

Report of the second Indo-Dutch Mission to review the Mahila Samakhya Programme, an education programme for women's equality of the National Government of India.
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PART FOUR

SOME OBSERVATIONS RELATED TO THE MAHILA SAMAKYA PROGRAMME IN
GUJARAT

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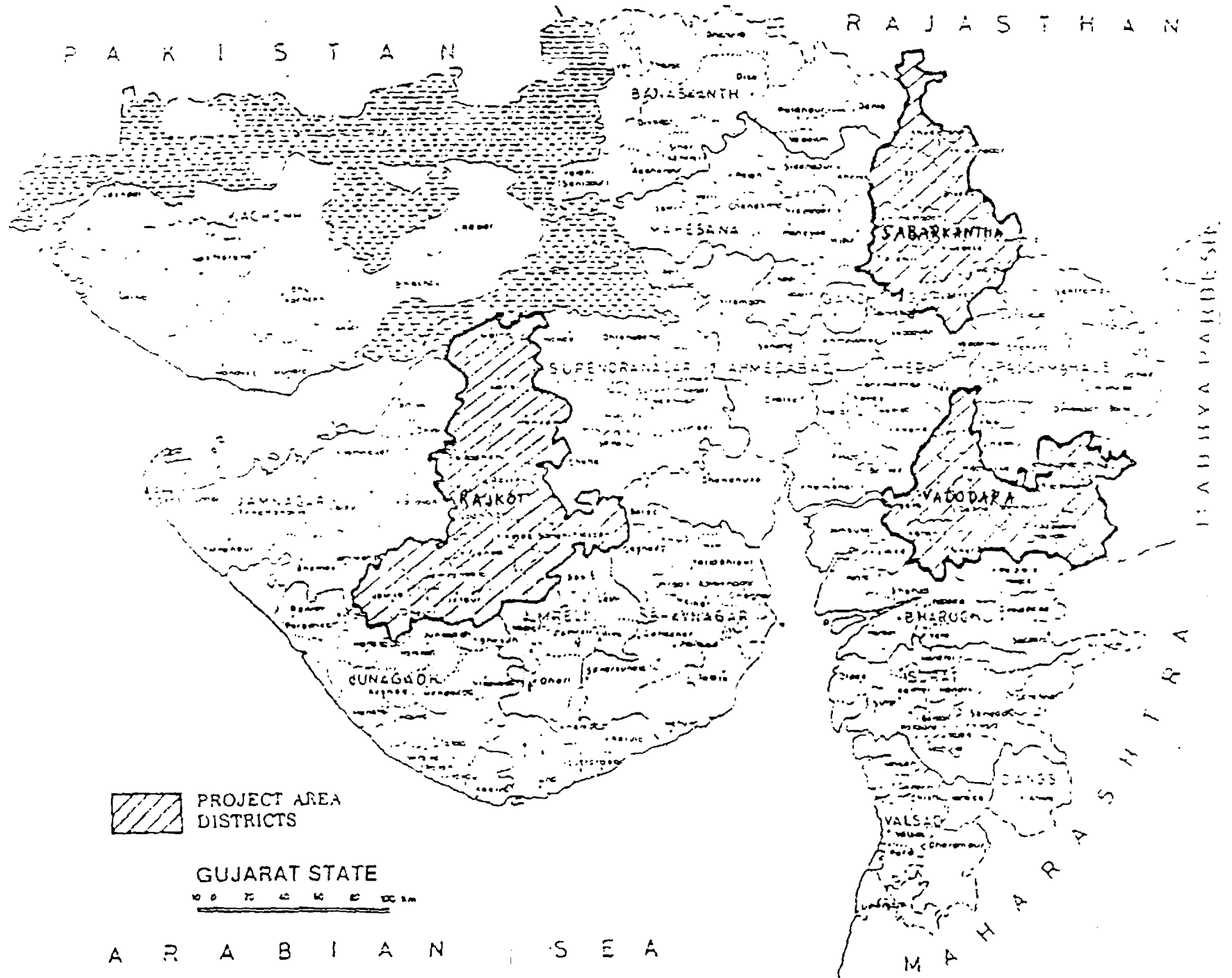
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MAP DISTRICTS COVERED BY MAHILA SAMAKHYA, GUJARAT.



1. Introduction

In Gujarat, the Mahila Samakhya Programme is implemented in the districts of Rajkot, Saberkantha and Baroda. Saberkantha is one of the poorest districts of Gujarat. The availability of water is a major problem in the district. Most villages have to do without a source of drinking water. Many people are unemployed or work as marginal labourers. The rural population of Saberkantha consists of large proportion of tribals. The level of education among the rural population is not as bad as one would expect. Missionaries have active in this region for a long time and have set up many schools. In general women have been much less exposed to the missionary activities.

The district of Rajkot also has a water shortage problem. The district has a large proportion of scheduled castes. The social customs and believes can be characterised as orthodox and conservative. For women this means a high incidence of women burning and dowry deaths in the region.

