

**ALTERNATIVE AVENUES  
TO WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND EDUCATION FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY**

Report of the second Inco-Dutch mission to review the Mahila Samakhya Programme, an education programme for women's equality of the National Government of India, 29/09/1991 - 31/10/1991.

**PART ONE: GENERAL REPORT**

January 1992

Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India

Directorate General for International Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of The Netherlands

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Mission wishes to express its appreciation for the valuable support given by the National Programme Director, the State Directors, the District Coordinators, their Resource Persons and other staff functionaries of the Mahila Samakhya Programme, and by the Royal Netherlands Embassy, and particularly the Secretary for Women and Development. Their enthusiasm for and their commitment to the programme, the information they have made available, as well as their availability for briefings, meetings, discussions etc. have been a constant source of inspiration. In addition they were concerned about our well-being, took care of many of our practical arrangements and accommodated to our requests for changes in the programme, for this we are very grateful.

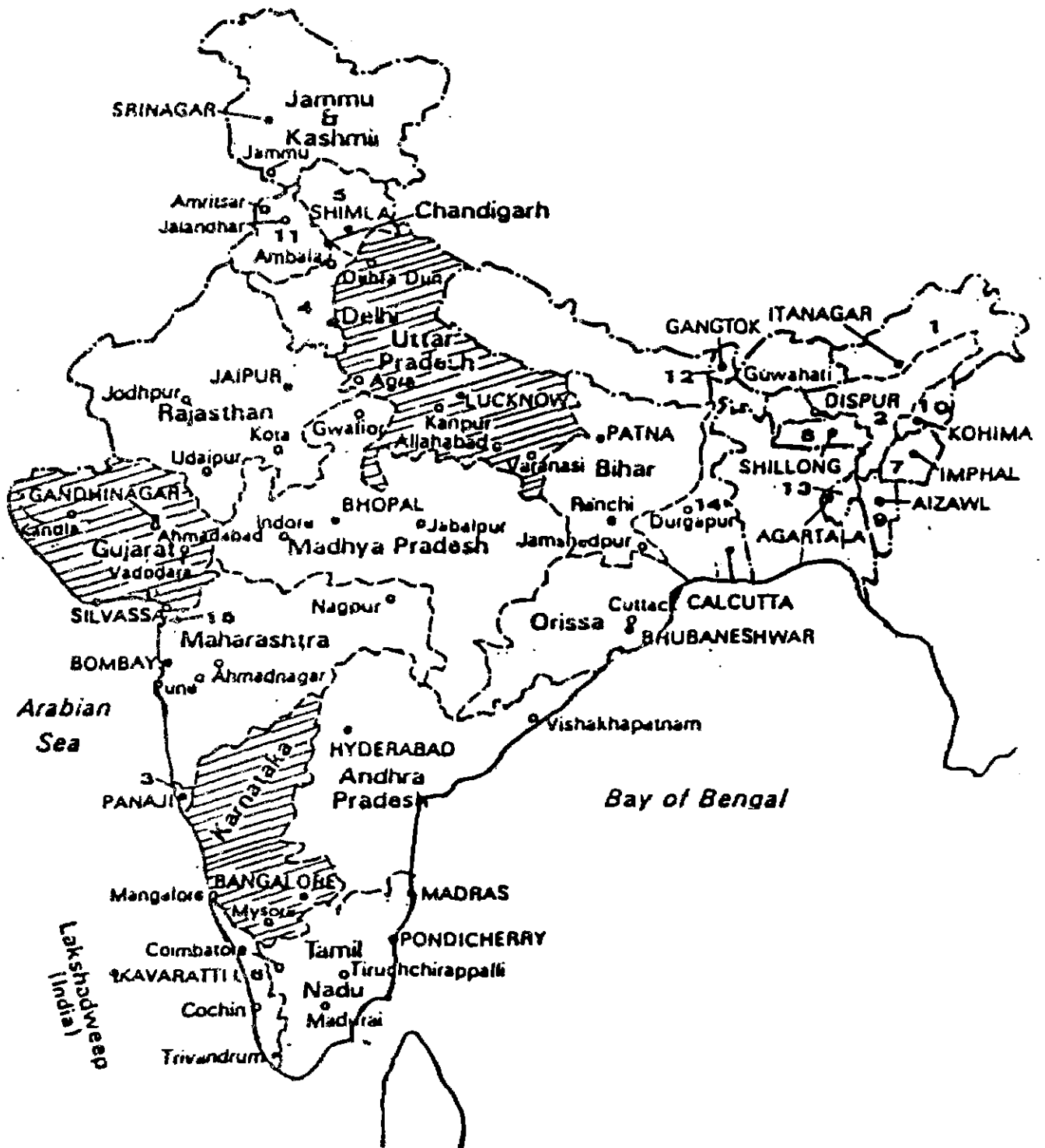
The mission would also like to thank the Secretaries of Education of the National Government, and of the State Governments of Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh for their attention and their supportive comments. Our gratitude extends to the other functionaries at the State, District and local levels, as well as to the representatives of the governmental and non-governmental agencies and individuals who have participated in meetings and discussions with the members of the mission.

Last but not least our appreciation and gratitude goes to the sahayogini's, sakhi's and sangha women, who were willing to share with us some of their own experiences from their participation in the Mahila Samakhya Programme. We sincerely hope that our interruptive presence did not disrupt the process they find themselves involved in. Their contribution to our understanding has been extremely valuable for the completion of our task. We surely wish that the outcome of this review will help to further support and strengthen the Mahila Samakhya Programme in order to help it fulfil its promise regarding the generation of an approach to education that leads towards women's equality.

January, 1992

EDUCATION FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY PROGRAMME:

UTTAR PRADESH, GUJARAT, KARNATAKA



**EDUCATION FOR WOMEN'S EQUAITY**  
**REVIEW OF THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME**  
**29/09/1991 - 31/10/1991**

**MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**New Delhi, January 1992**

**EDUCATION FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY**  
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**MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

GENERAL

The overall objective of this Mission was to:

- review the progress of the Mahila Samakhya Programme from February 1990 onwards and to determine the degree of accomplishments of the objectives;
- to appraise the revised document for the period 1991-1996 and to recommend changes and or improvements.

The aspects to be addressed relate to the empowerment strategies of the programme, the formation of the Mahila Sangha's and their activities, training, innovations in education, documentation, evaluation and monitoring, organisation and management structures and the financial aspects.

The extension of the programme

The Mission explicitly wants to stipulate that the Mahila Samakhya Programme should be extended for the coming five years, according to the Revised Project Document (September 1991), including the planned phase-wise extension of the programme into 10 additional districts.

Main conclusions

The unanimous conclusion of the Mission is that the Mahila Samakhya Programme is an exceptional and excellent programme in terms of its design, its conceptual frame-work, its strategy for reaching women and encouraging them to plan and take collective initiatives to change their situation, its flexibility to be responsive to local conditions and its potential for educational innovations.

The Revised Project Document establishes the MSP identity as an educational programme by linking the educational initiatives that have emerged so far to existing schemes under the Department of Education (AE, NFE, EFA) and by creating new women centered educational facilities.

The Mission is highly impressed by the achievements of the Programme during the two and a half years of its existence, given the concrete reality of women's lives under adverse conditions of extreme poverty and an often hostile and violent environment.

The assumption that empowering women will lead to a growing demand for education is confirmed by the fact that in all districts women have come up with requests for literacy.

The MSP staff has been successful in establishing its credibility among poor rural women, among the local communities, and with local government bureaucracies. The MSP has managed to build a local infra-structure of very committed female village activists, staff and resource persons, as well as a wide network of cooperating supporters. The programme has taken root in more than 1000 villages in 10 districts of Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. The impact of the programme reaches far beyond the Mahila Sangha's. It affects the husbands and families of the sangha members. Children, youth groups and gradually the whole community seems to become involved, as well as local authorities and organizations. Many resource persons, trainers and consultants have had to adapt their approaches and programmes to make it more suitable and relevant for illiterate village women.

### POINTS OF ATTENTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Sensitization and mobilization of the support structure

Familiarization and sensitization of government and non-government organizations at different levels has to remain a priority for the coming years. The Mission has observed that the following issues need serious attention in the coming future:

- how to deal with economic and legal issues, women come up with, and how to respond to social violence and atrocities against women;
- what is the role of the MSP in the overall support system;
- its role in mobilizing and sensitizing through net-working and cooperation with other agencies;
- its advocacy role: how the MSP can become an effective channel through which the voices of rural women can be heard and responded to at the level of policy making and implementation.

#### Non-negotiable principles

One of the strong assets of the MSP is the inherent flexibility in terms of its design, implementation structure and content. Another feature is the lack of time bound and quantitative targets, which is in line with the process approach of the programme. The Mission sees the formulation of the so-called "NON-NEGOTIABLES", as provided in the Revised Project Document as extremely useful. They reflect the basic philosophy of Mahila Samakhya and provide the Programme with a set of unifying principles and guarantees against compromising its basic philosophy and strategy. Similar guiding principles can be formulated for other aspects of the programme, like the cooperation with other agencies and the education component. Different situations or levels of implementation may need a slightly different set or translation of these principles.

## Education

During the first two years attention was focussed on the development of an appropriate infra structure, the design and implementation of basic training and the establishment and strengthening of Mahila Sanghas. The educational component so far has received less systematic attention. This is understandable as in the context of the MSP literacy and numeracy are considered as skills which facilitate and strengthen the process of women's empowerment and not as empowering instruments on their own account.

Under the MSP a number of experimental approaches to literacy and other exciting types of learning, like the creative learning centres, have been initiated. However, some of the approaches developed so far still miss a well thought out strategy with a long term perspective.

It is recommended that a more systematic sharing of experiences takes place within the MS Programme in order to develop common strategies and approaches for the generation of participatory methods and gender-sensitive materials.

The Mission fully appreciates the MSP focus on building a strong foundation for the empowerment of rural women at village level during the initial phase of the programme. But as a logical consequence of the evolving processes the demands made by women on the support systems will change and become stronger. This means that the MSP will have to more clearly define its role in relation to the overall support structure and strengthen its identity as an educational programme.

The Revised Project Document anticipates this development by e.g the creation of new women centred educational facilities like the envisaged Mahila Shiksha Kendra's and by the establishment of Resource Units for the development of gender-sensitive learning approaches and materials. However the Mission is of the opinion that the MSP needs to develop its basic learning philosophy with a long term perspective, which gives direction to the creation of innovative, interactive learning methods and the generation of gender-sensitive learning materials. Furthermore, some clear guiding principles need to be developed to give coherence to the evolution of the educational component of the MSP and to guarantee its continuous commitment to the process of women's empowerment.

Regarding the idea of establishing Educational Resource Units, as mentioned in the Revised project document, the Mission is doubtful whether these should be established at District level. It would imply the establishment of 23 DRU's within a period of five year and possibly unnecessary duplication. State level Resource Centers with mobile units to support the districts, as well the appointment of a resource person for the education component at the DIU's seems to the Mission a more feasible option to consider.

## Training and Human Resources

The Mission is impressed by the tremendous impact of the training on the personal lives of those involved in the programme. The video's made in the three states show moving examples of how women have experienced and valued their changes.

Due attention should be given to the training needs of the present staff, including the DIU functionaries. In view of the broadening perspectives for the future of the programme, the expansion and diversification of activities in different directions, the Mission is of the opinion that the MSP will have to invest in strengthening its human resources base.

A carefully planned human resources strategy will be required at District as well as State level in conjunction with a strategy for training and education inputs. The Human Resources Strategy should take into account the changing needs of the programme and its extension into more villages and new districts.

#### Strengthening the DIU's and State Programme Offices

The Mission is concerned about the fact that (except for Karnataka) most of the DIU's and State Programme Offices are at present under-staffed. The present situation with regard to a number of the district programmes demands the strengthening of the DIU's and State Programme Offices. Highest priority should be given to filling up the existing vacancies by appointing:

- District Coordinators where they have not been appointed,
- additional Resource Persons for the DIU's for the educational components,
- Assistant Project Directors and Resource Persons at State Offices to plan specific programme components.

It is also recommended to look into the possibility of appointing an Assistant National Programme Director within the Department of Education.

#### The expansion of the programme

The Mission is in favour of a phase-wise expansion of the programme into new districts. Where needed priority should be given to the consolidation and strengthening of the district programmes, rather than on expanding too fast. The pace of the area wise expansion will depend to a great extent on the capacity of the existing infra-structure, the availability and the training of the human resources and on the cooperation from the side of the State Governments, local governments and the voluntary agencies that operate in the intended areas of expansion.

#### Legal support

In all districts as well as at State level issues have come up which relate to the legal system or have legal implications, e.g. violence against women, land and settlement disputes, labour regulations and wages, property rights, inheritance laws, registration of sangha's, the legitimacy of official documents like contracts, statutes etc.

The Mission favours the set-up of a strong legal support network of committed legal experts at district as well as at State level, whose advice and assistance can be mobilized if the need arises.

The Mission recommends that the legal implications of sangha registration in relation to ownership or access to assets acquired by the sangha will be looked into.



### Evaluation

The Mission is of the opinion that important lessons can be drawn from the success of the internal review experience in U.P and would like to propose to devise an in-built or internal evaluation structure which is not too distant from the environment in which the programme is implemented. Regarding the internal and external evaluations the Mission suggests the following:

- to assign the task of coordinating and facilitating the internal evaluations to a staff member at each of the State Programme Offices. These coordinators will form the MSP evaluation panel, with the task to develop qualitative parameters to monitor the process and to produce an annual report;
- external review and support missions should preferably take place on a regular yearly basis. The function is to support the programmes. They should be low-key and need not necessarily be of Indo-Dutch composition. They could consist of Indian experts only and a certain continuity in the composition of the mission teams is recommended;
- a joint Indo-Dutch evaluation Mission should take place every two to three years. Continuity in the composition of the mission teams on both sides is recommended.

### Voluntary Agencies

Regarding the relation of the MSP with cooperating voluntary agencies, the Mission favours a more formalized approach. Any working relation should be based on a contract in which terms and conditions are clearly spelt out. NGO's that have been sub-contracted by the MSP should not have delegated members in the District Resource Groups.

### Mahila Samakhya Societies

In the General Council of the Mahila Samakhya Societies, Government Officials form the minority. The Mission is of the opinion that this is a wise decision as it gives the government a much more free role to play. As far as the Executive Committee is concerned, the Mission is in favour of individual members over Government ex-officio members. District Coordinators however should not be part of the E.C. as it confuses the managerial clarity.

### National Resource Unit

The Mission strongly supports the establishment of a Mahila Samakhya Resource Unit at National level, according to the proposal in the Revised Project Document. Special emphasis should be given to the following tasks of the MSRU:

- to function as a clearing house, to facilitate collation and dissemination of information and experience and to respond to the information needs;
- to initiate inter-State coordination;
- to coordinate internal and external reviews;
- to organise workshops on the documentation needs of the programme.

### National Resource Group

The Mission is of the opinion that the function of the National Resource Group as a sounding board should be maintained. However, it does not agree with the proposal to give the NRG the role of a Steering Committee as well. The Mission recommends the constitution of a separate Steering Committee out of a cross section of the NRG members.

### Finances

Unit costs not necessarily make the financial system more flexible, especially not when the MSS cannot exceed the limits presented in these unit costs. The Mission recommends to base the unit costs on an estimation of the average costs and to indicate the lower and upper limits.

In the Revised Project Document the budget for certain items have been increased, but most have not. The Mission recommends that an inflation correction is added to all budget items. The total budget for the 1992-1997 period amounts to Rs 443 million or approximately Dfl. 33,2 million (at a rate of Rs 1: Dfl. 0,075).

Experience has shown that some unit-costs have been too low, such as the amount for the sangha hut. A revision based on an estimation of the real costs is possibly required.

The Mission recommends that special funds will be created for the development of innovative learning methods and materials. This also includes the production of video films and other audio-visual aids.

In the overall budget the impression is created that the Management costs are very high in relation to the other items. This impression is wrong. The Mission recommends to bring budget items, which are clearly activity costs, but placed under management costs, under the heading where they belong to.

In order to make the MSS financially viable, it is suggested that the interest accrued on deposits will remain in and can be used by the Society.

It is proposed that after the side-letter for the Revised Project Proposal has been signed, to provide an advance amount of Dfl. 3 million as working capital, in view of the increased scale of the project.

In view of the need for strengthening the human resources capacities of the programme staff, particularly at the district levels, the Mission would like to recommend to the Government of the Netherlands to allocate an extra amount of Dfl. 150.000 annually under the technical assistance programme for

- study tours in the Region,
- international exchange and attendance of workshops, conferences etc.
- participation in up-grading courses,
- technical support missions by Dutch or other experts (if requested),
- exchange visits from fellows from educational institutions in the Netherlands (educationalists, teachers etc.).

The Indian Government willing to host the visitors and to provide accomodation in the field.

## ABBREVIATIONS

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| AE    | Adult Education  |
| ASTRA | Application of Science and Technology to Rural Areas                                       |
| DIU   | District Implementation Unit   |
| DRG   | District Resource Group  |
| DRU   | District Resource Unit   |
| EFA   | Education For All  |
| EC    | Executive Committee (of the Mahila Samakhya State Society)                                 |
| GOI   | Government of India  |
| GON   | Government of The Netherlands  |
| ICDS  | Integrated Child Development Services  |
| JSN   | Jana Shiksan Nilayam (library/community education centre for 4-5 villages)                 |
| JRY   | Jawahar Rozgar Yogjana (rural employment scheme administered through the local Panchayats) |
| MHRD  | Ministry of Human Resource Development   |
| MS    | Mahila Samakhya  |
| MSK   | Mahila Shiksan Kendra (residential centre for women's education)                           |
| MSP   | Mahila Samakhya Programme  |
| MSS   | Mahila Samakhya Society  |
| NFE   | Non-formal Education   |
| NGO   | Non Governmental Organization  |
| NPD   | National Programme Director  |
| NPE   | National Policy on Education (1986)  |
| NPO   | National Programme Office  |
| NRG   | National Resource Group  |
| NRU   | National Resource Unit   |
| POA   | Programme of Action (of the National Policy on Education 1986)                             |
| SPD   | State Programme Director   |
| SPO   | State Programme Office   |
| UP    | Uttar Pradesh  |
| Volag | Voluntary Agency   |

## GLOSSARY OF LOCAL TERMS

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| anganwadi       | pre-school child care center   |
| anudeshika      | female teacher   |
| devadasi        | a woman who is dedicated to the Goddess Yellama  |
| devadasi system | refers to the custom of temple prostitution  |
| jatha           | street theatre   |
| kutir           | hut (Gujarat)  |
| mahila samakhya | women's equality (lit. women speaking as equals)   |
| mahila sangha   | women's collective or group  |
| mane            | house, home (Karnataka)  |
| meia            | fair   |
| ole             | (smoke-less) stove   |
| sahayaki        | village level coordinator of mahila sangha (in Karnataka, lit. one who assists)  |
| sahayogini      | female fieldworker or area coordinator who provides guidance and support to 5 to 10 villages (lit. one who helps and guides) |
| sakhi           | (sahayaki in Karnataka) village level coordinator of a mahila sangha (lit. female companion)                                 |
| samelan         | meeting (of all persons)   |
| sangha          | collective, also used to refer to a meeting (lit. a joining together)  |
| thikana         | hut (Uttar Pradesh)  |
| Udan Khatola    | flying magic carpet: creative learning center for children (Varanasi District)   |

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**PART ONE: GENERAL REPORT**

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PART THREE: SOME OBSERVATIONS RELATED TO THE MAHILA  
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PART FOUR: SOME OBSERVATIONS RELATED TO THE MAHILA  
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## 1. MAHILA SAMAKHYA: EDUCATION FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

"I have pointed out that education or valued knowledge is a resource for rural women ..... in the 'Education for women's Equality Programme' ..... a conscious effort is being made to revalue some of women's traditional knowledge, ..... this form of learning aims at giving women a greater sense of worth and self confidence. Rather than trying to change structures from above, the goal is to empower women in their struggle for change."(\*)

### 1.1 Description of the programme in brief

The following description of the Mahila Samakhya Programme serves as a introduction to the report of the review mission. The description is based on the available reports and our own observations.

The Programme Education for Women's Equality, MAHILA SAMAKHYA is a scheme of the Central Government of India under the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development. At present this programme is implemented in three states: Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh. It will soon be extended to Andhra Pradesh and Bihar.

The programme aims at empowering rural women, who have been neglected by the educational system and who live under socio-economic and cultural conditions, which gives them little opportunities to benefit from an education system that is alien to their immediate environments.

In general terms the situation of poor women in the rural areas is being characterized by their low societal status due to the prevailing values related to caste, class and gender, by restrictive and often cruel social customs and traditions, by a division of labor in the family which assigns to women the major part of domestic, farm and income related labor, even more so in areas with a high degree of migrant labor, and by their exclusion from fora where major decisions are made. Socio-economic developments tend to aggravate their situations, cutting them off from their traditional social and economic securities and leaving them without means to maintain control over their changing situations. These factors reinforce a negative self-image among women, and their work, demands and perspectives receive little recognition and respect.

