA's relationship with HP has been its implementation of HP's Smart Technology for a Smarter Business (STSB) curriculum in the fourteen districts of Gujarat in Western India. The project has been funded by an HP grant worth US\$80,000.

As part of their training, SEWA members are taught basic ICT skills and receive continuous support. Most trainees are semi-literate and SEWA delivers the Program in both English and the local language, Gujarati. The STSB training is conducted twice



a month and so far 8,800 entrepreneurs have completed the program (May 2009).

The entire STSB program is implemented by SEWA in such a way that it is highly community based and driven. SEWA selects the trainees/potential trainees through its community based organisations. The ICT spearhead team comprising of rural grassroots leaders identify potential trainees/entrepreneurs who are then imparted the training and provided with financial as well as marketing linkages.

"SEWA always believes in deploying technology at the grassroots level for generating livelihood security. The microenterprise training in this context plays an important role in helping trainees set up their own businesses and enter the mainstream economy. HELP is now benefiting thousands of poor rural women," says SEWA's Reemaben Nanavaty.

With HP's support, SEWA has been able to have an extraordinary impact at a local village level, supplying previously inaccessible hardware and software. This has created a visual, tangible and operational base for ICT learning that has energised local communities and helped them to understand that ICT tools can have a real impact on their lives.

"The program has reduced the myth around technology and shown that rural poor and illiterate women can also use latest technology for ongoing development opportunities. It is with this objective that SEWA has brought ICT to the doorstep of the common villager," Reemaben says.

"Rural poor women, particularly the younger generation, have started to believe that their drudgery can be minimised by utilising these tools, which will in turn expose them to a new world where they can secure their advancement and livelihood through increased access to gainful employment."

Opening up new opportunities

The STSB curriculum has proven extremely successful, with thirty percent of SEWA's trainees going on to start their own businesses and increase their incomes.

Puspaben Martinbhai Parmar from Chikodra Village in the Anand District was one such trainee. She was previously trained in photography and video and had started her own small business in her home, however she never believed it would become her main source of income.

"After taking training as part of the HP curriculum, I started a micro-enterprise," she says.

"I now maintain my accounts and expense statements in my computer and I'm using my laptop to download photos and graphical software for video and photo editing. Before the curriculum training, I was hardly earning 1,000-1,200Rs a month - now I'm earning 2,500-3,000Rs a month."

Improvements in earning capacity are a key benefit of the program and are commonly mentioned as part of feedback from trainees. Urmilaben Pravinbhai, a member of the Savings SHG Spearhead Team in the Vadodara District used to work on a farm as an agriculture worker. Her earnings were 12,000Rs per year. After setting up her micro-enterprise with help from SEWA, she is now able to earn between 20,000 and 25,000Rs a year.



"I did not know how to use a telephone or fax machine," she says.

"But after learning, I found its application very useful. So I also taught my son how to use it. Today we run a small telephone kiosk, which sustains our livelihood. It has turned into an income and employment generation activity for my family."

This ability to pass knowledge onto future generations is another long-term positive impact of the program. Armed with these new skills, it's hoped that recipients and their families and especially those in remote areas, will be able to access previously inaccessible markets, products and services.

"Sitting in my remote village, ICT is my gateway to developing a better understanding of the economy which helps me to deliver good quality output for the market," says Gauriben, an artisan from the Bakutra Village in Patan District.

"ICT is not just a platform for growth but it is an expression of self-confidence and self-respect."

SEWA – creating new futures for Indian women

SEWA has around 1,100,000 poor, self-employed women members across the seven provinces of India. All are non-regular wage workers, both rural and urban, who work without minimum wages, assured work or benefits. Over the last few years, SEWA has trained 5,000 rural workers in core computer skills and provided non-technical training for 33,000 more.

The aim of SEWA is to assist female workers find full employment and self-reliance by overcoming traditional societal constraints and providing alternatives for forging a sustainable livelihood.

After completing training with SEWA, members become skilled workers and are able to identify and develop opportunities that convert non wage earning activities to newer enterprises. SEWA has also had great success in minimising seasonal migration caused by lack of employment by encouraging women to form self-employed producer groups and find new markets for their products.

“SEWA focuses on building the capacity of its members so that they may enter the mainstream economy and sustain their livelihoods,” says SEWA’s Nanavaty.

“By providing them with training in micro-enterprise development and helping them to set up their own businesses, SEWA is helping to ensure these women entrepreneurs are capable of being self-reliant. This has resulted in income security and better livelihoods for our members. It’s also brought self-respect and recognition for women in their villages and given them a greater role in the local decision making process.”

In this era of globalising economy this program is resulting in inclusive growth.

Investing in local communities: the HP Entrepreneurship Learning Program (HELP)

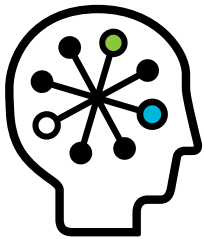
Of course SEWA is just one of many recipients of HELP, which in Asia-Pacific provides annual grants of technology, cash and training curriculum. Specifically, grants are provided to local non-profit Micro Enterprise Development Centres (MEDCs), which then provide access to IT for local entrepreneurs. While the MEDCs receive the actual grant, it is HP’s goal to use these organisations as a vehicle to reach out to the broader community.

In 2008, HP awarded 23 of these grants from countries as diverse as India, China, Thailand, Indonesia and Australia, to provide start-up assistance, business training and advice to entrepreneurs and very small businesses.

According to Peter Ekstedt, HP Global Citizenship Manager, HP Asia-Pacific & Japan, the program was borne out of a strong commitment to invest not only in burgeoning enterprises, but in the economic and social wellbeing of the communities they support.

“When you see the experiences of entrepreneurs involved in the SEWA program you understand the potential that corporate social investment has in helping communities, particularly those facing substantial economic challenges,” said Peter.

“We are extremely proud of the ongoing development of the SEWA program and in particular the tangible benefits it continues to provide to the participants, their families and communities,” he added.



Technology for better business outcomes

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4AA0-xxxxENW, June 2009

