MAHILA SAMAKHYA

National Evaluation Report

1993

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1993

Department of Education
Ministry of Human Resource Development
Government of India
New Delhi
India

FOREWORD

Since its inception in 1989, the Mahila Samakhya (MS) programme has been shaped and guided by its commitment to a philosophy, rather than by chasing pre-set targets. At the core of the programme is a strong faith in the capacity of women to control and change their own lives and situations. Education is a process which enables women to question, conceptualize, seek answers, act, reflect on their actions and raise new questions. As such it is central to women's struggle. The Mahila Samakhya programme endeavours to create the space for women to come together, to seek knowledge and information, to make informed choices and to become actors in, rather than objects of, development processes.

The basic commitment of Mahila Samakhya is to the Sanghas – the women's collectives at the village level. All programme processes and activities are essentially Sangha-centred and focussed. This commitment has also provided the framework for evaluating the programme and its functioning. The challenge for Mahila Samakhya has been to identify and assess the dimensions of change in the lives of the women involved, through a process which itself contributes to and strengthens other ongoing programme processes.

Apart from in-built systems for continuous monitoring and review, the programme design provides for periodic evaluation by expert teams. The first National Evaluation, the reports of which are presented in this volume, was carried out in 1993. The state MS teams and the evaluators have collaborated to design and carry out the exercise, which has successfully combined professional objectivity with an open and collective process. It has been an enriching experience, and has given us valuable insights on key issues, processes and emerging trends and directions. Far from being a purely academic exercise, the evaluation has provided an essential input into planning for the future of Mahila Samakhya, and ensuring that the programme moves towards its goals without compromising its essential philosophy.

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Joint Secretary
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EVALUATION OF THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROJECT
An Overview of Issues and Trends

BACKGROUND

The design of the Mahila Samakhya programme provides for an ongoing process of internal monitoring and self-evaluation, as well as for periodic external reviews by joint Indo-Dutch review missions.A review of evaluation mechanisms conducted by the NRG in 1992 led to the decision to have,in addition to the above, a system of National reviews , which would take place more frequently than the Indo-Dutch reviews, would go into the various aspects of the programme at greater depth, and would assess processes from an objective viewpoint. It was decided that the evaluations would be carried out separately for each State, by a team of women who, while they were not part of Mahila Samakhya, were committed to women's empowerment and sensitive to field processes.

The first of these National Reviews was carried out between 1992-93. The parameters for the evaluation were developed jointly by members of the NRG and representatives of the State Units.

The objectives of the evaluation exercise were defined as :

— **To identify the emerging patterns and trends in Mahila Samakhya.**

— **To gain feedback on the effectiveness of the programme processes and structures, and on the validity and adequacy of the Mahila Samakhya concept.**

The overall framework of the evaluation was designed to reflect emerging strategies, levels of women's empowerment and the sustainability of the processes initiated by the programme.

Broad parameters within this framework included

— the conceptual understanding of the programme philosophy at different levels.

— the degree to which Sanghas had begun functioning as collectives.

— the nature, strength and direction of the various empowering processes and struggles at the Sangha level.

— the nature and degree of the changes in women's self-image and self-esteem, role and visibility

— the nature of interactions with power structures and *institutions.*

— the degree to which the programme had been able to access resources and network with other groups in the environment.

— the situation with regard to training.

— resource creation

— expansion and outreach of the programme .

— functioning of structures and systems, and

— issues and areas of concern.

These parameters were further analysed and broken up into indicators (see Appendix I for details).

The process of selecting evaluators was done at the State level, and panels were prepared by the respective ECs. *The criteria for selection of evaluators were also worked out in the course of the exercise of detailing the parameters.*

— Belief in the MS philosophy and concept and familiarity with the MS structure and strategy.

— Understanding of and familiarity with the rural environment.

— Sensitivity to and respect for rural women and ability to conduct themselves appropriately in villages/Sanghas.

— Familiarity with government structures and their functioning.

— One person per team to have specific competence in the evaluation of developmental interventions.

— At least one person per team with a command over the local language.

— Reading, writing and communication skills.

— Not a member of the Executive Committee of the same State.

— Perceptive, intituitive persons who can be critical but supportive.

It was decided that the teams would spend at least three weeks in the field. Since all the evaluators were also involved with their own work and professional commitments, these three weeks of field work were spread out and time-frames for the State evaluations decided in consultation with them. The broad parameters developed at the National level were detailed and further broken down into specific indicators through discussions at the State level and with the State ECs. These detailed parameters were shared with the evaluators, who met and held discussions with the State and District teams before starting the exercise, which was conducted between March and August 1993, with the evaluation teams visiting the field and interacting with members of State and District teams, Sahayoginis, Sakhis, Sangha members,trainers, government officials and others who are or have been connected with the programme. Members of evaluation teams each concentrated on a different district and prepared detailed District Reports, which were later compiled into State overviews. First drafts of these reports were shared and discussed with members of the State Units and DIUs, as well as with the team at the National Office, before they were finalised.

A meeting of some members of the State Evaluation Teams was held at the National Office in March 1994, to discuss the main outcomes of the evaluation exercise. It was felt that, in spite of wide variations across States, it was possible to discern certain common trends and directions within the programme, and raise certain issues of importance in relation to the overall vision and direction of the programme . This brief overview summarises and highlights these trends and issues.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND GAINS

The Mahila Samakhya programme has, in all three States, brought about major changes in the lives and situations of the women involved. The evaluations emphasise the following:

— A foundation for women's empowerment at the grassroots level has been built. Although Sanghas differ in form and size, the majority are committed to collective action to solve their own problems.

— Women have moved ahead from expecting the programme to deliver material benefits, to understanding empowerment in a broader perspective, and to seeing the Sangha as a forum where they can share and analyse their own issues and problems.

— In many cases, women have come together in Sanghas in spite of traditional communal and caste divides.

— Many Sanghas have been able to initiate action on issues of importance to the larger community, and have been able to mobilize the support of others in the village, including men, to make government delivery systems more accountable to the community.

— Issues such as domestic violence, oppressive social customs and discrimination against women have in many cases been firmly established as social and community issues rather than as merely problems of individuals or families.

— Sanghas have been able to identify and articulate their needs. They have mobilized their own resources and have received support from the programme to plan and implement strategies for change in areas such as literacy, health, water supply, savings and credit, child care, education and economic development.

— The Sakhis and Sahayoginis are self-confident, competent and motivated women with a deep understanding of, and commitment to, the ideology of Mahila Samakhya. They form a strong and mutually supportive network. Mahila Samakhya has given them a distinct voice and identity, and has supported and facilitated their evolution into a resource for change at the village level.

— The programme has continued to be shaped and directed by the needs and priorities of the women themselves, rather than by any pre-set targets or blueprints. There has been no dilution of the emphasis on process.

ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The evaluations have also drawn attention to emerging trends which are relevant to the processes and structure of the programme, and to the planning of future strategies.

1. Empowerment at the Sangha level

The strategies adopted by the programme have resulted in a variety of complex dynamics at the individual and Sangha level. Involvement with Mahila Samakhya, and becoming a part of a process of collective analysis of experience, has

helped women to see their personal struggles in the context of the larger struggle for empowerment. Each woman has negotiated her space within the family and within the community in her own way. Compromise, confrontation, exercise of collective pressure and bargaining from a position of collective strength, and various permutations and combinations of all these, have come into play at different times and in different situations. No attempt has been made within the programme to document and evaluate all these strategies. Similarly, there has been no exploration of the meaning of empowerment for the women involved in the programme in the context of their relationship with men. It would be necessary to develop a clearer understanding of the detailed dynamics of processes of empowerment taking place at various levels from the individual to the collective, as a first step to assessing the impact of the Mahila Samakhya programme. Apart from being essential for long-term planning and strategising within the programme, such an understanding would be a valuable contribution towards enriching our conceptual frameworks for gender analysis.

The programme has brought about visible and striking changes in the self-image, attitudes and competence of Sakhis and Sahayoginis, and has helped them to develop a holistic understanding of issues. However, these empowering processes have progressed unevenly for other members of the Sanghas. It has been pointed out that the reason for this difference probably is the fact that programme interventions such as training , opportunities for sharing and reflection and for skill-building in specific areas, are more frequent and intensive at the level of the Sakhis and Sahayoginis, than at the Sangha level.

