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India Studies in Business and Economics

Babita Bhatt
Israr Qureshi
Dhirendra Mani Shukla
Vinay Pillai *Editors*

Social Entrepreneurship and Gandhian Thoughts in the Post-COVID World

 Springer

*To Gandhian social entrepreneurs and
progressive communities for prefiguring
Sarvodaya through Antyodaya.*

Preface

It is with great pleasure, humility and gratitude that I present to you this edited book, which is not only a professional endeavor but also a deeply personal journey. Throughout my life, I have been inspired by the profound thoughts and views of Mahatma Gandhi on village-centric development, which have shaped my perspectives early on and influenced my research orientation for the last 15 years.

My first encounters with Gandhian thoughts and views were during my childhood visits to Anandwan, and later to Sewagram Gandhi Ashram during my late teens. I was also inspired by the remarkable work being done by Prakash Amte at Hemalkasa, and had the opportunity to witness his efforts in 1985. These early experiences gave me a glimpse of indigenous communities engaged in commoning in Gadchiroli district, which left a lasting impression on me.

During my schooling and undergraduate years, my engagement with the National Service Scheme exposed me to various Gandhian programs, including constructive works. Later, as a geologist traveling across India, I witnessed various social issues and innovative projects aimed at addressing them. However, it wasn't until I completed my doctoral studies in organization studies in 2008 that I was equipped to make philosophical sense of the diverse Gandhi-inspired constructive programs being implemented by some remarkable social organizations.

My research took me to remote villages in India, and between 2008 and 2022, I visited and stayed in over 2000 villages, some of them multiple times. During these visits, I had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the wicked social issues of poverty and marginalization being addressed by some of the most dedicated organizations. I am indebted to these organizations for the invaluable lessons I have learned from their work. While it is not possible to list all of them here, I have been profoundly influenced by organizations such as ASSEFA, BAIF, Barefoot College, BASIX, Development Alternatives, Digital Green, Drishtee, Ekgaon Technologies, PRADAN, SELCO, SEWA, Seva Mandir, and Srijan, among others.

I have also had the privilege of interacting with some of the greatest minds and souls in the development sector in India. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to learn from visionaries like P.V. Sathesh, founder of Deccan Development Society, and Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA, both of whom recently left us. I have also had the

honor of meeting with S. Loganathan, founder of ASSEFA, whom I consider a true *Antyodaya* leader and a tireless visionary in his efforts to help the most marginalized. Mr. Mohan Hirabai Hiralal, who embodies Gandhi's concept of *Sahyogi Mitra*, has been a catalyst behind the Maha Gramsabha movement in Central India. My interactions with him have been enriching.

My interactions with such dedicated Gandhians over the last one and a half decades, and in some cases even longer, inspired me to initiate this edited book on Gandhian thoughts and their relevance in today's world. However, this book would not have come to fruition without the invaluable contributions of esteemed development professionals and social activists who have dedicated their lives to the development sector. I express my deepest gratitude to Mr. Vijay Mahajan, Ms. Aruna Roy, Dr. Harish Hande, Mr. Ajay Mehta, Mr. Satyan Mishra, Mr. Loganathan Kumar, Ms. Pallavi Varma Patil, and Dr. Chetan Solanki for sharing their profound wisdom and experiences in the development sector. Their lifetime of work and expertise has enriched the content of this book and made it more comprehensive and meaningful.

In addition, I feel fortunate to have renowned Gandhian scholars as contributors to our chapters. Dr. Somnath Ghosh, Dr. Sudarshan Iyengar, Dr. Suraj Jacob, Dr. John Moolakkattu, and Dr. Sujit Sinha have graciously shared their scholarly insights, adding depth and academic rigor to the book. Their expertise and profound understanding of Gandhian philosophy have been invaluable in shaping the content of this book.

Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to other social entrepreneurs who have not been directly involved in this book as contributors but have nevertheless helped shape my views through their inspiring conversations. Mr. Deep Joshi, co-founder of PRADAN, Mr. Rikin Gandhi, founder of Digital Green, Mr. Vijay Pratap Singh Aditya, co-founder of Ekgaon Technologies, and Mr. Ved Arya, founder of Srijan, have all shared their unique perspectives and insights, which have enriched my understanding of Gandhian thoughts and their contemporary relevance.

Lastly, I humbly offer this book as a homage to the exemplary work carried out by the esteemed *Antyodaya*¹ leaders and dedicated Gandhians. Their relentless efforts to empower the marginalized and uphold the values of truth, nonviolence, and social justice are truly commendable. It has been a dream to compile this book, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to do so. It is with great humility that I present this book as a token of my appreciation and gratitude to these esteemed individuals who have inspired me and countless others with their unwavering commitment to Gandhian principles.

Canberra, ACT, Australia
[On behalf of the editorial team]

Israr Qureshi

¹ In the preface and throughout this book, I submit that the term *Antyodaya* is used in the noblest sense as envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi, referring to the upliftment of the most marginalized members of society.

Cultivating Women Entrepreneurship: A Case Study of SEWA



Arpita Ghatak, Aftab Alam, and Israr Qureshi

The poor do not need charity; they need an enabling mechanism to strive and come out of the vicious circle of poverty and vulnerability.

Ela Bhatt, Founder of SEWA

1 Introduction

The subject of women's entrepreneurship has garnered much attention in recent years owing to its potential to foster sustainable growth, environmental stewardship, social inclusion, and gender equity (cf. Bansal et al., 2014; Bhatt, 2017, 2022; Hota et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). It is widely acknowledged that women's engagement in entrepreneurial activity can lead to various benefits, including improving capabilities, enhancing family well-being, and broadening socioeconomic gains (cf. Ansari et al., 2012; Haugh & Talwar, 2016; Kistruck et al., 2008, 2013a, b; London, 2016; Qureshi et al., 2021a, 2022a, b, 2023). Women's participation in entrepreneurship has been linked to an increase in their capabilities, such as their advocacy and leadership skills (Bhatt et al., 2022, 2023; Qureshi et al., 2023, [this volume](#), Sutter et al., 2023). Entrepreneurship research in the marginalized context

A. Ghatak (✉)

Royal Holloway University of London, Egham, UK

e-mail: arpita.ghatak@rhul.ac.uk

A. Alam

Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, West Bengal, India

e-mail: aftabalam@iitkgp.ac.in

I. Qureshi

Research School of Management, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

e-mail: israr.qureshi@anu.edu.au

suggests that providing women opportunities to acquire new skills, knowledge, and experiences can enhance their personal and professional development (Ansari et al., 2012; Hassan et al., 2023; Datta & Gailey, 2012) and overcome marginalization they experience (Rosca et al., 2020; cf. Bhardwaj et al., 2021; Qureshi et al., 2018a, 2020, 2022a, 2023). Thus, engaging in entrepreneurial activities can provide women with a sense of empowerment and autonomy, which can contribute to their overall well-being and self-esteem.