In the Mahila Samakhya Programme the empowerment of women is seen as a critical precondition for their participation in the education process. The main emphasis of the programme is on empowering women to control their own lives and, to influence and change their social, economic and political environments. In "TWO YEARS ON, An overview of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka from July 1990 to June 1991" (August 1991) the primary objective of the Mahila Samakhya Programme is summarized as

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(\*) Wieke van der Velden in 'SILENT VOICES, Gender, Power and Household Management in Rural Varanasi, India', PhD thesis VU Amsterdam, 1991, p. 166.



**"to create time and space for women to collectively identify and prioritize issues which affect their lives, critically analyze them, seek new types of information and knowledge, and to initiate action to change those conditions of their existence that they wish to alter - in short: to empower women to take control of their own lives"**

The approach in starting off this process of empowerment is based on recognition of women as persons in their own right and of their value as workers who have their own knowledge, experience and ideas. Through strengthening their sense of self worth, building group awareness and solidarity and through collective reflection and decision making, women are encouraged to themselves articulate their needs and demands, plan and initiate actions to address them. This process is expected to lead to a demand for relevant information, knowledge, education. Consequently the programme objectives include "the creation of informal educational structures which respect women's pace and rhythm of learning, given the conditions women live in, the multiple demands of the households and the prevailing seasonal changes in women's working patterns" (Revised Project Document MAHILA SAMAKHYA, Education for Women's Equality, September 1991).

Ultimately the Mahila Samakhya programme has the potential to generate a new set of gender-sensitive and women-oriented learning-teaching methods, materials, curricula etc. which will gradually transform adult, non-formal and formal education programmes.

The process approach, which characterizes the Mahila Samakhya Programme implies a great degree of flexibility as to how the programme is being implemented: for each state, district, village the process of empowerment follows its own pattern and meets with its own specific conditions. Another implication is that no fixed targets are set in terms of numbers of women to be reached, to become literate or educated in a certain period of time.

The main thrust of the programme so far has been on organizing mahila sangha's, group meetings of village women and supporting them to become self reliant in terms of collective decision-making, planning, management and organization of their joined activities. There is no set or pre-determined pattern for these activities, the sangha women determine and manage the activities and they set the pace.

Under the Mahila Samakhya Programme a number of experimental approaches to literacy and other exciting types of learning have been initiated recently, based on and in interaction with the local environment. It is expected that, gradually, these initiatives will evolve and grow into full fledged innovative, participatory and gender-sensitive systems of learning. To realize this expectation the Mahila Samakhya Programme will have to shift its, at present, predominant focus on the facilitation and empowerment of mahila sangha's towards a stronger emphasis on the development and strengthening of the educational component.

At present the programme is planning the phase-wise expansion of its area of operations in four directions:

1. to enlarge the number of women in the villages by including poor women, who have not yet been reached;
2. to enlarge its outreach to a greater number of villages in the districts where the programme is already operational;
3. to enter into 10 new districts in the coming five years;
4. to expand the programme in new states: Andhra Pradesh and Bihar.

The pace of the area wise expansion will depend to a great extent on the capacity of the existing infra-structure, the availability and training of human resources and on the cooperation from the side of the state governments, local governments and the voluntary organizations, which operate in the intended areas of expansion (see Chapter 4 on Human Resources) .

A fifth type of expansion, which the programme will have to address and carefully design and plan, relates to the expansion in terms of programme activities. As the programme evolves and the mahila sangha's get stronger the needs in terms of a support system and in terms of education and training inputs will change accordingly. This means that the Mahila Samakhya Programme will have to determine the nature of the support it is able to mobilize either through its own programme or through other schemes from the government or from non-governmental organizations.

## 1.2 Policy background

The Mahila Samakhya Programme (MSP) has emerged from the new National Policy on Education (NPE) which was formulated in 1986. As stated in the policy document the Government of India is committed to use education as an instrument of basic change in status of women and to play an interventionist role in the empowerment of women (NPE-1986, Ch IV.4, Government of India). India is one of the few countries in the world, perhaps the only country, with a national education policy which explicitly gives priority to education as a human right and a means for bringing about a transformation of the society towards a "genuinely egalitarian and secular social order". Education is seen as an "instrument for securing a status of equality for women, and persons belonging to the backward classes and minorities". (Resolution of the Government of India No. F. 1-6/90-PN (D.I), dated 7th May 1986)

This policy emphasis on education for women's equality is based on the recognition that post-independent developments and educational policies so far have been unable to break persisting imbalances in the socio-economic structure of the society and in the educational status of men and women.

Some indications of the genderized disparities in the participation in the education system (based on the 1991 census data) are:

- . in 1981 the female rate for literacy was 25% as compared to 47% for men;
- . illiteracy of women was highest in rural villages and among women of the scheduled castes (90%) and tribal women (92%);
- . 70% of the rural girls in the age group of 6-14 years were outside the schoolsystem, whereas 42% of the boys in the same age group were out-of school;
- . the lowest school enrollment rates are found among girls who belong to the scheduled castes, tribes and other minority groups;
- . girls drop-out of the schoolsystem at an earlier age than boys.

The data further indicate that women are under represented in higher education, in the teaching profession and at higher decision-making levels of the education system. (\*)

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(\*) Source: Towards an Enlightened and Humane Society, NPE 1986, A Review, Committee for Review of National Policy on Education, 1986, New Delhi December 1990, page 28/29.

See also the following page.

**SOME PROVISIONAL DATA ON LITERACY IN THE MANILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME AREAS**  
Based on provisional estimates from the results of the 1991 census

**A. Literate Population and Crude Literacy Rates 1991**

|                      | Literate Population (in millions) |       |         | Crude Literacy Rate (per cent) |       |         |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------|---------|--------------------------------|-------|---------|
|                      | Females                           | Males | Persons | Females                        | Males | Persons |
| <b>GUJARAT</b>       | 0.2                               | 13.6  | 21.3    | 41.18                          | 61.44 | 51.85   |
| Rajkot               | 0.4                               | 0.8   | 1.4     | 49.23                          | 68.07 | 57.88   |
| Saber Kantha         | 0.3                               | 0.6   | 0.8     | 36.92                          | 63.09 | 50.22   |
| Vadodara             | 0.7                               | 1.0   | 1.7     | 45.12                          | 63.66 | 54.81   |
| <b>KARNATAKA</b>     | 0.2                               | 12.0  | 21.0    | 27.37                          | 56.29 | 47.82   |
| Bidar                | 0.15                              | 0.3   | 0.4     | 24.82                          | 47.59 | 36.48   |
| Bijapur              | 0.5                               | 0.8   | 1.3     | 33.62                          | 57.17 | 45.60   |
| Hysora               | 0.5                               | 0.8   | 1.2     | 33.07                          | 47.30 | 39.87   |
| Gulbarga (+)         | 0.25                              | 0.5   | 0.7     | 20.14                          | 41.47 | 31.81   |
| Baichur (+)          | 0.2                               | 0.7   | 0.7     | 17.83                          | 39.47 | 28.77   |
| <b>UTTAR PRADESH</b> | 13.4                              | 33.3  | 46.7    | 20.92                          | 45.41 | 33.78   |
| Fakri Garhwal        | 0.05                              | 0.15  | 0.2     | 21.94                          | 59.47 | 39.08   |
| Mohitnagar           | 0.2                               | 0.5   | 0.8     | 22.38                          | 43.23 | 33.59   |
| Mada                 | 0.1                               | 0.4   | 0.5     | 13.45                          | 41.63 | 28.75   |
| Vacant               | 0.5                               | 1.2   | 1.8     | 22.60                          | 57.19 | 38.19   |

Notes:

(+) New districts of the Karnataka State Programme

The literate population excludes children in the age-group 0-6 who are treated as illiterate in the 1991 Census.

A literate is a person who can both read and write with understanding in any language. A person who can merely read but can not write, is not literate. It is not necessary that a literate person should have received any formal education or should have passed any minimum education standard.

Crude Literacy Rate:  $\frac{\text{Number of Literates}}{\text{Total population (incl. 0-6 age-group)}} \times 100$

**B. Percentage of literates to estimated population aged 7 years and above for 1981 and 1991**

|                          | Females |       | Males |       | Persons |       |
|--------------------------|---------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|
|                          | 1981    | 1991  | 1981  | 1991  | 1981    | 1991  |
| <b>INDIA</b>             | 29.75   | 39.42 | 56.37 | 63.86 | 43.56   | 52.11 |
| <b>GUJARAT</b>           | 39.56   | 48.50 | 65.14 | 62.54 | 52.21   | 60.91 |
| <b>KARNATAKA</b>         | 33.16   | 44.34 | 58.72 | 67.25 | 46.20   | 55.98 |
| <b>UTTAR PRADESH</b>     | 17.18   | 26.02 | 47.43 | 55.35 | 33.33   | 41.71 |
| <b>ANDHRA PRADESH(+)</b> | 24.16   | 33.71 | 46.83 | 56.24 | 35.66   | 45.11 |
| <b>BIHAR (+)</b>         | 16.51   | 23.10 | 46.58 | 52.62 | 32.02   | 38.54 |

**C. Increase literates and illiterates between 1981 and 1991 among population aged 7 years and above (for whole INDIA)**

|             | Females<br>(per cent) | Males<br>(per cent) | Persons<br>(per cent) |
|-------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Literates   | 46.0                  | 42.0                | 50.5                  |
| Illiterates | 9.0                   | 4.8                 | 7.3                   |

**D. Ranking per state for overall literacy rate and for female literacy rate (descending order, total number of states 31 excl. Jammu & Kashmir)**

|                       | Overall Literacy Rate | Female Literacy Rate |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| <b>GUJARAT</b>        | 15                    | 17                   |
| <b>KARNATAKA</b>      | 20                    | 21                   |
| <b>UTTAR PRADESH</b>  | 27                    | 29                   |
| <b>ANDHRA PRADESH</b> | 25                    | 25                   |
| <b>BIHAR</b>          | 31                    | 30                   |

Source: Government of India

The Mahila Samakhya Programme focuses on women who are the most deprived from access to and participation in education: poor women in rural areas, women from scheduled castes, tribal groups and other minority groups, as well as rural women from impoverished caste groups. The low participation of women in the education system is to be regarded in the context of their specific socio-economic and cultural conditions.

One of the strong assets of the MSP is the inherent flexibility in terms of its overall design, implementation structure and arrangements as well as content. This flexibility makes it possible to be responsive to the specific conditions of female poverty, the prevailing cultural values, the socio-political, economic and administrative environment in the areas where the programme is being implemented and to the acquired experience over time as well as the course of the process which has evolved with the particular group of women.

### 1.3 Women's empowerment

The policy framework provided by the National Policy on Education has been translated in concrete guidelines in the Programme of Action (POA, 1986). The section on Education for Women's Equality in this document focuses on the empowerment of women as a critical precondition for their participation in the education process. And "...women become empowered through collective reflection and decision-making. The parameters for empowerment are:

- building a positive self-image and self-confidence
- developing ability to think critically
- building upon group cohesion, fostering decision-making and action
- ensuring equal participation in the process of bringing about social change
- encouraging group action in order to bring about change in the society
- providing the wherewithal for economic independence."

(Chapter XII, pp 105-7, POA 1986)

The parameters for women's empowerment as formulated in the POA have provided the basic building bricks for the Mahila Samakhya Programme. As mentioned above under 1.1, the main objective of the MSP, among others, is

to initiate a collective process among poor rural women, which enables them to take control of their own lives, to articulate their collective interests, priorities and demands, to together plan and initiate actions to address them and to actively decide upon and influence changes in their social environments.

This process is mediated by the creation of conditions which enable poor women to meet, build a positive self-image, critically analyze their situation, explore their collective strength and solidarity and by strengthening their capacities for collective decision-making, planning, group management and self-reliance.

The emphasis on women's empowerment is further reflected in the training which is a key mechanism at different operational levels of the programme: the village, the village group coordinators (sakhī or sahayakī) and the fieldworkers or sahayoginī's (see Chapter 4).

#### **1.4 The original Programme Document or "Green Book"**

The Programme was formulated as a pilot project, and widely discussed during 1987-1988. The official programme document, in this report referred to as the "Green Book", was officially approved by the Government of India in September 1988. The agreement with the Government of The Netherlands for the financing of the programme was signed in July 1989 after an Indo-Dutch appraisal mission and mutual consultations between the two governments (see Annex 1). The financial agreement refers to an initial period of six years and involves an amount of approximately Dfl. 10 million (for further details regarding the financial arrangements see Chapter 7).

The programme document provides a broad outline of the main components of the project, as well as the implementation structure and the financial pattern as envisaged when the programme was being conceptualized.

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The main components of the Mahila Samakhya Programme are:

- a. the establishment of mahila sangha's or women's collectives at village level, including the training of sakhi's (village coordinators);
- b. the development of an infra-structure of trained fieldworkers or sahayogini's as well as a district resource unit consisting of resource persons and a district coordinator who give support, guidance and information/training inputs to the mahila sangha's and sakhi's;
- c. the training component;
- d. support services such as
  - . day-care centers for small children which provide pre-school education;
  - . the provision of a hut, a place where women can hold their meetings and which can be developed women's activity centers run and managed by the collective of village women;
  - . financial provisions for collective experiments related to relief of women's work like e.g. water tanks, growing of trees, etc.;
- e. the educational component consisting of
  - . the development of adult and non-formal education centers,
  - . the establishment of residential condensed course institutions,
  - . vocational courses,
  - . the development of innovative learning methodologies, materials and systems.

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During the first two years of the programme implementation most of the attention was focussed on the development of an appropriate infra-structure, the design and implementation of the basic training and the establishment and strengthening of mahila sangha's. The creche component and the hut construction component

met with various complications related to bureaucratic procedures, the availability and acquisition of land, the need for sangha registration etc. Moreover, not everywhere the sangha's were ready to articulate their demand for these services. And little use has been made of the funds set aside for collective experiments.

The educational component so far has received less structured attention. In the context of the MSF literacy and numeracy are considered as skills which may facilitate the process of women's empowerment, not as empowering instruments on their own account. Only when village women demanded it, perceiving it as being relevant, literacy training was introduced. In all states the demand for literacy emerged over a period of time and in almost all of the districts initiatives have been taken to start literacy programmes in a more or less experimental way. Other education related activities are just emerging sporadically with exception of the 'Udan Khatola's' or creative learning centers for out-of-school youth in Varanasi and Saharanpur (see also Chapter 3 and Part Two).

The implementation structure covers the organization at national level, state level and district level, and can be characterized by the relative autonomy, decentralization and delegation of decision-making and financial powers (see for details Chapter 5).

The system of documentation, internal evaluation and monitoring has not been implemented in the way as mentioned in the project document, since the proposed SITARA construction has not come off the ground and has been abandoned. This will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

The programme document or "Green Book" is not used as a blue print for action. It merely provided the leading principles and framework of values which have guided the implementation of the programme in different areas, as well as a set of potential provisions and allocations which could be tapped or called upon when needed or requested. This flexibility has made it possible to adapt the programme implementation to the situations and status of women in a certain area, the specific cultural patterns and social, political, administrative and economic conditions. The same flexibility does, however, bear the risk of overlooking areas of interest and experiences that are common, could be shared and exchanged for mutual benefit. It may prevent looking beyond the programme as it evolves locally and closing it off from positive external impulses and possibilities to strengthen the process. The mission members have observed instances e.g. in the field of literacy, where teams were trying to 'invent the wheel again', ignoring the experiences, knowledge and expertise that has been developed elsewhere, inside or outside the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

Another feature of the programme document is the lack of time bound and quantitative targets, which is in line with the process approach of the programme. The document does give some numerical indications about the expected coverage of the programme over a certain period of time. But these numbers serve merely as an illustration, not as targets to be reached.

### 1.5 The Revised Project Document

After two and a half years it was felt that there was a need to revise the original programme document. The Revised Document was formulated and presented in September 1991 after a series of internal and external discussions and based on

the feedback from the State and District Programmes on an earlier version. The so-called "BLUE BOOK" or Revised Project Document is built on the experience gained with the implementation of the MSP over the past two and a half years and looks ahead. The document is to provide a framework which does justice to and supports the evolvement of alternative strategies, modalities, work styles, solutions etc. in response to the specific conditions in the different areas of operations. The coherence of the programme is maintained by the overall ideology and conceptual framework. This framework is translated in the "BLUE BOOK" in a set of guiding principles which guide and will continue to guide the implementation at all stages.

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**The "Non-Negotiable Principles" of the Mahila Samakhya Programme:**

- a. the initial phase, when women are consolidating their independence, time and space is not hurried or short circuited;
- b. women participants in a village determine the form, nature, content and timing of all the activities in their village;
- c. the role of project functionaries, officials, and other agencies is facilitative and not directive;
- d. planning, decision-making and evaluation processes at all levels are accountable to the collective of village women;
- e. education is understood as a process which enables women to question, conceptualize, seek answers, act, reflect on their actions, and raise new questions. Education is not to be confused with mere literacy;
- f. acceptance that as an "environment of learning" is being created, what women decide to learn first may not be reading and writing. Women's priorities for learning must always be respected;
- g. acceptance that given the time, support and catalysts for such reflection, women are of their own volition seeking knowledge with which to gain greater control over their lives;
- h. the education process and methodology must be based on respect for women's existing knowledge, experience and skill;
- i. every intervention and interaction occurring in the project must be a microcosm of the larger processes of change; the environment of learning, the respect for equality, the time and space, the room for individual uniqueness and variation must be experienced in every component of the project;
- j. a participatory selection process is followed to ensure that project functionaries at all levels are committed to working among poor women and that they are free of caste/community prejudices.

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The mission sees the formulation of "non-negotiables" as extremely useful. They provide the programme with a set of unifying principles and guarantees against compromising its basic philosophy. At the same time, it remains necessary to periodically check these principles on their practical usefulness, to revise, reformulate or add to them in order to prevent rigidity and to prevent them from becoming 'empty statements' that no longer have a relationship to the reality.

Different situations or levels of implementation may need a slightly different set or translation of these principles (see also Chapter 6).

The Revised Document will carry the Mahila Samakhyas Programme into and over the VIIIth national Five Year Plan (1992 - 1997). The Programme objectives have been reformulated and refer to the creation of an environment where women become aware of the need for and demand a kind of education that serves their own development process. Some of the specific objectives are e.g.:

- enhancing a positive self-image and respect for women,
- enhancing women's confidence in their ability to control and change their lives,
- enabling women to recognize and value their contribution to their families, communities and to the society,
- creating an environment where women demand and collect knowledge and information,
- creation of informal educational structures which respect women's pace and rhythm of learning, given the conditions women live in, the multiple demands of the households and the prevailing seasonal changes in women's working patterns.

In addition to this more emphasis is given to objectives related to the development of the educational component of the programme, giving the project a clear identity as an educational programme.

The appraisal of the Revised Document is integrated in the text.

## 1.6 Indo - Dutch Review

Within the organizational set-up of the programme a recurrent external review is envisaged by a panel of independent experts from India and from The Netherlands representing the two governments. The first joint mission took place in September 1988 for the appraisal of the original programme document. A second joint mission reviewed the programme's implementation in January 1990, about six months after the Indo-Dutch agreement had been signed. At that time most efforts were focused on the preparation of the human resources, the translation of the basic concepts and ideology in the training approaches, the implementation of training programmes for *sahayogini's* and for *sakhi's*, as well as on the establishment of the infrastructure in each of the states. The conclusions of this review were extremely positive with regard to the level of conceptualization of the basic ideological principles of the programme and its operationalisation in the training programmes. The mission report included a number of positive recommendations regarding the implementation structure.

The present and second joint-review was planned after an interval of 18 months and took place in October 1991. During the period covered by the review the activities at village level have taken root, which has added a new dimension to



the programme. In the same period the state organizations have undergone a phase of fundamental change by the efforts to establish and consolidate the autonomous state societies and District Implementation Units in all districts where the programme is implemented. These developments are fully described and recorded in the progress reports prepared by the State Offices and in the General Overview prepared by the National Office. The video presentations prepared by each of the three states give deeply moving and impressive illustration of the depth of the programme seen from different perspectives.

The overall objective of this mission was to

- review the progress of the Mahila Samakhya Programme from February 1990 onwards and to determine the degree of accomplishments of the objectives originally formulated;
- to appraise the Revised Project Document for the Mahila Samakhya Programme for the period 1991 - 1996 and to recommend possible changes and/or improvements.

The aspects to be addressed relate to the empowerment strategies of the programme, the formation of Mahila Sangha's and their activities, the training component, the innovations in the field of education, documentation, evaluation and monitoring, the organization and management structures and the financial aspects of the programme (see for the Terms of Reference Annex 2).

It is impossible to capture the essence of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in a summary, which does full justice to the complexities, and the achievements of the programme. We hope that the description of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in this chapter and its related aspects, reflect the unanimous conclusion of the mission that we are dealing with an exceptional and an excellent programme in terms of its design, its conceptual framework, its strategy for reaching women and encouraging them to plan and take collective initiatives to change their situation, its flexibility to be responsive to local conditions and its potential for educational innovations.