Although the nature of the Sanghas is not identical in the three States, and there is wide variation between Sanghas even in the same State, Sanghas which have reached the stage of being completely independent collectives are still few in number. Sangha members tend to depend on the Sakhi or Sahayogini for guidance, and Sakhis often rely on each other, rather than other Sangha members, for support. In other instances cited, the perspective and understanding of the philosophy of the programme at the Sangha level, seems limited . It appears that where Sanghas are primarily issue-based, there has been a focus on short-term strategies rather than on organization-building in the long-term.

The question of the limited degree to which Mahila Samakhya has been able to reach out to and involve other women in the village, who are not members of socially and economically deprived groups, has also been raised. The issue of class in relation to gender, which is a reality of village-level social and community structures, has not been systematically addressed at the Sangha level. A similar issue is the role of men in processes of women's

empowerment.While it is obvious that the solidarity engendered by issue-based struggles in the village,the enhanced self-esteem of women and their expression of collective strength, have had the effect of catalyzing a process of questioning and change for many men, there are also many instances of men feeling threatened and reacting with hostility. However, there have been instances, although few in number, of Sanghas implementing strategies specifically designed to involve the men in the community in the activities of the programme.

Since Mahila Samakhya is a time-bound programme with the long-term goal of building an independent identity for the Sanghas, processes at the village level require an intensive focus, with strategies being designed to understand, take forward and strengthen empowering interventions for the Sangha women. An essential prerequisite for this is building a deeper and better understanding of the nature of these processes and to evolve parameters to study empowerment through education , empowerment in the context of personal relationships and in relation to economic independence, and women's strategies to negotiate space for themselves within the family and community.

It is essential to help the Sangha women to develop a holistic gender perspective which encompasses all the aspects of the reality of their lives. Expanding the outreach of the programme to include women from other classes and castes would enrich and deepen the collective analysis at the Sangha level. At the same time, it is essential to develop an approach which builds programmatic or issue-based solidarity with men in the family and the community, and actively work towards integrating a gender perspective into the functioning of village social and community groups, and Panchayati Raj institutions.

2. Structures and systems

The organizational structures and systems of the programme have been evaluated from two standpoints - their effectiveness in providing support to processes and activities at the village level, and their congruence with the philosophy and non-negotiable principles of the programme. The need for further decentralization and collective participation in management, and the need to evolve and strengthen mechanisms to reduce bureaucratization at the State and District levels, has been stressed. Although the organogram has been conceptualized as putting the Sangha women at the top, moving down the line to the State Programme Director, there are weaknesses in practice. More concrete steps need to be taken to ensure that decision-making and accountability also always move from the State to the village level. Financial systems are also felt to be insufficiently decentralised. In one State, where

programme functionaries are deputed from government departments, decision - making is more centralized and functioning at the State level is perceived as being more directive than facilitative.

Mechanisms to ensure that management structures and systems are facilitative, decentralised and allow the space for the development of autonomy at the Sangha level, need to be designed and implemented wherever necessary. Structures and systems must also incorporate the space for creative collaboration with NGOs and other groups in the environment. Openness in functioning and ultimate accountability of all levels to the women's groups in the village, also must be built in. Evaluations such as this one can be conducted through a collective process starting at the Sangha level, which is validated through discussion of findings between the evaluators and the various groups within the programme. Internal reviews of the functioning of Sakhis and Sahayoginis by Sanghas, of the performance of the DIU by the Sahayoginis and of the State Unit by the District Units would help to develop a sense of ultimate accountability to the Sanghas.

Internal reviews and evaluations of the programmes in each State have also raised specific issues related to decision-making processes, financial management, resource mobilisation and personnel policies,which should be taken into account while designing more responsive and decentralised structures and systems for the programme.

Although the Executive Committee is the empowered body for the implementation of the programme at the State level, decision making powers tend to be concentrated with the office bearers. Decentralizing and broad-basing the functioning of this body would facilitate implementation and set the pace for more effective management .

It has been pointed out that the processes of reflection and analysis which take place within the Mahila Samakhya groups are greatly enriched and deepened if there are opportunities for accessing and learning from the experience of others who are working with the same objectives .There is an urgent need to ensure interactions and exchanges between Mahila Samakhya groups, and other groups in the environment - autonomous women's organizations, governmental and non-governmental development organizations and programmes, elected bodies at the village level ,and professionals and academics. These interactions would not only expand the experience-base of the programme, they would also ensure access to a wider information and resource support network. The programme design envisages such support structures at the State and District levels, in the form of State and District Resource Groups, which would include representatives of all the above, and which would help to build and consolidate linkages between various

elements. These structures are not functional except at the National level. Constituting and activating State and District Resource Groups would ensure feedback on programme processes, as well as provide information, support, insights and guidance.

Actively interacting and building links with other groups in the village and community, such as school teachers and school children, youth clubs, local NGOs and service organizations, and Panchayat bodies, would also strengthen support systems and help the programme to gain recognition and legitimacy at the village level.

3. Strengthening and Consolidating Need-based interventions

In every instance, the activities taken up under the programme at the village level have been dictated primarily by the needs and priorities of the women. Thus, programmes - whether for literacy and education , setting up of child-care centers, Mahila Shikshana Kendras, construction of Sangha huts or setting up of savings and credit groups - have not been imposed or planned as a State-wide activity, but have been taken up at the village level as a response to specific local needs. Several innovative strategies and approaches have been evolved and implemented by Sahayoginis and District teams.The literacy programmes going on in the three States are an example. Sahayoginis and Sakhis have experimented with new ways in which women can be taught to read and write, and have been actively developing methodologies and materials. It is emphasized that these interventions have now progressed beyond the preliminary stage and more focussed planning as well as a greater degree of skill is now called for. A long term perspective and a better understanding of literacy in the larger framework of women's empowerment, a qualitative enhancement of pedagogy as well as involvement of literacy experts in designing curricula and post-literacy materials, and linkage of literacy activities with opportunities for further learning and skill training, are all essential to ensure that these interventions are ultimately empowering. Similar challenges are emerging in programmes for children's learning, education for drop-out girls, vocational and skill training, group economic activities and participation in Panchayats.

4. Training

In the Mahila Samakhya context, training is seen as an essential intervention in the ongoing processes of reflection, analysis and action within the programme, rather than as a one-shot learning opportunity. In all three States, the initial phase of the programme saw intensive interactions between Sahayoginis, Sakhis and training teams, which included

women with long experience and a demonstrated commitment in working with women, and who shared a belief in the basic values and ideology of the project. The processes initiated and sustained by these training programmes were instrumental in giving the women opportunities to experience and explore their strengths, to build solidarity with each other, to develop a collective framework for understanding gender, and to experience and internalize values and attitudes which have led to a deepened perspective and a transformation of the ways in which they see themselves and their worlds. Relationships with the trainers have often led to networking and the building of links with other groups and organizations which are part of the larger women's movement.

However, the evaluation shows that there is a change in the nature of the activities at the Sangha level, with many groups moving ahead from the stage of reflecting on and exploring the need and implications of coming together, to tackling collective action on specific issues. They also emphasise the need to ensure that empowering learning processes which were part of their initial phase of training for the Sakhis and Sahayoginis, are experienced by the other women in the Sangha as well. There is a clear need for more focussed and strategic training programmes which will be tailored to meet specific learning needs and which will strengthen and reinforce concepts and skills built earlier.

A systematic assessment of learning needs would have to be undertaken separately for various groups of women. Some broad areas have, however, been identified by the evaluators. As mentioned earlier, there is a need for Sahayoginis, Sakhis and Sangha women involved in several activities including literacy and post-literacy teaching, child care, health, communication, economic activities and organizational and managerial roles at the District and village levels, to enhance their understanding and competence in these areas. In the context of elections to Panchayati Raj institutions and reservations for women in these bodies, there is a need for women at all levels within the programme to explore the concept of political empowerment and develop an understanding of the implications and possibilities of Panchayati Raj. Similarly, to become effective facilitators for the Sanghas, and to help them to achieve an independent identity, Sakhis and Sahayoginis would need to build their understanding of communication, problem-solving, dealing with conflicts, collective decision-making and leadership, and learn how to facilitate these processes in groups. If the long-term objective of the programme is for Sanghas to become independent and autonomous, Sangha members must also explore and analyse the implications and options, and acquire the competence to fill new roles.

