

**AIDE MEMOIRE**

**Indo Dutch Joint Final Review**

**of**

**Mahila Samakhya**

**December 2001**

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The task of the review mission as laid down in the Terms of Reference was to:

- Review the progress of the programme since January 1998, and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women.
- Recommend a strategy for the next phase (2003-2007) in the three concentration states, i.e. Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Kerala, consistent with the policy of Government of India (GOI) and the policy of Government of the Netherlands (GON)
- Provide an estimate of the total budget for the next phase.

The preliminary findings and joint conclusions that are presented in this aide memoire are based on field visits to districts in the 3 concentration states Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Kerala, plus discussions with the Mahila Samakhya (MS) teams of Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka, whose programmes funded by the Netherlands Government.

**Summary**

The National Programme of Mahila Samakhya (Education for Women's Equality) was launched in 1998 in pursuance of the goals of the New Education Policy (1986) as a pilot project in 10 districts of Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh with assistance from the Netherlands Government. The project was extended to Andhra Pradesh at the end of 1992 and to Kerala in 1998. The Mahila Samakhya programme is at different levels of development across and within these states, the programme has extended beyond the Dutch assisted programme in these states to cover a total of 10 states covering 9000 villages in 61 districts.

The Mahila Samakhya Programme is implemented by the National Project Director assisted by consultants at the national level have provided a vital link to facilitate issue based sharing on issues such as decentralization strategies, Sangha strengthening and federation formation. They have also facilitated the flow of information between the states. The lack of consultants at the national level has significantly impacted these processes over the past one and a half years.

The National Resource Group (NRG) has played a vital role in providing direction and developing a strong gender perspective for the processes of empowerment to be grounded soundly in the programme in the early phase. The meetings of the NRG held in different states have also facilitated greater learning. The infrequency of NRG meetings and the shift in focus of agenda to activities and achievements rather than the strategic issues to strength on the programme is noted with concern. The revitalisation of the NRG to fulfill this agenda is essential to ensure strong linkages with the women's movement as well as to provide direction to the programme through the establishment of the NRG proposed in the 10<sup>th</sup> plan period. The NRG members have also provided significant inputs to the state programmes.

The mission team is of the view that the MS in the states has been able to redefine education, informed by the women's perspective emerging from the grass roots. Processes of empowerment have been strengthened from the Sangha level upwards. With the dissolution of the Sakhi's position Sangha women's leadership is more

visible and widespread. The programme agenda has included adolescent girls in significant measure in the period under review, with specific programme initiatives designed to cater to their emerging needs.

Stronger Sanghas show an accelerated pace of learning and transference to action especially in the older districts. They have enhanced their capacities to move to new managerial and decision making roles, apart from having greater linkages with Panchyati Raj and village development initiatives. They have also sought to institutionalize their own spaces through the formation of federations and are preparing to enter into negotiations with the government through the agency of their federations as they emerge. Sanghas are affiliating at cluster level and providing support to weaker groups and to women outside their Sanghas. The weaker Sanghas on the other hand rely on the Sahayoginis and the stronger Sanghas to provide the guidance and leadership respectively for their activities. The conceptual clarity and capacity of the Sahayogini to guide and facilitate the empowerment process in the Sangha directly impinges upon the quality of the Sangha and its capacity to emerge as an empowerment forum for women at the grassroots level.

With the changing nature of Sanghas and the demand for more issue based inputs, the role of the Sahayogini has also changed from being mobilisers to being specialists and providing issue based knowledge inputs, and facilitating articulation of these from a class and gender perspective. Variation in the quality of inputs received by the Sahayoginis across the states to prepare for such a role have also hampered or facilitated such a process of collective action and institutionalization at the federation level.

The broadening base of MS, to bring existing groups under a common umbrella to address social issues related to their status, has been facilitated by other organizations and programmes too. It means that the programme outreach and intensification strategy is evolving, and it is recognized increasingly as a programme for the mobilization of women across class and caste groups as a forum for women social and political empowerment.

