CHAPTER 5

WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION AND NEW SYSTEMS OF WATER MANAGEMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE INITIATIVES OF SEWA IN GUJARAT

In the previous chapters, we discussed the water policy environment internationally and in the national context of the institutional structure of water governance in India, specifically Gujarat. Community initiatives were also analysed and it emerged that gender has rarely been considered within the chosen analytical framework for the theme of water and its governance in the study of development politics. Also, the importance of gender has not been considered in the context of decentralisation and community action for changing the water management systems along with women’s empowerment in the Indian context of Panchayati Raj. This chapter documents the field study of SEWA and its contribution to rural water programmes in Gujarat, more specifically to the process of involving women and panchayats in these water management programmes.

The study was conducted in Gujarat and interviews of the government personnel in the Water Board in Gujarat and NGO heads (SEWA in this case) were undertaken in the years 1999 and 2000. The basic objective behind this was to understand the role of panchayats and community organisations in forming the linkages of grassroot organisations and women’s groups to the district and the state levels and also to look at the government’s responses to women’s needs and demands. At the State government level, the interviews of Mr. Tripathy, Director of GWSSB (Gujarat Water Supply and Sewerage Board), Mr. Barot, Director of GJTI (Gujarat Jalsewa Training Institute), and Mr. Thakkar another government official of GWSSB, were conducted to get the government’s perspective. State level interviews also included those of Indira Hirway, policy expert on water issues in Gujarat and head of the organization called “Development Alternatives” based in Ahmedabad.
A Case Study of SEWA’s Drinking Water Campaign

The study of SEWA was conducted based on the case study method with a view to understand the single case contributing to an understanding of wider situations. The aim is therefore understand the case selected for an in-depth study and to assess how typical the impact of the organization. Subsequently in the next chapter the detailed study of the district and village levels have been discussed.

Process documentation of SEWA’s Water campaign was carried out in the years 1998-2001. For this purpose I participated in SEWA’s water campaign meetings and also collected minutes of earlier meetings conducted in past years. I also attended the on-the-job technical water training programmes and women’s water committee meetings and “gram sabhas” i.e. village panchayat meetings etc. I also consulted the literature available in SEWA and the list of documents consulted has been provided in Annexures. Other documents looked at included the annual reports of SEWA of the past five years, review/evaluation reports and project proposals of the water projects submitted by SEWA for funding by the government and other international organisations. These included to organisation such as UNICEF, UNDP, European Commission, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller foundation, CIDA, etc. Water campaign plans and proposals submitted by SEWA to these funding bodies and the stated objectives, activities, methodology, policies and visions outlined in these were carefully noted and analysed. I also got access to the training reports to understand the types of training conducted and the annual calendars etc. that are in SEWA’s records, archives and the library. Newsletter of SEWA called ‘Ansuya’ and a record of research and monitoring schedules kept in SEWA Academy were also looked into for checking what gets reported about SEWA.

Interviews within SEWA included those on the founder, Ms Ela Bhatt, rural development director Reema Nanavaty, co-coordinator of water activities in the eleven districts Ms Bharti Bhavsar, the district co-ordinators in the three districts of the study and other associated SEWA functionaries at the block and village level. The main aim was to understand the dynamics of the relationship between the communities NGOs and the Government at district and state level and to understand the process of the campaign carried out by SEWA.
Thereafter, for the purpose of analysis, the emerging themes and issues were identified. They are being presented below as the findings of the case study on SEWA.

**Historical context of SEWA’s Water Campaign in Gujarat**

The Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) is a registered trade union of about 250,000 poor, self-employed women in the informal sector (Rose, 1992). These women belong to the poor classes and represent the SC/ST/OBCs and also poor women from among the general categories. They work as farmers, dairy farmers, minor forest produce collectors, salt workers, crafts workers and cottage industry workers. In India, about 30% of the poor women are economically active and are home-based workers (GOI, 1987) and use water for domestic and economic purposes. One of the reasons of SEWA for taking up the issue of rural drinking water on a sustained basis is that its members consider water an economic and an ecological input for various economic activities. (Nanavaty Reema, 1998). Two-thirds of SEWA’s members are rural-based and there was an overriding demand from these members to take up this issue as their work, and their work-time, depended on timely availability of safe water. Water scarcity, salinity, water-logging and other water-related problems severely affects women’s ability to access water for their employment activities as well as impinges on their productive time. Water is an important input for their small enterprises. Water is needed by women for irrigating vegetable plantations in home gardens and for nursery raising. Women also need water for dairy co-operatives where water is used to feed and clean the cattle and to keep the milk cool. Fruits and vegetables vendors need water to wash, clean or store their perishables. Savings and credit groups can generate more income by using time gains for productive work. Social security service providers like dais (midwives) doctors and those in-charge of balwadis (crèche) also need clean water. Several DWCRA groups have been formed for rural employment programme of the government by SEWA and these members need water as an input for handicrafts, gum collection, farming and food processing. Almost 47,000 of 2.11 lakh women workers, who are members of SEWA, are home-based workers.