In the past three years, the Sahayoginis are increasingly playing the role of trainers. The formation of District Training Teams is an attempt to develop and strengthen in-house training capacities, thereby reducing dependence on outside agencies. This change in role requires enhanced skills in using methodologies and training tools, a more comprehensive understanding of the role of training/learning in achieving the objectives of the programme, and opportunities to share and reflect on their experience in training. In addition to these, it is necessary to build competence in running training programmes on content areas such as literacy, health, water resource management, economic enterprises or use of a particular technology, depending on the priorities of the Sangha. More systematic strategies are necessary to develop and strengthen the training capacity within the programme, while simultaneously negotiating collaborations with other NGOs and training groups.

The training needs assessment would need to be followed by a process of identifying persons within and outside the programme who could take on trainer roles, and interacting and collaborating with them to implement the strategy decided on. In the process, links with other groups with experience in training and working with women could be initiated, leading to expanding horizons and enrichment of concepts and practice.

6. Prospects of Sahayoginis

All the evaluations agree that the Sahayoginis are the key persons behind the success of the programme, and have actively worked to preserve its essential character. There is uniform appreciation of their enthusiasm, energy and commitment, as well as their contribution to developing the ethos and long-term vision of the programme. Many of these women are themselves single mothers, victims of familial and social violence and oppression who have shown great courage in struggling to live their beliefs and who have experienced empowering changes in their own lives. From the initial years of the project, they have played a demanding role as the link between the District Units and the Sanghas, traveling over long distances and in frequently dangerous conditions to organize and supervise Sangha meetings and activities, document the ground-level processes and provide support at the individual and personal level to the Sakhis and Sangha women. Over the years, as the activities of the project expanded, the number of villages covered by each Sahayogini has increased and the level and nature of her activities have also changed. New responsibilities in training and in planning, implementation and coordination of specialized activities have now become part of the agenda. Having worked at a high level of intensity with the same groups of women for an extended period of time, some of

the Sahayoginis are now showing signs of stress, exhaustion and 'burn-out'. The present structure has only limited opportunities for Sahayoginis to move into new roles or to gain affirmation and validation for the additional roles they have taken up. To a large extent, these issues are also valid for Sakhis who are, in the majority of cases, now handling roles which have extended far beyond their initial boundaries.

The challenge facing the programme is to respond to this situation and to keep the enthusiasm and vibrancy of the Sahayoginis alive. Enhanced opportunities and new challenges could result from a system of rotation between Sahayoginis, setting up Block- or Cluster-level coordinating units and providing Sahayoginis with facilities for enhanced mobility. Sakhis and Sahayoginis could be affirmed and supported in their new roles as trainers, teachers, elected members of Panchayats or managers.

7. Long-term perspective for Sanghas

Since Mahila Samakhya is essentially a time-bound programme, one of its long-term goals is to help the Sanghas to reach a stage where they are independent of the District and State units. It is envisaged that all the women who are presently part of the programme will ultimately form a cadre of aware and empowered rural women, who will take forward the process of collective action for change. The programme and its processes cannot be viewed in isolation, and should be seen as sharing a commitment to women's empowerment along with other movements and groups in the country.

Sanghas have been broadly classified into three categories those that are in the formative stage, those that are coalescing into collectives but still need support and guidance from the programme, and those that have taken roots in the community and are functioning independently. There is now an imperative need to start exploring different options for the future of the Sanghas - their becoming registered as autonomous societies either individually or in groups , or federating at the cluster, Block, District or State levels. While these options are being considered, there is also a need to build Sanghas towards competence in assessing their development needs, participatory planning, raising and managing resources to implement their plans and in networking with structures in the larger environment. There is also a need to explore alternative sources for resource support at the Sangha level . A process of delinking of mature Sanghas from the programme structures can be initiated, after evaluating Sanghas on the basis of their readiness for autonomy. Dialogue and discussion within the programme and in the Resource Groups will be needed to develop a set of indicators to assess the ability of the Sanghas to exist and survive as independent organizations.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

INTERVENTIONS NECESSARY IN THE CONTEXT OF EMERGING STRATEGIES

❑ Constituting/activating State and District Resource groups.

❑ Active networking/interaction with other groups at all levels, including the village level.

❑ Making training more focussed and need/issue based.

❑ Making structures and systems more responsive and accountable to Sanghas.

❑ Involving a broader spectrum of women in the Sanghas.

❑ Giving Sanghas the training, information and resource support to plan and implement their own strategies.

❑ Ensuring that management is facilitative and provides space and opportunity for the exercise of autonomy in planning, decision-making and evaluation.

TO SUPPORT/TAKE FORWARD RISING STRENGTH AND CONSCIOUSNESS OF WOMEN

❑ Creating opportunities for continued growth of Sahayoginis.

❑ Documenting and studying individual and collective processes of empowerment taking place in the programme.

❑ Ensuring more focussed and intensive capacity-building for Sangha women.

❑ Increasing the spread and outreach of the programme in terms of number of villages/Blocks covered, as well as including a majority of women in each village.

❑ Training to be in relation to be oriented to empowering and capacity-building at the village level.

FOR SUSTAINABILITY OF PROGRAMME PROCESSES

❑ Expansion to cover a larger number of villages and women.

❑ Ensuring continued interaction and exchange with other groups working for and committed to women's empowerment.

❑ Ensuring that the programme structure is responsive and sensitive to the needs at the Sangha level.

❑ Initiating steps to delink from mature Sanghas, based on an assessment of their state of readiness..

❑ Exploring resource support options for Sanghas.

APPENDIX I
PARAMETERS FOR EVALUATION OF THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME

The National Resource Group approved of the parameters for evaluation of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in its meeting on 27th January 1993. The parameters must be scanned through the following levels :-
1. Emerging strategies.
2. Women's rising strength and consciousness. and
3. Sustainability of the processes initiated by the programme.

PARAMETERS TO IDENTIFY EMERGING TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN MS:

1. Theoretical and Operational Understanding of Sangha Concept and Women's Leadership Roles (in the view of Sangha women, Sakhis, Sahayoginis, district and state functionaries, trainers, and support structures), including
   a) Range of issues involved.
   b) Strengths and weaknesses.
   c) Nature of women's withdrawal from or identification with the Sangha, especially in conflict situations.
   d) Economic and non-economic factors.
   e) Strategies and techniques of mobilization and Sangha-building.
   f) Degree of empowerment at all levels.

II. Programme Content:
   a) Educational activities.
   b) Child-based activities.
   c) Health.
   d) Legal literacy.
   e) Sangha hut construction.
   f) Economic activities.
   g) Environmental awareness and action.

III. Process:
   a) Campaigns and struggles.
   b) Breaking silences - articulation and expression.
   c) Flow of information.
   d) Documentation and communication.

IV. Access to Resources:
   a) Government schemes and programmes.
   b) Resources from other institutions and organizations (NGOs, banks etc.).

V. Interactions with Power Structures and Institutions:
   a) Family
   b) Community.
   c) Political structures.
   d) Govt. structures
   e) NGOs and any others.

VI. Visibility:
   a) Changes in women's self-esteem and self-image.

b) Changes in social and cultural image.
c) Changes in role perceptions (of self, of others).
d) Social and political space gained.
e) Articulation and assertion.
f) Changes in role and status of girl child, if any
g) Empowerment of Mahila Sanghas particularly in terms of education and the degree of sustainability.

VII. Resource Creation:
   a) Information\knowledge resources.
   b) Physical resources.
   c) People\human resources.
   d) Financial resources.

VIII. Training:
   a) Method of determining training needs.
   b) Training mechanism and methods.
   c) Content.
   d) Follow-up and reinforcement.
   e) Training inputs for administrators and support staff at all levels, especially in MS philosophy and strategy.
   f) Assessment of internal and external trainers.
   g) Relationship with trainers.
   h) Present role of training in the programme.
   i) Impact of training in the field.