We are duly impressed by what the Programme has achieved in the two to two and a half years of its existence, given the concrete reality of women's lives under adverse conditions of extreme poverty and an often hostile and violent socio-cultural and political environment. In this context the MSP staff has been successful in establishing its credibility among poor rural women, among the local communities, with local government bureaucracies and with voluntary agencies who already have a long-standing presence in the areas where the programme is operating. State Societies have been instituted in all three states, while the organization at State level needs to be further consolidated in Uttar Pradesh and (to a lesser extent) in Gujarat. The MSP has managed to build a local infrastructure of very committed female village activists (sakhis or sahayaki's), female fieldworkers (sahayogini's) and programme staff and resource persons, as well as a wide network of supporters who cooperate in various activities, or who sympathize with the programme and support it externally: from local youth groups, husbands, village leaders, school teachers to professional experts, bureaucrats, like-minded NGO's, training institutions etc. At present the programme has taken root in more than 1000 villages in 10 districts (U.P. 4, Karnataka 3, Gujarat 3). In many more villages the programme was initiated recently, or ground work is still being done. The programme is reaching poor rural women from under-privileged groups, bringing them together and gradually building a process that strengthens confidence in their abilities to change their situations through their own collective initiatives.

Our comments, critical remarks and recommendation must be regarded in the context of our overall positive assessment of the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

In our efforts to look behind the sometimes lyrical descriptions, which are the consequence of the enthusiasm with which the programme staff has recorded the achievements of the programme, we have tried to put together a picture based on the reality of our observations, discussions and interactions with staff and resource persons and on the documentation provided for us. We, members of the review mission, would like to record our appreciation for the quality of the documentation in the form of the reports and videos that has been made available by the staff. They form the basis for the review in addition to our own observations and discussions with various participants in the villages, at district, state and national level. The fieldvisits to the different districts, although too brief and insufficient to fully assess the process at village level, have been extremely valuable. They enabled us to appreciate the conditions women live in as well as the conditions under which the MSP is being implemented. They also allowed for direct interaction with village women and for more in-depth discussions and creative brainstorming with the accompanying staff and resource persons on various aspects of the programme.

## 2. REACHING OUT, STRATEGIES TO EMPOWER RURAL WOMEN

### 2.1 Introduction

During the first two and a half years the implementation strategy focussed mainly on the empowerment objective of the Mahila Samakhya Programme: to initiate and sustain among poor rural women a collective process of growing strength which enables them to take control of their own lives, to articulate their interests, priorities and demands, to together initiate actions to address these and to actively decide upon and influence changes in their social environments.

#### 2.1.1 A process approach

The 'PROCESS' which is the keyword used to characterize the approach refers to a continuing development through a chain of step by step changes. Its course is determined by the participating women and its direction is guided by the basic philosophy of the MSP. Issues raised by women are made part of a process of interactive learning through collective analysis, collection of information and if necessary visits to and meetings with concerned officers at local, block or district level offices, collective decision making, strategizing and planning on the course of action etc.

The basic assumption behind the approach is that the majority of women in India who live under conditions of extreme poverty are caught in the daily struggle for survival. They have scarce opportunities to use whatever small sources of power they can rely on and they do not have a clear conception of how being educated may benefit their lives. Their daily working patterns leave them little time, nor energy to spare; they live under restrictive social norms, which gives them no opportunities to meet and interact outside the pattern of their daily obligations. They are isolated from the mainstream of information and decision-making processes, and they are un-informed about their rights; they often live in an hostile and oppressive environment, many women are victims of rejection, harassment and violence in their families and outside. Social and economic schemes, if they ever reach them, often address women as ignorant recipients without acknowledging their traditional knowledge, experiences and practices, reinforcing their negative self-image.

Under these circumstances women mostly appear to take their situation in a rather resigned manner and rely on their own, often individual, survival strategies to cope with their changing environments. It should be stressed here that this does not mean that women are completely powerless. Given their situation women usually employ different strategies to exert influence, and some women may be in a stronger position to assert power than others, which may relate to age and their position in the household, family, or community. But the scope of their powers is limited and mostly, insufficient to challenge vested socio-political interests and relations based on gender. In India poor women are often seen in the forefront of grass-root struggles for wages, environmental issues, struggles against alcoholism etc. But that does not necessarily imply that their position gets any stronger nor that they are involved in decision-making and planning of these actions. And they seldom have the opportunity to further explore the strength of their collective powers.

The concepts of 'time' and 'space' are keyconcepts in the **Mahila Samakhya** context and refer to a wide variety of enabling conditions which create for women opportunities to come, sit and talk together and to join their forces:

- a specific and jointly agreed upon time that suits women's daily and seasonal working patterns;
- a place where women can meet and feel safe to talk: this may be translated into a concrete facility like a sangha hut;
- creating time for women to participate in meetings and group activities by organizing collective activities that help women to use their time in a more effective way: in the programme budget provisions are made for the establishment of child care centers, and for collective experiments to enhance the availability of e.g. drinking water or fuel and to encourage group awareness and collective functioning.

The conditions to be met and the way they are to be met are specific for each different situation and they depend on women's own priorities and what they perceive as constraints. Basic survival needs and social conditions related to resistance from their social environments (husbands, in-laws, parents) may need to be addressed first. One of the basic premises in the Mahila Samakhya approach is that none of these conditions are to be 'imposed' or part of a fixed package of delivery services. The women determine what the conditions are and how they are to be addressed.

Exposure to new experiences, alternative perspectives and new types of knowledge are conditions which help women re-assess their situations and their capacities to change their conditions. The knowledge or learning input from the programme aims at building a positive self-image, strengthening women's confidence, their sense of worth and their value as human beings and workers who have their own ideas, knowledge and experiences, and at building group awareness and solidarity. The latter is being reinforced by stimulating group functioning skills: e.g. participatory decision making and planning, collective management and organization of any action or initiative undertaken by the group or collective of women.

### 2.1.3 The catalysts

The programme has created a system of regular meetings and networks of trained village group coordinators (sakhi's or sahayaki's) and trained fieldworkers (sahayogini's) as catalysts to bring about the process at the village level.

In the villages women's group or mahila sangha meetings are held with a regularity of two to three meetings per month or more frequently if necessary. In Bidar, Karnataka e.g. sangha meetings were held every fortnight with in between one meeting for the chit fund (a rotating saving system). In addition some groups of women met more frequently for nightclasses (literacy training). In each village one or more (in Karnataka often even three or four) village women have been elected as coordinator of the group meetings, called sakhi's or sahayaki's (in Karnataka).

In principle the sakhi's or sahayaki's have been elected by the group to participate in a basic orientation training programme, which exposes them to new experiences, perspectives, ideas and skills related to their new role as facilitator. In village group meetings they share their novel experiences with the

women of their village, initiating discussions among women. Sakhi's meet together twice a month to exchange experiences, review the happenings in the village, receive feedback from other sakhi's and from the programme staff and plan their courses of action. One meeting is held at block level clusters with the sahayogini's who work in the same block. One monthly sakhi/sahayaki meeting is held centrally for the whole district and with the whole district staff. These monthly meetings often include a educational input and/or discussions on important news items (the Gulf War, elections, communalism, new articles on women's issues etc.).

A district meeting of sahayaki's was attended by one of the mission teams. It was an impressive, colorful and lively affair: more than 120 women meeting together in a huge tent and in small discussion groups all around on the grass. They had come in groups of three to five women from their respective villages. Guided by their sahayogini's and the resource persons from the district unit they talked about their bodies and various health issues related to women's reproductive functions. For the sahayaki's as well as for many of the sahayogini's it was a novel experience to talk about their bodily functions and they had to shed a lot of their shyness and inhibitions. At the same time they showed excitement when exposed to new and positive ways of looking at menstruation as a mechanism of purification of the body rather than as something wicked which makes them 'unclean'. They continued talking regardless of the presence of a foreigner and included the visitors (a resource person from the State Office and a member of the mission) in their discussions about causes of miscarriages, premature births and neo-natal death. Their questions also showed their own preoccupation with childbirth and fertility (\*). Later, when talking with a group of women about the meeting one elderly lady eagerly leafed through the health book used in the meeting and said proudly "this book is our mirror, it opens our eyes to our lives!" (Diary notes)

The number of sakhi's per village differs. Usually one or two have participated in the basic training, but at cluster and district meetings they are often accompanied by one or more village women.

In Gujarat a system of sakhi rotation is followed, allowing one village woman to participate in the training and other sakhi activities for a period of one year, then a new sakhi will be trained for another year. The idea is to prevent concentration of leadership functions in one person and promoting sharing of responsibilities. It is expected that after a period of five years a group of at least five women in each village will have received the training. It is too soon to assess the merits of the rotation system since only one group of sakhi's in Gujarat has arrived at the stage of completing one year. However, there seems to be apprehension and concern among the sakhi's about the intended changes

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(\*) This was later confirmed in a meeting with a lady doctor. No data exist about the occurrence of miscarriages, neo-natal and maternal death. But in view of the poor health and hygienic conditions and based on the questions which rural women usually raise when coming to her clinic she finds reasons to suspect a high occurrence of these causes of death among the rural population.]

and their future role as their one-year term is over. Moreover, they are obviously concerned about losing the stipend they receive during the period of training, which they appreciate as a welcome source of income. It is an issue that requires the attention of the district staff because it can grow into a cause for dissension among the sakhi's. It may be suggested to together with the sakhi's look into other forms of sharing responsibilities, and sharing the training experiences and sharing of the payment.

In Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka the number of sakhi's or sahayaki's per village is more fluid. There may be two or even four, depending on the choice of the sangha's. The honorarium may be shared, whereas in Karnataka the sahayaki honorarium is transferred to the mahila sangha's who decide about its use.

The processes at village level are guided by team of trained fieldworkers or sahayogini's who are to act as catalyst and facilitator and who rely for back-up support on the programme coordinator and the resource persons from the District Implementation Units (DIU). The sahayogini's are present at most of the sangha meetings, keep records of what has been discussed and of the decisions taken by the group. Each sahayogini works in an area of 5 to 10 villages which she visits at least twice per month to attend the sangha meetings. Monthly the sahayogini's meet for two to three days with the DIU staff to review the village processes, exchange experiences and problems and to jointly plan their courses of actions in response to the issues raised by the sangha's. In all districts the sahayogini's form strong networks of motivated women who mutually support each other. Among themselves they have divided some tasks either by rotating or by dividing themselves in committees who specialize on certain aspects of their work: vigilance, the training component, the production of newsletters, etc.

Both sakhi's and sahayogini's are accountable to the collectives of village women. This means for instance that the sahayogini's in Karnataka have to inform the sangha's if they are unable to attend a meeting or keep an appointment with the sangha.

The whole system of horizontal and vertical meetings which combine the different levels of participatory planning, decision making and action, form an intricate clockwork which keep the process moving. Each meeting is planned and organized as a learning experience which is to support the ongoing process of empowerment and personal growth which each participant in the system, either sakhi, sahayaki, village woman, sahayogini, resource person, staff member or other participant undergoes. As learning is considered to be a dialogical process each participant is equally a learner and an instructor. The amount of organization, care and well thought out strategizing behind the whole system is not to be under estimated.

The Mission is impressed by the conscious efforts taken at all levels and in all districts to implement the system in the manner as it is intended. This has not been easy as it was often a struggle against the ongoing currents and in adverse conditions. It was mainly done by trial and error in an empirical way: each district finding its own ways and designing its own methods and solutions for the occurring situations, conditions and problems. This has resulted in a pluriform pattern of issues and activities.

Yet, some similarities or at least comparabilities in the basic approaches per district and per state have emerged as well as differences. And some ways have

met with more success or faster results than others, taking a slower road or having had to face more severe obstructions. Which way or strategy has been more effective is not for this mission to tell, because each evolved in response to the local conditions and environments, as well as in conjunction with the response from the village women. Moreover, we fully underscore the basic principle that, especially at the beginning, the process should not be hurried or short circuited, because it is essential to first build a foundation of trust, confidence and common understanding. Then there may be internal as well as external factors which do influence the pace and course of the process in a positive or a negative way.

Without losing sight of the fact that essentially the sangha women are to decide about their own process we do recommend the MSP staff to develop a system of more effective periodic exchange and sharing of experiences by topic or programme component between districts and across states. Analysing the dynamics, the internal and external forces that influence the process as well as looking at solutions or strategies developed in other areas and assessing their value for one's own situation, may help to evolve more effective ways and further strategic planning.

In the following paragraphs some observations and comments of the Mission concerning various aspects related to the process of empowering women and to some of the programme components are given for further consideration. More detailed observations which refer to the specific states or district programmes are given in Parts Two, Three and Four of the Report of the Review Mission.

## 2.2 The impact of the programme at village level and the limitations

### 2.2.1 The impact

The impact of the MSP on village women is evident from the extensive descriptions in the progress reports about various events, activities, the struggles and resistance women had to cope with, as well as their achievements.

In their sangha meetings women discuss their lives, share their (novel) experiences, exchange views and analyze how their situation is affected by patriarchal, caste and class related values. Together they identify problems and priorities, decide, plan, act. Initially the group meetings were facilitated by the sahayogini's. Gradually the sakhi's or sahayaki's are seen taking over this facilitating role and the village women will manage their own meetings. The sahayogini's and sakhi's or others will take the role of resource persons. These meetings are seen as a learning experience and if necessary information or learning inputs from outside are collected, requested or together with the sahayogini or district staff planned and organized.

The issues discussed by village women and the actions they undertake relate to all aspects of their lives: unequal wages, lack of water and fuel, ration cards and distribution, access to forest resources, exploitation and abuse by landowners or middle men, communalism, poverty, women's rights, child care, the quality of the schools and attendance of teachers, education of girls, widow's pensions, family violence, sexual harassment, rape, suicide, abortion, health problems, local herbs and treatments. In short, various kinds of social and economic injustices, their sorrows, their fears, their anger and their joys. Women sing,

dance, touch one another and enjoy the recreational aspects of being together, finding out new things, being exposed to new experiences, sharing their sense of power.

The activities village women organize range from night classes (literacy), managing child care centers, organizing saving schemes, efforts to acquire land for and construction of mahila sangha huts (a space for women to hold their meetings and organize their activities), to mobilizing women and community members for collective actions. In groups women visit government offices to request services or to get information about relevant schemes. They go to meetings, fairs and training programmes outside the village. They travel longer distances to make excursions and exposure trips. And in some villages women have started to mobilize women in neighboring villages in organizing their own mahila sangha's. There is no set or pre-determined pattern for these activities, the sangha women determine and manage the activities and they set the pace.

In more than 1000 villages in ten districts spread over three different states groups of at least twenty to thirty women are motivated to get together weekly or bi-weekly and discuss issues which they find important, raise problems that need to be taken care of, decide on the kind of follow-up, plan actions and decide on the management and organization of their collective enterprises. The fact that the majority of these women belong to the poorest and most under-privileged groups of rural women makes this into an even more impressive achievement of the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

For many village women, before the Mahila Samakhya Programme came in the village no opportunity existed to meet due to their workload, due to the fact that unlike men, women usually did not have a place for meetings, due to their social conditions: their husbands, in-laws, or parents, or just social customs would not allow them to go out to a place for meetings. Or women would not think of going to meetings because they did not expect it to be of any relevance for them.

Many women have had to convince or even fight their families in order to be able to attend the meetings. To come to a meeting is a first step, to loose fear for talking and exposing one-self in a group meeting is for most women another turning point in their lives. When discussing the assignment to review the Mahila Samakhya Programme the Mission decided on its own working definition of empowerment in the following terms:

to acquire the courage to without fear confront the power structures in the immediate environment and articulate one's priorities, views, requests and demands.

The descriptions in the progress reports give evidence of the growing self-confidence and courage of village women to address themselves to local and district authorities and request information, services, actions to be taken related to e.g. the distribution of rations and ration cards, widow's pensions, employment schemes, road repairs, land issues, installation and repair of pumps. It should be realized that it is not only a matter of women addressing male functionaries, but of women who belong to the harijan caste or other minority groups who speak up without fear to men of higher caste and class status.

Women who rely on the solidarity of their sisters in other villages have successfully fought for higher wages and against exploitation and abuse by their employers. Women decided to no longer keep quiet about crimes and acts of



violence, by mobilizing the community, taking action to expose the culprits and seeking justice. And they realize that they can do this with the back up support and solidarity from the network created by Mahila Samakhya. There are examples of women crossing the institutionalized boundaries of caste segregation or communalism to cooperate and join in actions for water, against atrocities, or to create educational opportunities for their daughters. Breaking such barriers, unlearning in-built values and attitudes and discovering new, exploring novel possibilities and learning new skills which women thought to be far beyond their reach, are indications of the process of growing strength.

In our own observations and meetings with village women we were often impressed and moved by their enthusiasm and exhilaration women showed about their exposures to new experiences, new information and new opportunities. They made clear that the process they are in is irreversible, that they expect and will demand more. The assumption that empowering women will lead to a growing demand for education is confirmed by the fact that in all districts women have come up with the request to learn literacy skills, to be able to read the Mahila Samakhya newsletters by themselves and to be able to write and share their own thoughts with other women. They recognize that being literate give them a new sense of value, dignity and respect in the public world that is dominated by written words and written rules.

### 2.2.2 Limits

At the same time one has to be modest: changes do not come overnight, successes are not as visible everywhere and failures or non-events are often not well-recorded. It is impossible to generalize from descriptions of events and from incidental observations and impressions for a thousand villages. Not all activities or discussions lead to tangible results. Fights for a well to be dug, the allocation of land, proper wages etc. may take a long time and repeated visits to the concerned officials. Actions against alcoholism or violence may bring temporary relief, but do not prevent recurrence of the issue even with double force. Collective decision making and planning may drag into a lengthy process. And learning new skills not necessarily leads to better jobs or higher incomes. No seldom women have to fight their own disappointments or impatience.

"We just sit and talk together, nothing has come out of it" is what a woman said in a village meeting. In the same village the sangha women had managed after a prolonged struggle and negotiations with the village authorities to have a well dug and a pump installed at a piece of land between their hamlet and the main village settlement. This was already a few months ago. But the confrontations with the village leaders and the outcome of the struggle was perceived by the programme staff as an achievement in terms of empowerment, whereas the village women considered it just as another bargaining gain not as something special.

Women who feel free to talk are also not inhibited in expressing their criticism. Although not in line with the Mahila Samakhya principles we did come across women in all three states who clearly demanded a more active role of the sahayogini's and of Mahila Samakhya, especially with regard to women's economic and survival needs. For poor women who are in an extremely vulnerable position in the society their economic livelihood is just as real as social security, health and participation in decision making processes. Moreover, their self-confidence will be strengthened if they manage to bring about some concrete economic or

material improvements and experience a sense of achievement. This means that women's economic demands cannot simply be ignored, but that strategies must be developed how to deal with such issues.

Women also realize that there are limits to what they can achieve by pressurizing local governments, especially if their efforts are being obstructed by higher level politics or developments beyond their reach, which protect the vested interests, like in the actions of women against alcoholism. Issues of communal and domestic violence cannot be fought against at the local level only, if the higher level police and legal systems fails to respond and take adequate measures.

Moreover, there are indications that the process of empowering women and their public exposure in the society makes them vulnerable for aggressive reactions from their domestic environments or wider social environments. Individual cases in the domestic sphere are discussed in the groups and together with the sahayogini's or resource persons a solution will be worked out through consultations and persuasion. But societal responses like burning of houses, harassment or even rape ask for other strategies and responses. The anti rape march in Bidar was impressive expression of solidarity in the spirit of Mahila Samakhya. Mass mobilization aimed at holding the community responsible proved to be effective, but other responses in the public and legal sphere are will be needed as well.

All these observations lead to the conclusion that the Mahila Samakhya Programme will need to consider seriously

- . how to deal with the economic and legal issues women come up with, and how to respond to social violence and atrocities against women;
- . what is the role is of MSP in the overall support system, what kind of support it will offer and what not;
- . its role in mobilizing and sensitizing the support structure through networking, cooperation, linking up with other agencies;
- . its advocacy role: how the MSP can become a channel through which the voices of rural women can be heard and responded to at the level of policy making and implementation.

In all states the MSP can take an active role by providing linkages to the programmes of other agencies (GO and NGO), making women aware of the existence of relevant programmes, schemes and services, and influencing the agencies by making them more responsive to the demands and the needs of rural women. It is also important to keep informed of and anticipate on future development plans for the area, make an assessment of how these plans will affect the lives of women and their opportunities for employment. Education by itself cannot change the economic structures and create opportunities for employment but it can help women to be prepared for and demand changes in the employment structure.