1 Founded by Elaben Bhatt, SEWA was registered in 1972 as a union; SEWA has a holistic approach to the welfare of its members. It organises women as economic groups so that they can collectively demand better wages and improved conditions of working. SEWA also provides support services to its members as part of the endeavour to improve their overall working conditions. These services include child care, savings and credit, health care, insurance cover and housing and infrastructure development.
who roll *bidis* (hand-made cigarettes), make *papads* (spiced crackers) or process food. Water is used to soften the leaves in which *bidis* are rolled. Water is also used to knead the dough for *papads*, make spiced drinks or cook food sold in roadside kiosks. (SEWA Annual Report, 1998). SEWA has initiated several campaigns related to water, food, housing, social security, insurance, health benefits etc., to expand SEWA’s membership and to strengthen the trade union. SEWA’s founder Ela Bhatt points out that despite successfully lobbying for women workers’ rights since its inception in 1972, SEWA is till today not a recognised national trade union. To qualify, SEWA has to meet three requirements. It has to represent five trades, be active in five states (SEWA is already active in UP, MP, Gujarat, Delhi and Kerela) and have at least five lakh members and SEWA has yet to satisfy the last stipulation. SEWA decided to strengthen its membership base, particularly in rural areas, through a massive campaign on a central issue affecting women’s lives and the issue of water was identified by women as one of their biggest issue affecting work so the water campaign was launched. It is interesting to note the process of initiation of the campaign and how it is being carried out. These are described below.

Initially, the impetus to take up water-related projects had come at the various inter-district meetings that are regularly held to share experiences and discuss issues relating to the economic activities undertaken by SEWA members. Interventions in the water sector were discussed by SEWA *karyakartas* and *agevans* at length. Lack of access to drinking water figured prominently at SEWA’s annual meetings where SEWA members discussed their major problems and proposed viable solutions to deal with them. At issue-based meetings, such as those on health, forestry and handicrafts, women also talked about the lack of adequate and safe drinking water and how this handicapped women from having enough time and work to earn a better income (Agarwal 1998). In January 1995, at one of the regular meetings of the nine district co-coordinators on the eve of the state government’s annual budget, discussions centered around major concerns of SEWA’s members that could be included in the government’s budget by lobbying with the government. Several livelihoods concerns were voiced. The discussion gathered momentum within SEWA when, at the April 30, 1995,
meeting of the co-coordinators with Elaben Bhatt, founder and former General Secretary of SEWA, Elaben reiterated that SEWA members should identify and take up a critical problem that: Affected a large number of women, existed in a large number of areas, should have continued to affect women for a long period, negatively impacted poor and self-employed women's living and working conditions (Interview with Ela Bhatt, Jan 2000.). After much discussion, the co-coordinators zeroed in on lack of easy access to sufficient and safe drinking water. This deprivation acutely affected women's productive time and work, irrespective of what particular economic activity she was engaged in. As SEWA had realised in its work in the water sector in Banaskantha, water was an economic and ecological regenerative input that sustained rural livelihoods (Interview with Reema Nanavaty Dec 1999.). It was decided to adopt equitable access to safe and adequate drinking water, critical to all SEWA's members, as the main issue on which to work with the state government and influence its policies and programmes to make them more responsive to the needs of SEWA members. This common issue could then be taken up as a campaign in all the districts where SEWA had a membership base. Though district co-coordinators had zeroed in on lack of drinking water as the common critical concern, Elaben recommended that a final decision should be taken only after all SEWA karyakartas, agevans and members agreed. As a union, SEWA is led in its decisions by its workers and takes up demand-based issues. It follows a participatory and consultative process in all decision-making. The statewide water campaign or the 'pani jumbish', also called the Millennium Drinking Water Campaign on Water, Women and Work. (Nanavaty 1998) thus came into being. The campaign was initiated in 258 villages across nine districts (Agarwal 1998). Subsequently, it spread to eleven districts of Gujarat.

Before the campaign was launched in 1995, SEWA had sufficiently expanded its water-related knowledge base in the water sector after successfully implementing many water-related activities in several districts. These included activities in Banaskantha since mid-1980s in Sabarkantha from 1992 on a World Bank-aided watershed development programme and in Vadodara from 1993 on the rehabilitation of the Sukhi dam oustees and facilitating the access to drinking water for them. The campaign is Government data shows that in all these eleven
districts.

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4 Earlier in nine districts but later on two of the districts – Banaskantha and Kheda – were subsequently split into two in 1998 by the state government so it became 11 districts, including Patan and Anand districts.
districts, drinking water was a very real problem. As the table below shows, even in 2000-2001, over 60% of the villages in the 11 districts, where SEWA works are officially identified as water shortage villages.

Table: 5.1 Shortage of Drinking Water in SEWA Districts 2000-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Total no. of villages</th>
<th>Villages with water shortage</th>
<th>Percentage of water shortage villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kachchh</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Surendranagar</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patan</td>
<td>1245</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mehsana</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Banaskantha</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gandhinagar</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sabarkantha</td>
<td>1387</td>
<td>1027</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kheda</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anand</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vadodara</td>
<td>1590</td>
<td>1499</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8783</td>
<td>5378</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hirway, Indira, 2000

After the decision to launch the campaign there were intense discussions among SEWA leaders and members and the nature and role of the campaign was conceptualised and these are: (as based on Interview with Bharti Bhavsar, Nov, 1999).

- It will not substitute government agencies to finance and implement drinking water infrastructure.
- Its purpose is to mobilise and facilitate its members to dialogue and lobby with official agencies to access drinking water as well as acquire more control over its supply.
- It seeks to empower women with the requisite capabilities to carry out the above tasks.
The objectives of the water campaign are to:
- Rally rural women on the issue of water and create general awareness among all the stakeholders.
- Develop, maintain, revive and manage traditional and 'modern' sources of drinking water with women at the helm of affairs.
- Evolve alternative grassroots institutions of women in order to develop, maintain and manage these sources of water.
- Set up a women's technical cadre to make women efficient resource managers.
- Increase employment opportunities for rural people, especially women.
- Link up with the government and other agencies like the elected bodies so that women can influence water-related decisions, policies and programmes.
- Make water-related policies more gender-responsive.
- Forge links with like-minded institutions, associations and foundations to promote the issue of women, water and work - nationally as well as internationally.