IX. Expansion and Growth:
   a) Sangha level, including,
      1) Outreach\converage of women.
      2) Meetings\workshops\trainings attended.
      3) Sangha meetings held with and without external facilitation.
      4) Integration of Sanghas (Eg.by caste, community).
   b) Number of villages covered\Sahayoginis (including ratio of villages to Sahayogini).
   c) No. of blocks\taluks\districts covered.
   d) Expansion of staff at district and state level.
   e) Changes in roles at all levels.
   f) Expansion and growth of relationships and linkages.
   g) Involvement in new\unplanned\creative activities and processes.
   h) Location of MS within the larger women's movement and linkages with others within it.

X. Functioning of Programme Structures:
   a) Nature of functioning of Executive Committee, states Prog. Office, Dt.Impl. Units, National Prog. Office, National Res. Group, trainers\training instns, Sanghas.
   b) Assessment of individuals within the structures.
   c) Assessment of structures alone.

XI. Democratization and Decentralization:
   a) Decision making processes.
   b) Forums for problem solving, interaction and decision making, and strengths and weaknesses of these.
   c) Processes of selection\recruitment.

XII. Finance Management:
   a) Relationship between functional responsibility and financial authority.
   b) Analysis of expenditure patterns

c)   Financial decision making patterns and processes.

XIII. Environment:

a)   Internal environment of the programme, including.
1)   Relationship within teams:
2)   Relationships between teams\levels.
3)   Power dynamics.
4)   Culture\ethos of the organization. and
5)   Multiplicity of roles.

b)   External environment of the programme, including:
1)   At community\village level.
2)   At block\taluk level.
3)   District level.
4)   State and National levels.

5)   Extent of influences of Mahila Samakhya on other institutions and organizations (Govt. and NGO's) to make their policies and programmes more gender-specific

XIV. Area of Neglect and Weakness:
a)   Information flow and communication.
b)   Relationships within and between teams.
c)   Extent of planned critical inputs.
d)   Trust-building.
e)   Degree of empowerment at every level of the structure and particularly the Mahila Sanghas.

XV.   Risks and Opportunities:

XVI. Demands and pressure on the programme:

MAHILA SAMAKHYA KARNATAKA

Districts :
Bidar
Bijapur
Mysore

EVALUATION TEAM
Dr. Poornima Vyasulu
Dr. C. V. Geetha
Prof. Shyamala Varadarajan
Ms. Usha Rani

REPORT OF THE EVALUATION OF MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAM IN KARNATAKA

BACKGROUND

The Mahila Samakhya Programme (MSP) is a unique initiative launched under the Department of Education of HRD Ministry. The program aims at creating A TIME AND SPACE for rural women, a pre-condition for the process of empowerment of women. It has been implemented in three States in the country, Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, in some select districts. The program has been in operation since 1989, in these areas.

The program has been reviewed periodically, as planned in the initial design, both through an internal process and through external evaluation missions.

This report is the outcome of an evaluation team's work, one of the three in each of the states. The report presents the impressions of the four member team, based on their field experiences, interactions with the MS team at all levels, study of relevant documents and reports. It is hoped that the report will be of use in the efforts at further strengthening the program that has tremendous potential, and in the planning of its extension to a wider area in the process of giving the due place to women in the society.

The report will be presented in several sections as follows :

❑ Background to the evaluation

❑ Evaluation methodology

❑ Constraints faced in the evaluation

❑ Mahila Samakhya - its goals, strategies and mechanisms

❑ Organisational structure and processes of MS

❑ Achievements of MS

❑ Areas that need further strengthening

❑ Some issues of concern/importance to the future of the program.

❑ Conclusions and recommendations

❑ Appendices

THE EVALUATION - COMPOSITION OF THE TEAM, APPROACH, METHODOLOGY

The evaluation team for Karnataka consisted of four members and was put together by the State Program Office (SPO) in consultation with the State Executive Committee. The team was briefed on the expectations from the evaluators, time framework, and oriented to the MS program by the State Program Directc (SPD) and the District Program Coordinators (DPC).

An extensive terms of reference was drawn up to guide the evaluation work. But, given the constraint of time, it was agreed that the work would focus only on the critical and tangible parts of the TOR, and that it would attempt to provide an unbiased, yet empathetic outside view of MS program functioning in the State.

The team decided to cover the three Districts of the State where MS has been in effect for the last three years. These were - Mysore, Bijapur and Bidar. Other districts like Raichur and Gulbarga where the program has just begun were not included in the scope of the TOR.

The team split into three groups - two members for Mysore district and one each for Bidar and Bijapur. Details of the field visits, coverages, schedules were drawn in consultation with the District Coordinators, as also the schedule for meetings among the members of the evaluation team for consultation and sharing of experiences.

The team decided on taking a sample of villages that would represent activities of different nature, for example:

-     Villages where the Sangha formation has just begun, as well as those in which they have been in operation for some time;

-     Villages closer to cities/towns, as well as villages located in the interior;

-     Sanghas that have taken up action on collective issues,

as well as those which are still groping with what to do;

Sanghas that are considered as very effective by the MS staff, as well as those which are considered yet to coalesce, and so on.

It was agreed in the team that the evaluation approach would be process oriented, unstructured and open to a dialogue with the MS team, its friends and the women who are the focus of the process of the program. Given this approach, no structured material like questionnaires, or interview schedules were used. The focus was not on measurable indicators, but on the general direction in which the program is headed, and on whether the groundwork has been laid for achieving the goals of the program. This approach gave full cognisance to the fact that MS is attempting a basic social change process, which has inherent hurdles that cannot be overcome in a short time span. And that empowering women is often a "Two steps forward and one step backward" process, which needs to be given time before its results are visible.

It has also been the approach of the team to present the MS team with an outside view of the program, without making value judgments, sometimes presenting critical and provoking points. The aim has been to encourage introspection, rather than to allow for complacency in the dynamic women who are working towards the goals of the program.

It is to be noted that the program has built into it, an internal monitoring and evaluation process, that may throw light on many operational issues in greater detail than can be assessed by a team of external evaluators.

In fact, we had the pleasure of going through the report of an internal evaluation of the Mysore District Unit, which deserves compliments, both in terms of its scope and the process adopted. We feel that the staff which can introspect in such detail and candidness is well set for examining its own functioning.

CONSTRAINTS FACED IN THE EVALUATION

A common constraint that seems to be faced in most evaluations that utilise external consultant resources is that of time. In this evaluation too, finding a common time when all team members were available to undertake field work was a problem. It must be noted that three of the team of four are employed in University jobs and had to take leave for the work.

The initial procedure of the evaluation team choice, formation and orientation pushed the schedule to the later part of June, which is the agricultural season in Karnataka.

This meant that the village women would be available only in the late nights, for meetings with the evaluators.

Further, the field work in the Kollegal area of the Mysore district was constrained by the BSF's presence, in connection with 'Operation Veerappan'. There are several villages with Sanghas initiated by the MS program here, for tribal women of the district, and these could not be covered. In the Mysore district, the monsoon had set in , and with some villages unapproachable by road, extensive field visits were hampered.

Our present report is to be read in this background and context.

MAHILA SAMAKHYA - ITS GOALS

The MS program has the broad goal of creating a space and time where rural women can come together, examine their own situation and determine their own path of empowerment.

At the core of the program design is the value that women's empowerment is possible only when they viewed as active agents and capable of self-determination and not as passive acceptors of what society metes out to them.The programme envisages providing services and facilities, as well as appropriate environment and support required for this process.

These goals and their relevance are well understood and internalised by the MS staff who show a close identification with the target group women without "us and them" dichotomy. There is a common perception of MS as a forum that can empower, enlighten and provide means and ways for women to overcome social, economic, cultural legal and other such traditional hurdles. There is also an awareness of the inherent slowness of this process. The expected end results are women who are strong and aware capable of self-determination, and with the ability to create a new social order.

Towards these goals, the program has several components:

❑ Grassroots level women's organisations at the village level.

❑ Educational activities.

❑ Mahila Shikshana Kendras (MSK).

❑ Other support service like Child Care Centres (CCC), savings and credit, health and legal services, links with economic programmes and civic amenities and so on.