Similarly, women's involvement in entrepreneurship has also been associated with improved family well-being¹ (Datta & Gailey, 2012; cf. Kumar et al., 2021; Shahriar & Shepherd, 2019). Women entrepreneurs can generate income and create employment opportunities, which can lead to higher household incomes and improved living standards for their families (Hazarika & Goswami, 2016; London, 2016). In this way, women entrepreneurs can serve as role models for their children and contribute to their education and development. Women's entrepreneurship has broader socioeconomic benefits. Women-owned businesses can contribute to economic growth and development by creating jobs, generating income, and driving innovation (Haugh & Talwar, 2016). Moreover, women entrepreneurs can help to address gender disparities and promote gender equality, which is a key component of sustainable development.

Despite these potential benefits, ensuring the participation of the most marginalized women in entrepreneurship remains a significant policy and ethical challenge (Bhatt, 2022; Hota et al., 2023; Qureshi et al., 2023). Women who suffer marginalization account of factors such as poverty, race, ethnicity, and intersectionality may face additional barriers to entrepreneurship, such as lack of access to capital, opportunities, and networks (Bhatt et al., 2019; Qureshi et al., 2023). Addressing these barriers and promoting inclusive entrepreneurship is crucial to ensure that the benefits of entrepreneurship accrue to women, their families, and marginalized communities. However, the participation of the most marginalized women in entrepreneurship remains a policy and ethical challenge that must be addressed to ensure that marginalized women benefit from entrepreneurship. We provide a more detailed account below.

2 Women Entrepreneurship in Marginalized Contexts

Women's empowerment is critical for economic development (Hechavarria et al., 2019; Kelley et al., 2017) and societal progress (Langowitz & Minniti, 2007), and research suggests that engaging women in entrepreneurial activities has the potential to generate financial and social value for the individuals and communities (Jamali, 2009; Niethammer, 2013). Indeed, because women face various forms of

¹There are mixed findings about family well-being, as entrepreneurial initiatives by women in developing countries have been found to lead to tension within the family, and at times increase in domestic violence (Ahmed, 2005; Rahman, 1999).

social discrimination (Minniti & Naude, 2010; Qureshi et al., 2023, [this volume](#)) and have less control over resources (Bhatt et al., 2022, [this volume-a](#); 2023; Qureshi et al., 2018b; Sutter et al., 2023), they are considered as one of “the poorer” sections of the society (Minniti & Naude, 2010, p. 278). Hence, developing their capabilities and skills through entrepreneurship can bring substantial personal as well as broader social and economic gains (Haugh & Talwar, 2016).

The importance of gender equality in creating equitable and sustainable societies is also recognized in the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015–2030), which aim to eradicate poverty, social exclusion, and environmental challenges. Engaging women in entrepreneurial activities has the potential to address the UN SDGs on gender equality and women empowerment (SDG 5).

The extant literature on entrepreneurship connects entrepreneurial activities with women’s empowerment and emancipation (Calás et al., 2009; Rindova et al., 2009). Relatedly, in developing countries, women entrepreneurs are seen as the “vanguard of social transformation” (Prahalad, 2005,² p. 134; Rosca et al., 2020). Following the UN’s agenda to reach gender equality by 2030, there has been a particular emphasis on the numerous advantages and ripple effects of supporting women’s empowerment (United Nations, 2016; see Maurer & Qureshi, 2021; Yang et al., 2020). The vast literature on gender and entrepreneurship also advocates for promoting women’s entrepreneurship through capability-building programs (Bhatt et al., 2013, 2022; Bryan & Mendaglio, 2020; Costin et al., 2021; Mamo et al., 2023; Rodríguez et al., 2014; Sutter et al., 2023). Crucially, some of the arguments to promote women’s entrepreneurship are rooted in the essentialist characteristics of women and the resulting belief that investing in women’s well-being will improve societal well-being (Hendriks, 2019). For example, it is generally believed that women are altruistic by nature, and therefore, an empowered woman can use her capabilities for the betterment of society (Mestre et al., 2009; Rosca et al., 2020). Similarly, a stream of business ethics research characterizes women as more keen and capable of caring and offering social help to others (Gilligan, 1982; Maurer & Qureshi, 2021; Simola, 2005; Wethington et al., 1987). Furthermore, women are seen as less individualistic and more collectivistic than men (Cross & Madson, 1997; Hofstede, 2011; Lalwani & Shavitt, 2012) and often describe themselves in terms of their connectivity to others (Maurer & Qureshi, 2021). As collectivism assumes that people belong to a closely knit group that provides security and protection, it prioritizes group loyalty over personal individualistic achievement (Gelfand

²We acknowledge the critique of Prahalad’s notion of bottom of the pyramid (Karnani, 2007; Qureshi et al., 2021d, endnote 1), and it is not our intention to see marginalized context as potential opportunity to make profit. We believe that marginalized communities, if provided opportunities to develop capabilities through using their indigenous knowledge and locale resources, can generate their own livelihoods and truly represent the foundation (base) of humanity. The focus of the base-of-the-pyramid initiatives should be to empowering these marginalized communities (Bhatt et al., 2021; Escobedo et al., 2021; Hota et al., 2019, 2021; Parth et al., 2021; Pandey et al., 2021; Parthiban et al., 2020a, b, 2021; Pillai et al., 2021a, b; Qiu et al., 2021; Qureshi et al., 2016, 2017, 2018b, 2021b, c; Riaz & Qureshi, 2017; Zainuddin et al., 2022).

et al., 2004; Lalwani & Shavitt, 2012) and provides a rationale for facilitating women entrepreneurship.

In this chapter, we extend the existing work on women entrepreneurship by bringing insights from Gandhian philosophy. A Gandhian perspective on women entrepreneurship rejects the “masculine, industrial, and paternalistic” (George et al., 2023, p. 1) assumptions of dominant entrepreneurship theories and provides the foundation for nonviolent, caring, and compassionate entrepreneurship (Bhatt & Qureshi, [this volume](#); Bhatt et al., 2023, [this volume-a](#), [b](#); Mahajan & Qureshi, [this volume](#); Mehta & Jacob, [this volume](#)). We apply the Gandhian perspective to a social organization in India’s Self-Employed Women’s Association in India (SEWA), set up by Ela Bhatt in 1972. Intending to empower poor and marginalized women workers in the informal sector and develop self-reliance, SEWA has created almost 50 institutions for and with people experiencing poverty. Inspired by Gandhian principles, SEWA’s core actions focus on the implementation of Gandhian principles. Specifically, its activities aim to organize self-employed women and enhance their collective power, cooperation, and leadership capabilities at the grass-roots level through the establishment of associations and networks (cf. Bhatt & Qureshi, [this volume](#); Iyengar & Bhatt, [this volume](#); Javeri et al., [this volume](#); Kumar et al., [this volume](#); Qureshi et al., [this volume](#)). This strategy aims to facilitate their access to social security and advocate for improved standards of living and social protection for laborers (Chatterjee et al., 2021).

SEWA concentrates on developing capacity through education and professional training. Since its foundation, SEWA has continued to adhere to Gandhian values of *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (nonviolence) in creating self-reliant, equitable communities (cf. Bhatt et al., [this volume-a](#), [b](#)). In this chapter, we first discuss the key principles from Gandhian economics and their relevance for entrepreneurship. We then provide an overview of SEWA and demonstrate how it enacts Gandhian principles in its mission, organizational structure, and practices. Further, we critically evaluate the impact of these practices and processes on women’s empowerment. Our study also explores the challenges faced by SEWA during the COVID pandemic (2020–2021) and the measures taken by the organization to overcome those challenges. In the final section, we discuss the key insights from SEWA for entrepreneurship and women empowerment and show how these insights can be applied to different contexts.