One of the main principles for carrying out the campaign is that: It is gender-focused, dealing with water issues as they affect both men and women and the power relations between them. So, the activities of the campaign address women's practical needs as well as their 'strategic' needs for effecting a favourable shift in gender power relations. Some other outstanding features of the campaign are:
- It is operated through community-based organisations, which would collaborate with state-run institutions and elected bodies.
- It combines the traditional with the modern by reviving traditional water sources and knowledge and marrying these to new scientific knowledge and technologies.
- It adopts an integrated approach, by linking drinking water activities with long-term recharge of surface and groundwater sources.
- It would combine advocacy with on-the-ground demonstrative actions, thus practicing what is preached.
- Above all, the campaign is guided by SEWA's political strategy of combining struggle with development, of demanding rights but also learning to discharge new responsibilities.
Activities, Strategy and Institutional structure of the Campaign: Decentralised Model

To carry the campaign forward, a 56-member central campaign committee was set up in 1995. It comprised four agevan and two organisers, from each of the districts. District co-coordinators were also members of this committee. The committee met quarterly. At the first meeting on July 27, in Gandhinagar, it was decided to begin the campaign by first taking stock of the situation. For this, some village-level surveys were undertaken to collect information on the status of drinking water. Information was collected from the people by holding gram sabhas and from the concerned authorities. Simultaneously, taluka-level meetings were held where SEWA invited officers of the local administration and from some line departments. These meetings were held during 1995-96 in seven districts. The purpose was twofold: to collect information about government's policies and schemes as well as to give SEWA members an opportunity to discuss their water-related grievances with the concerned officers. These first-of-its-kind meetings were attended by mamlatdars (officers in-charge of taluka-level administration), sarpanches and taluka development officers (TDOs) and were quite successful in bringing to the fore several village-level problems and examining why authorities could not attend to them. Apart from drinking water, other rural infrastructure needs also came up and later this resulted in infrastructure development of villages as many villages got roads and electricity (Agarwal 1998).

As a trade union, SEWA has been struggling against restricting policies and rules but simultaneously built capacities of its members so that they could improve their working conditions through collective action. This also meant taking advantage of government programmes wherever possible. In Banaskantha too, SEWA had worked on a government-supported water programme but modified it appropriately so that it benefited its members economically while regenerating the ecology of the region. Upgrading members' capabilities is part of this process (Interview with Reema Nanavaty). Besides lateral learning, exposure trips are also organised wherein women, and men, travel to places outside their homes to see for themselves how poor women are taking up new roles with regard to water management. Exposure trips outside the country, to international water forums and meetings have also been organised for rural women, which equip village women to place 'her' problem within a wider perspective and to influence participants' decision-making by sharing her experiences and
views. Use of the folk media has also been effectively used in the water campaign. 'Prabhat pheris' (religious processions at dawn), songs composed by village women, leaflets, posters and street plays on water have become quite popular and new ones continue to be added (Process Documentation Information).

SEWA’s strategy of intervening at multiple levels – from the village to the state – has helped strengthen the water campaign. At another level, SEWA has been influencing state-level institutions from within. In 1998 SEWA representatives met the state minister of water supply and senior ministry officials to discuss an action plan whereby village women would develop and manage water sources using their insights, skills, traditional knowledge and labour. No concrete proposal came out of that meeting but subsequently SEWA was appointed to the state-level committee for re-charging water sources. This Recharge Committee has been formed at state level in Gujarat comprising organisations and non-government and others that work on water related issues. SEWA’s membership on the Water Recharge Committee has played a key role in the water campaign. For instance, SEWA asked some village women from Surendranagar to present to the committee their case for building roof rainwater harvesting structures. It was following this presentation that the committee advised the Water Board (GWSSB) to fund construction of roof rainwater harvesting structures in village Surel, Surendranagar, and elsewhere in the state. The details of this scheme and the experience of women with roof rain water harvesting has been discussed in the next chapter. A similar process gave SEWA the state’s first operation and management project to be handled by a people’s organisation in Surendranagar again. Village women in Surendranagar manage the Thala-Malvan group water supply scheme covering four villages, which are supplied water from a single bore well (Interviews of government officials in Gandhinagar). This scheme and women’s leadership in its operation and management has also been discussed in the next chapter. Thus, SEWA uses its membership on the committee to leverage government funds and take up various government schemes through the GWSSB. Its presence on the committee has also helped SEWA link up with water board’s Gujarat Jalseva Training Institute (GJTI) for training women mechanics and other water-related programmes. Some of these trainings conducted by GJTI have also been described in the next chapter. SEWA’s need-based approach responds to members’ requirements and the water campaign has evolved accordingly in different districts. For example, in Surendranagar, Banaskantha and Kachchh,
where water sources are scarce, roof rainwater harvesting has been taken up in real earnest. Women also co-ordinate with the water department for mobile water tankers in times of drought. Where groundwater is saline, as in Banaskantha, women have constructed plastic-lined ponds to prevent ingress of salinity. Where pipelines are the main source of water, as in Ahmedabad, women have lobbied with the state water board for expanding the piped water supply network to their villages. In districts like Sabarkantha and Ahmedabad where handpumps are common, women have trained as handpump mechanics. In Gandhinagar, women have taken up recharging of wells because the water table is rapidly declining. (Kapoor et al. 2002). The details of the handpump training in Sabarkantha district will also been discussed in the next chapter.