The components are seen as tentative, in the sense that the program is designed to be responsive to the felt needs of the women's groups. For example, even though literacy was not seen as an important component in the initial design,

the expressed desire by some Sangha women to become functionally literate, had got MS to provide support in this direction. Similarly, when environmental issues were expressed as an important concern, the program has included this agenda in its Sangha activities.

In fact, this attitude of openness to the program components and activities can be seen throughout the MS approach to women's empowerment.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF MS IN KARNATAKA

At the State office, the program is headed by the Program Director, supported by the Associate Director and Administrative staff, providing State level coordination and support for linkages with collateral agencies, as well as administrative support. This office also keeps in contact with the other three States through the National Program Office.

The program is implemented by the three districts through the three District Implementation Units (DIU).

Each DIU functions in an autonomous way-in the utilisation of resources, identification of villages to be covered, planning the work, meetings etc. The DIUs also have their own Consultants and Resource Persons for program implementation.

The DIUs are headed by a District Program Coordinator (DPC), a group of Sahayoginis, and requisite administrative staff.

At the village level, the program is a shaped by the women's Sanghas, animated by the Sahayakis and other functional members. Organisationally, the Sahayoginis and the Sahayakis form the cutting edge of leadership in the program. According to the perceptions of the Sahayoginis, the distinction between these two groups is -

The Sahayakis are Sangha members with additional responsibilities. They are nominated by the Sangha women to provide leadership, convene meetings, keep records, keep in touch with the district office, convey information, take up follow-up work on the Sangha decision, etc. The Sahayaki's position is rotational in that a new member assumes the charge after two years. The position is seen as an honorary position, in that they are not paid employees of the MS program.

The Sahayoginis on the other hand, are seen as in charge of several Sanghas in several villages. They function as a supportive resource, have more contact with the State Office, get to tackle village level problems at a later stage. Their position is not rotational on the decision of the Sanghas. They are paid employees of the MS program, even though it

is often reminded to them that there is an element of 'Voluntarism' in their work. Unlike the Sahayakis, the Sahayoginis are seen as having the potential to be promoted or upgraded to other positions like that of the Resource Person.

Apart from the Sahayaki, at the Sangha level, there are other functionaries like teachers, creche caretakers, secretaries for savings and other office bearers.

In presenting the organogram, MS makes a departure from the traditional structure, in that it puts the Sangha women at the top, moving down the line to the State Program Director (SPD), thereby implying a downward accountability.

ORGANISATIONAL PROCESSES

In congruence with its goal of making women empowered to define their own path, the program places a lot of emphasis on Sangha meetings. It is here that the women come together on a weekly basis to discuss their issues, and plan for collective action. The meetings are convened and facilitated by the Sahayakis, and supported by the concerned Sahayogini. The Sangha meetings define the activities to be undertaken by them, whether it is a trip to the local authorities for services, running a CCC, starting adult education classes, or a savings and credit activity.

The Sanghas are encouraged to keep records of the meeting, process, decisions taken and follow up actions, etc. The Sahayoginis role in these meetings is seen as a facilitating person, providing the necessary support to the Sanghas, and a linkage with the DIU.

At the MS staff level too, there are monthly meetings in the DIU for information and experience sharing, and for planning Block level events.

The program has envisaged the training components as an important process for equipping the Sahayoginis and the Sahayakis to play their respective roles effectively.

The Sahayoginis have been trained through a three phase, extensive program in almost all aspects - in awareness, skills, gender, organisational matters, etc. Details of these trainings are available in well documented reports.

The emphasis in the Sahayaki training has been on their role as village level animators, again in awareness of the MS goals, and skills for managing the Sanghas. These trainings have utilized both the MS's internal resources as well as external consultant resources.

The program places a lot of emphasis on the general environment to be created in all aspects of the program. For example, the seating plan in all meetings is informal, making the women feel comfortable, there are no fixed chairpersons

conducting the meetings, the women are encouraged to bring their children etc. Spontaneity and warmth are fostered. Similarly, the Sahayoginis are very approachable for the Sangha women, the women come to their houses, whenever they need help or advice.

It is to be noted that the program looks at the development of not only the women in the Sanghas but also that of the staff of MS. There are examples of the Sahayoginis being given opportunities to enhance their own skills, be it in the area of becoming literate, or utilizing their skills in dramatics, writing, singing, etc., in the activities of the program. There are many instances of opportunities for the Sahayoginis gaining awareness in health, legal, environment issues, though participation in seminars, workshops, etc.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE MS PROGRAMME

The evaluation team is of the unanimous opinion that the achievements of the program are most impressive and commendable, given the short duration for which it has been functioning in an area like women's empowerment, a process akin to "swimming against a strong tide" There are significant and concrete achievements, in terms of setting up a foundation for the empowerment process at the grassroot level.

We were impressed at the Sanghas, their approach, the articulate and unhesitant way in which the women responded to our queries. In most areas, the women readily came together to meet us and apprise us about the program, its gains, its aspirations, limitations and expectations for the future.

We were happy to note that the program has weaned the women from only material expectations to an appreciation of the empowerment process, the need for unity, organisation, awareness building, and collective action.

So, the first and the most important gain of the program is the formation of village level Sanghas of women, geared to examine and tackle issues of concern to them, with support from MS staff.

In many of the villages, the Sanghas have managed to mobilise resources needed, be it a Sangha building, child care services, land for building a Sangha mane as they call it, pressurize the local authorities on basic services like water, bus, PDS, and so on.

The Sangha women see the value of collective action in solving their problems. They say "The authorities take serious note when we approach them as a united group"

In most of the villages we visited, the Sanghas have started child care services, which relieve the women from worries of their children when they go for agricultural work.

The centres serve a meal at noon time, keep the children from getting into mischief, and teach them some songs and alphabets, etc. The center also serves as a point to refer the children for medical help, in cases of illnesses. This service is to be appreciated for its value in freeing the women, at least to some extent, from pressures of child care.

Many of the Sanghas have taken up small savings to meet expenses of collective action, to travel to Taluka offices, get petition applications typed etc. Others who have saved a larger sum are examining using the amount for income generation activities.

The MS program had set aside some funds to be given as honorarium to the Sangha Sahayakis. Most Sanghas have decided to us this as savings for meeting Sangha needs, whether it is to build the 'MANE', or to organize block level events, or purchase assets and materials for the use of the Sanghas.

The women show a strong sense of pride in belonging to the Sanghas, feel confident of their ability to work towards common good through the Sangha.

Thus, it can be said without any doubt that the program has managed to create strong and appropriate local level forums that can work towards the empowerment process in the villages.

We had opportunity of meeting some of the NGO representatives, who have worked in the same geographical areas as MS. In their opinion, the MS is working in a way that strengthens the development process. They see the MS staff as extremely committed, hard working, and approachable. The NGOs are open to work in collaboration with the MS staff, and find them valuable partners, due to the close rapport that has been established with the village women through the Sangha process.

Similarly, the State Resource Center representatives were full of praise for the MS program, its approach, the way it has been working towards gender equality without taking a strong anti-men stand. When asked whether this approach would sustain even in the final stages of confrontation with power structures, they said "We are confident that they will never give in to violence or corrupt means. The sahayogiis are so close to the village women, they can carry on the process that has been initiated by the MS programme".

At the organisational level, the greatest achievement of the program is a cadre of Sahayoginis. These women are very articulate, aware, committed and work with a clarity of the program goals and approaches. Their level of motivation is such that they work in harsh field conditions, with minimum transport, boarding or lodging facilities, without any complaints. Some of them have to walk for 4-7 kms, after traveling by local buses, to reach the villages. They often have to stay at some make shift arrangements in the

village after a late night Sangha meeting. All this they do with cheerfulness and dedication. They seem to be driven by the satisfaction that they are contributing to a significant cause, which touches their own lives at one level. Some of them see their work continuing even if the MS program ceases. In some Sanghas, when asked what would happen if the MS program came to an end, the women said "We will support the Sahayoginis with our own resources, she is one of us". This shows the bond that has developed between the staff and the women.

