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**IFAD**  
**INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**  
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**REPORT ON THE EXPOSURE AND DIALOGUE PROGRAMME VISIT ORGANIZED  
IN THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA FOR EXECUTIVE BOARD DIRECTORS  
AND IFAD STAFF**



## INTRODUCTION

1. Following the decision taken by the Executive Board in September 2003 (document EB 2003/79/R.31), four Executive Board Directors and a country representative of IFAD visited the Republic of India from 8 to 19 December 2004 to participate in an exposure and dialogue programme (EDP) in Gujarat and thereafter hold discussions with the Government of India, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Food Programme (WFP) in Delhi. The participants were:

- Ms Haliba Djerir – Algeria (country representative)
- Mr Bernd Dunnzlaff – Germany (Director)
- Mr Médi MOUNGUI – Cameroon (Director)
- Ms Mariam Mousa – Egypt (Director)
- Ms Carla Elisa Mucavi – Mozambique (Director)

2. Five IFAD staff members<sup>1</sup> also took part in this field visit. They were joined by Mr Phrang Roy, Assistant President of IFAD's External Affairs Department, on 17 December 2004.

3. The EDP group was joined by three senior officials from the Government of Gujarat. The participants from IFAD realized that this was a new and important beginning.

4. This report presents the EDP objective, organization and processes as well as a summary of the participants' group reflection that followed the EDP. It also summarizes the group's interactions in Delhi. Two attachments accompany the main report: the first provides details on the group reflection, focusing on issues that are relevant to IFAD; and the second presents the participants' personal reflections. Since the learning was experiential and thus necessarily individualized, the personal reflections have been kept separate.

### A. The Exposure and Dialogue Programme

#### Organization

5. The EDP was organized by the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a member-based organization registered as a trade union working in the informal sector. SEWA was founded in Ahmedabad in 1972 as a union of self-employed women workers and now has nearly 470 000 members in Gujarat and 700 000 in all of India. SEWA aims to organize women towards full employment and make them self-reliant. Full employment means employment through which workers obtain work, income, food and social security. Self-reliance means that women should be individually and collectively autonomous, both economically and in terms of their decision-making ability. SEWA also seeks to help workers and producers to become managers and owners of their own businesses.

6. An innovative partnership has been established between SEWA and IFAD, along with the Government of India and the Government of Gujarat, to launch *Jeevika*, a long-term livelihoods project. This is a unique partnership in the sense that SEWA is a signatory to the agreements along with IFAD and the national and state governments. *Jeevika* is an all-encompassing project aimed at helping some 40 000 rural households in three districts.

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<sup>1</sup> Ms Katherine Davis, Ms Viviane di Majo, Mr Raul Hopkins, Mr Shyam Khadka and Ms Deirdre McGrenra.

## **Objective**

7. As summarized in the preparatory discussion between IFAD and SEWA, the EDP aimed to familiarize IFAD's Executive Board Directors and staff members with the lives of poor people. Each participant faced the challenge of seeing the reality of poverty and vulnerability through the eyes of a particular individual – usually a woman – and understanding how that person was striving to overcome poverty and insecurity.

8. Each participant was given the opportunity to have a close meeting with a host in the environment of her family, social group and community; the host was the focal point of the immersion. Participants met their hosts in the reality of their daily work and observed their hosts' daily needs; in this way, the face of poverty was unveiled.

9. The aim of the programme was for participants to briefly cross the social divide between themselves and their hosts. For this reason, participants were to 'walk in the footsteps' of their hosts, participating in their daily lives and work in order to get a clear picture of the hosts' daily worries, needs, failures, achievements, hopes and fears. The immersion programme was both a challenge and an opportunity to personalize the otherwise abstract nature of the relationship between donors and beneficiaries of development cooperation. As hosts and guests met face to face, this rather impersonal relationship became a more personal one. IFAD's commitment to poverty reduction was strengthened by becoming a deep personal concern.

## **The Process**

10. There are three phases of the EDP – exposure, reflection and dialogue. A short description of participants' experiences in each phase follows.

### **First Phase: Exposure**

11. This phase involved a person-to-person meeting, called an 'exposure', which was about seeing, feeling, perceiving and experiencing the daily lives of hosts and their families. During their stay, participants got to know the life stories, life-cycle risks and coping strategies of their host families. The participants realized that building up a personal relationship in a short time was an intensive process.

