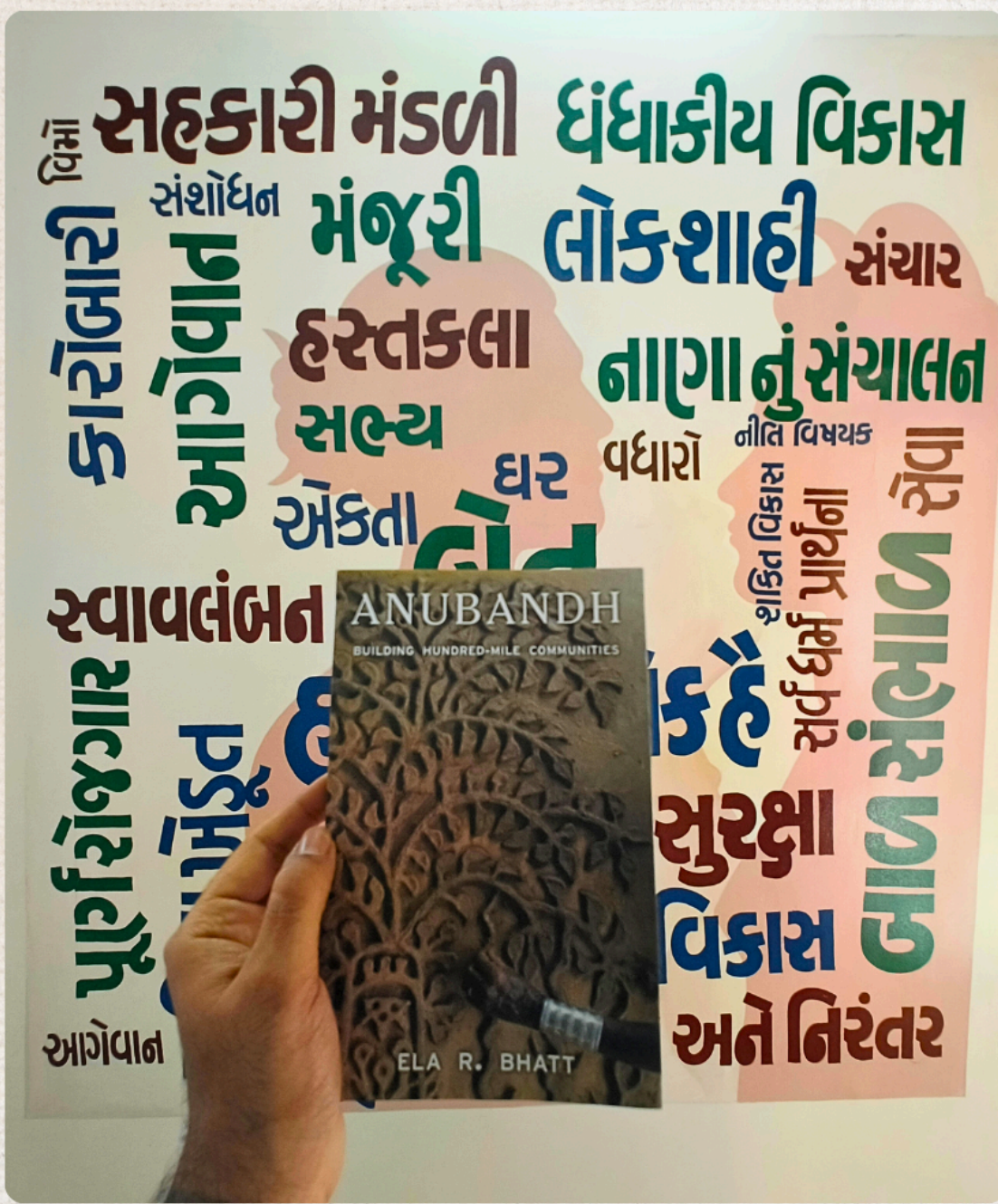


Strengthening Informal Women Workers' Agency Through Collective Enterprises



Dear friends,

At SEWA Cooperative Federation (SCF), our work has always been guided by the wisdom of Late Smt. Elaben Bhatt, who **reminded us through Anubandh** that our lives, livelihoods, and environment are deeply interconnected. Today, this interconnectedness goes beyond just philosophy - it is a framework for action.