The other impressive achievement of the program is its *openness to including components that are felt as important* by the women, without imposing items that are considered important by the planners. For example, *most women's programs include literacy as an inevitable component. In MS, it was on the women's request that this was initiated.* The functional literacy component was included in collaboration with the Literacy Campaign efforts of the State departments. In some Sanghas, where this has not been felt as a priority, no pressure has been put on women to become literate in the conventional sense. On the other hand, awareness building through information inputs and collective reflection on the realities of their existence has been given more importance. In this, MS has focussed on education with a wider scope, rather than on mere literacy, which is just one of the means for education.

The Mahila Mahiti Melas are an excellent example where relevant information is disseminated without the rigors of classroom learning. The programme has organized the melas in such a way that not only awareness building, but also experience sharing on a wider platform and a large number of issues has been possible.

Another component of the MS program that relects the need based nature of the strategies, is the Mahila Shikshana Kendra, which has provided an opportunity to the young girls to continue their education. The approach of the Kendra is appropriate and motivating for the school dropouts, with all the necessary support and facilities being provided at the DIU.

On the whole, we felt a constant movement in the *program process, a continued search for making the program meaningful, relevant and evolving means to keep it going, forging new linkages and mobilising resources.*

AREAS THAT MAY NEED FURTHER STRENGTHENING

The evaluation team, while fully appreciating the achievement of the program would like to draw the attention of MS, to some aspects of the program which may need

further strengthening. These areas may have been considered by the staff, but we would still like to place these, in case they have escaped attention of the MS team due to the implementation demands of the program.

a)   The first is the role of the Sahayoginis.

The Sahayoginis are the key personnel in the program implementation. Their selection and training seems to have been done in an effective ways. But what about their working conditions that demand tremendous physical and emotional involvement?

We felt that the Sahayoginis may soon 'burn out', if *they continue to work at that pace.*

Among the demands on the role is being available to the Sangha women and the Sahayakis at all times, travel over long distances and difficult terrain, being the link between the DIU and the Sanghas, supervision of the Sangha meetings, documentation of the village visits, organizing Block level events, to name a few.

Over the years, as the number of villages brought under the fold of MS has increased, the number of Sanghas to be covered by the Sahayogini has also increased, as the staffing situation at this level has not changed significantly. It was pointed out by the State Program Director that there are some indications that the pressure is beginning to show. Many Sahayoginis look weak and tired, and complain of acidity, a sure sign of irregular hours of eating and overwork. Surely, the MS program would not let the ends justify means.

b)   The second related point is the status of the Sanghas themselves. At present the MS Sanghas can be classified into three categories - those that are still in the formative stage, those that have started meeting regularly and having found its village level functionaries, but still needing some guidance from the MS staff, and those that have taken roots and can function in a more or less independent way. The role of the Sahayogini in each of these would of course vary.

At present, a Sahayogini works with 10 Sanghas. These Sanghas may be at various stages of maturity. The location of the villages could be quite close to each other in case of some, or quite far apart in case of some. Thus, the quota of ten for each Sahayogini may result in varying load in different cases, making some feel overburdened and another Sahayoginis work seem as quite easy.

We feel that the number of Sanghas being handled by each Sahayogini should be determined in consultation with her, taking into account the maturity of the Sangha, its location and also the Sahayogini's own confidence in handling the demands of the work.

c)   The next area that needs strengthening is the CCCs. They are at present rendering very valuable service to the women. One of the evaluation team members, Prof. Geetha,

has some detailed comments to make on the functioning of these centres and suggestions for improving their effectiveness.

d) Similarly, the concept of the Mahila Shikshana Kendra is a laudable effort in providing opportunities for the young girls in advancing their education. We felt that MScan explore further linkages to answer the question of "What after school finals?" Not all girls may be interested in continuing formal education. Options like vocational training, self employment training may be more appropriate in these cases.

As mentioned earlier, the process of women's empowerment with which MS is working will demand a constant innovation and forward looking strategies. The program will have to be ready with options, plans, linkages, information and so on to meet the expectations raised in the women's groups. For example, the Sangha women in Badagalapura in the H. D. Kote taluk, are a well knit, empowered group, who are already looking for income generation opportunities. They want to start a pappad making unit, willing to invest their savings, explore the market etc. We understand that a similar interest is shown by a Sangha in the Bijapur district. MS will have to find means of supporting such initiatives, strengthening linkages with DICs, financial institutions, entrepreneurial development organisations etc.

e) Another area that needs to be closely examined and strengthened is that of training of the Sahayakis and Sahayoginis. The earlier Indo-Dutch evaluation mission noted that the approach to training was "a-la-carte", and our impressions too seem to confirm this. In our interactions with the MS women, the ratings of training programs and experiences in these varied from the superlative to the most dismal. For example, some Sahayoginis felt that the training changed their whole being, helped them realise their potential, invested them with many skills. On the other hand, a particular training program of the Sahayakis at Bangalore was reported to have been a worthless, even humiliating experience, for them. Here again, we would like to point out that the exploratory, An a-la-carte approach to training which might have been appropriate in the early years of MS, may need to be replaced with more purposive, need based, intensive and systematic training. For this, no single training organization or institution may be adequate. MS will have to keep in touch with several such organisations, work with them to develop programs that are tailor-made to meet MS's specific needs.

f) The empowerment process in the MS has no doubt begun but one wonders whether it has reached the village women level, as effectively as it has the Sahayogini and the Sahayaki level. It was expressed by the Mysore DIU staff

that in many Sanghas, things seem to be left in the hands of the Sahayaki. Even though the role was to be rotated among the Sangha women every two years or so, this rotation has taken place only in some Sanghas. The DIU is very aware of this issue, has noted it in their internal evaluation process and are already thinking about ways to overcome the tendency of power being held in the hands of a few women. The MS staff will have to look into initiating in groups and the risks of concentration of power in a few hands.

In some of the Sanghas, there is still a tendency to ask " What have we got out of the Sanghas?" Unfortunately, most government programs and NGO initiatives have reinforced this tendency of expecting things to be given, provided with little effort on part of the target group. MS has not pandered to this, but it is natural that the expectations do come up. The program will have to look at how the concept of self-initiative of the Sanghas can be driven home to a deeper level.

g) In some villages, the women's stance on gender equality issues raised some doubts in our minds. For example, on the issue of equal wages, many women did say that " Our work does not deserve the same wages as the men's." Is this stance based on the realities of their existence or is it based on the unquestioning acceptance of social values? We were not sure that the issue had been taken up for discussion in the Sanghas. On the other hand, on the issue of preference for male children, every Sangha expressed concern and said that this attitude needs to be changed. So, the question is how deep and wide is the acceptance of gender equality concept, is it still a concept being debated or a strong value that is being internalized, in all its dimensions?

h) On the question of literacy, right from the beginning, it has been included in the agenda only on the explicit interest of the Sangha women. In many Sanghas, this interest seems to have stopped at being able to sign the names. The non-formal adult education activity has not taken off in most places. MS has made excellent contacts with the State Resource Centre, which has produced meaningful and effective materials for use in this. MS has also developed very good workbooks and reading materials to be used in teaching literacy. But we did not see these being put to use. MS has provided each Sangha with books on a variety of subjects, including good literature, but we did not see evidence of it being read by or read to Sangha women. We feel more efforts are needed in this direction, in terms of rejuvenating the literacy component. Of course, the pressure to conform to the target oriented approach of the Literacy Mission and losing the goals of MS in the program imperatives may have to be carefully examined.

On the whole, the achievements of MS far outshine the areas which need further strengthening. Some of these areas

of weaknesses are those that are coming to light now, and could not really have been anticipated. In fact, some of them are proof of the fact that the program has unleashed a process of social change in favour of women. It is important, therefore that they need to be addressed to and dealt with in the program.

A NOTE ON SOME CONCERNS AND ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO THE FUTURE OF MS PROGRAMME IN THE COMING PERIOD

The MS program has clearly made impressive achievements in terms of establishing a sound base at the grassroots level, for meeting the goals. Like any intervention process, there may be some un-intended consequences of the program, that may need to be looked into, in order to keep the long term goals. Even though these are not problems at present, ignoring them may prove detrimental to the program in the long run. We would like to submit these points for consideration to the MS personnel, both at the operational and policy levels.