### 2.3 Strategies for dealing with violence

Looking at the nature of the issues taken up by the sangna's indicates that there is some degree of conformity. In all states and districts, deliberately or unintentionally, women have started to organize themselves around issues which can be considered as community issues, be it that they are raised from a women's perspective: ration cards and the distribution system, water, electricity, road

## Overview outreach M.S.P. Uttar Pradesh

| District      | Number of villages | Number of Sakhis | Number of Sahayoginis |
|---------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Varanasi      | 64                 | 125              | 6                     |
| Tehri Garhwal | 103                | 103              | 15                    |
| Saharanpur    | 93                 | 93               | 9                     |
| Banda         | 80                 | 100              | 8                     |
| Total         | 340                | 421              | 8                     |

## Overview outreach M.S.P. Karnataka

| district | number of villages | number of sakhis | number of sahayoginis | number of registered sanghas (Societies Act) |
|----------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Bidar    | 150                | 440              | 14                    | 39   |
| Bijapur  | 177                | 212              | 17                    | 0  |
| Mysore   | 123                | 280              | 18                    | 95   |
| Total    | 450                | 932              | 49                    | 134  |

## Overview outreach M.S.P. Gujarat

| district    | number of villages | number of sakhis | number of sahayoginis |
|-------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Saberkantha | 72                 | 49               | 10                    |
| Baroda      | 92                 | 182              | 12                    |
| Rajkot      | 76                 | 82               | 12                    |
| Total       | 240                | 313              | 34                    |

## Outreach of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in India

| State         | number of villages | number of sakhis | number of sahayoginis |
|---------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Uttar Pradesh | 340                | 421              | 38                    |
| Karnataka     | 450                | 932              | 49                    |
| Gujarat       | 240                | 313              | 34                    |
| Total India   | 1030               | 1666             | 121                   |

repair etc. These are issues that can be expected to face least opposition from the male side of the society. By mobilizing the community and active pressurizing the local, block or district level officials are made accountable to the community. When successful such actions have evoked recognition, respect and support from men. The same can be said about issues related to women's wages, bonded labor, access to forest resources, children's education, health etc, as they are related to survival and the welfare of the family. It should be emphasized that the way these issues are being dealt with - the analysis from a gender perspective, the process of decision making and planning - reflects the Mahila Samakhya approach.

It proves to be much more difficult to develop a strategy for dealing with issues related to social violence, injustices and atrocities against women which are related to traditional social customs and beliefs that are ingrained in the fabric of the local society. Usually women have kept silent about these issues. Through the process of sharing life experiences in the sangha's issues of wife beating, alcoholism, desertion etc. started to come up. Discussing these problems and analyzing the causes have helped to make women aware that what they perceived as their individual problem is a social problem in which they can support one another. Generally a non-confrontation approach is being sought and if incidences of atrocities or injustice are reported the women are supported in an individual way. Recognizing that this is not sufficient the DIU's in Gujarat have discussed what strategy they could follow, but no clear policy emerged. Being aware of that the issue of violence against women is extremely complicated to deal with, the Mission suggests that also for this issue exchange of experiences and ideas across states and districts and together with a number of selected experts may help in the development of micro level as well as broader strategies. These may include multi media approaches to raise public awareness about the issue and reduce the fear of women to even talk about it, as well as the mobilization and creation of social, medical and legal support systems.

#### 2.4 The coverage

At present the programme has taken root in more than 1000 villages, which means that in these villages sangha meetings are held on a regular basis (see also the overview on the previous page). In areas or blocks where the programme was initiated recently the groundwork is still being done. During the last months in Karnataka the activities have been extended to two new districts, Raichur and Gulbarga, where the programme has been introduced in the villages by a team of experienced and newly trained sahayogini's through street theatre and village visits. Here the process of building sangha's still has to begin.

Consistently, a policy has been followed to concentrate on the poorer sectors of the community and to focus on women from the scheduled castes, tribal groups and other communities. Where possible efforts have been taken to include poor women from other caste groups, either by forming separate groups or by including them at a later stage. In Mysore conscious effort have been taken to organize meetings between sangha's from different caste groups, for example to share a meal together and to jointly manage a child care center. Considering the traditional values which separate women from different castes, sharing a meal between high caste and harijan women is quite a revolution. And there are various examples of sangha women in other districts, who actively involve themselves in mobilizing and persuading women from higher caste groups, whose

mobility is restricted because of purdah, to join the sangha meetings. There is ample evidence in the progress reports and sustained by the Mission's observations that the MSP has been very successful in establishing sangha's among women from the poor and under privileged sections of the village communities, regardless of caste or religious background.

## 2.5 The process of sangha formation

The establishment and formation of sangha's has turned out to be time consuming process. It has involved careful and conscious efforts from the side of the sahayogini's and district staff to establish rapport among the women to be reached and to gain their trust and confidence. They have succeeded through patience and persuasion, house to house visits, starting meetings with smaller clusters of women, as well as efforts to gain the confidence, approval and support from the local environment.

The initial stages in the formation of sangha's are extremely important for the success of the programme. As has been mentioned before in this report the Missions agree fully that this process should not be hurried or imposed by external incentives or pressures. However it might be of interest to the programme to explore the constraining and facilitating factors involved in the formation of the sangha's in the different districts, because it will help in the development of more effective strategies for specific situations.

Some of the constraints noted refer to e.g.

- initial distrust and hostility from the side of the women and from the local community;
- resistance from the families or the social environment;
- recurring expectations of the side on the women that the MSP is another service delivery agency and projections of these expectations on the sahayogini's and sakhi's;
- communalism or community segregation based on class, caste or religious background: it is more difficult to create a pluriform sangha with women from different backgrounds than to organize sangha's of a homogeneous composition or within rather a homogeneous environment, like among tribals;
- the absence of sakhi's during the initial process of the sangha formation: in Gujarat sakhi's were selected after sangha's had been formed which took several months to a year, and as soon as sakhi's became involved the process at village level intensified;
- a possibly rather passive (waiting for the developments to come rather than anticipating) attitude from the side of the facilitator.

Facilitating factors appear to be related to

- the involvement of sakhi's, which has clearly intensified the group building processes in various situations. In some district in UP the initial sakhi and sahayogini training were combined and sakhi's have been involved in the village processes from the very beginning;
- the possibility to mobilize women on the basis of common and shared interests, as in cases of bonded labor, wages, access to forest resources, water, health etc.;
- visibility: the implementation of concrete activities like starting a tree nursery intensified the efforts of group building;
- an active and stimulating attitude of the facilitator: e.g. by being able to establish linkages with other programmes.

One facilitating factor which was prevailing in at least two of the districts where Mahila Samakhya is operating is the continuing presence of organizations like Jagori (in Varanasi) and Aikya (in Bidar). Both organizations worked with women in the districts before the Mahila Samakhya Programme was initiated and their work continued under the MSP.

There is an interesting difference in the emphasis on the creation of strong and self-reliant sangha's which is prevailing in Karnataka and the emphasis on strengthening the role of the sakhi's and building strong sakhi networks which can be observed in Uttar Pradesh (see also Part Two, Uttar Pradesh).

The MSP-Karnataka has been quite successful in building strong mahila sangha's. Almost one third of these are registered, while many are in the process of formalizing their status through registration. In Karnataka a decision has been taken not to pay the sahayaki a honorarium, but instead to make the funds available to the sangha. To have access to this money the sangha's have to register and open a bank account. The availability of a sangha fund, at the disposal of and to be managed by the collective of sangha women is an important factor in promoting the formalization of the sangha's (the implications of sangha registration and formalization are discussed in Chapter 6). In Bidar the women in one of the villages visited by the Mission told their sahayogini that from now on they could quite well manage the sangha on their own and they had started to go off to neighboring villages to encourage women there to establish their own mahila sangha's. A process of spontaneous sangha formation seems to be emerging.

In UP and to a certain extent also in Gujarat the idea of what makes mahila sangha is not as clear. The concept of sangha could be applied to any kind of meeting where women (and men) come together to discuss an issue that is important to them. Among women there are differences and they do not necessarily always share the same interests. In UP the sakhi's function as village animators mobilizing village women to join the sangha meetings. Mobilizing women around specific issues may attract a different audience for different issues and sangha meetings may consist of large gatherings of women from different backgrounds. A loose network-like formation may be an asset and leave room for other women in the village to join the meetings if they feel the need to do so. There the question might be raised if formalizing the mahila sangha will strangle this open network-like character. The possibilities of creating a sustainable organizational form which allows for flexibility as well as for openness need to be further explored.

Within a sangha old and new patterns of leadership will emerge: we have seen strong and powerful women who dominated sangha meetings. Internal dissension and conflicts may disrupt the process of sangha development. It requires from sakhi's and sahayogini's special skills of group and conflict management to deal internal, as well as external conflict situations as a result of confrontations with the environment. The training should include such skills.

## 2.6 The response of the environment

Through the essentially non-confrontation approach aimed at involving the social environment and acquiring community benefits the women have been successful in getting the support from men and gaining respect from the local community.

Men cooperate in various activities like the building of sangha huts, organization of activities like mela's.

Realizing the importance of back-up support from men at different levels the Bidar district team has organized special workshops with men and youth to discuss with them and make them understand the work and ideas of Mahila Samakhya and their role and attitudes towards women and women's issues. Other workshops have been organized to sensitize Mandal Panchayat members or village leaders of the districts (see also Part Three). These workshops have met with a very positive response and organizing such workshops when the need arises have become part of the district programme plan.

In all district programmes the activities include familiarizing village women with the working of local bureaucracies and activities of different organizations. Women now frequently visit government offices at block and district level. And exposure trips are organized e.g. by the Rajkot team to different organizations and agencies in the district in order to learn about their activities and programmes. Such interactions help the process of familiarization in both ways.

At the Mahila Mahita Mela held in February last year in Bidar District one of the workshops was on the structure and functioning of the Mandal Panchayats and the Zilla Parshads in the state of Karnataka. The District Collector of Bidar District reported with appreciation that, since the mela, he has received frequent visits from groups of women from different villages, who come to his office to see him, to get information, to make request or to invite him to come to their village (which he often does). The District Collector of Banda District regularly gets visits from village women and he considers them as a reliable source of information.

The progress reports provide a lot of evidence of positive and also negative reactions and responses from the side of the community, from authorities, from different agencies. The nature of the response depends very much on the attitudes from the persons concerned as well as their knowledge or ignorance about the Mahila Samakhya Programme. And aside from the positive examples given above the Mission has also met with a striking ignorance about Mahila Samakhya among government officials at block and district level and representatives from agencies, who have not had the direct opportunity to become involved in or familiar with the work of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Conscious efforts to inform authorities and agencies are a first step towards a policy of sensitizing government officials, administrators and other agencies to become more responsive to women's issues. It will prepare the way for rural women and women's groups for mobilizing support and services if needed (see also Chapter 5). The Mission is of the opinion that the MSP should start developing and implementing effective strategies for familiarization and sensitization of government and non-government organizations and agencies at different levels.

Our observations related to cooperation with other agencies are given in the state reports, whereas the organizational implications of the cooperation are discussed in Chapter 6.

What has been mentioned above does not discredit our overall conclusion that in many places the MSP has made an outstanding achievement in gaining credibility and support from within the local communities, from local authorities and government officers and other agencies.

## 2.7 Child care centers and hut construction

The child care centers and hut construction components of the MSP programme can be seen as metaphoric translations of the Mahila Samakhya objective to create 'time' and 'space' for women to meet.

Originally the provision of a 'hut with a spacious veranda' was seen as a precondition for the formation of sangha's and a budget allocation is provided for the construction of the sangha hut. This may have led to some confusion regarding whether or not the provision of a sangha hut would be considered as an incentive for women to form a sangha. The Mission agrees with the change in policy mentioned in the 'Revised Project Document' that the need for a place to meet and organize activities should come out of the sangha meeting and that sangha women should be able and willing to take on the responsibility for the construction and maintenance of the hut. This means that they are to be involved in all phases of the decision making, designing, planning, budgeting, construction of the hut and the related management and organization.

Considering what has been mentioned above about the formalization of sangha's there remain questions to be resolved as to what kind of organizational form is required to sustain the hut construction and carry the responsibility of its management and maintenance, the 'ownership' of the hut and the land, its use(s) (see also Chapter 6 and the observations from the fieldvisits in Part Two, Three and Four).

The mission members have seen various examples of huts, but none with a spacious veranda. The way these huts were designed showed little involvement of women in the design of the hut, which might have been due to the fact that the available funds leave little room for deviation from a standard construction plan. Women showed obvious pride in their new huts, but, in some instances, they confessed that their hut might be too small for their meetings, which they prefer and continue to hold outside, due to lack of ventilation. Women also gave many reasons why they thought a hut was needed: e.g. as a place to

- meet, especially for women who live under purdah restrictions and during the rainy season;
- sleep for women in case of emergencies e.g. if they seek refuge from their homes;
- stay overnight for visiting women from other villages, for sahayogini's, DIU staff and other resource persons;
- prepare and cook meals when activities are organized;
- have literacy classes;
- keep possessions and attributes of the sangha: reading materials, posters, other learning materials.

It is obvious that such uses demand requirements to be met, like availability of water, sanitary facilities, electricity, sufficient space, etc. which should be reflected in the design of the hut.

Moreover, the huts can be (and are sometimes) used as child care centers, or schools for children. These function might not yet arise among the women because the need for a creche does not necessarily coincide with the need for a hut. But there seems to be another, hidden, agenda for the destination of the sangha hut which is built in the design of the Mahila Samakhya Programme: its use for educational purposes, as local library and as a potential activity center for women. These aspects need to be clarified and specified more and then be



taken into consideration when discussing the hut construction and its design with the women.

A similar double agenda is hidden in the creche component of the programme which is conceptualized as a provision to create time for women and girls to be able to participate in learning and other sangha activities. According to the MS principles it is to be provided after women have expressed the need for it and the sangha women are to be in charge of the organization and management of the center. At the same time this child care center is considered as a facility for pre-school education, for nutrition, and for children's health. A policy for the integration of all these aspects has been worked out in Bidar and Mysore, which ensures the full participation of the sangha women. This has resulted in an interesting training programme for the creche workers. However, the way this policy has worked out, at least in Bidar, leaves some room for questions regarding the relationship with the ICDS programme and the integration of the health and nutrition component.

In view of the above the Mission recommends a thorough review of both the hut construction component and the creche component and the development of a long term strategy. The "myth" that these activities should emerge spontaneously from the sangha should be broken and the MSP should clarify its own ideas about the possible functions of the sangha hut or the creche in relation to e.g. the educational component.

The possibility of expanding the pre-school education component into an open center for creative learning for children of all ages, like the Udan Khatola's in Varanasi could be considered.

As for the hut construction an extremely fascinating development has emerged in the Rajkot District through the involvement of a female architect. Through a process of interaction with sangha women in different villages a fully participatory approach has evolved which allows for the integration of different components like e.g.: collective decision making; creative designing; identification of low cost building techniques; budgeting, planning and organization; skill training for building and construction techniques; creating a sense of ownership; enhancing women's self esteem and societal respect; literacy and numeracy skills etc. It will be interesting to explore the possibilities of expanding this approach and adapt it for use in other situation of develop similar approaches (see also Part Four).

## **2.8 Reaching out**

It will be clear from what has been written in this chapter that the impact of the Mahila Samakhya programme reaches far beyond the mahila sangha's. It affects the husbands and families of the sangha members, the children, youth groups, and gradually the whole community seems to become involved. Networks are forged among sangha's across villages. And the organization of festive manifestations like mela's for the International Women's day (in e.g. Gujarat), have attracted thousands of women who are not involved in sangha activities and aroused their interest. The organization of activities like literacy training, child care centers, hut construction, new types of village based learning centers etc, involve the support from the community, from the bureaucracies, as well as the training of volunteers, teachers and other workers. Large manifestations like the

Bidar Mahila Mahiti Melu required the mobilization and cooperation from agencies, government officials from different levels, police authorities, volunteers, youth groups, all of whom seem to have become affected by the spirit of Mahila Samakhya.

Many resource persons, consultants, trainers and others who have become closely associated with the activities of the programme, for instance by providing special training courses for sakhi's or sangha women, have had to adapt their approaches and methods and materials as well as the content of their programmes to make it suitable and relevant for - mostly illiterate - village women, e.g. the training in handpump maintenance in Banda District by a team of expert from a UNICEF programme. It is too early to assess the extent to which this involvement has changed their outlook and attitudes, or whether it has a spin-off effect on their own work or activities within their organizations. But the potential for change is certainly there.

### 3. LINKAGES TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Within the Mahila Samakhya Programme education conceptualized in its widest sense. As formulated as one of the "non-negotiable principles":

"education is understood as a process which enables women to question, conceptualize, seek answers, act, reflect on their own actions, and raise new questions. Education is not to be confused with sheer literacy." (\*)

It refers to a continuing process of interactive learning, sharing of life experiences, un-learning and re-evaluating internalized attitudes and notions, and creating new kinds of knowledge built upon one's own experiences. In the Mahila Samakhya Programme any activity is made into a learning experience aimed at reinforcement of women's empowerment process and includes participatory review, reflection, decision making and planning. Within the MSP various innovative initiatives have evolved which link it to the 'conventional' education system.

#### 3.1 Literacy

##### 3.1.1 Innovative experiments in literacy training

In all districts where the MSP is operating the demand for training in literacy and numeracy skills has emerged over time, either from among the sangha women or from the sakhi's. The reasons women usually give are that they no longer want to be cheated by money lenders or shopkeepers; that they want to be able to read road numbers and the destination of the bus; that they want to sign their applications and other official documents, rather than placing a thumb print; that they want to calculate their working days, to prevent being cheated when collecting their wages; to write letters; to read story books, religious texts and information etc. In each district a form of literacy training has been introduced. Some make use of existing materials and methods, but most of the district programmes developed their own approaches. Major constraints are the lack of suitable learning materials in the local language, the lack of appropriate - interactive and self-learning - approaches and methods, and the lack of (voluntary) literacy trainers. It means that in the majority of the districts initiatives for literacy training have started in a rather experimental manner in some cases with, but mostly without a systematic external input or guidance from experts. The training programmes may focus on interested sakhi's, on village women, on strengthening the skills of potential (voluntary) literacy trainers. Some methods focus on self-learning, others use a literacy-camp method (periodic condensed training courses for a selected group of learners), others may prefer nightclasses for groups of learners, or a combination of different methods is used.

In Baroda and Sabarkantha Districts (Gujarat) no literacy material nor literature exist in the languages and dialects of tribal women. With technical assistance from educational and linguistic experts methods and materials have been developed based on local words, using local songs and stories. Similarly material was developed for

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\* See Revised Project Document p. 3/4 and Chapter 1.5 p. 8 of this report.

neo-literate women on issues like afforestation, health, legal aid and drinking water. An interesting experiment is the development of a primer for self-learning which is centered around the life story of a local village woman and which raised questions about women's discrimination and oppression (Saberkantha District).

In Bidar District (Karnataka) an integrated approach to literacy has been developed by the DIU with assistance from Aikya. The approach allows for a maximum degree of flexibility and differentiation with regard to timing and the pace of learning and special materials have been and are being developed for this programme. The method combines self study with periods of intensive training and aims at training illiterates as well as neo-literates to become trainers of illiterate women themselves. The method provides for learning continuity and at present some ideas for a post-literate strategy are beginning to emerge.

The Mission recognizes the necessity to adopt an experimental approach which allows for flexibility, adaptation to local environmental conditions and the patterns of time management of the female learners, and for development of methods and materials which recognize the local dialects and oral traditions in the form of poems, stories, songs etc. But we have the impression that some of the approaches developed so far seem like ad-hoc responses to an emerging need, rather than a systematic and well thought out strategy with a long term perspective. None of the methods developed so far include the development of neo-literate learning and information materials through participatory methods, with exception of the example given above for Sabarkantha. With a few exceptions each team appears to be inventing the wheel again, using its own means without sufficient back-up and didactic input from experts or experiences elsewhere.

However, in order to reinforce the sustainability of the literacy and numeracy skills the training should be related to the process of women's empowerment and personal development. It should enable women to get access to knowledge and information that is relevant to their lives, to read and question the contents of official documents and contracts, to themselves read stories and newspapers, and to write letters, applications, as well as express their own thoughts and ideas on paper for sharing it with others.

Much can be learned and shared from the approaches which are being developed in e.g. Sabarkantha District (Gujarat) or from Bidar District in Karnataka, and most probably also from other districts. The mission strongly recommends more systematic sharing of these experiences, as well as with similar experiences in other environments (e.g. with marginalized populations in other states, urban environments) with the aim to learn from one's own and others' positive and negative experiences, to pool and share resources and materials where possible and necessary. The further aims should be to develop common strategies and approaches for the generation of participatory methods and gender sensitive materials which can be adopted in different environments, and to strengthen and professionalize the available expertise. Through this the Mahila Samakhya Programme may be able to offer a viable alternative to common target-oriented literacy methods, which goes beyond mere training in basic reading and writing skills and extends into different forms of adult education. Moreover, it will make the position of the MSP stronger viz a viz pressures to take on and implement education programmes (Literacy, AE, NFE) which have an approach which is incompatible with the ideology of the MSP.

### 3.1.2 The involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the literacy campaign

The enthusiastic involvement of the MSP district team of Bijapur in the literacy campaign has had a positive impact on the success of the campaign and the participation of women in the literacy classes. The aftermath of the campaign is however that it resulted in a dis-orientation of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in the district as it interrupted the process building activities in the villages. The intensity of the campaign method has drawn on all available human resources. Moreover, the target-oriented, time-bound and service-delivery character of the campaign approach can conflict with the process approach and participatory methods used in the Mahila Samakhya Programme. It does not need to be so that the two methods cannot be made compatible if the process started is well on its way and the programme is sufficiently strong. In the case of Bijapur the literacy campaign may have come too early, in the phase when the programme still had to establish itself.

