

Empowerment Through Mahila Sanghas

The Mahila Samakhya Experience

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MAHILA SANGHAS

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Bridget Riley, Born - 1931.

"The elements are compressed at the centre, creating an area of vibrating tension. Pushed to an extreme of curvature the line still does not break, and the undischarged energy is contained in bands of shimmering motion."

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Acknowledgement

This work is the result of collective effort : Mahila Samakhya functionaries and researchers both inside and outside the project. Its baseline is a series of reflective exercises from village women, Sangha members, Sahayoginis, DIU functionaries, State Programme Co-ordinators, National office consultants in Mahila Samakhya. Ongoing reflection as a planned collective exercise has been an essential feature of Mahila Samakhya style of functioning; and reflection on the present and future status of Sanghas has been a major concern in the programme. The initiation of this study was timed well with this conceptual preoccupation and facilitated a consolidated exercise to discover emerging patterns of Sanghas.

At one level almost six thousand women have contributed to this study; at another level one can call this a fresh outcome of the 'churning' in and around the project - individually and collectively.

Sharada Jain
Laxmi Krishnamurthy

December - 1996.

GLOSSARY

ANM	—	Auxiliary Nurse Midwife, the Government representative at the village level.
Bechari Aurat	—	Poor woman (not in the economic sense of the term).
Devadasi	—	A term used in Karnataka for women from specific castes who were traditionally dedicated to the Goddess Yellamma and who then became the favoured mistresses of one or other big landlord in the village. Nowadays their position is more akin to that of a prostitute. Her counterpart with some qualifications, in Andhra Pradesh, is called a Jogini.
DIU	—	District Implementation Unit of Mahila Samakhya.
DWCRA	—	Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas — government programme for setting up income-generating units with groups of women.
Ekal Aurat	—	Single woman.
Gram Panchayat	—	Village Council.
IRDP	—	Integrated Rural Development Programme — run by the Government, under which scheme loans are advanced from Banks for income-generating activities.
Jogini	—	See Devadasi.
Kanyadaan	—	The ceremony at a wedding where the daughter is ritually handed over to her new husband's family. Traditionally widows, being considered inauspicious, are not allowed to participate in this or any other ceremony at their child's wedding.

Kayda Committee	—	An informal Legal Committee set up to try our cases of violence against women.
M.S.	—	Mahila Samakhya.
Mandal	—	A sub-district administrative unit in Andhra Pradesh.
NPE	—	National Policy on Education.
NGO	—	Non-Government Organisation.
NRG	—	National Resource Group — the National level advisory body of Mahila Samakhya.
PDS	—	Public Distribution System — a Government scheme for making available basic staple food, at a fair price, to the public.
POA	—	Plan of Action — in relation to the Education Policy.
SC/ST	—	Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes.
Sahayogini	—	The Mahila Samakhya functionary at the sub-district level, who articulates with women from about 10 villages.
Sakhi	—	The "Co-ordinator" at the Sangha level. She is a paid worker in U.P. and Gujarat.
Sangha	—	The Mahila Samakhya collective of women at the village level.
Taluka	—	A sub-district administrative unit.
TRYSEM	—	Training for Youth in self-Employment : for giving training in vocational skills.
Vidhwa	—	Widow.
WDP	—	Women's Development Programme — a precursor of Mahila Samakhya in Rajasthan.

Empowerment Through Mahila Sangha

The Mahila Samakhya Experience

Twenty years ago serious policy discourse hardly admitted the argument that women's educational needs required different focus as distinct from men. The literacy classes and condensed courses offered had no takers. Mahila Samakhya Programme 1988 was responsible for a radical policy departure as it shifted the focus from delivery design to conditions that make education possible for poor rural women. The assumption was that gender stereotypes should first be questioned seriously by women and accepted by the community. That alone would counter the reason for women's non-access to the world of education. Facilitating access through questioning was the first step. Mahila Sanghas as forums for such a questioning emerged as a strategic choice in the programme.

The present study addresses this basic assumption. Has the programme succeeded in the formation of genuine groups -- distinct from mere aggregates of rural women eligible as 'beneficiaries' of a scheme? How do groups form? What happens when a group starts coalescing? What kind of priorities emerge? Does this process lead to essential education? How does it alter gender equation in society? And does the second generation get a better deal in life? Must access to resources, political participation and other spin-offs precede the inevitable impact on gender violence? How do Sanghas approach this?

Other questions needing deeper reflection and debate are : is the Sangha a medium or the final empowerment answer? What next? A Federation? Can the Sangha acquire enough flexibility and maturity to accommodate needs of increasing and differential levels/types of individual empowerment of its members? These and many other related questions hang together around the vision of 'Future' in Mahila Samakhya.

This report is woven around broadly five major concerns. First, the issue of Sangha formation. What has been the range of processes in this specific programme? How do they fit into the announced Government policy of `collaborative development efforts'? Next is the area of education - the raison d'etre of the proramme. The third section deals with women's access to tangible resources. The fourth concern - central to women's empowerment - is the question of women and violence. The fifth section attempts to understand empowerment in its multiple dimensions and in different arenas - the community, the panchayat and the home. The final section is an examination of areas of vulnerability and the future.

An attempt is made throughout this exercise to distil certain general propositions from a large set of specific experiences. The hope is that it could inform policy on women.

Methodology

This study was initiated in July 1996 with a meeting in Delhi, where representatives from all four states - Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh were present; as were members of NRG and some researchers who were requested to join as part of the Research Team. This was essentially a brain-storming meeting to decide the content and methods of collecting and collating data, the timeframe for the study and the format of the report. A background note was circulated earlier to focus discussion.

Subsequent to this meeting, separate teams were formed for each State in consultation with the State and District Programme Co-ordinators. Several workshops and meetings were held at the sangha, District and State level in which almost six thousand women participated from thirteen districts of four states. The sahayoginis played a critical role in eliciting the perceptions of Sangha/village women regarding MS processes. It was ensured that in each meeting an inside-outsider member was present to maintain the focus of the study. This was followed by meetings at State, District and Sangha level, a two day meeting was held in Delhi on August 29 and 30th, 1996 to discuss findings, thrashout issues and arrive at conclusions.

A vast pile of data, old reports, occasional papers, field notes and case studies emerged through this process. It seemed impossible to do justice to the invaluable information (wisdom!), compress it in 'X' number of flat sheets of paper, and accept it as representative of the kaleidoscopic multidimensional reality out there.

Sangha women-sahayoginis also communicate in a non-linear style. Internalized processes and concepts are often woven into the fabric of a story. These internalized learnings are communicated onward in many non-verbal ways. We have tried to bring about an (un-easy) compromise between two different types of communications. Stories/Case studies quoted in the report are each representative of many more parallel ones from different areas. There is an increasing realization that this report has not done justice to all the significant patterns that surfaced during the heated discussions in each district covered by this study. But we have tried as far as possible to put valuable insights into a more generalized format. The hope is that MS women would affirm themselves in this presentation also. Symbolically speaking, Gujarat groups would see their work in the Andhra Stories : Karnataka women would recognise their own events in what is presented by Uttar Pradesh. An understanding of a 'kind' of happening through hundreds of specific events is what this report attempts.

I

Mahila Sangha

"Only when we all get together can we achieve something - when ten people walk, a path is formed." *

Background

Recognising the fact that low levels of education and literacy are a crucial factor in the continued subordination, the National Policy on Education (NPE 1986) emphasised a positive interventionist role that an appropriate education policy could play. The Programme of Action (1986) stressed on "collective reflection and decision-making" for womens empowerment, and expanded into meaning to include building a positive self-image, develop critical thinking, building group solidarity and collective decision making, and action in order to set in motion the forces of social change.

Department of Education (Ministry of Human Resource Development) initiated the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Its objectives were delineated by NPE and PoA; and initiated under the banner of "Education for Womens Equality" (Mahila Samakhya 1988). The narrow sense of literacy was de-emphasised as the possible means of allowing women to participate as equal citizens. In fact women were encouraged to "plan and monitor their own education, to reach out to a new body of knowledge". (Mahila Samakhya 1988). One hoped that an experience of equality would impart the necessary confidence required for women to reach out towards previously inaccessible knowledge. The reality of gender subordination was reiterated; an attempt made to address and alter those mechanisms through which subordination is legitimized, taken for granted and internalized as personal destiny' -- therefore, unchangeable.

Patriarchal structures of power reward `good' women who conform to a narrow definition of their identities : obediently and faithfully fulfilling roles while confined among family, community and social requirements. Simultaneously the `bad' women are punished : because they dared to step out of stereotyped roles. The plan rejected the view of unequal gender relations being god-decreed and also underscored that legitimisation of subordination be rejected at the collective level. Given that gender inequality pervades the social fabric, it is a systemic phenomenon that needs to be addressed collectively rather than individually. The plan enabled women to translate and link personal experiences of gender subordination to the larger systemic forces of gender inequality in society. Women needed a common forum to bring them together, enabling the sharing of personal experiences; this could then emerge as collective knowledge, energising members to alter social equations at a very basic level; shaking the very core of their internalized subordinate status in family and community.

Understanding Powerlessness

Women have been shut out historically from the closed triangle of knowledge power, economic power and political power. The triangle gives access only to a limited and privileged control-group. Poor rural women live in permanent fear and paralysis due to their powerlessness in the face of events - daily, monthly or merely as games played by adversaries. They lack initiative to change the given variables of a situation. Individuals have failed to break through territorial monopolies. To counter powerlessness women need to collectively alter their self-image and therefore social-image. This can happen when women come together as an organic unit, discover strength of commonality and bonds of solidarity, and initiate joint action, thereby discovering and experiencing their inner power.

Mahila Samakhya viewed sanghas as the means of countering powerlessness. Sanghas were the instruments that would enable women to plan, implement and direct their own empowerment. The role of the outsider was to facilitate the coming together of women, allowing them `time and space' to determine direction

and pace of social change. `Delivery' of skills or education was outdated, education could not be thrust upon women. Once the Sanghas were established, it would come about naturally within the collective reflection of its format.

Unlike most other development plans, the original plan document (October 1988) of Mahila Samakhya was kept deliberately amorphous and open-ended deliberately. It had to be consonant with the flexibility and philosophy of the programme, which was not centered around predetermined targets and time-lines but **as a plan that allowed women to plan.** It was hoped that experiential learning would help fill in the gaps left open by the plan.

Since the original plan document, which dubbed Mahila Samakhya as womens education for equality, the programme has come full circle : viewing the struggle for equality as a necessary condition for womens education. The demand for information, knowledge and education is seen as the natural outcome of collective reflection and resistance against gender subordination. This revised theme can be termed as `Women's equality for education'

Sangha Formation

Mahila Samakhya was initially operationalised in the following 10 districts from 3 states in India :

Baroda, Rajkot and Sabarkantha from Gujarat.
Bidar, Mysore and Bijapur from Karnataka.
Varanasi, Banda, Saharanpur and Tehri from Uttar Pradesh.

Each district had its specific socio-economic - political scenario, neccessitating a contextually relevant process for initiating the project. However, two broad patterns of sangha formation can be discerned in all these districts, viz. one through existing activities of NGOs and the other directly.

* The first approach consisted of taking an identified group of women created through NGO intervention attempting to weave in the agenda for empowerment of women through Mahila Samakhya.

* The second approach was to initiate group formation through specially designed processes independently of existing structures.These comprised principally of attempts at establishing emotional rapport and creating a forum for women's issues.

Building on Existing Womens Groups

NGOs as Mahila Samakhya Implementors

Locally based and established NGOs of that area were the initial entry point for Mahila Samakhya in districts and villages. It was envisioned that the NGO experience would be useful in establishing the MS programme and in reaching rural women. They could perhaps provide assistance in identifying villages, sahayoginis and Sakhis* and help in their training. National Resource Group (NRG), an apex body at the centre, identified suitable NGOs which expressed a willingness to link up collaboratively in initiating and furthering the principles and processes of MS.

For example Mahila Samakhya in Uttar Pradesh was implemented through Vikalp and Disha in Saharanpur, Lok Jivan Vikas Bharti and Bhuvaneshwari Mahila Ashram in Tehri, Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Seva Sansthan and Vigyan Shiksha Kendra in Banda. In Varanasi, Saghan Kshetra Vikas Samiti was the first place where Mahila Samakhya activities were initiated, prior to the former launching programme. Similar processes were followed in Gujarat and Karnataka.

This strategy of initiating the programme through well-established local voluntary organisations, was crucial to the smooth fast and effective launch of Mahila Samakhya - especially as it was an amorphous and an open-ended programme. This method showed quick results; proved that MS is possible, thus increasing visibility of the programme.

Problems

Despite this smooth and efficient entry problems arose along the way. The strategy of NGOs as point of entry did not function as originally envisioned; it ran

into several problems in all three states. Womens equality and struggle against gender subordination was not necessarily an NGO priority. Most of them had been working on creating women's collectives for rural development, so the specific agenda of empowerment of Mahila Samakhya was seen as "too vague" by them.

Although some NGO leaders were able to comprehend the power of womens collectives, they were unable to relinquish control over decision-making to these womens groups. Essentially, the NGOs were in total control. This kind of leadership was inimical to changing gender subordination patterns.

Competition, not collaboration became the NGO motto; instead of coming together to formulate a common agenda based on MS philosophy, the NGOs indulged in territorial struggles to gain control over MS women (Sahayoginis, Sakhis or Sangha women) towards furthering their own organisation specific agendas. For example, some NGOs were unwilling to release "their" women for district level or state level Mahila Samakhya melas. Despite multiple efforts made in several districts (U.P., Karnataka, Gurajat) to federate local NGOs, the Mahila Samakhya programme failed to became a thread of commonality between these NGOs. One of the possible reasons for this could be basic distrust of government programmes; this has been internalized and Mahila Samakhya viewed as just another government programme.

In many cases NGOs had effectively contributed Sahayoginis to the programme. These Sahayoginis had been brought together under the MS banner - they had undergone collective training. These trainings had fostered a sense of solidarity, which worked against narrow agendas of those parental organisations that had spawned the Sahayoginis in the first place. The result was that the Sahayoginis felt pulled in opposite directions all at once and their loyalties became divided. They found themselves in situations where they were asked to make choices for which they were unprepared. In short, the particular institutional pressures were stifling and stressing their identities as women, working against basic MS principles and philosophy.

The Sakhis were also getting mixed-messages. Trainings conducted by Sahayoginis under the MS approach had different informational and organisational priorities than those conducted by NGOs. The brunt of these processes was shared by the sangha women as well, whose planning efforts were limited by the agendas of the implementing agencies.

The net result of this was a gradual move away from NGOs to initiating processes, through Sahayoginis for facilitating and collecting of rural women.

Direct Intervention by Mahila Samakhya

The alternative route to sangha formation has been through sahayoginis. The broad pattern emerging in all Mahila Samakhya states is, that District Implementation Units (DIU's) select and train a team of sahayoginis taking help from trainers; either from non-Govt. professional groups or from existing human resources within the state. These sahayoginis are specially trained in building rapport with village women, understanding them and facilitating them to understand themselves. In some states (U.P. and Gujarat) the sahayogini helps identifying sakhis who act as women leaders. While the sahayoginis' role is broadly the same in all states of MS the role of sakhis and their position in the Mahila Samakhya structure shows a wide range of difference. On the whole, theshift has been from grafting the Mahila Samakhya programme on existing groups to forming fresh autonomous groups for initiating Mahila Samakhya programme.

The case of Andhra Pradesh illustrates this shift in strategy for establishing sanghas. Andhra Pradesh is one of the more recent additions to the MS network. The APMSS (Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samakhya Society) followed a conscious and concerted strategy to initiate sanghas (or mandals, as they are referred to in the region) in districts and villages where NGOs were not working. This was done in order to avoid situations of potential conflict as identified above, and also to avoid duplication of efforts. In addition, this allowed for the implementation of MS in contiguous blocks unlike the earlier strategy.

It came through very clearly during meetings with MS functionaries there were myriad ways in which Sahayoginis and other MS women initiated sangha formation in an independent manner (directly under the aegis of state programme offices and DIUs). These discussions highlighted the fact that there is no single "right" way of setting up a sangha but a multiplicity of rich approaches. What is needed is sustained effort by the Sahayogini in particular to create the time, space and opportunity where women can come together, establish a rapport at the emotional level, and initiate a dialogic sharing of experiences. The varied approaches to sangha formation include :

* **Door to door visits so as to initiate personal contact.**
* **Getting involved in and assisting with the daily chores of women.**
* **Participating in family and community functions like marriages deaths, births, and festivals; and sharing in the joys and the suffering of women.**
* **Organizing special meets/melas and celebrating occasions such as Women's Day, Independence Day, and Environment Day.**
* **Organizing and taking part in women's activities at the village level where talk of sanghas is initiated by people who are respected in the community and whose opinion matters.**
* **Getting women together to indulge in creative activities like singing songs and bhajans, dancing, and putting up plays.**
* **Organizing alternative modes of information dissemination such as puppet shows and street theater, which foster a sense of fun and collective enjoyment.**

Problems

Even this reformulated process of establishing sanghas as autonomous bodies, independently of NGOs, has not been without its problems. The process of establishing the credibility of MS as a government programme, and of initiating the sangha formation process has met with several hurdles at the village community and family levels, besides running into conflictual situations with outside agencies working in the region.

In Mahbubnagar's Utkur mandal area there was an NGO working with twenty three joginis. Before beginning work in the region the APMSS tried contacting the NGO leader but failed in their efforts. Once the MS programme had been operational for seven months, the man contacted the APMSS and asked them to quit working with the joginis since he was already involved in setting up a rehabilitation programme for them. The APMSS suggested several alternatives to him including that he concentrate on education for children. Further, the MSS felt that organising joginis as joginis was wrong in principle. The problem was sorted out but not without painful negotiation.

(Source : A.P. Mahila Samakhya Society Report, August 1996).

There have also been cases of resistance to sangha formation in different states.

There was a case in Bijapur district in Karnataka where MS functionaries were deemed thieves. The Villagers were under the impression that the Sangha people observe in the morning and steal things at night. They also held the blind belief that these people take girl children and sacrifice them to the Dam. The villagers thought that these people take Devadasis on the pretext of arranging their marriage but sell them instead. For all these reasons the villagers put up a strong resistance against sangha formation (August 1996).

The Keri people who live in another part of Bijapur district were also opposed to sanghas. When some DIU functionaries visited a village, they were looked upon as thieves and locked up in a nurse's house. No amount of coaxing and convincing worked. The villagers even called the police. The police did not believe the MS functionaries either because they were unable to provide identity cards when asked to do so. MS women showed a letter from the Samakhya to the police instead but the villagers believed that the Samakhya women had found and picked it up from the street. Fortunately a teacher in the village knew one of the Sahyoginis and he was able to convince the police that MS is a government body and not a gang of thieves. The head policeman was convinced. He had been on duty for three months only and apologized

for being unaware of this particular government program. The MS women were released. After this episode, photo-identity cards with the MS seal were issued to all the Sahyoginis so as to avoid similar situations from arising again. (Source : Mahila Samakhya Bijapur, August 1996).

Family Pressures

People did not view MS as delivering immediate, tangible benefits. Daughters, sisters, and daughter-in-laws were prevented from joining sanghas for all kinds of other reasons as well. In some cases there was mistrust of MS women who were considered `outsiders'. The intentions of these `outsiders' were thus questioned at both the community and the family levels. There was also the issue of house work not getting done if the women of the house joined sanghas.

Other Issues

Issues of caste and even gender membership of sanghas have come up repeatedly in all four states during implementation. Village women have raised questions regarding the inclusion of scheduled caste women in sanghas. There have also been instances where lower caste women have absolutely opposed the inclusion of upper caste (and therefore "privileged") women in sangha. In some cases villagers have objected to the notion of all-female sanghas and have insisted that both men and women be included and that all meetings be held in public. Men have expressed the suspicion that allowing their wives to join sanghas would alter the male-female (husband-wife) relationship in a manner that would be detrimental to the present state gender relations, and thus destabilize marriages. There was a case in Bidar district, Karnataka where men actually hid behind screens and spied on the initial sangha formation meetings held in their village. They asked all sorts of questions and ridiculed even the possibility of women coming together and achieving something concrete.

Disbelief in Linkages

In one particular example from Bidar district in Karnataka, villagers argued that if Mahila Samakhya had been a State-sponsored government program, it would

have come through the offices of the BDO or the Tahsildaar. Since this was not the case, the Mahila Samakhya program must be from another country! Responses of this kind came in many quarters. They demonstrate the ambivalent attitude towards the government system. At one level, a common response from the people is that "nothing can happen in this system." At another levels they also feel that anything outside this system cannot have lasting qualities. It cannot be strong enough to allow people to hope!

This response in a way validates the MS design which is fully supported and 'owned' by Govt. but promotes an alternative style of management. (Source: MS Karnataka, 1996)

Revised MS-NGO Relationship

Using NGOs as implementors of the Mahila Samakhya programme allowed for a quick and effective initiation; but problems arose along the way that needed to be addressed and the strategy of initiation changed accordingly. With the shift to independent launching of sanghas, without assistance from NGOs, problems and resistance are being faced at the initial stages of the program itself. But once the MS functionaries persevere through this initial phase and a sangha gets established, the latter sanghas are generally more sustainable in the long run.

This is not to say that MS does not view NGOs as partners in the programme anymore. On the contrary, NGOs at the national level continue to provide MS with invaluable insight and assistance. At this level NGOs as initiators and trainers help weave in sensitivity, flexibility, critical questioning of the system, and assist in establishing country-wide support networks of women's organizations. Even at the state level NGOs continue to play a critical role in capacities other than implementors of the programme as is evident from the following observation.

> **"At present we have many individuals from various NGOs helping us at different levels from village level activities to state level trainings and workshops. They contribute on the basis of requirements of the programme as and when required. Some work with us on a part-time basis regularly, some occasionally giving specialized inputs in various components."** **Source : U.P. Mahila Samakhya report, 1996.**

It is through the non-govt. linkage that MS has able to get its ninche in the national women's networks - women's studies groups as well as the autonomous women's groups.

Sakhi, Sahayogini and Sangha

Despite a fresh nomenclature in Mahila Samakhya, its basic linkage to WDP concept is most apparent in the Sakhi, Sahayogini roles. They are a revised, redesigned versions of Sathin and Pracheta of WDP, Rajasthan. The WDP concept of Sathin as a village woman leader who could act as catalyst in forming village level forums for women, which in due time could emerge as strong pressure groups for raising genuine demands, fighting injustice and creating an environment for 'equal' treatment of women, was initially accepted in Mahila Samakhya with appropriate modification. The change was towards making it more broadbased; and flexible planning for smoother and effective expansion of the process of group formation. The 'honorarium' for sakhi was also a reminder of sathin-heritage, though the exact amount and number of women taken as sakhis in a particular block/taluk varied greatly. The variations were from a single paid sakhi to two paid sakhis, two rotating sakhis, three rotating sakhis and sometimes (in Gujarat) even four sakhis sharing the honorarium. Sahayogini, as a Taluk level worker, was similar to a Pracheta, seen in a supportive role as also a link to the District Implementation Unit*.

This model was accompanied by another, freshly evolved concept in Mahila Samakhya, i.e., that of sangha formation as a direct step supported by sahayogini, trainers and DIUs resource persons and finding to be given to the collective rather than to individuals. This model avoids the problems created by single or few dominating leaders and works on a more democratic functioning of a group with the possibility of emergence of multiple leadership for different kinds of skills.

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* *The first training in Mahila Samakhya was infact that of a group of sakhis in Varanasi, 1988.*

The following excerpt from one of the workshops conducted for this study records the pros and cons of the two broad models existing in Mahila Samakhya as perceived by the sangha women and sahayoginis :

Paid Sakhis

* They shoulder the burden of being leaders by virtue of being paid by the programme.

* They are spokespersons (at times) for the sanghas.

* They are the yardstick of empowered women at village level, according to the sanghas.

* The paid sakhis are a convenient link in the structure for operationalising the programme in the beginning.

* Sanghas still feel very dependent on the sakhi -- in fact they look up to her for guidance.

Sanghas without sakhis

* Sahayoginis develop relationships with sangha women directly -- not through an individual.

* The whole process of collective formation takes longer to crystallise.

* The sangha interacts more directly with sahayoginis, and DIU to access information.

* Decision-making processes within some sanghas are more active when there is no dependency on a sakhi.

* Where sakhis are absent, more women come forward to take up leadership roles.

The present status of the various patterns of Sakhi-Sangha investments in the four Mahila Samakhya states covered by this study is as follows :

Sangha Sakhi Models

Distribution of Honorarium

Model	Gujarat	U.P.	Andhra	Karnataka
One Sakhi	17	405	--	--
Two or more Sakhis	245	268	--	--
Rotating Sakhis (called trainees)	262	--	--	--
Sangha Model	8	172	252	692
Sanghas which are in process or not taking funds	22	--	--	209
Total Sanghas				

Source : Mahila Samakhya National Office, 1996.

It is noteworthy that the major trend is towards a model of sangha which does not rely on specific leadership roles. Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have totally opted out of the paid sakhi model.

These examples illustrate the flexibility of the programme plan which has allowed for continuous modifications of the proposed models. It highlights the fact that the initial plan had been a set of open-ended guidelines which needed to be (and were) reinterpreted according to the demands of the local setting. This has allowed for a plurality of approaches that are contextually relevant and situation-specific.

These changes and shifts in sangha establishment and organizational/ operational structure have resulted in an altered perception of the sangha itself among its members. When Mahila Samakhya was being implemented through NGOs, rural women were essentially viewed as a target group to which certain

government schemes could be delivered. This was in stark contradiction to the manner in which Mahila Samakhya had envisioned sanghas as a common forum where women could discover and re-discover their identities and problems as women, and mobilize around issues that were of priority to them. This perception has itself been broadened and enriched by the sangha women for whom the sangha has come to imply something more than a mere forum. It is viewed as a desire for "a physical space (thikana), a social space (collectivity), a human space (emotional and intellectual support), and an organizational space (solidarity)" (Perspectives: Mahila Samakhya U.P., 1993). The regular functioning and vitality of certain sanghas has altered the heretofore accepted wisdom that even if women were provided a space to come together they would not be able to do so because they do not have any time given their heavy work schedules. Experience from sanghas in all four states show that women make time for issues and activities that are of importance to them. Most sanghas meet at least once in two weeks, and there are cases where sangha women are meeting once or even twice a week, usually after 10 pm when all the other work is done.

Processes of Sangha Spread

Two distinct modes of program expansion and spread of sanghas have been observed in Mahila Samakhya programmes. At one level it is the role of the State Program Directors (SPDs) to identify new districts where the program could be expanded. Within districts the DIU functionaries, in consultation with the SPDs, decide on the blocks and villages in which to expand the program. In other words, expansion is a planned activity initiated and implemented from above. Once these decisions are taken, Sahyoginis are sent out to the concerned villages where they initiate the coming together of women.

In addition to the aforementioned process, a more interesting trend of program spread has emerged which is in keeping with the bottom-up approach and self-empowerment philosophy of Mahila Samakhya. Sanghas are spreading to new areas on their own initiative through alternative systems of communication like word of mouth, without the involvement of `official' motivators like Sahyoginis. **New sanghas are being initiated by women who have kinship networks in MS villages**

through which they receive information about the Programme. In some sense existing sanghas are playing the role of Sahyoginis in disseminating information and encouraging the formation of new sanghas. Kinship networks are a crucial mode through which women in non-MS villages and taluks/blocks become aware of MS. The other important channel of information on MS is migrant labor. This spread through kinship networks and migrant labor is not only happening within states but across state boundaries as well. For example, there was a case in Andhra Pradesh where labor migrants to Gujarat learnt about the MS Gujarat Program and brought the information back to their village in Andhra Pradesh. They also learnt about the rotational paid Sakhi strategy being followed in Gujarat and questioned the alternative process of common sangha fund in their state.

Sangha : from an Aggregate to a Group

Collecting women together for a specific purpose - an outsiders objective - is not synonymous with the notion of a group. A group to have an identity must experience and act as a unit with an inner momentum. How does this happen? or, When can it happen? MS experience clearly demonstrates that in the final analysis, a group emerges only under certain conditions. These conditions are what outsiders can create. Interventions can at best facilitate those processes which help the gradual emergence of a group. What are the specific steps that help such an emergence of a group? The response MS groups is as follows :

- **Training** : At the basic level, women must discover their commonality not merely at a verbal level but as a lived experience. To realise that they are a unit in some respect women have to feel as a unit. For women who have internalised their role and status as a subordinate member in the society, this experience arises in a very authentic way, if and when they can distance themselves from their personal context and look at their shared situation. An in-house, residential training situation helps this experience to emerge. And this, initially facilitates a core leadership for a sangha.

- **Support** : Emotional and Institutional - With an altered perception of women's identity, their world view goes through a turmoil. What appeared straightforward, God decreed `destiny' to them, alters into a human cultural situation which needs to be changed. This newly acquired state, which is an inevitable outcome of sensitive training, needs strong support at an emotional level. This is the most critical first step in empowerment which MS strictly adhered to. It is this which constituted the major departure from bureaucratically managed interventions (Govt. or Non-govt.). Strong sanghas in MS vividly recall their experiences of internalising the supportive gestures by Sahayoginis and DIUs. Also absence of this can be seen as a crucial factor responsible for the break-up of Sanghas.

- **Strong and Sensitive Sahayogini** : The position and role of the Sahyogini is crucial to the successful emergence of a sangha. She should be a full-time functionary, trained in the MS philosophy and approach, and devoted to not more than ten villages. The three major facets of her position are: a Mahila Samakhya functionary, a group organizer, and a trainer (Source: Mahila Samakhya, U.P., 1996). The woman in this position should be able to culturally relate to the village women and serve as a role-model for them. She should be able to establish emotional rapport, solidarity and a relationship with sangha women which requires going beyond the traditional confines of the "government official" (sarkari) label that comes with her position. She should avoid potentially conflictual situations and monitor the pace of change closely so as to keep it within `acceptable' limits. She must always view accountability to the village women as a priority. The Sahyogini needs constant capacity building through on-going training and educational upgradation. She should have easy access to a contextually relevant information system which will assist her in her role as a facilitator/motivator of local women.

- **Flexible, Responsive and Supportive MS organizational structure** : The MS structure should motivate and not stifle emergence and operation of sanghas. In addition, timely and appropriate

intervention is required by all functionaries to solve problems as and when they arise. The MS structure should creatively facilitate situations that bring women together, encourage them to do things collectively and discover their commonalities as women.

- **Transparency of functioning** : Transparency in the functioning of the MS structure, information sharing, and decentralization of decision making are crucial elements that contribute to the processes of successful sangha formation.

- **Collective activities** : Besides the role of the Sahyoginis and a supportive, facilitative MS structure, the sanghas must go through the rites of passage, the necessary steps, and indulge in collective activities before they can build a sense of solidarity. It has been observed that struggle plays a central role in the emergence of sanghas. A sangha that does not go through a history of struggle over issues will remain a loose aggregate (or break apart) and not emerge as a collective in the real sense of the word. This also implies that a sangha needs sufficient time to formulate its priorities and engage in the necessary struggle to achieve success. A sangha formed in a quick manner is generally unstable and unsustainable.

- **Caste and class** : Some interesting common trends have emerged with respect to the caste and class composition of sanghas in all the states included in this study. It has been observed that organically strong sanghas generally tend to be caste-specific and most sangha members hail from lower castes. In addition to one-caste sanghas there are many instances of mixed sanghas where members come from several lower-caste groups. For example, in Bidar district (Karnataka) there are 44 mixed caste sanghas out of a total of 202 sanghas in the whole district, and in Bijapur there are 66 mixed sanghas out of a total of 210 (Refer to Table I). Mixed sanghas have also formed across caste lines as long as there is a commonality of class affiliation. In other words, women belonging to different castes will come together in one sangha as long as they belong to the lower class. There are no instances of purely upper class sanghas or

sanghas where there is an intermixing of upper and lower class women. That is to say that while caste boundaries can and are transgressed during the process of sangha formation, class boundaries are hard to collapse.

Bidar District

S. No.	Caste based Sanghas	No. of Sanghas
1.	Harijan Sangha	127
2.	Mixed Sangha	44
3.	Christian Sangha	14
4.	Madara Sangha	7
5.	Lambani Sangha	5
6.	Muslim Sangha	3
7.	Kurumba Sangha	1
8.	Reddy Sangha	1
	Total	202

Bijapur District

S. No.	Caste based Sanghas	No. of Sanghas
1.	Harijan Sangha	72
2.	Madara Sangha	57
3.	Mixed Sangha	39
4.	Harijan and Madara Sangha	27
5.	Lambani Sangha	7
6.	Oddara Sangha	5
7.	Kuruba Sangha	3
	Total	210

Break-up of Sanghas

Based on the afore-mentioned preconditions for emergence of sanghas, the following configurations lead to disintegration of sanghas :

- Overpowering leadership at all levels of the MS structure has emerged as one of the leading causes of the weakening and dissociation of sanghas. Leadership that suffocates rather than enables—be it at the sangh level, Sakhi level, Sahyogini level, DIU level or the state office level is not conducive to the strengthening of sanghas. Sangha women, Sakhis, and Sahyoginis need to work collaboratively rather than competitively with each other.

- Sanghas also disband when Sahyoginis and the DIU/state office functionaries do not respond to sangha needs in a timely and appropriate manner. Apathy on the part of programme functionaries kills the sangha spirit. This includes lack of regular visits to the villages and systematic reviews of sangha activities and progress. Another important factor contributing to the decline of sanghas is restriction on smooth information flow both vertically and horizontally through the various levels of the MS structure. This becomes especially problematic where money is involved because it flouts the very basic principle of accountability.

- Situations in which sangha activities take on a sense of ritualism leads to the stagnation of sanghas. In addition, making personal grudges into sangha issues is detrimental to the growth of sanghas because it accords precedence to the individual over the collective.

- Intervention from outside agencies-whether governmental or non-governmental-which follow a philosophy that is antithetical to the basic premises and processes of Mahila Samakhya leads to a decline and eventual break up of sanghas. Conflicts with NGOs have been discussed previously in this report. It has been observed that government schemes for women's economic development (like DWCRA) that impose aggregation of women from without rather than building collectivism from within result in the disbanding of

sanghas. This has been the experience of all four states particularly where governmental (or non-governmental) loan schemes are concerned.

Indicators for Strong Sanghas

Based on discussions on the preconditions for the emergence of sanghas and the factors contributing to their break up, the following indicators for strong sanghas have emerged the absence of which in turn gives indicators for sangh weakness also. These indicators refer principally to the processes of Sangha functioning and not to the initial investments. In other words, the first few steps taken in any Sangha are the choices made by them out of a whole set of "possible" ways of doing things. What emerges as the outcome from them can be estimated through the following indicators.

A strong sangha is one which

* takes initiative in identifying a common cause
* responds with sensitivity to issues of exploitation/violence on women
* integrates community concerns in its agenda
* takes a decision without guidance from Sahyogini
* builds an image of "a power to reckon with" at the community level
* pressurise the existing system for greater accountability to people.
* attracts and sustain participation from different sets of women and men over varied issues
* holds regular meetings in which women take active interest and part, and indulge in creative, open-minded problem solving
* encourages alternative forms of learning
* provide leadership opportunities to greater numbers of women.

Statewise Categorisation of Sanghas

State	Total No. of Sanghas	Strong Sangha	Medium Sangha	Weak/ Fallen Apart Sangha	Percentage of Strong Sanghas
Gujarat	554	259	192	103	45%
U.P.	845	264	330	251	31%
Karnataka* (Bidar and Bijapur)	433	146	125	162	34%
A.P.	252	97	49	106	39%

** While Karnataka has a total of 901 sanghas. The exercise for assessment of strong, medium and weak sanghas was done only in Bidar and Bijapur in August 1996.*

*** This table has been compiled by collating the information put together by districts on the basis of the indicators emerging through Sangha meetings and presented in this report above.*

Source : Workshop Reports in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, 1996.

II

Education

Mahila Samakhya understands 'education' in the broadest sense of the term. To draw-out; to lead forth; to realise potential; to discover ones inner resources. Education in the M.S. context spells out as :

* Acquiring self-confidence and esteem.
* Becoming able to deal with authority in the home, in the community, in Government offices.
* Knowing about ones own body, about health problems and remedies; and being able to apply this knowledge in daily life.
* Learning of vocational skills.
* Knowing about the law and being able to articulate with the legal system to redress wrongs.
* And again, reading and writing : literacy as a part of education.

Losing one's feelings of helplessness; becoming empowered to say "I can change", "I can bring about change" is the result of education.

Finally, becoming a human being among other human beings, treating others likewise and expecting the right to be treated the same : this is what Mahila Samakhya education is all about.

Education, viewed in this light, permeates all of the M.S. programme : Its energy, empowerment not only of immediate members, but in widening circles all those associated with the M.S. at the district, state and national level.

In the context of the Sangha members these related aspects of education are operative. This section examines **three different but related aspects of education : Education as life skills; education as information / knowledge and education as literacy.**

Education as life skills

It is an indisputable argument that the basis of managing life (as opposed to life managing one) is confidence and self-esteem. The following are representative voices from Sangha woman across the MS canvas picked during meetings, workshops and from newsletters.

I Exist	"By being a member of the Sangha we have got a `name' where no name existed before."
Loss of Fear	"We never knew what a sangha was and we were scared to talk to village elders. When anyone visited our village, we never spoke to them. The village elders dealt with them. Now with the sangha we have gained strength and courage. Now the village elders approach us regarding various issues like rations, roads, etc."
	"Now we are able to face and talk with the police and other people in authority without hesitation".
Expanding Horizons	"Earlier we only knew our parental home and in-law home. Now we go to many places."
	"We meet many different types of people".
Collective Strength	"The strength we have is because of all being together -- it comes from the feeling that we belong to a sangha."
	"When we want to achieve something we all sit and think about it, plan for it and then take the necessary action. The villagers are a little in awe of us!
	"Everywhere we go we acknowledge the fact that we are sangha members."
Respect	"We convinced our menfolk at home to let us join the sangha. Now we get respect at home."
	"Before they used to treat us like dirt. Now we have a standing of our own."

Making things Happen	"The village people come to us with their problems, e.g. if the ANM does not come regularly; when village development activities are not carried out properly; even when there is trouble at home." "We listen and we talk and we do things. People believe in us."
Decision Making Planning for Future	"Now we take part in deciding things for our children. We do not want our daughters to be like us. They will study and do lots of things. They will begin early we have begun only now.
Rights and Action for Change Confidence is Infectious	Recognizing that I have rights and can take action towards getting these rights has widened to include the village. MS women, supported by their Sanghas, have been elected to Panchayats, in pursuit of change at the community and village level.

Action has spiralled into confidence, competence and self-esteem, as women have tackled one, another and yet another area of the daily business of existence.

These altered ways of seeing, these changed attitudes, these new skills in the management of life are the prompters of action as delineated in different sections of this paper.

Education as Information and Knowledge

Whereas education for life skills underlies all M.S. activities and is largely communicated through non-verbal means and interactive behaviour, a large part of M.S. education is the acquiring and effective application of information and knowledge. This aspect of education has been separated from literacy, because many Sangha women while being illiterate or only marginally literate, assimilate vast quantities of information at workshops and meetings, which is regularly applied in everyday life : Specifically in the areas of health, environment, law, government schemes and programmes. Demystification of knowledge distilled as

information, not only enables women to take action themselves (e.g. with reference to traditional medicine, health practices) but makes accessible the PHC, the anganwadi, the school, B.D.O.'s office, bank, the police station, courts, etc. Literacy is not experienced as essential to 'making things happen' in all these arenas that matter.

Rukma, 45 years old, Saharanpur Distt. U.P. has been working with Mahila Samakhya for some time. She had attended many meetings and training workshops. On May 16, 1993 Rukma had gone to a nearby village to buy rations from the weekly haat (market). By the time she had completed her work she found that the last bus for her village had left. It was getting dark and she decided to walk home. In a while she noticed, Raja (22 years old) following her. Soon he caught up with her and managed to overcome and rape her. Rukma's only witness were the potatoes and carrot strewn on the road. Nevertheless Rukma managed to get hold of herself and returned home to her husband. Together they went to the village Pradhan (headman) and gave details of the assault. At break of day with her soiled clothes in a bag for evidence, without a bath, Rukma went to lodge an FIR at the police station with a Sahayogini. The policeman didn't realize that he was dealing with women who were aware of 'what has to be done' in case of a rape. As he wrote the FIR he was surprised that Rukma knew what to write in the complaint. The women noticed that the policeman didn't seal Rukma's clothes (for use of evidence). The Sahayogini and Rukma realized that there was a great gap between the law on paper and its actual practice.

Finally they went to the doctor to ask him to conduct a medical examination for proof of rape. The doctor was not keen but after much cajoling the conducted the examination but didn't give Rukma a copy of the medical report. Meanwhile, Raja hearing about Rukma's action fled the village. The police cajoled his mother to come to the police station. The women did not want the old lady to be harassed for her son's doing. Finally, when Raja did not turn up, the Sakhis stayed with his mother at the police station while waiting for the return of her son. Eventually Raja surrendered to the police.

The villagers then put great pressure to withdraw the case. According to them Raja had already paid the penalty for his crime - he had been arrested for a day and his name was listed in the police records. Both Rukma and Raja were poor and could not afford a long case in the court. Eventually, the Sangha women decided it was best to accept Raja's public apology. Next day in front of the lawyers, within the court premises, the Sangha women made Raja apologize (in writing on stamped paper) with the promise that in future he would never rape another woman.

Rukma and the sahayogini knew every step which had to be taken in case of Rape'. Neither the policeman, nor the doctor could fool them.

From Gujarat

The women from Veddi and Gopalvada village in Sabarkantha District, Gujarat are asking for more information about the schemes for literacy and school education from the Sahayogini.

