

Empowerment to Reach Markets: Didi Bahini Sewa Samaj HomeNet, Nepal

***Impact:** Didi Bahini Sewa Samaj supports urban home-based workers through training, saving and credit services, and collective work opportunities that improve income. But equally important, the group creates a safe space for women to find mutual support and to build their confidence.*

Didi Bahini Sewa Samaj, a member organization of HomeNet Nepal (HNN), provides economic empowerment to women through skill development and opportunities to collaborate and reach markets. While established in 2000 as an NGO, the organization is membership-based and has some of the democratic characteristics of an MBO.

The women-only organization provides livelihood and educational services to its urban working poor members – all women. Training offered helps the women improve their stitching, hemming, and embroidery skills as well as their ability to market products while other educational programming focuses on institutional development and capacity development. Savings and credit schemes have also become part of the organization's mandate.

In recent years, Didi Bahini Sewa Samaj increased its focus on home-based workers (HBWs) after its leadership came to realize how much support urban HBWs need in order to survive and thrive. As a result, more urban HBWs have joined Didi Bahini Sewa Samaj, and now they make up more than half of the organization's 110 members. At its recent AGM, the organization decided to provide loans of Rs 50000 to member HBWs who want to start a business. Significantly, the loan program enables enterprise growth by requiring no collateral, and charging no interest on loans.

Didi Bahini Sewa Samaj is also helping support and improve livelihoods by facilitating collective production of cultural products and helping members gain access to markets. This began with six-seven members who made and sold their products only in limited places, but there has been a steady increase in involvement. Today, many HBWs participate in this collective production, and the women occupy a large space in the market.



photo: HomeNet Nepal

One of them is Ms Shobita K.C. For her, the chance to be a member of Didi Bahini Sewa Samaj has led to an improvement in her income, her work and her life. Previously she worked for a piece rate, sewing buttons on bags at home without a supportive network of other producers. Now, she is part of the collective production team and thanks to the skills training she has received – including in marketing strategies – she is capable of taking her goods to market herself. She can count on being paid every month on the basis of the days she has worked. The benefits of belonging are also social, she says. A supportive group allows her to share problems – including personal problems – and receive compassionate consideration and advice.

A significant highlight of her involvement has been the chance to go to India through HomeNet; there she saw many HBWs working collectively, learned new things and improved her position. While she feels she has gained a great deal of information that helps in her work, as well as the confidence and skill to be a trainer, Ms Shobita K.C. says she wants to learn more to better herself and her situation.

Didi Bahini Sewa Samaj plans to continue supporting urban HBWs through training, saving and credit services, and collective work opportunities that improve income. It also wants to expand its offerings, and has approached Gharelu Udyog and Koteshwor Municipality Ward for assistance in providing, respectively, an awareness raising programme and health programmes.