### **1. Impact of Mahila Samakhya on Women's Empowerment**

Both Sahayoginis and Sangha women spoke with pride about their increased courage, confidence and self-esteem, which has enabled them to strengthen their position, individually and collectively, within the family and the community at large. In the older districts of AP, Gujarat, UP and Karnataka the Sanghas have created alternative systems to address specific women's needs, i.e. Women's Courts, collective farming to ensure food security and girls residential centres for a safe learning environment. Sanghas demonstrate their increased autonomy by being far less dependent on Sahayoginis. The formation of federations highlights this process.

#### ***The impact on women's personal and family lives, autonomy and the socio cultural environment***

The lively interactions with Sangha women and Sahayoginis underline this gained confidence. By sharing experiences among themselves, women are analysing their current situation, and establishing a foundation for solidarity and greater autonomy. Women are now negotiating for more space in family and society, beyond their limited roles. They express a greater say in family affairs, from addressing their own

health needs and taking time off for meetings, to sending their daughters to school and challenging child marriages and violent relationships.

Women have become more visible, due to their increased physical as well as social mobility. Sangha women have taken up positions as Sahayogini, teacher and elected representatives at the village and block level. Local leaders are now participating in cluster networks and setting up federations. These new roles, priorities and expanded networking create a need for further education, although it remains difficult to motivate elderly women to progress beyond very basic literacy skills.

Women highlight the various changes in their lives, but are forced to keep negotiating within the family and the community for a change in power equations. However, the fact that Sanghas have emerged as credible local organisations provide space for greater autonomy for women and are valuable sources of information. Sanghas provide access to government services and resources such as pensions, houses and roads, and are also able to demand and pressurize government for quality and timely services.

### ***Creating a foundation for grass-root level women's movement***

Beyond Sanghas women come together at village or block level on various social issues. Sangha women have started rallies against alcoholism and the local sale of arrack. They have successfully taken action against discriminative social practices such as child marriages, the *jogini* and *devadasi* system, treatment of widows and single women. Women are strong advocates of girls education, participating in enrolment campaigns and fighting against child labour. Low and discriminative wages have been addressed through rallies and lengthy negotiations. Women across the States have started challenging domestic violence and public harassment. In Gujarat, UP and Karnataka they have established Women's Courts (Nari Adalats) to address these issues.

At village and block level Sanghas can operate as a strong pressure group, making use of and thus reviving traditional communication media. In the older districts in UP, AP and Karnataka this has been identified as the main objective for the formation of Federations. These initiatives create new forums women. However, it would go too far to speak of a women's movement, as it lacks the critical mass. The programme is scattered within districts and states, addressing a broad range of issues. Furthermore, the linkages with the regional, national and international women's movement have not been consolidated, though most staff and Sanghas see themselves as part of the women's movement. They recall the nationwide Sangha Mitra meeting as a profound expression of women's solidarity across state borders. However, the strategic alliances with likeminded organisations need to be improved, to strengthen the outreach of the programme.

### ***Women's political participation***

The under-representation of women in politics has been addressed by the Indian government by the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, Panchayati Raj Act. Panchayat Raj with its 33 percent women's reservation stands out as a local institution for self-governance that is able to adopt women's agenda in village development. MS successfully incorporated Panchayat Raj in its programme as a vehicle for women's autonomy in local self governance. Channelising information on the Panchayat Raj, provided understanding

and awareness, has strengthened women's presence the process of self-governance. Sangha women were motivated and supported to stand for elections, which was a learning experience in itself. A substantial number were elected as Panchayat Ward Members, Sarpanches, and Block representatives. Some villages and tribal settlements have even established all women Panchayats.

Post elections MS has been offering capacity building training for elected women representatives in all states. This exercise has helped bridging the lack of experience of women's public exposure, and at the same time created a common platform for women's issues.

Sanghas have played a significant role as activators of village Panchayats. They have participated in the general meetings (*Gram Sabhas*) and put their issues of concern on the agenda, like alcoholism, violence. Also demands have been made to set up the mandated committee on Social Justice which is meant to tackle social issues. Sanghas have become more articulate and able to influence decisions and the allocation of resources.