3 Gandhian Economy

3.1 *The Principles of Gandhian Economics*

Gandhian economics is not recognized as a separate economic system within mainstream economic theories. However, as a philosopher and freedom fighter, Gandhi emphasized the importance of *Satya* (truth), *Ahimsa* (nonviolence), and *Aparigraha*

(nonpossession) (Kumarappa, 1951), with the latter being the key to achieving non-violence (Iyengar & Bhatt, [this volume](#); Kumar et al., [this volume](#)). Other Gandhian principles that promote *Satya* and *Ahimsa* include *Sarvadharmā* (integrating all faiths) and *Swadeshi* (propagating local employment and self-reliance) (Kumarappa, 1951). To assess whether an organization is truly Gandhian, it must be tested on these touchstones. Kumarappa, a close associate of Gandhi, was a pioneering economist who focused on rural and developmental economics. He explained Gandhian economic thought through five distinct groups, using the animal kingdom as an example of how natural resources are utilized.

The first group is the predatory group, which includes imperialist economies that take from nature without giving anything back. The parasitic group consists of capitalist economies that extract resources without preserving them. The enterprising group includes entrepreneurs who create personal wealth through the development of new products and solutions. The gregarious group includes communal economies that produce more than they consume and share assets and produce among members. Finally, the service group includes economies where members work for others without expecting anything in return, driven by core values such as *Satya*, *Ahimsa*, and *Aparigraha*. While the service group shares some similarities with communism, the concept of nonpossession distinguishes it from collective possession and shared benefits (Iyengar & Bhatt, [this volume](#); Kumar et al., [this volume](#); Kumarappa, 1951). Overall, the service group aligns with Gandhian principles, and we explore how SEWA, an organization promoting women's economic empowerment in India, embodies these principles.

3.2 The Critique and Relevance of Gandhian Economics

Critics of Gandhian economic principles argue that they lack empirical support and share many similarities with socialist and communist economic thoughts. They assert that the focus on nonmaterial factors in individual utility functions, such as loving and caring relationships, is difficult to establish empirically and limits the creation of further propositions (Diwan, 1982; Ghosh, 2012; Koshal & Koshal, 1973; Javeri et al., [this volume](#)). This criticism highlights the challenge of applying Gandhian principles in a modern economic context and the need for further research to support or refute their effectiveness.

The Gandhian economic principles assume an idealized society. Applying the principles of equilibrium neo-classical economics, the existence and sustenance of such an idealized society depend on the condition where all agents in economic transactions follow the Gandhian economy of love and care (Iyengar & Bhatt, [this volume](#); Mehta & Jacob, [this volume](#)). When this condition is met, all agents of economic transactions also receive value for their efforts, creating a win-win situation (Mehta & Jacob, [this volume](#); Mishra & Shukla, [this volume](#); Solanki, [this volume](#)). Such an economy cannot be governed by any government but depends on collective participation within a community led by a trustee. Examples of the

application of Gandhian economic thought include the trustee-led cooperative movement and “Pay as you like” or “Pay for the next customer” type pricing mechanisms, both of which have seen mixed levels of success. While such economic entities have received mixed success in India, a wider range of applications of the Gandhian economy remains to be explored (Madan, 2007).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a reevaluation of the classical economic system, with a growing interest in community-based economic models that prioritize altruism, trust, and self-reliance (English, 2021; cf. Simon, 1992). This has sparked a renewed interest in Gandhian economics and its potential applications in current economic systems. The emergence of community-owned initiatives and trust-based local economies (Bhatt, 2022; Pandey et al., 2021; Pillai et al., 2021a, b; Riaz & Qureshi, 2017; Qiu et al., 2021) has provided evidence of the feasibility and success of alternative economic models (Bhatt et al., 2021; Dey & Sikder, 2022; Escobedo et al., 2021; Hota et al., 2021), paving the way for the exploration of Gandhian economic principles in contemporary society. In the following sections, SEWA will be analyzed as an example of an organization that has successfully implemented Gandhian economic principles in the modern world.

4 Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA)³

SEWA is a membership model with women members coming from different trades. It follows four levels of governance. To expand the reach of SEWA and fulfill its dream to empower self-employed women all over the county, SEWA Bharat works toward integrating more and more women as its members all over the country. The role of SEWA Bharat is to strengthen smaller SEWAs, develop new SEWAs, facilitate linkage between SEWAs and NGOs, and build a national identity for SEWA.

4.1 SEWA Membership

SEWA charges a minimal annual membership fee for women workers. The members of SEWA are self-employed women from the four types of informal sectors comprising 106 trades (Self Employed Women’s Association, 2022b).

- Vendors and hawkers: These women sell products like vegetables, fruits, meats, fish, and other food items in unauthorized places like housing colonies, footpaths, or through the neighborhood.

³Most of the information about Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) has been sourced from their website <https://www.sewa.org/>. Unless specifically attributed to another source, it should be assumed that information is from this website.

- Home-based workers: Women who work from home produce products to sell in the market. These workers include artisans, weavers, and women who process products.
- Labor and service providers: These women work in construction sites, agriculture fields, and small factories. They also work as house help or waste collectors.
- Producers: They run small businesses like cattle rearers, salt farmers, and marginal farmers, among others.

4.2 SEWA Governance

As noted earlier, SEWA's constitutional structure comprises four levels (Self Employed Women's Association, 2022a). At the first level are the members from different trades. The second level of the constitutional structure is the Trade Committee for each trade. The trade committee is at two levels: district-wise trade committee and city-wise trade committee. These trade committees for a particular trade comprise leaders formed for each trade, and its members are the district-wise leaders and city-wise trade leaders of a particular trade, which are selected by the members. The meetings are held once a month to discuss trade-related issues and strategies. At the next level comes the Trade Council comprising elected representatives from the trade groups. For every 1500 members of a trade, one representative is elected based on voting. The final level of the constitutional structure is the Executive Committee, which comprises 25 elected members. The elected members are one president, three vice presidents, one general secretary, two secretaries, one treasurer, and the president from trade groups having the highest membership. The meeting is held every month to strategize policy-level issues.

5 Strategies Adopted by SEWA for Women Empowerment

Driven by Gandhian philosophy, the implementation strategies of SEWA are context-specific and start by recognizing the social and cultural barriers to inclusion. Intermediaries need to understand the communities and social contexts (Bhatt et al., 2022; Qureshi et al., 2021a, b, c, d), their resource constraints (Hota et al., 2019; Sutter et al., 2023; Qureshi et al., 2022a, b), and the ethical issues involved (Bhatt, 2022; Hota et al., 2023). Intermediaries have been able to successfully overcome negative social constraints through "recipient transformation" (Qureshi et al., 2018b), scaffolding, and technoficing (Qureshi et al., 2022a, b). SEWA tried to bring those changes by following a particular organizational structure. In the next sections, we first discuss the structure of SEWA, followed by its roles in various aspects of society.