One of the things the Sangha women wanted to know about was the scholarships given to tribal students. The Sahayogini went to the block office and got the required information. The Sangha women went in a group to the village school and asked for relevant information from the teacher. Initially he resisted their queries; later he asked male members of the students' families to come and collect the scholarship. He also deducted Rs. 5/- from each one's scholarship. Sangha women protested against this practice. The teacher then gave an assurance that he would purchase a dholak, a wall clock and another musical instrument from the collected fund.

Two to three women from the Sangha visited the school once every week till the time the teacher got these items for the school. The Sangha women asked for the receipt of the purchase made and ensured that from next month the scholarships were given to the mother of the students.

Now, the Sangha women are invited for school functions and the flag hoisting ceremony.

And again

> **"When a visiting Education Officer told Sakhi Santa Ben of Leelavanti Mahila Sangha of Gujarat M.S. that there is no official rule to deduct money from the student's scholarships, on any pretext, she passed on this information to her village Sangha. The Sangha women later, confronted the teacher in the presence of the Education Officer. The students revealed that the teacher was taking Rs. 10/- from each student. The Education Officer immediately issued orders for the teacher's dismissal. The Sangha women on the request of the teacher asked the Education Officer to given another opportunity for the teacher to correct his conduct, to which the Education Officer agreed. The teacher gave in writing to Sangha women that there would not be any misdeed on his part in the future".**

These two cases exemplify strategies used. Correct procedure was followed : Information was obtained and the "proper channel", the E.O., was contacted. No feathers were ruffled. It is worth noting that in both the cases, the teachers were not terminally punished.

In case after case in every area of their expanding lives, women have taken action, fully armed with information and supported by other women. They have not always been successful, nor always balanced blind justice with understanding, but there has been enough success to make women confident of their action methodologies.

Education as Literacy

Women recognize literacy as being absolutely desirable - but only for their children, not so much for themselves. This may perhaps be due to the fact that some of the more telling outcomes of education - feeling empowered, gaining knowledge, being able to get things done, are things women have experienced without becoming literate. But sometimes literacy becomes necessary.

> **Balamma of Hireven Kelkunta, Raichur District, Karnataka, was elected a panchayat member. She was canvassing to become the President. While she was in her house three men came to her and informed her that a meeting was being held in the next taluk and she**

had to attend it. They made her sign some papers. She readily signed without reading the contents. They took her to Raichur by jeep. There they left her in a hut and said that the jeep had broken down. Suspecting something fishy, she demanded to be taken home. When she reached home the next evening she was informed that the other male candidate has been elected President unopposed. She met the District Commissioner with her problem. He expressed his helplessness as she had "signed" the withdrawal papers without reading them.

This was certainly incentive enough for Balamma to become literate!

Then again, women trained as handpump mechanics in Banda, U.P., became literate via the language of handpump maintenance.

Various attempts have been made to get women interested in literacy. One such effort is the holding of **literacy camps** in U.P. These camps create an environment which will motivate women to literacy. Region specific curricula were devised - In Saharanpur, the curriculum was built around violence to women; in Varanasi to panchayati raj and wages and so on. The starting of **literacy centres** for women followed on the running of camps. These centres, have District specific premiers as also various magazines published by M.S. as also those from other organizations like Niranther, Jagori, etc.

The following table gives numbers of the different types of education centres being run in the different state.

States	Women's literacy centres	Non-formal centres for children	Mahila Shikshan Kendras	Creches
1. Andhra Pradesh	78	87	2	--
2. Gujarat	170	27	1	53
3. Karnataka	124	260	3	89
4. Uttar Pradesh	133	155	1	--

In all the States **NFE centres for children** are very popular. The attempt is not at starting alternate schools but to get children ready for formal schooling.

There exists a vast diversity of initiatives regarding running and monitoring of literacy centres from the creches and early childhood care centres of Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh to the fun and games "urankhatolas" of Uttar Pradesh, to the upto class 10 NFEs of Karnataka. While this keeps faith with the MS principle of respecting diversity, **the common thread linking all of them is the creative and energising type of care and education that is provided in these centres.**

Sangha members have a say in the selection, appointment and monitoring of teachers. Gujarat child care centres are daily monitored by sangha members and parents. The sanghas have links with the PHC which also gives them a few daily use medicines to keep. The ANM finds it unsafe to visit far-flung villages -- Sangha members ensure her visits by escorting her to and from their villages.

In Andhra Pradesh a system has been worked out by which the Sangha, parents and Mahila Samakhya share the salary of a NFE teacher. Some of the teachers are male and a lot of care is taken in selecting responsible and gentle boys as most of the student are girls. The teacher in all the States is a member of the MS team, in the sense that she is trained in an environment of MS philosophy and participates in other activities.

In Andhra Pradesh, MS NFE teachers have been placed in regular formal schools which have only 1 teacher for 5 classes. These NFE teachers teach through songs, games and other active methods. The Sarpanch has even sanctioned Rs. 300/- extra per month per teacher.

The Urankhatolas of Uttar Pradesh exemplify the spirit of freedom and non-fear central to the MS process. Children at MS NFE centres exude a confidence and energy not usually associated with school-going children in rural India. While this spirit is visible in most MS NFE centres, the pedagogical component of literacy has been taken from different sources, as appropriate to each state.

Mahila Shiksha Kendras are a truly exciting an innovation of M.S. It has taken time for the idea to catch fire, but at present demand for exceeds supply. The MSK's

are residential schools for girls and women. The very fact that they are residential (necessitating being away from home at least three months at a time and spending each day with ones peers), is half the battle won. Coupled with a non-fear environment which promotes questioning, analyzing and seeking of knowledge - makes the MSK's fitting cocoons for nurturing the spirit of Mahila Samakhya.

In one MSK of Banda, U.P. a systematic effort was made to develop local and woman-relevant curriculum, which included some general knowledge as well. As far as empowerment was concerned, the course was highly successful, but feedback seemed to indicate that the girls (as compared to the older women) wanted a curriculum that was more closely aligned to that of the formal school. This, in spite of the fact that 30 out of 80 girls and women of 2 MSK batches, joined the mainstream in classes V and VI.

This is one more confirmation of the fact that children and young girls (upto 16 years of age) want to identify themselves with the formal system, whereas older women seem to want a more functionally-oriented education. It would appear that **for young people, literacy in itself is desirable and empowering, whereas for older women literacy is a means to an end.**

Presently in some areas there are plans to set-up more MSKs in other areas, e.g. A.P. where there is a move to experiment with non-residential alternate schools for girls. Actually, all MSKs are potential alternate schools, if on a regular basis they could adopt the open school exam system, which would open up worlds beyond the village for its young students.

The NFE Centres and especially the MSKs are Sangha-replicas in so far as they provide that environment of non-fear and togetherness which foster "empowerment" - in this case for children and young girls.

III

Access to Resources

"All this (Sangha activities) is not our work — it is our right"

For women who have internalized a subordinate status in society over centuries, the notion of 'access to resources' unfolds itself through a long circuitous journey. Money and property are obvious, tangible resources over which they have never had direct control. The possibility of accessing them, therefore rests on a basic ability to understand the larger context and confidence to reject the structure which has justified and perpetuated it. Such an ability stems from an Inner Resource - the Power Within. It is this pre-condition which allows for access to more visible and tangible forms of material resources. The previous section 'Education', explored this precondition.

In this section we deal with the tangible/material resources of basic amenities, resources for health, and economic resources.

Basic Amenities

In village Pal of Rajkot District water taps had been provided for the convenience of the whole village. However, the arrangement of water distribution was as such that Patels (an upper caste) were getting more water, and supply was negligible or sometimes nil in Harijan localities. Sangha women were upset about this system of water distribution. They kept thinking about the ways by which they could alter the existing situation.

Sangha members called a meeting and discussed the water problem. It was decided that they first meet the Sarpanch. They had a talk with the Sarpanch who was not very co-operative. He was from a higher caste. The women thought that they would have to go to the district level. All of them went by tractor to the district headquarters and met the

Collector. The Collector put pressure on the officers of the taluka; they had a Gram Sabha and discussed the problem.

The Sangha women said that since they also pay water tax, should they not get water? It was decided that when water distribution takes place, at that time two women from the Sangha would also be there to take care of equal water distribution. After some time the arrangement was regularized. **Rajkot District Report, 1995.**

Water is one, if not the main issue addressed by Sangha women in all MS areas. Many of the cases are about unequal availability of water on a caste and class basis.

There are also instances of demands made on the administration for an overall increase in the supply of water e.g. In another Gujarat village a nearby dam which diverted water to another village, became the cause for Sangha women to organise themselves and demand their right to the water. In this particular case, women forcibly prevented the authorities from releasing water to the other village - and the whole issue was regularized later on in favour of the protesters.

But by and large, authorities are pursued relentlessly for seeing that justice is done, rather than taking the law into their own hands.

Negotiation is part of the MS strategy as also to make the administration responsible and accountable to the people.

Other basic amenities that Sangha women have organised themselves for (usually successfully) are street lights, roads, drains, electricity, ration shops, increase in the number and frequency of bus routes, handpumps, latrines, safe school buildings. This has happened in almost all villages where there are strong Sanghas. Also by implication, these activities are missing where the Sanghas are weak or have fallen apart for some reason or the other.

Health

Trainings in health have been a major pre-occupation in all M.S. States : Information about how the body functions; what causes illness and how to prevent

disease; the importance of personal and environmental hygiene. In addition to practical value, this demystification helps women feel more 'in control'.

Surveys

Participatory Surveys have also been a means to getting information about local illnesses and subsequent workshops are related to findings e.g. health workshop : women-specific ailments, malaria, T.B. etc. have tied in outside information to existing local situations.

Camps

Gujarat (as also districts of other States) has held **training camps** regularly for young girls, regarding the functioning of their own bodies. Worries about ailments and little - known facts about one's body are discussed openly, which has been a very empowering experience for participants.

Traditional Medicine

An equally empowering experience has been the collecting of information about and putting into practice **traditional medical practices.** In the absence of allopathic medical facilities in view of their higher costs, traditional medical practices become doubly important. That known usages are being affirmed adds to the process of empowerment. Karnataka has published a book on local traditional medical practices and this is being translated into different languages. 30 types of medicinal herbs have been identified and some women are growing them for their own use as well as for sale. About 10 of these herb varieties are for treating women's ailments. But the growing and selling of herbal medicine has not yet been systematized or taken off in a big way.

Allopathic Medical Facilities

Though allopathic medical facilities are hard and costly to come **by, networking is done for better collaboration with the system.** As stated elsewhere in this report, ANMs' problems e.g. about the safety of travelling to remote villages is addressed, so that the ANM begins to feel part of the M.S. system - she is being treated as a human being - a refreshing change, calling for friendly (and therefore

helpful) feelings on her side. The same applies to the **anganwadi worker** - she is helped not to feel isolated in her job of feeding, weighing and charting the health of the children in the process of being monitored in carrying out these tasks.

Holistic Health

Not only are health and medical matters demystified and firmly related to the practical, but the relationship of health to nutrition, social taboos, women's status in the home, etc., makes for a holistic understanding of the entire area of health and its maintenance.

Economic Resources

Access to economic resources can be discerned under three categories :

1. Fair/higher wages.
2. Government schemes.
3. Savings and thrift.

1. Wages

Next to water, wages is perhaps the most common issue around which women have organised themselves.

In Pal Village the agricultural activity was in full swing. In July 1994 Sangha women were going to fields for work. Like the previous years this year also landlords engaged labourers. In the meantime prices for essentials had gone up. The women called a Sangha meeting and discussed how to cope with the rising prices. They felt that the during peak season at least, their wages should be higher. The women decided that they should get a minimum of Rs. 30/- per day as wages; they should be provided with afternoon meals and tea should be given twice a day. As a form of protest against their existing low level of wages all the women decided not to go to work from the next day. The the landlord called a meeting with the women, they told him about their decision. Outraged at this, the landlord sent for women labourers from the neighboring village (Dhokra) but the Pal Sangha women had already informed the Sangha women of Dhokra regarding their move.

Women of both villages were united and none came to work in the fields. They decided to fight the unjust level of wages. "They would rather die of starvation than work on such low wages", they said. The third day the landlords begged them to come. The women set down their conditions to which the landlords had to agree and the Sangha won.

Cases like this abound where women have held out for two and three months at a time. Many a time they have not succeeded, but often they have. While the struggle is on, other women in the village help out with food. Hearing of successful cases from other areas acts to keep spirits from flagging.

At other places there have been struggles for equal wages with men. Where successful, often men subsequently demand a rise in their wages!

2. Government Schemes - (including credit from National Banks)

Unlike the struggle for wages, where Government schemes like DWCRA, IRDP, SC/ST housing, etc. have been accessed it is only some women who are selected for schemes - on a quota basis; the majority of Sangha women do not benefit. At times this has threatened to break up the sangha and at times women have refused schemes/loans because all the women could not benefit. It is a very delicate balance, between the individual and the group. There are no ready answers, especially in the situation of deprivation in which most Sangha women live.

In many of the MS areas, women singly or in small groups (not co-terminus with the Sangha) have taken advantage of DWCRA, TRYSEM and IRDP to start income-generating activities. It is a safe rule of thumb that where Sanghas are strong, individual members of the sangha benefiting from Government schemes will not disrupt the collective strength of the Sangha. As to when, in the life of the Sangha, economic benefits accrue to individuals, appears crucial to the health of the Sangha as a collective.

Banks by and large are not unwilling to give loans to women, as women have a long-standing reputation of 100% and on-time returns.

Following is a case-study of where the Sangha women managed to get Bank rules changed :

In Almatti, Karnataka there is a group of thirty women belonging to the 'Vaddera' community (Stone-cutters by profession). Mahila Samakhya is working with this group since 1989. The Sangha is very strong. The women wanted to take a loan from the local bank to take a 'big rock' on lease in order to cut it into small stones to be used for construction. This was essentially to expand and strengthen their economic activity of stone-cutting. When they approached the Bank authorities, they were told to take up dairy, poultry or other activities which are 'identified' activities of the Bank. Stone-cutting was not on their list. The women reacted to this strongly and dialogued with the Bank authorities that they are not skilled in any of the activities mentioned by them and it would take a long time for them to be trained in totally new activities.

In the monthly bankers meeting at the taluka level the Sahayoginis and the Sangha women raised this topic (stone cutting as an economic activity to be included in the bankers list for lead loans) in the presence of Lead Bank Manager, NABARD Bank Manager and the local bankers. The Zilla Parishad had issued standing instructions to all banks to give first priority for lead loans to the Mahila Samakhya Sanghas due to 100% repayment of loans wherever the loans have been dispersed. Which is why the bankers took up the matter very seriously and suggested that the women meet the Chief Secretary. The bank manager also issued a letter of recommendation to the head office seeking permission to include stone-cutting as an activity for taking loans. Meanwhile the Sangha women met the Chief Secretary and put it to him that they need the bankers help to improve their economic situation and at present there is no scope as stone-cutting is not recognised by the bank for lead loans. There are many activities similar to this which are not included in the Bankers list. The Chief Secretary has identified the other such activities and recommended that the Bankers give all such loans.

Almatti village, Bijapur district, Karnataka.

To rationalize Government rules to be user-friendly to poor people is part of the mandate of MS. Not knowing about the immutable reputation of monolithic Government rules, perhaps makes them less formidable and therefore easier to change.

Savings and Thrift

Savings and thrift are not the most important activities of these self-help groups :

This is perhaps because the central tenet of MS philosophy and practice is the collective strength of Sangha members for fighting against the inequality and oppression which is contained in 'n' number of areas of daily life.

The general experience in MS regarding savings and thrift is that it is detrimental to sangha coherence, especially if such activity is introduced in the early days of Sangha formation.

> **In Mehbubnagar, District in Andhra Pradesh at the time of MS expansion to new areas in 1995, the district administration launched a district-wide thrift campaign in all the 1200 — odd villages. The strategy was to have Kalajatha performances* the previous night and thrift groups formed the next day around the idea of saving one rupee per day. In Narva mandal, the three sahayoginis were very keen to be trained in the Kalajatha and be part of the team. They felt that this would be a quick way of establishing rapport. No doubt as a result of the performances, the three got recognition, a quick contact with a wide cross-section of the village and euphoria knew no bounds when in several village there were 5-7 thrift groups formed with 15 to 20 women. Then the problems surfaced. Several of the groups were of upper caste/ class women whose aspirations were different. There was an essential contradiction. Should there be one sangha? The question of identity became sharper.**
>
> **As a team the DIU took a stand that there will be no collectives formed on the basis of caste alone. Conflicts of interest, social taboos etc. surfaced. The sahayoginis were faced with problems of the multiple**

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* *Travelling awareness building performances.*

aspirations of different levels. They also recognised that the groups were not organic entities. And in fact their work was complicated in a manner which was not faced by the other sahayoginis. The challenge now is how to cope and devise alternate strategies.

In other mandals where the Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samakhya had been working for some time and strong Sanghas existed, the thrift campaign did not have an adverse impact. On the contrary it enabled an analytical discussion on the potential and problems of thrift.

In other areas, e.g. in Karnataka, starting savings has initially disrupted group unity. The only talk in sangha meetings would be about money. New members were not admitted to the sangha because of the problems of who saves, who takes loans etc. Gradually adjustments were made and the saving group became a sub-set of the Sangha. This is seen in Gujarat as well.

Savings have been used in different ways : Crisis loans for emergencies; loaning out to other women at lower rates of interest than money lenders charge; for group activities, like generation of forest and grass cover, for running literacy centres, etc.

In Karnataka Sanghas have saved impressive sums of money :

S.No.	Particulars	Bijapur	Raichur	Mysore	Bidar	Gulbarga
1.	No. of Sangha started Savings	159	58	36	19	N.A.
2.	No. of Sanghas receiving Honorarium	172	49	159	180	115
3.	No. of Sanghas having Bank Account	172	63	159	180	115
4.	No. of Sanghas utilising Honorarium	20	49	134	160	115
	Total amount saved in the Sanghas	2,30,000	44,966	N.A.	2,50,000	2,00,000

Women borrow money from the Sangha to start income-generating projects. There is an impressive array of these from fruit and vegetable vending, mat weaving, cattle rearing, rope making and even sericulture.

Everywhere women have formed their own rules, interest rate, schedule of returning loans etc., according to local needs and convenience.

Sanghas have two types of funds

- From the personal savings of Sangha members.
- From the MS programme. In Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, individual sakhis are not paid - the amount is deemed to be the Sangha fund from which women draw to a limited extent for Sangha work. In Uttar Pradesh too, there is one paid sakhi per Sangha (in place of 2 sanctioned posts) and the additional money becomes the Sangha fund.

A big question for the Sangha is - after MS what? A federation of Sanghas? A women's bank? Money saved suggests the feasibility of some such alternatives. Some of the options being explored will be discussed in the section on the future.

Accessing resources is a relatively easy task compared to dealing with the core of gender inequality - the violence that is perpetrated on women, visibly in physical terms and what is perhaps more crushing of the inner self, verbally and through small actions, every day over weeks and months and years.

By accessing resources especially tangible/material resources, women actually enlist the community on their side - water, roads, loans, are shared assets. Facing violence and resisting it is threatening - men via social mores are quick to blame women for attempting to break up the family, a prospect which touches deep insecurities among both men and women. The next section is about how, despite this, women have started dealing with the issue of violence.

IV

Women and Violence

"We have made a bundle of all our fears and thrown it in the river."

Violence against women emerges as a truly universal issue in Mahila Samakhya. From the very outset, it was recognised as a non-negotiable point around which Sangha women thought it necessary to reflect and act. While it is a recorded fact that women's groups in every Taluka/block of all MS Districts have, at some point or other, demonstrated strongly against violence on women and on many occassions managed a 'success story' in as much as the culprits have been punished, it is equally true that no intrinsic barrier for committing violence against women has been created. The Intricacies and delays of the legal system are proverbial. And for poor rural women, the route to legal justice is even more exhausting and impoverishing. Cases of rape, murder and battering continue to occur despite all resistance. This appears to be the hardest ground to break. However, what this study indicates is a steady, positive shift at two levels, which can be taken as serious indicators for maturity of **understanding** and **responses** of Sangha women to issues of violence. Moving towards a deeper understanding of what 'hurts' and humiliates a woman, Sangha women have also responded to 'violence' at the basic human level i.e. humiliation and injury to the personhood of all subordinated groups. This has included reacting to caste discrimination as violating the dignity of persons.

Naming

A significant change that can be clearly discerned across the Mahila Samakhya canvas is with respect to what is **named** as violence. Despite diversity of idiom and degrees of significance accorded to the "line items" listed under the category of violence, a broad consensus was recorded on the comtemporary

understanding of violence among sangha women in all the four states covered in this study. The aggregated list emerging from meetings held with sangha women and sahayoginis is as follows :

* Wife beating.
* Rape.
* Mental torture : forcing women to obey and accept in an unquestioning manner.
* Humiliating treatment of infertile women and calling them "barren".
* The devadasi tradition.
* In human treatment of widows : isolation and segregation.
* Labelling defiant, non-conforming women as "dayan".
* Eve-teasing.
* Forced abortions and female infanticide.
* Humiliation of wives when they don't please their husbands.

Recalling earlier experience in Mahila Samakhya trainings and meetings, the Sahyoginis now find a major shift in the manner in which women perceive 'violence'. During the initial Mahila Samakhya training situations women almost always shared personal agonizing experiences by describing them as "dukh" or suffering. The group interpretation of personal suffering was generally **"what women have to go through"** or "**how women are treated in society**." Physical vulnerability and emotional vulnerability were intimately connected aspects of what was termed "**the tragedy of womanhood**." This suffering, pain, and sense of vulnerability was invariably seen as the common bond between women that cuts across caste, class, rural, and urban divides. Now, the change in the self-image of women, leading to a sensitive interpretation of what constitutes basic dignity of a person, these and similar experiences are renamed as 'violence' on women.

Four incidents are presented below from MS villages which are indicative of the sensitive responses of MS sangha women to situations of violence which they absolutely refuse to tolerate and in the process have evolving initiated processes for their own ways of ensuring justice.

Gali (abusive language) as Violence

> **MS has been working primarily with Basawa jati women in this block. A man belonging to this community was very rude to the Sahyogini and used foul, abusive language. The Sahyogini shared this indignity with the sangha women who decided to call a big meeting in the village. In addition, they registered a case against the man with the local police. In the course of discussions within the meeting, it emerged that the man concerned had bribed the police (by paying them Rs. 300) The village community then decided that there was no point in waiting for the police to take action. They further decided that the culprit should now pay a fine of Rs. 600/- which is double the amount he paid as bribe and each woman from the sangha would be allowed to beat the man twice with her sandals. The women, however, while welcoming the decision taken by the village elders, and accepting that the penalty of Rs. 600/- should be held, decided not to beat up the man.**
>
> **The fact that the sangha women could call a meeting of the entire village community on an issue which they thought was important and get a decision in their favor, is considered very significant within the village.**
>
> **Rajli Village, Dhaboi Block, Baroda District, Gujarat, 1995**

Here the important point is that the Sangha action has been around an issue which a few years back was never seen as a major affront. Gali i.e. abusive language was generally seen as a very trivial matter. In the above story, the sangha women reflected and declared the use of foul language as basically violating the dignity of a woman and was therefore a totally unacceptable behaviour. Also, the case indicates their choice to take serious action by organising a fresh forum for justice involving women and men from their immediate context where "proving" the deed is never an issue. Again, the fact that they chose not to beat up the culprit with sandals, inspite of getting the sanction

from the community at large, demonstrates their own style of settling issues and confidence in demonstrating their sense of justice.

The shift from taking cognisance of only gross forums of violence towards a subtler sensitivity for the dignity of women, displays a revised self-image of rural women.

Family Violence

This is a case of domestic violence and incest within an upper-caste family where the father repeatedly beat and raped his daughter who was around sixteen. The girl was living with her father and one brother while two of her brothers were working in Pune. After physically abusing the girl he would generally lock her up in a room so that no one in the village, especially the sangha members, would come to know about it.

One day, during a state of drunken stupor, the man raped his daughter and, as usual, locked her up. The girl felt extremely oppressed. After waiting for three days, she ultimately wrote a letter to a sangha member who was well known in the village, and sent the letter through a local boy. The sangha women went to her house and spoke to her about the incident through her window. They decided to take up the issue on her behalf as long as she was willing to make her story public. The girl agreed to do so. The sangha members took the girl to the police station and lodged a complaint against the father.

Meanwhile the father got word that the sangha was aware of what had taken place, and did not come home. He even attempted to bribe the police through the support of the community leaders. However, his attempt failed because the sangha was strong and the police stated that the girl had complained herself.

The girl, accompanied by Sahyoginis, went to the court on the appointed date. Ten minutes before the hearing, the girl's older brothers got to speak with her and threatened to cut her out of the family if she came out with the truth. They told her that family bonds were stronger

than MS bonds and the sangha would not support her in the way that her family could. The brothers were successful in dissuading the girl from stating the truth. Her only words in the court were that nothing had happened to her; her father had been drunk and had fallen on her which was why she had complained to the police.

The girl later admitted to the sangha women that she had been pressurized by her family not to tell the truth in court. The sangha women and Sahyogini were visibly disappointed at the girl's decision and the outcome of the case. However, they followed it up and found out that the girl had become pregnant and was taken in for an abortion. She had been taken to her brother's place in Pune.

Kolurgi Village, Bijapur District, Karnataka, 1995.

This is apparently a "failure" case in as much as the last minute decision of the girl to "back out" left the sangha women very disappointed. However, the case clearly demonstrates the following :

* The desire on the part of rural women to reject the old habit of "accepting" what is done within a family, particularly by the head of the family.

* The public image of the sangha as a forum where girls and oppressed women can find support and redress.

* The enormity of the battle which continues to be fought.

From "Widow to "Single Woman"

During the course of trainings that MS conducted with sangha members, women who had lost their husbands were conspicuous in their demeanor. While most women were busy applying mehendi or buying colored bangles, these silent, stark women stood out. It was at this point that MS functionaries took a conscious decision to change the perception about widows. They began the process by not labelling the women who had lost their husbands as widows but as "single women."

One particular Harijan woman, Sudama, who had lost her husband, was bereft of any ornaments or accessories. After the meeting where a conscious effort was made to use the term "single women" when referring to widows, Sudama felt encouraged enough to start applying a bindi. The village was against what they considered "arrogance" displayed by a widowed woman, especially one belonging to the Harijan community. Sudama, however, stood her ground. But women from higher castes who had also lost their husbands were unable to break out of the accepted beliefs and customs.

The sangha meeting also focused on other negative customs and norms associated with the figure of the widow. The result of these discussions and deliberations was that Nirmala, a thakur widow, decided not only to be present at her daughter's wedding, but also to perform the "kanyadaan" rite!

MS has made concerted efforts in fighting against orthodox beliefs and superstitions, especially where widows are concerned. This has now resulted in referring to all women who have lost their husbands as "Akeli Aurat" as opposed to "Vidhwa" who is precluded from participating in village activity and also prevented from adorning herself in any way. Sewapuri, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, 1995.

Dayan (Witch) Issue

A similar representative case is recorded in Gujarat where the Sahayoginis decide to counter the social violence against women. In Adivasi areas a defiant widow or infertile woman is often declared as a "dayan" by the community. This is in effect a verdict to punish the woman who has not fulfilled social norms. When this issue was discussed in the sahayogini meeting few of the sahayoginis decided to select an "announced dayan" as a `Sakhi'. They not only thought about it but soon implemented it in the field. There was a village Hareshwar in Sankeda Taluka where Chandan Ben was declared as a `dayan'. Chandan Ben was "barren" and therefore considered inauspicious by the villagers. They kept their children away from her shadow. She was living in complete isolation. Sahayoginis of this taluka decided to take

up this issue seriously and chose `Chandan Ben' as a sakhi, so that her social image could be altered. Her subsequent role made a great impact in the village. Now Chandan Ben is recognised in the village as an "aware" woman on community issues.

Baroda District Report, Gujarat, 1996.

Devdasi as an equal

Kamalabai, a devadasi who was supporting her old mother and two children, was murdered because she did not allow men from her village to become her customers. The men felt offended, and gang-raped and murdered her.

The local sangha women organized a huge rally around the issue despite being told by some community members that a devadasi was not worth all the noise and efforts that the sangha was making. The sangha women, however, ignored these allegations, and got the support of other sanghas in the area as well as the DIU and other NGOs for the rally. The rally was attended by approximately 5,000 men and women who were fed by the village community; water tankers were moving with the procession.

The sangha women took up the case with the police and insisted that an FIR be filed. In addition, they followed up on the post-mortem proceedings which had tried to cover the rape aspect of the case. They also got the PSI (sub-inspector, who had helped the culprits in getting out on bail) transferred. In addition, the sangha women assisted in ensuring compensation for the family of the devadasi.

Bijapur, Karnataka.

This case is a clear illustration of the strong will of sangha women to take up the issue of the murder of a devadasi who is generally ostracized by the community. In addition, this case highlights the vertical and lateral linkages made by the sanghas. Networking with other sangha women and the community at large, they also tapped into vertical links by approaching the DIU, the police, and other NGOs to support them in their efforts. This also demonstrates the continuous

efforts of sangha women at ensuring accountability (in this case from the police, from MS structure and from NGOs in all their processes.

Responses

Establishing New Forums for Justice

"The process of justice in formal systems is long and troublesome for women. It needs much time and money, so we have created this system which is our own arrangement".,

"who will believe in our verdict of justice?"

"we are giving the judgement and the people will surely believe in it".

"People say that women have framed law for themselves!"

"It is always said that women do not have any sense which is why lawyers treat us badly. They stretch out our cases for any length of time".

The quarterly Newsletter (Apni Baat), of Jan. 1996 reports the following situation in Mahila Samakhya, Gujarat :

"Mahila Sanghas meet in Baghodia Taluk (Baroda Distt.). They get many cases from rural women who have been subjected to personal violence. The Sangha sisters therefore decided that let us have a "Kayda Committee" to have a better handling of issues. Women from ten villages took initiative and got themselves enrolled in the committee. They decided to have a planned presence on every Monday from 11 am to 5 pm. Soon cases started `coming' from neighbouring villages, ranging from maltreatment within family to molestation and similar issues.

We had started this committee but the question still remained regarding proper location and space. We used to meet under a neem tree, in the Bagodia Taluk Panchayat court. We all felt that we needed a better place which could be our "office". All women who bring their grievances to this committee spend a good amount of money on bus-fare etc. which is their own personal expense. However, they prefer this any day to going to the court. Here, they talk fearlessly and at length. When a poor woman does not have money for bus-fare she explains the case to a sangha woman in her village who, then, can share it at Baghodia.

We all did a street play to establish our committee formally. We have named it as "Naari Adalat". We need to take training in running this committee — we seek help from sisters who are in legal profession. We wish to move forward".

The main aim of Nari Adalat was to provide justice to women. It was a dream come true for women who were suffering from injustice within the society but not able to respond to it due to the self image of 'Bechaari Aurat'. Now it is not limited to Padara and Waghodia Taluka only but is being extended to other places.

Mahila Samakhya Baroda has organised a legal course for women to strengthen the 'Nari Adalat' concept. This had two broad objectives :

* Facilitating women to develop their power for analysis and think seriously before coming to a judgement.

* Acquire an understanding of the relationship between feminist ideology and alternate legal system (Nari Adalat).

This course extended over a period of two and half months in which 25 women participated. They interacted with experts confidently. Since all the women were "Dalits", so the major thrust of the course was to link women's issues with Dalit movement.

After completing this training, these women disseminated information about 'Nari Adalat' to as many women as possible. Now Nari Adalat is dealing with not just issues of violence but also trying to make Government programmes more accessible to women. It is emerging as an alternative forum of justice where women can talk fearlessly about themselves and seek justice as a 'right'.

Main Features

- Women sitting in a open place and talking about themselves, is itself a matter of significance and a cause for astonishment, within the village community. Now, women have acquired this public space for themselves. Because the venue of Nari Adalat is the office of the block panchayat, it has caused a lot of impact on Govt. workers too.

- In the past, this group has dealt with a wider range of issues, viz : 'Stree-Dhan' (an asset which women acquire at the time of marriage), divorce, wife beating, right of child, harrasment by police, problems (liquor related and scholarships for PDS), issues pertaining to property, sale of daughters and livelihood for women. The number of cases is anywhere between 5 to 30 on each issue.

DPC Report, Baroda, August 1996.

Similar forums are coming up in almost all districts of MS. They are not exactly well defined but functionally operative whenever a noteworthy case comes. The very fact that such forums function publicly with an ever growing number of cases points to :

- Families making public that which was strictly kept under covers before. Which means the woman is no longer considered solely to be blamed for rape, harrassment, etc. That there is a perpetrator of violence is recognised — who can then be apportioned blame for the misdeed.

- The community by way of the gram panchayat, elders, etc. by the very act of taking part in judging the misdeed, are acknowledging that the many ways of harrassing women are indeed wrong, calling for punishment of the perpetrator of this violence. This is a stronger indicator of change than settling a case in court, for law is often ahead of existing social mores and does not reflect real social change as much as actual community action does.

The overall pattern emerging through hundreds of small stories from various Sanghas in M.S. is that now Sangha women do not take insults quietly. It is apparent that :

* They have a judgement of their own which rests on a sensitive understanding of justice.

* They have a self image to maintain which is one of resisting all forms of injustice, in which personal violence is one sub-set.

V

Empowerment : Multiple Dimensions

In previous sections we have looked at how `empowerment' has been operative in the daily lives of women. What is the texture of this empowerment and how does it operates in the different arenas of womens' lives?

How do women handle power? Differently from men? If so in what ways? Do women, singly or in small numbers in a mans world, follow given patterns of power-play? And does a critical mass of women behave differently? What has 'empowerment' meant to Sangha women? How does the age-old internalized self-image of the sacrificing, nurturing, do-not-know-anything woman articulate with the newly acquired ability to "make things happen"?

These are not new questions for which there is one clean, easy answer. MS experience has been that the sangha women have acted in myriad ways - all along the scale, from continuing to stay oppressed to taking on the attitudes of power they see around them. There however, appears to be a pattern for the majority bunched in the middle. By and large, the women who have felt some power within, have acted in **practical** ways - give a little, take a little; two steps forward, one step back. They have **negotiated rather than confront; maintained relationships rather than act in terms of ultimate and abstract 'truths'.** And this is visible in their encounter with the community and now, increasingly, in panchayats. Their immediate political arena, the home, is possibly the last one for demonstrated change.

The following story from Karnataka, captures the essence of the M.S. experience of women's use of power.

At the community level

> **In Yediapur village of Raichur District, a research study was to be carried out about women's status in Karnataka. The survey was being done in collaboration with M.S.; specifically sangha members.**

For not too clear reasons, some villagers disrupted the survey, were rude to the investigators and put a halt to the interviews being conducted. The survey team left. Sangha members, as hosts to the visiting team, felt they had been humiliated by their own co-villagers.

Amongst the leaders of the group who had insulted the research team were three village hotel owners. None of them ever allowed any SC/ST community member to be served in their premises. Angered at the general behaviour of these villagers, particularly of these hotel owners, the Sangha women confronted them. They took up a larger issue of `justice' with them through their discriminatory behaviour.

"So far we have not said anything to you" they said, "but now we will see that you admit everybody to your hotels".

The women approached the Tehsildar and got permission from him to have the hotels closed down. 'It is against the law to practice such discrimination' they said. And they made the hoteliers close shop.

Subsequently, one of the hoteliers came to them and pleaded that he had no other way of earning a living and feeding his family. He agreed to the sangha women's insistance on removing discrimination against SC/ST members. He accepted that he would serve everyone who came to the hotel. The women talked this matter over among themselves and decided that he should be allowed to carry on business but must serve everybody". (Karnataka Report 1996).

This is such a recent case, that what happened subsequently is not known. However, it is clear that where Sanghas are really strong, women do not take insults anymore. What this case demonstrated is that :

* Sangha women had an opinion of their own; now different from the more powerful villagers.

* They now had a self-image to maintain (in their own and others' eyes).

* Women are now willing to take action to right what they saw as a wrong.

* The Sangha women did not take the law into their own hands. They merely saw to it that the law was implemented : a more difficult thing than taking the law into one's hands!

Having done all this, they felt sorry for the hotelier who had no other means of living. They were promoting justice with common sense and understanding. By agreeing that the hotelier open shop, they also bargained for admitting everyone. It is in such balancing acts that the Sangha women keep themselves within the periphery of village goodwill, while forwarding their cause in small but sure steps. In a way, one can discern in this case a pattern of alternative use of power which is not overpowering or 'destructive' of the others.

Distilling the Conceptual

Considering the fact that the above case is just one of the many instances that has come up in MS experience, it is possible to discern a pattern in the `empowerment ' of sangha women, which cuts across the specificity of their environment. The experience from all four states broadly demonstrates three stages in the process of shedding off `powerlessness'. These are demarcated more at a conceptual level rather than seen as a chronological ladder. More often than not, the three layers are intertwined through continuous struggle for change in women's position at home, in the community and in society as a whole.

The first stage of empowerment is visible when they can distance themselves from a given situation and recognise the structures of power, decode the symbols and look into them straight without fear. This may not alter the situation at all, but it alters the chemistry of the encounter. Women learn to analyse the situation and in the process, the `fear' gradually turns into an `understanding'. This can only happen when they discover that their personal suffering is a `kind' of systematic phenomenon, a chronic situation, which need not cripple their morale.

The next stage in this process is when women can experience the change of not only being able to `name' the injustice but also by resisting it : what is not `right',

need not be accepted. Hence, the courage to protest is experienced. And this is possible in the `togetherness' of the collective.

There is a small Sangha of fifteen women (eleven SC Madigas and four Christians) in Bidar District, Karnataka, which has become strong enough to have a large support base in the village.

According to long custom, the Madiga women clean out dung from Gowda (upper caste) homes after which they receive leftover food given by the Gowdas, Their children too are bonded to the Gowda for a year for a specific amount of money. But the money is kept by the Gowda till the end of the year.

Women of the Sangha decided they would not do this humiliating thing any more. When they told the Gowdas, they were told, "you can stop working for us in the fields as well. And take your children away". The money for the children was not given either. These families started working in the next village after negotiating with the Sangha there.

The Gowda who tried to get labour from nearby villages could not do so because the story had got about and the Madigas were hanging in together.

At about this time, a Madiga died and the angered Gowdas denied him burial in the upto now common burial ground. This let off a chain reaction in a number of villages and applications were forwarded to the District authorities, that separate burial ground should be allotted to theSCs. Tension mounted.

A few days later, a Gowda died. Now, when a Gowda dies, it is a Madiga who has to go round giving the news and receiving money in his angavastharam (top cloth). Also the "impure" clothes of the dead man's family have to be washed by the Madigas.

The Madigas refused to perform both these duties. A Gowda had to go round bare-chested giving the news and collecting the ritual money. This was very humiliating for the Gowdas. And his fields were not

being worked at a crucial time. So negotiations began and a compromise was arrived at. The Madigas started working in the fields and their children were not bonded but re-employed with immediate payment of wages. When the M.S. state director asked the women what part the Sahayogini had played, the women said she had come to mourn with them, the death of the Madiga who had died. i.e. she was a sympathizer a supporter, not a leader up front.

Tegampura Village, Bidar District, Karnataka.

This case demonstrates the involved relationship between the castes and the difficulties of changing such complicated cross linkages. Here, women across sanghas got together to loosen this stranglehold.

At the third stage a more mature state of realisation emerges : viz. that we need to know more, learn more, find out more - before making simplistic judgements. Basic confidence in oneself generated by predictable support from a group nurtures the learning spirit and humility in one's own stand.

Moving away from this broad pattern, and as a clean contrast, one can discern multiple cases of these very Sangha women who take family violence as a quiet suffering. What they do with ease in a public forum becomes the most difficult battle at home individually. The important message here is that empowerment processes exhibit their impact, to begin with in the public situation where the collective can visibly be together. Whether it is wage or caste or other struggles, women have tempered justice with their conditioned reflexes of nurturance. Also, in most community level action, perhaps because women become a critical mass, they are more easily able to act in deviant (from the traditional) ways; unlike at home, where they battle the very roots of power, ultimately, alone.

The Panchayat

A freshly discovered arena for struggles to shake off gender domination is the panchayat. This being a very recently entered area, patterns are barely discernible. A woman by herself is often squashed or, if sufficiently ambitious, follows (or is urged to follow by those at home supporting her), power patterns

that are all around her. However, where there are more than two or three women in the panchayat and receiving support from women outside (in this case the Sangha), there is an attempt to use this newly acquired power for doing good to more than just oneself. This, a more readily recognizable pattern in the longer existing community level action, is only a glimmering in the context of action in panchayats.

Hanumavva lives in Dotihal of Kushtaggi taluk in the district of Raichur, Karnataka. She used to collect firewood and sell it. She belongs to the scheduled caste. She was not permitted to even enter the main village inhabited by upper castes.

She contested the Panchayat elections and was victorious. She was given training by the MS DIU to equip her to handle her official obligations.

After attending one training session she requested that the other women who had won and were non-Sangha members be given training. Non-Sangha members attended the training and these seven have formed a strong union of their own. They have become so strong that they have succeeded in raising many issues and see that they have a say in the decision-making process. This woman who had to stand on the outskirts of the village to sell her bundle of firewood to the village folk is now much in demand. People are vying with each other to invite her to their homes for a cup of tea and a chat!

Karnataka

Since 1983 there has been a 25% reservation for women, in panchayats in Karnataka. In the elections held end 1993, after the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution was passed, 35,334 women were elected to the 5641 Gram Panchayat in the State. Women constitute 43.6% of the total number elected to Gram Panchayats in Karnataka - though the reservation is only one-third.

In Mahila Samakhya areas, an unprecedented 205 women contested the elections and 135 were elected - a majority from the most oppressed in society.

The difference between other areas and MS areas is that in the latter, candidates are supported by the Sangha. Also, Sangha and Sangha-supported women receive information and training in what it means to be a member of the panchayat.