Therefore, as discussed above, the campaign works closely with government agencies and departments to secure both rights of women with regard to water as well as sensitise the authorities to their duties. Training programmes too are undertaken in collaboration with government institutions. Co-ordination has been undertaken with the following agencies:

- Panchayat institutions at the village, taluka and district levels
- District Rural Development Agency(at the district level)
- Gujarat Water, Supply and Sanitation Board (GWSSB) at the state level in Gandhinagar and also its offices in district and taluka (block) level
- Gujarat Jalseva Training Institute (GJTI)

Institution building begins from the village itself with the village-level water committees.5 ‘Pani samities’, or village-level water committees, are the first building block of SEWA’s water-related grassroots institutions. Majority, or all, of the members of these pani samities are women. In some villages supportive and pro-active men are also nominated to the committees. Pani samiti members are usually identified and nominated at a gram sabha called by SEWA members in conjunction with the sarpanch/panchayat leaders to discuss village-level water issues. Pani samiti members oversee the day-to-day activities of water-related programmes or projects in a village. Where there are few water works, active SEWA members

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5 Information collected as part of the Process Documentation of the Water Campaign and Interviews with village women, who attended the Campaign meetings from eleven districts of Gujarat.
and 'agevans' implement, maintain and repair the works. SEWA has set up new pani samities only where it has failed to revive the defunct 'pani panchayats' registered in the early 1990s by the panchayats. These pani panchayats comprise the sarpanch, the government health worker, primary school teacher, some village male leaders and two village women. Women constitute 30% of the committee members. Each 'pani panchayat' usually has between six to 10 members. Where SEWA has successfully revived pani panchayats, it has put at least two of its own members on the committees. "In many villages of district Surendranagar, pani samitis were formed long time ago by the panchayats. We have formed new pani samities in 5 villages and revived existing ones in another five. We have got our own members nominated on to the committees we have revived. The fact that SEWA was already working with women of these villages made this task easier. "Initially, we did face resistance from both the panchayat members and the village women who did not want to take up positions where they had to deal with panchayat members directly, on the same footing. The environment is generally hostile. Panchayat members ask us: what can women do in the water sector? This attitude makes it difficult for us to motivate village women to take up positions on these samities." Informed Beenaben, Local District Co-coordinator, Surendranagar.

As a matter of principle, village-level pani samities work with panchayats. This helps the water committees garner panchayat funds, get panchayat sanction required to undertake building of any village-level common facility, and tap other resources like labour mobilised by the panchayat. This linking up also helps the water campaign win support from villagers and the local leadership. All village adults are involved in the decision-making process through gram sabhas. The first step undertaken by SEWA is to hold a gram sabha comprising all village adults. This is done through the sarpanch, or, in case the sarpanch is not co-operative, through the talatti or some panchayat member. The usual process of initiating the water campaign in a village is as follows:

- The sarpanch is contacted and asked for support. He/she is asked to call a gram sabha to discuss water-related issues.
- The village administrative officer (talatti), who is also the secretary of the village panchayat, is invited to the gram sabha.
- All the relevant information about water sources is gathered from the people, in particular from the women.
- Water-related problems are identified and discussed in detail.
- Villagers, in particular the women, are encouraged to come up with viable solutions to their water problems.
- The solutions are discussed in detail, including identifying the relevant government agencies and the people in-charge.

Women, and supportive men, are motivated and rallied to take up catalytic roles. Women are trained to solve their water problems. The training and capacity building ranges from knowing about government water agencies, writing requisitions for redressal of grievances to interacting and negotiating with those in authority. Women are also trained in technical and managerial aspects of water supply.

The Process in Brief

Contacting the Sarpanch / SEWA agywans → Identifying Water-related Problems → Prioritising the Problems

Identifying Partners & Resources → Identifying Tasks and Roles → Planning for the Activities

Listing Constraints → Listing Immediate Actions

Source: Figure above illustrated in Report in Kapoor et. al. SEWA’s Millennium Water Campaign: Women Water and Work, 2001

District-level Organisations in SEWA

The campaign has been taken up through SEWA’s district-level federations, called ‘local associations’, some of which were already registered when the campaign began. These federations, governed by an executive committee, represent the major economic activity of its members. However, its functioning is not restricted to a single economic activity. These associations perform a variety of roles, which benefit its members. Water-related activities thus
also became an integral part of these associations. For example, the plastic-lined pond was made by the Vanlaxmi Cooperative in Mehsana for storing water to irrigate its plantations. The technique to make such a pond was learnt from Banaskantha on an exposure trip to Banaskantha. In Kachchh, members of the craft association built water tanks that harvest rainwater on the roofs of their homes thus enabling the members to earn much more when they save on water collection time.