Baroda district has a very mixed population, urban, rural, tribal and non-tribal. Baroda city, located in the extreme west of the district, is quite industrialised, with a large petrochemical industry. In the east of the district there are pockets of tribal villages. In the non-tribal area there are many landless families.

The MSP in Gujarat was launched from April 1989 onwards. The Mission was very impressed by the enthusiasm, involvement and overall professionalism of the staff. The Mission also found the achievements of the programme over the last two years to be impressive, bearing in mind the constraints in human resources the MSP-Gujarat is facing.

2. Strategy of empowerment

The Mission noted that there seems to be a clear understanding of the ideology of the Mahila Samakhya Programme among the state and district level staff. There is a continuous process of reflection and questioning about the role and work of the MSP.

In Gujarat a deliberate decision seems to have been made that the MSP should act as a catalyst only. The Programme should not be identified as a common government programme with a specified delivery-system. In practice, however, it is very hard for DIU's to decide when to intervene and when to act as a facilitator.

When women's direct personal problems, related to suppression and domestic violence, are concerned there seems to be more readiness of the programme-staff to intervene than in other matters. When community issues are concerned e.g., water resource management, sangha hut construction or literacy, women are asked to take collective action and support and assistance of sahayogini's stands out less.

Although Gujarat is officially a 'dry state', alcoholism, accompanied with domestic violence is a common phenomenon in the rural areas. This means that it is not rare for women to face violent repercussions at home, because of their participation in the MSP meetings or other activities.

The Mission feels that there could be a clearer stance in the matter: when does the MSP intervene and when does it stand back and facilitate? The MSP identity should be clear at all levels of the programme, especially at the level of the sakhi's.

3. Training and resource support

Since 1989, training of district resource persons and sahayogini's in Gujarat was performed by an organisation called JANVIKAS. The involvement of one training organisation has had the advantage of being able to run a process-training, with a regular assessment of the training needs and a sustained follow-up whenever necessary. Janvikas' experience in the area of rural development is undisputed, but the organisation is less experienced in dealing with women's issues. The involvement of an additional training organisation, one that is experienced in this area, could perhaps be considered as an addition to the present external training inputs.

The impact of the training has been clearly observed by the Mission at the sahayogini-level and to some extent at the sakhi-level. Sahayogini's clearly showed confidence in facilitating cluster and sangha meetings, handling a group process, taking responsibility of the training of sakhi's. The mission had some doubts about the skills and abilities for facilitation and mobilisation of sangha women at the sakhi-level. The sakhi's were able to reproduce what they had learned at the training-sessions, but had not internalised the ideology to such a degree that they could communicate it to the sangha-women. Of course, the Mission realises that it is very hard to achieve this last link in the process, and that it needs a prolonged training input.

In order to achieve clarity in this matter, and to be able to adjust the training inputs according to the needs of the programme, the Mission recommends to make an in-depth assessment of all the training needs, and of the impact of the training till date. The training should lead to building leadership to ensure empowerment of village women. The training also should include technical issues like organising child-care and literacy centres, health care, social forestry, water resource management etc. This planning exercise of training needs should preferably be a participatory and co-ordinated process.

Recently, training inputs have increasingly become an internal matter, as District Training Teams are formed. In the initial, developing stages of a training team, outside resources will still have to be drawn upon. However, it is the intention of the MSP-Gujarat that training teams will gradually be able to depend on their own abilities. This shows that the MSP is now increasingly building its own long-term training capabilities, which is very encouraging. The Mission, however, is worried that it might lead to the exclusion of external inputs. The Mission believes that, because of the sort of programme that the MSP is, some external training inputs will always be required to meet the needs of the programme.

For example, the mission feels that because of the strategy MSP-Gujarat has chosen, a training in conflict-handling and negotiating skills is very relevant at the moment. This kind of training could very well be organised by an external training organisation. Furthermore, the mission felt that it also would be useful to provide some training for sakhi's and sahayogini's in how to mobilise support structures at village and block level. These are just two examples, an in-depth study of training needs would, of course, identify many more areas for training.

The MSP Gujarat differs from the programme in the other two states, in that here sakhi's are considered to be learners and not workers in the programme. This means that they receive a stipendium for one year, during which they receive regular training. When the year is finished, another sangha-woman will be eligible to become a sakhi and will receive a stipendium for one year. Thus, a system of sakhi-rotation is created, allowing the programme to strengthen the leadership-skills among a large group of women in a relatively short time.