### ***Women's legal rights***

Overall, Sangha women have become far more aware of their legal rights and the concerned laws and regulations. Strong sanghas demonstrated their awareness in being able to address various issues relating to discriminative social practices which are legally banned practices, like child marriage, *jogini*-system, and untouchability. Women ensured implementation of certain rights such as minimum wages and land titles through collective action, negotiating with land-owners and officials. The weak Sanghas need to ally with the strong Sanghas for support to assert their rights.

Issues like domestic violence, harassment, rape, murder and caste violence have been addressed through formal and alternative justice systems. Women compel the police to act timely and effectively as they are aware of the prevailing procedures and steps that have to be taken. Several rallies have been organised by Sanghas for mobilising women from surrounding villages for issues. In Gujarat, UP and Karnataka the Sanghas have taken the initiative to set up Women's Courts, which have developed into a credible alternative justice system.

### ***Cutting across caste and class***

The focus on the poorest households resulted in a dominant representation of women from Scheduled Caste, backward and disadvantaged groups. Trying to include other women has not always been easy, as basic needs such as water, housing or health facilities tend to vary, given the fact that caste/class groups are living in geographically separated areas.

However, overall sanghas are consciously addressing the issue. Some more outspoken than others stress the common concerns, talking about having the same blood, belonging to the same gender caste. Sanghas cross the caste boundaries by eating together, holding meetings in various caste houses, introducing new customs like bathing each others babies. Upper caste women complaining about broken water pumps in lower caste areas and lower caste women supporting higher caste women in crisis highlight the solidarity among women of different background. Through consolidated efforts Mahila Samakhya has been able to establish a presence in tribal settlements, which were earlier shying away from outsiders interference.

Addressing issues of violent relationships and acts in private and public domain is seen as the most 'unifying' common concern. The alternative justice system of Nari Adalats demonstrates this with its broad outreach, also catering to the needs of muslim women and upper castes.

### ***Growth, pace and emerging trends***

Meetings with older Sanghas have revealed a change in roles of Sahayoginis and Sanghas over time. Sahayoginis who used to be the implementers of the programme, have now become facilitators, who are more specialised in certain areas. Sangha women have become more autonomous and demonstrate acquired management skills by organising their own activities, only calling on the Sahayogini for backstopping. As Sanghas become stronger and stronger, they adapt quicker to new roles and reach out to neighbouring villages to help other women to establish their own Sanghas.

A significant development is that women are creating alternative systems to address their needs. In line with the process of acquiring greater autonomy sanghas have started the formation of Federations. These networks of clusters of villages have evolved as forums with a larger voice and presence at the crucial block level to articulate women's concerns on issues like violence, health, *Panchayat* interface, education, savings and credit. *Nari Adalats* have emerged a gender sensitive alternative justice system that is supportive by the community.

MS is gradually broadening its scope. Starting with older women it now has created a space for participation of younger women and adolescent girls. Separate *Cheli Sangha's* and *Kishori Sanghas* focus on adolescent girls' issues like health, sex education and harassment. Given the common practice of girls shifting to their in-laws place after marriage, these girls are potential expansion agents, taking along their experiences. Those who stay back in their own village, as is the practice in Kerala, can strengthen the existing Sanghas.

The mobilising potential of MS has been recognised by various government departments, which call on the Sangha women for implementation support. This offers the Sanghas an opportunity to tackle the shortcomings of government programmes from within. The district functionaries supplement that, given the increasing requests for gender inputs. However, Mahila Samakhya should be aware of the danger of becoming a service delivery machine.

Expansion of the programme is a must to ensure a more visible presence as a process oriented, bottom up approach. Although the programme has expanded in most states during the past five years, both in a planned way and voluntarily through Sanghas' own initiative. The ground reality of numerous SHGs and women's schemes calls for a new approach. In Andhra Pradesh the Sahayoginis are now successfully working with existing SHGs who are united in addressing social issues, at the same time strengthening the group dynamics. Kerala has more or less the same approach, although its entry-point is training for economic self-reliance.

## **2. Education**

The National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986 brought a conceptual shift from equal educational opportunities for women to education for women's equality. The potential of education as an agent of change in the status of women came to be recognised.