After the elections, Sakhis who won the election, stayed as members of the Sangha but gave up their positions as Sakhis as they felt they would not be able to do justice to the responsibilities of two jobs. Some women acted differently. They were instrumental in breaking up their original Sanghas, by forming new Sanghas of their own. Often this was at the instigation of menfolk in their families.

At the moment, it appears to be a very fluid situation. Sangha women feel that the elected woman is taking off on her own; the elected woman feels that the other Sangha women are envious of her new status. While there are tensions in adjustments being made in the family, the Sangha and the community, the new women panchayat members are taking their job seriously. Many of them have asked for, and appreciate receiving information and training.

The women have to face a lot of ridicule and snide remarks from the men - "We do not want your advice", they say, "we only want your signature!"

Nevertheless, many men are interested in gaining the knowledge that is accessible to the women. And the women are learning to read and write with new zeal. The general impression is that the Sangha women are more articulate and make their presence felt in the panchayat meetings, unlike the non-MS women. Not only do these women question decisions, but have learnt to support one another in discussions.

Men are resentful of this new attitude of questioning and probing, and a lot of pressure is being brought on these newly elected women to leave Sanghas, as men feel that the Sanghas are egging on these women to boldness. Women are being forbidden to attend training programmes as their menfolk fear the backlash from powerful sections in the community, if the women oppose them at panchayat meetings.

An interesting experiment in interactive communication was carried out in Karnataka. Named **Gramsat,** this programme linked up groups of women at

District level to a panel of experts on T.V. for answering questions and giving information. MS sahayoginis acted as resource persons; and facilitated discussions among the women and further clarified doubts expressed by them.

Though Karnataka is somewhat ahead of the other MS states time-wise, the matter of participation in Panchayats, due to various politico-historical reasons, the other States too seem to be proceeding along similar lines.

Andhra Pradesh

A.P. in Dec.' 1994 : In the face of imminent elections, a pictorial handbook on women's role in panchayats was prepared for discussions in all the MS villages. This book became very popular and even men wanted copies. In June' 96 elections were announced.

In Chinnaporta village, Mehabubnagar district, the ex-sarpanch and a new candidate came to the 50 strong Sangha asking for their votes. The women improvised a dias under a tree and demanded that each candidate should explain what they were going to do for the Sangha and village, if elected. The Sangha proudly reported that they asked many questions on drinking water, roads, street lights and land for a Sangha hut.

Several women from both Mehabubnagar and Medak were elected and training programmes were started for them during the second half of 1995. In these workshops the role of an elected member was explained through role-plays and mock-panchayat meetings. The workshops had to be stopped since the participation dropped. The problem was that powers had not been transferred as yet because of a high court stay-order. These powers were given to the Panchayat members since May 1996.

Recently, a ward member of Pocharam village, Pulkal Mandal (Medak District) who is also a Sangha member reported that they had ensured that the Panchayat cleaned and started constructing new gutters in the village. She reminded us that she had learnt this in the workshop that had been held almost 8 months ago!

Gujarat

Gujarat has had long experience of Panchayat Raj; M.S. women are familiar with the concept. Many M.S. women - Sahayogini, Sakhis and Sangha women stood for contesting the elections, where again, through role plays and mock panchayat sessions, women became familiar with the working of panchayats.

As in the other States, when M.S. women got elected, they resigned from M.S. or in many cases gave up the elected post to continue working with M.S. perhaps because they are new to the process and haven't yet learnt power games, or maybe it is the M.S. conditioning, or a combination of the two - but in all M.S. areas, women have by and large, projected a resistance to corruption. This image of being `straight' is present in other spheres of M.S. operation too. It is only to be hoped that with the passing of time, this image does not become part of an unattainable Utopia.

Sakhi Labhuben, a Harijan stood for election to the Sarpanch post. The woman contesting against her was a Patel. Other women and Sakhis of surrounding villages canvassed for Labhuben. On the night before the voting day she was contacted by the Patel caste people who told her to declare her support in favour of the Patel woman. She was offered Rs. 10,000/- Labhuben was firm in her conviction that she stood for learning, knowing and winning; not for buying others or selling herself. Sangha women immediately called a meeting. Men of the Harijan caste voted in favour of Patels and afterwards Labhuben came to know that voters had been bought for Rs. 100/- each and she was the victim of this corrupt practice. While the counting took place Sangha women were not allowed in and Labhuben along with her husband could not go inside. She expressed her feeling that she felt lonely there, being a woman. 30-40 Sangha women consistently supported her in her struggle for change. In spite of losing, it was a valuable learning experience. It remains to be seen how exactly this experience will be used the next time around.

Mota Mandra VIllage, Kotdasangam Block, Rajkot Distt. Gujarat.

Uttar Pradesh

The experience from U.P. is a telling comment on the question of corruption. To quote from a `Work in Progress' report of an NGO, Nirantar titled `Of Women, Politics and Panchayats'.

Corruption : What were our expectations of women?

Little needs to be said about the ethos of corruption that pervades the system. But how have women panchayat members performed on this front? When reservations were introduced, the faith so often articulated by a wide cross-section from conservative quarters to feminists - was that women will not fall into the quagmire of corruption. This faith stemmed from different sources. There were some who believed that women are innately pure and therefore more honest, that women are motivated by a sense of commitment to the community and not self-interest. There were others who did not glorify women in any way but felt that women's own experience of oppression will mean a greater senstivity towards other ofrms of injustice.

BUDHILIA : Pradhan of Mangawan Budhilia is a kol who won from a reserved seat. She was a village level worker with M.S. and had been through numerous trainings on gender empowerment. When she won everyone was euphoric. She had every potential to be a model woman pradhan. Initially she used to turn to M.S. for all her information about rules and procedures. When she first became pradhan she did not even recognize a Jawahar Rozgar Yojana cheque which the BDO had given her; she kept complaining that her panchayat had not received any fund! The cheque, she thought was a piece of paper, which she had crumpled and tucked away in the folds of her saree. But about six months after she became Pradhan, we began noticing signs of change. She slowly started becoming secretive and irritable every time we went to her village. Then she started to refuse information about government schemes and money. Once we discovered that she was paying lower wages to women labourers on a construction site. It went against every principle of gender equality she had been taught. In time her irritability turned into open hostility.....

Budhilia gradually got sucked into the system of corruption. As have many other women pradhans. Are the women as bad as their male counterparts? The answer is no, for several reasons :

- Not because they are biologically any less susceptible to corruption, but simply because they have not been in the public realm and therefore have less experience of corruption.
- Also, as women, they are more vulnerable, and therefore less likely to be corrupt with impunity. After all, it is much easier to point finger at a woman in power than at a man in a similar situation. Shortly after winning elections, many women expressed their nervousness - they were eager to do what they had promised during their campaigns, not because they had a greater conscience, but because they were scared that the villagers would catch them if they didn't."

In the Family

Changes in the power structure within the family are the most difficult to achieve, to record or even to observe. In public spheres of the community and panchayat, visible actions reflect changing empowerment. In the private world of the family, this is much more difficult.

"We confront men outside but it is a no-win situation with our own family members at times."

Women who are towers of strength in public, appear willing to put up with beating and being cowed down at home. Women choose their spaces and it is easier to effect changes outside the home. However, many report to more respect being shown to them in their homes and also of their insistence that their daughters go to school. The change in image outside the home **does** have its repercussions in the home, but the exact texture of this impact has not been captured.

Apart from the Sanghas, there are in many of the M.S. Districts, forums for hearing cases of violence against women, including violence in the home. Here again, we

do not know what effect this discussion of family violence in public, is having on the power relationships in the home. Widows in many of the M.S. districts now wear bindi, jewellery, bright clothes - what effect this has had on their status in the home - we do not know.

How does empowerment in the home happen? This needs to be further researched : so that we begin to understand how women are negotiating for more `space' in decision-making at home and how actions in the family and outside interact in enhancing a woman's status; such that we have a more complete picture of how empowerment works in different arenas.

VI

Areas of Vulnerability

FUTURE

There is no available experience of large scale programmes for women's empowerment and therefore no precedence to fall back on for weighing alternatives about 'what next?' or 'will 'x' produce the required 'y'?'

Is empowerment measurable? Is there such a thing as being 'fully empowered?' And is there a point in the process of empowerment when it becomes self-perpetuating? Does the **means** to empowerment differ according to class, status, circumstance? e.g. The sahayogini is less dependent on collective action for enhancing her self-image than the sangha woman is. And at the District, State and National level, M.S. associates have recourse to/choice of several forums (groups) to meet the needs of self-growth.

The above and related questions are of immediate concern in the context of plotting activities for the future. Given that M.S. is a programme for social change and that empowerment is not a package deal, with a neat beginning and end (like digging a well or building a house), future action is not as clearly visualizable as is habitually expected of planned developmental programmes.

The Sangha has been largely successful in enabling poor rural women initiate their journey to empowerment. Experiences with panchayats, with savings groups and with income generating attempts, women's search for wider horizons in conducting their lives, has highlighted the volatile nature of the articulation between **individual empowerment** and **collective power.**

Mahila Samakhya assigns value to collective power and remains somewhat ambiguous in its reaction to individual empowerment. But even within the framework of M.S. philosophy, for progression in the process of empowerment, a dynamic combination of individual empowerment and collective power is called

for. Collective power is essential for attempting planned and visible social change, but without the accompaniment of individual empowerment, collective power can become authoritarian and oppressive.

Strains are beginning to manifest themselves in the articulation between individual and collective empowerment. To recapitulate :

* When women got elected to **panchayats,** they have (often at the instigation of their menfolk) placed the Sangha second in position to their own personal power. Many a time Sangha women have then withdrawn their support.

* The starting of **savings groups** changed the character of the Sangha. Savings became the most important activity and Sangha membership was no longer open to all women, nor Sangha concern open to myriad issues.

* **Income-generating activities** do not come the way of all Sangha women. The same is true for house and land allocation. This splits the Sangha. If the Sangha is kept together it is with dissatisfied rumblings from among the members.

To what extent does collective power restrict individual initiative? Wherein lies the balance?

Another manifestation of self-growth, especially among the Sahayoginis, is their straining at the leash of doing the same sort of thing again and again; hold village meetings; respond to Sangha needs; meet government officials; write reports, etc. etc. It is, in part response to this that forming training teams of Sahayoginis has been visualized. There has been a demand from some government and NGO sectors for M.S. type of training and this will provide the Sahayoginis with an outlet for exercising their initiative.

In the same vein, Sahayoginis, and more recently, the teachers of NFE centres, want to educate themselves further. **Sangha women, in geometric leaps, are demanding education for their daughters; they are as yet not so urgent in wanting**

to be literate themselves. This is an area of growth which does not bring into conscious focus potential conflict between individual and collective power. Resolution of the conflict is not called for.

Mahila Samakhya addresses **social change** via new equations in gender relations. This means a change in both the individuals and the institutions in society, through a continuing interaction, over time, between the two. **The family, the community, economic and political structures do not change easily.** Perhaps the family, where gender relations are sculpted, is most resistant to change.

To provide the soil for growth without defining the furrows is not an easy task. Especially with pressures from national and international "development makers" for quick yields with short-term inputs. Roads and water, loans, pensions and buffaloes are the cosmetics of change. It is **HOW** these resources are acquired, the `learning to fish' part of it, that is critical to basic and sustained social change. Will M.S. be able to make for itself the time and space required for facilitating internalization of the HOW of learning?

There is a **certain anxiety and over-protectiveness on the part of the M.S. structure** which might well stifle the very initiative that constitutes the backbone of the programme.

For Sahayonigis, Sakhis and Sangha women, there are many models of women's collective to wean them away - promoted by State and Central Governments for implementing various schemes viz. Literacy model, DWCRA, extension education model in social forestry and agriculture, etc. as also the various NGO models which are very different to the M.S. Sangha processes. The style of working in these groups clearly clashes with the M.S. approach. Will the M.S. groups be in a position to sustain their identity? Would such a gesture lead to an arrogant isolation as against lateral linkages?

In certain areas, Sanghas have mooted the idea of **federating** themselves. M.S. structure is not very clear about the type of support it should provide to such efforts. Will some women capture the activity for their own personal

aggrandizement? In Karnataka and to some extent, in Gujarat, federation of Sanghas, at the Cluster/ Taluk/ District level, is actively being experimented with. In Bijapur, Karnataka, the idea of setting up a women's bank is being mooted. In Gulbarga, Karnataka, there was tentative planning for setting up a Sangha federation for overseeing development - setting up schools, ensuring water supply, etc. But this attempt became aborted in the haste to set-up the federation without paying due respect to the democratic process.

In U.P. an independent society for the repair of handpumps "Vanangana" has been set-up after a particularly successful experiment of training women in handpump maintenance. This takes us to the single Sangha or **multiple Sangha** question. As stated earlier, when a Sangha has attempted to incorporate savings activities in its agenda, if the Sangha is not a strong one, it has tended to break up. Where Sanghas have survived, it has on the whole been when the savings group has become a sub-set of the main Sangha. The logic seems to be that all the women in the Sangha may not want to save; also there are women in the village who do save but don't belong to the Sangha. The parent Sangha caters to issues common to all or most members, **where joint action is called for.** As needs and horizons expand will sub-set Sanghas and activity groups be the answer?

Steering on the well-nigh unchartered seas of planned social change makes M.S. vulnerable to the vagaries of the unknown, but, this exactly, is the challenge which keeps the programme 'alive' in the attempt to reach its objective of empowering women and that even further goal of humanizing humanity.

AIDE MEMOIRE

First Joint Review Mission of Mahila Samakhya

(24th November, 2008 to 4th December, 2008)

National Report on the First Joint Review Mission

For Mahila Samakhya

24th November to 4th December 2008

Mahila Samakhya (MS) – Education for Women's Equality – is the Government of India's (GOI) main programme targeted at tackling gender inequality. It promotes gender equality and women's empowerment by supporting women to organise into collectives, called *Mahila Sanghas.* These help women to resist violence; to gain better access to education and health services; to open up economic options such as microfinance; and to enhance women's role in local government. MS is run by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and education is usually at the core of activities. The *Sanghas* campaign for and support girls' participation in formal schooling, build and manage centres for non-formal education for girls, often with boarding facilities, and organise women's literacy and numeracy programmes.

1.2 The purpose of the current phase of *Mahila Samakhya* is to consolidate and double the size of the programme and to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in a total of 167 Districts across 11 Indian states[1]. The objectives of the programme are as follows:

- Expansion of the programme to form an additional 21,000 *Sanghas* in 420 additional EBBs;
- Raised confidence and capacity of one million *Sangha* and federation women members with increased engagement of other women community members;
- *Mahila Sanghas* playing an active role in monitoring village level educational, health, rural employment and other relevant activities;
- Greater participation of women and girls in formal and non-formal education;
- Women empowered to improve the quality of life of themselves and their families.

1.3 MS is a national programme funded through national resources with additional external funding by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID). The DFID funding will be from the year 2007-08 to 2013-14. Following on the monitoring mechanisms provided in the project, the 1st Joint Review Mission (JRM) for MS was conducted from 24th November to 4th December, 2008. The Missions objectives were to:

[1] The programme is currently operational in 83 districts and 339 blocks in nine states: Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh. Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh will be added to the nine existing states in the programme during the period of DFID support

(i) Review progress in overall implementation, particularly expansion and consolidation of the programme's coverage.
(ii) Look at processes being adopted to achieve the objectives of Mahila Samakhya.
(iii) Examine issues related to State and District implementation capacity.
(iv) Review financial management.
(v) Review TC Fund implementation.

1.4 The Mission comprised of 12 members (GoI:6, DFID:6). Each State team comprised 2 members. The Mission visited six States during the mission; Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, and Uttar Pradesh. The details of the Mission composition are attached at Appendix 1. State reports are annexed.

1.5 The mission records its deep appreciation of the support received from the Department of School Education and Literacy, National Project Office, and State Project Directors and their respective teams in making available their records, providing astute presentations, facilitating field visits, open and candid discussions.

2 Expansion of MS Coverage

2.1 During the 11th Plan period, the coverage of MS is expected to almost double nationally to cover 21,000 additional sanghas in 420 additional EBBs. This has led to a lot of thinking around expansion and consolidation strategies across states. The first issue that arises is the **need to maintain high quality alongside expanded coverage.** Attention will have to be paid to make sure that there is no dilution in training and capacity-building efforts. Given the range of new intervention strategies, support both in terms of materials and capacities needs to be strengthened. Non-availability of staff is severely impacting expansion capabilities.

2.2 A second issue relates to consolidation and strengthening of federations. This involves building the federation's financial resources, a physical space which can be identified as both an organisational and information hub for expanded impact in the locality, management and networking capacity to facilitate linkages with government and other organisations. Since federations are the key to long term sustainability it is **important to prioritise the strengthening of federations within MS agendas,** in order to facilitate the process of expansion of coverage.

2.3 MS **needs to maintain a balance between increasing service delivery (KGBV, MSK) and its mandate for mobilisation and empowerment.** Service delivery has been taken on to a limited extent in different states in order to serve as a model that can be used for policy advocacy, to create initial trust for facilitating convergence and as an entry point in difficult contexts where state services are non-functional. Without additional management costs, this creates

an additional burden on district functionaries, both in terms of implementation and monitoring, cutting into the time available for mobilisation and empowerment activities, without necessarily influencing the practice of state delivery systems.

2.4 State **Resource Centres need to be strengthened** as autonomous institutions so that they can play a range of supportive roles at the state level. This would include: providing information to federations and district units, research, documentation and sharing of good practices, networking within and across districts and states, advocacy for influencing policies, ensuring convergence and mainstreaming gender issues into various state and non-state interventions.

2.5 The proposed National Resource Centre will be significant in positioning MS as a key women's empowerment program which has the potential of informing other development programs at the National level. This will also be instrumental in generating internal and external expertise and providing continuous support to state MS around the evolving needs of MS and its federated bodies across states.

3 Capacity and confidence of sanghas

3.1 A core objective of MS is to build the capacity and confidence of sangha members. All MS states have further developed their own methodologies for reflecting on the level of the sanghas (weak, medium, strong etc) and assessing their capacity-building requirements, based on their ability to raise issues, take initiatives and mobility. Bihar MS has gone a step further in developing a list of 20 process indicators that are essential for sanghas to progress to federations.

3.2 Sanghas and federations have organised themselves around the six themes of education, health, political participation, legal matters (including domestic violence) sangha self-reliance and empowerment and economic activities. These core teams make efforts to engage with government departments in order to access information and benefit from government schemes. Across the board, strong sanghas and federations have shown remarkable success in education, legal rights and redressal, political participation, health and nutrition, economic activities and social mobilisation.

3.3 In order to create an enabling environment for girls' education. Kishori and Kishora Sanghas have been set up and few sensitisation camps for men too are organised in Karnataka and UP. Campaigns to elicit the support from community are also held.

3.4 While the confidence of women has been raised and they are beginning to negotiate with PRIs and other State organisations, this process of negotiation also leads to a questioning of status quo and often results in conflicts. Similar conflicts can be seen at all levels of MS activity. While this is a sign of positive

change, support needs to be leveraged to give them legitimate space, voice and help resist backlash.

3.5 Developing adequate capacities amongst sanghas and federations to facilitate autonomous action should remain a major priority of MS. This will enable MS to phase out of old areas and expand into new ones without compromising on both quality and outcomes.

4 Education and Convergence

4.1 Education is a major component of MS and it is seen as integral for women's empowerment. Various interventions provide for education inputs, these vary in form across states but are common in their philosophy of women's empowerment with education. Broadly defined, it ensures that women are better aware of the rights and entitlements and are able to acquire the needed information from various programmes and schemes (SSA – NPEGEL, KGBV, NRHM, NREGA). Various trainings have been held for sangha women on issues of legal literacy, health and HIV AIIDS, accessing banking/institutional facilities, skill building (masonary, maintenance of tube wells, stoves etc), development of entrepreneurial skill. This has also led to better practices (nutrition, health, hygiene) at household and (dealing with discrimination issues) at the village level.

4.2 The MS has the experience on ground to be able to influence the mainstream education and health interventions and many other development schemes mentioned above. The convergence has helped mahila sanghas to build the credibility of the sanghas in order to realize their entitlements but this also throws up challenges. **Therefore a role of leveraging their experience to better influence the design and implementation of other schemes across levels may be significant. Annexed to this report are some generic suggestions for the States to consider on health and nutrition.**

5 Participation in Formal and non-formal education.

5.1 Women's Literacy – For promoting literacy, various interventions (literacy centers, short term camps, Jagjagi kendras, linkage with open school etc) have been pursued by various states. Convergence with state Adult Literacy Program (AP, Assam) has led to access to relevant materials. In some states (Assam, Bihar, Gujarat) this has led to functional literacy and helped them gain skills in managing bank accounts and has prevented them from exploitation in various situations. **However the gains in literacy remain limited in some states (UP, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh) . More focused efforts are needed in this aspect for self reliance of federations.**

5.2 MSK/ Jagjagi – All states provide opportunities making a come back to girls for marginalised backgrounds in the form of Mahila Shikshan Kendras which are residential accelerated learning programs. There are MSKs which provide

primary and upper primary education. A unique case is seen in Karnataka where MSK provides secondary education (class 9 and 10). There is evidence of some girls from MSK gaining entry to KGBVs (UP, AP), continuing education through open school (Bihar) continuing in formal schools (Assam, AP); efforts should be made to ensure that more girls from MSK continue education. In states like UP where it generates a high demand, MS should also direct the girls to RBCs and influence the SSA to plan RBCs in the area. Training and materials also need to be reviewed for quality in some states (Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh). **The learning levels of girls at various exit points need to be assessed, this may be taken up across states.**

5.3 Formal education -

5.3.1 KGBV: In some states few KGBV are run by MS (67 by Bihar, 33 by Uttar Pradesh, 29 by Karnataka, and 11 by Gujarat). In states like Bihar these KGBVs are run in many non MS blocks. MS in some states (Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh) need to balance demands for increased service delivery and its mandate for mobilization and empowerment. While MS run KGBVs are centres of excellence, their impact on other state and NGO run KGBVs appears as yet minimal. **There needs to be more proactive steps on part of MS as well as SSA in this regard. Regular Teacher Training for KGBV teachers on gender and social issues as well as pedagogy and content needs to be strengthened across all states. Certification of girls for facilitating mainstreaming in formal schools may be required in Gujarat. Many of the girls have continued to secondary education; however this aspect needs to be looked into. The management cost for running KGBVs need to be provided by SSA to MS to help them run KGBVs more effectively**.

5.3.2 NPEGEL: MS implements NPEGEL in EBBs. Interventions within model cluster schools have been taken up (963 in Bihar, 129 in Uttar Pradesh, 108 in Karnataka, 96 in Andhra Pradesh and 55 in Assam). While in states like Bihar and Assam, the program has been effective and has taken up remedial teaching, leadership training, vocational training etc in states like Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh the program needs to be strengthened. **In this case too, much more impetus is needed to make formal schools gender sensitive.**

6 Quality of life and empowerment

6.1 The sanghas have taken considerable initiative in ensuring that they send their children, especially girls to schools, by creating a favourable environment for education. This includes an improvement in health and nutrition status of girls and women, combating communicable diseases through sanitation drives. Making health delivery institutions more accountable is also required in addition to where available, developing and using of indigenous systems of medicines which are cheaper, more accessible and help preserve bio-diversity. They have been in the forefront of addressing gender discrimination at the community level by raising their voices against domestic violence, child marriage, child labour,

dowry demands and other social practices adverse to women such as the devadasi system in Karnataka, doll-beating or the symbolic hitting of brides in UP, or witch-hunting in Assam. Nari adalats have emerged in most states as non-formal dispute resolution mechanisms. They have been very effective in providing justice as well as reconciliation support to women and men. This has had a ripple effect wherein non-MS members are also coming to the nari adalats for assistance.

6.2 A majority of women being poor, economic empowerment is a major concern. Sangha women have ensured work through their engagement with NREGA and negotiated equal wages. In some states, they have been able to develop innovations to ensure that they get work when they need it. Another economic empowerment strategy has been through setting up savings funds.

6.3 Finally the participation of sangha members has been increasing in the PRIs. They are also getting into decision-making roles within PRIs, as well as bringing in EWRs who are not sangha members into the sanghas.

6.4 Federations play a role in safeguarding the gains made at the sangha level, and providing information in relation to other spheres of action.

7 Programme Management

7.1 Programme management across states is decentralised, participatory and flexible allowing MS to respond well to emerging challenges. The annual work plan and budget is built through a well thought out process starting with a reading of field trends, interaction with sangha women, federation plans, district plans leading up to agreed state plans.

7.2 The most compelling concern, echoed in each state, is on recruitment and retention of staff. There are substantial vacancies at all levels. Staff honorarium was reworked in 2005-06 and implemented from 2007 along with the 11th Plan. These are fixed amounts and do not allow for any annual increase over the Plan period. With the implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission award by the Centre and the State, wage differentials between MS and the market have risen significantly. This situation has been made worse with the withdrawal of social security benefits of insurance cover, medical allowance and provident fund which have led to further discontent. It is vital that these **HR issues be addressed at the earliest.** It is learnt that mid plan revision of honorarium has been done in the past (2001) and could be used as a precedent.

7.3 Older MS districts have been provided a project vehicle. Later districts suffer from lack of this. Given late working hours and remote villages, **mobility (vehicular) support and communication support (mobile phones)** is crucial for expansion as well as consolidation. Innovative solutions could be explored to make this possible.

7.4 A **robust MIS** that uses participatory methods and tools to assess progress against objectives and indicators as outlined in the Results Frame work would be useful.
7.5 Regular **and structured inputs by NRG** to state and District teams would help support and guide teams towards achieving the objectives of the programme.

8 Financial Management

8.1 States have good accounting and audit arrangements. A **financial management & procurement manual from the NPO is needed** to help them in their capacity building.

8.2 A larger issue to be addressed by the NPO relates to fund flow. Funds are currently released in 4 instalments with the State society executing a bond on stamp paper before release of each instalment. It is recommended **that releases be made in 2 instalments,** as is the case for almost all schemes of Government of India. Extant circulars (from the Chief Controller of Accounts dated 23-05-08) already allow for acceptance of a single bond for the whole year, even if release is in instalments and where fund transfer to societies is electronic (as in the case of MS) for dispensing with pre stamped receipts.

8.3 Along with this reform, it is also suggested that the **NPO communicate an indicative financial envelope to each state by December** each year to enable states to plan for next year. The state EC must thereafter meet to approve the next year's plan in the last quarter of the current year. This would allow the NPO to process release of first instalment for the year by April itself.
Ideally, all the above changes could form part of the proposed FM manual.

9 Technical Cooperation Fund

9.1 As a part of DFID's support, funds are available under Technical Co-operation to support and facilitate the strengthening of capacities as the national level and at the state level. The mission was provided an update on the various initiatives that are being undertaken. Strengthening of the NPO with Gender, Financial expertise and administrative support is being taken forward. Another assignment under the TC fund will carry out a baseline survey. This will be completed by an independent consultant in 2008/09 and will be followed in 2010/11 by a mid-term evaluation that will also be completed by independent consultants. An independent impact assessment will be carried out in 2013/14. In addition, documenting and replicating best practices across States would also be commissioned. The State Reports highlight some select practices that can be picked up for this purpose. All of these initiatives will be jointly commissioned by DFID and GoI.

9.2 Also, some quick capacity building inputs have been identified as necessary to orient/update MS staff members to deepen the understanding of staff on gender and social exclusion issues in existing and new MS locations. This training is due to begin in early January 2009 by Education Resource Unit (ERU).

Annexure

Joint Review Mission of Mahila Samakhya (24th November to 4th December)

List of the Mission Members

Sl. No.	Name of the MS State	Name of Mission Members	
		GoI Representative	DFID Representative
1.	Andhra Pradesh	Ms. Kokila Gulati, Programme Director, Girls Education Programme, CARE, 27, Hauz Khas Village, New Delhi – 110016	Sangeeta Mehta, Deputy Programme manager, National Team, DFID – India, B-28, Tara Crescent, Qutub Institutional Area, New Delhi – 110016
2.	Assam	Dr.Gouri Srivastava Reader Dept. of Women's Studies, NCERT, 17-B Sri Aurobindo Marg New Delhi 110 016	Anne Philpott, Health and Nutrition Advisor, DFID – India
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4.	Gujarat	Dr.Malavika Karlekar, 54-E, Sujan Singh Park, New Delhi – 110003	Paul Thomas, Procurement Adviser, DFID – India
5.	Karnatka	Dr. Anita Dighe, Himgiri Nabh Vishwavidyalaya, C-1/101, Indira Nagar, Dehradun, Uttarakhand	Pankaj Jain, Governance Adviser, DFID – India
6.	Uttar Pradesh	Ms. Shikha Jassal, Senior Executive, Global Advisors Limited,	Dr. Nitya Rao, Senior Lecturer, Gender and Development, School Development Studies, University of East Anglia

Joint Review Mission
Mahila Samakhya
State Report – Andhra Pradesh
25th November – 4th December

Acknowledgements:

The Joint Review Mission (JRM) team Andhra Pradesh comprising Kokila Gulati, Government of India representative, Sangeeta Mehta, DFID Representative, visited Andhra Pradesh during 25 November to 1 December. The support extended to the team by the functionaries of the MS at national, state, district and sub district levels as well as the partners is highly appreciated. We especially thank the State Project team and district teams of Karimnagar and Warangal for facilitating our visit to the districts for an in-depth field level review. The team would also like to thank the National Resource Group (NRG) and Executive Committee (EC) members who took out the time for interaction on strategic issues. The mission thanks the SPD and her team, and district teams for their cooperation, support and hospitality.
The list of interactions, field visits to the State and the two districts are attached in Annexe 1.

I. An Overview of State MS Programme

The State has been implementing Mahila Samakhya (MS) Program since year 1992. The MS is being implemented across 12 district and 76 mandals reaching 3185 villages reaching 96,921 women. The State's strategy is well thought out and involves participation of sanghas members, programme functionaries and Government officials. The state team has selected the EBBs and is now looking at identifying the mandals. A detailed note on the strategy is attached as Annex 2 to this report.

The State has added 6 new mandals with 289 villages in the year 2007-08. APMSS is expanding to two new districts namely, Vishakhapatnam and Khammam. The programme has recently expanded in 2008-09 to another 12 mandals (474 villages) in Mehboobnagar, Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Kurnool and Anantpur. The State team would be expanding to two new additional districts and 200 villages.

Keeping the spirit of the MS programme intact, APMSS works with organizing and capacitating sanghams. While the strategy of developing sanghams and federations had been taken up since the beginning for women's empowerment, it also began working with existing women's self help groups as it expanded in 2000-01 and the state scenario offered the opportunity to converge with IKP. Thus followed expansion to new districts and mandals as there were already a large number of women mobilised and organised into SHGs. Focus was also on

women who are not part of any SHG but were from poor and marginalized backgrounds.

Issues:

- The APMSS team notes that while expansion is being taken up, given that there are frequent changes of team members, it is a difficulty to maintain quality of processes.

- IKP during its recent implementation has been imposing loans in inappropriate manner to its members such that it does not get optimally used to service real needs of poor women. Repayment in such cases also becomes difficult making women more dependent on men; this also reinforces discriminatory practices such as wife beating. Wider influence needs to be exerted to place women's empowerment central within the program instruments while converging with schemes like IKP.

II. Program Processes - Sanghams and Federations

APMSS is currently covering 3,185 villages in 12 districts. It has 96,921 women in 1,995 Sanghas. There are 28 federations at the mandal level. Mobilizing women (especially the poor and the most marginalised), building their awareness, and initial discussions within the sanghams brought into focus the issues of health, women's position or gender equality in society, education, food, water, farming needs, migration, lack of say in family issues and village level politics. In this process Health, Education, Participation in Governance, Natural Resources and Social and Gender equity issues were the major issues taken up around which action was taken by sanghams. With each meeting and analysis of relevant issues, the sanghams grew in strength; this can be seen even among the newly formed sanghams. Sanghas are seen to work together on common solutions through institutional means – collecting farming, securing their legal rights etc. Mission observed effective processes on ground in Village Seetanagaram, Warrangal district, where the ALC centre was functional and the Sangha members appeared confident.

In this process, women realized that they need to be federated at the mandal level to evolve as a pressure group and engage with women centered policies and programs at local level – Child marriage Act, Domestic Violence Act, Programs like NREGA, Adult education etc. The number strength was significant in asserting their rights and entitlements. Women stood in solidarity and campaigned against any discriminatory issues that could not be resolved at the sanghas level. The state team reports that the federations have realised that a minimum of 4 members need to be literate for effective functioning of federations. The mission suggests that the next JRM reviews the progress made as this is critical for self sufficiency of federations.

Unlike other States, AP State already has many functional SHGs in the villages. This has offered both an opportunity as well a challenge to the APMSS work. As APMSS took up expansion in new districts and mandals it converged with the State program called IKP; a programme that has mobilized women at village level for purposes of thrift and credit. As a consequence, this led APMSS working with existing SH group and thus the process in these districts did not beginning with mobilizing women. This resulted in having to work with very large women's sanghas (80-120 members) with varied social background. The large number of women made it complex to deal with issues of social equity and in mobilizing members around social issues. MS evaluation in 2004 had also pointed this out.

Response to this challenge by APMSS was a change in its strategy in expansion districts and mandals where they had begun work with existing SHG groups. In order to have more homogeneous groups, ward wise sanghas were formed. These were usually caste based and allowed women to discuss their specific issues of discrimination as homogeneous groups. By organizing these sanghas it was possible to expand the reach to women who may not have been part of the SHG of IKP program. Once the sanghas had begun to reflect on their issues and became a collective as a common interest group, gradually they were also mobilized into a Core Group at the village with representation of each sangha. Issue/theme based committees were formed within each sanghas and core group to take forward certain themes. This strategy of core group is being implemented in 60 (out of the 76) mandals where MS is currently operational. This excludes the 12 mandal from where MS has withdrawn.

These issue/theme based committees federated at cluster and then at the mandal level. Capacity building of sanghas on these themes is integral part of this process. This has now become the strategy for all new mandals and districts.

Autonomous Federations: 28 federations formed are registered under Societies Registration Act in the five project districts of Medak, Mahabubnagar, Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Adilabad. APMSS withdrew from 12 mandals from direct implementation; The mission appreciates the federations as they are now the voice of the women in these districts as they continue to provide support to the sanghas. They are now functioning as independent institutions.

Sanghams: The focus on the poorest households resulted in a dominant representation of women from Scheduled caste, backward and disadvantaged groups in the sanghas. With change in strategy and developing ward wise sanghas and issue based committees helped MS to retain this focus to reach the most marginalized and help women pursue issues prioritized by them even while they partnered with programs like IKP.

The women became aware of issues that were constraining their social position and condition, they were much more aware of their own potential, they derived a lot of support from each other in overcoming barriers and act as pressure group in resolving many of their issues. The sanghas have become not only a body that

makes significant changes towards improving the quality of life – some efforts are outlined below:

- They have shown initiative in ensuring that they send their children especially girls to school.
- They have ensured work through their engagement with NREGA, negotiated equal wages (though the ideal is still far), have developed innovations to ensure they have work when they need it for e.g. seasonal calendar is considered and work is obtained off peak agricultural season..
- They have taken action to stop child marriages, have resolved issues of domestic violence and family disputes through counseling the family. This is now accepted by men and women and social justice principles have practiced.
- Village communities recognized the strength of sanghams in rendering justice and accepted them as part of traditional panchayats. Eventually, the federations emerged as informal social justice forums at mandal level. So far about 460 cases were resolved by these forums in addition to the numerous cases resolved at Sangham level.

Participation in governance: Different interventions towards facilitating women's pro-active participation in local self governance resulted in about 1,874 women elected to different positions in 2006 Panchayat elections and formation of two all women Panchayats. Subsequently, 494 EWRs joined the sanghams. The efforts to reach out and widen the ambit of influence in sanghas are appreciable.

Federations are playing active role by campaigning through folk art forms and taking up short term projects on issues like enrolment and retention of girls in formal schools, promotion of child rights, women's health and nutrition, reduction of HIV related stigma and violence, etc. They are also addressing issues of violence against women and family disputes by forming themselves into non-formal forums for redressal at mandal level. Federations extend their support to APMSS in programme expansion to new areas by introducing the programme to district officials, making field visits, identifying issues for action and in mobilizing women for reflection on common concerns.

Training to theme based committees to federations at mandal level and at sanghas level in new districts and mandals goes a long way in making the strategy relevant to the present day scenario of AP. Having developed the critical mind among the sangha women, they are able to discern that the way the loans are being currently provided, it does not lend to economic empowerment thus opening up an issue for advocacy.

Autonomous Federations: Interventions like Samatha – Dharani (collective agriculture programme), adult literacy and Bala Sanghams are now being facilitated by respective federations with support from APMSS. Two Mahila

Sikshana Kendras are run by the federations, one each in Medak and Mehboobnagar districts, with grants from APMSS. Another federation was able to access other resources like MP fund. *Swatantra Bharata Mahila Federation* of Makthal mandal, Mahabubnagar district has also lent itself to play the role of expanding the MS program and the women' empowerment involvement to another mandal in the same district and has received grant by MS for the same. Members of the federation are attempting to find ways for better communication with sanghas members especially when they have absentees from a particular sanghas over a period of time, this is needed as the link of the karyakarta to all sanghas is now absent.

Issues

- Converting SHGs formed for thrift and credit to self help collectives/sanghas that will jointly address women' discrimination through multi- faceted measures require recasting the membership (to make it more inclusive), redefining the purpose of the group and work towards group bonding and cohesion. Analysis of women's position and condition help the women identify common areas of interest. This requires a lot of facilitation and follow up for them to assume this role. The motivation to be part of the group that has no monetary benefits requires building intrinsic motivation to address social issues, common issues that the woman can identify with, builds on the success they gain from collective action and bonding. The assumption that SHG women are already mobilized and thus it saves time to form sanghas is not true.

- While education for their empowerment is strong, it may be worthwhile to strengthen the educational inputs on literacy and numeracy amongst sanghas members. This continues to be the weakest input. Capacity building in this aspect is required.

- The autonomous federations shared a need to enhance the federation fund such that it helps them to take up large assignments like running of MSKs and it does not impact on their ability to meet on a regular basis. If they could develop a corpus or an additional resource could be allocated, it would help them deal with delays in payments made by Government counterparts etc while they took up their initiatives.

- There is a felt need for continued capacity building by autonomous federations as they expand their influence and work towards self sustaining initiatives, this could be supported by the State gender resource centre (SGRC). This need may inform the agenda and mandate of the SGRC.

III. Training programs under MS

To critically analyze women's position and condition, reasons for the second citizen status and articulate ways to collectively address both practical gender

needs and strategic gender interests requires continuous capacity building of sanghas, and the APMSS team.

There have been significant measures to build the capacity of the team, these have included training on perspective building on the philosophy and approach of MS, quarterly review meetings, theme based training etc. The Mission did not get a chance to look at any on going training but from the reported feedback by the district and state team members, these trainings are found to be very useful. A proposed calendar of training is outlined in Annex 2.

Internal resource team include identified team members, sangham and federation women, and issue committee members. The MS program requires a high degree of commitment and motivation to work in adverse circumstances and hence the ethos of a learning environment has been critical to the success of the program. Continuous review and capacity building as well as motivation have resulted in building capacities across levels. This supported and made possible staff growth within the organization thereby retaining organizational talent at higher levels of responsibility for some staff. Mission suggests that this practice should continue.

Sanghas and federations demonstrate autonomy in taking forward many of the issues. Efforts at APMSS collaboration with adult education and conducting a one month camp for developing literacy levels of elected women from SC and ST backgrounds is appreciable (114 women from 94 Gram Panchayats in 22 mandals in 3 districts)

Action research with agencies like WASSAN (Watershed Support Services and Activities Network) for influencing NREGA with field realities and with CARE on involving men in child care is also instrumental in building capacities in research and advocacy at the same time work for influencing larger programs with inputs from an engendered perspective. The team has sought inputs from many experts on issues of legal literacy and have sought managerial training etc to build knowledge and skills for themselves as well as the federations and sanghas. They are part of networks (e.g. informal network of advocates that links to counseling centers across districts and *nari adalat in Medak district*) which provides the support in renewing the information around the entitlements for the poor and the marginalized women.

There are also newer areas of capacity building that emerge as the program deepens its influence. Some of these include:

- There are many new karyakartas, some of them have been engaged with APMSS processes (girls of MSK) but due to a high turn over of staff there is continuous need for capacity building of the new entrants. The mission proposes that it might be useful to identify and train larger group of possible karyakartas on the MS approach, so that the programme has a wider base even in event of the high turn over of village level

functionaries. Regular programmes for in-depth induction training for new entrants and need based refresher training on a regular basis is required. Building an internal resource pool to meet the constant training requirements at the team as well as at the field levels is one major concern felt by the team.

- The elected women representatives need a lot of capacity building to be able to assert an equal position in a panchayat to ensure their voice is heard. The interventions in this regard are being undertaken but it requires extensive and regular capacity building support not only in literacy but with more information around the entitlements and negotiation with other male members.
- The education interventions like the Adult learning centers are still very weak in terms of its literacy and numeracy achievements. This capacity if developed could open up new opportunities for sangha women.
- The team requires engaging with other programs at cluster, mandal, district and state with issues of gender equity more systemically and forcefully. APMSS is unable to find a foothold to influence programs like the NPEGEL at the district and state level. This needs to be augmented.
- Though additional support is provided, more intensive and regular support from State and NRG members is needed especially for the district level staff where the turnover is highest. The mission suggests that the organogram of the APMSS be revisited to ensure that an appropriate reworked structure is able to respond to the emerging needs at the State level.

IV. Participation of women and girls in formal and non formal education

APMSS at the outset de-links education from literacy and sees it as a process of continuous learning and gaining confidence; developing ability to think critically; enabling women to make informed choices in areas like education, employment and health (especially reproductive health);ensuring equal participation in developmental processes; enhancing access to legal literacy and information relating to their rights and entitlements in society with a view to enhance their participation on an equal footing in all areas.