4. Literacy

A beginning has been made with the introduction of the literacy-component in all three districts. In Saberkantha, with the support of the Gujarat State University, very successful experiments have been conducted in this area. A literacy primer has been developed in the local dialect, through participation of sangha women. At the time of the Mission workshops were in progress to develop post-literacy material, by using the same participatory method. Issues that the women raised for the literacy material included: afforestation, health, public transport, legal aid, and drinking water. In this way the literacy programme becomes an integral part of the process of empowerment of sangha-women. (see also annex 2 for a more detailed description of the experiment)

Teen-age girls work as volunteers in the literacy programme in Saberkantha, teaching the women of their own village. In the district of Saberkantha, 400 women are now attending literacy classes. Learning to read and write helps to build their self-esteem enormously. Furthermore, these women start to take an interest in the education of their children, by keeping a check on whether the school teacher is actually present and whether the children are being properly taught.

In Rajkot, 13 literacy-centres were started. In these centres a variety of methods is used. They are based on existing methods, but they are different from routine learning methods. The intensity of the classes varies with the seasons, as the workload of women also varies with the seasons. In Baroda, sakhi's learn to read and write on a more individual basis, using a primer based on a self-learning method.

Each district has adopted its own approach towards literacy, which enables them to develop programmes that are responsive to women's needs and abilities. Nevertheless, the Mission feels that there could be more sharing of experiences in this area, among the districts and among the states. The mission found the method that was used in Saberkantha to be especially innovative. Research could be conducted into the question the Saberkantha-method can be used in other districts as well and into the question whether one really has to develop one's own material or whether existing material from other governmental (e.g. Adult Education) and non-governmental organisations (e.g. non-formal education) could be used in the MSP. Also, the Mission thinks it might be worthwhile to look into the experiences in Varanasi, UP, with the open-learning centres called Udan Katholas that have been established there. (see also part two of the Mission-report)

5. Human resources

A need for additional human resources was expressed to the Mission at all levels, during its Gujarat visit. At the same time the Mission also noted that the organisational structure that exists on paper, does not always reflect the real situation. The mission therefore recommends, to review thoroughly the formal organisational structure and to adapt it, as much as possible, to the needs of the programme. Only then, is it possible to determine the human resources that are needed and where and at what level the shortages and bottlenecks exist at the moment.

One aspect of the shortage of human resources was, however, very obvious to the Mission. None of the three DIU's had a district-co-ordinator at the time the Mission visited the districts. In all three districts this position is temporarily, and unofficially, taken care of by very young district resource-persons. The Mission has no doubts about the capabilities, professionalism and dedication of the three resource-persons concerned. However, the Mission is worried by the fact that all three DIU's are in fact understaffed because there are no district-co-ordinators. The Mission urgently recommends to fill these positions with persons, who are experienced enough to guide and manage the DIU's and to maintain the relations with other agencies, governmental and non-governmental, that are active in the same district.

6. Sangha huts

The Mission found the participatory method of sangha hut construction that has evolved in Rajkot extremely interesting. Through this method, women collectively decide on the creative design, the skill training (building and construction) and all the other aspects involved in sangha hut construction. The result of the collective designing process is translated by a woman architect into an actual professional design.

A very positive aspect of involving all sangha-women in the planning and designing process of the sangha huts, is that all the women will feel a sense of ownership once the hut is constructed. The Mission found that this sense of responsibility and ownership was often lacking in other districts and states of the MSP where huts had been constructed in a less participatory way. Furthermore, by using this method of sangha hut construction women's self-esteem and societal respect was enhanced. In this sense it is a truly empowering experience for the women concerned. The Mission hopes that this method of sangha hut construction will be shared with other states, so that it will not remain merely a pilot experiment. (see also annex 1 for a more detailed description of this experiment)

7. Role of the state office

A basic operating principles of the MSP is that a state office should operate autonomously from the state government. The Mission fully agrees with this principle, and thinks that this autonomy of the state office is crucial to the success of the programme. In Gujarat, the Mission felt that there is a need to strengthen the autonomy of the state office.

At the time of the visit of the Mission the state office was still located in governmental premises. The Mission is of the opinion that to ensure the necessary autonomy of the Mahila Samakhya Society, separate premises are a prerequisite. These premises should include boarding and lodging facilities for the sakhi's and sahayogini's, who will visit the state office regularly to attend training sessions, seminars, co-ordination meeting etc.

The autonomy of the state office is a necessity, among others, to provide assistance and guidance, and to give vision and direction to the programme. To avail of separate office facilities is a first condition to be met, to ensure a certain degree of autonomy. 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 will assist the State Programme Director in supporting the implementation of the District Programmes.

8. Internal Review

A workshop on the need and process of an evaluation was conducted in Gujarat by Ms Sharda Jain, and Ms Anita Dighe has assisted the staff in organising a reflection on the process and the activities. Furthermore, the Mission was told that there are plans to conduct an internal review in Gujarat.

However, the Mission is concerned, because there was no systematic follow-up on the training activities in this area. One format for reporting was tried out and then discarded as not suited to the needs of the programme.

The Mission is of the opinion that an internal review should serve as the basis for any strategic planning. The Mission hopes that an internal review will be conducted within the next six months, according to the structure the Mission has proposed in Part one (chapter 5) of its report.