Table: 5.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Local association</th>
<th>Main activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ahmedabad</td>
<td>Ahmedabad District Women’s Savings &amp; Credit Association</td>
<td>Agriculture &amp; milk cooperatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banaskantha</td>
<td>Banaskantha DWCRA Mahila SEWA Association</td>
<td>Craft &amp; milk cooperatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gandhinagar</td>
<td>Gandhinagar District Women’s Savings &amp; Credit Association</td>
<td>Savings &amp; credit groups and milk cooperatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kheda</td>
<td>Kheda District Self-Employed Women’s Savings &amp; Credit Association</td>
<td>Agriculture-based employment, nurseries &amp; health Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kachchh</td>
<td>Kutchcraft Association</td>
<td>Embroidery &amp; craft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehsana</td>
<td>Shri Vanlaxmi Mahila SEWA Tree Growers Cooperative</td>
<td>Wasteland development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabarkantha</td>
<td>Sabarkantha Khedu (farmers’) Mandal</td>
<td>Watershed development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surendranagar</td>
<td>Surendranagar Mahila &amp; Balvikas Mandal</td>
<td>Providing child care to salt-making workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vadodara</td>
<td>Sukhi Mahila Mandal</td>
<td>Savings &amp; credit groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pani Samities at the village level are linked through a district-level water spearhead team. The water spearhead team is part of SEWA’s district-level federation or the ‘local association.’ A few outstanding leaders of village water committees form the district level ‘water spearhead team’ which includes the water team leader who is a SEWA organiser. The team members sit on the executive committee of this local association. This gives them an institutional platform to operate from. In Kachchh, for instance, the water spearhead team has received funds from the Indian Express group through the Kutchcraft Association to build roof rainwater harvesting
structures. Through the executive committee, the water spearhead team also interacts with spearhead teams in-charge of other SEWA activities. This has enabled the water spearhead team to dovetail its actions with other ongoing programmes.

In Kachchh, for instance, SEWA savings and credit group members have taken 'water loans' to pay for the roof rainwater harvesting systems. In the year 2000, the Surendranagar executive committee decided to give a loan to the villagers of Surel to build roof rainwater
harvesting systems before monsoons because the government grant was delayed. In Surendranagar itself, the executive committee has decided to use loans from the savings and credit groups to build similar structures in other villages.

All spearhead teams are co-coordinated by the state-level water co-coordinator. Thus, the water campaign functions through a three-tier system at the village-, district- and state-level. The team comprises key women leaders of various pani samities and some SEWA organisers. A spear head team usually has between 7 to 10 members and the ratio of agevans to karyakartas is four is to one. As the name suggests, the role of the spear head team is to lead the water campaign in its district. The spear head team gives direction to the campaign and steers it accordingly. It interacts with the authorities at all three levels – the village, state and the district – and even at the state-level. Team members meet monthly to take stock of the situation and chart out their action plan. They monitor ongoing works supervised by the pani samities. Team members are trained to develop their knowledge base and interpersonal skills. They learn to galvanise village women and exert influence on water authorities. They are also coached in the technical and managerial aspects of rural water supply systems. Many of the team members become trainers and train women and even adolescent girls in various water-related issues ranging from water conservation to handpump repairing. Some of these members are panchayat women leaders and use their position effectively to push women's water-related concerns within panchayats. Some spear head team members, benefiting from the campaign, stand for panchayat elections. This intertwining of the women's grassroots organisations with government's elected institutions benefits the water campaign. When Basraba became sarpanch of village Mohadi in Kachchh, she knew she had to improve access to drinking water for the village women. On paper, Mohadi used to receive piped water from a small dam 6 km away but being the tail-end village, it hardly got any water supply. The supply was also at very low pressure. "It takes me one hour to fill four pots of 5 litres each," said Basraba. "We are three adults and two children in the house and we often have to make do with this much water for two days. "There is no other source of water except an old well. In desperation we sieve the well water through a cloth and use it for cooking and even drinking. Almost 50 households share a tap and often the tap goes dry before everyone has had a chance to fill her pots." With SEWA's help, Basraba has got 6 roof rainwater harvesting structures constructed. While the roofs crashed in the January 2001 earthquake, the surface
water tanks survived and were a boon because they were used to store water brought in by mobile water tankers. The water campaign has taught Basraba how to deal with officials. She effectively uses her position as sarpanch to get repairs done to the piped water system. "I am no longer afraid to go to the 'pani purota' (water board) alone," she says when asked how SEWA's training programmes have helped her. "I know the ropes and when the 'babus' (officials) say they cannot solve my problem, I tell them if it weren't for us consumers, they would not have any job to do! If the lower officers do not listen to me, I go up the ladder. I now know what my rights are and who to approach for what in this labyrinth of our bureaucracy."

The spearhead team is helped by a water team leader who is a SEWA organiser and is stationed in the district. The team leader is the spearhead team's friend, philosopher and guide. The team leader is not a decision-maker – she only facilitates implementation of decisions taken by the spearhead team and/or the pani samities. When the spearhead team is still immature, she is the strength and motivator of the campaign. However, in the long run, her role is expected to decline as the spearhead team members and the village water leaders take on the reign of the water campaign. The water team leader from each district reports to, and takes guidance from, the water co-ordinator stationed in Ahmedabad. The water co-ordinator also interacts directly with spearhead teams. At another level, she links up with the SEWA general secretary and, through her, to SEWA's executive committee and office-bearers. The water co-ordinator is also the nodal person for all state- national- and international-level authorities, programmes and projects. Within the district, each water team leader reports to the local district co-ordinator who is in-charge of all district-level activities of SEWA, including the water campaign. The local co-ordinator is stationed in the district and reports to an overall district co-ordinator stationed in Ahmedabad, SEWA's headquarters. The local district coordinators and district co-ordinators interact directly with the water co-ordinator. The water technical team, is a critical support to the water campaign team. The technical team comprises two types of members – the formally educated engineers and the illiterate but trained mechanics. These women bridge the gap between science and reality. The women 'engineerben' are stationed in Ahemdabad and co-ordinate with other technical agencies for village water activities. There is an attempt to build a technical cadre within each district. In Sabarkantha, Vadodra and Kheda, there are handpump mechanics. In Surendranagar there are 'linesmenben' who are in-charge of a rural piped water supply scheme covering four
villages. Most of the `barefoot' technicians are illiterate but this has not hampered their grasping power for technical details. The strength of the institutional framework for water lies in the fact that each layer co-ordinates with the other – thus ensuring vertical integration – and the whole is incorporated into the umbrella district-level association. The freedom to innovate and take up new areas of governance is inherent in the institutional framework and this also gives it a rare strength. The concept of spear head team is indeed very unique to the SEWA's water campaign, which enables the village water issues to get communicated efficiently and effectively in less time, forcing the government to respond accordingly. Although a bit complicated, the campaign structure basically helps in close co-ordination among pani samiti whose representatives form the spear head team, which is assisted by SEWA's district level federations to contact district level water officials. The team gets constant guidance, support and training through state level co-ordination with SEWA and the state level water officials based in Gandhinagar.