Balasanghams: Daughters of the Sangham women also felt a need for a forum to articulate their concerns and thus Cheli Sanghams (village level collectives of adolescent girls) evolved with girls in the age group of 12-18 as members. In the due course their position and condition were analysed and the need was felt for life skill education. Accordingly educational and capacity building programmes were initiated. During 2000-01, there had been a great demand for forums from boys (9-12 years) saying that they are lagging behind in information and knowledge and joined the groups. At present there are 912 Bala sanghams with a membership of 26,197 children and adolescents.

Issue:

The mission observed in the district (Warangal) that just like the mahila sanghams, the issues identified by the balasangham were in addressing issues of child marriage etc. Children theoretically knew of various rights but could not translate them to their real life situations. The mission proposes that children should engage around their real life issues and constraints. The interventions could take place around their life skill education, around building capacities to develop support systems for each other, in developing a supportive environment for young girls and resolving problems also at that level. This needs some consideration.

Adult Literacy – The sanghams had to frequently interact with the officials, be it accessing schemes, submitting memorandums or representations. Being illiterate/neo-literate posed a constraint and thus a demand for their literacy came up and literacy centers were started. Sanghams identified the instructors from their own village. 508 Adult learning Centres (ALCs) are reaching to 9,986 women. Short term MSK for 2 weeks have also been taken up to develop literacy around issues among sangham women. Open school linkages were also forged to help Sangha women continue education. Currently 249 sangham women are pursuing education.

Issue:

While the information dissemination contributes well to access to information to illiterate women, however the gains in terms of literacy and numeracy skills are fairly limited. The Mission observed in a centre in Karimnagar that despite the centre running for more than 3 years the number of women who have gained literacy skills remains rather low. Poor attendance continues to be an issue. This aspect requires attention especially as the transition to federation requires self reliance. A clear plan of action is needed to address this issue.

Mahila Shikshan Kendras

The MSKs is a residential program for never enrolled and dropout girls that helps them to make a comeback to education. Each MSK houses 40 girls and has 3 teachers. The girls are motivated by the sanghams and karyakartas and enrolled in the MSK. Currently 15 MSK are operational with 456 girls enrolled within them. Since its inception, 3050 girls have been enrolled in this program. Of them, 101 have cleared class X exams.

Issue:

The curricula and methodology needs to be more structured so that the bridge course, its content and pedagogy can be more widely shared. This has been a successful strategy of the APMSS and can present a better picture if data on the attainment of the girls at exiting MSK was also recorded and made available.

Interface with NPEGEL

MS has interfaced with NPEGEL in 96 model clusters and has implemented the varied components in the model cluster schools. The initiatives taken include development of the additional classroom, procurement of sports and library in the NPEGEL schools. Gender sensitization was also taken up for teachers of NPEGEL cluster schools in the current year.

One NPEGEL model cluster school (Zila Praja Parishad Secondary School, Garimapally) was visited in Warangal district. The head teacher reported that all children in the village were enrolled and there were no OoSC in its catchment area. APMSS had procured relevant children's books and sports material. However the mission noted that none of the material procured was being used by children. A multi purpose room had been constructed by MS but the resources had fallen short of resources to complete the construction of the planned attached toilet. The room has no storage space nor did it have much ventilation. MS team informed the mission that this was as per the design provided by SSA. There was a toilet in the school which was used only by teachers. There was no toilet available for girls in the school. Ironically one room was vacant which was used to park vehicles of teachers. Remedial classes were organized by MS to help children in primary and upper primary grades. The mission noted that APMSS could play a more proactive effort in making this a gender sensitive school.

VI. Resource Support Systems

State Gender Resource Centre: APMSS has developed a State Gender Resource Centre in supporting MS. This has evolved from the rich experiences and learning of the programme and acts as a functional unit of APMSS for ideological expansion. Currently the centre serves the function of a technical unit that provides support to other government programs and organizations. It pools its resources from grass roots while also engaging external persons as and when required. It has been able to extend short term & long term resource support to different programmes & organizations like Byrajju Foundation in non MS districts. It has taken up collaborative action research projects in collaboration with CARE and WASSAN. It also aspires to consolidate its lessons and training modules through dedicated effort in this regard. With such efforts the attempt is to extend visibility to MS, facilitate the process of mainstreaming gender initiatives into various interventions of other programmes and organisations, increase its network and build alliances for convergence. It currently has 2 staff positions and utilizes ten days per year of its entire staff for the purpose of the SGRC. It offers opportunity to many federation members/sangham women and team members from all levels to become resource persons and improving their capacities as trainers.

Issue:

A vision of SGRC for the coming years needs to be clearly thought, especially in light of aspirations of developing district resource groups. A need for capacity building of the autonomous federations also needs to be considered while planning the mandate of SGRC.

Some NRG and EC members interact with the SPD and are available for support and guidance. They have been contacted on a case by case basis by the State office. The mission observed and the team agreed that a more formal structured system of periodic interaction especially from the NRG members that are available in the state would benefit the programme tremendously. APMSS has good linkages with some departments for e.g. Adult Education Department. The team needs to explore further the convergence and co-ordination areas with other State departments viz. Elementary Education, Social Welfare, Panchayati Raj, and Women and child.

The proposed National Resource Centre will be significant in positioning MS as a key women's empowerment program which has the potential of informing other development programs at the national level. This will also be instrumental in generating internal and external expertise and providing continuous support to state MS around the evolving needs of MS and its federated bodies across States.

VII. Programme Management

One of the strengths of the MS programme is its participatory approach. This was evidently seen by the mission members in the field as well in the programme management systems. From the preparation of the work plans to their completion, settling of accounts, staff at various levels engages regularly with the members of sanghas/federation and with each other.

Annual workplan and budgeting exercise involves all levels of staff as well as sanghas women and utilises the information from the field to inform the choices that are being made at the district and State level. The planning process starts in December each year and culminates in a state workplan by March. The decisions at the cluster and mandal levels are consolidated at the district level, this leads to the preparation of AWP at the State level. The plan is then taken back to sanghams/federations for reflection and ensuring that mandal specific issues have been accounted for in the plan. These plans respond to the context and priorities of the mandal and have a built in flexibility to address evolving needs. These are finalised at the state level and are implemented with the approval of the Executive Committee.

Monitoring and supportive supervision - Regular reviews across levels on program management and programmatic interventions/themes informs timely feedback and mid course adaptations to the plan. Efficient tracking of the work

plan is undertaken both for the financial and programme progress through the periodic field visits, reflection and thematic meetings as well as the quarterly stock taking meetings. The district officials acknowledged their contentment and effectiveness of these meetings. While there has been a progress at collecting data and compiling the same at district and state level in terms of targets and significant information around the qualitative aspects still seems fairly anecdotal. External expertise could also be hired to help develop an MIS.

Key issues

- In ALL the meetings held with Programme and support teams in the district and State, the issue of remuneration, social security and physical security concerns of the staff were raised. It was disheartening to note that these issues had been raised by the Indo Dutch JRM of MS in 2001 and again highlighted by National Evaluation in 2004 and yet adequate measures were not put in place. Staff availability, retention and willingness to work in the field are increasingly becoming a serious concern for the programme and requires immediate action.
- MS is a central government supported programme and implemented by an autonomous body. Thereby it assumes a quasi NGO, quasi government status. Expectation therefore is for them to inform the government authorities and leverage to make gender concerns inform mainstream programs. APMSS needs to respond to this by being more proactive in influencing the State and district authorities of various development programmes. Negotiating with the respective departments to maintain uniqueness of MS in implementing convergent programmes is needed.
- It was reported by the MS team that the resources are inadequate for responding to external audit across all districts.

VIII. Financial Management

For the year 2008-09, APMSS has a total budget outlay of Rs. 6.85 crores of which they have received a total of Rs.2.40 crores till date. An upsent carry over of Rs1.04 crores was also available. As on 5.11.08 the reported expenditure was Rs 2.44 crore. In the last year (2007-08) a total of Rs 5 crores was received from GoI and the expenditure was Rs. 4.37 crores (65% of annual budget) of the total annual outlay (Rs 6.72 crores).

APMSS has proficient financial working system. Funds are received from GoI at the State level through electronic transfer. Onwards release of funds to all the DIUs is also through online transfers. In some districts due to non availability of the same Bank as that of the State office, transfers are done through demand drafts. Funds flow from the Centre to the State, State to districts is timely. Periodic (Quarterly and depending upon the need, it may be more frequent) advances are released based on expenditure expended.

State has efficient mechanism for audits and compliance measures. The State office account team conducts an internal audit every quarter for all the districts. Sangham/Federation level audit is conducted by the district accounts team. The financial reports are prepared every quarter after completion of quarterly audit done by the audit agency hired, following the internal audit by the state accounts team. For this purpose the external auditors conduct a complete verification at districts and state level. The annual audit report is placed in the executive committee meeting for approval and the same is sent to the NPO and chief audit officer of AG. In addition, the State accounts are audited by the Accountant General of Audit (GoI) also.

The state team follows the laid out financial norms and procedures for advances and settlements. The accounts team/s (at the state and the two districts visited) were well aware of the delegation powers and used joint signatories for transaction. All transactions above Rs. 1000 are conducted through cheques. All the bank accounts in APMSS are joint accounts. The accounts' teams across the state follow Tally software (9^{th} version) and accounts are maintained on a double entry system. Records are maintained well by the accounts team.
Two-three days induction training on Accounts procedures and systems is conducted at the State office for the new accounts team member. This is followed by on-the-job training through the reflection meetings on accounts, quarterly Statuary audit, AG audit and the internal audit by State office accounts team.

Mission explored the need and the issues under the proposed support of preparation of financial manual for the MS programme. This was welcomed by the State and the districts visited. The areas identified for the manual to address are as follows:

- Booking of expenditure/ budget heads: made explicit and explained further. Currently most of this knowledge is derived from the experience of the old staff.
- Guidance on purchases
- Guidance on entitlements –TA/DA to bring uniformity amongst the state

Though the team is continuing to perform to an efficient level, it has the following issues that are proving to be a challenge;

- Internal Audit: the programme is expanding to new districts yet the staff at the various levels remains the same; this poses an additional load on existing staff in delivering quality checks and audits.
- Costs of rented properties and vehicles are increasing at a rate higher than envisaged/guided by the XIth plan document, which needs reconsideration.

IX. Good Practices

- Autonomous Federations: As of now, there are 28 Federations at mandal level in the five project districits of Medak, Mahabubnagar, Karimnagar, Nizamabad and Adilabad. APMSS has withdrawn from 12 mandals from direct implementation. A study on the functioning of the federations may serve as useful documentation to the emerging federations.

- APMSS has shown impressive work with women in local governance. 1874 women got elected for GPs from Sanghams in 2006 panchayat elections. 494 Elected women representatives joined Sanghams. The mission members met up with an all women panchayat in Village Akunur, Saidapoor Manadal. The panchayat was elected unanimously and has received a cash price of Rs. 5 lakh from the State Government.

- Work with Bal Sanghams: An attempt to a forum for adolescents (girls and boys) for sharing, knowledge building, peer education, and collective action for second generation leadership towards social equality.

- Gender Resource Centre: Acts as a resource pool from the field learning to be used for internal and external stakeholders, could offer opportunities for the sustainability of the programme and sanghas beyond the project period. Provides support and offer growth opportunities to the existing staff.

X. Progress Towards achievement of MS objectives

The State is struggling to work out the MIS related to the achievement of the MS objectives and indicators. They are planning to collect the information on key indicators as given in the results framework. The mission spent time in explaining the result framework to the State team.

XI. Key issues in MS State Program

- There is an urgent need to review remuneration, social security and physical security measures for the staff. It was disheartening to note that these issues had been raised by the Indo Dutch JRM of MS in 2001 and repeated by National Evaluation in 2004 and that adequate measures were not put in place. Staff availability, retention and willingness to work in the field are increasingly becoming a serious concern for the program.
- The vision and role of State Gender Resource Centre needs to be thought through and articulated clearly. The resource centre will require drawing on internal and external expertise to meet wide ranging issues and challenges. As the APMSS assumes a more active role in its ideological expansion, the SGRC will become more relevant.

In order that it plays a role of a negotiator on gender issues, it will require to continuously be supported financially and otherwise. Its support to autonomous federations may also be considered.

- The gains in terms of literacy interventions remain fairly limited. This aspect requires attention especially as the transition to federation requires self reliance. APMSS needs to develop a clear plan of action in this regard.
- The Mission observes that the support towards education interventions remains limited. APMSS has not realized the full extent of the opportunity and intent of the scheme like NPEGEL fully to make education for girls equitable. Support from SSA for mainstreaming gender in these schools also remains limited. The ongoing formal and non formal interventions can be strengthened.

XII. Key Recommendations

- Given the inflation, increase in salaries of other government staff with the VIth pay commission and the risks faced by the field functionaries, it may be considered to review salaries as well as reinstating benefits such as medical insurance and provident fund.
- The MS program needs to position itself to engage with other programs on strategic issues rather than merely facilitating their benefits for sanghams. By taking up an advocacy role it can potentially influence the design and implementation of other programs that also have a bearing on women especially those from marginalised communities. Capacities too would need to be augmented to play this larger role.
- There is an urgent need to put in place a robust MIS that uses qualitative methods and tools to assess progress against objectives and indicators as outlined in the results framework. It is recommended the State office obtains external expertise to support them in this task.
- More regular and structured inputs are required by the state and district teams. Periodic inputs by NRG to state and district teams would help support the new members to the team to be oriented to MS's approach and ethos as well as guide it towards achieve the objectives of the program.

Expansion Strategy and Issues

- MS being the education programme for women's empowerment, it is initiated and implemented in the Districts with large number of Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs). Identification of EBBs in the selected district will be done based on the latest census records of female literacy rate and SC/ST population. Subsequent to approval by the EC activities are planned.

- Meeting the District Collector, PD – DRDA, PO – SSA and other district level officials, introducing the programme and taking their suggestions on the selection of mandals for expansion will be the next step.

- Field visits to the identified mandals and interaction with the mandal officials, existing women's collectives to understand the situation and major issues in the area. Federation members of older districts also accompany the team and extend support in this process.

- The observations, issues identified and the strategy for implementation of MS programme will be presented to the district officials in a district level officials' meeting facilitated by the District Collector. The suggestions and ideas of the officials will be taken into consideration in finalization of mandals and issues to be focused in implementation of the programme in the district.

- Setting up of DIU, selection of personnel and necessary capacity building follows.

- Working with the existing women's self help groups is the strategy followed in expansion to new districts since 2000-01 as there were already a large number of women mobilized and organized into SHGs. Focus was also on women who are not part of any SHG.

- Facilitation of formation of ward wise sanghams and identification of social agenda for action by sanghams is the subsequent strategy adopted. This process leads to formation of core-groups at village level, cluster level resource pool and the mandal resource group. In this process capacity building of women focuses on MS philosophy, objectives, collective strength and all the core issues. Analytical discussions will be held on status of women, patriarchal values, barriers for girls' and women's development and related issues. Gender is the crosscutting issue in all the discussions, analysis and initiatives.

- Convergence with other programmes and line departments at different levels like IKP federations, AWC, Sub-centre; mandal officials and other

organizations etc. for better access of schemes and services by the sanghams.

Problems / Challenges:

- MS is a central government supported programme and implemented by an autonomous body. Thereby it assumes a quasi NGO status. However, there is a gap in understanding this status among the departments and other organisations. Further the extent and financial allocations of the programme are small in comparison to the other government implemented programmes.
- Existing programme Vs expansion – State team (distances, time, energy and varied strategies in lieu of multiple phases of the programme).
- Time frame vs. Process – Plan documents presuppose that the programme needs to be consolidated in three years and withdrawn from implementation in five years. The processes need a longer and constant initiatives towards influencing attitudinal change among the women and the community for reducing gender disparities
- Availability of team members with conceptual understanding on gender, readiness to work intensively at field level
- Low honorariums and high workload – intensive, process oriented and odd timings, when compared to other programmes
- Trained team members leaving the programme for better opportunities.
- Long walking distances (4 – 6 kms) in the field to reach interior villages and the security of the team members in such conditions

Visit of Joint Review Mission members to APMSS – 25th Nov,08 to 1st Dec,08 - Itinerary

Date	Programme	Place
25.11.08	Presentation on the State Programme	State Office, Hyderabad
26.11.08	▪ Leaving to Karimnagar at 7.00am ▪ Reaching DIU at 10.00am ▪ Presentation on the District Programme ▪ Interaction with District MSK ▪ Lunch ▪ Proceed to field – Gangadhara Mandal ▪ Interaction with members of federations – Gangadhara, Saidapur, Chigurumamidi, Illantakunta, Koheda ▪ Meeting with All Women Panchayat Members – Akunoor Village, Saidapur (M) ▪ Visit to ALC Centre – Saidapoor, SC Colony ▪ Returning to District	District – 1
27.11.08	▪ Interaction with District officials, Karimnagar – Ms. Parvathi, GCDO, SSA, Sri. Muninder, Incharge IEC, Rural Water Sanitation, Sri. Syed Afzal, Supervisor, National Filaria Control Programme and Sri. Mallesham, Supervisor, Department of Adult Education ▪ Looking into accounts systems and procedures followed at DIU ▪ Proceed to field - Husnabad Mandal ▪ Visit to Mandal MSK, Husnabad - interaction with girls, teachers ▪ Lunch ▪ Meeting with Federation members – Mundadugu Mahila Federation, (Autonomous federation) Husnabad (M)	District – 1 District - 2

	▪ **Proceed to Warangal** ▪ Interaction with District officials, Warangal – Ms. Swarnalatha, GCDO, SSA, Sri. Srinivas Rao, Department of Health, Sri. Vedantha, Field officer, Department of Adult Education, Sri. Mahender, Ex President, Lions Club and Sri. Murali, MARI (NGO) ▪ Proceed to field - Gudur Mandal ▪ Sangham meeting & ALC Centre - Sitanagaram Village, ▪ Return to District and night halt	
28.11.08	▪ Proceed to field – Chityal Mandal ▪ Cluster meeting – Tekumatla Cluster, Chityal (M) - Interaction with Core group members from three villages (Ankushapur, Ramakistapur, (T), Tekumatla) ▪ Visit to Model Cluster school, NPEGEL – Garimella pally - Interaction with Head master (incharge) ▪ Proceed to Chityal ▪ Meeting with Bala Panchayat members – Interaction with Bala sangham members, Child Rights Protection Committee members, Bala Panchayat Members ▪ Proceed to District – Lunch ▪ Presentation on the District Programme ▪ Looking into accounts systems and procedures followed by DIU. ▪ Proceed to Hyderabad	
29.11.08	▪ Interaction with officials and representatives of partner organizations – Sri. Janardhan Reddy, Director of Adult Education, Sri. Ravi, WASSAN, Ms. Vanaja, Advocate, Disha Centre for Social Justice and Ms. Veena Yamini, Programme Coordinator, Women	Hyderabad State Office, Hyderabad

	Empowerment Module, Byrraju Foundation ▪ Meeting with DPCs and other team members of other districts ▪ Interaction with NRG member, Ms. Kameshwari Jandhyala, GoI Nominee and EC member, Prof. Fatima Alikhan ▪ Interaction with Federation members ▪ Looking into Accounts systems and procedures followed by State Office ▪ Interaction with SPD ▪ Interaction with State Office team – Results frame work	
30.11.08	▪ Report writing	Hyderabad
01.12.08	▪ Discussion with State Office team on draft report ▪ Meeting Chairperson ▪ Draft report presentation ▪ Return to Delhi	Hyderabad

Joint Review Mission
Mahila Samakhya
State Report – Assam
25th November – 1st December 2008







Introduction:

The Joint Review Mission consisting of two members Professor Gouri Srivastava, from the Department of Women Studies, NCERT and Anne Philpott, Health Adviser from DFID. They were briefed by the State Project Director and her team at Guwahati about the activities, coverage and the impact of MS. The District Project Coordinators appraised the team members about its roles, functions and issues addressed in the district and village level. To assess the functioning of the programme at the grass root the Mission members visited two districts Goalpara and Dhubri in the west if Assam from 26th to 29th of November, 2008. In these two districts five blocks and two villages were visited. In the former district the activities of MS were observed in Koshdhowa, Balijana & Matia blocks. In the latter it was Rupsi and Mahamaya. Discussions were held with sangha women and federation members from Gram Panchayat and the Blocks, aswell as visits to MSK residential schools.

The focus of the discussions was on socio economic, education, health and legal issues concerning women. The major social issues that MS focus on are child marriage, trafficking of women/ girls, child labour and witch hunting. The economic issues related to access to information on marketing of products and resources of the village and the community. Illiteracy and non-enrollment of girls in schools was the major issue of discussion. Legal matters related to domestic violence, rape, dowry cases, elicit relationship. In Dhubri District discussions were also held with the District Collector & the District Tribunal Judge.

The state wrap up meeting was held on first December 2008 at the AMSS office, Guwahati. The first meeting was attended by Mr Biren Dutta, Commissioner and Secretary of Elementary Education, Govt of Assam and Chairperson of AMSS and all AMSS functionaries from the state and districts. In this meeting the JRM members shared the key issues in the state AMSS programme and recommendations were accepted by all.

The Review team would like to state their appreciation for the extensive support given by all staff at the State Project Office and the wholesale support from the two Districts visited, Goalpara and Dhubri. The review team very much appreciated the dedication made by Sangha women and MSK to showing their programmes and traveling to meet them.



I. An over view of State MS Programme

The Assam Mahila Samata Society (AMSS) was registered in 1996 and the field level intervention started in 1997. AMSS has completed 12 years and is currently operational in nine districts. The tenth district Dibrugarh is in a formative stage. The focus is on Educationally Backward Blocks (EEBs). This programme has currently reached out to the most backward and marginalized women from SC, ST, OBC, Adivasi/Tea tribes and from the Muslim Community and where there are gender gaps in literacy rates.

. **Expansion and Coverage**

The strategy is to expand to low female literacy districts and Educationally Backward Blocks in the existing 9 districts and expansion into Dhibrugarh District.

District	Block	Village	Sangha
9 (10th District is evolving)	40	2378	2769

Dis-aggregated Data of Sangha membership (as of April '08) – state level

Overall state data shows a good mix across disadvantaged groups.

ST	SC	OBC	General	Muslim	MOBC	Total
15% (21180)	14.7% (20545)	20% (28081)	25% (35308)	22.9% (32021)	0.02% 2440	100% 139575

Dis-aggregated data of Sangha membership (as of April '08) District Dhubri level

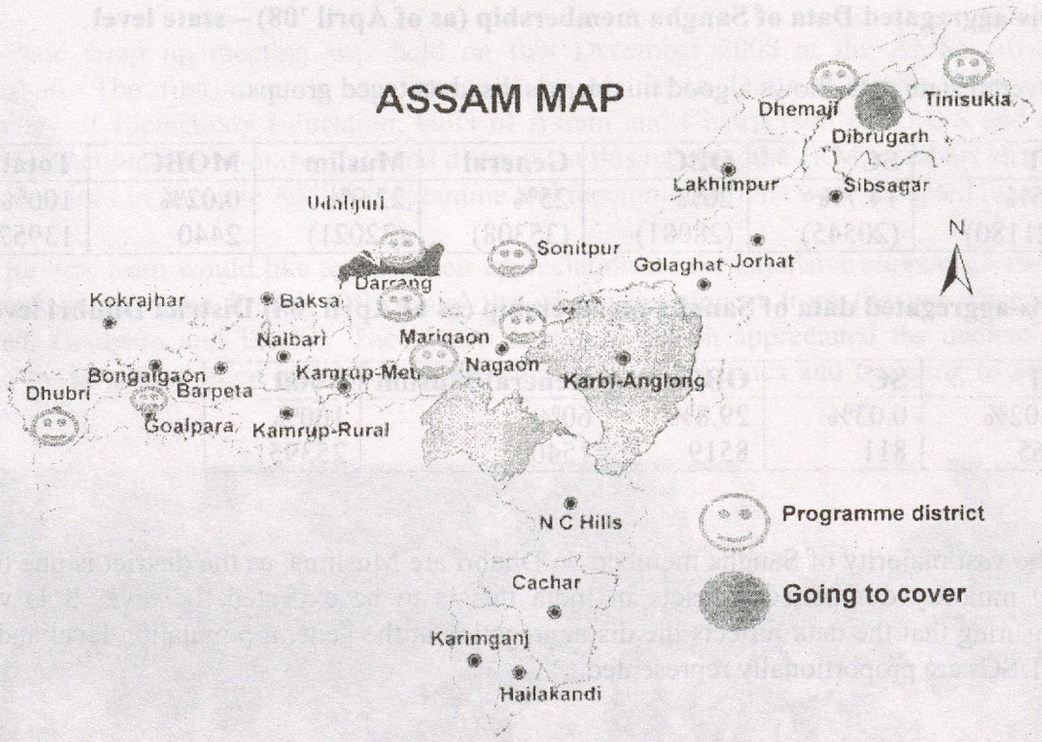
ST	SC	OBC	General/Muslim	Total
0.02% 665	0.03% 811	29.8% 8519	60% 15400	100% 25395

The vast majority of Sangha members in Dhubri are Muslims, as the district is one of the 90 minority dominated districts in India this is to be expected, however it is worth ensuring that the data reflects the dis-aggregation at the general population level and that ST/SCs are proportionally represented.

Specific feedback – Dhubri District Officials

The Dhubri District Collector mentioned that the Mahila Samakhya has greatly helped in launching literacy drive in the district and in organization of the Health Mela that was supported by Health Department. However, he was not aware of the functioning of ***Nari Adalat***. The District Tribunal Judge mentioned that the MS programme has truly empowered rural women and adolescent girls. He was of the view that '***Nari Adalat***' helped in expediting legal matters concerning women. The JRM team also visited two villages and had in- depth discussions with sangha members in Tiyapara village in Goalpara district and Naiserkuti village in Dhubri. Success stories of their own initiatives in eradicating illiteracy, conducting sanitation drives, ensuring enrolment of their girls in schools, promoting health and hygiene, safe drinking water, ensuring immunization of children and biodiversity drives were all enthusiastically illustrated by the women..

AMSS OPERATING AREA



Strengths of the State and Concerns MS Programme

The major strength of AMMS programme is the ownership of the programme by the community and community membership across all castes, religious and minority groups – specifically Muslime women were very involved across the state. Confidence building and self esteem raising was very noticeable in Sangha members.

The programme has received several awards in 2007/8 including the Chief Minister Best Community Action Award to DIU Goalpara, Community Leadership Award by the National Foundation for India. Both these awards were given.

In terms of concerns, AMSS has a great opportunity to highlight issues of relevance for dis-advantaged women at a higher level of policy dialogue, in District, State and National forums, which is not always capitalized on. For example they are recognized by NRHM as an official partner NGO, at the field level, this should not only be seen as an field level implementing agency but as equal partners in policy discussions.The NRHM framework has a formal requirement to include community voiced and perceptions of health services, which currently is not always capitalized upon at national or state level. MS is the ideal partner to provide practical grounded needs of dis-advantaged women into reviews or schemes and programmes – and they should be formal members of the NRHM annual reviews. Citizens voice is an area of need not recognized as often as it could be in health service delivery. MS has more traditionally worked on monitoring service delivery, traditional medicine and MDM schemes, but this could be expanded to monitoring quality of health services, client care and ASHA service delivery.

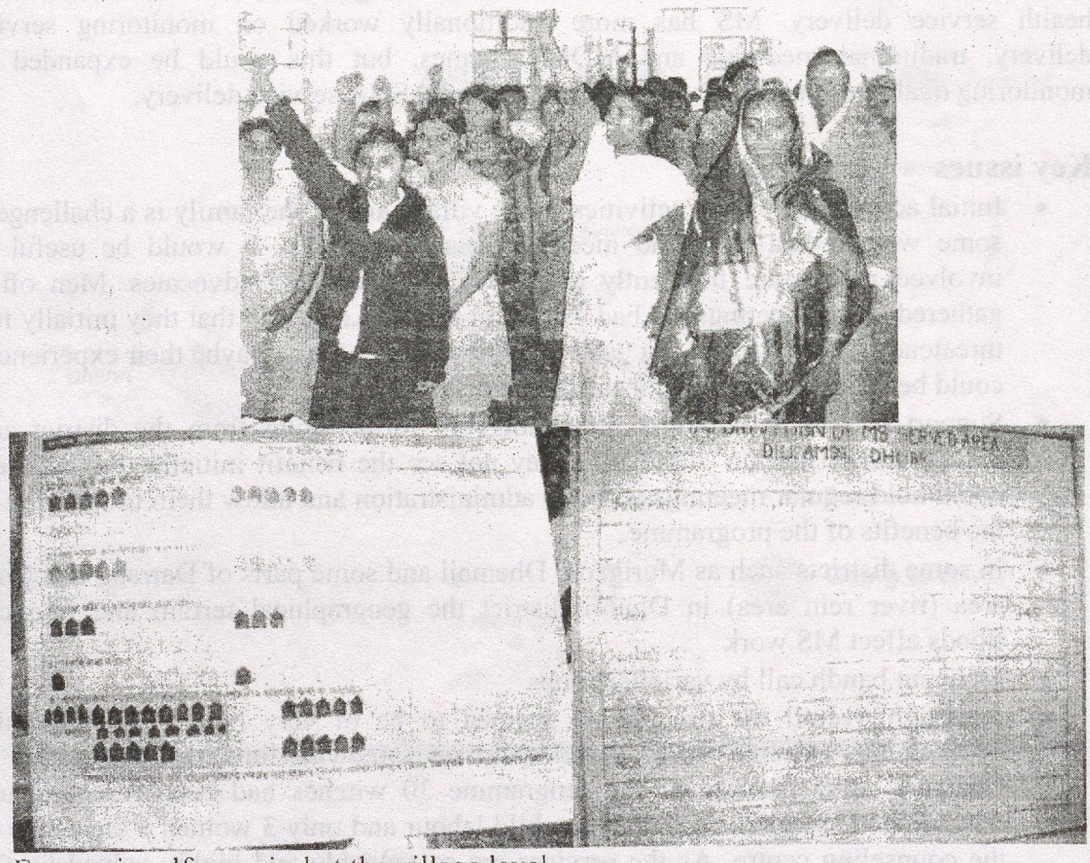
Key issues

- Initial acceptance of MS activities in the village and in the family is a challenge – some women had to attend meetings secretly initially. It would be useful to involved men more frequently as MS role models and advocates. Men often gathered at the meetings we had as part of the visit and said that they initially felt threatened by the Sangha but came to believe in benefits. Maybe their experiences could be used as advocacy for the newer districts.
- Support of MS activities is often not very forthcoming from the district and village administration – and they may not see the benefit initially. Project staff could hold regular meetings with the administration and allow them to feel part of the benefits of the programme.
- In some districts such as Morigaon, Dhemaji and some parts of Darrang and Char area (river rein area) in Dhubri district the geographical terrain and frequent floods affect MS work
- Frequent bandh call by various groups
- Although overall the programme seemed to be of very high quality and the interventions extremely useful, the reach was somewhat limited. For example in Goalpara- over the life of the programme 30 witches had been rescused and rehabilitated, 16 girls rescued from child labour and only 3 women a day come to the counseling centre. As the services are so valuable and highly valued by the

communities it may be possible to increase the reach of the programme and measure the impact over time.

II. Programme Processes in Sangha formation/roles

The total number of Sangha in the State of Assam is 2769 and total number of block federations is 18 in 6 districts. The Sanghas are formed in areas that are socially, economically and educationally backward. The MS philosophy is discussed by house visits , small group meetings, organization of awareness camps and frequent visits by MS workers. There was obviously good rapport between state and district staff and sangha members – evidence that State programme staff visit regularly and know the sangha members individually.IThe Sangha's are also provided with documents to enable them to record meetings and key issues, these are very innovative and the ones we saw were well kept. They record economic progress of the village by colouring households according to income groups and In the context of federations its formation is done at the Gram Panchayat level in a spontaneous manner. Women federate on issues concerning two or more sanghas such as legal and critical issues such as witch hunting, rape, land disputes, marital discord, equal pay for equal work etc. Celebrations of International Women's Day, Children's Day, Environment Day, Girl Child Day, binds many Sangha women of different villages to come together at Gram Panchayat level.



Economic self appraisal at the village level.

At the block level the formation of federation is done in a purposive manner. It is based on the need to encourage upward mobility of women from grassroot to the block so that they can impact on policy matters related to their blocks . Also women at block level federation can look at problems concerning women in holistic manner. In fact their perspective would widen by collectively addressing issues impacting the status of women.

The Sangha membership is not restricted in Assam. It is believed that increase in number of membership would strengthen women's movement at the grassroot level and thereby prevent discrimination and violence against women (Sanghas tended to have between 50 and 100 members). Federation is strengthened by training members on organisational , gender and financial management. Exposure visits of federation members are organized from one district to the other to acquaint them with the issues of the neighbouring districts. There were may good examples of sanghas using "visioning" methodology to draw their future goals in terms of "our ideal village" – there were then displayed prominantly. They often included women in active roles, clean safe villages, full schools and primary health centres.

In Assam Sanghas are nucleus of MS programme. They enjoy a lot of confidence among villages in which they are operational and also from the neighbouring villages. There is a feeling by non MS areas that they wish to have Sanghas in their villages. Some of the Sangha women have become small entrepreneures by starting plantation and small business. It was also striking how much more confidence women have who had been involved for longer periods and were now in Federations – illustrating the culmative impact of the programme.

Key Issues:

- There are weak and medium Sanghas who have not taken pro-active role in the overall development girls and women
- Database in few Sanghas have not been updated
- The Sangha evaluation process is one of self assessment, this could be complimented by allowing other Sangha women to peer review each other – to allow for external assessment and additional learning opportunities. The model of peer review would be useful as a whole in the programme – for example the next joint review should include state level officials from other states to review each others programmes.

III. Training Programmes under MS

The training programmes conducted by MS at different levels deal with variety of issues that focus on the capacity building of sangha women, teachers of Mahila Sikshan Kendras (MSK), instructors of Adult literacy centers on social, economic, educational, legal, health and personality development parameters. Some of the modules on health, legal matters are gender inclusive (few of the modules developed were available at District Implementation Unit at Goalpara and Dhubri). Training programmes conducted for Sangha members are on the following issues –

- Gender sensitization
- Formation of federation
- Legal awareness
- Leadership training
- Vocational training (short term/long term)
- Health and nutrition concerns -
- Conduction of base line survey
- Evaluation of Mid-Day-Meal scheme
- Early childhood education
- Resource mapping
- Training for mothers group
- Economic development programme

Training is also given to the instructor (Gayatri) managing adult literacy centers. Teachers teaching in MSKs are trained on gender issues and on content related areas. Most of the in-service teacher training programmes are organized during vacations.

External training resources that are tapped are mainly for preparation of modules that are adopted & adapted according to the context specific requirements. They are from UNICEF, Nirantar, SSA, DIETs, Pratham, Chetna, NCERT, Action Aid, Indian Institution of entrepreneurship, Guwahati. State Institute of Rural Development, Voluntary Health organization of Assam, Gyan Vigyan Samitti, Assam, State Literacy Mission, North East Network and Reach India.

Key Issues

- The teachers at the MSK school had received only one initial training – it would be fruitful to allow teachers refresher trainings on at least an annual basis to update their skills
- Proper documentation of training programmes.
- Need of gender inclusive subject specific modules.
- Module on guidance and counseling should be enhanced to ensure access to professional courses and including psychological needs of women and girls. Counseling could take part in informal private settings, not only in the drop in centres, to help women feel more comfortable.
- Need of gender sensitive materials, addressing gender based problems that are specific to different communities such as child marriage or witch hunting.

IV. Participation of women and girls in formal and non- formal education.

One of the major interventions of MS programme is in the domain of education. It addresses problems of illiteracy of adult women, dropout and never enrolment of girls in the districts of its operations in a very substantial manner. Adult women attend literacy classes in Jagrity Kendras where they are educated in state primary class textbooks "Kuhipath" and primers (Asom Kiron I, II, & III) prepared by State Literacy Mission . Besides this center, the growing demand of education among Sangha and village women

has resulted in the organization of adult literacy camps of 10 day duration. During interactions with sangha women at Koshdhowa & Balijana Blocks some of them stated that they have made their village fully literate .This phenomenon was also true in Dhubri. Literacy camps prepare sangha women for joining literacy drive in their own villages. Quarterly review is also undertaken to assess methodology and need for revision in technique of teaching if any. Adolescent girls also attend adult literacy classes. Women and girls spoke about the huge impact that this had on their life – in terms of aspirations, respect and communication.

"We learned to look with our eyes"
"Now we have recognition in our society"
"Now we are confident to voice our feelings"
"We can now dance and sing and have fun"
"Nobody calls us mad for dancing and singing"

Sangha members of Goalparaq and Dhubri, November 2008 as told to Review team

Example self reported Gender Planning Goals by Block Mahasangha DIU, Dhubri Block

Women should be able to drive four and two wheeler vehicles
Every village should have a legal women cell or court
Women should be encouraged to behold the position of highest authority
Women should be self dependant by doing self chosn enterprises
The sense of deep hesitation to every matter of women be extinguished from their mind and hearts
Wages of women be same as man workers
The relation between be man and women be spontaneous

For addressing the phenomenon of dropout and never enrolled girls, MS has opened Mahila Sikshan Kendra (MSK) a non formal center for education. In 2005-06 the total number of existing girls in the Kendra is 276 in 2008-2009. These centres give primary and upper primary education to girls belonging to the most marginalized section of the society. During field visit to MSK at Goalpara and Dhubri interactions were held with 64 girls of the centre . Details of girls are depicted in Table I

Table I
Enrollment of Girls in MSKs

Districts/ Blocks	Total Girls	Age	SC	ST	OBC	Muslim minority	Mixed
Goalpara	32	10-14	Nil	18	1	13	7
Dhubri	32	8-12	1	Nil	9	22	Nil
Total no.	64						

Source: -MSK data sheet & field visit to the two MSK centers at Goalpara & Dhubri

The age of MSK girls ranged between 8-14 years and they were from mixed community e.g. Rabha, Hajong, Muslim & OBC communities.The selection of girls are done by the Sangha women at the village level to ensure that the most needy get selected. There is demand by the community to enhance the capacity of MSK because there are still drop out and never enrolled girls in the catchments villages of its operation. In Dhubri district the teachers of MSK stated that around 90 girls wanted to be enrolled in the centre. In these centres children are given two to three months of bridge courses and then they are grouped into different classes according to their learning levels. The formal school curriculum is then introduced. Most of the MSK girls are mainstreamed in to formal schools. Nearly 55% girls from 2005-08 have been mainstreamed. In a discussion held with MSK DIU Coordinator at Goalpara it was mentioned that some of them held academic positions in formal schools. However, few older girls have not yet been mainstreamed.

Girls in MSK appeared confident, cheerful neat and clean and are very enthusiastic. They all wanted to pursue their education and had aspirations of becoming teachers, doctors, nurses, police personnel and social workers. Detailed routine of their activities was available in MSK. Children learned karate, cycling, yoga, dance, music and other skills such as sewing, knitting and embroidery. During discussions many girls mentioned that they did not want to go home during vacations. Subjects they liked most were Assamese, Hindi and Maths. Some mentioned that the difficult ones were Science and English in Goalpara. Difficulties in these subjects were addressed by subject teachers, resident teachers and peers. Profile of each girl is documented in MSK. Health education seems to be thorough with girls understanding about parts of their bodies. Appropriate to age reproductive health education seems to be taking place also. In Dhubri district the TLM materials, prepared by the teachers were very effectively internalized by the students. The teachers illustrated great creativity and enthusiasm in creating their own teaching materials -- such as one to show the different phases of the moon. The girls were very keen to demonstrate their dancing, English and karate skills. There was obvious rapport and affection between pupils and teachers.





Interface of MS with formal education

MS is implementing the NPEGEL scheme in three districts in 6 Blocks covering 900 schools for mainstreaming out of school girls in age group of 6-14 years. The major intervention of MS is to provide life-skill educations, decision making, negotiating, goal setting and how to cope up with socio-psycho needs of adolescent girls. Besides this, skill related to repairing bicycle, gas, tube-well is also given. Karate training is given to the girls for self-defence. The baseline survey of girls enrolled in NPEGEL is done by MS.

It is interesting to note that one of the strategies that helps girls to transit from non-formal (MSK) to formal schools is the adoption of half yearly & annual examination that follow the academic calendar of Government schools. The District Elementary Officer deputes an external invigilator to evaluate the answer scripts of MSK. About 55% MSK girls continue their study in formal school. In Dhubri the team met few MSK girls enrolled in state formal school.

