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**Supporting women's groups
through needs-based
extension & empowerment:
The case of SEWA, India**

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About CSD



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- Part of City & Guilds Group
- CSD works in the UK and internationally
- **Our Vision**
 - A world in which everyone has access to the skills needed for social and economic prosperity.
- **Our Mission**
 - To influence and improve skills policy and practice worldwide through an evidence based approach.

Focus of the case study



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- How have SEWA achieved high levels of engagement in their services by women across different religions, castes and social classes?
- How have SEWA built the legitimacy and social power of self help groups to enable them to be an effective structure for extension?

SEWA – Self Employed Women’s Association



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- Started as a trade union in Ahmedabad in 1972 – to support self-employed women to gain income and employment
- Now +1.3m members in India (mainly Rajasthan & Gujarat)
- Owned by members
- Offers extension/lobbying/financial services/market support



Key challenges faced by SEWA's members



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■ Small scale producers:

- Insecure profits
- Outdated practices
- Increased competition
- Environmental degradation
- Lack of market access

■ Agricultural labourers:

- Decreasing demand for labour
- Increasing labour supply
- Impacts from poor health



Research approach



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- Interviews and focus groups with:
 - Women's groups
 - SEWA coordinators,
 - SEWA management and leadership
- Explored SEWA's approach to extension and enterprise
- Asked what inclusiveness and influence in the community meant to them
- Used this as the basis to discuss how SEWA has created a system for effective extension at scale

What does inclusion mean to members?



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- Secure flexible employment
- Members decided on training
- Trust, particularly with savings
- Everyone regardless of religion or caste participating
- Relationship with SEWA coordinators



What does influence mean to members?



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- Formal recognition of work
- Support from husbands
- Travelling freely
- Marketing products and business decisions
- Engaging with government officials
- Sharing knowledge with others
- Access to credit
- Acknowledging their identity as a productive worker and an individual outside of the family

The power of the collective



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- Organisation and coordination - Foundation for all activities
- Representative structure provides a voice to address needs + information gathering
- Community and household meetings - target champions



Needs-driven extension



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- The central component to SEWA's support – both agricultural and enterprise training
- All delivered through farmer field schools or group training – needs-driven from the groups AND individuals
- Flexibility for extension agents
- Tech/financial/business management training
- Literacy programmes

Additional support



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- Market & other linkages - target key constraints to women entering the market
- Financial services
- Advocacy/mediation
- Lobbying
- Linkages to experts





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Thank you!

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