MS has engaged with rural women from socio-economically disadvantaged communities in the most backward areas of districts with low women's literacy. Sangha women with their involvement in local/regional social issues such as violence against women, *joginis/devadasi cult*, alcoholism, child marriage, wage labour, Panchayati Raj, health required specialized curricula. Each state has developed modules/materials within the local perspective and context for enhancing women's education and the MS perspective. These were shared during the Sangha Mitra Workshop at National level, in 2000.

There has been a tremendous upsurge in the demand for education - for information and knowledge by the Sangha women for themselves and school education for their children, particularly girls. Sanghas have actively participated in school enrolment drives, become members of Village Education Committees (VECs), School Education Committees (SECs) and School Development and Management Committees (SDMCs) in UP, AP and Karnataka to ensure the enrolment and retention of children in schools and monitor student and teacher attendance across the States. They are playing an active role in holding the system accountable. MS gender training modules have been extensively used by DPEP in UP and Karnataka as well as teaching learning materials. In UP a Government Order was issued to enable older women and adolescent girls (from MSKs) to appear for the class five examinations.

A strong thrust towards addressing the needs of girls' education within the MS has emerged. The educational needs of never enrolled and drop out girls have thus become a focus for MS. Short term bridge courses, such as *Bal Kendras*, *Bal Mitra Kendras*, *Cheli sanghas* and *Kishori Kendras*, are being used to facilitate children to be mainstreamed.

- The Mahila Shikshan Kendras (MSKs) have reached out to drop out girls with innovative curriculum models catering to their needs (family life skills as well as regular academic curricula) within a safe learning environment. Some States have recognised the need to provide teacher training support for the teachers/wardens of the MSKs. More professional support for these teachers is required for better transaction of the curriculum. MSKs fill a niche need and should be up scaled, especially for girls in remote and tribal habitations. MSKs should stay positioned within MS with future links to District Resource Centres (envisaged in the new phase), influencing mainstream education and catering to continuing education of Sangha women.

Literacy in MS involves the process of questioning, analyzing and seeking solutions. Women have joined literacy centres for literacy and numeracy skills in the context of their new understanding of political participation, paralegal initiatives, Federation processes and holistic health. They do need to access post literacy and Continuing Education materials to continue their education and not relapse into illiteracy. The programme should ensure that girls' education is not at the cost of women's education. Sanghas demands for education increase as they move towards issue based Federations. Neo literate materials need to be accessed and disseminated more widely. A stronger interface with Continuing Education would strengthen the literacy for women.

### **3. MS linkages with government and women's movement as resource agency and seeking support with others**

The mainstreaming of gender in national Development Policy constitutes an integral part of the PFA. MS UP drafted the State Policy for Women through extensive consultation with government agencies, NGOs and grassroots women. It has thus played a critical role in mainstreaming gender within the State Policy for Women. The state of AP has a Women's Development Policy.

However MS is yet to strengthen and extend these links and facilitate a more coherent and effective collaboration with the women's movement in the states. However, the government and NGOs draw upon MS gender training inputs and capacities. The decentralisation policy of Kerala state are yet to be impacted by MS interventions at Panchayat level. Members of MS Karnataka interfaced in the development of the Gender Development Index (GGI) of the Human Development Report, 1999. At a micro level, MS has drawn on individuals of the women's movement and networked with grassroots organisations to build strong pressure groups for advocacy and lobbying.

However, MS on its own does not interact adequately with the women's movement in India. The women's movement representatives in the form of NRG members are fewer and their skills are drawn upon in much smaller measures. Women from however this practice seems to peter out. Women from strong Sanghas however see themselves as a grassroots women's movement, but are yet to build up a critical mass. They are aware of their rights and have the ability to operate as a pressure group in a network with other sanghas.

#### ***The added value of the MS programme in GOI-RNE's sectoral approach***

MS works with women from the most marginalised sections of the society often poorest of the poor, scheduled castes and tribes (SC/ST and OBCs), illiterate and uneducated located in the interior villages of the most backward blocks of the districts. This coincides with the need based, sectoral approach of RNE comprising poverty, gender, environment, institutional development and good governance (GAVIM). The basic needs of women in all states are defined by water. Protection, conservation and regeneration of natural resources have direct implications on livelihood of women and emerge as a key agenda of the Sanghas. In AP, UP and Gujarat women have been part of Watershed Committees and their experience is invaluable for the formulation of community-based projects with a gender perspective.