In the District of Bidar the Literacy Mission will start its activities in a few months. Clearly the MSP is seen as an avenue for launching the campaign. The DIU staff is involved in the preparations and planning of the campaign and as well as in the preparation of the materials. There is a clear understanding that Mahila Samakhya will take up the campaign in the four blocs where the MSP is already operating in about 50% of the villages. This means an expansion in the coverage from 30% to 50% of the villages. The Mission is concerned that the activities related to the implementation of the literacy campaign will put an extra strain on the sahayogini's, the district staff and those who are already involved in MSP literacy activities, the trainers, volunteers, local teachers etc. Many more trainers need to be identified, trained and monitored, classes must be organized for women's, men's, and youth groups. Yet, since the programme in Bidar is firmly established and the sangha's seem to be strong and self-reliant, the chances for interruption of the process are small. The Mission would like to stress that it is very important that the DIU in Bidar remains in control of its cooperation in the literacy campaign and will not compromise its own learning approach and principles. It may use its involvement to influence the campaign methods by integration of participatory and self-learning methods, by introducing opportunities for flexibility and adjustments to the time patterns of the learners and to their pace of learning. Another challenge is that, through its involvement in the organization of the campaign, the DIU is in a position to be able to integrate gender-sensitive information and a women's perspective in the materials to be produced for neo-literates as a follow-up to the literacy campaign.

## 3.2 Children's education

### 3.2.1 Creative learning centers for children

Under the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Uttar Pradesh some innovative projects for education of out-of school children (children who have never been to school, drop-outs, early school leavers) have been started: Udan Khatolis (Flying Magic Carpets) in Varanasi and creative learning centers in Saharanpur. They provide a flexible learning system through play, songs, games and fun, and the use of the local environment as learning aid. In addition use is made of locally available books and teaching aids, newspapers and children's magazines. By providing childcare and pre-school education girls are relieved from the care of their younger siblings and able to participate in the programme. The centers in

Varanasi have been established with support from JAGORI, who mobilized experienced support from other groups like ALLARIPU and ANKUR and from experts on children's education. In Saharanpur a few centers have just been started in the DISHA area with support from ALLARIPU.

The centers meet with a very positive response from the village communities and from the children. The local communities have been involved in the planning and organization and management of the centers from the very beginning and consider it as 'their' center. At least 50% of the participants are girls, whereas some centers are attended only by girls. The centers are usually located in low caste areas but successful attempts have been made to break caste barriers. They have also stimulated a desire to learn more among women who, if they find the time, are seen to attend the classes.

The development of these creative learning centers - out of the locally perceived recognition of the importance of children's education - in a fully participatory manner is seen by the Mission as an excellent and extremely exciting example of an educational innovation which reflects the basic ideology of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. It has the potential to grow into an alternative and creative 'open-learning system', which is rooted in the local community. The mission fully supports the idea to expand the MSP activities to other villages via the introduction of creative learning centers for children. We think that it is worthwhile to give this experiment room and time to evolve and grow with guidance and didactical support for the development of creative learning methods, materials and for development of a long term learning perspective. However, care should be taken not to strangle the development by too much attention and imposition of 'blue print' models from other experiments. Sharing the experience with the other districts and with other states may inspire other programmes who want to initiate (or have initiated) similar initiatives.

### 3.2.2 Attention for teenage girls in Sabarkantha

Due to the activities of missionary organizations in Sabarkantha District in one of the blocks a good number of children, including girls, have access to formal education. This has made it possible for the MSP to involve teenage girls as volunteers in teaching literacy to women in their villages. For these girls, who are still in school or who recently dropped out, the MSP has organized a three day workshop. The intention was to familiarize the girls with the Mahila Samakhya concept and to introduce them to their task as trainers and facilitator. It was also meant to give them some guidance about what to do with their lives. For the girls the workshop was a new and exciting experience, not only to be away from their duties at home and to be among girls of their own age. But, especially, to talk about their future lives and opportunities. At the end of the workshop some of the girls had decided to go back to school and to continue their education. A second workshop is planned for over a few months and the girls have expressed their desire to extend the workshop to a whole week and to learn more about their career possibilities and their opportunities for vocational and further education. The Mission was very impressed by this workshop, it showed the importance of giving attention to girls in this age-group, who have had the chance to go to school but little opportunities to do something with it. They are at a crucial point in their lives having to make choices which can have a tremendous impact on their futures. Through this experiment, just by accident, an important target group for the MSP has been identified.

### 3.3 Other linkages to the education system

The Mission has not been able to get a clear insight into the involvement in and the development of other initiatives in the field of adult and non-formal education. In Banda about 100 NFE centers which apparently have been funded through the Mahila Samakhya Programme had to be closed, because the MSP established its own DIU and became independent from the NGO involved in the organization of the centers. It seems that another mode of funding for the centers is forth coming so that the NGO is able to continue its programmes. However the incidence shows that there has been no relationship between the MS activities and these NFE centers.

It is not clear what the situation is in other districts. AE and NFE activities are mentioned in the plans, but they do seem not form an integral part of the district programmes. The Mission has the impression that this part of the educational component in the MSP is kept quite separate from the other activities which relate to the empowerment of rural women.

In different districts of Uttar Pradesh, the Ministry of Education plans to establish adult education centers. In Varanasi 300 AE centers are envisaged which will also aim at providing adult education courses for women. The mission recommends that at district level as well as at state level initiatives will be taken to start a dialogue between MSP and AE, to exchange information and explore areas of common interests and, if feasible, to cooperate in the development of innovative learning programmes and curricula which are relevant for women, as well as participatory and gender-sensitive methods and materials for AE. We do think that there is room in Adult Education to adopt didactical innovations, as is stressed in the report of the Committee for Review of the National Policy on Education "Towards an Enlightened and Humane Society" (New Delhi, 1990).

Mahila Shiksan Kendra's or residential institutes for women's education have not been established yet, but are to be set up in each district. The institutes are envisaged as a facility which provides educational opportunities for women who are marginalized by society (particularly single women), and which will create a pool of educated and trained women for various rural development programmes. The Mission is of the opinion that the MSK's can have a great potential in areas where there is a need for literate and educated women to participate in educational and developmental programmes. The aims as stated in the 'Revised Project Document' are clear but neither the nature and contents of the courses, nor the methodologies to be used have been specified. Through the activities of Mahila Samakhya in the villages relevant subjects and skills can be identified for which courses or learning programmes need to be developed. And women can be identified who qualify for further training and participation in specialized courses. Because there is no experience yet in establishing and running MSK's in the MS areas the Mission recommends to start with the establishment of one or two institutes on a pilot basis. The selection of a voluntary agency with the right vision that is able to take the responsibility to design, plan, manage and maintain the center will be a crucial factor. The Mission recommends that the MSP will specify the criteria for the selection of a suitable agency that can mobilize the expertise and the resource persons needed for the development of the Mahila Shiksan Kendra's.

Aside from this the Mission is of the opinion that the responsibility for the MSK should be separate from the DIU and directly under the Mahila Samakhya State Society.

The integration of the Jana Shiksan Nilayan in the MS approach as proposed in the Revised Project Document seems a logical development. The function of the JSN to provide women with post-literacy supports in order to ensure the retention of their literacy skills is not developed yet in the MS programmes. The generation of attractive, relevant and interesting literature and information for neo-literates is an area that needs urgent attention, for which funds need to be made available. One way is to develop such materials in workshops with the participation of neo-literate women, as described above for Sabarkantha. In addition to this the possibilities of using and acquiring existing materials, which have been developed nationally or in other states through other programmes need to be looked into (see also Chapter 5 on the clearing house function of the MS National Resource Unit).

The Mission fully supports the idea of establishing educational resource units for the generation of gender-sensitive educational materials and innovative learning-teaching methods as mentioned in the Revised Project Document. There is a great need for such methods and materials to be used in Adult and Non-Formal education and the Mahila Samakhya provides a working area for the generation of such materials and methods in a participatory way with different groups of villagers: women, men, youth, older girls etc. But the Mission is doubtful about the establishment of these resource centers at the district level. The District Resource Unit (DRU) will further be discussed in Chapter 6 on Organization and Management.

### 3.4 Concluding remarks

The Mission fully appreciates the MSP focus on building a strong foundation for the empowerment of rural women at village level during the initial phase of the programme's implementation. But as a logical consequence of the evolving processes, the demands made by women on their socio-political environments, on the support systems, as well as on the Mahila Samakhya Programme will change and become stronger. This means that the MSP will have to more clearly define its role in relation to the overall support structure, what it does and what it does not provide in terms of support and services women can and cannot expect. In order to strengthen its credibility with the village communities and the collectives of village women that have been established under its programme, Mahila Samakhya needs to strengthen its identity as an educational programme or otherwise. Rather than waiting for demands to emerge the MSP is ready by now to anticipate its responses, particularly in education by systematic and strategic planning for the development innovative, interactive and gender-sensitive learning approaches, methods and materials.

The Revised Project Document anticipates this development to a certain extent by linking the educational initiatives that have emerged so far to existing schemes under the Department of Education or by the creation of new women centered educational facilities like the envisaged Mahila Shiksan Kendra's (residential institutes for condensed courses) and by the establishment of Resource Units for the development of gender-sensitive learning approaches and materials. However, according to the Mission, more is needed for the development of the educational component. The MSP will need to develop a basic learning philosophy with a long term perspective, which gives direction to the creation of innovative, interactive learning methods and the generation of gender-sensitive learning materials (literacy, post-literacy; visual, audio; based



on local cultural traditions, songs, poems, stories, local knowledge and practices, materials available in the local environment; encouraging creativity, exploration and self learning). It will also give depth, direction and inspiration to the further creation of local initiatives in response to the emerging learning needs of women and other initiatives related to education (non-formal and formal).

Whereas a set of 'non-negotiables' have been developed for the empowerment component of the programme, some clear guiding principles need to be developed to give coherence to the evolution of the educational component of the MSP and to guarantee its continuous commitment to the process of women's empowerment. The Mission realizes that this is not an easy task, which can be accomplished overnight. But it should be recognized as a major challenge for the future of the MSP. Moreover, the MSP already has an impressive brain trust at its disposal in the National Resource Group and the State General Councils of experts in the fields of education and women and development, who may be willing to cooperate with the Programme Staff as resource persons and bring in their expertise for the development of a basic philosophy and conceptual framework for the educational component as well as its practical operationalization (see also Chapter 6.5.4.1 on the MS Resource Unit at the National Level).

## 4. TRAINING AND HUMAN RESOURCES

### 4.1 Introduction

The training component in the Mahila Samakhya Programme aims at imparting and strengthening the capabilities of the human resources involved in the implementation of the MSP for facilitating the process of empowerment at village level. It has the nature of a 'training-of-trainers' training and the main target groups are the sahayogini's and sakhi's (or sahayaki's), who are the core actors in facilitating the processes at village level. Less intensive and more functionally oriented is the training for other groups like the resource staff, office staff and different groups who are to be involved in village activities as e.g. creche workers, literacy instructors etc.. However, the philosophy and the training approach for these groups are the same.

The basic philosophy of the training is a reflection of the Mahila Samakhya ideology and includes vision as well as attitudinal, cognitive and skill based aspects. Recurring elements in the training process are e.g. the basic philosophy and concepts of the programme, the translation of these concepts to the every day practice, reinforcement of a positive self-image, analysis and revaluation of notions related to gender, caste, class and other belief systems, analysis of women's oppression and causes of poverty, revaluation of women's worth and the value of women's knowledge and experiences, building group awareness and cohesion, enhancement of critical reflection and analysis, introduction and enhancement of processes of collective decision making, participatory planning, management and organization, as well as related operational and functional skills.

With exclusion of the sakhi's, who themselves are village women from a harijan, tribal or otherwise under privileged background, the majority of the trainees (e.g. sahayogini's) come from a different social and cultural environment than the village women (e.g. educated, urban, higher caste, privileged class). This implies that the training consists of changing in-built attitudes, values and beliefs and providing an environment which fosters the evolvement of a new set of values. Moreover, most of the trainees are women who themselves experience in their own social environments the forces of oppression, restriction and rejection caused by gender and caste related beliefs. The training aims at bringing about a process of empowerment and personal growth, as well as a sense of solidarity and collective power among the women, who are involved in the training process.

The methodology of the training in the different districts has a number of common characteristics which again are related to the MS philosophy:

- the training is participatory: the whole training group is involved in shaping the structure and contents of the training sessions;
- the training is not to be over-structured and too task or target oriented;
- the training aims at breaking down hierarchical barriers and caste or other differences: relations within the group are non-hierarchical, each person is respected and participates in collective decision, planning and action;
- interactive methods are used, while the relation between the trainer and the group is non-hierarchical, the trainer acting as facilitator and as learner with the group;

- the experiences of the participants in their lives and work form the basis of the training: sharing of experiences, feelings and thoughts, analysis of the circumstances which have affected these experiences are part of the process; moreover, the training integrates field experiences and provides for reflection and feedback;
- the training is considered to support an on-going process of learning, empowerment and growth. This means that the training sessions are reinforced by subsequent review, reflection and analysis of past experiences and planning future actions. Each review session is created as another learning experience of the participants.

In addition to this the training includes experiences with communication and group management skills which are built in the methodology of the training. The basic orientation training of the sahayogini's and the sakhi's forms the foundation for an extensive system of training which integrates the monthly review and reflection meetings, special workshops, training in specific skills, exposure to new experiences, participation in and review of group activities, organizing and implementing training for others, etc. Each district has evolved its own system over time in response to the actual situation and conditions under which the programme operates. Details about the different training activities and organizations involved are given in the state progress reports (see the National Overview and the Revised Project Document).

The design, contents and implementation of the basic orientation training programmes of sahayogini's and sakhi's was part of the review by the Indo-Dutch Mission in 1990. This time the Mission has looked more at the effects of the training and the evolvement of the systems of training in the districts. Some observation and comments are given in the following paragraphs (see also the reports of the field visits and Annex 4).

#### 4.2 Some characteristics of the training per state

In each State the training component developed with support from one or more Voluntary Organizations who are experienced in awareness and process oriented training. Among the most important agencies are JANVIKAS for Gujarat, AIKYA and SEARCH for Karnataka, JAGORI, ALLARIPU and ACTION INDIA in Uttar Pradesh. Often these organizations have been able to mobilize other resource persons or draw on other experiences, particularly from the WDP in Rajasthan. Most of these agencies already had a long-time presence in one or more of the areas and some experience in working with rural women.

Although the basic philosophy of the training programmes has the same common characteristics, in each state the training agencies have given a certain accent or special input which more or less characterizes the programmes.

##### 4.2.1. Gujarat

In Gujarat, for instance, the emphasis of the training approach is on the evolvement of the process through participatory reflection: the training is as a catalyst for the following phase of the programme and aims at training the trainee in her role as facilitator. Not discrediting the effectiveness of the training approach and the methods of the training, the Mission would like to comment that

there may be some disadvantages of putting a too strong emphasis on the facilitating role. It may reinforce an attitude of 'wait and see what happens', and preclude anticipation on possible developments and timely planning of adequate response strategies. The training itself has resulted in highly committed and articulate sahayogini's and sakhi's. Among the sahayogini's there is clarity of vision and awareness of the issues they are dealing with, they are responsive and have built good relationships with the village women. As the majority of the sahayogini's have a different socio-cultural and educational background than the mostly tribal or harijan village women, this means a significant break through of social and cultural barriers. To achieve conceptual clarity and internalization of new ideas and values appears to be much more difficult to achieve with the newly trained sakhi's. Obviously, as the Mission observed on several occasions, their training is not completed and more strengthening will be needed as well as training in communication skills, group management and conflict handling. From the side of the field there is a need for a more structured input of technical training for specific groups, e.g. sakhi's and sahayogini's who want to specialize on specific issues and other groups who can become or want to become involved in village activities or who want to strengthen and expand their skills such as (potential) health workers, teachers etc. Areas of training mentioned by women are e.g. health, water management, child care, agriculture, social forestry.

#### 4.2.2 Karnataka

In Karnataka the influence of one single training organization is less clearly visible. Different organizations have contributed to the shape of the training component and some of these trainees have become integrated in the programme staff. The emphasis in the training coincides with the state programme emphasis on building group awareness, solidarity, group cohesion and self-reliance of the group and aims at making sangha's independent and self-sustainable. This places a strong emphasis on the training of a large body of motivated sahayaki's and on group management skills. The training systems that have been developed by the DIU's consist of a variety of training and education inputs which together serve at least three functions:

- a. to sustain the process of self-awareness, building of confidence and personal strength, as well as building of solidarity and group strength;
- b. to strengthen and expand functional capabilities and skills related to different aspects of the programme;
- c. to strengthen the personal growth and future perspectives of the trainees.

An extra accent in the training of the sahayogini's is the attention for their personal growth and career possibilities by stimulating, supporting providing opportunities for self-study and specialization. The Mission appreciates and supports this new development and hopes that it will be expanded to include not only the sakhi's, but DIU staff as well. This is important as the MSP is considered to be a time-bound programme, it is unable to offer the job-security which regular government employees have.

The training system in Karnataka consists of a complex array of different types of training and education for a variety of different groups. An example is the overview of training activities in Bidar District in ANNEX 3. Some of the workshops and training programmes organized relate directly to the activities of the programme. Sometimes sahayogini's, sakhi's or resource persons are selected to attend training programmes organized at state level or by other agencies outside Mahila Samakhya. It is certainly positive to be able to respond to

opportunities which give exposure to new knowledge and experiences. But the Mission has noticed that, sometimes, the relevance of the experience for the MS programme gets lost, if there is no direct opportunity to apply or give a concrete follow up to what has been learned. If such events remain a one time input without being sustained by practice or some kind of continuity in following training or learning sessions the effort may be wasted. Some streamlining and strategic planning of learning inputs is advisable, in line with the concrete reality and the needs of the programme, as well as with the personal needs of the person selected for the training (see also 4.5).

#### 4.2.3 Uttar Pradesh

In Uttar Pradesh Jagori has played a major role in shaping and supporting the training component in three of the four districts. The other agencies belong to the same network as Jagori and have more or less followed a similar approach. Jagori has introduced special attention to the situation of single women by involving them in the training programmes and by making the situation of single women part of the training content. The training is aimed at creating solidarity and the building of strong peer networks among sakhi's and sahayogini's. The Mission is extremely impressed by the role Jagori has played in the coordination and provision of the training and other support to the district programmes. Through its network with sister organizations, Jagori has been able to mobilize other essential resources for strengthening the programmes. The impact of the training is clearly visible in the spirit, the vibrancy, the confidence, the commitment, as well as in the conceptual clarity of the sahayogini's and the sakhi's who form support strong networks. The interruption in the support from Jagori and the resulting absence in training continuity has had a negative impact on the programmes and in some districts e.g. Tehri Garwhal a reorientation training of sakhi's, sahayogini's and of the DIU staff is urgently needed. In all of the U.P. districts the need has been expressed for a professional and ideological input from a resource person of Jagori for backing up their programmes and to assist in the development of their own training capacities. In Saharanpur District Allaripu has taken up this role in relation to DISHA. In view of the changes that have occurred over the last year the Mission recommends to investigate a possible restoration of the relationship between Jagori and the Mahila Samakhya programmes in Uttar Pradesh on new terms that are mutually agreed upon.

#### 4.2.4 The impact of the training on women's personal lives

On the whole the Mission is impressed by the tremendous impact of the training on the personal lives of those who have been involved in the programme. Apart from commitment, clarity of vision, functional skills etc. related to their role and function in the programme, the training has caused dramatic changes in lives of individual sahayogini's, sakhi's and other persons involved. The video's made of the programmes in the different states show moving examples of how women have experienced and valued their changes. In meetings with sahayogini's in different districts and states sahayogini's mentioned the following changes as being the most important for themselves:

- feeling confident,
- feeling free to talk about personal experiences, fear and anger,
- feeling no fear to speak in meetings with women,
- losing fear and inhibitions to talk to men and public officers,

- feeling free to move about,
- feeling friendship and solidarity,
- being able to accept group criticism,
- being able to make independent choices concerning their own lives without letting their social environments interfere.

These achievements are even more remarkable in view of their often traumatic personal life histories. Many women are still undergoing a process of fundamental change, old values are distorted and new have not yet fully matured. This makes them sometimes extra vulnerable when they meet with negative and adverse reactions from their environments. The peer group solidarity, strength from the group and support and solidarity from the MS networks are extremely important to sustain and strengthen them as long as their process is not yet completed.

#### 4.2.5 Training at village level

As yet the training has mostly been focussed on field- and village level coordinators to prepare them for their role as facilitator. The idea behind this is that through them the process will be mediated to the sangha women and that by sharing their experiences the sakhi's will be able to recreate a similar process of gaining confidence and strength among the village women. To what extent this actually happens is difficult to assess. But most probably this expectation is not realistic as in many instances sahayogini's and sakhi's have not yet been able to reinforce and internalize their new experiences within themselves. This impression is based on the observations and discussions of the mission members at meetings in the villages.

Since the programme has taken root in the villages and the process has begun some additional intensive training workshops with mahila sangha's at the village level may be considered, e.g. in the form of three day training camps for each sangha or for a group of women from a cluster of sangha's. The training should allow for creativity, games, theater plays and fun, and be of a similar nature as the orientation training for sakhi's, where the whole group is involved in shaping the structure and the contents of the training.

Some further comments related to the training are given in a separate paper which is included as ANNEX 4.