9. Documentation

DIU's expressed a need to come to a more systematic and manageable documentation policy within the MSP. The problem was mainly presented to the Mission as a staffing-problem. While the Mission agrees that the DIU's are understaffed, it does not agree that the problems in the area of documentation become more manageable by appointing additional staff.

The Mission thinks that there could be more training inputs in this area. Sahayogini's should receive more training and continuous guidance by DIU-staff in report writing. One or two DIU-staff members should receive training in archive and office management and in managing a small scale documentation centre (including the handling of a simple classification system). Such a training was, for example, conducted by Jagori in UP. DIU's could then consider switching to a village-wise filing system as was done in Karnataka and UP.

10 Relationship with NGO's

As in the other two states, the relationship of the MSP with the NGO's has not been without problems. At first there was not enough clarity about the MS ideology within the MSP itself. So, the programme could not communicate clearly what it expected of the NGO's. The Mission has clearly observed this lack of clarity among NGO's during the visits to the districts.

The Mission feels, however that networking and co-operation with existing NGO's is vital for the MSP. Past experiences, therefore, should not lead to a strategy of withdrawal. Now, that the programme has taken root and that there is much more clarity about what the MSP can do and what it cannot do, but should ask others to do, one can be much clearer about what one wants the NGO's to do. The timing is right, to re-open the dialogue and explore the possibilities for co-operation and reciprocal relationships.

The Mission also found that in general NGO's are still most willing to co-operate with the MSP, provided that there is clarity about what can be expected of them. For establishing such linkages there has to be a certain degree of self-confidence among the MSP-staff that is supposed to perform this task of forging linkages. At the moment, this self-confidence seems to be lacking. However, the Mission is confident that, when at each DIU an experienced district-co-ordinator has been appointed, this will no longer be a problem.

In conclusion: the MSP-Gujarat should adopt a more outward looking strategy towards NGO's and formalise its terms of co-operation with them. Networking should be a key-word in all the MSP-activities.

11. Finances

At present, funds are released on a monthly basis upon prior approval of expenditure. Although no major obstacles were reported, the Mission recommends, for reasons of efficiency, to disburse funds on a quarterly basis. This seems a logical step, since the activities at the district-level are also planned on a three-monthly basis. The Mission feels that it is possible to release funds on the basis of the activity planning, because the financial norms for sangha huts, child care centres, etc. have been clearly set in the 'green book'.

The Mission also thinks that a revision of the delegation of financial powers at each level of the programme might be useful.

12. Expansion strategy

For the coming five years an expansion to three other districts in the state of Gujarat is envisaged. The three new districts have not yet been identified.

The Mission feels that for the MSP Gujarat it is of utmost importance at the moment to review its human resources requirement, to fill all vacancies, and to give priority to appointing district-co-ordinators. The Mission urgently recommends to finish these activities, before embarking upon a strategy of expansion.

Consolidation of the work that is now in progress in the districts is much more important than expanding into other districts. Sangha formation is just taking root in the districts, and many elements of the programme have not yet come off the ground at all, or only to a limited extent: e.g. child care centres, sangha huts, literacy centres etc.

One form of consolidation that the mission would strongly recommend for the MSP-Gujarat would be: to develop a policy of strategic planning. Based upon the experience of two years, the MSP can now, to a certain extent, anticipate on the main issues that women will come up with. In this way, the MSP can provide a prompt response to the articulated needs. As has already been stated above, some temporary external support might be needed in this area. Furthermore, the MSP by the very nature of its programme, does not allow for mere consolidation of its activities, because new demands and challenges are constantly being voiced. So, even a strategy of consolidation will take up a lot of energy of the already strained human resources of the MSP-Gujarat.

For these reasons the Mission would like to recommend a very cautious and phase-wise expansion strategy for the MSP Gujarat.

Annexes:

**Annex 1: Mahila Kutir (Sangha huts), Rajkot
From: 'The Unfolding', pages 64 - 75**

**Annex 2: Development of literacy primer, Saberkantha
From: 'The Unfolding', pages 101 -107**

Annex 1: Mahila Kutir (Sangha Huts), Rajkot district

MAHILA KUTIR :

In the month of December 1990, it was observed in review cum planning exercise that

- a) The women had begun to identify themselves as members of Sangha and were using this forum to discuss issues that concerned them.
- b) The Sakhi selection process which was almost complete by then, contributed towards strengthening the group feeling.
- c) if some of the issues they were discussing could be converted into activities, it could facilitate learning and mobilisation.
- d) Caste differences between the Sangha women had given rise to the problem of having a convenient place for Sangha meetings.

It was felt that by taking up the construction of "Mahila Kutir" (Mahila Hut) the DIU could respond to the above situation. This would facilitate learning for the women around issues of collective planning, designing, decision making and executing the plan. Identification of land, making applications and getting approval from the Government would provide ample opportunities to undertake collective action. It would also help reduce some of the caste differences.