Key Issues

- Enhancing the budgetary head for food item in order to meet the cost of living index. This was mentioned by MSK teachers for meeting the nutrition and health needs of girls. They currently have 25 Rupees per girl per day.
- Increasing the capacity of MSK from 30 to 50girls as most of the villages in MSK districts have dropout & never enrolled girls – if this is possible without compromising quality.
- Organization of content based training and refresher for MSK teachers in English language, Science & Maths.
- Encourage exchange between teachers and sharing of teaching skills.
- Increasing the salaries of MSK full time teachers.
- MSK should be up scaled to upper primary in those districts that do not have this facility. Also the residential period should be extended from the present one year to two years. This will help the older girls to complete at least upper primary.
- Facilities of computers, TV & Telephones need to be provided for better connectivity.
- Teaching of less traditionally gender bound skills should happen in MSK – currently the more traditional "female skills" of sewing, handcrafts, cooking, dancing are prominent – these should be added to with teaching of IT, typing, mechanics, public speaking and so on. There was an abundance of traditional beautiful handcrafts made by the girls – which they say secures income- however more "modern" skills may also serve the pupils well in the future.
- Opening of National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) in districts with study materials in Assamese language.

v. Women empowerment to improve quality of life for themselves and their families

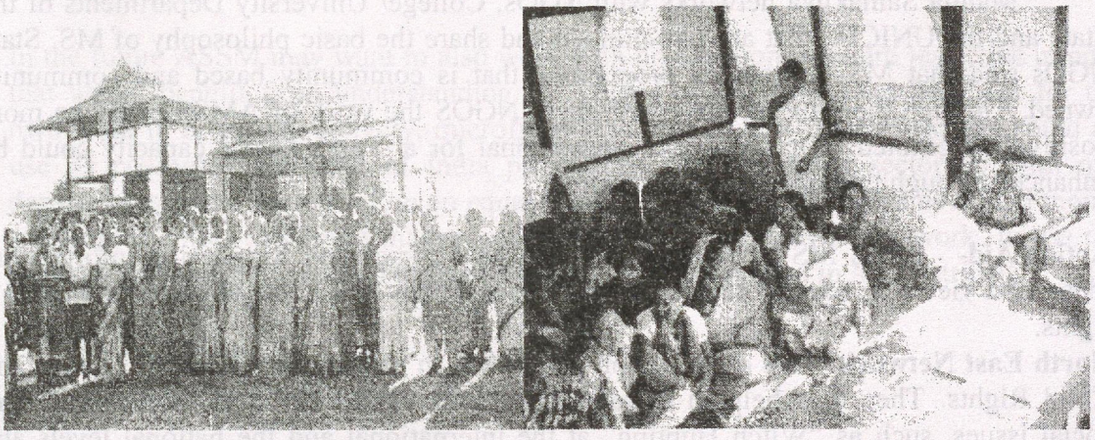
The AMSS in Assam has adopted a life cycle approach in empowering grass root level women and girls through its different operational structures such as Sangha, MSKs, Jagrity Kendras and Kishori Manch. In these centers adolescent girls and women are imparted skills for personality development and self-reliance. This phenomenon was very visible during district, block and village visits. Some of the parameters of empowerment that were perceivable are stated below.

Women and girls have – become more confident and articulate in raising issues concerning them, aware about their rights and entitlement, participate in decision making processes in the core groups of Sanghas such as health, education, legal literacy and economic self-reliance, taking active part in literacy drives and total sanitation of their villages, monitoring Mid Day Meal scheme, attendance of children and checking teacher absenteeism, ensuring achievement levels of children, promoting savings and entrepreneurship skills in women. In the context of health the Sangha women have become aware about their own health needs and have encouraged the promotion of health related concerns such as use of clean drinking water for their families and communities. There were some especially striking examples of women acting collectively to ensure that

the health service providers would provide regular services, and acting as a "watch dog" for their health services in terms of cost and regularity – there is potential that they could also start to act on quality aspects, eg maternal mortality audits or provision of correct drugs.

Nari Adalat has depicted the confidence of women in taking up legal issues affecting them. Sangha women have successfully taken up cases of violence related to family disputes, illicit relationship, trafficking of girls and women, child labour and witch-hunting. In most cases they have been able to settle cases, which shows the confidence the community has in them. In Dhubri district the Nari Adalat has documented 43 cases related to domestic violence, dowry, rape, physical assault and land disputes in 2006 till date. Again Nari Adalat should work with local authorities to try and increase the numbers of cases that they are able to mediate.

Nari Adalat in Dhubri



Protection of bio-diversity and encouraging the use of indigenous medicine is an important component of women's empowerment in the state.

The priority programmes of women's empowerment are – legal literacy, adult literacy, participation of women in local-self government and reproductive child health. Many Sangha women who were also ASHA's or who were Dia's

Burning Social Issue: Witch hunting in Assam

In areas of Assam witch hunting and banishing is practiced and in some cases encouraged by religious leaders. Often in the context of widowed, infertile or single women being stigmatized and sent away from the community and their families. AMSS has worked well to rehabilitate women banished and bring them back into their villages. There is a good opportunity to also create awareness generation for stopping the practice.

Key Issues

- The activities of Sangha women need to be given recognition by district and the state administration – and MS at the state and district level can work more "upstream" to ensure that MS are involved in planning processes and demonstrate the impact on indicators not seen as traditionally ones of women's empowerment such as health and nutrition..
- Sanghas could start to monitor not only quantity of services such as mid day meal or hours of health services, but also get guidance on how the quality of those health services could be improved. Nari Adalat may be able to act as facilitators or support maternal and infat death audits with District Collctors and the Health Service Providers.

VI. Resource Support System

Mahila Samakhya networks with NGOs, College/ University Departments of the State and the UNICEF that are like-minded and share the basic philosophy of MS. State NGOs said that MS is the only programme that is community based and community owned. Through their strong links with these NGOS the work of AMSS could be more positively promoted in national and international for a – and AMSS capacity could be enhanced through the process and exposure.

Action Aid- Helps MS in advocacy on women's issues and for sharing information, ideas, and views on several developmental issues. Helps MS in propagation of women's rights.

North East Network -This organization assists MS in training on CEDAW, Human and Child Rights. They also help in disseminating information on some of the important social issues, such as "Witch Hunting" at the international and the national levels and strategies evolved by MS in handling it.

Voluntary Health Association of Assam - This organization helps in the capacity building of MS functionaries as well as Sangha members on health issues such as reproductive, adolescent health and on existing medical facilities of the state. Orientation on accessing these facilities are imparted to Sangha members. Goalpara and Nagaon districts have been selected as "Mother NGOs" under National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) by the strong recommendation of this organisation.

Action North East Trust - Helps MS in critically analyzing Government schemes and programmes.

Women Study and Research Centre - This center has taken up a study on Evaluation of MSK in 2006-07. The Centre is supportive of all interventions of MS. The Director of the Centre is on the Executive Committee and is also the member of the National Resource Group (NRG).

UNICEF - Supports MS activities financially and technically in the implementation of NPEGEL scheme. They have taken up a project on Child Protection at Sonitpur district.

The State Resource Centre at Guwahati is attached to MS state office. It is at an evolving stage. The objectives of MS resource centre is to gather the experiences of rural women's empowerment process and thereby share each of them through documentation for its dissemination to larger public forum as well as it supports the National Resource Centre at Delhi in terms of materials developed.

Two members from NRG are in the Executive Committee of the state MS society. They help in disseminating good practices, innovations if any and some of the problems impacting the programme in the state. The NRG plays an advisory role to the state. The role of the NRG is to advise and guide Government of India in policy matters concerning women's education and the future role of MS strategy in larger educational intervention. The Executive Committee is an empowered body that takes care of all programmatic, administrative and financial decisions, including an in-depth examination of specific innovations of the state.

Key Issues

In the future ASSM may want to also work with organisatons that are less "like minded" that would benefit from understanding the impact of women's empowerment for their own work in economic delivery, microfinance or commercial enterprises. MS could also use its position as a Govt of India programme to work cross sectorally with other departments at the state level on an equal footing, not only being seens as a field monitor and implementor. MS could maybe work with their existing NGO network to use their expertise in impact evaluation to demonstrate their great impact in MS districts..

VII. Programme Management

AMSS management system is designed to facilitate the objectives of the project in terms of being participatory decentralized and flexible It's participatory nature is visible in training programmes, workshops, material development, exposure visits and handling of legal issues. It was obvious that the MS approach is bottom up and women in the Sanghas drive their own agendas – and this varies dependant on local issues..

AMSS recruits its staff at the state, district, block and at the panchayat / cluster levels. At the state level in Assam all administrative positions are currently filled. The two vacant positions at the state level are regarding that of one consultant. At the district level 9 block Junior Resource Person are vacant and that of a data entry operator. At the block and cluster level currently all positions are filled. Based on discussions with SPD & ASPD it was reported that additional staff at all levels are needed for meeting the expansion requirement in newer districts, blocks & villages. In older districts for documentation of AMSS activities, meeting the multifaceted needs of the federation additional human power is needed. Also MS has been given additional responsibilities of handling several schemes of Government of India from time to time such as NPEGEL that requires additional staffing. Therefore, for sustaining its own activities along with additional task assigned more human resources are needed.

The training of MS staff can be designed by the NRC at Delhi . The training could focus on – management skills, information of government schemes and programmes, research methodology, development of indicators, gender budgeting and ICT. Also training of preparation of manuals for guidelines on budgets & others specific task should be imparted.

The Annual Work Plan and Budget Formulation of AMSS follows the national guidelines. However it adopts participatory and need based approach based on the requirement of the field. The annual and monthly work plans are very meticulously prepared. It gives details of activities, budget provisions, number of programmes, number of participants and durations both at the state and the districts level. It also includes expansion strategies of MS and some of its structures such as Mahila Sikshan Kendras, Kishori Manch and Shishu Vikash Kendras. The growing training needs for Cluster Level Resource Person (CLRP) and Sangha women is also recorded. In 2008-09 the approach in the annual work plan and the budget is focused on target achievement in areas such as literacy and registration of federation at the block level.

The tracking system of affectivity of MS activities in all fields related to education, health, economic self-reliance etc are monitored regularly through an effective monitoring system, although this focuses on quantitative targets largely. In a discussion held with SPD and ASPD they mentioned that the monthly review meetings at the state, district, block levels are held in addition to field visits that are regularly taken to see its impact at the grass root level. For qualitative impact success stories of the programme are documented and analysed to see how the process adopted has helped in achieving the result. This mechanism would help in replicating it in other MS district, block and at the village level. Also state, district and block conventions of sangha women along with MS office bearers is annually held for tracking the success and failure of the programme taken up. At the Sangha level women have their own mechanism of analysing the impact of the programme. They document the success and failure in their baseline reports. During field visit the team members observed that the Sangha women used different colours to record their progress and shortfalls of their activities. Overall tracking is very extensive, self evaluated and well recorded.

Key Issues

- NRC should strengthen the management skills of all MS office bearers in all the states of its operations.
- Increasing the staffing pattern at all levels. This would strengthen the programme, as in Assam it is expanding to newer districts, blocks and villages. It would also go a long way in promoting partnerships with other organizations.
- Ensuring that MS staff are not overburdened with reporting requirements.
- More independent impact evaluations should take place that compare intervention areas with non intervention areas. These should include indicators independent of MS impact indicators such as reduction of malaria in villages that are monitoring use of mosquito nets (such as Dhubri) or link with health NGOs doing that work.

VIII Financial Management

For the purpose of this review – the review team asked the State office and District office the same series of questions about audit, banking arrangements, delegation of authority and other financial management issues. The team also studies the records supplied to them in the District visit. This section summaries the response.

1. Fund flow from GOI and status of releases to districts from State

Banking/Fund Transfer Arrangements

Funds are transferred from the GoI to through electronic transfer and to the District by a demand draft. **Both at the district and state level it was confirmed that** Bank Reconciliation Statement are prepared on a monthly basis. At the state level one had been prepared on 31st October and they are prepared quarterly.

Financial monitoring reports are prepared every month and include

- Receipt & Payments Account.
- Bank Reconciliation Statement.
- Income & Expenditure Accounts.
- Compilation of Receipt & Payments Accounts of State & District Offices.
- Details of Activity Report.

The Dhubri District office also mentioned the Advance list, monthly performance report, matrix of update information on numbers reached, an action plan and an Honorarium statement. The State office confirmed that they ensure correct classification of expenditure through verification of monthly activity report. The district submits the monthly activity report as per budgeted activities approved in AWP & B of AMSS. In addition the Dhubri office discussed other verification documents including; the cash book, bank pass book, minutes of programmes, photos of programme with banner and the ledger book.

Advances given by the state for the following activities; For construction of Sangha Hut, for travel if MS functionaries goes to district or other state for official purpose, Honorarium advance on a special case basis. The selected district gives advances for the same reasons and Mahila Sikhan Kendra.

Advances are always shown in advance entry register aswell as recorded in cash Book & ledger. They then are reflected in receipt & payment accounts, Income & expenditure accounts & also in the Balance sheet. They prepare a schedule of Advances. And then maintain journal book for adjustment of advance on completion of programme. Proper Journal Vouchers are also maintained for the purpose. The same system applies at the district level with a ledge head opened for the person to whom advance is given. The final expenses are then verified at district level against the previously mentioned documentation. The honorarium advance recovery is met from 5 equal installments of honorarium.

2. Financial Management

All Accounting is done with double entry system at both state ad district level. The state office ensures correct classification of expenditure through cash book, ledger, Journal with vouchers, Bank Reconciliation Statement, Bank statement along with minutes, attendance register of the programme compare with the AWP & B as per financial guideline. There are standard activity codes for both state and District. Expenditure is classified according to national guidelines referenced according to the monthly work plan.

3. Status of audits and compliance

There is a quarterly internal audit through through CAG empanelled CA at the state level and all districts. The external audit reports are attached to the state annual reports. The state office described the procedure for appointment as

"We have collected minimum 3 nos. of expression of interest of C.A. firm by offering letters to the reputed CA Firm with consolidated fee after due permission from Chairperson of AMSS Chartered Accountant has been engaged & Approved in next Executive Committee meeting".

The District level office felt that the auditor was appointed by Chairperson of AMSS and accounts put before her for review. Both the state and district office described the external audit as being on annual rotation however for both 2006-07 and 2007-08 the same audit company was appointed A Choudery and co, of Guwahati.

4. Financial rules and delegation of powers; procurement system

The State Project Director and Accounts Officer are responsible for accounts at state level, whereas at the district level whereas at the district level it's the DPC and District Accountant. Qualifications include B.Com Accountancy and Graduate in Commerce for the Accounts personnel and Graduate for the Directors. All State staff have received financial management training by MS National office recently – and at the District level state training. Monitoring and support was through visits by the state office to districts (as per need but usually 3-4 times a month), and accounts would be discussed in state review meetings.At the state level it was confirmed that all amounts beyond Rs. 500/- are paid Account payee cheque. At the state level the joint signatories are the State Programme Director and Accounts office (delegated authority is one lac), anything over that needs the Chairperson's signature also. At the District level the DPC and Accountant can sign up to 20,000 rupees.

Special issues/recommendations

- In Dhubri the staff of the MSK highlighted that the budget allowance was 25 rupees a day for each girl for all food which made it very difficult for

them to provide nutritious food, providing flexibility on that budget head should be explored.

- AMSS state that their auditors are rotated annually and yet this is not the case for 06/7 to 07/8 - Auditor rotation should be ensured – and potentially come from other states. The review of audited accounts could also be review by a wider group than the chair and maybe include chairs from other states.
- There are significant amounts of paperwork in that at the dsitrict level it can it takes full time 150% person time to complete – this should be monitored to ensure that people's duties are not solely dictated by report completion.

IX. Good Practices

- AMSS through its activities has bridged caste and religious barriers among communities such as SC, ST, OBC and the Muslims.
- Implemented equal pay for equal work at the grass root level.
- AMSS worked with UNICEF to provide training for traditional birth attendants (Dia's) until 2004 to help them provide safer birth sevices. When Government of India policy changed to encourage institutional deliveries and JSY incentives this left a gap in terms of supporting traditional health workers. However in Assam many Dias and Sangha members have become ASHA workers, and now are formally linked with health services and therefore in the health referral chain in case of difficult deliveries. This is a positive step in terms of health care for women who may have traditionally given birth at home – this should be encouraged for other Sangha members who recieved this original training as many have been left frustrated with the abrupt change in GoI policy.

X. Progress toward the Achievement of MS Objectives

Result frame work

<table>
<tr><th>Narrative</th><th>Verification</th></tr>
<tr><td>Expansion</td><td>1) Covered 10 districts as per target fixed for Assam, MS in 11th plan documents
2) 40 Blocks covered, 2379 villages and 2769 SAngha's evolved.
3) Sangha membership 1,41,897 - Social break up is given below
4) 21,575 women have become literate.

<table><tr><th>Social category</th><th>No. of women become literate</th></tr><tr><td>ST</td><td>12768 (59%)</td></tr><tr><td>SC</td><td>496 (2%)</td></tr><tr><td>OBC</td><td>795 (4%)</td></tr><tr><td>Muslim</td><td>5244 (24%)</td></tr><tr><td>Others</td><td>2272 (11%)</td></tr><tr><td>Total</td><td>21,575</td></tr></table></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Better access to health services</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>• 412 Sanghas have involved or worked as Pressure group to regularize the ANM (2007-08)
• 56 applications put up to health department under RTI Act. (2007-08)</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td></td><td>• 1254 Sangha have been ensured birth registration (2007-1143 Sangha women selected as ASHA under NRHM (2007).</td></tr>
<tr><td>Out put</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Coverage</td><td>Village covered in 9 MS district of Assam (The tenth district is at initiation process)
• All total 2379 Villages have been covered where 2769 Sanghas have been evolved (In some villages 2-3 Sanghas have been formed due to its size & geographical barriers)

<u>Membership in Sanghas</u><table><tr><td>Total</td><td>21,575</td></tr><tr><td>ST</td><td>21180 (14.92%)</td></tr><tr><td>OBC</td><td>28081 (19.78%)</td></tr><tr><td>MOBC</td><td>2440 (1.71%)</td></tr><tr><td>Minority (Muslim)</td><td>32021 (22.56%)</td></tr><tr><td>General</td><td>35308 (24.88%)</td></tr><tr><td>Total</td><td>1,41,897</td></tr></table>(Out of total Sangha member 75.12% belongs to backward/marginalized community i.e. SC, ST, OBC, MOBC & Muslim

In five older MS districts (Darrang, Dhubri, Morigaon, Sonitpur & Goalpara) Sahayoginies were withdrawn in 2005-06.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Training/Workshop organised for capacity build up of CRP</td><td>- Organized workshop to define role of CRP, since most of the CRPs were selected among the Sahoyogini from 2005 onwards
- Vision Mission Workshop in perspectives of the 10th & 11th plans from 2004 onwards
- Training on Strategies Gender Need analysis (2007)
- Training on Federation from 2004 onwards</td></tr>
<tr><td>Raising capacity and confidence of Sangha/ federation for articulated demand</td><td>- Studies conducted by external agencies such as DIET in reference to the MS and Non MS areas in aspects of awareness level of women on the issues of health, legal matters, public works, Government schemes reflects that confidence level of women of MS has been enhanced as compared to non MS areas.
- Plantation has become a regular activity which is reflected in the Sangha profile.
- 153 Gram Panchayat Federations have been established
- 15 Block Federations have been registered
- XX Sangha women have been selected at PR representatives</td></tr>
<tr><td>Involvement of Sangha in different village level institution & schemes.</td><td>- Involvement of Sangha in VEC – 232 (2007-08)
- Sangha women selected as ASHA under NRHM –1143(2007)
- No. of Sangha involved in school monitoring – 738 (2007-08)
- No. of Sanghas involve in Mid-Day-Meal scheme – 596 (2007-08)
- 5879 Sangha women were involved in regularization of</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td></td><td>NREGA (2007-08)
- Sangha, Kishori Manch & MSK alumni playing pro active role in selecting & motivating girls to join in MSK.
- 695 cases settled through Sangha and Nari Adalat interventions.
- Early marriage stopped by Sangha & Kishori Manch – 28 during 2007-08.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Mainstreaming of girls</td><td>- Through NPEGEL & MSK, 423 no. of girls have been admitted in formal school during 2007-08.
Caste community break up of mainstreaming
<table>
<tr><th>SC</th><th>ST</th><th>Muslim</th></tr>
<tr><td>35</td><td>327</td><td>61</td></tr>
</table></td></tr>
<tr><td>Gender sensitization in formal institution</td><td>Since 2007-2008, AMSS had started organizing gender sensitization programme in co-educational institution at upper primary level. Also, college level girls have been invited from 10 colleges of MS districts on the same component.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Women empowered to improve the quality of life of themselves and their families (economic opportunities, health, political participation)</td><td>- Component wise profiles have been developed by AMSS through participatory workshop involving Sangha/federation members and distributed in the Sanghas so as to create a new base line for Sangha/Federation. This profile reflects the women access to resources and their participation in development activities.
- In (2007-2008), 323 women were elected in panchayat election. Also, federation organized interface between candidates and communities
The alternative structures like Nari Adalot, District Counseling Centers are managing by Sanghas/Federations very effectively. Reported cases have been increased every year and recorded properly. These structures able to get recognition from District Administration.</td></tr>
</table>

Key Issues

- Reflection of achievement of MS objectives should be shown as annual targets for cross reference.

X. Key issues in the state MS programme

- Increasing the staffing pattern of MS at the state, district and block level to address issues of expansion, documentation and handling multifaceted issues
- Enhancing the cost of foods for MSK girls to meet the growing cost of living index.
- Opening of Centers of NIOS in districts and blocks and study materials in Assamese for enabling MSK girls to complete the school level.
- MSK should incorporate certain not traditionally "female" skills to be imparted to the girls such as bicycle, stove, gas and tube-well repair etc.

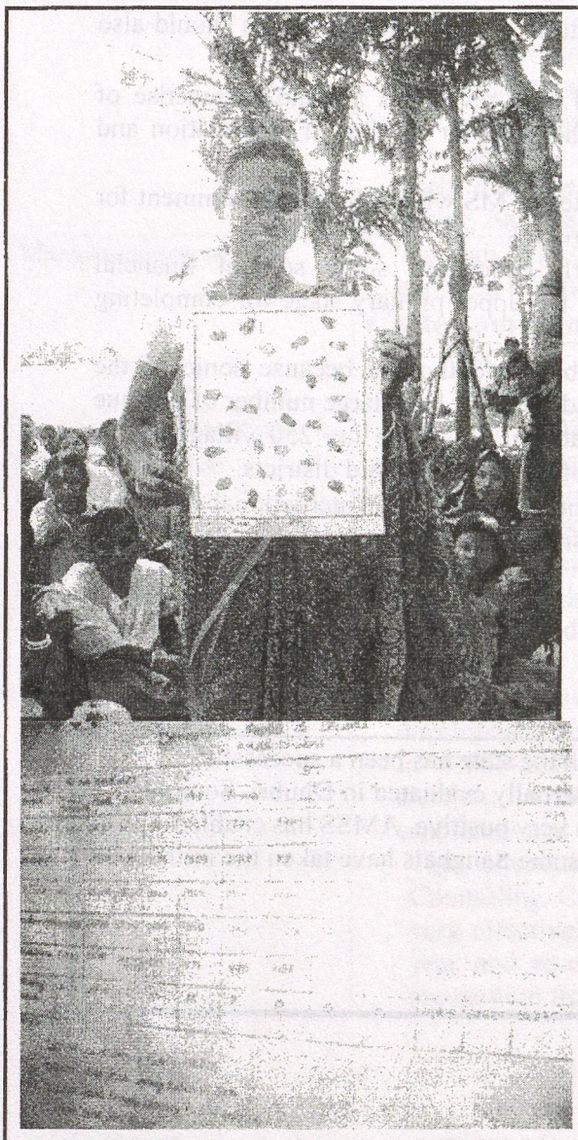
Training in first aid and managing natural disaster such as floods should also be given.

- Strengthening of exposure visits and peer review as a standard practise of Sanghas to other states and within the state for sharing of information and dissemination of good practices.
- Evolving strategies for linking activities of MS with the state Government for policy influence as a more upstream process.
- Other than state incentives for girls educations some sort of financial assistance should be given to girls at the upper primary stage for completing schooling.
- The guide lines for AMSS should be made flexible because some of the districts in the state such as Dhubri and Sonitpur have large number of revenue villages which are more than the National Guideline i.e. 250 villages. This would help in the expansion strategy of AMSS in the said districts.
- Linking ASSM more productively and formally with international fair-trade organizations to ensure that the extensive handicraft production is as fruitful as possible for Sangha women.

XI. Good Practices

Adult literacy - the adult literacy campaign in the state has been a successful endeavor. The literacy campaign has been externally evaluated in Dhubri, Sonitpur, Darrang and Nagaon and the result have been very positive. AMSS has enabled XXXX women to become literate. Currently some Sangha's have taken the initiative to become fully literate in XX villages.

A totally literate village



Visioning our village goals – the district office and sanghas all used a very creative method to allow women to express their visions and aims for the future by drawing a picture of their "perfect village". This was then laminated and hung on the wall. It's a very effective talking point and way for non literate women to see how to change their village.

Best Practice of Impact Evaluation – Dhubri District - An independent agency undertook an analysis[2] of impact of MS in Dhubri District - comparing MS areas with non MS areas. The methodology was randomised so that differences could be

[2] Study on the Impacts of the activities of MS Society of Dhubri District, Assam – District Institute of Education and Training, Dhubri,2006

attributed to MS interventions. It showed some interesting impacts and specifically higher levels of awareness on women's rights in Sangha areas. For example;

-In served areas consent is taken for marriage in 87% of cases, only 19% in not served.
- In served areas 93% of women are aware of FP and health and only 60% in unserved.

In terms of literacy and actual impact there were also some significant impacts;
- Drinking water facilities are available in 64% of served area and 40% in unserved area
- Female literacy is nearly double in the MS areas (61% compared to 36%)
- Child mortality was marginally higher in the non MS areas (12.8% compared to 13.8%).

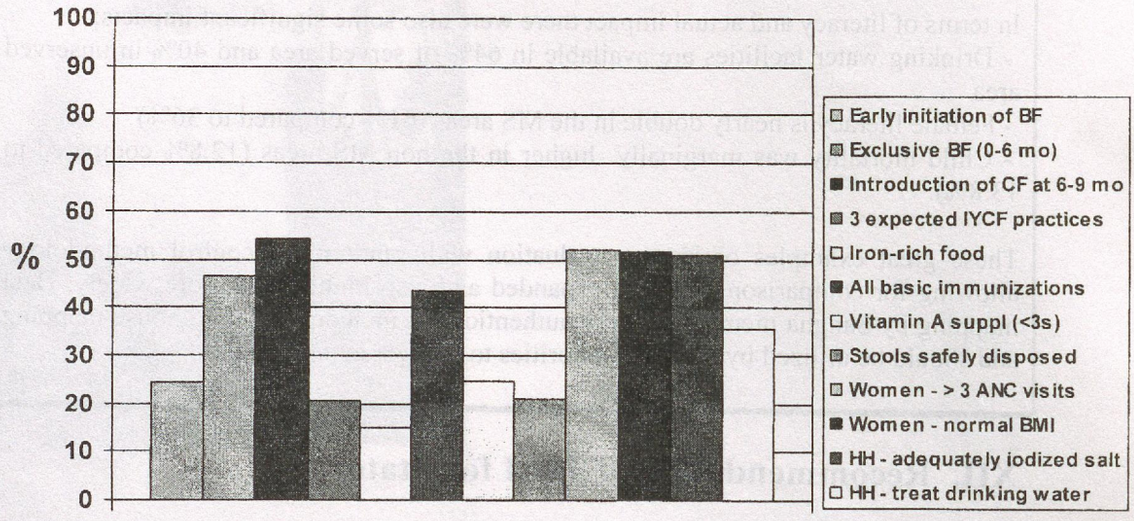
These great examples of impact evaluation with randomised control methodology allowing for comparison could be expanded and also highlighted more widely. Data mapping by Sangha members is very authentic as it includes house to house mapping and should be utilized by District authorities to a larger extent.

XII. Recommendation of JRM for State

- Designing capacity building programmes for MS office personnel , including gender budgeting, research methodologies, management skills and ICT. Teachers of MSKs should included regular refresher training and ICT skills.
- Encouraging exposure visits of Sanghas within the state and other state for information dissemination and mutual learning. Ensure that peer review at all levels becomes a standard element of MS reviews – including state to state peer review for the next JRM.
- States should interpret guidelines dependant upon their needs and capacity – for example in populated areas where there is a need Districts can expand beyond the 250 villages guideline.
- The resource centres should be linked via the internet with online resources shared – Karnataka is one example to study.
- Explore how positive male role models could become a part of MS's work, especially in the Nari Adalat's work – and expand the educational messages to include challenging stereotypical male roles, and illustrating how Sangha's can have a holistic positive community impact.
- Build upon existing good health and nutrition reach in the following ways;
    - Monitor and mentor Anganwadi services to ensure that all under 2s receive information and services as this is the critical window for nutritional impact (below shows graph with ten essential interventions and current levels nationally)
    - Ensure that dias involved in original TBA training up to 2004 are mainstreamed into formal healtgh services –through ASHA training – and Sangha's mentor ASHA's to better discharge her role in essential child health and nutrition – such as appropriate feeding practises, treatment seeking of childhood diseases and other nutrition services.

- Monitoring health services should include both quantity and QUALITY of health services by Sanghas – this is seen effectively seen in regularising of ANM services already this could be expanded to include the provision of high quality/appropriate services by both ASHA and ANM .

National Coverage of ten essential interventions for under 2's nutrition



Inputs for ensuring good nutrition



Response rates section Trends in Contraceptive use

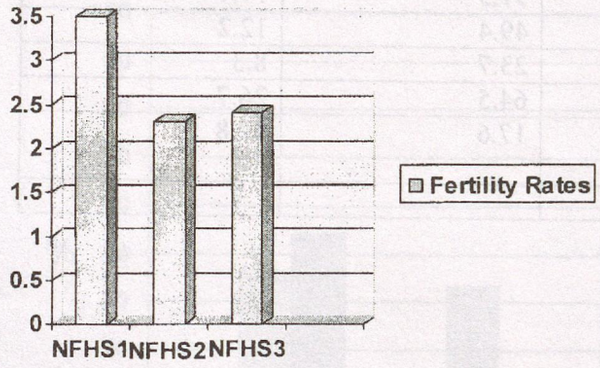
Annex – Key Development Assam indicators – NFHS 3

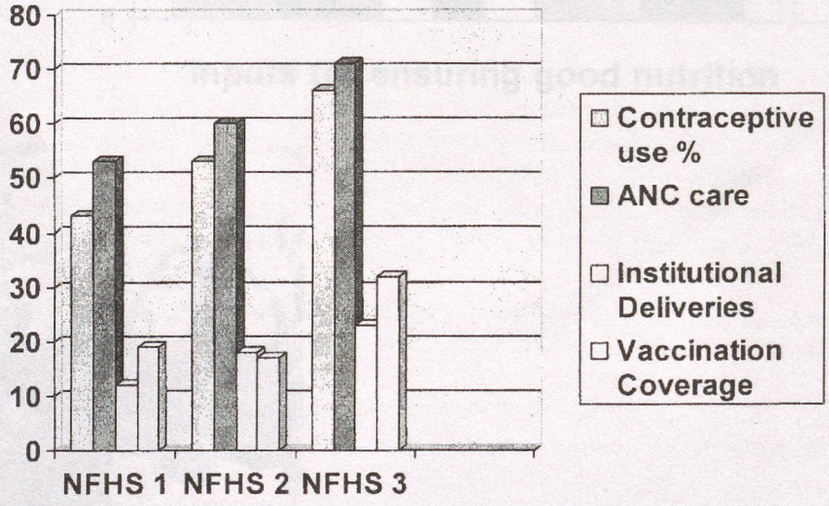
Population and Household Profile	TOTAL	URBAN	RURAL
Literate	76.3	87.7	73.8
Residence	100	20.2	79.8

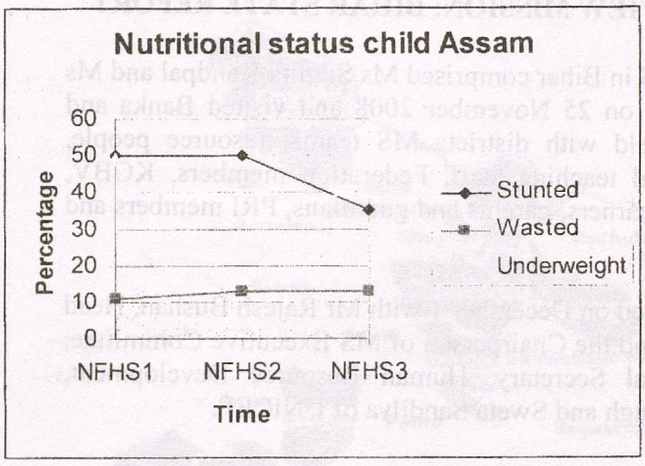
Mean household Size	4.7	4	4.8
% of households			
With electricity	38.1	80.6	27.3
water	11.6	30.4	6.9
toilet	76.4	97.5	71.1
house	19.7	49.4	12.2
vehicle	11.4	23.7	8.3
TV	34.3	64.5	26.7
Own agricultural land	41.7	17.6	47.8

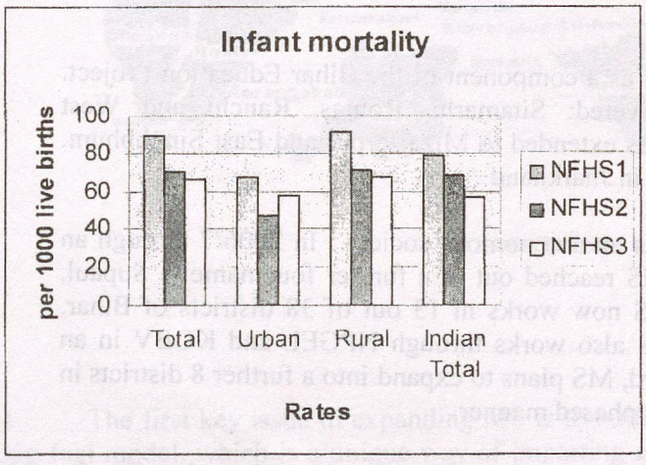
Key Health Indicators – Assam from National Family Health Survey – TrendData

NFHS 1992-3
NFHS 2- 1998-9
NFHS 3- 2005-6






Nutritional status child Assam
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Percentage
Stunted
Wasted
Underweight
NFHS1
NFHS2
NFHS3
Time


Infant mortality
100
80
60
40
20
0
per 1000 live births
NFHS1
NFHS2
NFHS3
Total
Urban
Rural
Indian Total
Rates

MAHILA SAMAKYA JOINT REVIEW MISSION: BIHAR STATE REPORT

The first Joint Review Mission of MS in Bihar comprised Ms Sumita Kandpal and Ms Emma Spicer, who arrived in Patna on 25 November 2008 and visited Banka and Gaya districts. Discussions were held with districts MS teams, resource people, village women, formal and informal teaching staff, Federation members, KGBV, MSK and Jag Jagi and Bal Jag Jagi learners, parents and guardians, PRI members and the State MS team.

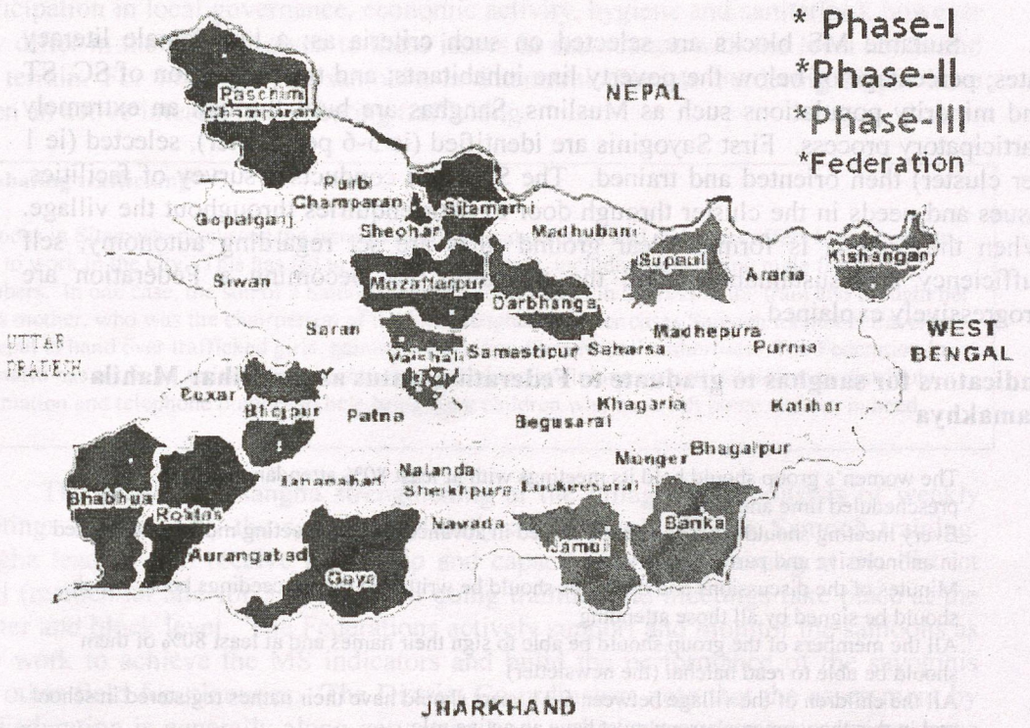
At the State level, meetings are planned on December 1 with Mr Rajesh Bushan, Head of Bihar Education Project Council and the Chairperson of MS Executive Committee; Mr Anjeni Kumar Singh, Principal Secretary, Human Resource Development, Government of Bihar; and Mr S N Singh and Sweta Sandilya of UNICEF.

Overview

1. Bihar introduced MS in 1992 as a component of the Bihar Education Project. At that time 4 districts were covered: Sitamarhi, Rohtas, Ranchi and West Champaran. The following year it was extended to Mizaffarpur and East Singhbhum. Ranchi and East Singhbhum are now in Jharkhand.

2. In 2005 MS was registered as an autonomous society. In 2006/7 through an accelerated process of expansion, MS reached out to a further four namely: Supaul, Kishanghanj, Jamui and Banka. MS now works in 13 out of 38 districts of Bihar, covering 60 out of 533 blocks. MS also works through NPGEL and KGBV in an additional 97 blocks. Looking forward, MS plans to expand into a further 8 districts in the course of the 11th plan period in a phased manner.

3. The strength and distinguishing feature of MS in Bihar is putting education for girls and women at the centre and as a precondition for empowerment. The programme is designed to take its cues directly from the women involved in the collectives. However, MS faces a number of adverse geographical and infrastructure difficulties in operating in Bihar, such as poor roads and lack of electricity, transport and modern communications such as newpapers and television. For instance, the village women the Review spoke to did not know that India had recently put a rocket on the moon.



4. The first key issue in expanding MS is to build on its success, particularly the Jag Jagi model, which is a unique way of imparting education to women and girls of all ages, particularly in areas where no schools exist. In order to make expansion a success and take activities forward, obstacles in the recruitment process must be overcome (the vacancy rate for the programme is currently around 30%). During the Review team's discussions, the quality of MS was widely seen as dependent on nurturing women's and girls participation and capabilities over long periods. This is process intensive by nature and therefore presents challenges when scaling up activities.

5. Sustaining the Federation movement (9 Federations are already in position) is also challenging, in two ways. Firstly, getting the samoohs to reach the qualitative parameters Bihar has set to become MS Federations and secondly sustaining the impetus and momentum of the Federations themselves.

6. Thirdly MS as a whole faces an uphill struggle against prevailing and continuing attitudes of discrimination against women and girl children all levels in Bihar.

Programne processes involved in sangha formation

7. There are currently 5,142 sanghas (known as samooh in Bihar), covering 4,457 villages and 109,923 women. This is approximately 10 times more women than were involved in 2003 and double the number involved in 2006.

8. Suitable MS blocks are selected on such criteria as: a low female literacy rates; percentage of below the poverty line inhabitants; and the proportion of SC, ST and minority populations such as Muslims. Sanghas are built through an extremely participatory process. First Sayoginis are identified (ie 5-6 per cluster), selected (ie 1 per cluster) then oriented and trained. The Sayogini conducts a survey of facilities, issues and needs in the cluster through door to door enquiries throughout the village. When the Sangha is formed clear ground rules are set regarding autonomy, self sufficiency and sustainability and the indicators for becoming a Federation are progressively explained.

Indicators for sanghas to graduate to Federation status as per Bihar Mahila Samakhya

1. The women's group should hold its meetings with at least 80% attendance, and at prescheduled time and date
2. Every meeting should have an agenda agreed in advance and the meeting must be conducted in an inclusive and participatory way
3. Minutes of the discussions and decisions should be written in the proceedings book, which should be signed by all those attending
4. All the members of the group should be able to sign their names and at least 80% of them should be able to read halchal (the newsletter)
5. All the children of the village between 6-11 years should have their names registered in school and in this the women s' group must have an active role
6. The group should participate in the supervision and running of Bal Jag Jagi, Jag Jagi and other education centres
7. The group should be able to give correct information about Bal Chaman, Kishori Munder and the school management committee and they should be of assistance to these organisation
8. The women's group will purchase materials for Jag Jaji and Bal Jag Jagi centres from the fund transferred to their bank account, and will maintain the same items properly
9. All atrocities/violence against women and girls should be opposed and efforts made to confront the problems
10. The group will raise its voice against all such social evils as child marriage, discrimination between boys and girls, superstition, witchcraft, which contribute to making women and girls weak and should act to stop such practices
11. The group must keep correct information about legislation related to women and girls and should be able to help wherever necessary
12. The group must pay special attention to personal and environmental sanitation and hygiene
13. All the women must know about the primary health centre and should be able to reach the centre and take full advantage of it
14. The group must make regular savings and all the women should know how to keep accounts correctly
15. All women should have equal and regular access to the savings' kitty
16. The construction and maintenance of the community meeting place will be the responsibility of all women
17. The women's group should have correct information about government and non government institutions so that advantage can be taken from them
18. Women should have correct information about Panchayati raj institutions in which they should also be able to participate and from which they should draw advantage
19. Collective decision making should be an important feature of the group
20. The group should have correct information about the local MS Federation and get closely associated with them

9. On average, it takes six months to one year for a Samooh to form and five to six years to become a Federation. All Sanghas adhere to the same principles and work on the same core issues (ie education, health, violence against women,

participation in local governance, economic activity, hygiene and sanitation); however they differ in the priority given to these issues in accordance with the local needs and the terrain. For instance, the samoohs in Sitamarhi districts bordering Nepal have taken an active interest in combating trafficking.

Combating trafficking

Samoohs in Sitamarhi discussed the issue of trafficking and scams and dishonest offers being made to girls to work in the city. This has led to a change in attitude, including sensitising male family members. In one case, the son of a Samooh member found a girl in distress in the train and brought her to his mother, who was the chairperson of the local sangha. In other cases Samooh members travelled to Nepal to hand over trafficked girls, gaining recognition from Nepali authorities. The Federation in Sitamarhi has taken an active role in combating trafficking by linking up with Childline to distribute information and telephone number to help bring back children who have left home and are in need.