#### 4.3 Internalization of the training component in the District Programmes

In all district the training component has become integrated in the implementation structure in order to make the districts self sustainable in meeting its training needs. Gradually experienced sahayogini's and sakhi's have become involved in the training process as facilitators, in designing the programmes, in guiding and supporting new trainees in the field. In Gujarat District Training Teams have been formed consisting of resource staff, sahayogini's and sakhi's who are responsible for identification of the training needs and organizing the training programmes.

The mission fully appreciates and supports the policy of internalization of the training, involving experienced sahayogini's and sakhi's in the design and implementation of the training programmes and allowing for a stronger adaptation

of the programme to the local conditions. But the Mission has observed that there is a danger that gradually the ideological principles of the Mahila Samakhya Programme become diluted and that the training becomes purely functional and mechanical. Even if the DIU manages to handle the training component together with the sahayogini's and sakhi's a form of external back-up e.g. through attachment of a training consultant or resource person remains necessary in all districts.

Moreover, the internalization of the training component implies the training of DIU staff and sahayogini's and sakhi's to become trainers themselves. They need to be equipped well for this role. While the situation in the field changes, it is necessary that the DIU's make periodic assessments of the training needs with a perspective on the direction in which the programme is evolving, and plan the required support inputs in a strategic way.

#### 4.4 Training and Human Resources at DIU level

The training system so far is focussed on training of sahayogini's, sakhi's, or specific groups for specific tasks. The Mission has noticed a remarkable absence of a systematic training strategy for DIU staff, e.g. resource persons and District Coordinators. There is certainly a need for systematic review and reflection, training inputs and specialization at this level as was expressed to the Mission on several occasions.

The Mission is also concerned about the fact that (except for Karnataka) most of the DIU offices are understaffed. We are impressed by the enthusiasm, involvement and overall professionalism of the district staff. They make extremely long working day and weeks. But this leads to a structural problem. Heavy work is acceptable to everyone during an experimental and pioneering phase. But on the long run it turns into a drain on the operating capacities which will threaten the sustainability of the programme. This combined with the limited opportunities for strengthening the operating capacities and personal growth leads to the recommendation of the Mission that priority should be given to the strengthening of the human resources at the DIU's by filling up the vacancies with capable and experienced staff. In addition attention should be given to the training needs of the present DIU staff. The present situation with regard to a number of the district programmes demands the strengthening of the DIU's and State Programme Offices. Highest priority should be given to the appointment of:

- District Coordinators where they have not been appointed,
- additional Resource Persons for the DIU's for the educational components,
- Assistant Project Directors and Resource Persons at State Offices to plan specific programme components.

It is also recommended to look into the possibility of appointing an Assistant National Programme Director within the Department of Education.

#### 4.5 Training and human resources development

Looking at the future of the MSP the role of training for the development of the human resources capacities will increase in importance. As the programmes evolve and the sangha's become stronger the demands from the village women on the programme will increase accordingly. In order to meet those demands the MSP

must anticipate and prepare its responses in various forms of educational and other inputs. Already there is noticeable change in the role of the sahayogini's from facilitator of village processes to the role of resource person and trainer. Sahayogini's have formed committees who focus on different themes and aspects of the work that are found to be relevant in relation to women's empowerment.

The Mission envisages the following development,, which is already beginning to take place. Sahayogini's will turn into mobile training and resource teams who support the mahila sangha's. It may become more effective then to diversify tasks and build in a specialization on relevant themes or specific tasks, according to the needs of the programme. Moreover sahayogini's have their preferences and special talents as well. They may want to specialize their training input and support on specific subjects like women's health and health practices, women's rights and other legal issues, children's education, agriculture and environmental issues, budgeting and group management. Or some of them may want to get involved in micro-planning activities with village women, assist them in collecting information, analysis of the data and writing reports and information and documentation materials. Others may want to specialize on collecting oral histories, generating educational materials with women or become teachers for open learning centers. The programme offers many opportunities and perspectives to strengthen one's capacities in certain fields, which may also widen future career perspectives or job opportunities. In the districts various forms of horizontal and vertical mobility have been noticed: sakhi's becoming sahayogini's, a typist becoming a sahayogini, sahayogini's becoming resource persons at the DIU, a messenger becoming a resource person for construction activities, etc.

In view of the broadening perspectives for the future of the programme, the expansion and diversification of activities in different directions, the Mission is of the opinion that the Mahila Samakhya Programme will have to invest in strengthening its human resources base. A carefully planned human resources strategy will be required at District as well as at State Level in conjunction with a strategy for training and education inputs, either to be developed within the programme or to be sought or mobilized from outside. The Mission recommends that these plans are made first at the District level with support from the State Office. The plans should include the DIU field staff as well as the administrative staff of the DIU office (e.g. accountants, documentalists, etc.). In the plans attention should be given to identification and training (pre-service as well as in-service) of new staff at all levels.

The Human Resources Strategy at the District and State Level should also take into account and anticipate the phase wise expansion of the programme in the new districts as planned for the coming five years (see also the comments of the Mission in Chapter 1). Given the present situation with regard to a number of the district programmes and the need to fill up the existing vacancies at the DIU's the Mission is of the opinion that priority should be given to the consolidation and strengthening - and in some cases the reorientation - of the district programmes, rather than to expanding too fast.



## 5. DOCUMENTATION, EVALUATION AND MONITORING

### 5.1 Documentation

#### 5.1.1 Documentation and its use

The Mahila Samakhya Programme uses many different kinds of documentation. Some of it is generated within the MS Programme, other documentation material is used in the programme but developed externally. Documentation is mostly developed and collected at the state and district level. Sometimes documentation is also collected at the village level. For example, Sangha huts in Mysore, Karnataka, have metal trunks with literacy kits, some books and sometimes records of the sangha meetings.

Documentation is no end in itself, it is a means to achieve something else. Therefore, the vital question is: what is the documentation used for? This question is especially relevant for the types of documentation that the MSP develops itself. The following goals for documentation can be distinguished:

1. To document the process. This is one of the main inputs for evaluation, which is discussed in the second part of this chapter;
2. To systematise information that the MSP generates to share it with others within or outside the MSP. This can be database type of information that results from the micro-planning activities or other baseline studies, or case-studies like the Kutwadi-land case (Mysore, Karnataka).
3. To document the way in which different programme components function, e.g.:
  - the infrastructure
  - the training component
  - the (innovative) educational inputs
  - the co-operative linkages, e.g. with NGOs.

Is the documentation to be utilised for day-to-day monitoring, short term planning, strategic planning or as teaching material, advocacy (influencing policy-makers) or general publicity etc.? Each utilisation needs a different kind of information and will result in different types of documentation. The Mission feels that at this stage in the programme there could be more reflection around these questions. This could result in the development of a comprehensive MSP documentation policy.

#### 5.1.2 Types of documentation within the Mahila Samakhya Programme

For the sake of clarity we would like to distinguish between various kinds of documentation in the MSP:

- A. Documentation generated from within the MSP. This type of documentation can again be subdivided according to its purpose:
- a. Basic filing and information gathering (e.g., micro planning in Bidar, Banda water pumps surveys);
  - b. Internal reports. Reports of sangha meetings, training reports, Sahayogini monthly reports, progress reports, case studies etc.;
  - c. Newsletters for internal use;
  - d. Instruction material. Brochures, songs, poems, posters etc.;
  - e. Material to inform outsiders about M.S.P. For example the video films made by each state.
- B. Documentation developed by others that is used in the MSP

a. **Basic filing and information gathering**

Most of the districts in the programme have developed a village-wise filing system. This system is combined with files on special subjects (e.g., survey on smokeless stoves in Mysore or waterpump documentation in Banda). The village files do not only consist of sahayogini reports, but also contain general information about the village. For example on the literacy-rate, the social composition, the official name of a village (that e.g. in Banda is often differs from the name used by the women themselves).

The experiences in Banda, Mysore and Bidar show that performing survey activities need not only be the task of sahayoginis and DIU-staff. Sangha women, including illiterate ones, seem to be very capable and eager to perform survey activities in their villages. Surveys of this kind can be very useful in planning activities. The involvement of sangha women in all stages of the planning process is ensured by making survey activities a participatory process.

The sangha women in Banda have made simple maps of their villages in preparation for the training on repairing handpumps. At the same time, sahayoginis have made an inventarisation of the available waterpumps, the ones that need reparation and of where extra waterpumps are needed. The result is that M.S.P. Banda has the most comprehensive and up-to-date information on drinking water-points in the district, unequaled anywhere in the government administration. Therefore, this type of information or database can be very valuable, not only for the MSP, it can also be used when linkages with other programmes are established.

In Bidar an experiment called 'Micro-planning for Basic Education' was started in early 1991. This experiment involved the setting up of a village-level Education Committee of five or six interested women. They would survey all educational facilities in their village: number of children attending school, number of literate and illiterate men, women and children etc.

In Banda the follow-up on the survey was evident, the Mission witnessed a training programme for illiterate women to repair handpumps. Unfortunately, in

Bidar, we could not see the results of the micro-planning experiment and its follow-up. Yet, we trust that there will be an adequate follow-up on this planning exercise, because surveys of this kind can serve as a basis for planning activities for the MSP and other relevant programmes. Such surveys need not be limited to drinking water or educational facilities, many other aspects of village life can be surveyed in this way and can form the basis for a comprehensive village database.

#### b. Internal reports

In this category many types of documentation can be mentioned. Internal reports are written at every level of the programme and they are closely linked to the monitoring and evaluation process, which will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

At the moment, the monthly sahayogini-reports form the basis of the MSP internal progress reporting. At the DIU the sahayogini reports are consolidated into three monthly reports. At the state-level these district-reports are again consolidated into a six monthly state progress report. The information included in the sahayogini reports therefore determines the quality of the progress reports. It is of crucial importance that the sahayogini reports contain the kind of information that the programme needs.

It is expected that, when the programme progresses, the reporting on village level activities will increasingly be taken over by sakhis or other sangha women. There are already examples of sakhis writing reports (Banda) and of the recording of sangha decisions (Mysore). We expect that in the coming years, when the impact of many literacy activities will become apparent, many more village-level reports will appear. The sahayogini reports will then no longer be the only source of information on the village level activities of the programme. But, it is expected that the sahayogini reports will remain an important basis for the internal progress reporting.

The Mission would like to stress that, in view of the general level of education of sahayoginis, long-term training and guidance in this area is needed. Training workshops on report-writing and creative writing have been organised for this group, but until now it has been too much of a one-time input instead of a longer term process of continuous training sessions. Furthermore, the use of formats for reporting on village visits could be considered. We will discuss the matter of using formats more extensively in the second part of this chapter, which deals with monitoring and evaluation.

Internal reporting is generally used as an instrument for accountability. Within the MSP the internal reports serve this purpose in an upwards direction. For the accountability to the grass-roots level other instruments/types of documentation are needed. For example, newsletters can serve this purpose. (see also next section)

Apart from the monthly sahayogini-reports, all sorts of other internal reports are written. Of each training a report is written and on some issues special case studies, e.g. the Kutwadi land-case in Mysore district. These reports also serve as inputs for the progress-reports. They are used as reference material when organising new training sessions etc. These types of reports should not only be used within the district itself. They could be a basis for sharing experiences

between districts and states, because they contain important lessons to be learned.

### c. Newsletters

One of many interesting aspects of the MSP is, that many districts prepare their own M.S. newsletters for internal use. The *sahayoginis* often read out these newsletters to the, mainly illiterate, *sangha* women. The newsletters generally contain a mix of general news, information about MSP activities and contributions of the women themselves (usually recorded by the *sahayoginis*). They are a good instrument for the accountability of higher programme-levels towards the *sangha* women.

The newsletters also provide excellent reading material for neo-literate *sangha* women. They meet a great need, because relevant reading material for adult, female neo-literates is rare.

The Mission thinks that the newsletters should be geared as much as possible to the target group of neo-literates. This means that a good design and attractive illustrations are extremely important.

At the moment, in some districts, a DIU-staff member illustrates these newsletters. However, this is purely on an incidental basis, someone in the office happens to be good at it and takes it up. The Mission recommends, therefore, that the task of designing and illustrating these newsletters should be taken very seriously. Training in this area could be provided to a member of the DIU or a *sahayogini*, who is allowed to specialise in this area.

Also, it can be envisaged that the state-office supports the illustrating and design, and provides some articles. Although it may seem inefficient to produce a separate newsletter in each district, the Mission supports it wholeheartedly. In this way the newsletter can be recognisable for the *sangha* women and be written in their language or dialect.

In Karnataka a state-level, quarterly, newsletter is produced for internal as well as external use.

A secondary goal of the district level newsletters also could be external use, for example: to inform district government officials about the programme.

### d. Instruction material

Since its inception a great variety of materials have been produced within the programme. In Saberkantha, for example, literacy primers in the local language and based on experiences of the rural, tribal women themselves were produced. In Mysore posters are made for use in workshops. Traditional and newly written songs have been recorded on audio-cassettes in many districts. In Karnataka brochures have been written on health problems of women.

MS resource persons from different states now work together on the subject of herbal and traditional medicine, to exchange knowledge and develop material jointly. The Mission believes that this kind of sharing of knowledge and experiences is very useful. In many other areas, e.g. literacy, legal issues, a similar type of cooperation between the states could be set up. The national office could initiate the formation of such coordination groups.

This Mission, as well as the previous one, found that the possibilities within the budget for developing audio-visual instruction material are too limited. It is not clear to the Mission whether the budget for 1992-1997 allows for more room in this area. We hope that this will be the case, because we feel that audio-visuals can be very useful instruction material, especially at the sangha level (see also Chapter 7.3 p.4)).

**e. Material to inform outsiders**

So far, this aspect has been a rather neglected within the MSP. This is in line with the low-profile policy that was kept at the beginning of the programme. As has been discussed in other parts of this report, the timing seems right to start a more outward looking strategy for the MSP. Until now some material developed for internal use has also been used for informing outsiders. Examples of these are the state-newsletter of Karnataka, the video-films that have been made in each state and to certain extent the progress reports.

There are no examples yet of the MSP documents that are developed for external use only, but developing a concise brochure to inform government officials about the programme, for example, is urgently needed. The Mission also found that few co-operating NGOs are clear about the MS concept and its programme. Especially when these NGOs are no longer represented in the District Resource Groups (see Chapter 6 on Organisation), it seems necessary to start an active strategy of keeping co-operating NGOs informed about the programme.

In addition to this the MSP can make use of its own documentation resources to produce case studies on specific topics which include the voices of rural women and analyses from their perspectives. These studies can be used to inform and sensitize governmental and non-governmental agencies, as well as policy makers and implementors at different levels policy makers, and make them more responsive to the demands from women.

**B. Documentation developed by others and used in the MSP**

Of course, the MSP does not have to produce everything itself. In many districts literacy primers developed by others are used very successfully. Most District Implementation Units keep some sort of library consisting of documentation from other sources. But, it is difficult to be informed about all suitable documentation that is being produced and available elsewhere in India. It is too much to ask this of DIUs or even from the State Offices. This task should be taken up at the national level (see below).

In one district the Mission found that a simple method of classification of the available documentation was used. Some training in setting-up and managing small-scale documentation centres for DIUs seems useful.

Sometimes, documentation developed by other organisations for a different audience turns out to be an unexpected success within the MSP. For example the monthly wall magazine 'Bhima', meant for working children, is now very popular among sangha women in Mysore.

The description of the different types of documentation used in the programme, shows that there is a wealth of material available. Some sort of clearinghouse function at the national level seems useful, to make a maximum use of this material.

The documentation itself, however, should not be developed at the national level, this should remain as decentralised as it is now. The National Programme Office, or rather, the to be established National Resource Unit could take care of informing the states and districts of the kind of material that is being produced within MSP. It could perhaps also arrange for appropriate translation if needed. Also, the National Programme Office could, through networking, try to be informed of the relevant material that is produced by others (NGOs etc.) and in other states. These tasks imply an expansion of the National Programme Office for which financial and human resources as well as adequate office facilities are required.

The 'Revised Project Document' contains a proposition for a Mahila Samakhya Resource Unit at the national level. The Mission strongly supports the establishment of this national resource center, that should, among others, take up this clearinghouse function (see 5.3).

## 5.2. Monitoring and Evaluation

### 5.2.1 Introduction

Monitoring and evaluation serve several purposes. On the one hand, evaluation and monitoring is needed for the accountability (upwards, downwards and horizontally). To ensure the accountability at all levels it is crucial to have high quality internal reports, in English and in the languages used in the different states. Evaluation results should be disseminated upwards, as well as downwards. As discussed in the paragraphs on documentation, different types of documentation will have to be used for different types of accountability.

Apart from the element of accountability, evaluation and monitoring also form a basis for planning and adapting the programme continuously to the needs expressed. Adequate and appropriate follow-up is therefore crucial. Monitoring and evaluation are needed in order to be informed about the progress of the programme and the emerging needs, problems, issues etc., and to anticipate and plan adequate responses in the form of appropriate strategies for initiating activities, collection of information, planning of -participatory- educational inputs, liaison with other agencies or programmes etc.. In this sense, monitoring and evaluation are management-tools.

The MSP is not a standard development project, it is a process that evelopes in multiple directions under, sometimes distinctly different circumstances and environments. Therefore, simple monitoring with the help of quantative targets is neither possible nor desirable. But, it is feasible to create alternative parameters for monitoring the process. A failure to develop these parameters makes it impossible to plan ahead. Such strategic planning, based on the past experiences, is very necessary for the MSP in the phase that the programme is now entering.

So far, suitable parameters for monitoring the process have not yet been developed. In this respect the Mission feels that such parameters are to be developed from within the programme based on e.g. the guidelines suggested in the report of the MSP appraisal Mission of 1988 (p. 35).

These suggestions are:

- 'a record based on the priorities and values of village women reflecting the variables which they themselves consider good and bad about their situation, using a simple matrix scale taken at intervals through the duration of the programme;
- involvement of members of a sample of mahila sanghas in analysis of their own group's strengths and weaknesses, costs and benefits, failures and achievements, at intervals through the duration of the programme;
- case histories of the process of organizational development in contrasting localities, and the resultant local structures and programme activities;
- "stakeholders" analysis capturing the convergence or divergence of views of the feasibility of the partnership between government and voluntary agencies.'

The Mission notes that especially the first three suggestions seem very relevant for the MSP, and the phase it is now entering. In addition we suggest the following guideline as well:

- a record of how different women experience and feel to changes in their lives on account of their participation in Mahila Samakhya activities and what for them the significance is of these changes (e.g. sangha women in different sangha's, sakhi's, bahayogini's, various functionaries, trainers, resource persons etc.).

The Mission recommends to start a kind of pilot programme for the development of such parameters with a few selected villages in each district. Periodic review and exchange of experiences within the districts will be part of the experiment in order to concretize the formulation of parameters and methods of working with them and to make these into useful guidelines to be adopted in the whole programme.

Related to this we recommend:

- to establish, in a workshop or in another form, which information is needed to guarantee a minimum basis for planning, and
- to develop a simple format to ensure that at least this information flows in. This is not meant to exclude all other types of reporting. Sufficient time should be allowed for experimenting with the formats.

A drawback of the current type of reporting, is that the progress reports are too much of a compilation of events and are more descriptive than analytical. As the programme progresses and extends it becomes increasingly difficult to handle this compilation of information and more concise reporting procedures must be established. Reporting formats can help to keep the information concise and makes it possible to quickly select the kind of information that is needed.

Such a format must also allow space for recording observations, associations, creative writing etc. Apart from that, the formats should ask for 'simple' information like: date of village visit, name of village, number of sangha women and sakhis present, other people present (government officials, DIU-staff, etc.), where did the meeting take place, issues discussed, recent developments in the village, problems, positive points (progress), plans for future activities, etc.

Several formats could be tried out before deciding on any one of them. The MSP is not the kind of programme where ready-made formats can be used. The programme must develop its own formats according to its needs, on a trial and error basis. Formats could also be adapted to the specific needs of a certain district or state.

Before a useful format can be developed, it has to be clear what kind of information is needed to monitor the process. In addition to this care should be taken that using formats for reporting does not lead to rigidity. There should be room to describing striking incidents, personal observations, important developments etc. The different kinds of reporting should complement each other.

The Mission notes that the current, more descriptive progress reports, were a very valuable source of information. As such they served their purpose as an instrument for accountability to the state level, national level and the donor.

### 5.2.2 Monitoring and evaluation experiences within the MSP

At the moment, the peer-group evaluation at the monthly sahayogini meetings is an important instrument of evaluation within the programme. In all the districts its importance for the sahayoginis themselves (to reinforce their process of growth, support each other and to build group solidarity), and as a planning instrument was stressed. The Mission notes that these peer-group evaluations have a great potential as an instrument of process evaluation and collective planning. However, care should be taken that by discussion the functioning of individual persons it becomes an instrument of screening individual performances. The Mission also noted that these peer-group evaluations increasingly take place at sakhi meetings.

So far, state-level internal reviews have been organised in UP and Karnataka. In Gujarat there are plans for such a review. The report of the Karnataka internal review was unfortunately not yet available at the time of the Mission. The report of the UP internal review were extremely useful to the Mission. From discussions with the programme staff at different levels the Mission also observed that the internal evaluation in the way it was conducted in UP proved to be a very valuable, clarifying supportive and inspiring experience for the district staff, although there had been a lot of apprehension about the whole experiment beforehand.