THE ROLE OF A FACILITATOR ARCHITECT

Since it was the first attempt in construction of the 'Mahila Kutirs' in Mahila Samakhya Gujarat and MSS had no

technical resources to support such activities, it was decided to first set up 5 to 6 units on an experimental basis. While the primary aim was to create a learning experience in collective action, exploring different methods in low-cost construction using local materials was also one of the goals.

An architect was appointed for a period of four months from April 1991 to July 1991 to help achieve the above goals. She believed in demystifying the role of an architect and emphasised the need for high involvement of Sangha women in the construction activity. Her keen interest in and knowledge of low-cost construction techniques was to help provide an exposure to appropriate technology and also create opportunities for learning. During her association with Mahila Samkha the architect actively worked with village women, Sakhis, Sahayoginis and the DIU.

Although it was proposed to complete construction of five units before the rains of 1991, changes had to be made in the plan, as acquisition of government land free of cost turned out to be more time-consuming than expected. In fact one could say that during the four months the uncertainty of getting land before the rains greatly affected the interventions of the architects.

In the first month, the architect focussed on eliciting the help of Sahayoginis together information on the building material used in the villages and their prices. This

provided her the basis to design several options of the Mahila Kutir that could be suggested to the village women. During her visits to the village she tried to involve the Sangha women in the designing process. The architect used slides, charts and demonstrations of different low-cost techniques to put before the women various alternatives to initiate a discussion on them. The orientation during this phase was to prepare the women to efficiently and effectively complete building the Mahila Kutir.

In the second phase i.e. during the next two months the architect along with the DIU planned a different course of action to and create learning opportunities. She spent more time with the Sahayoginis orienting them with the basics of construction principles, use of environmentally friendly and low cost technology in construction. This was done with the aim of equipping the Sahayoginis with adequate information to help them initiate discussions at the Sangha level. This helped to widen their information base.

In the third phase the architect helped to set up systems by which we could involve the Sangha women in several areas so as to sustain their morale and the enthusiasm. It was during these discussions that some women got interested in learning masonry which is considered a skilled job performed only by men. The possibility of training and creating a team of women masons from different villages was also explored.

Through the four months, many interesting episodes occurred in the Sanghas.

IDENTIFICATION AND APPLICATION FOR LAND :

In several villages the women had been facing a problem of having joint meetings of different castes. The women from place higher castes and the lower caste could not meet at a common. The latter are not allowed to enter the houses of the former either. But they could meet in a common place like a school building or 'Anganwadi room' (of the ICDS programme). It was not possible to get access to these rooms in the evenings for the Sangha meetings in all villages.

It was in such villages that the Sahayoginis first initiated discussions regarding building the Mahila Kutir. The discussions invariably reduced around whether the Mahila Kutir is a "building provided as part of the Mahila Samkhya Scheme", or is it an "opportunity for the women to built it their own way to suit their needs."

It was through the process of identifying land making applications, approaching the 'sarpanch', the 'talati' all by themselves that women began to accept that it was truly an opportunity for them to decide for themselves. After an initial phase of slight resistance and hesitation the women in most villages have gone to the panchayat office at least four to five times to see to it that the matter is taken up seriously. In a few villages the women have even gone upto the taluka level to follow up their application.

From finding out as to who the talati is of their village to procuring of land records from him or the

sarpancha, the women have adopted many ingenious ways of getting their work done.

For instance in Paal, the Sarpanch initially refused to pass on any information about land records of vacant land in village, so the women approached the talati who was more helpful.

In another village, the women turned the forwarding of the application into a prestige issue for the talati. They told him that in all the other villages the talatis have already done this job and therefore he too must forward it and sure enough the tactic worked.

Even though usually two or three women were more active and taking responsibility they had seen to it that other women were kept informed about the details.

Various complexities related to the caste system were also brought to the fore, too.

The deep seated caste discrimination which is often glossed over by superfluous measures to appease the lower castes was exposed in many villages. In one village the sarpanch insisted that the Mahila Kutir be built in the area where the higher castes lived even though no women of the high caste participated in the Sangha activities. The Scheduled Caste women argued that if the Mahila Kutir was built in that area, they would not be ultimately allowed to use it in the same fashion as their young children were

restricted from entering the ICDS centre run in the high caste area.

Though the Sakhis of this village were convinced after they heard of the enthusiasm in other villages, they said that it would take some time before the other women from their village were convinced. It was in the Sangha activities, the scheduled Caste women argued that if the Mahila Kutir was built in that area, they would not be ultimately allowed to use it in the same fashion as their young children were restricted from entering the ICDS centre run in the high caste area.

The women of the scheduled caste community used to think quite highly of this sarpanch as he often came to their homes and enquired of their problems and difficulties. The women felt often this episode that when it came to helping create an asset for the women of the scheduled caste the sarpancha's attitude was exposed (or he showed his true colours).