Recognising the strength of MS training capabilities the GoKerala and AP have envisaged MS to provide gender inputs for future RNE assisted projects. Sangha women in UP, AP and Karnataka have sought to influence the modalities of development at grassroot level. While Gujarat MS has moved away from a process oriented, empowerment approach becoming a delivery mechanism. A conscious effort is necessary to resist even directives from central and/or state level as a vehicle for programme delivery only. While Federations may choose to enter into such roles and need to be facilitated in their negotiations for the same. MS programme should remain rooted in facilitating awareness, analysis and action.

The Mission notices that although State Ministries recognise MS capacity for gender training, the Ministry of Education seems not yet convinced. In Karnataka the education training materials are developed addressing issues common for adolescent girls, which could be shared more widely to avoid duplication within or outside MS. In AP the expectation is that MS will implement more innovative programmes for women and girls' education at the state department level. At the district level,



however MS has not been involved in the development of the new literacy primers for Akshara Kranti.

Linkages are clear at the Block/ Mandal and Taluka level through the membership of the District Development Office once a month planning and review meeting. In AP the Mandal Development Officer visits the Sanghas to get feedback on development issues and seeks support of the federation and programme for awareness campaigns on women's issues and child rights.

### ***MS convergence with Government and NGO activities***

MS is basically an NGO located within the Government structure. The added value is that it should influence government policies regarding gender and empowerment. MS is seen as a vehicle to influence, as it has been part of massive campaigns like the Pulse Polio programme in all States, and acted swiftly in the delivery of emergency relief of food supplies in the quake affected areas of Gujarat. While MS here is a partner in implementation of programmes with Chetna as the lead NGO in the MOH/Family Welfare/ World Bank (WB) programme. MS UP has gone to scale and itself acts as the Mother NGO. Although partnerships may be mutually beneficial and enhancing empowerment of a subaltern group they do not necessarily coincide with MS perspectives. Spreading MS activities to implement programmes needs to be done with caution and based specifically on women's own analysis of needs priorities and strategies otherwise MS stands the danger of being reduced to a mobilisation role for numerous target oriented interventions.

### ***Child labour***

MS has no mandate to address issues of child labour, however Sangha women's concern regarding the education of their children has led to an intense involvement in enrolment campaigns, thus contributing to a reduction in child labour. In AP women have raised the child labour issue out of concern for the health of their girls working in the cotton fields. They have articulated the rights of children in mass drives and have been influential in negotiating with landlords and government for reduction in child labour. Through consolidated action the Sangha women have also changed the cropping pattern from cotton to food crops. In Karnataka and AP young girls are prevented from being dedicated to a deity (devadasi system), which is a form of child prostitution. The Bal Mitra Kendras in AP and Karnataka address the education for children who work, while in Gujarat linkages are forged with NGOs to continue education for children of pastoral migratory communities. MS has no policy to fight for eradication of against child labour, but as and when the need arises facilitates Sangha women to take up the issue. However MS helps Sangha women to enable their daughters to access education.

## **4. Monitoring & Reporting**

MS has been producing a fairly high volume of monthly, quarterly, biannual and annual reports, which capture all the activities being performed within the programme. Reflection and analysis on these reports is carried out in day to day interaction among programme functionaries. There is however a need to add greater analytical depth so that reporting captures not only the itinerary of events but assesses problems, hurdles and learnings. Follow up on previous reports is not integral to the reporting process, it is also advised to include action taken component as a standard feature.

Besides regular reports, documentation in MS covers a wide spectrum, which includes process documentation, workshop reports, exchange visit reports, special events

reports like *melas* etc. Some of these have immediate use and therefore have shorter shelf life whereas others have potential of long term use and would benefit a wider community. There is a need for greater systematization, analysis, indexing and utilization of these for future planning as well as for wider dissemination.