The instrument of reviewing and reflecting on experiences is certainly part of the MSP, by now. However, the Mission feels that a more systematic structure for these reviews could be established, to ensure regular reviews in a 'safe-environment' with comparable methodologies and appropriate follow-up.

### 5.2.3 A structure for monitoring and evaluation

The original MS Programme document ('green book') envisages that the monitoring and evaluation process will be guided by an agency called SITARA. SITARA stands for: State Information Training & Resource Agency. The 'green book' states: 'A voluntary agency or a social science institute will be selected by the National Resource Group in consultation with the State Government to



function as the SITARA' (p. 10) Apart from evaluation and monitoring, SITARA would also be entrusted with documentation tasks.

In none of the three states has a SITARA been established. The conclusion seems justified, by now, that this structure does not serve the needs of the programme. The previous Review Mission also noted in its Executive Summary: 'Experience of implementing the programme suggests that planning, decision-making and information should not be distanced by placing Sitara functions in an external agency.' The present mission supports this view.

An alternative to the SITARA construction will have to be found. The suggestions for documentation have already been given in the first part of this chapter (5.1). According to the Mission it is preferable to devise an in-built or internal evaluation structure, which is not too distant from the environment in which the programme is implemented, neither from the process of decision making and planning within the structure. Moreover an internal evaluation structure can provide more guarantees that evaluation does not immediately make one vulnerable to the outside world.

The Mission is of the opinion that important lessons can be drawn from the success of the internal review experience of the MSP in UP. The following recommendation for an internal evaluation structure is based on that experience and on the structure that is described in the 'Revised Project Document':

- To assign the task of coordinating internal evaluations to a staff-member at each of the three state offices. The three state evaluation coordinators will form the MSP evaluation panel. This panel will be coordinated by the National Office and may be strengthened by one or more resource persons e.g. from the NRG or from the State Councils.
- The tasks of the panel are: to develop parameters to monitor the process and to produce an annual report.
- The tasks of the state evaluation-coordinator are: to initiate and facilitate internal evaluations at district and state level, to be responsible for writing a report of the evaluation and for keeping track of the follow-up in the district programmes.
- The actual evaluation will be carried out by one or more resource persons. In this context a resource-person refers to a person from within the MSP, but from another state. It should be someone who is familiar with the issue (if a special issue is evaluated) or the kind of problems that are being faced in the district (if a district is evaluated). It does not matter from which level the resource persons are drawn, they can be sahayoginis, sakhis, district coordinators, NRG-members etc.
- To ensure a 'safe environment', reports of evaluations are to be kept strictly internal. The main conclusions or abstracts of the reports (no names etc.) can be made available to future external review and evaluation missions.
- External review and support missions should preferably take place on a regular yearly basis and state wise. The function of these missions is to support the programmes and if necessary to identify areas that might need

a stronger support input. The missions should be low key, and have sufficient opportunity (time, freedom of movement), not only to observe and comment, but also to engage into dialogues with MS staff, sangha women and other concerned persons. The yearly missions need not necessarily be of an Indo-Dutch composition, they could consist of Indian experts only. The composition of the missions can differ per state, and the timing also can be different per state.

- In addition to this a full-fledged joint evaluation and review mission should then take place every two to three years. This means that for the next phase (1992-1997) one mid-term review and one evaluation should be planned. The final evaluation mission should take place six months before the end of this phase. These joined review and evaluation missions should consist of Indo-Dutch teams. To ensure a certain degree of continuity it is preferable that the whole or at least part of the mission members have been involved in the earlier review and evaluation missions. Moreover, a period of joint preparation for all members of the mission team in India which includes a careful planning of the mission's activities in coordination with the National, State and District Programme Offices.
- The external review and evaluation missions should be conducted in a low key manner and have sufficient opportunities for dialogues at all levels of the programme implementation structure, as well as for some participation in village level activities.

### 5.3 The MAHILA SAMAKHYA RESOURCE UNIT at the National Level

One of the main conclusions from this chapter is that the establishment of a MS Resource Unit can be very useful for the next phase of the programme. In the 'Revised Project Document' the following tasks are mentioned for this Resource Unit:

1. to facilitate collation and dissemination of information and experience in the project areas and among policy makers;
2. to bring out periodic overviews of the project, outlining different trends, strategies, and innovations;
3. to provide a forum for project functionaries to learn from each other; reflect and distill their raw experiences into knowledge;
4. to enable project functionaries to take short sabbaticals to reflect, study and write in the Resource Unit;
5. to organize workshops for orientation of new entrants and key officials at the national, state and district levels;
6. to respond to the information needs of the state units by drawing upon a wider national network;
7. to bring out a bimonthly Mahila Samakhya newsletter and publish monographs and manuals;

- 8. to run a library and documentation center;
- 9. to facilitate joint NRG-MSS internal reviews.

In this chapter we have further specified certain tasks of the National MS Resource Unit. These are:

- the clearinghouse function: this is in fact covered by number 1 and 6. To avoid confusion, the Mission recommends to divide nr. 1 in the internal and external functions of dissemination of information;
- to initiate inter state co-ordination group-meetings in subject areas also can be seen as a specification of task nr. 1.;
- in the proposed structure for internal and external reviews/evaluations, we have limited the task of the National Office (task nr. 9) to the co-ordination of the evaluation-panel and the facilitation of the external reviews and evaluations;
- task nr. 5 could be further specified by organizing workshops on the documentation needs of the programme. And based on the outcome of that, to organize workshops on the development of reporting formats.

Finally, the Mission would like to stress that, most of the MSP material is generated at the district and state level. This should remain so, and this task should not be taken over by the resource unit at national level. The Mission, fully supports the establishment of a National Mahila Samakhya Resource Unit. According to the Mission the clearinghouse function, rather than the generation of documentary materials should be the core-activity this resource unit.

## 6. ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

### 6.1 Organization Development

As stated in the "National Overview", the Mahila Samakhya Programme is an unusual programme to be implemented by any government. It needs flexibility in many aspects. It advocates a non-target oriented process approach, has little to none affinity to a top-down approach, and recognizes in its strategies for women's empowerment, the necessity to be involved in issues concerning the attitude and behavior of individual women and men.

Within the first two and a half years many experiments related to subject-matter, strategies and organizational set-up have been done. Lessons have been drawn and are being drawn from these experiments.

So far the Mahila Samakhya Programme, from an organizational point of view had all the elements of a typical "pioneer" organization: a clear vision, highly motivated staff, flexibility, innovation, a capacity to experiment and a dislike for organizational forms and procedures which might hamper the freedom of the "pioneers". At the same time, being a programme of the government, the Mahila Samakhya Programme really had to struggle. Obviously, not all experiments were successful. Flexibility in the strategies did not always tally with financial flexibility, or sometimes even with the basic approach: not to hurry or short circuit the initial phase, when women are struggling to obtain their independent time and space. All this is not surprising. In the language of Organization Development it simply means that the Mahila Samakhya Programme is ready to enter into the next phase, often called the "organizational phase". It means a higher level of organization, more coherence and a certain degree of standardization in administrative measures, training and approaches. All this is necessary as the MSP is growing and becomes more complex. It may sound "bureaucratic" in the ears of the pioneers, but it need not be so. In the next paragraphs this will be further elaborated.

### 6.2 The identity of the Mahila Samakhya Programme

The facilitation and reinforcement of women's empowerment is the main strength of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. As a consequence of this - and considering the MSP being an educational programme - it has the potential for the development of innovative and participatory, gender-sensitive educational approaches, which eventually will affect the education system. In the majority of the *sahayogini*, *sakhi* and *sangha* meetings visited the members of the mission have observed the impact, which the Mahila Samakhya approach has had on women's lives in terms of confidence building and gaining self-esteem, societal respect, the ability to gain a greater control over their own lives and the generation of changes through collective action. It was here that the Mahila Samakhya approach was strictly followed, to first focus on the development of strong *mahila sangha*'s in the villages. Only after that, and after the *sangha* women have expressed their need for it, the more material components like the *sangha* hut (*thikana*, *kutir*, *mandi*), a child care center, or literacy training can be introduced. To maintain this non-interventionist approach has not been easy.

As most Government programmes promise some material gains at the beginning of any programme, the villagers, men and women alike, expected the same approach from the Mahila Samakhya Programme. In some cases like e.g. in U.P. the Mahila Samakhya Programme was contracted out to Voluntary Organizations through a grant-in-aid mechanism, before the Mahila Samakhya Society was formed. The Agencies naturally exercised their own approach, which often meant: promise and deliver the goods first. Obviously, there was no separate Mahila Samakhya identity. But the same happened within Mahila Samakhya as well. The Mission came across a number of situations, where women were promised a sangha hut in order to tempt them to form a women's group or sangha. Such approaches from within are extremely dangerous for the identity of the Mahila Samakhya Programme as a whole.

Does this mean that the Mahila Samakhya Programme should not provide a support system? Not at all. The Mahila Samakhya Programme is an education programme aimed at the empowerment of marginalized rural women by creating an environment for learning, which in its turn reinforces women's process of empowerment. As such, it has the potential for the creation of an alternative, innovative, gender sensitive system of participatory learning and it is linked with Adult and Non-formal education. Within this context the Mahila Samakhya Programme can be regarded as a support mechanism. In the original project document various support services are mentioned in the form of child care centers and collective experiments to enhance availability of water, fuel and fodder (see also p. 7). In the Revised Project Document (September 1991, p. 16) there is the following addition:

"In addition the DIU's are coordinating with the block and district administration to provide such services by harnessing ongoing schemes like DWCRA, Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, training and credit schemes being organized by the Department for Women and Child and the Rural Development Department. An effort is being made to ensure that there is no duplication, by keeping communication channels open and actively forging linkages with the administration at all levels."

The Mission is in favor of this last addition. Although it was an assumed attitude before, by formulating it explicitly, it has become official policy. It clarifies the facilitating and liaison role of the Mahila Samakhya Programme with regard to the existing GO and NGO support services and development schemes. This implies that the Mahila Samakhya Programme has no intention to take up everything themselves. It also means that the identity of Mahila Samakhya as an education programme is not diluted by taking up activities, which can hardly be related to its core activities or for which it is not properly equipped.

By emphasizing its facilitating role through establishing or re-establishing linkages and alliances with other support systems the MSP will be able to clarify its role within the overall support structure and strengthen its identity. For instance, in all States the need has been expressed for linkages with a strong legal support network of committed lawyers, legislators and legal experts, whose support or advice can be mobilized if the need arises. The Mission strongly favors such a network and sees a role for MSP in the facilitation of this network.

It should be realized, however, that there is constant pressure on Mahila Samakhya to take a more active interventionist role. And at certain instances the temptation has been and will sometimes be very strong. It is here that the

question may be asked, whether the strongly advocated flexibility should allow for every possible freedom at State and District level even at the risk of compromising the Mahila Samakhya principles.

How far should the flexibility go and how much guidance and auditing is necessary? Let there be no misunderstanding. As will be clear from the foregoing chapters the Mission recognizes and appreciates the process oriented, non-target and flexible approach. As cultural, social and economic aspects differ from State to State and from District to District, flexibility in the implementation per District is necessary in order to be responsive to different local environments. And differences with regard to the shape and set-ups of the State and District programmes are existent as can be read from the State and District field-visit reports (Parts Two, Three and Four of the Report of the Review Mission).

However, to a certain extent direction with vision and guidance are necessary as well. The Mission has observed that in a number of cases there was not enough guidance and monitoring, which has led to situations and work methods which are contrary to the Mahila Samakhya approach, as has been described above. Where should there be guidance and monitoring, including corrective measures, and where should there be flexibility and freedom?

The Mahila Samakhya Programme has found the answer itself: the Revised Project Document states:

"As the project inches towards these objectives, it has sought guidance not from targets, but from certain inviolable principles, which have to be kept in mind at all stages of implementation."

These NON-NEGOTIABLE PRINCIPLES are mentioned in the first chapter of this report (p. 7). The Mission is of the opinion that these "non-negotiable principles" are excellent, as they give clear guidance to the State Programme Directors and the District Coordinators about the approaches to be followed at field-level. In order to avoid any differences of opinion on the interpretation, it is suggested that guidelines or examples be added as to what should NOT be done. For instance:

adding after:

a) "the initial phase, when women are consolidating their independence, time and space it is not hurried or short circuited".....

the following sentence:

" Sahayogini's should not approach village women with the promise of a sangha-hut or any other material gains if they are prepared to form a sangha."

As these principles are geared towards the Mahila Samakhya approaches at field level, other non-negotiable principles could be thought of, for the State level, like e.g.:

" Structural changes which involve the total Mahila Samakhya Programme can only be made in cooperation with the National Level."

And the non-negotiable principles can be translated in terms of reference for collaborative linkages with other agencies. Furthermore, a system should be developed to ensure that States and Districts adhere to these principles.

### 6.3 Cooperation with voluntary agencies

The problems related to the cooperation with NGO's have been adequately described in the report of the National Programme Office "Mahila Samakhya Karnataka - Uttar Pradesh - Gujarat, A National Overview", Chapter IV on Mahila Samakhya NGO relationship, some issues (September 1991, p. 15). To summarize:

- When the programme was being planned meaningful partnerships with non-government organizations were seen as an important strategy to prevent excessive bureaucratization and to provide space for NGO's and individual activists as conscience keepers of the programme.
- The Mahila Samakhya Programme was launched by NGO's in three of the ten districts, but also in a number of blocks of Districts with a DIU. As women's organizations were difficult to find, NGO's having a presence among the poorest communities were identified and gender input was provided through training and regular interactions. However many conflicts emerged, resulting from conflicting leadership styles, different approaches contrary to the Mahila Samakhya approach, strong anti-Government attitudes, or a 'do-gooder' attitude.

The chapter ends as follows:

"Mahila Samakhya is at a juncture when we have to redefine the nature of our partnership with NGO's, especially in the context of their role in the District Resource Group, as trainers and as partners in implementation. Needless to add, this must be done in consultation with the organizations currently involved in Mahila Samakhya"(p 20).

The Mission wants to comment as follows:

The above statements give the impression that severe problems existed with all NGO's. This is not the case. Organizations like Aikya, Janvikas, Jagori, Allaripu and others have done excellent work in the field of training and implementation. Confrontations or conflicts that took place with the implementing NGO's, were mostly due to the fact that their role was not sufficiently defined or that no action was or could be taken when they overstepped their role.

Furthermore, the idea to be equal partners in the implementation at a stage when the Mahila Samakhya Programme still had to develop its identity and to establish its credibility sounds somewhat naive. To become real partners requires organizations of equal strength, which are able to negotiate their cooperation from an independent position vis-a-vis one another. In this case the MSP was dependent on the NGO's and in the weakest position, although it may have had the best ideas. The MSP at that stage kept in the view of the Mission a rather low profile. But that can be abandoned. The Programme has gained sufficient strength to enter into contracts with NGO's on its own terms.

The Mission is of the opinion that for the cooperation with other agencies a more formalized approach is required. Any working relation should be based on a contract, in which the terms and conditions are clearly spelt out, as well as the financial arrangements. The contract should include the possibility for corrective measures and possibility of cancellation of the contract.

The involvement of NGO's in District Resource Groups will be discussed in more detail in the section on the Management Structure. Here, it is sufficient to state that NGO's that have been sub-contracted by the Mahila Samakhya Programme should not have delegated members in the DRG.

#### 6.4 Formalization of Mahila Sangha's

From an organizational point of view the following question regarding the registration and the status of sangha's still has to be answered:

What are the legal and administrative implications for the sangha and for the Mahila Samakhya Programme or the Society if the sangha's are registered?

Most probably the sangha has to be officially registered in case a sangha hut is handed over to the sangha in order to establish its ownership of the hut and/or title to the land. However, it still has to be investigated whether this is really possible. Legal advice is urgently required here, as in many cases the sangha hut will be constructed on Government land. The Mission recommends that the legal implications of sangha registration in relation to ownership of or access to assets acquired by the sangha will be looked into. Related to this is the earlier raised question as to who constitute a sangha. Mahila Samakhya has already indicated that these issues need urgent attention.

The Mission was informed that in one of the States the idea has evolved to form a federation of sangha's. This emerging idea still has to be discussed at different levels, including the National level and in the different States. Moreover it is doubtful if the idea to form a federation has also emerged from the mahila sangha's in the villages. However, the impression was given e.g. in one of the three video-films, that the idea to form a federation had been agreed upon, as a part of the strategy for the coming five years.

The Mission appreciates the initiative to start thinking about dreams and visions for the future. But we are of the opinion that much more strengthening and consolidation at field-level is necessary, before such an idea could be considered. It should be prevented that the idea of forming a federation becomes an end in itself. Furthermore, it is questionable whether it is the task of Mahila Samakhya as a programme to develop and further implement these organizational ideas. If it is felt as a task of the MSP, then again the legal and administrative consequences should be studied as soon as possible.

#### 6.5 Management Structure

According to the 'Revised Project Document' the overall administrative structure as proposed in the original programme document has been retained. However, the internal management structure of the project has been modified slightly in order to make it more responsive to the needs evolving from the processes generated in the villages and to the emerging needs of the programme. According to the Mission some aspects of the management structure need further clarification or specification.



### 6.5.1 Denomination of staff functions

As the Mahila Samakhya Programme is considered as a time-bound programme, it is understandable that no regular government positions can be created. For this reason denominations like "consultants" and "resource-persons" have been chosen for long term and short term staff functions. However this creates confusion, as there obviously is a difference between inside and outside consultants, inside and outside resource-persons and district-resource group members. Mahila Samakhya has already re-named at State level the post of resource-person into Associate Programme Director. The Mission advises however to abandon denominations as Consultant and Resource-Person for internal staff functions and change them into e.g. core-staff-member, (assistant) programme officer, or any other denomination that makes clear, that it refers to internal staff. The Mission is of the opinion that even then, the contracts for these functionaries can be time-bound.

### 6.5.2 District Level

#### 6.5.2.1 District Implementation Unit (DIU)

The DIU is considered to be the district branch of the Mahila Samakhya Society and consists of a Project Coordinator, Resource Persons and supporting staff. In all districts a DIU has been established. Each DIU has a certain autonomy in evolving its own specific implementation strategies and preparing its annual plans and budgets according to its needs and strategies.

The Mission is concerned that in all three districts of Gujarat and in three of the four U.P. districts no District Coordinators could be appointed, due to various reasons. With the exception of Karnataka, all of the DIU's are at present understaffed, one resource person taking the place of the District Coordinator. The Mission is of the opinion that the absence of a District Coordinator with the full responsibilities and powers related to this function endangers the required autonomy of the DIU. It is recommended to make all efforts to fill these posts.

#### 6.5.2.2 District Resource Group (DRG)

The District Resource Groups have been established in different ways in the States and Districts. In some districts it clearly is an advisory body consisting of individual experts in the various fields where Mahila Samakhya is working. In one district it has the image of an empowered body, while in some districts (Gujarat) it is virtually non-existent.

In 1990 the decision has been taken at State and National level that the DRG should be an advisory and not an empowered body. However, the project-document still could cause confusion, as it states that the DRG "...advises and GUIDES the DIU in its planning and implementation" (emphasis added). The Mission strongly feels that the earlier decision should be adhered to and that the DRG should be regarded as an advisory body only. Moreover, we feel that an advisory body should consist of experts in the fields in which Mahila Samakhya is working. They might be from Governmental or Non-Governmental institutions. However, they should not be representatives from these organizations, as being a representative implies that the interests of the organizations to which they belong to will have to be taken into consideration. This seems contradictory to the expected advisory role.

The Mission is of the opinion that the District Resource Group has an important function in supporting the district programmes. It provides a network of local resource persons who may be called upon for advice and other support if needed. The DRG also serves as a channel for networking with other organizations, services and support systems at the district level. Therefore the Mission recommends the reconstitution of the DRG's as advisory bodies in all districts where the MSP is being implemented.

### 6.5.2.3 District Resource Unit for Adult and Non-Formal Education (DRU)

The original Programme Document envisages the establishment of a District Resource Unit for Adult and Non-Formal Education under the Mahila Samakhya Programme in the various districts. However, the relationship of this institution towards the DIU's and the development of the district programmes has not been clarified. So far DRU's have recently been created in the Districts of Mysore and in Bidar (Karnataka).

In the 'Revised Project Document', the DRU is mentioned as an educational resource unit for Adult Education and Non-formal education with the task "to generate gender sensitive educational material, develop innovative teaching-learning modules for rural women and train instructors in creative pedagogy" (p. 15). The Mission regards the specification of the DIU task to develop gender sensitive educational material as an improvement. However, terms like e.g. Women's Resource Unit or Mahila Samakhya Educational Resource Unit would be an even better reflection of the Mahila Samakhya's identity. The Mission is strongly in favor of the linkage with AE and NFE, as they are also part and parcel of the Education Department of the MHRD. Moreover, there is a great need to develop gender-specific approaches and educational material and the Mahila Samakhya Programme provides an excellent foundation for the development of such materials in a participatory manner.

The Mission has certain doubts about the viability of these Resource Units at District level. As the project is planning to expand from 10 to 23 districts in the coming five years, this will imply the establishment of 23 Resource Units, which are to be managed under the responsibility of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Although there is a large variation of cultures and environmental conditions between the different districts, it is unlikely that there are that many differences in the basic approach for the development of educational material and teaching-learning modules. There is the danger of duplication of work and the generation of too many different approaches in addition to the expected difficulties in the coordination. Moreover, there is a question of the availability of a sufficient number of experts and personnel for the envisaged DRU's. To form a separate section or unit at district level seems to be premature.

