

# Informal Women Workers lead COVID-19 Recovery in India



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# The Informal Economy in India

93% of total workforce and 94% of female workforce is informal

Contribution of the informal economy:

- 50% of India's GDP
- 55% of national savings
- 47% of exports



# Informal Economy: Nature & Characteristics

- No work and income security
- No social security, social protection – insurance, sick leave, maternity leave, child care
- Few laws, poor enforcement
- No fixed employer – employee relationship; no work security
- Large segment are self-employed
- No voice, visibility – uncounted, undercounted, undervalued
- Overlap between informality, poverty and gender



# The Self-Employed Women's Association

- National trade union of 2.1 million informal women workers, in 18 states
- Founded in 1972 by Ela Bhatt in Ahmedabad, India
- Inspired by the values of Mahatma Gandhi
- Organises women through joint strategy of union and cooperatives
- Formed 150 women's cooperatives and collectives
- Promoted more than 5000 membership-based organisations



# SEWA Cooperative Federation: an **enterprise support system**

**110**

Cooperatives promoted

**300,000**

Informal women workers impacted

**6**

Sectors of work

*Capacity building · Business development · Market linkages · Communications · Research & Policy Action · Digital inclusion: exploring platform cooperatives*



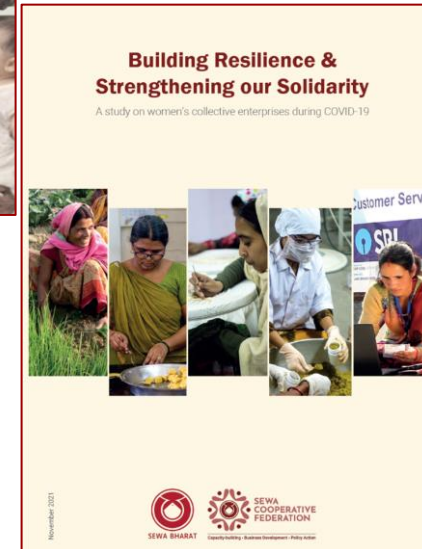
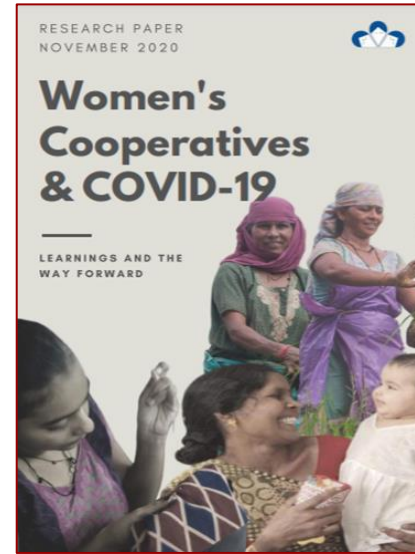
# Major Findings from the COVID Studies

## At member level

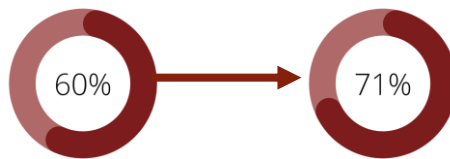
- 70% Lost livelihood and 65% reduction in income
- 82% Faced financial crisis and Food security
- Lack of access to health resources
- Loss of lives and livelihood, specially during 2nd wave of COVID
- Vaccine hesitancy among members

## At Cooperative Level

- **Agriculture Sector:** Crop sold out at very low rate, supply chain disruption, sold produces are very low rate
- **Service Sector:** Reduce demand for service cooperatives, workspace closed, lack of public transport,
- **Manufacturing and handicraft sector:** Difficulty in procuring any raw materials Raw material and transportation costs increased, Difficulties in delivering raw material to Home-based workers
- **Finance sector:** A strong risk of defaulting, non-payment of loans, affecting cash flow of enterprises, 12% increase in overdue loans, Volume of withdrawals from the bank increased



# Actions taken by the Cooperatives



Reached out for support

Received livelihood support



Livelihood support to over 50 informal workers through mask & sanitizer production



Negotiation with employers for salaries; One month salaries through Cooperative Reserve Fund



Distribution of nutritious food through childcare centers



COVID Insurance Policy developed by Insurance Cooperative



COVID-19 Awareness through Whatsapp groups, SMS, conference call

# Our Emergency Response

## Health

884

Community Health Kits

2.6 Lakhs

Masks Distributed



34,356

Health Kits distributed

5070

Sanitary Packs

674

Teleconsultation Calls  
with doctors facilitated

132,976

Informal workers and  
their household insured  
during COVID 19

587,714

Women informed about  
social protection schemes

## Social Protection



659

Women Community Leaders  
(Aagewans) trained to  
provide relief, health  
awareness and rapid referral

## Food

165,107

Ration Kits distributed



5.9 Lakh

Cooked meals distributed  
through childcare centers  
and SEWA centers

8

Business pivots enabled  
for revenue and  
outreach stabilisation

INR 10  
Mil.

Working Capital Support  
to Social Enterprises

3795

Seed Kits to  
farmers

## Enterprise Related

SEWA Cooperative Federation is one of the many social entrepreneurs/initiatives on the World Economic Forum's listing of Top 50 COVID-19 Last Mile Responders.



# Actions taken by SEWA Cooperative Federation

- **Digital training of trainers for COVID-19 awareness:** trained 50 master trainers for the digital training which includes WhatsApp and conference call, that made more than 36,000 villagers aware of COVID and its precautionary measures.
- **Provided seed capital** of Rs. 5 lakh to the Megha Cooperative of the agriculture sector, where members availed money to purchase seeds on small and flexible EMIs.
- **Financial support:** working capital provided (INR 10 lakhs) for mask and sanitizer production
  - With 45-50 women artisans, our handicraft cooperative produced more than 3 lakhs masks and distributed in the urban as well as rural areas whereas the healthcare cooperative manufactured 25,000 of good quality hand sanitizers.



# The Way Forward to Rebuilding and Recovery

- **Organising and building membership-based organisations (MBOs) like cooperatives is key; focus on women, youth**
- **Decentralized approach---bottom-up re-building; decision-making, control in local hands**
- **Innovating, pivoting, expanding to new sectors**
- **Investing in MBOs: working capital, flexible financing**
- **Market linkages** - online and offline
- **Capacity-building** - technical and skill trainings, management, exploring alternative livelihoods
- **Digital inclusion** – digital literacy, enabling use of tools and technologies, infrastructure
- **Ensuring universal access to social security: health care, child care, insurance**



**Women's ESS enables recovery, rebuilding and resilience of women's cooperatives/collectives, communities and our economy**