SEWA contributes to women's empowerment by providing necessary tools for employment (Spodek, 1994). It develops the awareness and business capacity of the

members. SEWA also provides business development support. In addition to employment, SEWA also aims to improve the lifestyle of the members. It carries out these objectives through various cooperatives like the Indian Academy of Self-Employed Women (IASEW), SEWA Cooperative Federation, Mahila Housing Trust, etc. Various measures toward different dimensions of women's empowerment are discussed in the following section.

5.1 Awareness Development

SEWA creates awareness through three mediums: "Anasooya," "Radio SEWA," and "RUDI no Radio." Anasooya is a bimonthly magazine that promotes the work of SEWA members with other self-employed and informal workers over the country by sharing their work, experience, and viewpoints. These mediums help others to learn about SEWA and to create a support network for self-employed women. Awareness among its members regarding the activities of SEWA is spread through video recordings produced by VideoSEWA, which was established in 1984. It is also a means to train its members regarding various activities and programs. In 2002, it registered the cooperative Shri Gujarat Mahila Video Sewa Mahiti Communication Sahakari Mandali Limited with the mission to produce educational videos and guide the members in their business.

Radio SEWA is an educational medium to reach the remotest villages where they can discuss their problems and leanings. It is also used to educate the members about government policies and schemes that might help them in their business and livelihood. RUDI no Radio is a community radio program started in 2005. The program is broadcasted every Saturday from 8 to 8.15 p.m. on the Ahmedabad-Vadodara area on All India Radio. It was originally a 15-min show where Rudiben conducted informal talks with the members of SEWA on the challenges that they face as women and as laborers. These informal talks help to take the story of the women worker to the masses and make people realize the difficulties faced by women workers in day-to-day life. Over time, the episodes started to deal with various topics like nutrition, insurance, health, education, environment, communal harmony, agriculture, traditional art and crafts, seasons, festivals, and more. The estimated number of listeners of the show is 500,000 weekly.

5.2 Capacity Building

SEWA believes every woman has the ability and potential to succeed as an entrepreneur (Bhatt, 2008; Blaxall, 2004). It focuses on developing its members' skills so that they can perform the activities required in establishing and running their businesses (Paromita et al., 2020). SEWA accomplishes this through different cooperatives and sister companies. These cooperatives develop the capability of their

members by focusing on management techniques, production optimization, new technologies, and digital inclusion, among others (Herbel, 2010). All the members of SEWA can take these capacity-building sessions. The events are organized by the cooperatives, and the members are informed of the sessions through the trade committee or trade council. Based on the above discussion, we can clearly see Gandhian principles at work. For instance, the cooperatives are based on the idea of trusteeship (Iyengar & Bhatt, [this volume](#)), and the education and training of the cooperatives' members are motivated by the ideas of *Nai Talim* or Basic education (Holzwarth, 2016; Patil & Sinha, [this volume](#)). Similarly, the focus on inclusion (e.g., digital inclusion) and providing learning and development opportunities to all members of the cooperatives are based on the Gandhian idea of equality (Diwan & Gidwani, 1979). The different cooperatives working in the capacity building of members are discussed below.

5.2.1 Leadership Capabilities

SEWA develops the leadership capabilities of its members through Member Education, which is followed by the SEWA Movement Training. After this, a higher form of leadership training is provided by initiatives like Kadam Training & Training of Trainers.

Member Education is the backbone of leadership development and helps women recognize their potential and impact on the country's economic development. They are identified as women workers and are presented as an integral component in the country's socioeconomic development. It is the first step of developing leadership capabilities as the members gain confidence in themselves. SEWA Movement Training is a two-day program organized by in-house trainers to incorporate leadership qualities among the members so that they can become leaders and better run their businesses. This training also helps the members to understand the principles and philosophy of the SEWA movement and the organization and make them capable of leading SEWA in the future.

Kadam Training is an advanced leadership four-day program where capacity building is provided to the best performers of SEWA Movement Training. The members are provided with exhaustive knowledge of SEWA's different activities. After Kadam Training, the leaders are provided with a "training of trainers" course so that they can become trainers and continue to enhance the leadership qualities of fellow members.

5.2.2 Professional Programs

The members are provided cooperative training, communication training, and managerial skills development training to facilitate them in their business. Cooperative training is provided to impart marketing and technical skills to rural members to enable them to perform their entrepreneurial activities smoothly. Communication

training helps the members develop communication skills vital in every phase of life. Communication skills go a long way in efficiently running the business. Additionally, it enables the members to properly communicate their needs, concerns, experiences, and stories with the people so that people are aware of their struggles and they develop a sense of working together with people for mutual growth. Various writing, photography, and video training workshops are organized so that the members can adequately perform their business's documentation activities.

“SEWA Manager Ni School” (SMS) is a learning center to impart managerial skills required to run a business among women members. Through SMS training, members learn about the basic requirement of concepts of business relating to finance, operations, and marketing. SMS has helped members grow their businesses by improving their knowledge of planning and performance evaluation methodologies and increasing their budgeting capabilities. The members have shown an increase in confidence as they have more control over their business and have good knowledge of their rights, particularly ownership concerns. SEWA established the Community Learning and Business Resource Center (CLBRC) at the village level, where the training is provided. In collaboration with various government bodies, academic institutes, and corporate and technical firms, SMS has also developed an online learning portal to teach several managerial skills to the members. The members are given online training on mobile literacy, digital banking, virtual meeting platforms, entrepreneurship, community building, etc.

5.3 Business Development Support

5.3.1 Facilitating New Business Frontiers

SEWA Trade Facilitation Centre (STFC) forms the mediator between the artisans and the global market. These informal workers are their companies' producers, owners, shareholders, and managers. Their goal is to improve the socioeconomic status of the rural craftswoman by ensuring security and a fair share of their work. They provide the artisans with production optimization, marketing strategies, and integrated supply chain to improve their business output (Sinha, 2013). It deals in products from apparel, accessories, and home furnishing categories. In addition to white label and wholesale, STFC has developed a national fashion brand Hansiba.

With the decline of the waste recycling industry, the women's waste picker cooperative faced an imminent shutdown. It was then that Gitanjali was born, and the cooperative started to manufacture stationery products from recycled waste and generated an income for its members (Buvinic et al., 2017). Thus, a new life was breathed into the dying cooperative. Slowly, the members are transitioning from informal to formal and are gaining a dignified status in society.

SEWA Ecotourism, a cooperative that deals with ecotourism, was established in Ganeshpura. The women of Ganeshpura village formed the members of this

cooperative. The ecotourism park was developed on a 10-acre plot from the village panchayat. The land was useless and filled with dangerous snakes and reptiles. The members of the cooperative cleaned the land. They formed an ecotourism farm comprising a serene desert atmosphere experience, camel ride, rare bird watching, children's park, musical performances, and traditional games through which the village women could generate a livelihood. The farm also offers several products, including unique ethnic spices, organic vegetables, and organic food and beverages.