Training for Women’s Empowerment

Within the water sector, training has assumed a central place so that women can manage and control their water sources by imbibing the needed information, knowledge and skills. This includes the need to equip women with leadership skills, managerial know how and technical competence. Training is transferring knowledge and awareness raising (Grift, 1995). It is an organized event aiming at helping communities or individuals to enter into learning processes, to bring about changes in understanding, skills and behaviour. As opposed to formal education, training is part of non-formal education. According to the 'Oxfam Handbook of Development and Relief', there are different approaches to training. Training exercises are undertaken in both a formal and an informal setting. SEWA emphasises a great deal on capacity building of women to make them self-reliant. Women’s knowledge, skills and self-confidence have been enhanced through a combination of training programmes and communication and advocacy programmes. SEWA has tied up with technical institutes like the Gujarat Jalseva Training Institute (GJTI) to impart technical skills to village women in handpump repairing and pipeline repair. This has given birth to a cadre of `barefoot mechanics' in the campaign. Regular meetings of SEWA members, agevan and karyakartas to discuss water issues at the village, taluka, district and state-levels motivate women to clear
their doubts, learn from each other and take on fresh initiatives. These meetings are also used to communicate feelings and best practices, share experiences and work as training grounds for confidence building and expansion of the knowledge base (Process Documentation information). In formal programmes, SEWA often collaborates with training institutes such as the Ahmedabad Management Association (AMA), Action for Food Production (AFPRO) and the Gujarat Jalseva Training Institute (GJTI). The GJTI is the main training institute for the 7000 employees of GWSSB (GJTI 2000). Outside agencies like UNICEF and World Bank also fund these official training sessions. Several of the women trained by these institutions in turn become trainers and train village women to expand the pool of trained women within the water campaign. These training range from the highly skilled handpump repair and water quality testing to the general awareness exercises for environmental protection and water conservation. The SEWA Academy itself conducts several training programmes in leadership qualities and working as a team for collective action. The SEWA Academy tailors its training programmes according to the needs and experiences of SEWA members. It believes in mutual learning, participatory methods and developing a cadre of trainers from within the rank and file of SEWA members. The training capsules ensure that women develop self-confidence, leadership skills and a sense of self-esteem by recognising their own contribution to their homes and to their communities. The basic training offered at SEWA Academy is on organisational skills and leadership roles. This is mainly for grassroots-level new leaders. In addition, there are capsules on training of trainers, advanced leadership roles, making of video films, DWCRA activities, running and managing small activity-based groups, special training for young girls (adolescents), and for documentation and report-writing.

In addition to the pratinidhi meetings (SEWA's elected body member's meeting) and workers' education training, 5,516 rural women leaders of the activity-wise spearhead teams obtained training from SEWA Academy in 1999. At the informal level, women continually learn from each other during their regular meetings as they carry on their routine business. Facts, insights and experiences are shared, discussed, modified and internalised. District co-ordinators are constantly in communication with SEWA members, in particular the leaders, to guide, inform and assist them in all aspects of their work. Besides classroom lectures and informal osmosis, women's abilities are also developed through a comprehensive and rather versatile
Information, education and Communication (IEC) package by GJTI. Some of the main technical training programmes undertaken by GJTI have been:

Table: 5.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S No.</th>
<th>Main Training Capsules in 1999</th>
<th>No. of Trainees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Leadership Training</td>
<td>776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Leadership Training (Advance Group)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Orientation to SEWA</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Organising Training</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Exposure &amp; Dialogue Training</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Workers' Education</td>
<td>30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Video Replay</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Photography</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Training of Trainers</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Research Training</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Spearhead Team Training</td>
<td>5,516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Pratinidhi Milan (elected union representatives meeting / training)</td>
<td>1,498</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SEWA Annual Report 1999

Table: 5.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Type of Training</th>
<th>Duration In Days</th>
<th>Site of Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chlorination – care &amp; use of chlorinators</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>GJTI office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fluoride in drinking water</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Village-level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Water quality &amp; water borne diseases</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Village-level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Water harvesting, conservation &amp; recharge</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>GJTI office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Water management &amp; environment protection</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>GJTI office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Handpump maintenance and repairing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Village-level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Group water supply scheme training⁶</td>
<td>2+2</td>
<td>Village-level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are also some study tours, which enable water leaders to learn about water activities outside their home state. Among the study tours⁷ was one for handpump mechanics in