1. MS has by design been a very open and flexible program. It has defined empowerment as a process, and one that is to be shaped by the Sangha women. This very openness also makes the work to be seen as without boundaries. For example, to what point should the Sanghas scope of work be extended? If a forest official beat up the husband of a Sangha woman, should it be taken up? If the children of Sanghas women are not getting their allowances for attending schools, should that be taken up? If there is caste politics in a village, or caste discrimination in the village hotel, should the Sangha swing into action?

We felt that quite often, the Sangha is seen as a body that ought to tackle all issues of social injustice. This may be fine in principle, but does not seem too feasible. It is too much to expect of the Sanghas to tackle each and every issue that comes up in the village, even though the events do affect the women and touch their lives in some way or the other.

2. The second area of concern is what could be happening to the nature of relationship between the women and the men who work in the MS program. There is a feeling among the men, (at least the two who interacted with us) that there are occasions when they have been dealt with unfairly by the women staff of MS.

Perhaps this could be due to the women feeling uncomfortable in handling the roles of authority, feeling empowered for the first time in their jobs..... It is as if they have to exercise this new found sense of powerfulness on the nearest and most accessible MALE! May be the men in

MS have taken this in their stride, despite feeling hurt and frustrated. The same may not be the response of other men who come in contact with the MS staff, like other government functionaries, relatives of Sangha women etc.

It is important that the staff do some process reflection on how to cope with empowerment, the personal changes it brings, and most importantly working from positions of authority without being drawn into a dehumanization process, which would be anathema to the values of MS.

3. The third area of concern is the question of whether there is an increasing bureaucratization in the functioning of the programme? Is the decision making process sufficiently participative? This needs to be examined closely, because it is one of the non-negotiable principles in the design of the MS.

For example :

The process of internal evaluation of the DIUs was to involve all the staff of MS, both the field workers and the administrative. The Mysore team felt that this time, some of the staff were asked to be kept out of the process, a unilateral decision made by the State Director. The question asked by the DIU team is why are we making this divide? They have been in lved in the implementation in their own way. If internal evaluation is a mechanism for self reflection, even if there is the risk of role ambiguity, then everyone should have been involved. This did not happen and the Mysore team expressed concern.

There is a feeling that in some decisions like appointment of a DPC, contracting the training resource institution or even the empanelment of the evaluators, the MS staff have not been involved or not kept well informed.

Perhaps, this is an inevitable problem of the extension and growth of the program, but must nevertheless be constantly kept in check, if the program is not to lose its unique features, and become yet another government scheme!

4. Given the goals of MS, INDIVIDUATION of the Sanghas from the MS programs and its staff is a very important issue. The tendency to develop a sense of dependency on the Sahayoginis needs to be actively curbed. This was to be done through a process of rotation of the Sahayoginis among the Sanghas in the districts. There are both pros and cons of this, the loss of rapport and trust built with the Sangha women over time, logistics or residence and location etc.

The Sanghas seem to fall into four categories :
- Those that are still in the formation stage,
- Those which have come together, but still needing the MS staff's intervention in the conducting of meetings,
- Those that have coalesced into an effective group, capable of handling their own issues, and defining their own agenda,
- And those that have come to be effective pressure groups,

and looking into future activities like income generation etc.

As mentioned earlier, the Sahayogini's role in each of these is different. On one hand, her presence in a mature Sangha may block the Sangha from becoming self reliant, she may on the other hand not be able devote more time to the still forming Sangha.

This process of facilitating the individuation demands a sensitivity and a willingness to "let it happen", and yet be available for consultation, on the part of the Sahayoginis. A training input on these "Group Dynamics" could be in order, both from the point of Sangha development, and rationalisation of the Sahayoginis work load.

5. The MS program is understandably riding an exciting wave of empowerment process. It must, however, not be forgotten that as a program being implemented under the Education Department of the Government, there are certain disciplines to be maintained. For example, in the accounting systems and financial management, or in the conducting of meetings of the Executive Committee. If these are not appreciated and followed, the program can come under severe criticismdespite its achievements.

What the program personnel have to strive for is a balance between the autonomy they enjoy and the discipline that needs to be maintained for an effective implementation of the program.

6. In the early years, at the state level, the MS program was headed by Ms. Srilatha Batliwala. She had at that time felt the extreme demands and pressures of shouldering this responsibility. She felt that sharing of this between two persons would give enough breathing space and also bring a wider perspective into the program at the top level.

Consequently, on her resignation from the post, there are two positions at the State level - that of the SPD and the Associate Director.

In terms of skills and profiles, each of them bring their own expertise in to the program. Ms. Uma Kulkarni has had many years of field experience, and Dr. Shashi Rao's perspective on education is well in tune with the MS goals. The two could complement each other in shaping and implementing the program.

However, there is a feeling that they are not working in coordination with each other. The growing tension and conflict between these two may hamper the program in the long run and something must be done either by way of arbitration or role definition, so that the smooth functioning of both is ensured.

At the moment we are not in a position to comment on the rights or wrongs of each, but can say that there is some conflict. We would request the MS policy makers to look into the matter at the earliest.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On the whole, the evaluation experience has convinced us that the MSP has set in motion a process of empowering the rural poor women in the areas where it is being implemented in the state.

The strategies and mechanisms adopted, as well as the operational goals, are in congruence with the overall objectives of the program as originally conceived.

The achievements of MS in terms of setting up a grassroot level structure, providing this with resources and support - both human and material, and creating the right work culture and ethos, is commendable. All this has been achieved in a short time of four years, a fact that needs to be appreciated, given the "Swimming against the Current" nature of the program.

The MS team members are most impressive in their conviction and commitment to the cause of women, shown in their approach to work, their eagerness to learn and their ability for critical self examination. They are 'level' with the Sangha women, relate well to the realities of their existence, and yet keep in sight the goals of the program. We are convinced that the empowerment process will be sustained at the grassroots level, even after the program has initiated a withdrawal strategy in some years.

The program has achieved an excellent documentation system, both of the process of empowerment and tht of implementation. This would be of great interest and value to people working in the area of women's programs. Similarly, the presentation of information to the Sangha women and sharing of experiences and wisdom among them has been enabled through appropriate means. These are to be highly appreciated.

Some of our points on areas that need to be strengthened is to be taken in this background. These have been made keeping in mind the potentials of the program and the capabilities of the MS staff to respond to the evaluation report.

Organisationally, there are few areas that need to be looked into, in the long term interest of the program and its spread into newer areas. These have been spelt out in detail in the report. We do feel that these have been sensed within the system at various points, but some concerted efforts are needed to put into action the lessons learnt, to take MSP to greater heights.

TOWARDS EMPOWERING WOMEN : CONSTRAINTS AND POSSIBILITIES
Evaluation of Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

TOWARDS EMPOWERING WOMEN : CONSTRAINTS AND POSSIBILITIES
EVALUATION OF MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME IN GUJARAT

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1   The Mahila Samakhya Programme primarily aims at empowering women through education. The programme presupposes that education can be a decisive intervention towards women's equality, and therefore it aims at creating circumstances which would promote their education for equality. The programme has been introduced in three States of India, namely, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat since the year 1987 on an experimental basis. In Gujarat the programme covers three districts viz. Baroda, Rajkot and Sabarkantha.

1.2   The present report entitled "Towards Empowering Women : Constraints and Possibilities" is an evaluation of the Mahila Samakhya Programme (MSP) in Gujarat. The 4 member evaluation committee was appointed on March 26, 1993. The crucial point emphasized was that the programme has to be looked upon as a process of empowerment rather than searching for the impact in quantitative achievements.

1.3   In order to get a clearer picture of the Programme, the committee met the SPD - the State Programme Director, (incidentally, on the eve of the appointment of Evaluation Panel, the earlier SPD who was with the Programme from its beginning was transferred), State and District level officials and other functionaries at the Ahmedabad office of the MSP. The members discussed both the philosophy and implementation of the MSP in Gujarat in this meeting. A plan of field visits by the members was also prepared in consultation with the district level personnel. The members were given all the documents, reports and newsletters of the MSP.