For over three decades, our informal women workers cooperatives have built livelihoods across agriculture, dairy, handicrafts, and services. Each of these sectors now faces new challenges - from volatile markets to rising production costs and climate uncertainties. Yet, within these challenges lie opportunities: to deepen women's agency, strengthen their enterprises, and move towards economic self-reliance.

At SCF, we are advancing this through three pathways:

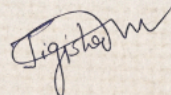
- Building women's leadership within cooperatives
- Enhancing enterprise capacity through knowledge and skills, and
- Creating stronger market linkages for fair value and visibility.

Through climate and enterprise trainings, leadership workshops, and national dialogues such as the Conference of Women Cooperators, women leaders from the informal economy are shaping new conversations on livelihoods and sustainability.

Our vision is clear; collective enterprises must become engines of resilience—economic, social and environmental. From Krishi Suvidha Kendras that reduce women's time poverty, to cooperatives exploring organic farming, value addition, and childcare support, each initiative strengthens women workers' ownership over work and decision-making.

This newsletter brings together stories, evidence, women workers voices, and reflections from that journey—of how cooperatives are transforming the way informal women workers work, earn, manage and lead. We are sure these stories will remind you, as they remind us, that resilience begins when women from the informal economy own their enterprises and shape their futures collectively.

In Solidarity,



Jigisha Maheta

Managing Director, SEWA Cooperative Federation





How We Prepared Ourselves to Strengthen Our Cooperatives



“ I need to keep this window open for light, but it increases the indoor heat considerably - Member, Abodana Handicrafts Cooperative

Across our informal worker cooperatives, women are already navigating the twin challenges of climate and market change - falling milk yields, irregular rainfall, unsafe work conditions, and volatile prices. To support them effectively, we first had to strengthen ourselves.

Over the past year, SCF teams across enterprise development, marketing, research, and capacity building have been learning how to identify and respond to these risks together. With support from partners, we created simple, bilingual modules that translate global science into local realities and connect climate awareness with enterprise strengthening.

This internal learning is now reaching cooperatives. At the Vatrak Fruits & Vegetables Cooperative, women farmers explored *anukulan* (adaptation), and *nivaran* (mitigation) through local examples and gamified tools.



VOLUME #13

In the handicrafts sector, our Workspace Mapping Report with Abodana Cooperative women artisans showed how extreme heat directly affects productivity and income, prompting us to reimagine safer, more resilient workspaces.

Study Parameters

- Availability of Space**
This parameter examines the spatial layout of the workspace, including the dimensions of the space, placement of furniture and the available space for movement, sitting and storage of items.
- Access to Amenities**
This parameter evaluates the availability and accessibility of essential amenities such as toilets, drinking water, and pantry facilities.
- Cooling & Ventilation**
This parameter examines the size and positioning of doors and windows and the placement of fans, coolers etc.
- Availability of Light**
This parameter evaluates the available natural light and its effectiveness for all workstations.

During the summer season, especially in the months of June and July, there is a high demand for orders, including bulk exhibition orders. However, our staff members also take more leaves to visit home or due to heat induced illnesses. This makes it challenging to manage the workload effectively.

By preparing ourselves, we are equipping informal women worker-led enterprises to thrive in the changing climate and markets.

Cooling and Ventilation

We got a new cooler this summer, but there's no place where it can be kept to cool both the rooms. Right now, it is kept here, making it hard for us to use the workstation.

I need to keep this window open for light, but it increases the indoor heat considerably. In the afternoon, I close half of the window to reduce the heat and manage in the limited light available.

We have to turn off the fan when cutting large fabrics because the airflow causes measurement inaccuracies and uneven cuts. During harsh summers, it is very difficult to manage without proper ventilation in the room.

21 Workspace Mapping | SEWA Cooperative Federation x UDS

An excerpt from the Workspace Mapping Report on the Cooling & Ventilation parameters.



In Their Own Words



During summer, my buffaloes give less milk. They also do not have enough green fodder. The rising temperatures have impacted milk production to a great extent.”

Shantaben, Founding Member, Shree Adalaj Mahila Milk Producers Cooperative.



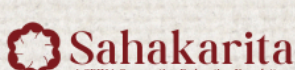
Flooding led to damage of paddy crop production across 30 bighas of my agricultural land. The water level was high and multiple houses were flooded.