5.3.2 Financial Support

The members of SEWA could not access the formal financial assistance required to buy raw materials and build assets and cash flow for smooth day-to-day operations provided by banks and other formal financial institutions (FIs) as they would not lend them money due to a lack of credibility (Berg, 2010). To overcome these constraints, SEWA members are forced to rely on informal sources of financial provision to satisfy their needs, such as village moneylenders, other value chain actors (e.g., input suppliers), family, and friends. These informal services usually exploit the members through high-interest rates and less flexible terms (e.g., rigid repayment periods and interest rates). Thus, to provide access to the formal financial institution to its members, SEWA Bank, a micro-finance institution, was incorporated in 1974. In addition to loans from businesses, the SEWA bank also provides savings, recurring and fixed deposits, and pension facilities.

5.3.3 Marketing Support

SEWA Gram Mahila Haat (SGMH) is a charitable marketing organization registered in 1999. It works toward providing services to rural and informal workers to improve their business sales. SEWA members can avail of these facilities to promote and improve the reachability of their products, leading to exploring new selling opportunities and making more profit. The initiatives of SGMH have a clear focus toward the growth of these rural businesses by helping in their expansion, which can be seen as the application of Gandhi's *Swadeshi* and the empowerment of these individual rural units resonates with Gandhi's *Sarvodaya* where people's empowerment is given priority (Ashok, 2022; Diwan & Gidwani, 1979).

5.3.4 Operations Support

SEWA provides operations support through access to low-cost raw materials. It opened a thread distribution center to provide threads at reasonable rates for the workers, which forced the nearby shopkeepers to decrease the price of threads and gave an alternative option of buying thread at a reasonable cost. SEWA also provides IT solutions to its members at an affordable price so that the members can take

benefit of digital technologies to strengthen their business through its NirmanSEWA initiative. The members can use their services to include modern technological solutions in their business or develop an online experience through websites and marketing. It also established Rural Distribution (RUDI) in 2004 by the farmers and for farmers to develop a rural distribution network for small and marginal farmers. Its objective is to provide food security to farmers and form an integrated food value chain that will reduce the hardships of the farmers in producing high-quality agricultural products (Cheng et al., 2012). It has 2,00,000 farmers as stakeholders, 11 processing centers, 3500 RUDIbens, and 1500 employees. “*Behen*” or “*ben*” is a term used in India that means “sister.” The women workers are termed RUDIbens to show respect toward them and identify them as sisters.

SEWA aims to develop its members’ living conditions by providing women’s basic requirements like healthcare, child care, insurance, and housing (Blaxall, 2004). The various measures taken by SEWA in this direction are discussed below.

5.3.5 Healthcare Facilities

Informal workers generally do not have access to good medical facilities due to a lack of availability and affordability (Blaxall, 2004; Sinha, 2008). To solve this problem for the members, Shri Gujarat Mahila Lok Swasthya Sewa Sahakari Mandali Ltd. health cooperative was established in 1990. It aims to provide life-saving health services and medicines to the poor at an affordable price. It also aims to provide basic education and awareness regarding health issues and hygiene. The cooperative has partnered with many governments and private health providers to attain its goal.

5.3.6 Child Development

SEWA’s cooperative Sangini registered in 1984 established childcare centers so that children of age 0–6 years can be taken care of while their mothers go off to work. The responsibility of these centers is to look into the nutrition, health, education, and capacity building of children. This facility helps the members concentrate on their work while ensuring their child is safe, which has led to double the income of the women workers. In 2022, Sangini operates, 11 childcare centers that cater to 350 children, with each center having a maximum of 35 children (SEWA Sangini Cooperative: Providing Child Care for Women Informal Workers During the COVID-19 Pandemic in India, 2022). Akashganga is a magazine club founded in 1966 where the daughters of members participate as writers, artists, and editors of the monthly magazine, thus enabling their creative growth. They contribute through quizzes, puzzles, and articles from different fields.

5.3.7 Insurance Facility

National Insurance VimoSEWA Cooperative Ltd. was incorporated in 2009 and provides insurance facilities to informal workers. The aim of VimoSEWA is to provide financial protection to its members and their families in case of wage loss, hospitalization expenses, and death (Sinha, 2006). Appropriate products pertaining to workers are designed that are aimed at developing financial sustainability, solidarity, and self-help for them. The policies include Saral Suraksha Yojna, Life Coverage Scheme, Swastha Pariwar, and Saving Link Scheme, among others.

5.3.8 Housing Facility

With the vision of providing houses for informal workers, SEWA Grih Rin Limited (Sitara) was incorporated in 2011 to provide affordable housing loans. The loan amount varies from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1,200,000 (US\$ 603 to US\$ 1447) and is distributed for a tenure of 20 years.

Mahila Housing SEWA Trust deals with improving the habitat of the informal women workers and has taken initiatives to improve the environment of the places where they live. It has taken measures like developing the slum through Slum Networking Program (SNP), providing electricity through Ujjala Yojna, and promoting the use of renewable energy through the Hariyali Project.

The objective of SNP is to improve the living condition of women by upgrading the slums. It is operational in Ahmedabad and is a partnership involving slum communities and their community-based organizations (CBOs), the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and participating private sector organizations (Sinha, 2013). It provides means for developing drainage, waste management and sewage, road construction, and lighting and water connection in the area.

Ujala Yojna program, with the help of the electricity provider board in Ahmedabad (Ahmedabad Electricity Board), has provided legal electricity to more than one lakh houses from the slums of Ahmedabad (Sinha, 2013). The project also educated the poor on the use of energy-efficient appliances so that electricity consumption is low.

The Haryali project is an effort to provide easy financing to the members for buying fuel-efficient cooking appliances (Mittal & Bhattacharjee, 2017). This aims to decrease the time taken and the cost of cooking. It also aims to promote solar lanterns and decrease the dependency on electricity and kerosene. The project aims to reduce wood burning and the use of fossil fuels and contribute to the larger goal of green livelihood for its members.

5.3.9 Cultural Programs

With the aim of developing extracurricular activities and promoting peace and solidarity, various cultural programs are organized. The different event emphasizes the diversity of our country and its rich culture, which includes dance and music from different regions of the country and plays portraying our nation's history.

6 SEWA in Tackling COVID Impact on Its Members

COVID-19 had a disastrous effect on economic and social development (Bhatt et al., [this volume-a](#); Moolakkattu, [this volume](#)). Undoubtedly, the most affected group was the informal women workers, who lost their work. Past literature has suggested that development based on Gandhian principles can build resilient communities and provide an effective solution to mitigate the negative effects of external crises (such as a pandemic) (Bhatt et al., [this volume-b](#); Ghosh, 2007; Mishra & Shukla, [this volume](#); Murphy, 1991). Initiatives of SEWA in reducing the COVID-19 impact were primarily driven by Gandhian principles. SEWA was mainly driven by the principle of Sarvodaya (Bhatt et al., [this volume-a](#); Javeri et al., [this volume](#)) when it was involved in spreading awareness regarding the pandemic, providing education-based training to its workers to deal with the economic crisis, and developing various facilities for providing services to all (Ashok, 2022; Joshee, 2012). Furthermore, while providing help to address the health and economic crisis, SEWA followed the Gandhian practice of "community of care" (Mehta & Jacob, [this volume](#)) and equality (Javeri et al., [this volume](#)) and rejected discrimination in all forms.