The sarpanch was quite irked and the Sangha women had to settle for a compromise but as they did not get the land that was most convenient to them. But they did manage to get it at a place closer to the area in which they were living.

The idea of building their own space had enthused the women into taking collective action.

In the month of April, Sakhis of five villages participated in a one-day workshop with the architect to plan the activities in their respective Sanghas. The Sakhis of one particular village Tarhghadi said that though the women were very keen to have a Mahila Kutir of their own, they insisted that if they worked as labourers, they would want to do it as daily wagers. It had been decided that if the women worked as daily wagers it would not generate a feeling of the Mahila Kutir being their own. There would be no difference between them working on a school building or any other structure and working on the Mahila Kutir that 'belonged' to them.

Though the Sakhis of this village were convinced, after they heard of the enthusiasm in other villages, they said that it would take some time before the other women from their village were convinced. It was in this workshop that one of the Sakhis made a very touching statement "We poor people cannot donate or contribute many in such endeavour, we are labourers and what we can contribute is our labour and therefore in our village we have decided not to take wages when we work on the building." This remark of hers had a great impact on all the other women, as one among them had stated her conviction.

Over the next two months, the Sakhis and the Sahayoginis of Taragadi village steadily discussed the issue of wages with women. The women gradually realised its importance and were converted to the extent that they told

the architect when she went to the village "Let's start construction soon. We shall work without wages and if need be we will put in money of our own."

WOMEN MASONS :

During the first phase of information gathering one of the facts brought out was that a large number of women from lower caste engaged themselves either in brick making at the brick kilns or as unskilled labour in building structures. ON learning this, the architect and district team felt that it might be worthwhile to explore if some of these women could be trained as masons. And so in the village meetings, Sakhi meetings, this was often discussed. The immediate reaction was "No, we can't do it. Only men can do it." On giving examples of the first lady doctors, women teachers - the women said "Oh, if you ask us then we can tell whether a particular wall is made straight or there are any faults in its masonry work." From this point then it was not very difficult to get atleast one or two women from a group of twenty or twenty five to be interested and open to learning masonry. At the DIU level it was discussed that if a team of about 20-30 women were trained as masons and in low cost techniques then they could undertake the construction of other Mahila Kutirs in the district. The architect had also identified a "Gramin Techniki Kendra" (Rural Technology Centre) at Jhagadia where a large complex was being constructed using a variety of low cost techniquo including experiments in mud technology.

In the month of June, 8 women from the villages volunteered to go to this centre for 3 days to gain an exposure to low cost

construction and on elementary knowledge of some of the techniques.

The entire experience had a deep impact on all the women. First of all none of them had travelled so far (Jhagadia is about 450 kms. away from their villages) in all their lives. Some had not even travelled in a train. This was for the first time they were travelling. In spite of a long and tiring journey, the women were most eager to see the complex and learn whatever they could. Most of the complex consisted of buildings built with sun-dried bricks (Not fire burnt bricks). One of the things that struck the women most was that mud houses too can look "sophisticated". The notion that only poor live in mud houses was rather shaken. Also they found a complete new area in which their aesthetic minds would contribute.

The women learnt to make different types of brick panels and face tiles, prepare non-erodable mud plaster and apply it and place the bricks and plaster then to build a wall. They were taught the proportions of various mixtures used in construction and the technical reasons for the different proportions used.

For all the three days, the women remained excited and eager to know the different methods used, in spite of a very tight and tiring schedule. It was for the first time that they were learning the "real" construction work, i.e. the art of masonry and handling building construction material all by themselves and no men to ridicule them. When the three days came to an end, the women did not want to go back to their homes. Although these women had gained partial freedom from lack of information. They

were still part of a strong patriarchal system and were therefore committed to return on the fourth day to their husbands and children and in-laws.

The impact these women and their exposure had in the villages was quite astonishing. Even though illiterate they narrated and described each and every technique they had learnt in great detail and even remembered the proportions exactly, even though they had not maintained any written record as they were illiterate women. With the aid of samples of some of the materials used they had brought along with them from Jhagadia, the women showed how each of the samples were to be used.

The men and women of village were quite impressed and even gave orders to those women to build small sections of about 3-4 houses. The men who mostly made fun of the women and their attempts to build the Mahila Kutir accepted that the women were serious and they even offered to contribute to the labour when the construction of the Kutir would actually begin.

MAHILA KUTIR AND 'TIME AND SPACE' :

While speaking of alternatives of technology various subjects such as industrialisation, urbanisation, marginalisation of the rural poor, were also discussed. It was explained in simple terms how all the low priced raw material for production of cement transported from the countryside was converted into high priced material as cement and promoted as the strongest and best building material.

Cutting down on the use of wood through various methods was also discussed in the light of preserving the fast deteriorating ecological balance of the already dry Saurashtra.