12. The participants also realized that exposure is a process of 'experiential learning'.

13. On 10 December, after the initial briefing by SEWA – in which the participants had the honour of being briefed by Ms Ela Bhatt, SEWA's founder – participants from IFAD and the Government of Gujarat were divided into six groups. Each group met hosts and established an initial rapport. The exposure itself began on 11 December when the participants travelled to villages in order to spend some days with host families.

### **Second Phase: Reflection**

14. The groups returned to Ahmedabad late in the morning of 13 December. There, the participants met with facilitators and hosts for an open story-telling session: they discussed their feelings about the exposure and shared salient events and personal impressions. The phase helped participants to understand the significance of the exposure experience, which was focused on understanding the specifics of the EDP.

15. On the same day, the participants met with the Chief Secretary of the Government of Gujarat and exchanged views on the latter's ongoing poverty-reduction and rural-development programme.

### Third Phase: Dialogue Focusing on Specific Issues

16. On the morning of 14 December, the participants from IFAD undertook an intensive group reflection exercise to discuss lessons learned. Informal in nature, it touched upon a number of topics. A summary of the discussion appears in Attachment I and is briefly reproduced below.

- (i) Regarding what should be taken home from this exercise, the participants unanimously agreed that it is important to maintain regular contact with IFAD's beneficiaries. There is a clear need for deeper and more regular interaction between IFAD and its target group. Executive Board members obtained a better understanding of rural communities and poverty, and were given the impetus to innovate and modify IFAD's institutional approach.
- (ii) Regarding possible improvements to the EDP, some participants felt that a longer stay with host families could have been beneficial. Others felt that the length of their stay was sufficient.
- (iii) Regarding IFAD's response strategies, it was unanimously agreed that it is possible to do a lot with very little in order to change people's lives. In addition:
  - Targeting the poor is possible, especially where member-based grass-roots institutions like SEWA are involved.
  - Small loans have changed people's lives and there is a clear role for IFAD in small and replicable projects.
  - IFAD assistance should be channeled to help people to express their social identities.
  - With initiatives such as *Jeevika*, there is hope for stopping migration from villages to cities.
  - Lack of innovation is not a result of lack of resources; the EDP has given insights that need to be concretized.
  - It is important for IFAD to be associated with institutions like SEWA.
- (iv) The strategy of women's empowerment is a very important element in the IFAD/SEWA programme; it is both relevant and successful.
- (v) The IFAD/SEWA programme represents an innovative partnership between government and grass-roots organizations, in which a leading role is given to SEWA. The Government will use this programme's instructional model to design and reorient its own programmes and other broader interventions. How can IFAD find a way to encourage other grass-roots organizations to replicate the partnership model of *Jeevika*?
- (vi) An integrated approach is needed to simultaneously address the various issues affecting the livelihoods of rural poor communities.
- (vii) There is a need for strengthened dialogue among stakeholders to overcome the obstacles faced by poor people.
- (viii) It is important that rural immigrants in slums be targeted for assistance. It is also necessary to address the problems faced by the rural poor in order to stop them from becoming urban poor.
- (ix) The village-level meetings were found to involve significant participation in preparing, implementing and monitoring community plans. Most villagers showed the will and desire to participate.

17. Following the group reflection, EDP participants met with senior SEWA leaders and government officials for an intensive dialogue on thematic issues and their implications for support strategies. This phase can be considered the ‘harvest period’ of the entire EDP. It focused on links between the micro and macro levels and the EDP’s value added regarding participant businesses and possible joint action with IFAD.

18. In the final part of this phase, the participants expressed their views on what they wished to draw from their experience – institutionally and personally – in order to support people living in conditions similar to those they observed as guests.

19. On the evening of 14 December, the Directors and staff members were invited by Ms Bhatt for a discussion over dinner; this proved to be another enriching experience.

### **B. Meetings in Delhi**

20. In Delhi, the participants met with: Mr Sudhir Mankad, Additional Secretary of the Government of India’s Department of Economic Affairs; Ms Maxine Olsson, United Nations Resident Coordinator; Mr Pedro Medrano, Country Director, WFP; and individuals from a cross-section of Indian society.