## **5. Organizational Structure**

Coordination of the programme through a National Office lends a National Identity to the programme. This identity is helpful at the state level in not only providing its visibility but also in negotiating space and autonomy for itself. NRG members provide guidance to the programme as EC members, at NRG meetings and as and when States request for their services. However, it was observed that not all the states are able to seek their guidance. Thus there is a need that National Office facilitates State-NRG interface more actively.

Majority of the representation in EC is either Government's ex-officio members or their nominees. It would be in the best interest of the programme in order to fortify its autonomous nature that the local non-government representation is increased.

In case of some positions at the state and district level there is an overlap and lack of clarity in the respective roles which though may lend flexibility in the short term but it could cause problems in the long term. There is a need to review and rationalize the job descriptions and roles.

### *Human Resources*

MS has been able to carve a special position for itself and make its presence felt on the ground due to its dedicated personnel. However, there is a serious problem of staff turnover. Honoraria and travel allowance were fixed in 1997 (five years ago) and have since not been revised. This is leading to serious morale and retention issues. Programme stands the risk of losing its momentum and jeopardizing its gains if this issue is not handled immediately. There is a need to benchmark MS compensation and employee benefit practices to other programmes to be able to attract and retain proficient personnel. The recommended revisions should also incorporate provisions to account for general inflation as well as performance based incentives.

MS personnel especially Sahayoginis work under extremely difficult conditions, which also raises safety and security, concerns. These issues should be closely looked into and organizational arrangements, which could be in the form of insurance-cover, etc. Mission noted that some of the states have instituted medical benefits and PF for their employees, i.e. Karnataka.

One-year-contract system of employment leads to insecurity in employees. There is a need for permanency of tenure, however to address the issue of an eventuality when funding to MS may stop, the contract of employment should be restricted to the period of the programme and also subject to availability of funds from the GOI.

Whereas there is regular interaction between levels of the MS functionaries which is quite facilitative in achieving organizational objectives collaboratively, a formal personnel appraisal system should be put in place, on the basis of which further renewal of contract, promotions and all other personnel decisions should be based. Annual employee appraisal should also feed into the Training Needs Assessment, which should further feed into Annual Plan in accordance with States' strategic objectives. Wherever induction into the organization is through an on-the-job process, it has been found to be insufficient. It is felt that there is a need for formal induction and orientation programme when new personnel are recruited or when a person is promoted and even when new states are covered by the Programme.

There is a need to specially account for and make room for additional administrative resources whenever additional projects like UNDP project Samata Dharani in Andhra Pradesh and Swa Shakti in Gujarat are taken up.

Considering the expansion of the programme and the complexities that come with it, it would be helpful if skills of MS personnel are upgraded in documentation, strategic planning including MIS, and basic budgeting process & financial management skills. Greater financial skills would not only enable informed management of programme through greater understanding of finance-physical linkages but would also contribute in substantive terms as then better finance appreciation would also be transferred to sangha women.

## **6. Planning & Budgeting**

MS Planning has evolved over the years, a bottom up mechanism, within the overall principle framework and inviolables of the programme, has been institutionalized. An extremely detailed annual activity plan is drawn up which feeds into the annual budgeting process. There is a need to further strengthen this process. The state at present follows the national guidelines (objectives) for the preparation of their budgets. It is recommended that they frame state level objectives, which would then become the basis for planning activities, budgeting, analyzing progress and variances. The progress as well as the monitoring can become more focussed and more state specific.

The annual budget is used by the National Office in conjunction with other financial & accounting factors to release funds to States; it is also used by the state and district accountants to keep check over expense variances. It is recommended that an activity and amount wise variance analysis be carried out in all states. This will facilitate better management & information flow and contribute towards improvements in future planning and budgeting.

## **7. Finance & Taxation**

*Accounts:* Accounting practices across the MS States are professional and satisfactory. A national level workshop was convened for accountants of all states and these practices can be attributed to that process. However, there is still a need to standardize financial reporting across all States. Disclosures in the accounting statement should also be standardized.

*Reporting to RNE from GOI:* Annual statements received by RNE from GOI reflect expenditure on MS programme. The said expense is fully borne out of funds remitted by RNE towards the MS programme. It is advised that the Societies, which receive RNE funds, should reflect advances, liabilities and bank balances on account of MS Programme separately in the audited balance sheets.