Member, Megha Indigenous Women Farmers' Cooperative



This year was especially difficult as the temperatures have reached up to 47°C, when the usual is around 40°C. We constantly adjust fans, windows and coolers, to balance light and heat, but can't work for long hours.

Member, Abodana Handicrafts Cooperative





Collectives as Engines of Adaptation

When we began building a climate lens within SCF, the goal was simple: take knowledge from our offices to the workplaces of our women workers. At the **Vatrak Women Farmers Fruits & Vegetables Cooperative**, this took shape through our first climate and enterprise awareness session - where 50 **women farmers explored** anukulan (adaptation) and nivaran (mitigation) through a farmers' version of **snakes & ladders**.

Each "snake bite" revealed harmful practices like burning residues or overusing chemicals, while "ladders" rewarded collective actions like seed saving, crop rotation. Between laughter and debate, one truth stood out - resilience is not built alone, but together.

What happens when a game becomes a lesson in climate resilience?

[Read Full Story](#)



Shaping Policy Through Women's Voices and Evidence

Policies at the intersection of climate, agriculture and livelihoods rarely reflect the lived realities of informal women workers. Through our research and advocacy, we are ensuring that cooperatives - and the women workers who lead them - are seen as central to building resilient and sustainable economies.

Our research shows that women farmers continue to face barriers in accessing crop insurance, finance, and support for transitioning to organic or climate-sensitive farming.

At the National Conference of Women Cooperators (2025) with VAMNICOM, Pune, these realities moved from paper to podium. Cooperative leaders sat alongside policymakers and funders, speaking firsthand about how heat stress, erratic rainfall, and crop losses are affecting their lives and enterprises. Their presence shifted the dialogue from token inclusion to genuine power-sharing in policy spaces.

[Read Full Report](#)



Partnerships That Strengthen Women's Market Power

Where is the market?

This question, asked by Sangitaben from Megha Mandli at the Swaraj Samvad in January 2025, captured the challenge at the heart of women-led farming. Women are eager to adopt sustainable and climate-sensitive practices, but without fair and accessible markets, their efforts cannot thrive.

The three-day gathering, part of the **National Coalition for Natural Farming (NCNF)**, brought together tribal communities, civil society groups, and donors to exchange knowledge on seed sovereignty, soil health, and sustainable production. Members from Megha Mandli joined these discussions, sharing experiences from their cooperatives and learning from others building similar pathways to resilience.

The dialogue reinforced two truths:

1. indigenous knowledge must be valued as a climate solution, and
2. resilience is incomplete without viable markets.

Guided by this, we continue working with partners to strengthen farm-to-table models across our cooperatives - linking sustainable practices with consumer access and fair pricing.

[Let's take this question forward, together.](#)





The Road Ahead: Scaling Women-Led Agricultural Enterprises

Our next phase focuses on strengthening women-led agricultural enterprises - linking sustainable cropping with affordable finance, social protection, and direct market access.

In the coming year, we will -

- 1 Pilot new livelihoods** to diversify income with mushrooms, medicinal herbs, and other high-potential crops.
- 2 Expand market linkages** to strengthen our farm-to-table model by establishing direct connections between women farmers, customers and businesses.
- 3 Integrate social protection** to ensure access to insurance, childcare, and health services so women can participate fully.
- 4 Scale sustainable practices** to promote crop rotation, organic inputs, and water conservation for improved soil health and reduced emissions.

We invite collaborations with partners, markets, and institutions who share this common vision.

Reach out to us.



Returning to Anubandh



“The prospects for restoring balance in nature – between farmers and the soil, the soil and the saplings, and the worms and the people – look very good indeed.

At SEWA Cooperative Federation, we often return to Anubandh – the reminder from our founder, Late Smt. Elaben Bhatt, that our lives, livelihoods, and environment are deeply interconnected. This truth continues to guide our work, whether in building women’s enterprises, strengthening markets, or restoring balance with nature.

For informal women workers, resilience is not an abstract word. It is the daily act of saving seeds, caring for livestock through heat waves, stitching under unbearable conditions, and running cooperatives that pool risks and share resources. Each of these small acts, when woven together, created a fabric of collective strength.

As we look ahead, we know that no collective can grow in isolation. **Resilience and self-reliance must be shared - across communities, sectors, generations - if we are to build a future that is just, sustainable and truly interconnected.**

In solidarity, we move forward - building enterprises that nurture both women and the world around them.



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