21. The meetings began on 16 December with a presentation by Mr Mankad, who appreciated IFAD’s support to India in terms of introducing innovations. These include pioneering and scaling up the concept of self-help groups, which became a nationwide poverty-reduction programme, and an innovative partnership for the livelihood-support programme with SEWA. Mr Saura Garg, Deputy Secretary of the Government of India’s Department of Economic Affairs, highlighted the important role IFAD has played in empowering tribal people.

22. On behalf of IFAD, the participants made a number of observations:

- The EDP was an excellent and enriching experience in which language barriers were broken. The participants observed that women had gained confidence.
- The IFAD-funded *Jeevika* project demonstrated an innovative public-private partnership; it was satisfying to observe the decentralization process reaching poor people.
- While India still needed to cover a lot of ground, its achievements in rural development were impressive. A bottom-up approach had been initiated and innovations had been introduced.

23. Mr Mankad also stated that IFAD’s projects stood out because of the involvement in project management of community organizations like SEWA. He went on to state that the World Bank was looking at this model for possible adaptation and replication.

24. On behalf of the Executive Board members, mention was made of the forthcoming Seventh Replenishment Consultation and of List C Member States’ expectations that India maintain its lead in terms of contributions. This would set a good example for other contributors and allow IFAD to expand the resource base of its enhanced programme.

25. Mr Mankad indicated that development efforts encompassed a wider range of activities than an arithmetic exercise can demonstrate; field presence should be more substantive, with appropriate delegation of authority and responsibility. Furthermore, IFAD might wish to consider the possibility of outsourcing some required services and channeling its investment into more profitable emerging markets while continuing to ensure prudence.

26. A luncheon meeting was organized by the Delhi office of WFP, which also hosted IFAD's field presence pilot initiative. Discussion centred on an exit strategy for food aid, cash assistance and food procurement policy in India. Regarding IFAD's field presence, Board members emphasized the need to monitor performance against agreed indicators.

27. The meeting with the United Nations Development Programme included a briefing with Ms Olsson regarding the significance of a United Nations presence in Delhi. She mentioned the usefulness of the United Nations' convening power and highlighted the United Nations Development Assistance Framework's emphasis on decentralization and strengthening accountability mechanisms at the local level. Board members then related their enriching experiences and recognized that the EDP had the potential to 'bring people back to reality'. Ms Olsson thanked the Executive Board Directors for sharing their experiences, which she described as a "gift" to her. She added that Board members' participation in the EDP programme was a very important step forward for the United Nations.

28. The Executive Board Directors and IFAD staff also attended a dinner meeting with representatives from a cross section of Indian society; Mr Phrang Roy, Assistant President of IFAD's External Affairs Department, introduced the Board members. A rich discussion of development in India followed, touching upon global issues.



**EXPOSURE AND DIALOGUE PROGRAMME  
FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD AND IFAD STAFF**

**GROUP REFLECTION**

1. EDP participants, comprising Executive Board Directors and IFAD staff, attended a discussion on the morning of 14 December 2004 at SEWA headquarters in Ahmedabad. Informal and reflective in nature, the discussion touched upon a number of topics and is summarized below.

2. **What should we take home?** The group unanimously agreed that it was important to have regular contact with IFAD's beneficiaries. There was a clear need for deeper and more regular interaction between IFAD and its target group. Such interaction gives Board members a better understanding of rural poverty and gives impetus to innovation and modification of IFAD's institutional approach. The Directors felt that senior IFAD staff members should also participate in the EDP on a selective basis.

3. **What improvements can be brought to the EDP?** In terms of the general issues, the following points were raised:

- Should EDP participants be hired as labourers with specific chores, where they are given a 'real feel' for the difficult labour required to earn a living?
- Should participants remain longer in villages with host families?
- Some participants felt that even a shorter period – even one day of exposure – would also enable adequate learning.
- Does the nomenclature "host" and "guest" create a separation between them?

