



SEWA FEDERATION CO-ORGANISES A SESSION AT THE GSEF GLOBAL VIRTUAL FORUM

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By Sewa Federation

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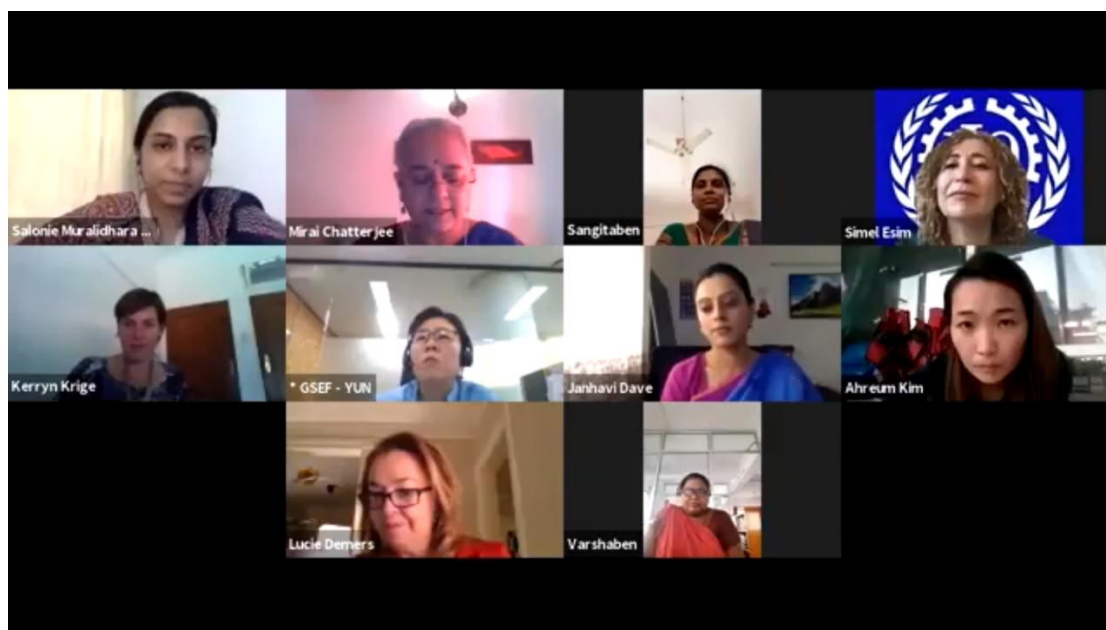
October 26, 2020

The Global Social Economy Forum, SEWA Cooperative Federation and International Forum SSE (IFSSE) co-organised a virtual event on women and SSEs. The event was held on October 20, 2020 and the event followed the framework of the [GSEF Global Virtual Forum](#).

The expert panelists included voices from the ground who outlined the challenges they faced during the pandemic, their responses, and needs. The discussion included inputs from experts who spoke about what concrete actions governments and civil society organizations can take to support women's SSEs.

On October 20, The Global Social Economy Forum (GSEF) hosted a global webinar on the social and solidarity economy's role in realising gender equality and equity. Titled Women in SSE Organizations, A Driving Factor for Resilient Communities and Economies: Best Practices, Challenges, and the Way Forward the panel discussion drew together people from India, Bhutan, South Africa and Canada with

expert input from ILO COOP Manager Simel Esim and ILO Pretoria's Kerryn Krige, who is part of the team developing the Social Economy Policy in South Africa.



Chaired by Mirai Chatterjee of the SEWA Cooperative Federation the panel opened with a discussion on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women SSE organisations, with Sangitaben (Board member, Megha Indigenous Women Farmers' Cooperative) and Varshaben (Board member, Lok Swasthya Health Cooperative).

Both cooperative leaders shared about the challenges they faced including loss of livelihood and hence income, an increase in care work in the home, and poor access to information on both the corona virus, the lockdown and support available. “ People did not have proper information on the virus and this resulted in fear. Our health cooperative worked hard to reach all families with proper information— simple do's and don'ts. We also linked informal workers to various government health services ,” said Varshaben , Sangitaben added, “Our's is a remote tribal district, and people had no idea what to do to protect themselves. Our farmers' cooperative not only provided health education, but also we linked members to government relief programmes. Local officials reached out to our cooperative for help in reaching women in remote villages. Our livelihood was affected as we are farmers and could not sell our produce in the market due to the lock-down. Our members had no money to buys seeds and so our cooperative provided small amounts of capital so that our members did not have to borrow from money-lenders.”

Janhavi Dave, International co-ordinator of HomeNet South Asia, then shared results from their multi-country research study which confirmed these experiences. With inputs from India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives and Pakistan the HomeNet study found that 70 per cent of people surveyed had not received the promised help from government, and 65 per cent spent more time in care work. ^

The discussion moved to a second phase, to explore what could be done to address these issues of exclusion and inequality. The ILO's Simel Esim reinforced the call for stronger and sustained support to social economy practitioners. SSE is widely regarded as a means to building inclusivity in our economies in a way that leaves no one behind. But with women facing labour market discrimination and work-family conflict alongside cultural and social barriers to work, an accelerated and committed focus is required. This requires engaging with governments and entities that support the development of the SSE, to build both vertical and horizontal institutional strength. Vertical strength happens through the establishment of unions and federations, that both connect people to each other, whilst creating platforms for lobbying and advocacy, giving people a voice. Horizontal institutions provide responsive practical support for example credit unions for local-level, tailored financing, or training institutions for skills development support.

“We need to look beyond case studies, and to look at ways to build systems, and strengthen the ecosystem of women SSEs. It is important that we do this as part of a movement, so that our efforts are not fragmented.”

This need to build partnerships and awareness was echoed by the ILO's Kerryn Krige, who is part of the team developing the Social Economy Policy in South Africa. “We still see women in the social economy doing work that is genderized such as care work, or cooking and cleaning. If we truly want to commit to gender equity, we have to start championing women working in the SSE who are challenging our stereotypes of what normal is.”

Lucie Demers, Director of Strategy and Development at Filicon, in Quebec Canada outlined how they had made funding available to women social economy practitioners, who were excluded from the system. She described a financial system that had “masculine” ways of operating, with a host of invisible barriers. “Women don't even think that they can access finance, because its not something that they can or even should do”. By making finance accessible to women entrepreneurs, was already showing good returns.

Chair Mirai Chatterjee, summarised the key inputs into a seven point set of recommendations to promote gender equity in the SSE. These act as a guide for those working in SSE on where we can strengthen our policy, research, government and practitioner focus.

The Seven-recommendations to realising Gender Equality in the SSE:

1. **Organise:** encourage the set up and creation of various collectives: unions, co-operatives, alliance networks.
2. **Decentralise:** localise our economies and purchase locally. To do this we need to empower women leaders, together with young and indigenous people.
3. **Tell the story:** ensure that people's voices are heard and that we challenge our own stereotypes in the telling. ^

- 4. **Plan with women, not for women:** the COVID-19 responses have ranged from poor to mixed. There should be greater representation of women on planning committees and structures.
- 5. **Gender gaps:** We need to recognise gender gaps in the new economy and start ensuring that it is diverse by building capacity of women in non-traditional livelihoods.
- 6. **Social Protection:** to support households with childcare, healthcare, insurance, pension, basic housing.
- 7. **Knowledge:** More research and documentation around women and SSEs, mapping what works, and what doesn't.

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