6.1 Responses to the Health Crisis

SEWA dealt with the health crisis by organizing vaccination drives, providing medicine and counseling, and providing protective supplies (Chatterjee, 2021; WIEGO, 2022). The informal women workers were unaware of the health hazards that covid could cause. SEWA sensitized the members about covid through voice and WhatsApp messages. Several digital campaigns were also run to inform the members of covid effects. It used its healthcare providers to educate the members and teach them how to be safe by wearing masks, social distancing, and using hand sanitizers. When the government was arranging vaccination drives to curb the spread of the virus, the workers were hesitant to take the vaccine. SEWA organized campaigns in the rural and remote areas of the country to spread the message about safety and the need for vaccination. Vaccination drives were conducted in these places by SEWA. SEWA members were also engaged in producing protective masks, which led to providing employment, and they also distributed masks free of cost among other SEWA members. SEWA also took initiatives in the production of

hand sanitizers. SEWA Social Security took permission from the government to produce low-cost hand sanitizers at its ayurvedic medicine production unit.

SEWA health wing offered to convert 11 of its centers into isolation centers. They also developed their centers into specialized covid facilities to account for the shortage of beds for covid patients. The frontline healthcare workers of SEWA worked day and night to handle the patients of COVID. Its social security health unit ran two low-cost medicine shops in Ahmedabad, which were open 24/7. SEWA arranged telemedicine services for its members to help them identify the covid symptoms and provide them with medical help at the right time. To help the children of the members to be occupied and cope with the lack of going outside, SEWA, in association with PRATHAM, an education NGO, made available educational and play videos with the children of their members.

6.2 Responses to the Economic Crisis

SEWA took various measures to help its members and the informal women workers to help improve their economic condition (Chatterjee, 2022; WIEGO, 2020). SEWA helped its members to enroll in government initiatives emergency cash and free ration. They spread awareness among the informal workers regarding the government initiatives and how to avail of those. In many states across India, SEWA distributed food packets and set up community kitchens to provide cooked food to needy families. For instance, SEWA Gujarat helped rural SEWA members set up food camps along the highways near their villages to feed migrant workers walking back to their home villages, and SEWA Social Security has mobilized and supported its childcare cooperative members to cook and provide nutritious meals to the children and their families. They distributed cooked foods among the informal workers to the needy through government support and local gurudwaras. SEWA has also facilitated market linkages for its members during the lockdown. SEWA Cooperative Federation maintained the supply of vegetables from producers to buyers in Ahmedabad. It also helped the domestic house-help members to continue their salary from the employers. It started the Vegetables on Wheel scheme, thus maintaining the supply of vegetables and milk to its members. It bought agricultural products from its small and marginal farmers. Wheat was supplied to the government grain market by the farmers.

6.3 Long-Term Strategy to Counter COVID-19 Impact

The members of SEWA have been affected immensely by COVID-19 and are still recovering from its impact. In order to safeguard the members from such disasters in the future, SEWA is implementing various strategies for the digitalization of business, restoring livelihood, and strengthening the supply chain. These strategies of

SEWA are aligned with the Gandhian principle of constructive work that believes in a proactive, long-term commitment to community development (Bhatt & Qureshi, [this volume](#)).

6.3.1 Digitalization

SEWA plans to develop the digital literacy of its members in the business, both in operations and payments. To broaden the reach of the micro-entrepreneur members using digital technologies, SEWA is launching its own Digital Social Enterprise—the SEWA Bazaar. Customers can buy the products from all over the country. Other modern technologies in areas like bar coding, packaging, quality control, photo-shooting, cataloging, inventory management, warehousing, etc. are being done. The members are being educated on the use of digital payment systems like digital wallets and the Unified Payment Interface (UPI) for transactions.

6.3.2 Restore Livelihood

SEWA is rebuilding the disrupted livelihood of the members by providing alternate employment and skills. Members are also being trained to use online platforms for business. It is building a platform from where the members can directly reach out to SEWA in times of challenge and disasters. It is adopting an innovative financing mechanism that aims to restore livelihood by devising (i) Livelihood Recovery Fund, (ii) Insurance products, (iii) Micro-business (rural enterprise)-based Livelihood protection plan (insurance), and (iv) a moratorium of one month on debt recovery and a waiver of interest on loans in distress hotspots and during pandemics/calamities until capability is restored.

6.3.3 Strengthen Supply Chain

Due to COVID, the supply chain was disrupted entirely. To prepare for such conditions in the future, SEWA plans to strengthen its supply chain through innovative interventions like managing storage space, creating a local circular economy, and developing a direct supply chain between women farmers and consumers. Many other organizations have also taken similar steps to build inclusive, resilient communities (Mishra & Shukla, [this volume](#); Javeri et al., [this volume](#); Solanki, [this volume](#)). It is currently working on the management of storage at the farm gate level that could make up for the lack of storage facilities and give the women workers control of when to sell their products. This will ensure that the supply chain is effective and efficient and can withstand any disruption in the future. It also plans to create a local circular economy for agricultural products that are packed and sold back to the rural communities, thus ensuring food security (Mishra & Shukla, [this volume](#)). It also plans to develop a direct supply chain between the women farmers

and urban customers, creating a win-win situation for both parties, where farmers get a fair price and customers get fresh products.

7 Learning from SEWA

Various centers of the SEWA faced different challenges across India. Instead of discussing each center's challenges in detail, we provide snippets of challenges faced by some cooperatives and lessons learned. To provide a comprehensive understanding, we selected cooperatives working in different domains and included both rural and urban groups. Using available secondary data, we further identified common strategies/initiatives adopted across different cooperatives in SEWA to overcome the challenges they faced. These commonalities could provide key insights to other organizations dealing with external crises. We highlight the importance of sharing information about challenges faced by different cooperatives and how they overcame them. By identifying common strategies, other organizations can learn from SEWA's experiences and apply them to their own situations. Table 1 contains information regarding the centers.

It can be observed from this table that there are some common patterns in the challenges faced by the cooperatives. They can be grouped under the following:

- (i) Government policy or initiative not having desired effects: It was observed that government policies or initiatives can sometimes backfire and lead to unintended consequences. The challenges faced by SEWA's cooperatives can be linked to such government policies. Policymakers should carefully plan and implement their policies to avoid such unintended consequences. SEWA being rooted in the local context had a much better understanding of the ground situation.
- (ii) Lack of financial literacy: We identify financial literacy as another significant challenge faced by people where SEWA's cooperatives were engaged in various projects. To overcome this challenge, we suggest that financial education should be promoted among marginalized and vulnerable populations.
- (iii) Misuse of benefits-uncritical loan usage: We also note that government benefits, such as loans, can sometimes be misused or abused, leading to unintended consequences. To avoid this, we suggest that guidelines should be provided on how these benefits should be used to prevent misuse, such as taking on high-interest loans unnecessarily. Instead, awareness should be created to leverage local resources so that their needs are fulfilled within their means.
- (iv) Fierce competition: We identify fierce competition as a significant challenge faced by SEWA's cooperatives. To overcome this challenge, we suggest that policymakers and cooperatives should identify what are the basic needs of the marginalized communities and work around the local skills and resources with the objective of Antyodaya.