⁶ Conducted by GJTI and GWSSB.
November 1999 in Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh. The first of its kind fair, it attracted women masons and mechanics from eight states. Shantaben from Sabarkantha was among those who went. Later, discussing the impact, SEWA mechanics realised they were luckier than their colleagues in Chitrakoot because the GWSSB was quicker than the UP water department in supplying them with spare parts. Now there is a move by the Sabarkantha water team to decentralise this still further by keeping all spare parts in the custody of the panchayats. The handpump women’s mela (fair) helped women to understand the similarity of problems faced and gave them the energy to find solutions. Lateral learning also takes place between two levels of the water teams when trainees become trainers, setting up a chain reaction of capacity building. For instance, SEWA’s engineerben’ have been training village women on recharging groundwater. They also survey and report on water activities from a technical point of view and this is shared by the district’s team members and by water spearhead team members from other districts. For instance, the engineers have documented and reported on roof rainwater harvesting systems, the takeover of the regional water supply scheme in Surendranagar, the outbreak of cholera in Surendranagar and handpump training in Sabarkantha. These trainings are held in the local language, explanations are simplified and explained in terms familiar to the trainees. The technical jargon is minimised and often translated into everyday language. The trainees themselves have evolved their own technical jargon\(^8\) understandable to them all! Even the venue of these training programmes is decided according to the needs of the trainees.

Some examples of the training programmes conducted by GJTI are provided below. The information was collected as part of the process documentation method adopted by the study for data collection.

**Water management and environment protection training**

A 3-days long training programme on ‘Water Management and Environment Protection’ was held in May 2000 in SEWA’s Bayard taluka head-office in Sabarkantha. This training was

\(^7\) Organised by UNICEF, the Water and Sanitation Programme and Vanangana, an all-women NGO working in the Chitrakoot region.

\(^8\) For examples see section on Sabarkantha in the next chapter.
conducted by GJTI for 55 women and 19 men from 8 villages. The handpump repairing team was also present. This was the first training of its kind for these villages.

On the first day, the training began with a prayer and lighting of the traditional lamp. At the inaugural session, the trainers told the participants about the training modules to be undertaken during the three days. This was important as it gave a good idea to the trainees of what was in store for them. The next session was on water scarcity. Discussions focused on acute water scarcity in summers, compared to the monsoons, and the fact that despite the scarcity rainwater was not being collected. Similarly, groundwater was being used extensively but water was not being put back into the ground. Also, because rainwater simply ran-off from the surface of the ground, the saline groundwater was not recharged with freshwater. The conclusion reached was that efforts should be made to put as much water back into the ground as was used. The trainees discussed some real life examples where villagers had taken an initiative to solve their drinking water problems. In 1973, for instance, there was no drinking water in village Bakore. There were lots of surface wells but the water was tasteless and saline. The only well with sweet water was too far away. The villagers subsequently dug a well near their pond and got sweet water. In another location, at a higher level, villagers dug a new pond to cater to 2000 people. After 10 years, the panchayat made additional drinking water arrangements. What was significant about Bakore was that people had solved their drinking water problem by contributing money and labour. All government help had come much later. Interestingly, even after so much effort, the water problem persisted so the villagers decided to recharge their handpump by harvesting rainwater and by deepening the pond. In addition, the villagers decided to undertake watershed development to lessen their dependence on groundwater for irrigation.

The trainers emphasised that people spoil 'government' owned assets and do not value 'free' water. Yet, water is not a free good. Bores are very costly to dig and hardware too is very expensive. Villagers are required to give just rupees 14 a year but even this little amount is not given. Instead, drinking water is wasted. The link between health and water was next on the agenda. Trainers said that because 80% of all diseases are water-borne, testing the quality of drinking water is necessary. Fluoride contamination, its effect on health and keeping drinking water sources separate from washing and cleaning sources was discussed in some detail.
Methods to purify water, like boiling and mixing alum or chlorine tablets were discussed. The trainees also discussed what they understood by 'environment' and how it should be managed. The issues that came up included: Environment is natural and man-made. Man's activities do not manage nature well. Land, water, forests should be in balance for good environment. Children should also know this. Forests keep air clean/pure and create rain. Forests also give water, wood and food for animals. Trees stop erosion. Villagers should grow four trees for every tree cut because trees help in replenishing the water-table. So let us pledge to grow and care for forests. Land is our mother and it takes care of us. The bigger the village the dirtier it is and all rubbish is put in mother earth. We should dispose off the garbage properly so that land is not defiled. Watershed activities were also deliberated upon. In the field, for instance, possibilities included farm ponds and recharging of irrigation bores by constructing check dams. Trainees visited village Dhamania with 2 'engineerben' from SEWA to carry out a survey of all the handpumps. Plans were made to recharge 3 handpumps.

The second day too began with a prayer. Water and health was again a topic of discussion. Water was linked with birth and life. Women said water is god because its use begins in the womb where it is home for an unborn child. Water is needed from pre-birth to death. Trainers quoted religious texts exalting the need for pure water to keep ourselves disease-free. For instance, the Rigveda says water is life's 'amrit'. Amrit means 'jo mrit nahi hai' – that which is not dead. Water-borne diseases were taken up again for discussion. The various kinds of contamination – from chemicals like fluoride and bacterial contamination were listed and preventive measures discussed again. For instance, by testing water, storing rainwater and sieving water from a four-layered cotton cloth. Bacterial contamination can be prevented by washing hands after touching anything dirty and before touching food. Washing of hands was emphasised. Referring to the local language, trainers said 'sabun' (soap) means 'sa', short for samanya (common), and 'bu', short for budhhi (sense). So whosoever has common sense will use soap! Again, emphasising sanitation or safai, trainers played on the word safai - 's' mean sab ke (for everyone) 'fa' means fayade ka (beneficial to) and 'l' means ilaj (cure). So one simple word safai means 'beneficial for everyone's cure!' The session was enriched by using videos for learning. The videos, belonging to the Gujarat Jalseva Training Institute, showed how water stored for far too long caused diseases. How difficult it was to get safe drinking
water in water starved areas. Another video showed the links between land, water and forests. A third one was on water management.