The Mission suggests to investigate whether it will not be more appropriate to place one Mahila Samakhya Educational Resource Unit at State level and add one or two more core-staff members to the DIU's, who will be responsible for the development of the educational component within the Mahila Samakhya District programmes. They will act as a field extension unit of the State Educational Resource Unit for the development and testing of methods, materials and learning-teaching modules together with the mobile support staff from the State Educational Resource Unit.

If, at the State Level a Resource Unit for AE and NFE already exists, it might be argued that there will be a danger of undesired duplication. However this will not be the case if the task and identity of the MS State Educational Resource Unit is clear. At a later stage they could be merged.

The Mission is strongly in favor of an organizational and management structure whereby the Resource Unit for the development of AE and NFE is separated from the MSP activities at the district level. It should be considered as an autonomous unit under the Mahila Samakhya State Society.

### 6.5.3 State level

#### 6.5.3.1 Mahila Samakhya Society (MSS)

The Mahila Samakhya Societies at State Level have been set up to ensure the autonomous and flexible character of the Programme. Officially the General Council is the highest body, consisting of ex-officio Government members and persons from non-government organizations and educational institutions. The NGO-members are in the majority. The Mission is of the opinion that this has been a wise decision. Although Mahila Samakhya is a Government Programme, it can easily become involved in rather precarious situations. To have a majority of Non-Government members gives the Government a much more free role to play.

The General Council meets only once per year, to review the implementation, to give overall policy guidance and direction and to approve the annual budget.

The actual power rests with the Executive Committee (EC). Here the composition is different. According to the Memorandum of Association for the State Societies, the Executive Committee shall consist of 7 Government Officials, 5 representatives from NGO's, the State Programme Director and the District Programme Coordinators. Regarding the composition of the EC the Mission would like to give the following comments.

First of all the Mission agrees that the State Programme Director is the Member Secretary of the Executive Committee. But to have the District Coordinators as members confuses the managerial clarity needed to run such a complicated programme in the opinion of the Mission. It is obvious that the voices of the districts should be heard clearly in the EC before decisions are taken. Before they reach the EC policy matters are discussed in District and State meetings where the District Coordinators are present. In addition to this the District Coordinators could be present in the EC meetings as observers, permanent invitees or advisors for special issues.

Another concern relates to the nomination of representatives of NGO's, working in the Districts, as members of the EC. If the recommendation of the Mission to cooperate with NGO's on the basis of clear contracts is accepted, then these NGO's should not be on the EC, as the EC has the power to order corrective measures. For the same reasons, as mentioned for the General Council, the Mission is in favor of a majority of individual members over Government ex-officio members. The Mission recommends to revise the Memorandum of Association for the State Societies accordingly.

### 6.5.3.2 Delegation of financial powers

The Memorandum of Association leaves ample freedom for the delegation of financial powers at any level. However, the manual "delegation of financial powers", as provided by the GOI limits the financial powers of State and District Coordinators to an unacceptable extent. Moreover, the various items are spelt out in too much detail to enable flexibility. For Karnataka this problem has been overcome and optimal financial flexibility is ensured.

In UP, the current inflexibility in the flow of funds to the District Implementation Units has adversely affected the planning and strategizing of the programme activities. However, the Secretary of Education of UP has ensured the Mission that all problems with regards to the smooth flow of funds will be solved immediately. Furthermore, it is expected that the impasse regarding the appointment of a State Programme Director will be solved before the end of this year.

### 6.5.3.3 The State Programme Office

In one of the States visited, there was a debate with the members of the Mission about decentralization and the future role of and need for the State Office was questioned. Emphasis was put on the strengthening of the autonomous role of the districts. The Mission favors the creative thinking and appreciates the open discussion with the concerned programme staff. However, the Mission is of the opinion that the State Office in each of the States, for the foreseeable future has a facilitating as well as a steering role to play towards the DIU's: e.g. for the development of the educational component, the coordination of the internal evaluations, liaison with GO and NGO agencies and programmes, for coordination of inter district and joined activities, production and dissemination of documentary materials, for the expansion of the MSP in new districts etc. Moreover there is a growing demand from the side of the sangha women in the districts for a stronger role of the State Office in sensitizing government structures and policy makers at the State level to become more responsive to the needs and demands from the rural women.

In Karnataka and UP, the Mahila Samakhya Societies, including the office of the State Programme Director are housed in separate office buildings. This is in concurrence with the autonomous character of the Societies. The Mission urgently recommends the same for Gujarat and any future States where the MSP is to be implemented. The office building has to allow room for inter district training workshops, seminars, meetings and conferences and lodging facilities for the staff.

The job-description of the State Programme Director as Chief Executive of the MSS provided in the 'Revised Project Document' leaves much room for different interpretations. The Mission recommends to make the job-description and the tasks of the State Programme Office more specific. It could include:

- to provide vision and direction and to guard the implementation of the Programme according to its ideological principles;
- to assist the DIU's in strategic planning;
- to provide for concrete assistance, guidance and, if necessary, mobilize external training, education and other resource inputs for the district programmes;

- to coordinate and support the development of the educational component;
- to coordinate intra and inter state linkages, exchange programmes, workshops, mela's, etc.;
- sensitization of existing support structures (legal, social, economic, health, etc.) at State level;
- providing a channel through which the voices and demands from women can be heard and responded to at policy levels;
- dissemination of information, documentation and other resource material in support of the district programmes;
- to coordinate and support the introduction and implementation of the programme in the new districts;
- the planning and financial management at State Level;
- coordination of district reports into half-yearly State Progress reports.

The implementation of these tasks requires more than one person. As the State Programme Office of Gujarat is, at present, understaffed, the Mission recommends that immediate steps will be taken to appoint an Assistant Programme Director who is to assist the Programme Director in supporting the implementation of the District Programmes.

Regarding the selection of State Programme Directors, the Mission is of the opinion that the National Resource Group should be involved, as they have a guiding role to play regarding Mahila Samakhya's guiding principles. It is recommended that two nominees of the NRG will be consulted before the final selection.

#### 6.5.4 National Level

##### 6.5.4.1 National Resource Group (NRG)

The Mission is of the opinion that the National Resource Group as a group of independent advisors has played an essential role in advocating the programme and providing a sounding board for discussing major issues related to ideological concepts and their operationalization, strategies, administrative and organizational bottlenecks, the educational component etc. However there appeared to be a need to reconstitute the NRG and to redefine its tasks. The proposed role of the NRG (p. 27 of the 'Revised Project Document') is to:

1. advise and guide the GOI on policy matters concerning women's education and the future of the Mahila Samakhya strategy on larger educational interventions;
2. plan the future expansion of the project and to simultaneously contain pressures for expansion which threaten to over stretch the ability of the project and to dilute its principles;
3. safeguard the non-negotiables of Mahila Samakhya and to ensure that they are treated as such at all levels;
4. discuss and debate various issues concerns and concepts which arise from the field and evolve broad strategies;
5. participate in internal reviews and evaluations;

6. maintain the national character of the project: individual members of the NRG are to attach themselves to one EC and/or one DRG.

Furthermore, members will be nominated for a maximum of two terms (max. four years) and approximately one third of the non official members are to retire from the group to make way for new members. This is to enable the project to draw upon a wider cross section of women and men.

The Mission supports the proposal in general terms and is in favor of a closer involvement of the non-official NRG members in the implementation of the MSP in the states and the districts. The Mission has observed - from reading the minutes of the meetings of the NRG - that the discussion on issues and policy matters are not always taken up for further discussion at the fieldlevel. This could cause a discrepancy between the general policy lines and the implementation in the districts.

Apart from their participation in internal reviews and evaluations as mentioned under 5 (see also Chapter 4), members of the NRG can also involve themselves in other activities, and contribute with their experience and knowledge. As the NRG is constituted of valued, committed and experienced persons in the fields of women and development and of education they could be invited to participate as resource persons in brainstorming seminars and workshops wherein the staff comes together to develop strategies for dealing with issues like e.g. literacy, sensitizing policy makers and bureaucrats, creative learning centers and other forms of non-formal education, the establishment and function of Mahila Shiksan Kendra's, the hut construction component, how to deal with women's demands for economic improvement, health and legal issues.

The Mission is of the opinion that the function of the NRG as a sounding board should be maintained for the development of new internal and external policy lines. The representation of a larger cross-section of individual women and men as resource persons without managerial responsibilities is therefore essential.

However, the present proposal gives the NRG a double task as it is to function also as a Steering Committee. According to the Mission the size and composition of the NRG as well as the frequency of its meetings make it not very practical to combine the two tasks. The mission recommends the constitution of smaller Steering Committee out of a cross section of the NRG members. The participation of the Secretaries of Education from the different states as e.g. permanent advisors in the Steering Committee will enhance the interaction and cooperation between the state and the national level. The idea of forming a Steering Committee at the national Level is already being considered at National Programme Office.

#### 6.5.4.2 The National Programme Office (NPO) and the Mahila Samakhya Resource Unit

The function of the National Programme Office as the coordinating body of the MSP within the Department of Education has changed and expanded to keep in pace with and to be responsive to the growth of the programme in the different states. In the absence a full fledged State Office the NPO has taken the role of supporting and coordinating the MSP in UP during the last year in addition to the normal tasks. This situation will end as soon as a separate State Office for UP is established.

From its position within the Department of Education the NPO has been able to share the MSP experience with policy makers in the GOI and helped to integrate the MS approach in policy and programme developments related to the policy of Education For All. This aspect of the NPO task is expected to get more importance in the future. The Mission sustains the proposed specification of the role of the National Programme Office as a bureau within the Department of Education to deal with the Government side of the Programme, the liaisons with other GOI departments and the Government of the Netherlands and to coordinate with educational policy and programme developments which integrate the Mahila Samakhya approach (see 'Revised Project Document' p. 28).

Related to this is the establishment of a Mahila Samakhya Resource Unit at National Level, which will be an office outside of the Ministry. Its main task will be to facilitate, coordinate and mobilize resource support (documentation, workshops, reviews etc.). As mentioned in Chapter 5 the Mission strongly supports the creation of this national MS Resource Unit and has proposed some modifications with regard to the tasks of this unit (see Chapter 5.3).

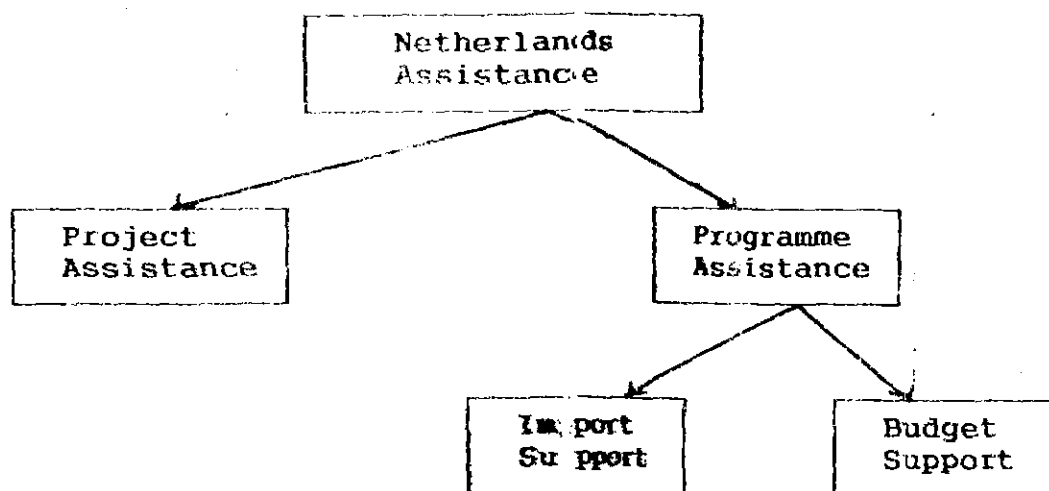
## 7. FINANCES

In this chapter only those items will be dealt with, which have not been described in the earlier chapters.

### 7.1 Mode of Financing

The Mahila Samakhya Programme is not financed according to the usual project mode of financing. This paragraph describes the difference.

The Netherlands Assistance to India is organized according to the following figure:



The Mahila Samakhya Programme is financed under Programme Assistance, sub category budget support.

Budget support means financial support to the budget of Departments of the Government of India. In reality this means support to activities with a Human Resource Development character with priorities being given to programmes with an innovative character. These activities have to be mentioned but do not need to be as fixed as is required under project assistance. This system therefore is much more flexible and the financial reporting does not need to be as detailed as for project assistance.

The identification and appraisal processes follow the same routes as project assistance. A side-letter has to be signed and payments are made on incurred expenditure statements.

### 7.2 Disbursements and flow of funds

The flow of funds from the Department of Education Societies has been smooth. After utilization of 75% of installment is provided on the basis of independent from the Society to the District Implementation Society. The Mahila Samakhya installment, another re. The flow of funds been discussed in the

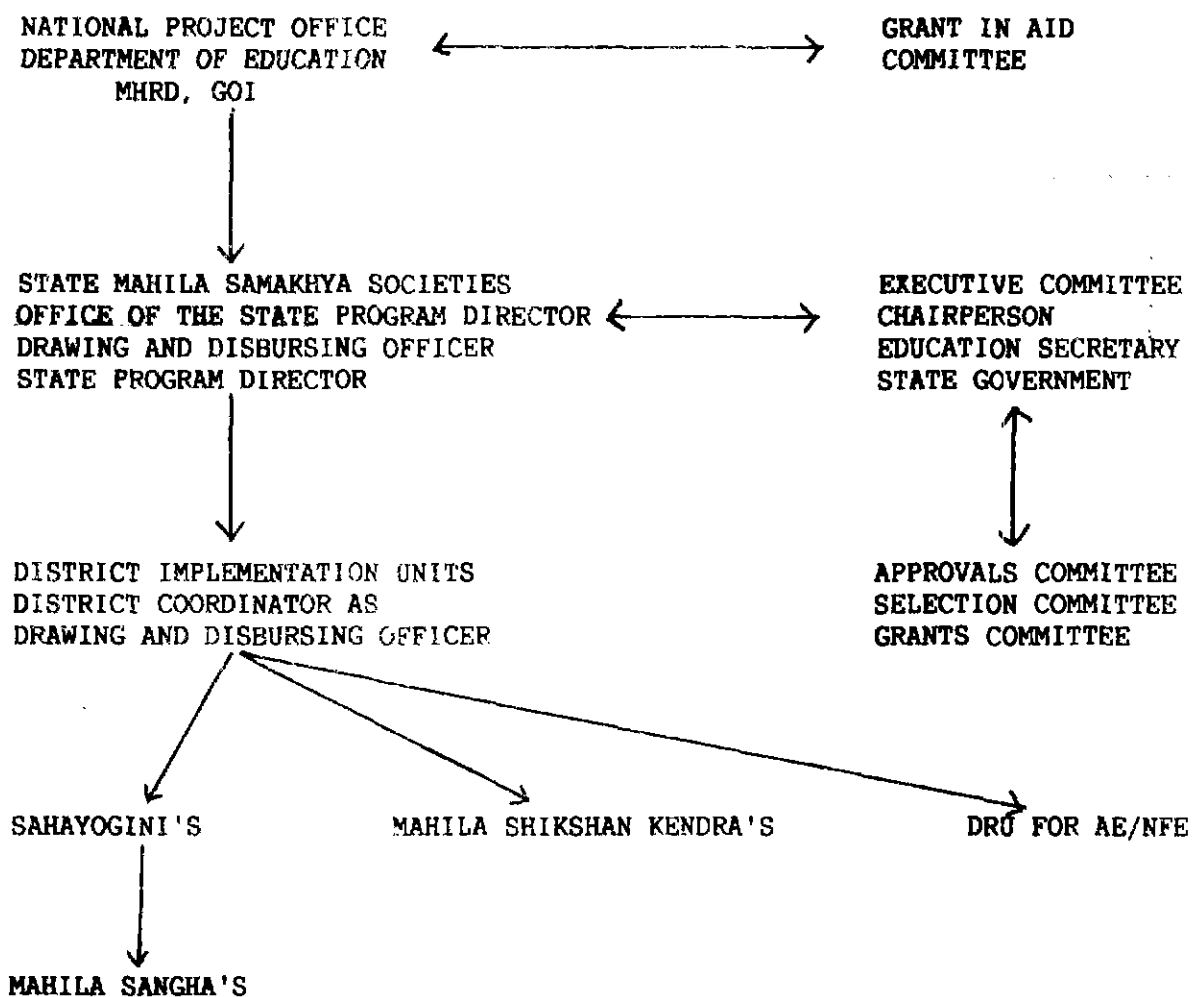


Chapter 6.1 on the Organization. Monthly or bi-monthly expenditure statements are provided by the District Implementation Units to the State Office.

The Mahila Samakhyā Society then submits quarterly statements of expenditure to the National Office on the basis of which it is decided whether another installment is needed. Annually detailed audited expenditure statements are provided to the National Office.

The following diagram outlines the flow of funds:

#### FLOW OF FUNDS



### 7.3 Expenditure and claims

The following table shows the expenditure and funds disbursed up to 31st March 1991 (end of fiscal year) in lakhs of Rs:

|                 | incurred expenditure | funds disbursed |
|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| National Office | 16,55                | 16,55           |
| Karnataka       | 63,58                | 110,65          |
| Gujarat         | 46,49                | 110,65          |
| Uttar Pradesh   | 95,40                | 244,96          |
| Outside project | 32,30                | 32,30           |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>254,32</b>        | <b>515,11</b>   |

The claims to the Government of The Netherlands in lakhs of Rs are as follows:

|  |           |               |
|--|-----------|---------------|
| Pre-financing:                                       | received  | 165,29        |
| Claim 30 Nov. 1990:                                  | received  | 140,88        |
| Claim 25 Apr. 1990:                                  | received  | 189,16        |
| Expected claim before Dec. 1991:                     |           | 106,00        |
| <b>Total amount released by GON by 31 Dec. 1991:</b> | <b>Rs</b> | <b>601,33</b> |

This is an approximate amount of Dfl. 6,5 million.

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As has been mentioned already by the Indo-Dutch Review Mission of 1990, the original 5 year budget apportioned expenditure equally across the years. This is in any programme a cause for underspending during the initial years. However, especially for the Mahila Samakhya Programme with its non-target oriented process approach, and the long process of training and sensitization, the initial process has taken even longer. Another reason for underspending was the fact that there proved to be little scope in the budget for variations. Moreover, some Executive Committees, although given full financial powers, were not clear whether they could approve innovative educational activities that do not conform to approved patterns. In April 1990 it was decided that the entire financial pattern would undergo major changes in the 8th Five Year Plan period. For the financial year 1991-92 the Executive Committee was fully empowered to consider and approve any innovation and appoint staff within the total number of approved posts.

For the 8th Plan period, an even more flexible proposal regarding the Financial pattern has been drafted.

The Mission would like to point out the following points which will again bring about inflexibility in the system.

Unit costs not necessarily make the system more flexible. In the 'National Overview', page 24 the following restriction is stated: "The Mahila Samakhya Society cannot exceed the limits presented in these unit costs". This sentence, unfortunately weakens what has been said earlier about the flexibility. The Mission recommends to delete this sentence.

In the unit costs fixed amounts per item are given. It would be better to make it an average, based on an under and upper limit, as costs will vary per district. This could be done in the same way as in the budget.

Comparing the unit costs of 1988 (Green Book) and the proposed unit costs for 1992 to 1997 some items have been increased, most others have not. It is recommended that an inflation correction is added to all budget items.

Experience has shown that some unit-costs have been too low. E.g. an amount of Rs. 15,000 for a Sangha Hut seems to be much too low. A revision based on an estimation of the real costs is possibly required. Also here a certain margin must be allowed for, since the costs might be different per area.

Some items seem to be missing in the proposed budget. E.g. no separate budget-item is given for the generation and production of video films and other audio-visuals, and for development of educational materials (including costs for printing, publication etc.), unless the costs have been included under another budget-item. In view of the expected emphasis in the next phase of the Programme on the development of innovative learning methods and materials the Mission recommends that special funds will be allocated for the production costs of such materials. This also includes the production of video films and other audio-visual materials for educational and publicity purposes.

A senior consultant (ret. accountant general) has been appointed recently to advise on

- a) re-drafting the "delegation of powers",
- b) amending the activities of association of the Mahila Samakhya Societies,
- c) simplifying accounting procedures.

#### 7.4 Budgeting

The budget-process clearly starts from the Districts up to the State and to the National Level. Each State prepares its annual budget on the basis of the District plans. A number of changes have been proposed, pending the approval for the 8th Plan period, such as a lump sum for all support activities, increase in certain limits, and the linkage of district staff members to village coverage.

The broad division of the overall budget in Management Costs, Activity Costs and Costs for Sahayogini's, and the respective budget allotments gives the impression that the management costs are high in relation to the other items. However, this is not in accordance with the reality of the Mahila Samakhya programme. The Mission sees two options to come to a more realistic division:

Option 1. Replace the terms Management Costs, Activity Costs and Sahayogini costs by Direct costs and Indirect Costs.