Table 1 Challenge faced and lessons learned by cooperatives

Center name	Challenges faced	Lessons learned
Pasunj Mahila Dudh Utpadak Sahakari Mandli, Ahmedabad	Excessive competition Younger people often do not want to work as dairy farmers and with the upgradation of Technology, women employees have been replaced by men	Livelihood security Leadership strengthening and capacity building Changing patriarchal norms Support women employees Patience
Sangini Mahila Childcare, Ahmedabad	Maintain quality services Space Scarcity High cost of running the childcare centers, which is almost unaffordable for the parents	Select teachers who lived in the same or similar communities as the children Increase in mothers' remuneration Childcare center in a mixed community promotes social integration by bringing together children and parents from different communities
Shree Saundarya Safai Utkarsh, Ahmedabad	Cooperative has limited funds Temporary worker and quality compromise Demonetization created a temporary difficulty for the cooperative and its members	Professionalization of work The solid foundation of values to face the challenges
Swashrayee Mahila Sakh Sahakari, Indore	The challenge to promote the savings habit Considering loans as an easy way to meet the financial needs The rigidity of some officials	Financial Literacy Training program for officials
Shree Gujarat Mahila Lok Swasthya, Gujarat	Convince informal economy workers that they could be competent health workers for their communities Government program, which has started providing generic medicines at low cost	Capacity-building Solidarity building

- (v) Behavioral aspects: The author notes that behavioral aspects, such as biases, emotions, and social norms, can influence an individual's decision-making process. Understanding these behavioral aspects can help policymakers and cooperatives design interventions that encourage positive behavior and discourage negative behavior among the communities served by SEWA's cooperatives.

Thus, SEWA has been successful in implementing various initiatives to address the challenges faced by its members. The initiatives include financial literacy programs, providing access to credit, skill development programs, and creating market linkages. These efforts have enabled SEWA's members, who are primarily women and marginalized communities, to improve their livelihoods and gain financial independence. The lessons learned from SEWA's initiatives can be highly beneficial to

entrepreneurs who are planning to establish or operate a venture that focuses on serving women or marginalized communities. By studying SEWA's experiences and strategies, entrepreneurs can gain valuable insights into how to effectively address the challenges faced by these groups. They can also learn about the most effective methods to promote financial literacy, provide access to credit, and develop relevant skills. Entrepreneurs can also benefit from SEWA's experience in creating market linkages. By leveraging SEWA's approach, entrepreneurs can build networks and partnerships that can help them expand their membership and various opportunities they can create for their members. Furthermore, SEWA's approach can help entrepreneurs develop innovative social entrepreneurship models that take into account the specific needs and circumstances of women and marginalized communities.

SEWA's initiatives provide valuable learning opportunities for entrepreneurs who intend to establish or operate a venture that focuses on serving women or marginalized communities. By studying SEWA's experience and strategies, entrepreneurs can gain insights into how to effectively address the challenges faced by these groups and develop innovative business models that meet their specific needs.

8 Discussion

8.1 SEWA from Gandhian Economic Perspective

Drawing from Kumarappa's analogies that describe different economic systems (Kumarappa, 1951), it can be argued that SEWA has transformed into a nurturing mother's house for distressed daughters. This connection to SEWA as a maternal abode holds significant meaning. SEWA has consistently been portrayed as a shelter, a place of refuge for its members, as depicted in Fig. 1. The members of SEWA are akin to the leaves of a tree, symbolizing their independence and self-reliance. The twigs of the banyan tree, branching out to create independent roots, demonstrate how a community is formed by sharing resources. For instance, SEWA's adherence to the tenets of the Gandhian Economy implies that the organization trusts its members to achieve end goals without the need for micromanagement. Members are expected to achieve self-reliance and self-sufficiency and face difficulties with resilience. The principle of self-reliance is emphasized to help members overcome challenging situations. Kumarappa's analogies can be used to highlight SEWA's transformation into a nurturing maternal abode for its members. The portrayal of SEWA as a shelter and the members as independent leaves of a tree signifies their self-reliance. The approach of the organization towards its members is based on trust and the principle of self-reliance, which fosters a sense of independence and resourcefulness among its members (Javeri et al., [this volume](#); Kumar et al., [this volume](#); Mishra & Shukla, [this volume](#)). Moreover, the principles of the Gandhian Economy guide an organization and enable its members to embody the fundamental values of *Satya*, *Ahimsa*, and *Aparigraha* (Iyengar & Bhatt, [this](#)

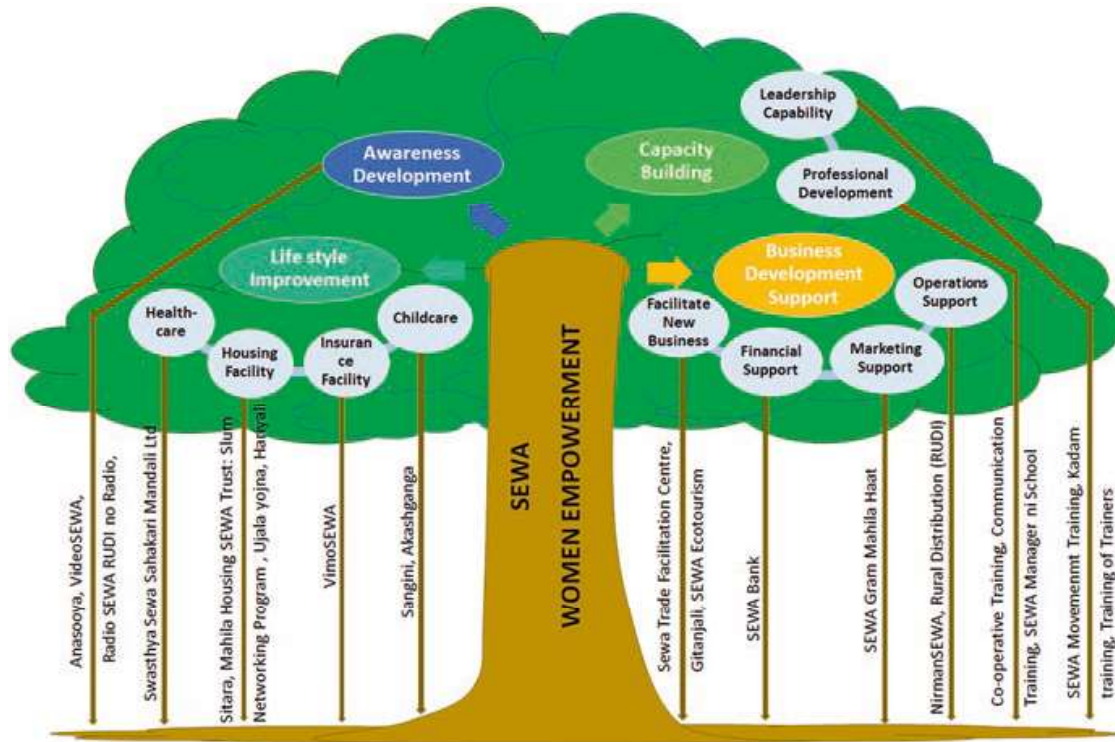


Fig. 1 Portrayal of SEWA

volume; Roy, [this volume](#)). SEWA's adherence to these principles underscores the organization's commitment to the core tenets of the Gandhian Economy. In this sense, SEWA's approach can be viewed as a true reflection of the essence of the Gandhian Economy.