10. The process of sangha strengthening at the village level consists of weekly meetings animated by the sayoginis initially and a yearly Mahila Samooh training. Sangha leaders also receive leadership and capacity building training at the district level (residential and for 5 days). On going training and meetings take place at the cluster and block level. The Federations actively support and monitor the samoohs as they work to achieve the MS indicators and build the performance of the sayoginis and other field functionaries. The District Co-ordinators note that the assessment by the Federation is generally along very strict lines, which demonstrates a strong sense of commitment and responsibility on the Federations' part.

11. Federations are strengthened through monthly meetings at the district level involving their executive committee members and quarterly meetings for the general body members. Meetings are held at the state level twice a year where experiences can be exchanged and plans for the next year prepared. A key strengthening and confidence building activity is the help Federations offer to MS programmes in their own development. One measure of the capability of the Federations is the help they have been able to offer other MS states. For instance, Federations hosted visits from AP and Jharkhand (2008), Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat (2006) and Nirantar (Delhi based NGO), and have undertaken three training sessions to support the Federations in Jharkhand.

The Federations in Bihar have chosen names that reflect the spirit, individuality and objective of each group: Jyoti (light), Shriusti (creation) Samridhi (prosperity) Pragati ek prayas (progress is an effort) Shwadha (self belief) Hamari Drishti (our vision); Basera (shelter)

12. In summary, the model for building the capacity of samoohs is highly systematic and intensive. The secret of its success has been strict adherence to the MS indicators and refusal to compromise on the non negotiable principles of the programme.

Training programmes under MS

13. Staff training is approached as an integral part of the programme and within this gender and capacity building are of paramount importance. Training accounts for around 25% of the State MS budget. The programme offers a detailed and

comprehensive training programme at all levels: sakhi, sayogini, saheli, bal mitra, kishori, shikshan sayogi, MSK teacher, KGBV teachers and wardens, MS programme personnel; NPGEL block gender co-ordinators and cluster co-ordinators; lady teachers and formal school teachers; district level trainers and resource people; elected PRI members; and all programme staff. The Review noted that the regimen was followed meticulously (see Annex A for details).

14. The methods used for training are highly participatory and include play, dance, role play and case studies. Often the case studies discussed have generated new training materials. The training takes place in a spirit of openness and reflection, including an in-built evaluation component. The materials used have often been prepared in co-ordination with the relevant departments such as SSA and ICDS. In addition, such national and international organisations such as Nirantar (documentation and gender perspective), Eklavya Jajori (gender issues), UNICEF (social marketing, hygiene and sanitation) and the Bihar AIDS Control Society have been involved in training members.

15. Importance is attached to training in accounts and financial matters; this is imparted to accounts staff but also MSK and KGBV staff (who keep the books for their facilities) and to Federation members and programme personnel.

16. The review team noted the impact of this training in the levels of leadership, confidence and motivation of staff, which is also transferred to the girls' and women and is evident in their attitudes and behaviour.

Positive impact from training and capacity building

Girls at the KGBV in Bodh Gaya cover their journals in cuttings from magazines. These performed their own gymnastic display inspired by one of the classical ballet photographs. The review team attributes this to the thirst for knowledge, creativity and resourcefulness inspired by the teaching staff. Similarly, one girl recited a poem which she had come across at the back of the register. The fact that she learned it and recited it with great verve and expression is an indicator of the positive environment in which these girls are growing up. Thirdly, the Hamari Drishti Federation in Gaya presented the team with meticulously prepared accounts, ledger and cash books which they had learned to prepare.

17. MS Bihar has broken tradition in approaching vocational training under its economic empowerment activities. In 2002 a Brahim young widow Vibia woman became the first woman mason under the sanitation programme in MS, facing ridicule and ostracism. Now Bibha is a master trainer and secretary to the Joyti Federation and commands tremendous respect of other MS workers as well as the community. The MS training programme has produced 535 qualified woman masons, who have installed 31,732 toilets (cumulative).

18. Other types of vocational training which have led to productive economic activity include: organic farming, flower cultivation, vermi-compost, collective farming, jute bags, madhuvani painting and jewerly and handicrafts. While appreciating these efforts the review team expressed concern over the marketability of some of these products. MS Bihar will need help from the State government and other agencies such as NGOs to successfully market these products as well as ensure

their quality. The Bihar Industrial Association has already provided support to enrich vocational training.

Participation of women and girls in formal and non-formal education

19. In Bihar MS has adopted a twin-track approach to strengthening access and retention in formal and non formal education, in which activities are linked and mutually reinforcing. Informal education cover areas where there are no schools or where particular problems exist, such as overage girls, girls from minority communities and deprived sections of society.

Non formal education

20. Exclusive to Bihar is Jag Jagi, a non residential bridge course for women and girls village level and in which age is no barrier. It has proved successful in a number of ways. Firstly, convenience (women and girls can devote 3 hours for this without interfering with their daily chores). Secondly, ownership: the teachers is selected by the MS members themselves (and paid according to SSA rates) and the times and venue are chosen by the women. Thirdly, participation is actively monitored by the MS. Some 45,000 women and girls are learning through Jag Jagi and a further 21,000 have already been mainstreamed into formal schools. Some of these girls have subsequently become graduates, teachers and nurses. MS Bihar plan to undertake a tracking study for Jag Jagi and MSK mainstreamed girls as a formal way to assess the impact of this highly popular programme.

21. Associated with Jag Jagi is Bal Jag Jagi, a pre-school operating in non ICDS/Anganwari and Balverg habitations, equipped with toys and other learning materials. 617 Bal Jag Jagis currently accommodate 25,118 children and have already mainstreamed 26,000 children into formal education. MS estimates that around 50% of these would not otherwise have gone to school. The objective is to develop an atmosphere where children come to love education. Like Jag Jagi, this is managed and monitored by the Mahila Samooh. Bal mitras are trained in convergence with ICDS. The review team visited one Bal Jagi Jagi that had been in operation for less than a year and where the children were able to count and identify colours.

22. The review team notes with concern that the budget allocation for Jag Jagi (including Bal Jag Jagi) under the 11th plan is less than under the 10th plan. In view of the significance of these programmes and the impact thereon on low-income groups, this amount should be increased and if not at least restored to the previous levels. MS Bihar should look into this.

23. Similarly, literacy camps for adult are an important source of non formal education, for which there is great need and for which samoohs have created demand. An internal evaluation of literacy camps was held last year and the content of the module was revised to given more focus to functional reading skills, starting with the recognition of words, letter and then sentences. A literacy camp costs around 16,000 rupees. The team further notes that the allocation for literacy camps comes from the same budget head as Jag Jagi and recommends that this be reviewed as suggested in the previous paragraph.

24. In Bihar MS comprises residential bridge courses for overage girls and emphasises mainstreaming into formal education. The duration is eight months, enabling girls to reach 5th standard. 22 MSKs are providing education to 805 girls at present. 9 of these are financed directly by UNICEF.

Formal education

25. MS runs 67 KGBVs in Bihar catering to 4,142 girls. Unlike many other states, MS runs KGBVs in non MS blocks (in this case in 33). KGBVs run for two years and the girls are aged between 11 and 14 or up to class 8. The Review visited three such facilities and interacted with the teachers and other staff. Our impression was that the KGBVs provided a very positive learning environment and caring atmosphere.

Good standards in KGBV

The weight and height of KGBV students is monitored on a monthly basis. Teachers reported that when girls who come from very poor families first arrive, they tend to be overwhelmed by the availability of food and often try to hoard their servings.

Each KGBV makes its own monthly newsletter, drawing on contributions from the girls. The contributions we read were of a calibre above the average age f the girls. The girls showed innovativeness and dynamism and were ready to sing songs, dance and generally energise others. The school apparently is able to nurture the inherent talents in these girls.

Both State education officials and UNICEF commented on higher standards in MS-run KGBVs compared to those run by others.

26. MS staff and girls made a request to extend the duration of KGBV up to upper secondary level (ie to class 10). The review team recommends this be considered on a selective basis. It was evident that there was little drop-out in the KGBV schools being run by MS. Next year it should be possible to more systematically compare drop out rates between KGBV and non KGBV students. Secondly, the review team notes the possibility that MS could scale up its KBGV and MSK activities by working through suitable NGOs, whose activities it would monitor and quality-assure. This would allow MS to extend services to a far larger number of disadvantaged girl age girls and could be considered as an important feature of MS's expansion strategy in Bihar.

27. MS supports formal schools through NPEGEL in all the EBBs in 9 districts, including non MS blocks. This amounts to 128 blocks covering 963 model cluster schools. The activities include gender sensitisation training for teachers, cluster level motivators and block and cluster core group members (ie school management members, PRI members). The review team met a number of teachers who claimed that MS was helping to improve their teaching skills and the performance of their students.

28. NPGEL also provides leadership training for girls and a one-month residential camp for girls providing leadership and character training and cycling lessons. Remedial classes are also provided for girls. 87,306 formal school girls are involved in the NPGEL programme. Competitions are organised regularly and the review team

witnessed a painting competition at which a number of male guardians and teachers were present.

29. The Government of Bihar is providing vocational training schemes for formal school girls under various programmes such as GJY and Hunur. MS implements these programmes in some blocks (eg, in Kishan Ganj, Supaul Sitamarha, West Champaran).

31. Finally, samoohs organise regular visits to schools and are also involved in running schools through the Mid Day Meal scheme. These efforts combined have supported greater participation of women in school management.

32. All the sangha and federations the Review met asserted that education was a central part of their activities and provided examples of the benefits of their involvement in improving enrolment and retention rates. MS and Federation representative claimed that Amas block in Gaya had attained 100% enrolment and retention at elementary level, while a neighbouring block Bakebazar had attained 100% enrolment.

Women empowered to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families

33. Empowerment is a gradual and long-term process and the results are often difficult to gauge. Much also depends on societal attitudes and the services and products available. The review team noted with pleasure that girls in Bihar were cycling- i.e. this is one good example of empowerment and products coming together successfully!

34. The top priority for MS in Bihar is girls' education. The girls who graduate from the various residential centres and non formal schools appear to be more capable of thinking for themselves and have aspirations beyond simply looking after their male family members. They are also being made physically stronger through proper nutrition and regular physical exercise. A good number of girls said they had used Karate to ward off aggressive boys! There were numerous examples where publicising girl role models appeared to have helped engender more positive attitudes and behaviours towards education.

Guria Khatoom is a muslim girl whose early education was in a JGG, from where she progressed to MSK and then KGBV. Guria now studies in Class 9 in a regular school, accommodated in an MSK because her parents live far from the school. Guria is a Karate master and whatever she earns she is giving back to the MSK as a contribution towards her upkeep. Guria travelled to London in 2005 to help launch the State of the World's Children report. Many girls and parent from the Muslim community have heard about Guria's success through newspaper reports and have been inspired by her success and have themselves enrolled in school.



35. The major interventions for empowerment outside school settings consist of the samoohs and its issued-based committees at village level, kishori munch, and the various activities of the Federation. A number of campaigns have been initiated against child marriage, domestic violence, rape, female foeticide and the dowry system. These campaigns are reinforced by the rituals, games and activities of the samoohs and clubs.

Table 1

Child marriage cases	No	Issued addressed
	591	437
Dowry system	1,755	1,235
Domestic violence	2,858	2,222
Rape and molestation	158	121

36. Hygiene and sanitation has been a priority for the state and where UNICEF provides financial support, including an additional staff member. Toilet installation has focused on 10 districts where 31,732 new toilets have been constructed, of which 13080 have been built since April 2008. 11 MS panchayats received Nirmal Graam Purascar for installation and use of toilets between 2005 and 2007. MS samoohs were

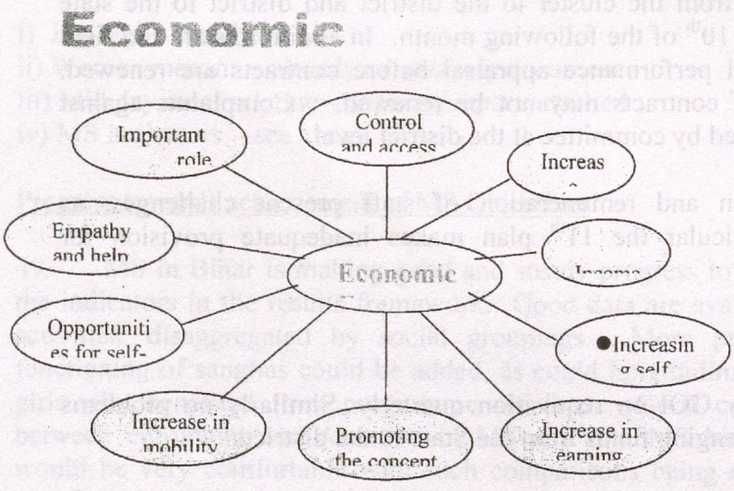
also actively involved in the success of Global Handwashing Day through campaigns, rallys and role plays.

37. Progress on health has been made mainly through awareness raising. The absolute lack of health facilities in Bihar has made it difficult for samoohs to formally link women with health services other than primary health centres. However examples were shared of samoohs persuading ANMs to visit to villages and receive better treatment for such conditions as amenia.

38. The review felt that it was an important mark of the maturity of Federation members that they provided practical and financial support in the last two years to assist following the floods. In addition, MS has been extensively involved in delivering the Mid Day Meal scheme in Bihar and has produced an extensive report on its experience – see Annex B.

39. MS has made inroads into governance and women's participation in the public domain. 463 samooh women have been elected to government positions at various levels. Similarly, in economic empowerment there has been good progress. There are 3912 credit and thrift groups comprising 68,328 women. Samooh saving amounts to 3 crores, 31 lakhs 71,490.

40. MS Bihar's approach to economic empowerment is shown in Figure 2.



40. There is a healthy degree of networking with NGOs both at State and district levels, as described in paragraph 14 on training. The State Resource Centre is providing training and provides newsletter but is still in a formative stage. Much depends on the functionality of the national resource centre, which is eagerly awaited. Both NRG and EC members have been extending full support to MS but would welcome more advice in sorting out problems concerning staff appointments and recruitment.

Programme Management

40. The review team saw many indicators of participatory programme management in Bihar – for instance the drivers acting as ambassadors for the programme as well as programme staff. Staff were under no illusions about the challenging nature of their work but generally felt well supported by the training they received and the management attention they got.

41. The State has an annual workplan setting out proposed interventions for 2008/9. The review team is of the opinion is of the view that this will need to be studied more deeply for conclusions to be drawn. Comments will therefore follow.

42. Regular reflection meetings are held at various levels at least quarterly, sometimes monthly (ie for Sayoginis). These review the previous months work and plan for the next and review any new developments. Monthly report on physical and financial progress are made from the cluster to the district and district to the state level and are received by the 10th of the following month. In addition, staff and field functionaries undergo annual performance appraisal before contracts are renewed. Approximately 1 in 10 staff contracts may not be renewed. Complaints against Samoah women are adjudicated by committee at the district level.

43. Recruitment, retention and remuneration of staff present challenges, as highlighted above. In particular the 11th plan makes inadequate provision for accounts and support staff.

Financial management

44. Funds are released by GOI on requisition quarterly. Similarly no problems have been experience in challenging funds from the State to the districts.

45. The audited statement for 2007/8 has been prepared by the internal auditor and reviewed by the auditor appointed by the Executive Committee (ie an empanelled auditor). This includes the funds received from GOI, SSA, GoB, UNICEF etc. The reconciliation of the internal and external audits was a thorough process, involving visits to all the districts. Action was subsequently taken to resolve a number observations made by the external auditor in dialogue with the districts. Observations covered the rate for the use of vehicles (ie more funds are needed than by SSA due to the distrances travelled and need for close monitoring). A second observation was that a generator for Banka had exceeded DPCs level of financial authority. Both these observations were subsequently regularised. A third observation with which MS did not agree was that KBGVs should employ a dedicated and qualified accountant. The final statement has recently been sent to MHRD.

46. A financial manual has been prepared based on those for UP and Utaraakhand and accounts personnel from these states visited to provide training to DPCs and accounts staff. The SSA chief accounts officer has also provided training to accounts staff. However, the State team would welcome additional support in preparing a simple and user-friendly financial manual. MS sees this as a key priority given the increasing volume of work it has been contracted to do, as well as in view of the planned expansion.

47. MS has no financial rules and regulations of its own but enjoys the delegation of financial powers as approve by EC, including procurement and as set out in the accounts manual. The main items procured have been generators, stationary and printing; all vehicles are hired. Important procurement decisions are referred to the purchase committee as per rules on delegated authority.

48. Based on the discussions the review team was able to have, it appears that book keeping and financial control is being given due care and attention. For instance, when questioned KGBV staff were able to produce cash, ledger and stock register, completed daily. Staff also had a clear idea of how much money was spent per month and how much it cost to feed and clothe each girl (ie 30,000 per month). However it is a matter of concern that seven accounts posts at state and district level are vacant.

Good practices

i) Jag Jagi – see above
ii) Women masons – already extensively document
iii) Mid day meal scheme – separate report attached
iv) MS indicators – see above

Progress towards achievement of MS Objectives

49. MS in Bihar is making good and steady progress towards the achievement of the indicators in the results framework. Good data are available on coverage of MS activities, disaggregated by social groupings. More process indicators on the functioning of sanghas could be added, as could longitudinal tracking of women and girls who benefited from programme activities. Good comparisons can be made between enrolment and retention in MS and non MS blocks and the programme would be very comfortable with such comparisons being made. The comparative benefits of KGBV and NPEGEL could compared in non MS and MS districts. On local governance, there is already a 50% reservation for women but it does not reveal which women are talking in their male relatives' capacity rather than their own. Some indicators may need to be revisited to capture nuances such as this. The baseline study will be invaluable in establishing a picture of status before during and after programme interventions. On health it may be possible to monitor women who have passed through MS and later become health personnel.

Recommendations

- Encourage Jag Jagi activity; review funds available and if necessary increase the budget to enable more JJ units

- Review team considered the indicators detailed for setting up Federations. These indicators deserve to be emulated in other states
- Enable the programme to progress by filling up vacancies without further delay
- Raise levels of remuneration available especially for accounts and support staff
- Provided UNICEF can help identify suitable NGO partners, MS to scale up its formal education activities for girls by monitoring and quality assuring standards of KGBVs and MSKs run by these NGOs.

Annex A: List of Training by post

Bihar Mahila Samakhya Society

Training at different levels

Sl. No.	Training type	Duration	Residential / Non Residential	Level
1	Samooh Training	3 Days	Non Residential	Village level
2	Sakhi Training	5 Days	Residential	District level
3	Sahyogini Training (I Phase)	5 Days	Residential	State level
	Sahyogini Training (II Phase)	10 Days	Residential	State level
4	Saheli Training (I Phase)	15 Days	Residential	District level
	Saheli Training (II Phase)	10 Days	Residential	District level
5	Kishori Training	5 Days	Residential	District level
6	Shikshan Sahyogi Training	15 Days	Residential	District level
7	Balmitra Training (I Phase)	15 Days	Residential	District level
	Balmitra Training (II Phase)	10 Days	Residential	District level
8	MSK Warden/Teachers Training	12 Days	Residential	State level

9	SRG & DRG Training	15 Days	Residential	State level
10	MS Programme Personal Training	5 Days	Residential	State level
11	KGBV Warden/Teachers Training (I Phase)	8 Days	Residential	State level
	KGBV Warden/Teachers Training (II Phase)	10 Days	Residential	State level
12	NPEGEL Sanyojika Training	5 Days	Residential	District level
13	Formal School Teacher Training	3 Days	Residential	Block level
14	Accounts Trainning for KGBV and MSK teachers and wardens	3 Days	Residential	District / State level

ANNEX B: CONVERGENCE PROGRAMMES

S.no	Programme	Agency	Numbers
01.	KGBV	SSA	67
02.	NPEGEL	SSA	963 MCS
03.	Gyan Jayoti	SSA	4 Dist.
04.	MDM	HRD,GOB	9 Dist.
05.	Vocational Training	GOB	10 Dist.
06.	Hygiene & sanitation	UNICEF Patna & PHED,GOB	10 Dist.
07.	Jagjagi	SSA	9 Dist.
08.	MSK (9)	UNICEF	8 Dist.
09.	SGSY	Rural Dept.(GOB)	600 MS
10.	Linkage	NABARD	314 MS

Draft Mahila Samakhya Joint Review Mission Report on visit to Gujarat

November 25-December 1, 2008.

Team members:

GOI – Prof. Malavika Karlekar,

DFID – Mr. Paul Thomas

Report on visit of JRM to Gujarat – November 25-December 1, 2008.

Team members: GOI – Prof. Malavika Karlekar, DFID – Mr. Paul Thomas

I. An Overview of State MS programme

- **Districts visited: MS state office, Ahmadabad, Vadodara, Sabarkantha, Rajkot – see Annexure 1.a**
- **Persons met: Annexure I.b**
- **Organizations interacted with: Annexure I.a/b**
- **Coverage: Annexure II**
- **Expansion strategy: Due to expand to the districts of Dahod and Narmada**
- **The primary focus of Gujarat MS is on tribal and marginalized pockets**

Strengths

- Nari Adalats
- Jasud Kendras
- Institution of Saahelis
- Information centres

Concerns

- Short-term (3-month contract) of staff
- Under-staffing
- Unspent budgets

II. Programme processes in sangha formation/roles

- No. of Sanghas/federations : Annexure I
- Observation on and nature of methodology of sangha/federation formation and their strengthening
- Status of Sangha by perspective, training, actitvities and self-confidence etc.

The process of Sangha formation was gradual and slow as initially women are shy and even suspicious of MS workers. They lacked self-esteem and were inhibited, all of which were overcome by intensive sessions with MS workers who impart intensive training to these women at the village level. The role of Cluster Resource Person (CRP) – who deals with thirty villages – is important for these groups as also the innovation of the Saaheli who is an interface between the Sangha and the CRP. A Saaheli looks after five to six villages, **and though the team had some initial reservations on the division of Sanghas into weak and strong, we found after observation, that there is indeed a palpable difference between such Sanghas, and that there is a case for extra work on weak Sanghas.**

Issue-based activities operate through the education, economic, legal, health and Panchayat committees. Process of forming Mahasanghas started in the year 2000 and a number of meetings and workshops were organized to explain the role of this body. Each Sangha was to form five sub-committees. One member from each committee was to be selected to represent the particular Sangha in cluster-level meetings. It was also decided to select one Sangha woman from each committee to participate at taluka level and one at district-level structure.

On November 26, the review team attended a meeting to celebrate the Anti-Violence against Women Day (November 25) organized in the Gayatri Mandir in Khattamba. [Note: when the review team expressed some surprise that temples seem to be popular venues for meetings, we were told that this was because they provided the requisite facilities for board and lodge at reasonable rates.]

This was a meeting of about 300-350 Mahasangha women from 5 Mahasanghas and it was a day's programme. Though they are provided a meal and bus fare, as the location is not connected by bus, women had come by shared jeeps, tempos and some had walked.

As the review team entered, it was greeted with slogans such as `Nari Shakti Zindabad' (women's power Zindabad), `Hum Bharat ki nari ain' (we are the women of India), `Beheno jagey, Himsa bhagey'(when women rise up, violence runs away) , `Nari sharir par atyachaar, nahin sehengay, and nahin sehengay'(we will not tolerate violence against women). A number of the women were tribals - mainly Vasava Bhil and Rathod - and there was an interesting three-generation case where grandmother Jashoda and her daughter were Mahasangha members and the granddaughter was a member of the Kishori Sangha. Jashoda had been with MS since 1989.

At the meeting, women spoke of their early experiences: a widow from Vaghodia village said that initially when she used to attend Nari Adalat meetings, her hay stacks were burned; others were beaten. When women gathered for meetings under a tree at the block office, there was unrest and they were asked not to gather there by the Block Officer and the district Panchayat president. Women persisted and now they had a Mahila Kutir in the same block: `when we started out we did not know that our fame would spread so far – we are proud of this!' Another woman said that through the MS' legal literacy programmes they have learned a lot about police procedure: earlier, when their men were taken off to the police station without warrants, they were helpless bystander. `Now we question, argue. Earlier we were frightened of the police – but not any more'.

There was an impressive display of training material, charts as well as medicines, potions and powders prepared by the Jasud Kendra (see pages 6-7).

The team went on to a Saaheli planning and review meeting in a temple compound in Kayavarohan. Saahelis in Baroda district are active in visiting homes to motivate parents to send their children to school, often walking long distances to do so. In addition to being a Saaheli, Rajliben is a Dai (midwife) trained at the government centre. She also claimed to have solved almost a hundred cases of infertility using traditional medicines and now has the catering contract for a KGBV.

On November 27, at a meeting with 22 Sangha women in Parvath village, Himatnagar district, the team noted the change in dress of tribals Bhils and Dungri Garasiya, who now wear saris and blouses rather than their traditional ghagra, choli and odhni. Punniben who is today a sarpanch would come to participate in the three-month bridge literacy course as

much as three times a day. She has even bought a mobile phone with her own earnings `as it took too long to communicate with my children who are living far away'.

Sangha meetings are held on the 8th of each month at which they dealt with a number of cases: in a case of elopement, the caste panchayat had decided to fix a fine of Rs 51,000 as the persons were underage – but the intervention of the Sangha resulted in a reduction to Rs 500! All children of Sangha women are in school and the girls fared better than boys in performance. Sangha women had also trained as hand pump mistris – in a village of 1256 persons there are 30 hand pumps and three anganwadi kendras.

The team also met with Mahasangha women in Sanusra village (Surendranagar district). Most were marginalized landless labourers – but were extremely enthusiastic about the MS programme: they shared a number of instances of how being Sangha members had empowered them, Hansaben recounted how when her baby was very unwell, she resisted the community's pressure to apply a heated piece of metal to the child's abdomen. Rejecting this traditional cure, she resolved to go to a doctor, and though it cost her Rs 10,000, she was assured that her baby would not suffer excruciating pain and be cured. She was able to resist familial and community pressures due to her membership of the Sangha who supported her resolve. In the same village, women also pointed out how they had been able to speak up against the custom of serving opium during marriage and death rituals. Bhanoben had campaigned against the growing custom of spending large sums of money on hiring musical band at weddings; in all instances, women faced great opposition and ridicule - but were able to convince others through their collective Sangha strength.

Another important development was the withdrawal of three Mahasanghas from the MS programme: these now work independently and a Saaheli is the liaison between them and the MS. Five Mahasanghas in Rajkot district too have decided to withdraw and this decision is awaiting EC approval.

III. Training programmes under MS

There a number of programmes for Sangha and Mahasangha training, a few more specialized such as those for the administrative and executive committee training, training for the Saahelis as well as Kishoris. Under health, Sangha women are trained to be:

- Traditional Birth Attendants
- Jasud Kendra Workers
- Health Workers as well as given training in traditional herbs
- "Jadibutti" identification and so on.

Education training includes:

- Education Committee training
- Literacy class teacher training
- MSK and KGBV Balmitra training
- Child Care Centre Balsakhi training
- Inter-district KGBV supervision and monitoring team training

Panchayat training includes:

- Panchayati Raj Committee training
- Elected Panchayat Member training

Economic empowerment training includes:

- Saving Group member training
- Vocational training
- Economic Committee training
- Vermicompost raining

Legal training included overall awareness creation as well as training to be a member of the Nari Adalat. Other interesting and important areas of training are those in self defence (morale building as well as some basic techniques), disaster management as well as TOT training for MS functionaries.

IV. Participation of women and girls in formal and non-formal education

MSK

At the MSKs across districts enrollment, material distribution, motivational and educational activities as well as health checkups, educational tours, parents' meetings- all continued with new batches of learners. In Panchmahal district, apart from the educational curriculum, girls were taught about personality development, importance of education, personal hygiene and health, vocational training in embroidery, stitching, sewing, making of phenyl, incense sticks, shampoo, washing powder and so on. Similar trainings were also conducted at the KGBV of Panchmahal district. In Surendranagar district the MSK was restarted because 26 Sanghas of Chotila block along with Mahasangha Executive Committee resolved that as the nearest KGBV was far from the villages, girls need to be enrolled by having their own MSK.

The team visited a literacy class for tribal sangha women in Morlipura, Sabarkantha district. So as to suit the requirements of the participants, the meetings are held from 9 to 11 pm every night. Elderly women waved slates proudly as well as demonstrated how they could now write their names. Why did they want to learn to read and write, asked team members? So as to sign their names as well as learn to read bus signs, was the answer. Also, said a number, learn how not to be cheated by shopkeepers.

Kasturba Balika Gandhi Vidhyalaya Schools – Doliya and Matel

The review team visited two KBGV schools, Doliya and Matel located in two districts, Surendranagar and Rajkot. The first school was housed in rented accommodation and the second is housed in a purposed built facility which is just over a year old. The purpose built complex was impressive and specifically designed to meet requirements of the KGBV initiative. The rented accommodation is not as well designed, but was fit for purpose; however it is understood that MS has, after a four year search, finally managed to acquire land within Doliya. It is planned that a purpose built KBGV complex should be ready for occupation in Doliya by mid 2010. It is suggested that as part of its construction that solar panels should be fitted to provide hot water and power to run the kitchen. The use of solar power would reduce power bills for the new building, be of educational interest to the students and demonstrate MS programme's commitment to help in combating climate change.

At both schools the review team had active interactions with both children and teachers, in both Gujarati and English. It was evident that the children were well cared for, happy and appeared to be very keen to learn. Both schools were clean, secure and well maintained. The review team observed children being taught in a variety of classes and it was evident that the teachers had a good rapport with the children. There were appropriate teaching aids and text books and the children enthusiastically demonstrated their literacy, numeric, artistic skills, and other accomplishments - including proudly riding bicycles. The review team met one particular girl, Rinku in Doliya who had graduated from the school last year and was now studying at a mainstream school in the village but who regularly visits the KBGV to help out. When Rinku discovered that one the review team was English she was keen to mention that she had been introduced to the British Prime Minster Gordon Brown when he recently visited India. She stated that she is working hard at her main stream school with the intention of one day being a pilot which would let her visit Gordon Brown's country.

During discussions with teaching staff it was apparent that once girls had completed level 7 studies at the KGBV School that it was sometimes a problem in getting a place in level 8 classes in mainstream schools. This was because KGBV do not currently provide an academic/achievement certificate which is recognized by main stream schools. Since one of the aims of KGBV schools is to ultimately mainstream girls it is important that girls who have satisfactorily completed KGBV studies are provided with such a recognized qualification.

During the two visits the review team was able to taste the food being provided to KGBV girls. It was both nutritious and tasty. The review team was

informed however that the daily budget allotted to feed a girl for a whole day in a KGBV equated to approximately Rs 25. Apparently this figure was dictated by prescribed budgets in 11th Plan but had not changed for a number of years. In light of recent significant food inflation it was becoming increasingly difficult to keep to this budget. It is obviously important that girls in the care of KGBVs are properly fed and it is therefore vital that the budget for feeding girls remains realistic and achievable. The mission suggests that this be communicated to the SSA scheme for appropriate action.

V. Women empowered to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families

a) **Structural innovations:** Saahelis and cluster resource persons. The Saahelis have an important link with the CRP and there is active consultations between them, providing the **appropriate link between the grass roots' worker and the MS functionary**

b) **economic activities**: while SHGs are not a primary focus in the MS areas that deal with tribal and marginalized groups who are mainly involved in agricultural activities, there were a couple of interesting innovations that the team was introduced to:

Dhaan Golo in Lakshmanpura village.

On the spacious verandah of a well-to-do widow's home stood a three-foot high cylindrical clay silo that is about a foot and half in diameter. Decorated with relief art in purple and deep pink, it holds about 100 kilos of seeds, in this case maize. Sangha women who are registered to contribute, pour seeds into it and when it is full, neem leaves to protect the seeds from insects and damp are added and it is sealed with a band of wet clay. Quantities are sold to whoever needs the seeds and the money so earned is divided among the contributing members. There have also been cases of free distribution among poor women. Arkhiben took us to the edge of one of her family fields where women add dung to a large compost heap and sell tractor-loads at Rs 1000 per tractor before the onset of the rainy season. Here again, the contributing members share the profits.

c) Nari Adalts

Nari Adalats or women's courts have created a strong network of Sangha women at block and cluster level and by March 2008, 20 Nari Adalats were functioning in 19 blocks of five districts. Till December 2007, 3700 cases have been handled by Sangha women. Between April 2007 and March 2008 Nari Adalats resolved 178 (35 percent of the total cases) of the total 505 cases. 327 cases are in process and only 14 cases have gone to court.

The somewhat catch all term `mental torture' accounts for most cases: the team's observation of a case in progress at Vijaynagar. A young Dungri Garasiya girl was making her case before Sardaben Daljibhai Parmar, Karadi Jiviben Ratilal and other Nari Adalat members as well eight male members of the caste panchayat (we were told that women are also members of the panchayat, but none was present at the hearing). The complainant – who looked clearly underage – said that she had left her husband's home fourteen months ago to return to her natal village. A victim of extreme physical and mental torture – her drunken husband threatened to tie her six-month-old child to her and thrash them both – she was forced to leave without her infant. Now, she wanted to go back to her husband's home as otherwise she would have no access to her two-year-old child. Present with her were her father and his older brother; that there was no place for her in her parents' home was amply clear as neither of the two men put it forth as an option. What she wanted from the Nari Adalat was their intervention to ensure a non-violent marital existence.

Santaben said that the next hearing would be on December 15 as by then the Adalat would have sent for the husband: in the absence of any other available means, a member of the Adalat would have to go personally to deliver the summons. The team was shown the detailed register (and in fact had noticed two members writing down copious points) as well as the recording of the case on Rs 50 stamp paper. Members also discussed with the Nari Adalat as well as members of the caste panchayat the means adopted in case there was a difference of opinion between the two bodies on how issues were to be resolved. They were assured that a via media was invariably worked out – though in particularly intransigent cases, the help of the police was sought.

A meeting with Sub Inspector Atul Bajpai at the Vijaynagar police station proved instructive as he confirmed that a) the interventions of the Nari

Adalat were helpful and positive, and b) that he rarely had to intervene to sort out matters.

The team was also told of instances when Muslim Sangha members preferred to appeal to the Nari Adalats rather than to community leaders as they felt that the former were more sympathetic and responsive.

d). Jasud Kendras

Jasud Kendras, named after the hibiscus flower with therapeutic qualities, are the outcome of MS workers' interactions with women at meetings: what did they do when they were ill? There appeared to be little faith in the government medical system and women said that they contacted quacks or exorcists – and also locals who dealt in home made herbal medicines. Mahila Samakhya took a serious note of this situation and arranged a short –term training session on self-reliance for sangha members. Topics like women's diseases, their causes and homemade remedies were discussed during this training with women from Kawant, Chota-Udepur, Naswadi and Sankheda talukas and Jasud Kendras were opened at Naswadi and Kawant talukas in 1996.

One aspect that had to be borne in mind was the seasonality of certain herbs and maintaining their stock in advance. Sangha women of the Health Committees took the responsibility of maintaining the stock of such herbal medicines and gradually the demand for such medicines increased among the women. But the problem was that it was still difficult at times to ask questions about their diseases and that too in public. This too was gradually overcome by persuasion. The significance of herbal medicines and their medicinal effects on the diseases is properly explained.

Once all this is done, a complete case history of the visitor is taken. The patients are motivated and taken into confidence before ascertaining information about ailments. Then, they were given proper guidance and treatment. Most ailments relate to reproductive health and Sangha women make oils and medicines that are then despatched to the centres for sale. Known as Sanjeevani Kendras in Rajkot district, these outlets for traditional medicines may become a source of income for Sangha women.

VI. Resource Support systems

The team visited the Vaghodia Information Centre in Baroda district. Two women from among Mahasangha members and Saahelis the centre every Thursday from noon to 4 p.m. They provide information on a range of issues and government schemes as well as distribute relevant supportive documents as well as forms. These include forms for widows' pensions, support for the handicapped, caste certificates, ration card-related processes and applications for electricity connections. Recently, in early 2008, the centre helped provide the information as well as mobilize women to go to the Block Development Officer at the taluka. The women were agitating for the installation of electric connections in their homes in 23 villages. Having seen the success of these women, those from other villages are also now thinking of mobilizing for similar facilities. In this case, the information forms and support provided by the Information Centre was invaluable.

VII Programme Management

- Saaheli and Cluster Resource Persons are extremely important; not only in effective programme management, but also in ensuring that there is an appropriate measure of decentralization and democratic sharing of decision-making.

- A number of useful and well-thought documents have helped the programme: not only as guides to training, facilitation, evaluation and so on but also as records of activities and successful experiments. Some of the documents are:

  Karyapath

  Sangha Guideline

  Rainbow in life through Mahila Samakhya,

  Report on NariAdalat

KGBV Guide Line

KGBV Monitoring and Supervision Guideline

Mahasangha Guideline

- One of the biggest challenges that the MS programme has had to face in Gujarat has been the ongoing number of staff vacancies which is demonstrated in the table below:-

MS Programme Staff position

	2005-06		2006-07		2007-08		2008-09	
	In post	vacant	In post	vacant	In post	vacant	In Post	vacant
SPD	1		1/C		1		1/C	
SRP	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
CONSULTANT	2	2	2	2	4	-	4	-
DPC	5	2	4	3	5	2	5	2
RP	6	11	4	13	7	11	14	7
JRP	5	24	5	24	14	17	6	27
CRP	42	17	35	22	42	20	80	20

Admin/Accounts Staff position

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09

	In post	Vacant	In post	vacant	In post	vacant	In post	vacant
Accountant	1		1		1		1	
STENO		2		2		2		2
Assistant	1		-		1		1	
D.E.O.	2		2		2		2	
Accountant	7	-	7	-	7	-	7	-
Assistant	-	7	-	7	4	3	4	3
D.E.O.	5	2	5	2	4	3	4	3

Keeping this number of posts vacant will inevitably impede the effective management of the programme and in particular its expansion. In addition long term vacancies can have a demoralizing effect on the staff since programme implementation was dependent on something like half the sanctioned staff, putting an inordinate load on those in position.

- Budget formulation and implementation – see entry below within section VIII

- Recruitment and contract terms and conditions – It was apparent that one of the contributing factors in positions not being filled within MS programme related to terms and conditions, in particularly the practice of giving functionaries 3 month contracts with short breaks. This often results in individuals not obtaining next pay increments which they would have been entitled to if they were on longer term contracts. This practice is dysfunctional since it mitigates retaining the individuals with the most experience. To retain experience and committed individuals it is important that they are allowed to gain higher increments subject to performance.

VIII Financial Management and Procurement

The MS programme budget for Gujarat over the past three years (2006/7, 2007/8 and 2008/9) has been Rs 289.00 lacs, Rs 300.01 lacs and Rs 342.00 lacs. Total expenditure over the same three years has been Rs 161.33 lacs, Rs 168.40 lacs and Rs 79.89 lacs (to date). It is apparent from these figures that the MS programme has consistently not been able to utilize its budget allocation over these three years. It appears that this has been due to a number of programme factors such as significant number of long term vacancies within sanctioned MS programme staff and high turnover rates of some functionaries, but also factors such as natural disasters and timing of political elections.

It was also noted that budget for MS Programme in Gujarat has not historically been agreed by MS Executive Committee until after the start of the Financial Year to which it relates. An example of this relates to 2008/9 Budget which has not yet been agreed, it is understood that it will be signed off (along with 2007/8 annual report) at an Executive Committee scheduled to take place mid December. It is important that the annual state budget for MS is agreed prior to the start of the Financial Year to which it relates and particularly in light of the need for MS programme in Gujarat to be expanded to include a further two states in the next couple of that it accurately reflects likely expenditure patterns. It is also important from both a financial management, and programmatic perspective, that the Executive Committee complies with 11th Plan requirements that it meets at least every three months. It is understood that it last met over seven months ago.

It was noted that requests for grant allocation for MS programme were frequently not made or received until after the start of the Financial Year to which they relate. Because of the particular need for MS programme to deliver training and educational activities during period May – July (when women are more available to attend due to lull in agricultural activity) it is important that funding is provided in time to allow appropriate events to take place at this time. Once grant funding by the state office is received it appears to be released to districts in a timely manner.

The state office has since 2005 contracted out the upkeep and maintenance of its both it's central and seven districts' accounts of financial transaction and financial management processes to a local chartered accountancy firm. This firm uses appropriately qualified individuals and maintains books of account on a double entry accruals basis using "Tally" accounting software. State office receive reports from district offices and produces consolidated

expenditure/financial reports for MHRD on both a monthly and quarterly basis using prescribed reporting formats. Monthly reports include expenditure information and quarterly reports also include inflows and outflows data. It appears that the MS records of account were being well maintained and following accepted accounting norms.

There is not a very significant amount of procurement within the MS programme. A small sample check of procurements undertaken at the state office indicated that procurement was being undertaken in line with prescribed MS and state procurement procedures and that a clear audit trail was being maintained.

At present the MS programme team is following financial and procurement procedures contained in a bespoke MS Gujarat Delegation of Financial powers manual which was produced in 1998. In addition the programme functionaries are also using "Karyapath" which is a guideline manual produced in September 2007 which includes model reporting covering both programmatic and financial aspects of the Programme. It is understood that MS Gujarat Delegation of Financial powers Manual is in the process of being updated to reflect 11th Plan. Whilst both sets of financial guidelines are useful it was evident that there was not currently a national Financial Management and Procurement manual for the MS Programme and that as a result there was likely to be areas of uncertainty, and a risk that states might not be treating FM&P issues in a consistent manner. It is understood that such a national manual is being currently prepared.

Responsibility for both Internal and External audit has been outsourced to two different accountancy firms. It appeared that the MS programme was subject to appropriate annual external audit discharge which involves certification of accounts in August/September which are annexed to Annual Report. Internal audit is undertaken on a six monthly basis at both state and district levels. It was evident that MS accounting group undertake appropriate follow up/and or corrective actions resulting from audit recommendations and that there appeared to be an appropriate level of compliance.