4. **What can IFAD do?** It was unanimously agreed that IFAD can do a lot with very little in order to change people's lives. In addition:

- Targeting the poor is possible, especially where member-based grass-roots institutions like SEWA are involved.
- Small loans have changed people's lives and participants saw a clear role for IFAD in small and replicable projects.
- IFAD should assist people in expressing their social identities; SEWA had already been successful in 'sharpening' these identities. Is social empowerment a precondition for economic empowerment? Is social empowerment part of cultural empowerment?
- With initiatives such as *Jeevika*, there is hope for stopping migration from villages to cities.
- A lack of innovative ideas is not a result of a lack of resources; EDP had provided some insights and IFAD must work with these ideas.
- It is important for IFAD to be associated with institutions like SEWA. Should SEWA members be invited to attend IFAD activities such as meetings of the Governing Council?

5. **Empowerment of rural women.** The strategy of women's empowerment is a very important element in the IFAD/SEWA programme; it was found to be both relevant and successful. For example, women's leadership capacity has been strengthened along with their technical capacity to undertake such activities as repairing water pumps. Some points that emerged included the following:

- What can IFAD do to empower women? It is possible to help them to express their identities.
- Women should be given organizational, social and political platforms to express their needs and aspirations.
- Although it is not yet obvious in many developing countries, the importance of social and economic empowerment of rural women cannot be underestimated.
- Empowerment of women changes the balance of power within families and communities; it should be achieved in a sustainable manner.
- Women's empowerment can create conflicts – both within families and communities – but these conflicts can be managed.

6. **Innovative partnerships.** The IFAD/SEWA programme represents an innovative partnership between government and grass-roots organizations, in which a leading role is given to SEWA. The Government will use this programme's instructional model to design and reorient its own programmes and other interventions.

7. Some other points were also made:

- This programme is an example of emerging rural-sector partnerships in which NGOs are assuming the role of empowering women and working with government. It is also an example of the Government allowing another entity to take the lead in bringing development to rural communities.
- In IFAD projects, NGOs usually act as service providers. How can IFAD find a way to allow grass-roots organizations to replicate the success of the IFAD-financed *Jeevika* programme?
- Since member-based organizations are accountable to the people, the Government should encourage NGOs to participate in the development of villages lacking social services such as health and education.

8. **An integrated approach.** An integrated approach is needed to simultaneously address the various issues affecting the livelihoods of rural poor communities. The points raised included the following:

- Can the rural poor rise out of poverty in their current situation as wage workers (or specifically as salt workers)? In the African plantation sector, for example, the living conditions of wage workers have not improved significantly. Are the harsh working conditions that European workers faced in the early days of the industrial revolution avoidable in developing countries?
- What facilities and services must be provided to help people to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty?
- It is important that multiple livelihood opportunities and interventions be introduced.
- The design of *Jeevika*, including diversified sources of livelihood for informal-sector workers and social services such as health and education, is promising.

9. **Strengthened dialogue.** The participants agreed that dialogue should be strengthened among stakeholders to overcome the obstacles faced by poor people. Bureaucracy as the main obstacle and challenge to development was also discussed at some length.

10. **Linkages between rural and urban areas.** The participants who had visited urban slums felt that although these areas were only ten minutes away from downtown Ahmedabad, they were incredibly isolated. It is especially important that rural immigrants in slums be targeted for assistance. It is also necessary to address the problems that the rural poor face in order to stop them from becoming the urban poor.

11. **Bottom-up approach.** The participants recalled that the village assembly meetings involved significant participation in preparing, implementing and monitoring community plans. It was further recalled that most villagers showed the will and desire to participate.

12. A number of additional issues were discussed:

- If impact indicators are set at the global level, what happens in each project area? Any top-down approach to monitoring would be questionable.
- Bottom-up approaches to monitoring should be strengthened.
- Support to community-based approaches – particularly at the design stage of projects – should be made a fundamental requirement. Once this is done the rest should be easy.

13. Reflecting on the experience of the exposure phase, participants expressed their views on a number of broad issues. Examples include the following:

- “Very touched by the experience.”
- “I am impressed by the ‘wholesomeness’ of life in the rural areas and was able to see life from a much broader perspective.”
- “It has evoked a sense of humility in me.”
- “To me, the experience was not very different as the society I come from is very similar. But this was like SEWA’s *Jeevanshala* (life education) programme to me and very valuable”.
- “I realized that religious practices have a positive influence, introducing the spiritual dimension of life”.
- “It further enforced my belief of not going into too many technical specificities of design but to believe in participation”.
- “Although I have interacted very closely with the rural poor in Gujarat in the past, that process is essentially ‘extractive’ in nature to help collect information for a specific purpose. This experience is ‘experiential’ and goes beyond ‘intellect’ and touches ‘emotions’ directly.”
- “I felt like part of the family. It was good to see that ‘family values’ (as opposed to individualism) exist”.
- “Communities think logically, and they use that (for their development)”.