While these 'subjects' fitted into the "Theoretical understanding of poverty" of the educated lot, the true and real meaning of low cost techniques was grasped only by the Sangha women.

After seeing the buildings in the 'Gramin Techniki Kendra' where no wood is used for the roofs and mostly mud was used for rest of the building, one woman had tears in her eyes she came out in a soft voice "If only we had known of such cheap methods of good construction, we would not have spent our life time toiling and starving ourselves, depriving our children of good clothes, saving every small coin so that we could have enough money to build a "pucca" house (of cement and RCC)."

The idea of low cost techniques leading to greater time and space for the women of poor classes was poignantly brought out by this woman.

This first attempt to begin training of women in masonry has been quite encouraging. When these eight women speak of their experiences and what they learnt, it is most easily accepted by the other women. Some of them even expressed a willingness to undergo a month long training to learn the skill of masonry.

LEARNINGS :

The four months before the monsoon was a hectic period of work trying to get the land in time, do the trainings, prepare women to undertake responsibility, so that five units of Mahila Kutir could be completed before the rains. Due to procedural problems in acquisition of land not one of the units could be built before the rains. But it would be quite unfair to say that no learning took place. The amount of energy the entire issue generated among the district team, The Sakhis and village women has been unprecedented. The Sanghas and Sakhis have particularly come forward to take responsibility and confront those who tried to come in the way. Many village level and taluka level offices learnt about the 'Mahila Sanghas' and began to deal with them as a collective. The sense of being together definitely grew over working towards the building of a Mahila Kutir - a collective space for themselves.

Annex 2: Development of literacy primer, Saberkantha district

PROCESS OF LITERACY-PRIMER DEVELOPMENT :

Looking at the evolution of literacy as a common need of women in all villages covered by MS, we learnt that it is a products of endless processes taking place at all levels. It is

the net result of the active involvement of many individuals and organisations.

To begin with in Jan.90, a literacy workshop was arranged at Ahmedabad in which 3 Sangha women from Kaddbrahma Taluka participated. The primer developed by a free lance educationist, Ms. Nayanaben Shah, was found effective because of the 'self learning method. In the work shop, in which the primer was developed the learners/ participants were instructed about the usage of the material.

March 8th 1990, International women's day celebration proved to be an unusual trigger in raising the consciousness of women over the issue of literacy. A group of women from one area put up a role play on this day, highlighting the problems created due to illiteracy and how literacy could help improve the status of women. At the same time some of the village women demonstrated on the stage how they had learnt to read and write in the past few months.

Since then the demand for literacy spread like wild fire in many villages. Sustained dialogues took place about why literacy was essential and how would they acquire it. The District Adult education officer discussed the existing programme of this department with the Sahayoginis. To respond to the need of literacy, the only alternative available was of using the existing material.

Compared to any other existing material, self learning method of Ms Nayanaben Shah was found better suiting to women and therefore again used in another workshop. In this workshop 17

illiterate Sangha women of Bhiloda Taluka participated. They took home-exercises to be done by themselves. The same method was also used in one more workshop, where female members of milk co-operative of Dodiwada and Changodra village took part. The instructions for using the primer were simple and easy to follow. Thus, here an attempt was made to see whether the women could acquire the simple skill of reading and writing in a short span of 48 hours where there was no other pressure of household chores, agricultural work, etc. It was difficult to conclude the results of the workshop as the women found the level of language used slightly difficult to grasp (since it was not in their tribal dialect).

This experience clearly showed that a primer in local dialect was necessary for an effective literacy programme. Women also became very specific in their demands. They said, they would rather learn to read and write in their own language (which is a tribal dialect).

Developing a primer in Adivasi dialect was the next step in this direction. It was discussed in meeting with Sakhis, and Sahayoginis and ideas of the Sangha women were also collected. But it was necessary to know the pattern or system of developing literature. In the first workshop of literacy development organised 1990, some thinking on how to develop a primer for adults was done. This four day workshop was facilitated by the DIU. The participants were illiterate Sangha women, some Sakhis who had interest), literate village girls and Sahayoginis. The small groups were formed on the basis of the dialect, namely, (1) tribals of Khedbrahma, tribals of Bhiloda, tribals of Meghraj and

thakardas. Each of the small group had 1-2 literate girls, Sangha women and Sakhis and Sahayoginis.

Womes had come prepared with the list of words which they commonly use. The lists helped the small group prepare lessons based on the words in it. The basic principle kept in mind was of starting with a single word slowly leading to difficult one : not introducing more than 3-4 items (alphabots and signs) at a time in one lesson. Initially it became difficult for women to understand the reason or logic behind it because (1) illiterate women were totally unfamiliar with such things, (11) literate girls were so conditioned with the formal way of teaching that it became difficult for them to break their understanding and do something new. They also did 'not' have experience of this kind. We also felt that the objectives of having a mixed -group of literate and illiterate women was not fulfilled to the extent it should have. The illiterate women took time to open-up. They were feeling shy and there was a very natural fear of the so called 'educated' around them. Besides this, young school-going girls were so enthusiastic that they very unknowingly took over. They were very vocal and quick in responding. Facilitators made efforts to gently tone them down and create space for the illiterate women to participate.