Overall FM&P issues are being adequately managed; however there is an ongoing issue regarding the budgeting procedure reflected in significant annual under spending which need to be resolved as soon as possible particularly in light of the plans to significantly with the requirement to upscale MS activity in Gujarat.

IX. Good practices/innovations: These have been dealt in detail earlier sections of the report but include the following

1. Nari Adalats (pp. 8-9)
2. Jasud Kendras (p. 9-10)
3. Institution of Saahelis and use of Cluster Resource Persons (p. 10)
4. Information centres (p. 7)
5. Detailed guidance on programme management (p.10-11)

X Progress towards the achievement of MS Objectives

Overall MS Gujarat programme is on track. The main challenge is to expand into new districts and strengthen existing structures.

1. District-wise expansion underway as well as the withdrawal of empowered Mahasanghas who then set up themselves up independently.

2. Step-up economic and overall empowerment through new activities. As MS Gujarat is one of the first programmes, staff expressed their interest in going in to newer fields for women's empowerment such as experiments with:

a) improved sanitation

b) gobar gas

c) solar energy

The team established that in each of these areas there are organizations with whom MS functionaries can be in touch, such as for sanitation, the PRAVAH network as well as Aga Khan Rural Support Programme and Gujarat Vidyapeeth for gobar gas.

3. Expansion of KGBVs and literacy classes is also underway, particularly in BPL and similar areas.

4. Gender justice through Nari Adalts and intensive legal literacy classes.

5. Other possible indicators could be extent to which Sanghas are increasingly using mobile phones – this reflects confidence that Sanghas gain from achieving basic literary skills. In addition the programme could use the transition of Sangha groups to self standing status as an indication of their empowerment.

XI Key issues in the State MS Programme

- Understaffing
- Unspent budgets
- Excellent documentation and programme communication methods
- Highly motivated and committed staff

XII. Recommendations of JRM for State

- Need to resolve ongoing and significant under spending of budget

- Need to resolve existing understaffing situation through a range of remedial actions such as: replacing existing three month contract with ones for eleven months. These must ensure that staff being re-employed is not unfairly penalized financially by not being given an increased salary increment, considering potential for increasing salaries of staff working in difficult areas where recruitment is difficult.

- Better communications channels for MS functionaries and Sangha members through field visits to MS programmes in other states as well as attendance of relevant meetings and workshops.

- Ensure that Executive Committee meets on at least a quarterly basis so that they continue to take on effective and strategic overseeing of the programme.

Annexure I.a.

26th November 8 .00 to 10.00	Mahila Samakhya Office , 45-Umiya Vijay Society, OPP Bimanagar, Near Shivranjani Char Rasta , Ahmedabad	State Level Discussion Briefing of Mahila Samakhya Gujarat Programme
Baroda is 115 km from Ahmedabad is connected by Express Highway		
10. to 11.30	Departure for Baroda	
11.30 to 1.30	Village-Khatamba , Block-Vaghodia	Celebration of Anti women Violence day
2.30 to 3.15 3.15 to 5.00	Kayavarohan	Saahelie Training at Kayavarohan
5.00 to 6.00	Kayavarohan to Morli8pura (Block- Vaghodia)	
6.00 to 7.00	Morlipura (Block-Vaghodia)	Sangha Literacy Class
7.00 to 9.30	Return to Ahmedabad	
27 November 2008 **Himatnagar (SabarKantha) 100 km. far from Ahmedabad**.		
8.00 to 9.30	Ahmedabad to Himatnagar	
9.30 to 10.00	Visit to Himatnagar MS Office	
10.00 to 11.00	Vijayanagar (Dadhvav-Laxmanpura)	
11.00 to 1.15	Dadhvav-Laxmanpura	Collective farming and compost Dhan Golo, and interaction with women from a "strong" Sangha.
1.15 to 1.45	Travel back to Vijaynagar	
2.15 to 3.45	Vijaynagar	Visit to Nari Adalat, Caste Panch, and interaction with official of police department.
3.45 to 7.30	Vijaynagar	Visit to MS resource centre Interaction with information centre

		women Interaction with Sahaali.
7.30 to 9.00	Ahmedabad	
28th November 2008 **SurendraNagar(Doliya) is 165 k.m. far from Ahmedabad**		
7.30 to 9.30	Journey for Doliya	
9.30 to 11.00	Block -Sayala , Village-Doliya	Visit to Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidayala
11.00 to 12.00	Doliya	Visit to Mahasangha workshop
12.00 to 1.00	Doliya to Chotila	
1.00 to 1.30	Chotila to Sanosara	
1.30 to 2.30	Sanosra	Interaction with Sangha women
2.30 to 3.15	Sanosra to Jogashram - Than	
4.15 to 5.30	Jogashram –Than	Panchayat Committee Training
5.30 to 7.00	Than to Rajkot	
7.00 to 7.45	Rajkot	Visit to Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidayala School – recent construction
7.45 to 0.15	Rajkot to Ahmedabad	Travel back.
29th November	Mahila Samakhya Gujarat Office	Further discussion with State Team and review of Financial/accounting procurement issues with FM Group and Auditors.
30th November		Report writing
1st December	Mahila Samakhya Gujarat Office Gandhi Nagar Departure for Delhi	Meetings with:- State Programme Director Education Secretary

Annexure I.b

Baroda district – 26th November 2008

Sr.No.	Name	Place/Block	Designation
1	Celebration of Anti Violence Day	Khattamba Gayatri Temple	Sangha Women – 402 Staff – 17 Naynaben D. Joshi - DPC
2	Saaheli Meeting	Kayavarohan	Members of Mahasangha Total participants – 51
3	Information Centre	Vaghodia block 10, Satyanarayan colony	Jasodaben vasava – President of Mahasangha Hafizaben pathan – Vice president of Mahasangha Rashmikaben Patel - CRP
4	Meeting with Sangha members & Literacy Class participants	Morlipura Block - Vaghodia	Sangha Women – 35 Literacy class instructor – Shardaben bhilalbhai Rathodia Learner – baluben rathodia CRP- Anita gandhi

Annexure 1.c

Sabarkantha district 27th November 2008

Sr.No.	Name	Place/Block	Designation
1	Harsha Bhatt	Himatnagar	District Programme Co-ordinator Sabarkantha (Since last 6 months)
2	District Implementation Unit	Himatnagar Office	Administrative Staff 1 - R.P. Exhibition of Resource Materials & Photographs
3	Sangha Meeting	Parvath- Vijaynagar Meeting Place – Anaganwadi kendra	Sangha Members (22)
4	Sangha Meeting	Laxmanpura - Vijaynagar	Sangha Members (48)
5	Panchola Jashodaben Somaji	Laxmanpura - Vijaynagar	Leader of Mahasangh Saaheli (Since 1 Year)
6	Panchola Alkhiben Saukaji	Laxmanpura - Vijaynagar	Unopposed Member of Gram Panchayat (Since last 3 years) Member of Gram panchayat
7	Solanki Jasuben Rameshbhai	Laxmanpura – Vijaynagar	Saaheli (1 Years) Asha Warkar (6 Months)
8	Ninama Santaben Valjibhai	Parvath – Vijaynagar	Legal Committee members of Sangha (Since 3 Years) Member of Nari Adalat

			(Since 2 Years) Saaheli (1 Year)
9	Parmar Sardaben Daljibhai	Baleta – Vijaynagar (B.R.C. Bhavan) Nari Adalat	Member of Maha Sangha (since 3 Years) Member of Nari Adalat (2 Years)
10	Karadi Jiviben Ratilal	Saroli (B.R.C. Bhavan Vijaynagar) Nari Adalat	Member of Nari Adalat (Since 5 Years)
11	Members of Caste Panchayat	B.R.C. Bhavan Vijaynagar	Members of Caste Panchayat (18 Members)
12	Mr. Atul Bajpai	Police Station – Vijaynagar	P.S.I. (Since 1 Year)

Annexure 1.d

Surendranagar/Rajkot districts, 28th November, 2008

Sr.No.	Name	Place/Block	Designation
1	Varsha Bhatt	Surendranagar	District Programme Co-ordinator
2	Kasturba Balika Gandhi Vidhyalaya	Village : Doliya Block : Sayla	Teachers Name : Rathod Dharmisthaben Vaghela Shilpa Malakiya Hansha Girl : Rinku CRP- Jashben Shikh
3	Mahasangha Vision Workshop	Village : Doliya Block : Sayla	Manjulaben Rathod – Mahasangha President Samuben – Legal Committee Member Ramiben – Executive committee member Neetaben – Mahasangha member Jashuben
4	Sangha Meeting	Village : Sanosara Block : Chotila	Sangha Members (47) CRP : Mumtazben Fatuben Masuben Hemiben Sangha

			member Labhu ben Valiben
6	Kasturba Balika Gandhi Vidhyalaya	Village : Matel Block : Vankaner District : Rajkot	Teachers Name : Chaudhary Bhavnaben Single Jayshreeben

Annexure II : Coverage Of Mahila Samakhya, Gujarat

No	M.S. coverage	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09 **
1.	No. of Districts covered	07	07	07	07
2.	No. of Blocks covered	37	*38	36	39
3.	No. of villages covered	1761	1738	1890	2016
4.	No. of Sanghas	1699	1539	1744	1770
5.	No. of women members of Sanghas	46713	39494	41990	42400

*Padara from Baroda And RadhanPur From Banaskantha District was withdrawn from the programme as they were regarded as being self-reliant

** Information From 2008 to October 2008

INDIA
MAHILA SAMAKHYA (MS)
1st JOINT REVIEW MISSION
STATE REPORT: KARNATAKA
(November 24 –December 2, 2008)

1.0 Introduction

1.1 On behalf of the 1st Joint Review Mission (JRM) of the Mahila Samakhya (MS), Dr. Anita Dighe (GoI) and Pankaj Jain (DFID) visited the State of Karnataka from 24th November to 2nd December 2008. The guiding principle was one of a Learning Mission: (a) learning of progress made against agreed objectives and indicators as well as (b) discuss follow up action including capacity issues with a view to strengthen the impact of the programme. The Mission sought to look at processes being adopted to achieve the development objectives of MS, particularly in respect of strengths and weaknesses of the programme and to review State and district strategies being adopted that underpin implementation.

1.2 At the State level, discussions were held with the Secretary. Department of Education, the State Project Director, MS and her team as well as members of the EC. The Mission visited the districts of Koppal and Gulbarga. In the districts, the Mission interacted with the District Program Coordinator and teams at both districts and visited KGBVs as well as a MSK and NPEGEL centres. The Mission met with office bearers of MS federations (mahasanghas), sangha members, Nari Adalat functionaries, PRI office bearers and members of Kishora (boys) and Kishori (girls) Sanghas. The Mission also had the opportunity of interacting with the trainees at a gender training course for men.

1.3 The Mission wish to place on record their appreciation for the support and extensive documentation provided by the State Project Director and her team including the Senior Resource Person and the Accountant and thank the SPD and her team as well as all the officers and the staff at the district level who gave us their time, shared views and knowledge with us and for their overall assistance and their hospitality.

1.4 In Karnataka, MS works in 51 blocks in 12 districts. 4380 sanghas are active across 2701 villages. The program intends to expand to an additional 10 blocks in 6 districts by 2012. This would lead to coverage of all EBBs in the state. EC approvals for expansion in 6 districts have been obtained and 2 new districts will be taken up each year in 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12. Staff redeployment is currently being planned. Sahayogini recruitments are expected to be initiated by April 2009.

1.5 The strength of Karnataka MS is extremely dedicated staff and an enviable track record of performance and credibility across the state. MS federations and sanghas have shown remarkable success in education, legal rights & redressal, political participation, health & nutrition, economic activities and social mobilisation. The impact of their work extends well beyond sangha women, touching the entire village. This success has thrown up issues for the immediate future. These include the

need to balance service delivery with mobilisation & empowerment, staff retention and strengthening federations in changing contexts.

2.0 Programme Processes

2.1 MS Karnataka has 38 federations, in the 9 districts from which Sahyoginis have been withdrawn. Sangha membership has grown rapidly by 47,370 over the last 4 years. Since 2004, most new sanghas reflect a mixed caste composition. Disadvantaged groups (SCs, STs, Minorities and BPL) are well represented. In Gulbarga for instance, over half the members are SCs.

2.2 Formation of new sanghas involves entry point strategies and it is taking 3 to 6 months to form new sanghas through Sahyoginis. There is a well structured template for this and MS has been able to significantly bring down the time taken to form new sanghas. Newer sanghas also reflect a younger age profile. Sanghas facilitated by federations in older districts are also taking 3 to 6 months for formation.

2.3 During recent years, other agencies such as DWCD (Stree Shakti), MYRADA, and banks have also been organising sanghas in villages. These sanghas work predominantly on economic empowerment and often represent compelling alternatives for rural women. The approach of MS involving a more holistic appreciation of challenges facing women takes longer but the interaction which the Mission had with villagers and PRI functionaries confirmed that subsequently women turn more to MS for association.

2.4 Federations have been tasked with an increasing role. To ensure that federations are up to it, MS assesses their capacities periodically, categorising them as strong (those which can take up activities with limited guidance from DIU), medium (those which require presence and active assistance of MS functionaries for implementing activities) and those which are new or are working in a difficult environment. Training and capacity building needs of each federation are accordingly identified and responses designed. These include trainings, exposure visits to other locations, visits to Government departments, network meetings with functionaries of Government/ NGOs, other non MS sanghas etc.

2.5 The passion, commitment and competence of federation and sangha women in delivering on programme outputs has been outstanding. Documentation abilities of federations and sanghas have however emerged as a major challenge. This is made more difficult by the greying profile of federation office bearers, most of whom can barely sign their name and often need help to record minutes of meetings.

2.6 Grants are provided to federations for undertaking activities planned by each federation. During 2008-09, Rs. 18.47 lakhs have been transferred to DIUs for this purpose. Provision of funds and continuous training, based on assessed needs has helped in the formation and strengthening of sanghas and federations

2.7 A severe constraint which federations face relates to obtaining a space and fixed address for themselves. Unlike sanghas which are able to make sangha huts and use them in a variety of innovative ways, federations are not supported as part of MS, even in those districts where withdrawal has been completed. Rented buildings are no

solution as they involve recurring expenditure and exposes federations to capricious behaviour of landlords and vested interests.

3.0 Training

3.1 Training is one of the core interventions of MS. For sangha women issue based committee inputs are provided at the cluster and block levels. There are 6 committees of sangha women. These are (i) education (ii) panchayati raj (iii) legal literacy (iv) sangha self reliance (v) health (vi) economic development programme. Mahiti Melas at the block and cluster(a cluster consists of 20 villages) and sangha meetings at the village inform new sangha women about these committees. Jagriti Shivirs are held for weak/ defunct sanghas and to disseminate MS concepts and objectives. There are circle level meetings for sangha women at village level for updating documentation and reviewing their work. District level training programmes are held for developing sangha women as Resource Persons on various issues. Vocational training programmes are also held for sangha women. Every year, a state level mela is held for sangha women on one of the above issues.

3.2 At the federations, regular monthly EC meetings review the past month's performance and plan for the coming month. In case federations need any additional inputs, the JRP of the concerned block provides that input. Zilla Samiti meetings are held once in a quarter at the district to review the work of all the block federations. Resource Persons and District Programme Coordinator provide additional inputs that may be necessary. General body meetings are held once a year at the block level. These select new EC members and review progress. 'Maithri' training programmes are organized to build capacities of EC members and provide inputs on roles and responsibilities of EC members, information on by-laws of federations, activities to be undertaken by federations, improving their communication and negotiation skills, and undertaking pilots on gender budgeting. Special training programmes are organized to develop EC members as Resource Persons. Exposure visits to other federations are undertaken for EC members to enable them to learn from new experiences. Health camps are organized by the federations at the block and village levels with guidance from the DIU.

3.3. Capacity building of Nari Adalats(Women's Courts) is a specific priority. Regular monthly Nari Adalat (NA) meetings are held at the block level to review the progress in the previous month and take up new cases. In case additional inputs are required, these are provided by JRP and RP. Special training programmes to build capacities of NA are organized and inputs on concept of NA, identification of issues, decision making, fostering leadership qualities, etc. are provided. Five tiered para-legal trainings have been organized for the NA members during 2004 and 2005.

3.4 For Kishoris(young girls), cluster level, taluk level and district level camps/melas/training programmes are organized. Inputs on health, legal issues, education, general life skills are provided. In addition, school education programmes are held in schools in order to spread gender consciousness and life skills education among school children. For Kishoras (young boys) camps/melas/training programmes are organized on gender sensitisation, on education and mobilisation.

3.5 Pre-election training programmes have been organized for sangha women to motivate them to contest panchayat elections. Jayati Melas (post-election training programmes for the elected women representatives (EWR)) were organized to build capacities of elected members to participate in the PRI system. Special training programmes on standing committees were also organized at the district level for the EWRs. Social justice committee training programme was organized to strengthen the capacities of its members.

3.6 At the community level, village level school enrolment campaigns are held to enrol children in schools. Village level campaigns against child marriages are held to create awareness on the issue and thereby prevent child marriages from taking place. Gender and health awareness programmes are held in order to enhance the health status of the community. Gender training for men is done at the village level in order to spread gender awareness and thereby elicit men's support in women's empowerment. Network meetings are organized to establish linkages between the various departments and the community. Samuhika Simantana (safe motherhood) meetings were organized at the village level to raise awareness on pregnancy-related issues and to ensure community support and accountability. The success of this pilot has led to a state wide rollout by the Health Department. Documentation training programmes are organized for the sangha woman who undertakes this work, in order to ensure proper documentation. Gender perspective is intrinsic to each program and has been consciously built in to ensure that a commonly shared vision is developed at all levels and capacities are built for effective implementation of strategic interventions.

3.7 Conceptualisation and execution of this very large set of training initiatives has involved support from various external partners. This includes the Education Department (SSA in particular), DWCD, Agricuture and Industry Departments, NGOs such as MYRADA, SSF, Hamsalekha Trust, SEARCH, ITFC, Global Rights, Concern for Working Children, Green Foundation, FRLHT, BAIF, institutions such as KIDSURD, RUDSET, Banks and individual resource persons.

3.8 Internal assessment of training is an integral feature of all training with ground level changes being monitored. Learnings from this exercise has led to decisions on upscaling gender training for men, shifting of social justice trainings from blocks to clusters, discontinuation of certain interventions based on duplication with initiatives of other departments.

4.0 Participation of woman and girls in formal and non formal education

4.1 Education of the girl child is facilitated through KGVB schools, NPEGEL programme and MSK which together provide educational opportunities for girls from primary level to high school. MS, Karnataka and SSA together run 61 KGVB schools, 29 of which are in 7 districts covered under the Mahila Samakhya. During 2007-2008, 2839 girls were enrolled in MS-KGVB schools. Of these, 564 girls completed class 8 and were enrolled in various schools in class 9. Besides, remedial teaching to enhance learning, girls are provided curriculum-based teaching, extra-curricular activities, life skills, including gender education, and other skills.

4.2 NPEGEL is implemented by MS, Karnataka in 108 model cluster schools across 21 educationally backward blocks in 7 districts of Karnataka. Implementation of the programme takes place broadly at three levels (i) community-based activities (ii) remedial teaching (iii) capacity building for teachers. MS has adopted the Neighbourhood Groups strategy to reach every household in the village. Students who are enrolled are given special coaching through the remedial teaching methodology. 2504 girls were enrolled. Of these 2106 were provided remedial teaching. Once they achieve the relevant learning level, they are enrolled in regular schools. Training for teachers in remedial teaching has been conducted for 98 teachers in a 5-day training programme at the state level. Awareness programme, including introduction to gender concepts, has been held for 1065 cluster coordinators and teachers. Other activities have included raising kitchen gardens, conducting food demonstrations, holding science exhibitions and teaching vocational skills to girls.

4.3 MS has set up 4 MSKs in Bijapur, Koppal, Mysore and Chamarajanagar. There are 122 girls in classes IX and X. The kendras offer a condensed course with an enriched curriculum. Girls are provided gender education, vocational skills and personality development skills, along with the regular curricular activities.

4.4 The kishori programme is an important aspect of the women's empowerment programme. Young girls are taught the importance of nutritious food and better personal hygiene, particularly during menstruation. They are taught about their rights and on why they should not get married till they are at least 18 years old. They get an opportunity to learn a vocational skill and are exposed to the functioning of facilities such as post office, police station, gram panchayat, anganwadis, etc. There are 28,239 kishoris in 1199 kishori sanghas in 12 MS districts.

4.5 Addressing boys in the adolescent age groups is as important as addressing girls for they too need to understand women's rights and develop gender sensitivity. 4691 boys across 10 MS districts have been involved in the sensitization programme on child rights, women's rights, gender issues, health and education.

4.6 Efforts are on to increase the literacy levels of sangha women. Residential and non-residential camps of 3, 5, 15 and 18 days are conducted to motivate women. They later continue learning in the village level Akshara Kendras. Volunteers at the centres are trained in teaching neo-literates. 1078 village level Akshara Kendras have reached out to 18190 women. There is regular monitoring and evaluation. As a result, 6211 out of 8543 women who took the test, were certified as literate.

4.7 Education is the key focus area for federations and sanghas. Education is one of the areas of work of the 6 committees. The education committee meets regularly to create an enabling environment to (i) increase women's literacy levels (ii) bring out of school and drop out girls back to school (iii) address obstacles to girls' education and (iv) reach out to more girls in the adolescent age groups. Some of the activities undertaken by the Education Committee are school enrolment campaigns, regular visits to schools and anganwadis to oversee proper implementation of the Mid-Day meals programme, as part of community monitoring, and motivating out of school girls and their parents to continue education of girls. As a result of this, enrolment and retention rates of girls in schools have gone up significantly. 33 villages are now categorised as dropout free.

4.8 Sangha women have been making convergence a reality by interacting closely with local governance institutions such as panchayats and relevant government departments to resolve issues and problems. The involvement of 562 sangha women in School Development and Monitoring Committee (SDMCs) as members and mothers has also had a positive influence. They have been able to access services, bring transparency into the local institutions, influence larger decisions by creating public opinion and promote girl child education at all levels.

4.9 Field visits by the Mission and discussions with sangha women as well as kishoris and kishoras confirmed that high levels of commitment and enthusiasm had created a favourable environment for promoting the education of the girl child and education interventions had strengthened the desire amongst girls to rejoin and continue their education.

5.0 Women empowered to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families

5.1 Women's empowerment activities at MS are structured around the six themes of education, political processes, legal literacy, sangha self-reliance, health & economic activities.

(i) **Education**: Education is the bedrock on which empowerment can take place. The various interventions for formal and non-formal education have been detailed above.

(ii) **Political processes**: Participation in political processes has enabled sangha women access services and demand them where necessary. Sangha women participated in large numbers to oppose regressive changes in the Panchayat Act and attempts to lift a ban on sale of arrack. They have been making extensive use of the Right to Information Act. Committee meetings at block level every quarter inform sangha women of facilities and resources which they are able to access with greater confidence. Coordination meetings with panchayats have led to increased awareness amongst panchayat members and helped engender the working of the panchayats. Women are taking on more active roles in the panchayat sabhas as they now understand better the role of the citizen and the community, the decentralized way of functioning of democracy, and the power to influence decisions within their community. Women have begun to step out of their villages and access services at the taluka and zilla panchayat levels. Over 28,000 women from 3345 sanghas have met their local representatives in order to access various services from zilla panchayat and taluka panchayat levels. Sangha members have helped get job cards and entitlements under the NREGS. MS Karnataka, with support from external projects, has also been successful in bringing education and empowerment of women and girls on to the panchayat's agenda.

(iii) **Legal literacy:** Sangha women now know when they are discriminated against and recognize the different forms of violence they face. This awareness has been created through the legal committee meetings and the legal literacy programmes. The primary objective of the legal literacy programme is to increase awareness of legal issues among sangha women, strengthen the non-formal dispute resolution mechanism and enable women to resolve their problems themselves. The committee meetings have covered subjects such as

- How to use the Domestic Violence Act (2005) to protect women

- Backward and forward linkages between nari adalat, sangha, federation, social justice committees and counseling centres
- Awareness on specific subjects such as child marriage, child labour, devadasi practice
- General awareness on legal procedures pertaining to maintenance, divorce, child custody, bigamy, dowry, domestic violence
- Women's rights
- Forms of gender-based violence.

Nari Adalats (NA)) have been set up at blocks in all the MS districts. The NA meet once a month to hear cases brought by women. The process involves registering the case, analyses of the situation, visiting both parties in their villages, hearing arguments, finally arriving at a decision. In difficult situations, the NA seek support from the police, social justice committees and lawyers. Sindhuvani Mahila Salah kendras are counseling centres that supported the NA. While the Sindhuvani project served a useful function in the legal literacy programme of MS, it has now wound up since the project came to an end recently. The Sindhuvani project documented different types of cases that highlight the deep seated patriarchal values and the difficulty women face in attempting to break these stereotypes.

(iv) **Sangha self-reliance:** For the MS programme, the ability to access information independently, be mobile, take decisions on one's own, have control over one's income and the freedom to shape one's destiny, is seen as self-reliance. Viewed thus, the sangha women, supported by MS, have achieved a high degree of self-reliance. The sangha self-reliance committees have been building on women's sense of independence and making them self-reliant. Sangha women themselves are now working as resource persons. As the sanghas and federations grow in strength, so do the women. Efforts are on to further strengthen the collective voice of the sangha and the federation. Federations have been given a grant to enable them to build their capacity to plan and implement programmes independently. Women are realizing that they also need reading and writing skills so they are showing greater enthusiasm for the literacy programme. Engaging with boys and men has helped in breaking the barriers to women's advancement and build an enabling environment for achieving women's equality. Regular activities include expansion into new blocks/districts, committee meetings, organization of Mahiti Melas, Jagruti Shivirs, Network meetings, exposure visits and sending sangha women as resource persons for various tasks.

(v) **Health:** Health committees at the sangha level work towards creating awareness among women and kishoris about their rights through information given on different aspects of women's health. They are also encouraged to participate in health programmes and access the necessary services. Health committee meetings discuss topics relating to health rights, nutritious food, safe motherhood, use of iodized salt, kitchen garden, HIV/AIDS, RTIs/STIs, use of herbal medicines, facilities available in the health department, etc. Women take necessary steps based on the information given, carry out action plans and follow up activities which have impacted women's lives. They are now taking their health seriously, approaching hospitals, demanding proper treatment and accessing facilities. As a result, women have been able to increasingly access the Janani Suraksha Yojana, Bhagyaluxmi scheme, Madilu Yojana, Yashaswini scheme. So far 146 sangha women have been selected as ASHA volunteers. In order to break caste barriers and to promote awareness on nutrition, eating together is encouraged among sangha women. The safe motherhood programme is an innovative community-based programme to ensure that pregnant

women in the village get antenatal and post-natal care. Sangha women are encouraged to cultivate kitchen gardens and are made aware of the importance of preparing healthy and nutritious food. In order to prevent communicable diseases, sangha women undertake 'shramdanas' to clear stagnant water and clean water tanks and drains. Some of the health committee members of federations have been trained in scientific methods of preparation of herbal medicines for some common diseases. These medicines are now being sold through the Nari Sanjivini Kendras. A Nari Sanjivini Nidhi, provides loan funds to women for emergency medical care.. The Arogya Sakhi programme is aimed at providing health care through a link worker for women suffering from different health problems including reproductive tract infections.

(vi) **Economic activities:** Economic activities, including savings and credit, and income generation programmes, are crucial to women's empowerment. Economic activities enhance women's access to economic resources, increase control over their income, and improve their decision-making power. Among the activities carried out are:

- Continued savings and credit activities within sanghas
- Vocational skills training programmes
- Linking sanghas with banks, departments, local institutions and organizations
- Making relevant information available to the mahasanghas

Sangha women have continued their savings activities. Some part of these savings are used for children's education, health and other emergencies in the family. An increasing number has begun to employ their savings in productive activities. The vocational skills training given to women has helped them start their own small businesses. In the 12 MS districts, there are 3428 sanghas that have saved Rs. 9 Cr. Along with giving women information and awareness on economic activities, their capacities have been built through a number of programmes, exposure visits and networking with other departments for economic development.

6.0 Resource Support Systems

6.1 By its very nature and given limited resources of money and manpower, networking is vital to the success of MS. MS Karnataka has been doing so extensively around issues it works on. This has involved Government departments & agencies (Police, Education, Agriculture, DWCD, Panchayat & Rural Development, Sports & Youth Affairs), NGOs as well as with larger issue specific campaigns. Most of this engagement occurs at the level of the SPD and the DPC. Work with individual external resource persons is usually by the SPD.

6.2 The State Resource Centre is currently ill equipped to fulfil its mandate. It has no staff and the programme is still to think through its role. At best, it functions as a documentation centre and an in house library.

6.3 This is a crucial vacuum. Networking with the larger community is getting confined to working together on specific issues and through committed individuals within the programme. It has not yet led to a more broad based engagement wherein the State Resource Centre becomes an institutional mechanism for promoting dialogue, research and advocacy while it also supports the State MS. Doing this is important and will provide the SPD and the core team greater time and space to focus on expansion. The State Resource Centre will also help link up with EC members

who have been extremely supportive and engage extensively with MS through field visits, but do so in individual capacities.

7.0 Programme Management

7.1 Field visits by the Mission reveal a highly decentralised and participatory style of working. Districts are able to respond well to local issues and innovative approaches can be seen in each district. There is a well structured system of reviews and feedback involving district reviews conducted at the district by the SPD and the core team, monthly reviews and theme specific sub committees at the SPO.

7.2 The Annual Work Plan and Budget is built up through an assessment of field trends, interaction with sangha women, plans of each federation, district planning workshops for preparing district plans followed by a workshop of DPCs at the SPO with programme and finance staff. Over the past few years it has also become clear that work plans need to be revisited mid year since promised resources have not been forthcoming.

7.3 Strategic oversight is provided through the EC which meets every quarter and a Governing Body which meets annually. An Evaluation Committee consisting of an NRG member, an EC member, a GoI nominee and the SPD carry out evaluation of individual performance in exceptional cases.

7.4 New staff members undergo training for 15 days in a year. Exisitng staff train 8-10 days a year on their roles and responsibilities as well as forthcoming changes. Orientation on Mahila Samakhya concepts and gender training is provided to all level of functionaries . Apart from these, issue-based gender perspective training e.g. gender and education, gender and health etc. is also provided to the functionaries. Para-legal training programmes have been organized. HRD training for capacity building has been organized. Life skills education training and special lectures have also been organized for MS functionaries. Exposure visits to various MS states have been organized.

7.5 Issues around staffing are beginning to emerge as a major constraint on expansion and consolidation. With the implementation of the Sixth Pay Commission award by the Centre and the State, wage differentials between MS and the market have risen significantly. MS is unable to attract and retain talent with significant vacancies at DPC level and very substantial vacancies at Resource Person and JRP levels (See Annexure 1). Staff is stretched and a recent state specific decision on Provident Fund has made a bad situation worse with attrition increasing. There is increasing insecurity and discontent around working conditions and long term benefits.

8.0 Financial Management

8.1 Fund flow arrangements from GoI to States need to be revisited. . Funds are released in 4 instalments, with the State Society executing a bond on stamp paper before release of each instalment. During the last two years, the 4th instalment was not released to the State and hence work plans could not be fully executed. There are delays in release of instalments and in the last two years, MS has been forced to

borrow money from SSA just to run the programme. Fund flow to the districts has been prompt relying on ECS in 7 districts while the remaining districts move to ECS later this year.

8.2 The State has a robust system of internal audit with 2 full time and one part time auditor. This team audits the state office, district offices, federations, KGBVs, MSK and external projects. Internal audit visits each district once a quarter and spends 3 to 4 days carrying out a 100% voucher audit. The Mission has noted a rigorous system of follow up on observations of internal audit. The internal audit team successfully detected a fraud case in Bagalkote which led to complete recovery and dismissal of two staff members.

8.3 The external auditor is appointed each year with a three year limit on reappointment. Quotations are obtained from CAG empanelled auditors. District visits by the statutory auditor have been a regular feature.

8.4 Accounting is carried out on Tally at SPO and at districts with monthly Trial Balance and BRS being sent to SPO. All advances are reconciled and reduced to nil at the end of the year. The Accounts team at the SPO visits 2-3 districts each year to assess accounts. DIU accounts staff are trained at SPO every quarter. Rules on delegation of powers and on procurement processes are documented and were shared with the Mission. The rules are conservative and reflect good practises.

8.5 The SPO and DIUs reported positively on the new reporting format introduced by the NPO, since it has streamlined the CoA and reporting. There is however a need for greater support from the NPO on other aspects of capacity building on financial management.

9.0 Good Practices

9.1 Districts have reported a large number of innovations and ideas that have worked as pilots. Each of them represents significant efforts and achievements. The Mission has however chosen to focus on two particularly promising interventions which it would like to highlight as good practices.

9.2 The Kishori Newsletter is a quarterly newsletter started in 2007 by 20 young girls, members of a Kishori Sangha in Mysore. These girls were trained through the SRC (Adult Education) of the state government and now they are the editorial and the circulation team for this remarkable publication. They source content, write articles and pieces, organise pictures, print and arrange for distribution. Copies of the newsletter (Kishori) go to all KGBVs and MSKs run by MS and to all Kishori Groups within Mysore district. MS pays Rs 1000 for each issue towards DTP costs and copying costs. The most recent issue has its lead story on what a model school should be with other stories on girl child puberty – myths and taboos, managing waste, guava as the poor man`s apple, a girl from KGBV Bijapur writing in, a short story about discrimination faced by a girl child and how she challenged it, information about a talent hunt contest run by the state as well as lighter content such as a crossword, a poem, a quiz and a joke.

9.3 Bijapur district worked on tackling backlash in PRIs against assertive EWRs from Sanghas. EWRs from Sangha began noticing a visible backlash from other GP members whenever they raised issues or were persistent about them. Bijapur MS took this as a challenge. They met the district CEO, who deals with PRIs and with his involvement organised a 3 day training event for the President, Vice President and Secretary of 131 GPs from the district. This training helped articulate why sangha women were doing what they were doing and led to better appreciation of gender issues amongst GP functionaries. Impacts of the training were immediately visible. GP office bearers now began to actively call Sangha EWRs, involving them in planning and selection of beneficiaries for programmes.

10.0 Progress towards the achievements of MS objectives

10.1 There are 5 outputs in the results framework which encapsulate the objectives of the programme. Progress in respect of these outputs in indicated below.

1) MS coverage expanded to an additional 21000 sanghas

The state has drawn up plans and the state EC has approved expansion in 6 districts. This would cover 10 EBBs. Expansion will be predicated on the existing strategy of sangha formation which is participative and decentralised. Recruitment of Sahyoginis is expected to begin from April 2009 and redeployment plans for JRPs/ CRPs are being prepared. Withdrawal from 9 districts has already been completed and federations now carry out many activities.

2) Raised capacity and confidence of approximately 10 lakh sangha/ federation women, with increased engagement of other women community members

Sanghas and federations have organised themselves around the six themes of education, health, political participation, legal matters (including domestic violence), sangha self reliance & empowerment and economic activities. Each sangha member is on one or the other committee. These committees engage with government departments and work through network meetings to access information and improve their capacity to benefit from government schemes and mobilise support for their demands.

3) Sanghas enabled and actively assisting and monitoring/ interfacing with all educational , health, rural employment and other relevant programmes in the villages including primary schools, alternative and non formal education facilities etc.

562 sangha women are members of the SDMC, through which they monitor children's attendance, retention and learning as well as teachers' role. In 2007-08, 19885 sangha women reported having visited anganwadi to monitor these centres. 7665 women attended parents' meet at schools to review their child's progress. 786 sangha women are now EWRs at Panchayats and members of panchayat committees. 28433 women report having visited GP offices to avail facilities. 146 sangha women have joined as ASHAs. A pilot on Arogya Sakhi in Mysore district has provided link workers to connect women of the village to health facilities.

4) Greater participation of women and girls in formal and non formal education programmes

MS has facilitated significant improvements in enrolment and retention of girls particularly amongst the harder to reach SC and ST communities. 33 villages have now been categorised as drop out free. On its own, MS directly supports retention of over 5000 disadvantaged girls through KGBVs, NPEGEL and MSK. In addition it has facilitated enrolment of 2048 girls and re-enrolment of 2504 drop out girls in 2007-08 alone.

5) Women empowered to improve the quality of life of themselves and their families (economic opportunities, health, political participation)

Remarkable stories on women taking frontline roles are emerging. Snapshots are available in each year's annual report of the state society. Nari Adalats were able to resolve 533 cases in 2007-08 alone. Safe motherhood programmes have benefited 1909 women. Social ills such as Devdasi practice and child marriage are down significantly. Savings of sangha women have crossed Rs. 9 Cr. enabling many of them to obtain loans of over Rs. 5 Cr. from banks and under SGSY.

11.0 Key Issues in the State MS Programme

11.1 MS Karnataka has acquired considerable experience and expertise over the years and runs a successful programme. Staff competencies and confidence have grown and withdrawal has been completed from 9 out of the 12 districts. Going forward, certain key issues emerge.

11.2 Firstly, a major expansion is on the anvil now, requiring the state to set up 6 new DIUs. Alongside it must continue to maintain Sahyoginis in 3 districts from which withdrawal is expected by 2011-12. Federations in 9 districts are generally working well but will continue to need handholding support, particularly as new challenges emerge. Pilots have been run successfully and adequate documentation exists to capture the learning. The challenge therefore is managing expansion along with consolidation.

11.3 Secondly, MS Karnataka must balance demands for increasing service delivery (KGBV, MSK) and its mandate for mobilisation and empowerment. Managing more KGBVs or setting up new MSKs is often requested but the program needs to prioritise. MS has been outstanding in establishing models and demonstrating proof of concept but can it take service delivery to a significant scale?

11.4 Thirdly, in the hustle and bustle of implementation, HR issues have taken a back seat. In the early years of MS, commitment and passion of staff were adequate to see the program through. With expansion and a changing job market, it is now time to devote more attention to staff retention to ensure that this commitment and passion is sustained as expectations from staff on program delivery increase.

11.5 Finally, federations need a higher level of support. Federations are the key to sustainability and the realisation of long term benefits. However the context in which these federations must operate is changing rapidly. Work around education is in a

steady state and challenges there appear much more manageable than at the start of the programme. Women, in the meanwhile have moved on and age profiles of sangha women is changing. Women are demanding more in terms of other aspects such as water, sanitation and kitchen fuel. Federations and in most cases, MS staff, are ill equipped to engage. The challenge here is to continue to remain relevant to the women in whom so much has been invested in. Education will continue to be the core but other facets need to be explored alongside.

12.0 Recommendations

12.1 Expansion: MS Karnataka is a confident programme. It can now move faster and the Mission would recommend that expansion takes place at a more rapid pace, preferably targeting March 2011. This would be a stretch but is possible with greater attention to HR, to systems, particularly around measurability and training as well as a live blue print for engagement with federations.

12.2 Capacity and confidence: Sanghas and federations are now well conversant with what they need to do on education and doing an excellent job. However concerns of women are changing and capacity building of federations, sanghas and staff needs to be oriented accordingly. The NPO also has a role to play particularly in helping SPOs acquire necessary expertise. Support for physical space for federations is also a vital need.

12.3 Better quality of life through empowerment: Sangha women have engaged on sensitive issues of Devdasi practice, child marriage, dowry and child labour, dispute resolution and violence against women including some particularly extreme cases. They have had remarkable success. Yet this has often led to a backlash. Greater networking and a more robust State Resource Centre would be vital to sustain their efforts.

12.4 Programme and financial management: HR issues need urgent attention to ensure that MS can attract and retain competent staff. Fund flows from Government of India to the states need to be streamlined.

Staffing pattern Mahila Samakhya Karnataka 2008-09

Year	Level (State/Districts)	Name of post	Total No. of Sanctioned Posts	Posts filled at present	No. of posts Vacant
08-09	**State Level**	State Programme Director	1	1	NIL
		Senior Resource Person	2	1	1
		Consultant	2	1	1
		Internal Auditor	2	2	NIL
		Accounts Officer	1	1	NIL
		Office Manager	2	2	NIL
		Accountant	1	1	NIL
		Documentation Assistant	2	2	NIL
		Messenger	2	2	NIL
		Driver	1	1	NIL
		Sub total	**16**	**14**	**2**
08-09	**District Level**	District Programme Coordinator	12	9	3
		Accountant	12	12	NIL
		District Resource Person	26	17	9
		Junior Resource Person	51	40	11
		Office Assistant	12	10	2
		Documentation Assistant	21	20	1
		Messenger	21	20	1
		Cluster Resource Person	96	76	20
		Sahayogini	88	68	20
		Sub total	**339**	**272**	**67**
		Total	**355**	**286**	**69**

JRM Uttar Pradesh State Report, 25 November – 1 December 2008

Nitya Rao and Shikha Jassal

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

1. Overview of State MS Programme

MS, initiated in UP in 1989, with the objective of education for women's equality and empowering women to demand accountability, has now been active in the state for close to two decades. New districts have been added in phases: 1995-6, 2000-1 and 2006-7, and a further expansion is planned in 2009-10. As part of the JRM, we had a preliminary meeting with MS State level staff including the chairperson, and then visited two districts: Bahraich, where the programme was launched in 2006-7, and Sitapur which was launched in 1995-6. The objective was to assess the strengths and challenges in established and new sites. Key institutions were visited in each site: sanghas, mahasangha (in Sitapur), MSK, KGBV, Kishori Kendra, Meena Manch, Literacy camp, Nari Adalat and RTI training. We also had an interaction with the DRG in Sitapur. In Lucknow, we had interactions with all the DPCs as well as EC of MS, attended the launch of Nari Adalat Samvad (newsletter of the Nari Adalats) and a final debriefing with MS State team and Principal Secretary, Education, Mr V.N.Garg.