**EXPOSURE AND DIALOGUE PROGRAMME  
PERSONAL REFLECTIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD DIRECTORS**

**A. Haliba Djerir, Country Representative, Algeria**

1. My visit to India and my participation in the exposure and dialogue programme were, for me, an opportunity to discover the importance of studying the cultural environment of the target group in the process of development; economic help is important but not sufficient. The sustainability of any project can be achieved if all the factors surrounding the target group are well understood.

2. **Description of the environment.** I was a guest of a poor urban family from Ahmedabad. I am saying a family instead of a lady (as supposed by the programme) because I discovered, as others, that the focus should be on the whole family.

3. The family is composed of almost 20 persons: Rehana Ben, a 24-year-old widow with three children – two of them go to school thanks to the help of SEWA (the Indian Self-Employed Women's Association); the parents-in-law; and three brothers-in-law (one of them is married in the same house). We can add, also, the sisters of the mother-in-law (even if they do not live in the same house) and some neighbours, because all of them spend almost the whole day with Rehana's family.

4. Rehana is a Muslim lady. She lost her husband in one of the riots between Muslim and Hindu demonstrators in 2002. She is illiterate; she refused to marry again because she loves her children and does not want them to suffer, as she told us. The SEWA staff approached Rehana after the death of her husband and, surprisingly, I discovered that the person who was in contact with Rehana was a Hindu woman.

5. Backed by her father, she accepted after hesitation the offer of SEWA and is taking courses on using a sewing machine. Rehana's life changed after she started her first course.

6. During this experience, it was clear that poverty was not the only challenge for the grass-roots organization (SEWA) but also for the empowerment of women.

7. **Spreading awareness.** SEWA insisted that the beneficiaries attend organization meetings in order to share their experiences with others and learn how to express their concerns before strangers. Coming from a traditional society where simple women are generally proud and shy, I can say that these women challenged themselves and their families to attend these meetings. It is not easy for anybody to say "I am poor"; such action needs a lot of courage in traditional societies and shows, at the same time, the level of need.

8. After their confidence is built up, women start to be ambitious and optimistic about their future: Rehana told us that she wants to have her own house and she wants to learn how to sew modern clothes to improve her financial situation. She is fighting to secure a good education for her children, especially her daughter.

9. **External factors.** When I first learned that I would stay in an urban area (in the slums), I thought that I was privileged. I told myself, maybe because I am the youngest participant, they are taking care of me. But when I entered the area and after that my host lady's house, I realized that our friends from SEWA were very strict in their choices and I cannot say that I was privileged in any sense.

10. The political problems witnessed in this area increased the poverty of people; the infrastructure that existed was destroyed during demonstrations; lots of people lost their work; and some families

sent their very small children to work (which is another big problem). SEWA set up an office in this area – a small space where women can meet and talk about their problems. During our visit to this office, I met Muslim and Hindu widows who were drawing pictures to describe their pain. They were expressing the same sadness and asking for the same improvements. It means that poverty goes beyond any race or religion.

11. **Lessons learned.** This experience was unique on different levels:

- It was the first time that IFAD representatives spent two days and two nights with poor people. It means the first time that, as said in the report, personal experience was mixed with a professional one. From this, I learned how important it is for all of us, especially donor–country representatives, to have such direct interaction.
- It was the first time, as mentioned in the report, that a grass-roots organization, the Government and IFAD signed an agreement. From this fact, I learned that each country has its specificities that should be taken into consideration.

12. Finally, this experience was an opportunity to discover wealth inside the houses of poor people.

## B. Bernd Dunnzlaff, Director, Germany

13. Some friends and colleagues of mine had initially reacted sceptically: “Isn’t that a little bit exaggerated? Will anybody really know more about poverty after having been the guest of a poor Indian family?”