All four groups of different areas had prepared lessons in their dialect, but only the literature of Khedbrahma tribal group was found suitable for field test. The Sahayogini of that area tested it with and 4 to 5 Sangha women. The results were positive, but the primer needed to be organised. Some of the

learning of this workshop are as follows :

(1) It was too large and a diverse group to facilitate. Due to this none of the group members got enough concentration.

(2) Illiterate Sangha women and Sakhis coming for this kind of workshop should be more vocal. As they are not influenced by formal education and urbanisation, their participation becomes of prime importance.

(iii) The number of literate girls in a group should be sufficient and sensitive enough to give opportunity to illiterate women to come out.

LITERATURE FOR TRIBAL WOMEN OF KHEDBRAHMA TALUKA :

To reorganise the literature developed in the last workshop for tribal women of Khedbrahma, Technical support was required from a person who knew pedagogy of it, Shri Chunibhai Bhatt, an eminent educationist, trustee of Shramik Vidyapith, Surat, was consulted. He has done a lot of work in the area of adult literacy. After initial consultation a 6 day workshop was organised for developing literature in the tribal dialect of Khedbrahma taluka. Shri Chunibhai Bhatt and Ms Amrapali Desai facilitated the group of 3 Sangha women, one Sakkhi, one literate girl, two tribal Sahayoginis of Khedbrahma taluka and the DIU participated in the workshop. The SPD and the DRP of Baroda also helped actively.

We began a discussion on techniques of Adult literature development. Shri Chunibhai explained how adults are different from children and therefore the learning needs are different. Adult learners have familiarity of concepts, words, Language,

grammar, but the only skill which they want to acquire is reading and writing. Therefore, learning alphabets the way children learn will not interest them, and that is why it is necessary to have clarity about who is going to use the literature. From the clearly spelt out needs of the learners it becomes apparent that merely acquiring skills of reading and writing was not essential but education around it must take place. This will motivate women to learn. The basic principles like simple to difficult word, not introducing more than 3-4 items at a time, repetition of each item atleast 3-4 times, etc. were kept in mind throughout the process of developing literature.

An attempt was made to use the material developed in the last workshop. It became difficult as the words were collected haphazardly. The group decided to develop a story for which the words were of use as the experience of that helped everybody.

Shri Bhagvanbhai Patel, Researcher working on culture and folk songs of tribals of Khedbrahma, was consulted for editing the primer.

LITERATURE FOR TRIBAL WOMEN OF BHILODA AND MEGHRAJ TALUKA :

In another literacy experiment which is started in Bhiloda and Meghraj taluka, Dr Yogendra Vyas, head, Department of linguistics, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad was consulted. In first meeting with Sahayoginis on 15th March 1991 Dr. Vyas discussed how learning could be made interesting through games and non-formal ways. He asked Sahayoginis to collect words. One important feature of this Technique is, writing automatically becomes easier after one learns reading. He opined that we

should, therefore begin with helping women to read instead of doing both reading and writing simultaneously. Reading becomes easy for an adult learners when it is associated with a picture. Colours play an equally important role in the process of learning to read.

This experiment is divided in three phases. In the first phase the learner learns to read, in the second phase the learner is to learn reading and writing. The third Phase is imparting knowledge to neo-literates. According to Dr Vyas an adult can learn reading and writing both in 150 hours.

To prepare literature of first phase Sahayoginis prepared a list of words with the help of Sangha women. In all, 108 words were selected with pictures in such a way that all the alphabets of the dialect were covered. The words and pictures are painted and pasted on cards.

The material for second phase consists of a list of sentences based on the words to be learnt in the first phase. The sentences are framed in such a way that the learning to read Gujarati language also take place.

Identification of numbers takes place in the same phase.

Reading material for the third phase will be developed in a workshop with these neo-literates. This being a phase of imparting knowledge participation of women becomes essential. Efforts to involve experts in the field of developing literature for neo-literates are being made.

For both the experiments young school college going girls are involved as volunteers. Sahayoginis and the DIU went to schools, colleges, institutions, ashram shalas in order to involve literate girls of the same village to facilitate learning of the Sangha women. These volunteers were then imparted training before they took up the literacy programme in villages.

In the second phase volunteers shared their experiences and gave feedback and also learnt how to help women read and write.

The volunteers of Kherbrahma taluka came for a 10 day literacy training camp. Shri Babubhai Kumbhan and Shri Bharat Upadhyay discussed in detail the usage of literacy primer and discussed in detail the issues incorporated in the primer.

A lot of volunteers are playing a positive role and give field information to the DIU through different techniques. Spread effect of literacy is visible in some villages.