*Legal requirements:* Legally all the Societies should file Income Tax Returns. There is a lack of clarity with respect to this across the States. Some of the States are filing returns regularly. A few States have obtained exemption from the competent authorities whereas the remaining are not fulfilling their legal obligations. It would be advisable to comply with all requirements or seek exemptions from doing so as the respective MS societies may choose. This process should be coordinated and facilitated by the center.

*Funds Flow:* The flow of funds from Center to States usually takes two months from the date of receipt of 'request for funds' to final issue of draft. Factors like the amount requested, utilization certificates, audited statements and rate of utilization are used by the center to determine the amount to be released. In the interest of transparency and

to enable States to plan their funds in a better way it is advised that all States should be informed about the process followed at the center in adequate detail.

*Payments:* It is a good practice in MS that all payments above Rs 500.00 (Rs.1000 in some states) are made by cheques. Though some States are not following this rule. It is recommended that all the honoraria and stipends should be paid by bank transfer or cheques and all other payments above Rs 500.00 should also be paid by cheques.

*Purchase:* Purchase process adopted by MS is similar to that being followed by government. Considering the fact that it is time consuming and imposes unnecessary burden on the programme it should be simplified. It is advised that the process should be simplified for at least purchases worth below Rs. 20,000 without compromising on transparency.

*Bank Accounts:* Usually District Offices and State Office have separate bank accounts. At a few places it is not happening. At these locations it is recommended that separate bank accounts should be maintained for the State Office as well as District Offices.

*Idle Funds:* Some MS societies invest their idle funds in Fixed Deposits, whenever funds available are more than the projected expenses for the next month. There is a need to standardize this practice and idle funds should be invested in all States (and in all districts) in Fixed Deposits of 46 / 60 / 90 days according to requirement of funds.

*Community Contribution:* Current accounting system does not report the contributions received from community, which become available to the programme. The budgeting also does not keep in mind resources that would be available from this source. This also contributes to budget surpluses currently observed across the States. Community contribution accounting would make the budgeting process more realistic.

*Future Budgeting:* The budget for the next phase cannot be accurately estimated currently as programme processes and structures for the future are under revision. These have not been defined accurately and exactly as yet. However for the future budget it is recommended that previous budget be adjusted for factors like i) proposed salary increase ( $\leq 100\%$ ); ii) inflation (5% per annum – 1997 onwards); and iii) additional resources required due to the new structures that are proposed (National, State, District Resource Centers). This exercise has specially kept support to federations out of its purview. Roles and responsibilities of federations as well as plan for their long-term sustainability are pre-requisites to suggest any kind of support.

*Computerization* Given the large volume of data likely to be involved in planning, budgeting, monitoring, reporting and accounts processes it is recommended that these processes should be gradually computerized in a phased manner. The process of computerization should not create a parallel substructure within the organization but should be adopted by the existing management towards professionalisation of their work. Some of these require substantial capacity building inputs and is an area, which can be explored for Technical Assistance.

## **8. The next phase**

### *Rationale for a new phase*

In the course of its long journey of over 12 years M.S has emerged as a resource center on women issues. The experience of the programme has enabled the building of specific capacities and has forged wide-ranging partnerships across sectoral programmes of the government and grassroots organisations. It is realised

that there is a need to share successes and failures in the field, the process of effective mobilisation and organising women to increase their life-skills and self-confidence. They can then participate and influence at different levels of the power structures. MS experiences can be shared to enhance the learning of other organisations and people's efforts towards women's empowerment. For this a gender Resource Centre has been visualised at the State level in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

Such a Centre will help programmemes to mainstream gender issues in various sectors of development, and amongst others, developing roll-back and outreach strategies for the programmeme while ensuring women centred / block level institutions for good governance, social justice and economic sustainability. Moreover MS will be able to assist Sanghas to realise their objectives through intensive capacity building inputs for socio-cultural, political, economic and physical autonomy.