14. Of course, I had known the common definitions of the poor and the poorest of the poor beforehand. I was aware of the fact that there are about 1.1 billion people trying to survive on less than one dollar per day, three quarters of them living in rural areas. But over and above that, my EDP experience has meant that poverty for me personally now has a face, a name and a biography. That is due to my host lady. I had the opportunity to spend two days and two nights together with her and her family.

15. **A few facts and figures.** The host lady’s name was Savitaben Babulal Parmar; she lives in the village of *Zazansar* in the Indian state of Gujarat. She is 31 years old, has been married for 17 years, and has four children. She is illiterate, just like her husband – like 78% of the women and 48% of the men in their *Taluka* (administrative block). She is a member of the lowest caste, *Harijan*, and, without any doubt, one of the poorest of the poor – IFAD’s special target group. No regular income, no running water, no toilet (let alone a bathroom), an 18-hour working day from 4 a.m. to 10 p.m. It was a first, not only for me but also for my host lady. “We never had guests before in our life”, she mentioned later.

16. Savitaben’s village participates in *Jeevika*, a livelihood-security project for earthquake-affected rural households. *Jeevika* is financed by IFAD and implemented by SEWA, the Indian Self-Employed Women’s Association, on behalf of the Indian Government. Savitaben herself is involved in this project as one of the local SEWA leaders.

17. From the unstructured, partly contradictory overabundance of my impressions and experiences, I will now share a few points that strike me as particularly important.

18. **The overarching importance (and difficulty) of empowerment cannot be overestimated.** Empowerment in all its facets – individual, female, cultural, social, economic and political – is key to sustainable development. This became clearer to me during my stay in the village. I had the

opportunity to witness wonderful moments, when women were encouraged to introduce themselves in public, to stand out in the anonymous mass for their first time and to state their names. Initially, all of these women were shy, frightened and hesitating. But after a while, most of them stood there in front of the audience, bolt upright and with a self-confident smile.

19. I also got an idea of the complexity and pain of empowerment processes. Trying to change structures of power and authority inimical to development is a challenging undertaking. The same lady who just a moment ago impressed me as a respected SEWA leader in gatherings immediately covers her face as soon as an elder male relative appears. Family is a two-edged sword, which can mean solidarity, security, a resort and a safety net, but also control, oppression, restrictions and a straitjacket. The neighbour lady from a slightly higher caste, who develops ideas for their village of the future together with the others in the *Jeevika* project, avoids taking even a single sip of water from my host lady, who comes from a lower caste. The same poor women who are eagerly and successfully developing new income sources in the *Jeevika* project stay quiet in the district meeting, while those who are a bit better-off are doing all the talking and are keen to sell their own economic self-interests as common welfare. “But you know that they are like sharks!”: the women tried to explain their silence to their disappointed SEWA project manager, who had expected them to object.

20. I was grateful and relieved that I could actually be helpful during my stay – admittedly not in fetching water. There, my slight host lady with her fragile appearance – who weighed about half as much as I – carried two filled pots on top of each other on her head, apparently without much effort, while I had more than enough to carry only one of them clumsily on my hips the one-kilometre distance from the pipeline to her house (and besides, on my way I wetted my trousers with the precious water). I was of equally little assistance in baking the daily bread. My dough from millet and water had more resemblance to a lump, whereas my host lady formed perfect flat cakes.

21. Nevertheless, I was a real asset, without any doubt, in strengthening my host lady’s social status within the village structure. It was already extremely extraordinary that we – as allegedly distinguished people from far away – had even come to the remote village. But it was a sheer sensation that we were not the guests of the mayor or of one of the other notabilities, but visited one of the poorest women from the lowest caste, of all people, and that we actually ate and drank and slept at her house.

22. As a general rule, personally I do not like the flowery phrase “a win-win situation”. However, in this case the phrase may fit.

23. **The strong desire and will to escape poverty.** In light of the depressing poverty, it would have been no wonder if the prevailing attitudes had been faintheartedness, apathy and despair. But nearly everywhere, I observed people’s wish, will and commitment to improve their livelihoods. And there was the feeling that things are getting better, that the *Jeevika* project has brought hope to the village.