SEWA follows the concept of emotive-cognitive frames for social entrepreneurs to mobilize collective action for social change (Bhatt, [2022](#)). A social entrepreneur has two equally important sub-tasks: first, the social entrepreneur needs to understand their issue in situ from the perspective of the focal individual and community, and second, the social entrepreneur needs to frame their social change mission in a manner that connects with the individual at both the cognitive and emotional levels (Bacq & Janssen, [2011](#); Hota et al., [2023](#)). SEWA did follow both of these tasks in it. Most social entrepreneurs focus on a material condition that leads to the distress of an individual and community and tries to change such material condition in resources constrained environment (Hota et al., [2019](#); Parthiban et al., [2020a, b, 2021](#)).

However, often, social problems are systemic and exacerbated by social, economic, and cultural practices. In such situations, cognitive and emotional framing can play an important role. Figure 1 provides a framework for social entrepreneurs to apply the Gandhian Economic principles in practice. This framework is built upon the key learning insights from SEWA and summarizes how different activities of SEWA are leading to Sarvodaya. The framework involves three stages: (i) identifying the source of challenges, (ii) showing the path to overcome challenges, and (iii) motivational support to continue the journey. The first stage shows the broader

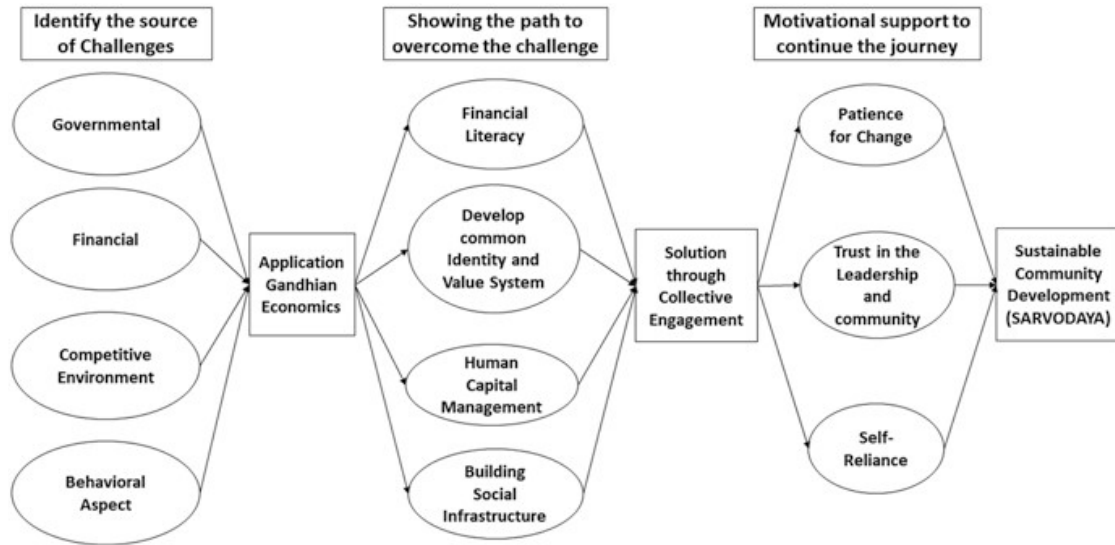


Fig. 2 The Gandhian framework for social entrepreneurs

challenges faced by SEWA workers. The second stage describes the pathways to overcome these challenges by adopting the Gandhian economy principle. Since the ultimate goal of the Gandhian economy is to achieve Sarvodaya, the last stage, highlights the role of motivational support in sustainable community development. Thus, the framework in Fig. 2 shows that trust in the leaders and founders and the entire community is integral to SEWA. A social organization with a focus on bringing change and empowerment of the community can adopt this SEWA model, which relies on Gandhian Economics.

8.2 Implications

Scholars and policymakers working in sustainability are emphasizing the importance of gender equality. For example, the UN Report 2021 highlights how achieving gender equality is important to address various other SDGs. Nevertheless, how entrepreneurial ecosystems can influence gender equality and how such women-entrepreneurship leads to community development remain under-researched, especially in the context of an emerging economy (Hechavarria et al., 2019). Furthermore, the theoretical foundations to study entrepreneurship remain rooted in Western philosophy and as such are limited in generating novel insights on the motivation, function, and impact of entrepreneurship in the emerging economy (George et al., 2023; Sutter et al., 2019). By exploring the work of SEWA through Gandhian economic principles, our study tried to bridge that gap. We demonstrate how Gandhian principles of nonviolence, nonpossession, and truth shape the value system of SEWA and enable it to achieve Sarvodaya (The upliftment of all) through Antyodaya (the upliftment of the most marginalized group in the society, i.e., women) (Bhatt et al., [this volume-a](#); Kumar et al., [this volume](#); Javeri et al., [this volume](#)). Through the

case study of SEWA, we highlight the need for building social infrastructure (i.e., child care) and nurturing communities of care (Mehta & Jacob, [this volume](#)) to address gender inequalities and build equitable, peaceful, and sustainable communities. We encourage more research to explore entrepreneurship and gender equality using indigenous theories (Sutter et al., [2019](#); George et al., [2023](#)) and mixed-method approaches (Qureshi et al., [2023](#)).

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Arpita Ghatak likes to introduce herself as a researcher, academician, and consultant. Arpita is a lecturer at the Royal Holloway University of London. She has 7 years of industry experience, which includes her entrepreneurial endeavor. Ms. Ghatak is working in the domain of social inclusion and entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial ecosystem, and user-generated content (UGC). She has published her research works in *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, *Entrepreneurship Research Journal*, and many international conferences.

Aftab Alam is currently a doctoral candidate at Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, India, working in the area of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and, more specifically, on developing a Framework for University Entrepreneurial Ecosystem. He has completed his B. Tech in Mechanical Engineering from Asansol Engineering College, West Bengal, and M. Tech from Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology. His research interests include entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial ecosystem, university entrepreneurial ecosystem, student entrepreneurship, gender and entrepreneurship, and small business research.

Israr Qureshi is a professor at the Research School of Management, Australian National University (ANU). He is the director of Australian Social Cohesion-Exploring New Directions (ASCEND) Grand Challenge Project. He is a member of ANU Institute for Climate, Energy & Disaster Solutions and an associate editor of *Business & Society*, *Information Systems Journal*, and *MIS Quarterly*. He was a member (Civil Society Group) and observer (Technical Working Group) on the recently concluded Australian Sustainable Finance Initiative. Israr is currently involved in multiple research projects that investigate various social value creation through alternative organizing. Israr's extensive research and pro bono advising of social enterprises and ventures in the base of the pyramid contexts helped him understand the potential of social intermediation, social entrepreneurship, and digital social innovation in transforming society.