MS is currently working in 60 blocks of 16 districts (a new district Chanduali has been culled out of Varanasi but MSUP still has only one DIU for both the districts). As per the expansion plan, it will extend coverage in 8 new districts (5 blocks in each district) over the 11th Plan period. At the same time, in order to maintain coverage of 250 villages in each district, there will be some expansion within existing districts in line with the roll-back strategy. Roll-back has been undertaken in 13 blocks of 7 districts, where organisational activity was initiated in the first and second round of expansion. It is planned to initiate rollback in a further 24 blocks, however, there has been some resistance to this from MSUP, who still feel the need for hand-holding and the danger of reversals if interaction is reduced at this point.

MS has much strength and we wholly endorse the strengths identified by the Joint Appraisal Mission, November 2006, particularly in terms of high levels of motivation and ownership of the programme by MS functionaries at all levels, creating a climate in favour of girls' education, the high quality maintained in all its educational interventions and the continued focus on the sanghas. Further, MS advocacy at the State level has led to the adoption of the UP Women's Policy in December 2006 (though there is no action plan or time frame for implementation as yet), amendment to the UPZALR to include inheritance rights to daughters, advocacy for implementation of the Domestic Violence Act 2005 and launch of health initiative for adolescent girls (Saloni Kishori Swasthya Yojana and school children under NRHM)

A key concern of MSUP relates to the exit policy and inadequate time frame to strengthen and consolidate the mahasanghas before further expansion. While the women are highly motivated, and participate in a range of campaigns, practical financial and organisational management skills are still insufficient to ensure self-sustainability. Few mahasanghas (around 8 out of 23) have yet been able to take

on sustained interventions. Capacity-building of mahasanghas on strategies to develop their financial autonomy as well as action agenda need to be prioritised, especially in blocks earmarked for rollback. Budgetary support is required to facilitate the careful planning of resource inputs and human resources, a recommendation also of the National Evaluation, 2004.

2. Programme Processes in Sangha Formation

The sangha is the building block of MS; the success of all its other programmes depends on the strength, initiative and ownership of the sangha. Programmes are initiated on the basis of expressed need and interest of the sangha members. Considerable time and effort is therefore spent on selection and training of Sahayoginis (grassroots workers), and thereafter organisation and training of the sangha members. To date, there are 4335 sanghas and 23 mahasanghas spread over 60 blocks of 16 districts.

Based on internal reviews the MS core team classifies sanghas as strong, medium, weak and emerging. The weak sanghas are often the new ones, where a demand is yet to be generated; medium sanghas start raising issues, have undergone some training, while strong sanghas raise issues, are mobile and also start owning their sangha, taking initiative as and when required. It takes at least 4-6 years of intervention and support for sanghas to become strong. It is only after this that the process of mahasangha (federation) formation can be started, and this would need some form of support and hand-holding for at least 4-5 years.

We visited two districts in UP, Bahraich (programme started in 2006) and Sitapur where the programme started in 1996. The key role played by processes and the length of intervention in strengthening the sanghas was clearly visible. For instance, in Bahraich district, the context is one of massive flooding for many months in a year, epidemics, extreme poverty and illiteracy, a porous border and generally non-functional government programmes, organising women into sanghas involves considerable struggle by MS functionaries. Here women have been meeting for a year, a basic training has been conducted, and they are keen to send their daughters to school now. Sangha women however still need time to engage in larger battles such as demanding teacher accountability or other benefits and reaching a position to question the upper caste pradhan, as a majority work as labourers for him. Awareness of their rights as well as solidarity to struggle is being developed slowly. The issues are gradually being discussed in the sangha, and the need for improving communication and information highlighted.

At the medium level were women sangha members of Balrampur, which is also only a year old district with a similar context as that of Bahraich. One major issue around which they have been able to organise is NREGA, in terms of both demanding work and securing payment. However they have not yet been able to mobilise women of other villages to support them in this. Another big achievement however was in terms of getting the BPL lists revised, due to high levels of caste segregation, the poorer people, mostly SC, had been excluded from these lists. They have also had other successes: getting their children enrolled in the school without payment of Rs 50 to the teacher, opening bank accounts etc.

Mishrikh block of Sitapur, where the programme was launched almost 11 year back, presents a much more consolidated picture of the programme. The Sahayoginis have already been withdrawn and a mahasangha of 50 villages was registered in 2001. The women are full of enthusiasm, articulate and have taken a range of interventions, from struggling for proper implementation of NREGA, to opening bank accounts, dealing with the block and police officials and so on. They have made sure to educate their daughters and daughters-in-laws. They have also each taken responsibility for organising women in three surrounding villages, thus greatly expanding their strength. They are planning to set up shops collectively which can help bring some income to the federation. Mishrik has got some land from the pradhan of Qutubnagar and hope to set up their office and a sewing centre there, which can train girls, but also become an income generating resource. They themselves identified financial insecurity and lack of resources as bottlenecks in terms of sustainability. The financial autonomy of mahasanghas remains a concern for MS, which has been trying to facilitate linkages with government programmes.

Implementation of government schemes such as midday meals, uniform distribution etc is now being undertaken by some strong sanghas, capable of facing resistance from the pradhans, who have so far been responsible for provision of midday meals. The purpose of taking full managerial responsibility of MDM by sanghas is to facilitate them gain recognition as a responsible community organisation and an entry-point into the school, ultimately leading to an improvement in the overall school environment including the teaching-learning process. In difficult areas such as Balrampur, Sravasti and Bahraich, it has also been experimentally used as an entry strategy by MS, to build rapport and trust through effective service delivery.

Issues and Recommendations:

- Strengthening sanghas takes a minimum of 4-5 years. In order to achieve empowerment outcomes, there is no shortcut to this process. Early withdrawal can have negative implications for the sanghas and longer-term outcomes of the programme. Rather than an exit policy, one needs to think of the changing role of MS and its functionaries in relation to the sanghas, encouraging them to interact with and include women from beyond the sanghas and from neighbouring villages in their activities.
- Given that UP is a large state with major demographic and geographical diversities and socio-economic disparities, specific, tailor-made interventions are required in each district to respond to local needs, especially in places like Balrampur, Bahraich, Shravasti.
- Sustainability of the federations is a major issue, both in terms of money and capacity. There needs to be training and planning for resource generation, as well as management capacities to deal with projects and schemes. Federations need to be developed as information hubs in order to facilitate this process. Linkages with MSKs can help create a mutual learning and sharing relationship. MS UP has been expressing anxiety about rapid expansion without consolidation. Additional budgetary and capacity-building support should be made available to facilitate this process. Link

3. Training Programmes

The success of MS strategy depends greatly on the ability of its workers at all levels, from the Sahayoginis and Anudeshikas at the field level to the district and state functionaries. Right from the beginning, MS has therefore focused on capacity and perspective building activities through a range of training programmes. These include foundational training to develop a gender perspective as well as elements of organisational strengthening, issue-based trainings (law, health, education, panchayat, savings, adolescent family life education, economic, agriculture, documentation and MIS, RTI) and vocational courses (technical training). Rather than one-off events, most of the training programmes have follow-up activities, for instance, perspective-building for Sahayoginis is conducted in three phases of five days each at the state level. The issue-based trainings are conducted for district functionaries at the state level, and thereafter rolled out at the district level. There is a specialist team of staff/resource persons who work on each of these themes, preparing specialised materials and tools. The vocational skills development programmes are often conducted with support of external agencies/volunteers, such as bead-making by NIFT students, and regular support of NCERT, New Delhi is being sought for the development of vocational education curriculum for rural girls.

Several issues emerge during the training programmes, and as far as possible these are discussed and necessary changes made, however, follow-up often becomes difficult. For instance, some of the issues raised during a recent perspective-building training related to problems of team-building, time management and inculcating feminist thinking. Patriarchal pressures are still strong and efforts to break them are often met with violence, caste can sometimes become a divisive factor too. But the issue of time is quite closely related to shortage of staff, and with growing programmatic pressures, has been hard to address.

Issues and Recommendations:

- The curriculum and materials are process-oriented and provide the pedagogy through which key learning can be communicated and internalised.
- District teams are often not staffed to capacity due to bureaucratic delays and non availability of suitable workers and this creates a real pressure on their time. While MSUP is conducting all basic capacity-building for field staff (sahayoginis) at the state level, this being more cost and time effective and also giving the sahayoginis an opportunity to interact with those from other districts, follow-up at district level needs to be ensured.
- Pressure of expansion and exit and the need to train large numbers in a short period of time has led to a reduction in duration of most training programmes. The implication in terms of sustainability of outcomes is not yet clear.
- It is important to further roll out some gender sensitisation training to men in positions of power, such as the police service or other local administrative departments, to pradhans of panchayats. The work with adolescent boys too needs to be strengthened within communities/schools. Gaining male support is essential for changing gender relations. Some budgetary support is needed to strengthen work with men and boys.

4. Participation of women and girls in formal and non-formal education

Education is a holistic process, hence educational planning too needs to be holistic. While primary education has been universalised, there is a huge shortage of schools providing secondary and higher secondary education, especially for girls. While several interventions have been initiated as part of SSA, they do not take into account fully the aspirations of young rural women, exposed to some education. While upper primary education (upto grade 8), can provide them with sustainable literacy skills, important in itself, they aspire to higher levels of education, and few opportunities are available for this. As a result, MS has tried to address the needs of girls and women of different age groups through a range of formal and non-formal interventions. The curriculum and teaching pedagogy is innovative and learner-centred and includes elements of life skills, social awareness and responsibility. At present, there are 242 kishori kendras, 15 MSKs (one in each district except Shravasti), 444 libraries, 168 literacy centres (very few in western UP and in the new districts), 31 bal kendras and 33 KGBVs.

MS has been successful in building close linkages between kishori kendras, MSKs and KGBVs to ensure continuation of learning for adolescent girls. A clear transformation is visible in the attitude, behaviour and skills of these girls. However in order to meet the growing demand from adolescent girls, MS should advocate for the opening of required number of RBCs (residential bridge courses) as part of NPEGEL and also influence their functioning.

The continuity however is less clear in the case of adult women. For instance, literacy camps targeting adult women are run for 21 days in three rounds at the village/cluster level. Visit to a literacy camp in Sitapur district revealed immense enthusiasm amongst the women and a desire for some form of follow-up as learning outcomes were very mixed, not many had attained sustainable literacy skills but present budgetary provisions on this head limit intensive and prolonged work. Some of the women who have studied in the literacy centres have however been able to pass the grade 5 examinations and now aspire to complete grade 8, as this will ensure sufficient skills to engage with state-level programmes (e.g ASHA) or even manage their own sanghas better. Strong aspirations were expressed for continuing education, but MS does not have the structures to respond to this need and the state education system too does not do so.

In the newer districts such as Bahraich, Sravasti and Balrampur, with very low female literacy levels, it has been difficult to identify local teachers (anudeshikas) with sufficient literacy skills for the non-formal interventions. Three month literacy courses have been organised for the teachers here, apart from training in teaching pedagogies. MSUP has strongly taken up advocacy to extend KGBVs upto higher secondary level in order to build local capacities, but has been unable to equally focus its interventions or advocacy in relation to women's literacy.

Issues and Recommendations:

- While MS run KGBV's are indeed centres of excellence, their impact on other state and NGO run KGBVs appears to be minimal. MS should be involved in the training and capacity building of teachers of all KGBVs in districts where MS is functional.

- MS to be involved in selection of site and design of KGBV infrastructure in allocated areas, as present sites are often both unsafe and inaccessible.
- MS should influence the setting up of RBCs and their functioning in districts in order to meet the demand being created.
- The demands of women for literacy need to be addressed and budgets provided accordingly.
- A letter to be issued by State government to relax the age limit for taking of grade 8 examinations by MS members, similar to that in relation to Grade 5 (October 1998, issued by Ms Vrinda Sarup the then State Project Director, EFA, U.P.). MS should however also liaise with the National Institute of Open Schooling and State Institute of Open Schooling for enabling sangha women to take these exams.

5. Women's empowerment and improvements in quality of life

A major element of women's empowerment involves shifting power relations between men and women across social categories. This involves both a process of personal empowerment, in terms of self-confidence and self-worth, as well as relational/collective empowerment as a strategy for mutual support as well as influencing decisions. Using sex ratios as a proxy indicator, a continuous decline particularly in Western and Central UP, is a worrying trend, reflecting a decline in women's social status. In this context, MS' core activity that involves the organisation of sanghas, alongside personal development through educational initiatives and trainings, has been a major contributor to shifting power relations. A few examples of empowerment are provided below:

- **Addressing gender discrimination: struggles against domestic violence**
  Domestic violence is widely prevalent in the state, but is rarely discussed in public or brought into the open. There are instances of female foeticide especially in the western part of the state, but domestic violence, rape, dowry harassment, sexual abuse resulting in pregnancy out of wedlock, are common across the state. Difficulties in accessing justice have led the sangha women of several blocks to organise nari adalats (women's courts) with MS assistance. These have been highly successful in resolving disputes of various kinds (except rape and inheritance cases which are facilitated), and creating social pressure at the village level for implementation. MS women were extremely articulate on the issue of injustice and violence against women.
- **NREGA**
  A majority of women being poor, economic empowerment is a major concern. Financial autonomy can also improve the bargaining power of women. While MS is not a service-provider and works with a rights-based perspective, it does facilitate women to make claims in relation to employment opportunities in the public sphere. One such is information about NREGA and helping sangha women to organise both in order to claim their right to employment, but also equal wages. Women in Balrampur have lodged a protest with the BDO as while they worked for seven days, they were only paid for five. In stronger sanghas as in Sitapur, women have now established their credentials with the BDO and in fact are bold enough to give him 'missed calls' on their mobile phone, so he can call them back to discuss work opportunities.

Issues and Recommendations:

- Empowerment is a process that is multi-dimensional, works at multiple levels (from the individual to collect) and is not easy to measure. Rather than particular interventions, it requires the creation of a facilitating environment and this indeed has been MS strategy. The processes of empowerment are however not fully captured in the Results Framework provided by GOI. Some suggestions are provided in Annex 2.
- Alongside strengthening sangha women, there needs to be greater priority to demanding system accountability. Teachers are not appointed in the EBBs, and even if appointed, rarely attend school, especially in remote locations. Neither do ANMs. VECs need to be activated and sanghas need to be empowered to report on teacher attendance. Like in the case of the ICDS programme, ANM movement too needs to be better tracked.
- To facilitate system accountability, essential for rapid expansion, MS needs to gain institutional recognition, while retaining its functional autonomy. MS has always been lauded for its high quality, but needs a legitimate voice in order to both facilitate long-terms strategic thinking and influence the supply of services.

6. Resource support systems

While there is considerable networking in terms of resource support, over time MS has developed internal capacities and is less dependent on external resource persons for conducting training programmes. Largely in-house capacity is used at the district level, though resource persons from other MS districts are also invited, depending on the issue. A list of external Resource Persons is however maintained at the state-level, and called upon when needed. These include both private consultants and government, non-government and international organisations such as Unicef (education and health), Sandhan (MSK), State Education Resource Group and IGNUS (KGBV), MARG (legal literacy), Sahbhagi Sikshan Kendra (PRIs), Jagori (gender), NABARD (savings groups), IIM-Lucknow (marketing) etc. MS has been extremely resourceful in mobilising volunteers from the IITs to design their website and provide IT infrastructure. MS also provides support to other organisations such as NIPCCD, ICDS, NRHM, GDS for gender training.

The level of networking and resource support varies across districts within the state. While there are very few NGOs working in Bahraich and Sravasti, there are more in the central and eastern belt, and resource persons from there are often invited for trainings, but more than this perhaps, to participate in events, sometimes even working together on specific issues. For instance, a lawyer in Sitapur is working closely with MS on a range of cases filed in the court. The limited interaction is because other local NGOs and professionals too are often over-stretched at the district level. However, as mentioned above, MS also seems to be focusing much more on networking within MS, rather than with other organisations. While the development of internal capacity is a great strength, it is important to guard against the risk of insularity in thinking, especially in a rapidly changing socio-political context.

The experience of networking and interactions with government departments is mixed and often dependent on the personality and interest of particular individuals. Yet MS has demonstrated a strong negotiating capacity with the

government, reflected in its recent success in obtaining control by 262 sanghas for management of midday meals and the independent recruitment of teachers of KGBVs run by MS. While the revised guidelines for KGBVs (9.6.08) give MS the task of both implementation and monitoring of KGBVs in states where it is functioning, clearly this is not feasible within existing MS resources. In the absence of additional management support, only a few schools have been taken up for purposes of demonstration. While a gap in both the quality of learning and physical arrangements at KGBVs run by the State and MS is visible, there has so far been limited impact of MS-run KGBVs on those run by other institutions (state and non-state). Yet MS is a part of the state as a resource group on the issues of schooling of rural adolescent girls

Issues and Recommendations

- While SRG and DRG structures exist at the state and district levels, it becomes extremely difficult to create a common agenda as well as to mainstream good practices especially in the backdrop of very frequent transfer of significant officers of related departments.
- Creative and perhaps different strategies need to be developed to build positive relationships with relevant government departments in light of the above. This is essential if MS is to meet its larger goal in terms of creating a gender just society. While creating a few islands of excellence is uplifting, it is not sufficient. If the creation of models is not having adequate impacts of the mainstream government systems, while still worthwhile, there is a danger of diversion of already over-stretched resources, especially human resources, from the core objective of MS.
- In particular , a strong working relationship is needed with SSA at state-level to ensure that all inputs under NPEGEL, MDM and KGBV are available to all children, as well as involvement of MS in training of teachers is ensured.

7. Programme Management

MS follows relatively transparent and participatory management systems. Staff at all levels is involved in planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and activities. The process of action and reflection is crucial to MS management systems. Regular appraisals of staff at all levels serve as a management tool, but also a strategy to empower staff to improve their performance. Training is provided not just in perspective-building and dealing with relevant issues, but also for MIS and data entry.

UP was the first of the MS states to start developing an MIS system in 1997. This is continuously revised as per need and currently is in the process of computerisation. The MIS formats are filled quarterly by the Sahayoginis and feed into the process of preparing the workplan and budget for the following year, alongside feeding into state-level planning. While several districts have identified programmatic activities that are required as a result of their MIS systems and meetings, the level of follow-up action required has often not been possible due to issues of staff discussed below, but also due to gaps between EC approval of budgets and release of funds by GOI.

There is a shortage of staff at each level, whether at field, district or state. This takes two forms. First, while the programme has expanded over the last decade, the support staff has not increased at the same rate. For example, while the number of districts in

which MS works has increased from 7 to 16 during 1999-2008, the number of accounting staff has remained constant at three at the state level. The same is the case at the district level. The coverage of villages in Sitapur district has increased from 50 to 180 over this period, yet there is only one accountant. This is due to restriction of budget on account services.

Though recruitments were done in 2006 and in subsequent years to fill up all the vacant posts and to a great extent turn over of staff is minimal, the no. of positioned staff is still much lower than the sanctioned posts at district level, clear from the following data:

Posts	No. of posts sanctioned	No. in position
DPC	16	12
Assistant/Steno/DEO	32	25
RP	29	29
JRP	87	67
CRP	43	36
Sahayogini	342	314
Messenger	32	28

There are several reasons for this. MS salaries are lower in comparison to other state organisations, but more importantly, the lack of social security and poor working conditions, alongside a demand for high levels of commitment and accountability, contribute to difficulties in recruiting suitable staff. During the national evaluation in 2004, cycles and mobile phones had been recommended for each Sahayogini, and despite being raised repeatedly at EC meetings, this has however not been approved. There are also no budgetary provisions for safety and security of staff working in remote areas: new districts are not allocated project vehicles (rented vehicles and unknown drivers can not be really trusted), there is no provision for benefits such as insurance, medical allowance, education of children, or any annual increment, which imposes a huge hidden cost as well as risk for district functionaries such as the DPC and RP. Some of these benefits had been in place when MS was receiving Dutch funding.

Issues and Recommendations

- Staffing pattern should be regularly reviewed and revised in response to the scale and scope of the programme at all levels
- There is serious need to rethink the employment conditions of MS staff to facilitate both recruitment to fill vacant posts, and maximise programme outcomes. Incentives like CPF, medical, insurance etc. should be provided for retaining employees.
- Safety of the district team needs to be ensured. Given that MS is a women's programme, and often there are emergencies and need to travel late in the night, each district unit needs to have a reliable vehicle support. This will also avoid the risk of harassment of women staff by unknown drivers. At the same time, a small allowance can be made towards the maintenance of mobile phones by sahayoginis.
- For expansion into new districts, second line of leadership (RPs) should be deployed rather than moving the DPC, as this disrupts the district programme in which the DPC has been involved.

- Despite the existence of a thorough MIS system, reporting continues to be largely qualitative and fails to report systematically on a few basic quantitative indicators in relation to education and health in particular. This is important for the purposes of reviewing impact and outcomes over a period of time.

8. Financial management

The personnel responsible for maintenance of accounts are having a minimum qualification of post-graduation. Proper Accounting Records have been made available. Books of Account are prepared on Double Entry System both at State and District levels. Internal Audits are conducted every four months at District level. Single Internal Auditor is responsible for 2-3 Districts. Albeit statutory audit is conducted at State level, auditors do visit districts also. Funds are transferred to State according to requirements, in two instalments. Release of funds from States to districts is through electronic mode according to the demand raised by the districts in the prescribed format. Financial rules of presenting accounts and classification is prescribed at State Level and followed at District Level. Monthly Review meetings for accountants of districts are held at State Office. New districts are maintaining accounts manually, though they know how to operate tally.

Procurement systems are followed according to the prescribed guidelines which inter-alia, mainly include:

- Number of members in the procurement committee
- Amount limits under authority of DPC, Procurement Committee, State level and National level
- No. of quotations received etc.

Issues and Recommendations

- Accounting staff at district as well as state level is not in proportion to the increase in number of districts/blocks/villages. This insufficiency increases the work load on the existing personnel thereby posing the risk of diminished quality of work expected in terms of presentation, control and compliance.
- Training/workshops should be held at National/State levels for the accounts officers on issues of funds management, utilization of funds, finance and accounts.
- It has been observed that clarity on classification of expenditure under various heads needs to be improved. For e.g.: in new districts, a vehicle is not provided, it is hired. The hire charges are classified under Honoraria to driver instead of Vehicle Hire charges. Further, with reference to safety issues discussed above as well as the cost factor, it is recommended that vehicles be purchased for all new districts rather than hired.
- Internal Audit should be conducted at state level as a measure of good practice and to help in better management.
- Internal Audit Reports of districts reveal that compliance relating to taxes deducted at source ("TDS")/ Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) etc. needs to be improved.
- Statutory Auditors should be appointed from CAG approved panels.
- Stringent Control Procedures for preparation and presentation of accounts should be formulated and implemented including increase in frequency of

monitoring visits at district and state levels, review meetings should also be held at districts offices, good practices (e.g: proper maintenance of accounts) in one district should be applied to other districts through the state office intervention.

- Accounts should be maintained electronically in all districts.

Good Practices

a. **Nari Adalat (Women's courts)**
Nari adalats have been very effective in providing justice and reconciliation support to women and men affected by violence, abuse and other marital difficulties. Court systems are often inaccessible to the poor, the process is long and expensive. For a small charge, the Nari Adalats are not only able to resolve a majority of issues, but also ensure their implementation and monitoring on the ground due to social pressure and accountability. The women have been trained in legal matters and pass their judgements on stamp paper of Rs 100, acceptable as evidence in courts, if required.

b. **Nari Sanjivani Kendra (herbal health centres)**
Sanjivani kendras were a result of the personal skills and local knowledge of sangha women in relation to herbal medicines. Herbs are collected, prepared into medicine and used to treat patients for a range of ailments. There are 34 such centres across 8 districts, which have been successful in treating scabies, white discharge, irregular menstruation, piles, joint pains, cough, fever, skin diseases, worms, to name a few.

c. **Breaking patriarchal customs and rituals**
MS has made considerable headway in terms of breaking a few symbolic patriarchal customs such as doll-beating during the Naga Panchami festival, hitting a newly married woman 7 times when she enters her marital home etc. The process is slow, but the symbolic shifts are essential for ultimately changing mindsets and behaviour.

d. **KGBV/MSK curriculum design and the transformation of girls**
Based on the successes with MSK in terms of the transformation of girls who went through the 8 month residential programme, MS has also designed a similarly innovative curriculum and pedagogy for KGBVs, with support from Sandhan in Rajasthan and other Resource Persons. While the MSK experience has already been documented, it may be useful to conduct such an exercise for the KGBVs, which run within the government structure.

9. **Results framework** (please see Annex 1)

As mentioned under Section 7, there is a need to analyse both the MIs and district-level baseline data from a perspective of impact assessment as well. This may require some quantification or recalculation of data that is already being collected to facilitate prioritisation and the management of change.

10. Key issues

A range of issues have been raised in the previous sections, a few are highlighted below.

- **Time frame:** Building strong sanghas requires a sustained process of organisation and training. Shortcuts will imply compromising on quality. While

sanghas can be strengthened in five years, it is not possible to create sustainable federations within this time period. One has to remember that the starting point for women in new districts is often very low. As revealed in Bahraich, hardly any are literate. They are subject to intense violence and patriarchal subordination, and need time to overcome their fears and build solidarity. Compressing the duration of support, both financial and technical, available to the sanghas is likely to compromise on long-term sustainability. The exit policy therefore needs to be carefully examined and planned for.

- **Institutional recognition:** In order to expand outreach without reducing quality, some form of institutional recognition is urgently required. Given the persistent gender inequalities and subordination in the State, while retaining its autonomy, MS needs to have a legitimate institutional role which can facilitate long-term thinking for social transformation, and for advocacy vis-a-vis other government functionaries and departments.
- **Focus on issues and convergence:** MS needs to maintain its focus on organising around key issues and facilitating convergence rather than succumbing to growing pressures to become a service delivery organisation. The strength of MS is its flexibility and ability to organise around local needs and context-specific issues, be it water in Chitrakoot, domestic violence in Saharanpur or the issue of quarry leases in Allahabad. This flexibility needs to be retained rather than feeling under pressure to take some action on a menu of development activities simultaneously (health, education, panchayats, rural development etc), unless in the realm of facilitating convergence. This is clearly stated under section 3.5.1 of the Green Book, namely, "MS as a programme is not involved in the delivery of services and resources". While there is no clear evidence on the time spent on different tasks by the district functionaries, the inability to spend sufficient time and effort on strengthening the mahasanghas is perhaps a result of overload of tasks, including facilitating and monitoring a range of educational interventions, especially in the context of insufficient staff.
- **Impact on policy and practice of state delivery systems:** MS interventions have demonstrated that existing programmatic structures such as KGBV and NPEGEL can indeed work well, yet this has often created conflict, rather than mutual respect and learning. MS developed materials or training packages are not being adopted/discussed for adoption in mainstream schools even in districts where MS is active, rather alternate institutions are being commissioned for this purpose. Despite efforts, while creating additional pressures on already hard-pressed district staff, the demonstration of excellence in service delivery is not having the desired impact in terms of replication and adoption by the mainstream educational system. Without improvement in state delivery systems, the larger-scale impacts of MS interventions will be restricted.
- **Budget Monitoring:** There should be proper monitoring of the budgets made at the district level in terms of planned activities and their costs to ensure they are sufficient, reasonable and practical. If this is ensured, it is not clear why released funds are lower than sanctioned funds. There needs to be in place an internal core team to regularly monitor funds utilisation in relation to budgets, identify problems and ensure timely revision, if needed.
- **Result Framework: M**easurement of outcomes resulting from the activities of MS need to be more closely related to its gender impacts, which include collective action not just to access government resources and services, but to change social norms and traditions, as well as personal empowerment.

11. Recommendations:

While several recommendations emerge and have been detailed in each section, a few key ones are highlighted here, directed to the GOUP, GOI, DFID and MS.

GOUP

- KGBVs:
    - Need to ensure better coordination between various organisations involved with KGBVs: SSA, Unicef, CARE, DIET, MS
    - Ensure that KGBV curriculum developed by MS should be discussed and mainstreamed in all KGBVs.
    - Ensure that MS involved in training of KGBV teachers.
    - Extend KGBVs till grade 12.
    - Additional resources to be allocated both for physical equipment and accommodation as well as additional teachers and specialised equipment.
- Need to focus on women's literacy:
    - Letter to remove age limits to the taking of grade 8 exams, to facilitate women's participation (see GO of October 1998 relaxing age limits for class 5 exams).
- Sanghas and mahasanghas facilitated by MS to be given recognition and preference by government departments in terms of both access to state resources and programmes and monitoring of implementation on the ground.
    - Sanghas to be a member of VEC and responsible for monitoring teacher attendance and quality of education.
    - Sanghas to report on ANM visits and availability of immunisation, medicines etc
    - Sanghas to report on implementation of development programmes such as NREGA.
- Domestic Violence Act:
    - GO stating federations and nari adalats as service provider under DV Act.

GOI

- Serious consideration to ways in which institutional recognition can be leveraged for MS as a GOI programme, in order to ensure adequate recognition to undertake successfully the task of expansion.
- Reinstating social security provided to MS staff during the period of Dutch funding of MS.
- Each district office to have access to reliable and safe transport and communication support to ensure safety and effective work.
- Alongside hands-on experience through demonstration schools, essential for retaining credibility, equal emphasis should be placed on mainstreaming MS learnings. A legitimate role needs to be created for MS, which is not resented by local level functionaries.
- Recommend to state government that all DMs should ensure legitimate status to MS representatives in district-level committees set up to monitor the implementation of education (and other development) programmes on the ground.

- Closer monitoring of budget and expenditure patterns and facilitating revisions, if required.
- A common financial module should be prepared at the national level indicating the broad principles/guidelines on finance and accounts to be followed at state and district levels.

DFID

- To support MS in mahasangha strengthening and consolidation activities through TC fund.

MS

- Prioritise strengthening of mahasanghas and facilitating linkages with government programmes. This would involve the federation serving as an information hub for the block, with assistance from MSKs.
- Develop links with the National Institute of Open Schooling for mainstreaming girls and women who have been through MS' educational programmes.
- Zonal/sub-regional review meetings to share wider thinking and strategising.
- Sustain efforts to influence mainstream state educational programmes by providing models, rather than let these become islands of excellence in the midst of poor quality outcomes.
- Analyse MIS from the perspective of impacts in terms of MS key objectives and prioritise specific issues in each district.
- Analyse time spent by district functionaries on different types of activities: issue-based, convergence (government linkage), delivery of government programmes (e.g KGBV), delivery of its own educational interventions and management – so that staff time can be reallocated accordingly, if needed with RPs developing specialisation in each of these activities.
- Strategic planning during the budgeting process to ensure that core objectives are adequately served.

Annex 1: Progress towards achievement of MS objectives (Results Framework)

Narrative	Measurable Indicators (OVI)	Means of Verification (MOV)	Assumptions
Goal			
Better educated and empowered women and girls accessing their rights and opportunities equally with men and able to participate fully in public life.			
Purpose			
Mahila Samakhya (MS) consolidated and expanded, to promote gender equality and women's empowerment	MS doubled to cover 167 Districts. Increase over baseline levels in MS blocks or districts if whole district is covered: **16 Districts (2007-08)** - Share of girls') enrolment in primary and upper primary schools reflects their share in the population(%). **Not Computed** - Ratio of young literate females to males disaggregated by Social category rises (ages 15-24); **Not computed** - Better access to health services by women, disaggregated by Social category (%) **1410 villages out of 4700 villages (30%)**	DISE and other Education statistics (Ministry of Human Resource Development). Education and health indicators pertaining to Sangha/Federation women and their families, generated within the MS Programme. MoH Annual reports (Reproductive Child Health II)	Greater gender equality improves investments in health and education for long term development, raises productivity and household saving and investment, reduces the burden of high fertility and promotes growth. Impact on Sangha women leads to a wider impact on non-sangha women also. MS processes receive support in a wider programmatic and political context. Policies and programmes facilitate the processes of gender equality.
Outputs			
1. MS coverage expanded to an additional 21,000 Sanghas.	1.1 21,000 additional Mahila Sanghas operating in 420 additional Educationally Backwards Blocks (EBBs) by 2014) (membership by SC, ST, Muslim and other disadvantaged groups): **4335 Sanghas (November**	Annual reports on progress from MHRD, MS JRM Aide Memories and specially commissioned surveys. Records of Workshops and	Project personnel are in place at all levels to facilitate new Sanghas. MS functionaries are oriented for non-hierarchical management styles and respect for

	2008) 1.2 A decentralized and participative mode of setting the agenda for MS established in the new EBBs (assessed annually from 2007-08). **NIL (4 districts having 8 blocks in 2006-07)** **Next Expansion for 2009-10 – 4 new districts** 1.3 MS Programme Management structures are delivering support to the Sahyogini/ Cluster Resource Persons and Junior Resource Persons effectively (assessed annually from 2007-08) **Varies with districts depending upon staff availability** 1.4 Existence of a systematic and effective plan of expansion /withdrawal from field areas and mechanisms for feedback. **13 Blocks total roll back – No Sahyogini, 27 CRPs, 9 JRPs** **24 Blocks Partial roll back – 157 Sahyoginis, 6 CRPs, 30 JRPs** **23 Blocks regular activities** **Two types of expansion is planned:** **a) Within existing districts to cover 250 villages** **b) Expansion to 8 new districts**	training programmes to check, inter alia, whether the pace and priorities of the programme are being set by Sangha Women and are reflected in the work plan of MS. Reports of Joint Review Missions MS reports Number and nature of capacity building activities for Sahyoginis/JRPs/CRPs.	transparency. There is programme support to counter any backlash against the programme objectives.
2. Raised capacity and confidence of	2.1 Articulated demand increases for information	Annual reports on progress from MHRD,	Women's groups at the village level set

approximately 10 lakh sangha /federation women, with increased engagement of other women community members.	on issues concerning women's lives: health, legal matters, public works, government schemes for women and poor in general, panchayats and environment, (assessed annually from 2007-08) **Qualitative information available** 2.2 Local communities supported in building their capacity to access/and manage environmental resources (land, water, forest) (assessed annually from 2007-08) **Context specific** **See Annexure - 2**	MS JRM Aide Memories and specially commissioned surveys. MS (including National Resource Center) Reports Records of Workshops and training programmes. Mid Term Review Annual updates of Baseline Survey.	the pace, priorities, form and content of all project activities. The time burden on women and girls in respect of their household responsibilities is reduced or at least is at a level that does not prevent their participation in MS activities. Effective functioning of National Resource Centre for Mahila Samakhya and Girl's education: i) NRC harnesses necessary human resources to provide sustained support to State MS Societies in material development, training and capacity building 2)NRC effectively facilitates the development and dissemination of lessons and knowledge generated by MS.
3. Mahila Sanghas enabled and actively assisting and monitoring/interfacing with all educational, health, rural employment and other relevant programmes in the villages including primary schools, Alternative and Non-formal Education	3.1 Active involvement in MS programme and participation of sangha women in village level development bodies **604 Sangha Women in Panchayat (November 2008)** 3.2 Sangha monitoring the functioning of schools and Mid Day Meal programme with dialogue/ interaction between MS members and schools teachers and educational functionaries (assessed	SSA and MS (MHRD) Reporting JRM, Mid Term Reports and evaluations commissioned by programmes.	The schemes allow space for public participation and implementers are responsive to Sangha's voice. An environment is created for women and girls to seek knowledge and information and create opportunities for their education.

Facilities,etc	annually from 2007-08) **1223 sanghas out of 3663 sanghas (33%) interacting with teachers (schools across 12 districts, 2006-07)** 3.3 Sanghas proactive on girls' education issues. Active engagement with Mahila Shikshan Kendras and other learning alternatives provided by MS or through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan/government. **476 Sanghas out of 3663 sanghas (13%) active in Education Committee (across 12 districts 2006-07)** 3.4 Sanghas and federations challenging and changing social practices and barriers to * women/girls education and empowerment **Qualitative Information e.g. 280 sanghas have stopped ceremonial caning of girls after marriage**		
4. Greater participation of women and girls in formal and non-formal educational programmes	4.1 Girls' share of enrolment to all levels of education in the EBBs increases particularly SC, ST, Muslim, and other disadvantaged girls (Assessed annually from 2007-08). **50% at primary level and appx. 25% at other levels (District Level data available but not calculated at State Level)** 4.2 Girls in elementary education have improved :	State MS reports, Non-formal and formal school records District Information System for Education (DISE) Reports of Joint Review Mission Education indicators pertaining to Sangha/Federation women and their	The time burden on women and girls in respect of their household responsibilities is reduced or at least is at a level that does not prevent their participation in education and training activities.

	completion rate; repetition rate, dropout rate particularly Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, Muslims, and other disadvantaged girls (assessed annually from 2007-08) **Not computed at State/District Level e.g. in Saharanpur district 82 out of 410 sanghas, retention of girls has improved.** 4.3 MS engaging in policy influencing at all levels in areas related to gender sensitisation of school curriculum and teaching and learning materials greater resource allocation for women's development. **Yes, but results not satisfactory**	families, generated within the MS Programme. Case studies profiling Sangha women/ families.	
5. Women empowered to improve the quality of life of themselves and their families (economic opportunities, health, political participation)	5.1 Women take on active roles in economic, social and political arena. **Yes (689 villages in 5 Districts issued Job Cards, 604 Sangha Women in Panchayat, 556 issues of violence brought to Nari Adalats)** 5.2 Access of women to credit **723 Saving Groups in 12 districts but not accessed Bank credit** 5.3 Active participation of Sangha women in developmental activities and in decision making at village level **Qualitative Information Available (e.g. in Allahabad district, 2**	Profiles of Sangha women and case studies from districts. Joint Review Missions. Number of elected women from under represented sections of society in local bodies. Annual Reports from States/Districts.	Managerial Capacity and /or staffing will be expanded or upgraded to deliver project outputs. Staff turnover will be managed through higher remuneration. Scaled up targeted interventions will not reduce the quality of MS. The activities of MS will not produce a backlash from certain members of the community that may be threatened by greater gender equality and

	sangha women are pradhans, 13 panchayat members, 27 Asha, 7 Aanganwadi helpers, 25 cooks, 8 VEC members, 3 TBAs) 5.4 MS enabling women to participate in electoral processes and facilitating inclusion of gender issues in local developmental agendas of elected representatives especially panchayats. **604 Sangha Women in Panchayat (November 2008)** **Training of 30 Pradhans on Gender issues** 5.5 Sanghas/federations effectively running, managing and supervising alternative forum and programmes such as Nari Adalats (Women's Courts), Health centres etc.- **Federation runs:** **1 out of 13 Nari Adalats** **2 MSKs partially managed;** **8 federations supplied uniforms under NPEGEL**		empowerment of women.

Annex 2: Suggestions on Results Framework

- At the Purpose level, apart from education and health outcome indicators, there needs also to be reference to:
    a. Changing patriarchal norms such as customs and traditions, violence, social practices such as veiling (ghunghat) etc; and
    b. Personal empowerment in terms of personal hygiene, nutrition, sharing workloads, mobility.

2. Output 2 relates to enhancing the capacity and confidence of sangha women and their interaction with the community.
    a. Indicator 2.1 attempts to cover too many issues each of which need to be broken up into specific issues and a proxy selected. For instance, under public works, participation in NREGA could be used.
    b. Indicator 2.2 refers specifically to environmental resources (land, water, forests), however, these are state and district specific. It may be more useful to assess the sanghas support at community level on issues of gender discrimination.
    c. In line with the output, there needs to be a further indicator to assess behavioural change in social terms. This could include the level to which child marriage has been curtailed, daughters and daughters-in-law are educated etc.
3. Output 4: greater participation in formal and non-formal education
    a. While the focus is on girl's and women's education, MS needs to ensure that boys too are educated in order to meet its objectives
    b. An indicator on women's literacy needs to be added, as also on the attainment of functional and life skills
    c. Alongside influencing curriculum and TLM (4.3), there is need to change the school environment in terms of teacher attitudes, abuse etc.

4. In terms of data sources, it is important to have an independent, national-level baseline study, as state-level data are often not reliable. Data generated by different schemes too differ from each other. NPEGEL is being implemented only in EBBs. Three districts in which MS is working (Auraiya, baliakhedi block in Saharanpur and Chitrakoot block, Chitrakoot) are no longer EBBs, hence NPEGEL has been withdrawn, even though the issue of illiteracy and dropouts persist and there is a lot of demand for MSKs.

5. While the focus of the results framework is on women's capacities and empowerment, and rightly so, there is a possibility for frustration due to lack of any control over the supply side, except through continuous struggle and advocacy. There needs to be a simultaneous effort to ensure system accountability and responsiveness. For instance, enrolment drives are undertaken, but if there are no teachers in half the schools, as in Balrampur district, the purpose is defeated.

F.No.3-11/2007-EE.7
Government of India
Ministry of Human Resource Development
Department of School Education & Literacy
(MS Cell)

Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi
the 15th January 2009

Subject: - First Joint Review Mission of the Mahila Samakhya Programme with DFID.

The first Joint Review Mission for the MS programme with DFID was organized between 24th November 2008 to 4th December 2008 in six States covered under the programme viz. Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh.

2. The main objective of the JRM was to review progress in the implementation of the MS programme with respect to programme objectives and to discuss follow-up action, including capacity issues.

3. A copy of the Aide Memoire of the JRM of Mahila Samakhya containing National Report and six States Report visited are enclosed for information and necessary action at your end.

4. The receipt of the same may kindly be acknowledged.

(A.K. Tewari)
Under Secretary to the Govt. of India
Tel: 23389613

To:

1. GoI Mission Members
2. DFID Mission Members
3. Chairman ECs of MS States
4. State Project Directors of MS States
5. NRG members of MS
6. Mr. Michael Ward, DFID – India

Copy for information to:

1. Sr.PPS to Secretary (SE&L)
2. PS Joint Secretary (EE.II)
3. Dir(SM)