24. On a more cautious note, I must point out that this positive assessment may be related to the sample of people we contacted. Women who are SEWA members are surely more development oriented than the average. Those who are not reached by SEWA – what do they do?

25. **What does it mean to be rich, what to be poor?** One absolutely ought to beware of romanticizing bitter poverty in any way, especially if one comes from a relatively rich donor country. However, to me, my host lady and her neighbourhood seem ‘rich’ in a sense different from material possessions. Their authenticity, their dignity, their social embeddedness (despite the grave caste problems), their overwhelming laugh, testify to a contact with life and a natural way of living that seems to have been lost in the so-called developed countries. We actually had so much fun during our stay. We had a terrific party (by the way, without any buffet and without a drop of alcohol – Gujarat is

one of India's "dry states", where alcohol is prohibited by law)! There is a sneaking suspicion emerging in my mind that emotional and social deprivation might be the trade-off for economic and material progress.

26. **Small critical comments after a great experience.** I must stress that two days and two nights were simply too short a period to shed the role of an outside observer. Personally, I would have loved to stay in the village for about a week. Perhaps then the idea of the EDP – to dive deep into local life – could have been accomplished. From the fourth night on (at the latest) we surely would have lost our exotic attractiveness and would have been able, for instance, to fall asleep out of doors without being closely watched by about 60 curious village eyes, as occurred on both the first and second night.

### C. Médi MOUNGUI, Director, Cameroon

27. A number of factors come to my mind while trying to write about this experience. The family of Sitaben, our host lady, was certainly very poor, if not the poorest in the entire village. She had a small hut, built on public land, on the outskirts of the main village, with no facilities to accommodate guests. Not only had she not had land, she also did not possess animals – not even a few chickens. It was a case of real 'hand-to-mouth' existence – no allowances for sickness or similar things.

28. The following are some of the images that are imprinted in my mind:

- Her family (her husband, two children and herself) had started a small vegetable garden with the support of a low-cost drip system obtained from a loan she had to pay back with the vegetable production. Water had to be fetched from a distance of about 200 metres to keep the system running. It certainly added to her already heavy daily workload, but I could see no complaints on her face.
- The family also had just started a vermin-compost enterprise, with the help of SEWA. As the family had no animals, animal dung had to be collected from droppings on public land. I noticed that Sitaben's face would brighten up whenever she saw a lump of droppings at some distance. Of course, these resources were scarce!
- Her younger child, a six-year-old son, had some urinary tract problems. An operation would cost about 1 000 rupees (USD 23). Since the family does not have that much savings to pay for the operation, the boy is required to take medicine every day. Such a 'delaying' tactic, as a means for dealing with crisis, would not always work, however. For example, when her husband was bitten by a snake, she had to borrow money from the fuel-wood contractor to whom they normally sell the fuel wood they collect from the community land. For want of money, the vow she made to perform worship to the village deity for enabling her husband to recover has not been done yet, however.
- Health is a major issue facing the poor living in rural areas. Fortunately, a low-cost family health scheme has been initiated under *Jeevika*, the IFAD-assisted project. This will now be available to Sitaben's family as well.

29. We also realized that the salt workers were perhaps the poorest and worst-off among the poor in the area. As an enterprise, this activity is both capital- and labour-intensive. This implies that most workers remain as workers throughout their life.

30. To me personally, it was truly an enlightening experience. Even though it was short, the sharing of experience and, above all, the immersion into the roots of poverty was real. It involved not only

physical but also mental and emotional sharing. The drudgery that we saw – and in a way underwent – made me understand what it is like to be poor. The deprivation and vulnerability that we could sense left us shaken. Despite all this, the family faced life with optimism. Sitaben always talked smilingly. She was hopeful that things would change for the better. I was very impressed with the openness with which we were treated. She always gave the impression of a person having a lot of spiritual openness and full of love for others. One big advantage the family and the community had was the sense of humility. It enabled them to face the ups and downs of life as they came. They also focused more on what they have instead of focusing on what they do not have. For example, Sitaben was very happy for having a husband who was *bhagat* (a good man who did not abuse alcohol and spent most of his time with the family).

31. I was also very impressed with the women's empowerment that had happened at the community level. We saw over half a dozen women speaking in public. They would start shyly but overcame that very quickly. From a poverty-reduction perspective, this would perhaps contribute most in the longer run. This is something Gujarat can share proudly with a large part of the developing world.