The National Resource Centre for Women proposed in the 10<sup>th</sup> plan period is envisaged as an autonomous organisation which plays a role in developing and overseeing policy interventions towards gender equality, drawing upon and strengthening the state and district resource centres and the federations of grassroots women. The National Resource Centre would facilitate the exchange of experiences and learnings across the states and the generation of new knowledge, to strengthen the programmeme at the grassroots level as well as to inform other educational efforts in the country. Rooted in the experience of the programmeme, this would also serve to inform and link with other programmemes for education to strengthen their gender perspective.

### ***State specific strategies recommended***

*a) In states of RNE priority.*

#### ***Andhra Pradesh***

The mission recommends that:

The programmeme be expanded to new groups in the existing districts, in old and new blocks/mandals

Strategic inputs be provided in 3-4 new districts in collaboration with other initiatives for women's development such as the District Poverty Initiatives Project (DPIP) to strengthen social and gender inputs and organisation for women's empowerment in a phased manner.

The expansion of MSKs at district and block level with enhanced outreach and turnover of larger number of girls, along with an agenda to cater to women's literacy needs.

Facilitation of the federations as they emerge in the seven districts and establishment of a State Resource Center and district resource centers, based on the emergence of women's federation, to provide issue based support to them and to a larger clientele.

#### ***Kerala***

The programmeme in Kerala is recent and is implemented in two blocks of two districts, and rapid expansion is warranted in the two districts where the programmeme is already operating. The mission however hesitates to recommend expansion to other districts until the programmeme autonomy in keeping with the principles and non-negotiables laid down are ensured.

Once these factors are ensured, the programme may be extended to two new districts, apart from intensification in the present districts including a tribal district, where women's literacy & development indicators are low.

The programme needs to work in a more focused way to strengthen alliances with women members of panchayats to create a stronger constituency of women.

In a 2 –3 years period the programme can develop a Resource Center For Women. The process of providing gender training to other organisations could begin even earlier, provided that priority is given to strengthening programme perspectives and processes in the area of operation.

The programme also needs to develop stronger links with networks for women's empowerment in the region.

### ***Gujarat***

A special focus status is called for in Gujarat, given that even after twelve years of programme implementation:

- there is insufficient and patchy evidence of progress.
- The empowerment of women at the Sangha level even in older districts is inadequate.
- There is insufficient conceptual clarity & understanding of the key principles of the programme amongst project staff.

The overall consolidation of the programme needs to take place before the new phase is planned. The mission recommends therefore to field a task force within a three month period with a mandate to formulate a Plan of Action with the team in Gujarat and the Government of India to strengthen the programme to meet its objectives, to be achieved by the end of 2002. The task force should also monitor the progress of the Plan of Action activities based on the achievement of which a new phase may be considered.

### *b) States which do not fall into the purview of RNE priority*

#### ***Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka***

A process of consolidation needs to be supported focusing on the gains of the programme. The proposed State Resources Centers need to consolidate the learnings of the programme and to inform the initiatives at the state and national levels through its linkages with the NRCW towards the integration of gender.

The emerging federations in the districts require support to be provided for District resource Centres to be able them to sustain issue based inputs to them and to others on women's issues as well as to support the networking and linking of federations and their experiences with other developmental initiatives in the region.

A part of U.P. recently became an independent state, Uttaranchal . M.S. programme is running in 4 districts here,(Tehri, Garhwal, Pauri and Nainital) of which Tehri is the oldest funded by the Netherlands. Since sahayoginis are carrying out the programme, the involvement of the SPO in UP should be taken over by an independent unit in the new state of Uttranchal.

Although the terms of reference for the mission lay down that the mission should recommend a strategy for the next phase for the three concentration states ie Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Kerala, however the mission team is of the opinion that the Netherlands Government should consider support for the National Level Programme of the Mahila Samakhya and to the National Resource Centre for Women, to enable

the formulation of National level strategies and development of alliances based on the experiences of the Dutch assisted programmeme.

*Information Flow to the RNE*

Mechanisms and terms for information flows to the RNE are contained in the Mahila Samakhya Ninth Plan Document of the Mahila Samakhya (1997-2002) which provides the Guidelines for Project implementation. The document states" as this is a 100% externally assisted project(Dutch Assistance) the six monthly and annual reports are to be furnished to them". This needs to be adhered to in order to facilitate information flow as well as in the interest of the programmeme