The last day too began with a prayer. Trainers used diagrams to show how groundwater can be recharged; how rainwater can be harvested at home, in the fields and in the village. How wastewater or dirty water can be filtered in a pit dug in the ground using sand and gravel of different sizes so that freshwater recharges the water table. A video showing the work of an NGO on these issues was also shown. The training concluded with a competition. Participants were asked to coin slogans for water conservation and prizes were given to the best ones. The usual feedback and thanks giving session followed.

Training for de-fluoridation of drinking water

A public awareness camp to control spread of fluorosis was held in Mehsana in September 2000 at the SEWA office in Gandhinagar. A total of 49 women from 12 village participated. The participants were first informed about fluoride – what it is and where it comes from. If the fluoride content is more than 1.5 milligram per litre, the water should not be consumed. Water should be tested and if fluoride content is high, an alternative source of water should be used. The women were then told about fluorosis, a crippling disease, which affects the bone structure. How fluoride collects in the joints so that the victim cannot move his/her arms and legs. Also, the diseased person should keep her/his head cool and body warm. He/she should not eat sugar, rice, salt – which are all 'white poison' and aggravate the disease. Simple, home-based measures to lessen the content of fluoride in water were taught. For instance, boiling water for 30 minutes. Putting chlorine tablets or 1 kg of alum and 100 gm of lime in a 10-litre water container. This should be stirred rapidly for one minute and then slowly for about 5-10 minutes to allow the sediments to settle down. Water should be consumed half-an-hour later.

Impact of the Water Campaign on SEWA as an Organisation

Increasing the membership being one of the concerns for SEWA, so following the launch of the water campaign, by December 1995, SEWA’s membership had doubled to 1,58,152 and
was continuing on an upward swing (SEWA Annual report 1998). The campaign enabled SEWA to take up 'new' villages where it did not previously have members. The link between water and women's economic activities was so strong that women flocked to meetings where water issues were being discussed.

The water campaign helped SEWA acquire a new identity. From being perceived as a welfare organisation, SEWA began to be seen as working towards women's empowerment – teaching them governance, technical skills and how to dialogue with public agencies. Earlier, SEWA's intervention had succeeded in enhancing women's income and status at the individual level. The campaign gave them new recognition in their communities. Creation of village assets through the campaign was also breaking new ground. SEWA came to be recognised as working towards gram vikas, or village development.

SEWA learnt how to deal with new players in the water sector – village male leaders, panchayats, administrative authorities and several line departments at the taluka and district levels. The campaign gave SEWA an opportunity to begin sensitising government officers and technocrats on gender issues. It began to recognise, harness and influence community knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) (Kapoor, et al. 2002). It also learnt how to grapple with people's politics. The campaign taught SEWA important lessons in mobilising communities and tackling tricky gender relations (Ahmed 2000).

Though a non-technical organisations, SEWA learnt how to handle highly technical work in the water sector. This, for example, included constructing roof rainwater harvesting structures in Banaskantha and Kachchh in the first phase, constructing plastic-lined ponds, repairing handpumps, operating a piped water supply scheme and reviving traditional sources of water like ponds and wells. SEWA also learnt the technical task of watershed management and recharging the aquifers by harvesting rainwater. The water campaign helped give SEWA leaders on-the-job training on how to organise gram sabhas and benefit from them. The water campaign linked village-level gram sabhas to taluka and district level structures on the issue of drinking water. The campaign also taught SEWA how to simultaneously work on short-term goals while pursuing long-term ones to avert worsening of the water crisis. SEWA's sound
reputation within the state government has also helped the water campaign achieve several milestones.

Critical Appraisal

Through the discussion above, an attempt has been made to describe the overall emerging picture of the water campaign issues and facts through the Process documentation method. As seen above that there exists a very dynamic and complex nature of relationships between SEWA's institutional team (called the spear head team) and the village level panchayat structure and the water committees within them. It was observed that there is a huge structure of teams working at different levels, there remains a greater need of interaction between these teams and panchayat members although a great deal of constructive partnership is evolving in several cases. While the team members comprising women act as great catalysts in initiating action at the community level by involving more women, usually the panchayat members do not necessarily like to get involved. There is therefore a greater need to involve them although understandably this is a slow and long process.

Moreover, the idea of spear head teams for the water campaign seems novel and successful in some ways but it presents an isolated case built around SEWA’s own position and fame acquired over the years at the state level, its ideology and method of working, which includes lots of meetings at different level within SEWA and with government officials. This gives enough opportunity to women to speak out and actively participate and encourage in taking leadership. It is hard to expect such kind of co-ordination from many other such organisations as each has a different focus and method of working. Nevertheless, one still needs to understand the process undertaken at district level and therefore, the following chapter seeks to further understand the dynamic nature of water campaign at the district, block and village level undertaken by women groups of SEWA in the three districts of Banaskantha, Sabarkantha and Surendranagar.