#### **D. Mariam Mousa, Director, Egypt**

32. I lived for about three days in a small village named Nabhela in the district of Sabarkantha, almost 100 kilometres from Ahmedabad. The experience of living in this village gave me the opportunity to actually experience life in a poverty-stricken rural area. The host family was one of the poorest in the village and suffers from scarcity of food, shelter and clothes – a family that has nothing to eat even for one full day. The man of the family died seven years ago from tuberculosis, which is common among men, women and children. The village suffers from scarcity of medical and social care and is unable to provide basic services and address the basic needs of its inhabitants. So not only some people but the whole community suffers from poverty.

33. I recall the image in my mind of the poor children who surrounded us during the unexpected meeting late at night, around 7 p.m. It was cold, but most of the villagers were covered only with thin blankets. But at the same time, they showed courage and dignity; in spite of the cold, they welcomed us with a song. It was their gift to our presence there. I will never forget all those children who were looking to us for a hope of survival, in facing the challenges posed by poverty.

34. Our experience with poverty and deprivation was total, as per the EDP requirements: participating in the activities of the family, sleeping in the open area, without basic services like toilets or kitchens. Nothing but the tents covered us. We experienced hunger for the whole day and appreciated a very, very basic meal (consisting of some rice or bread) prepared by the host lady, only at night. We very happily received a present from the villagers, which consisted of two litres of milk.

35. When I asked the host lady to what extent she could live without food, the answer was terrifying. Once she had been unable to feed herself and her children for four days and on the fifth day, when she had lost all hope, she decided to kill her family by putting poison in their meal. When she saw her kids eating, she couldn't go on with her decision and threw away all the poisoned food.

36. Thanks to the SEWA training courses for repairing water pumps in the village, the host lady started to be a member of the women's group of the village. She began to get some money to feed herself and her children. It changed her position completely in the community. She also started getting respect.

37. In the light of the EDP experience, I feel that:

- poverty concerns not just a single person but the whole community;
- it is better to talk about ‘poverty’ than keep on using the term ‘poor people’, as the people can be poor in material terms but not in terms of dignity and generosity;
- EDP must be used as a method to understand the roots of poverty because it enables us to perform better analyses; and
- for us to be successful, the ‘field’ must be treated as our resource.

38. I also feel that the EDP has to be extended from the current two to three days to at least one week.

39. IFAD should try to benefit from the EDP to the extent it can. The concept of empowerment has to be the main element for any rural-development project. Participation in the development process is the direct result of desire and will. So these two elements – desire and will – are important.

40. The experience affected me psychologically and I will never forget the children’s eyes showing their hope for survival.

#### **E. Carla Elisa Mucavi, Director, Mozambique**

41. When I decided to join the team of IFAD Executive Board Directors on their field visit to India, to take part in the EDP, I was not expecting such an impact. The EDP experience was moving and enriching. It allowed me to realize the dimension and complexity of poverty. It also permitted me to come to the conclusion that not much is really necessary to improve the life of poor people.

42. I was particularly impressed by the way SEWA is organized and by the dimensions of its work in reaching remote areas and poor people. Targeting poor women in its action was also very significant to me. I agree with SEWA that, by helping women, you are contributing to improve the living conditions of poor families.

43. By staying in Azzuben’s poor house of in the village of Lotiya for two days, I realized that, with a small loan from the *Jeevika* programme, she was able to secure some meagre income that contributed to improve the living conditions of her family. She could send their children to school, provide the family with food and save a bit of her income for other important needs. That small loan changed the perspective of her family for the better. Of course, that family is still vulnerable because the little they get is still not enough to invest and generate more income. In that regard, the spirit of association through cooperatives is of paramount importance.

44. Of course, SEWA has long-standing experience in organizing women in associations and the results of these actions are amazing. I was also touched by the bottom-up approach adopted by the village when identifying problems of the community. The experience showed a high level of participation by beneficiaries and other stakeholders in discussing the needs of the community and in the approach to be adopted for reaching the objectives envisaged. This trend has proved to be effective and is very commendable.

45. I should like to recommend that IFAD promote more interaction of this kind both for Executive Board members and IFAD staff.