1.4   The Committee members met, individually or in a group, the State-level officials and non-officials dealing with the programme and discussed with them the achievements and constraints of the MSP. The members also held discussions with the district level personnel, former and present as well as with academicians, training experts and representatives of the voluntary organizations associated with the MSP. Intensive field visits were made by the team members (the list of the villages is given in the appendix)

and discussions were held with Sahyoginis, Sakhis and Sangha members of these villages.

1.5   Besides these, the evaluation committee referred to some of the basic documents as well as internal evaluation reports of 1990, the two documents entitled "The Unfolding," 1991 and " The Awakening," 1992, the review report of Indo- Dutch Mission, 1992 and the Minutes of the various meetings of the Executive Committee of MSG. For preparing the report we have further referred to some of the developmental literature available in India and abroad providing perspective about empowerment experiments.

1.6   According to the Committee, empowerment includes a range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective mobilization for challenging the basic power relations. Empowerment is an enabling process whereby those who are powerless could be made capable through providing access to and control over resources. It helps the marginalised in the society, who are voiceless, powerless and quite often invisible. Power is not to be looked upon as a mode of domination over others but as providing strength which can help influence social and political processes, direction of social change and generate self worth. The present programme is envisaged to work towards empowering women by creation of an environment to seek knowledge and information in order that they can make informed choices.

1.7   Since the process of empowerment is to be generated in a social milieu which is patriarchal, male dominated and having caste-class material basis we believe the implementation of objectives and organising programmes presupposes the recognition of this social reality. We recognize the need for empowerment of women in this context.

1.8   While preparing this report the team has constantly referred to the parameters provided by the Government of India. However, the parameters which were primarily developed for the annual evaluation and which ran into 12 pages (later on summarized into three pages highlighting the emerging strategies, women's rising strengths and

consciousness and sustainability of the programme) were found to be too detailed and too many in number. The team discussed this point in the first meeting at Delhi and clarified that it would look at the programme more as a process rather than assess it in statistical terms. The team also mentioned that since the total coverage of the programme is limited, it was difficult to see its impact in significant visible terms. It was therefore decided to look at the programme in its total conceptual perspective, examine its major thrust areas developed over the past few years and study the problems related to the organizational structure. The team tried to understand the philosophy of the programme as articulated in the National level document and as translated in reality in the State.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF MS AND APPROACH OF MSP GUJARAT

2.1   In order to understand the emergence of the concept of Mahila Samakhya and the strategy underlying the MS programme, it is necessary to go briefly into the historical background of the policies and programmes for women in India.

2.2   The Community Development Programme which was initiated in 1951 and the establishment of Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) in 1953 as the nodal agency to oversee and coordinate the welfare activities, looked upon women mainly as a maintainer of family health, nutrition and welfare. Women were perceived neither as producers of economic goods nor as individuals with their own identity in these programmes. However, for the first time a cadre of women extension workers was created in the government.

2.3   The shift in approach from 'welfare' to 'development' of women took place in the seventies, coinciding with some of the major transformations occurring in the macro system, especially the emergence of women's movement in the country. The publication of the report on the status of women in India, entitled 'Towards Equality' in one sense exploded the myth about the high status of women in India. Data about women in poor households bearing the major share of work and the survival needs compelled the policy makers to look at women as workers and not merely as housewives.

In the seventies and eighties, therefore, women were allotted special quota or fixed percentage shares in the outlays of the pro-poor employment programmes like IRDP, TRYSEM etc. Later on, exclusively women's employment programmes like DWCRA, STEP etc. were introduced. The studies of these programmes, however, observed that the dual approach of wage employment and asset creation for women did not

contribute much to reduce the prevailing gender inequalities and destitute condition of women.

2.4   Due to various national and international developments, the concern for women's upliftment gradually moved from peripheral to the centre stage. The growing philosophy was of looking at women not as targets or beneficiaries of various programmes, by as active participants in the process of development. Empowering women to enable them to play this role effectively was the central point of the new approach that emerged gradually. And this was at the root of the formulation of MSP.

2.5   The National Policy on Education (NPE) which is a land mark in the field of policy on women's education, recognized that our educational structure has not been able to redress traditional imbalances in the educational achievement of men and women. The NPE therefore stated that education should play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women through removing their illiteracy and through increasing general awareness among them. In order to translate this role of education into concrete reality Mahila Samakhya, or Education For Women's Equality was initiated in 1987 on a pilot basis.

2.6   MSP, which is a process oriented programme and not a target oriented programme primarily seeks to bring -about a change in women's perceptions about themselves and the perception of society in regard to women's traditional roles so as to promote egalitarian gender relationships. It endeavors to create an environment for women to seek knowledge and information in order to make informed choices and create circumstances in which women can learn at their own pace. This is to be achieved through education which is viewed not in its narrow sense of formal education and learning of three R's but is seen as a learning process which may ultimately lead to enhanced self image and confidence of women so as to empower them for playing a positive role in their development as well as in family welfare.

2.7   The objectives of MSP as laid down in the Central Government document are based on the above approach which emphasizes that education can be a decisive intervention towards women's equality. The policy statement of MSP Gujarat reiterates the objectives as well as the parameters of empowerment articulated in the programme of action. It views empowerment as building of women's self image and self confidence, critical faculty of thinking, participation in decision making, group action for changing society and providing opportunities for economic independence, and expects them to achieve these through collective action.

2.8   MSP expects collective action on the part of women to begin at the village level through participation in discussion on various routine matters such as child care,

health, fuel, fodder, drinking water and education. Problems related to their status and role within the society and the family as well as problems concerning their selfimage could also be part of the grassroot level discussions and actions. In other words, the MSP primarily relies on rural women's initiative and involvement in meeting their needs and solving their own problems.

2.9   The village level activities are to be supported and guided by higher level personnel so that village level organisations (Sanghas) are strengthened and women are able to demand their own rights and are able to participate in the development process as equal partners. The village/taluka level dynamics is expected to get translated at higher levels also to strengthen women's movement and status at the State level.

2.10   In order that the goals of the programme could be reached, certain non-negotiable principles have been laid down in the National document: The time and pace of the programme have to be according to the capacity of women, women will determine the form, nature etc. of the activities, the role of project functionaries will be as facilitator rather than as directors, education is to be considered as a process which enables women to question, conceptualize, reflect on their actions, the content of learning will also be determined by the priorities suggested by women, etc. These Principles ensure that the programme remains process oriented, participative, decentralized and flexible in nature.

2.11   It is important to note, that there is some gap between the philosophy and strategy underlying the National document and its translation in the Gujarat MSP. A close look at the National document and the approach of the MSP Gujarat reveals that the Gujarat MSP is more target-oriented and activity-oriented and less process-oriented than the National document.

2.12   While the high objectives as well as the innovative approach of MSP are impressive, these can be achieved only if the programme design pays enough attention to certain basic pre-conditions as well as to logical outcomes of such awareness generating programmes. The following paragraphs discuss some of the points in this context.

2.13   Though the MSP is not educational in the narrow conventional meaning of education, the issues to be taken up and the processes to be undergone have to be educative. Our investigation however revealed that most MSP personnel have yet to grasp the idea that development activities are a part of an educative experience and that education is a key component of the programme. It was disturbing to hear a District Project Coordinator talking mainly about quantitative achievements in education in terms of the village covered, number of women educated and so on.

2.14   The imperative of building self-image and self worth

to achieve certain goals is well recognized in the programme. However, quite often the building of self image is believed to be an end in itself without realizing the implications of an aware woman. For example, awareness cannot remain confined merely at the individual level. It is bound to have some impact on the family and on the larger society. Once a woman becomes conscious of herself, of her problems and her power, she cannot remain contented with demanding water taps or hand pumps. Her awareness is surely going to affect her relationship with the family members as she is likely to question some of the unequal power relationships within the family. She will realise that the problem of water that she is facing is linked with the discrimination suffered by her in the family. The existence of this phenomenon was noticed in the case of some of the Sahayoginis when they were challenging the hegemony of father or husband. Unfortunately, however, the District Coordinators as well as Resource Persons have failed to recognize this dimension and are interpreting awareness in a very limited sense.

2.15   One striking feature observed during the field visits was the predominance of middle aged women in the Sangha meetings. In one sense this is understandable as these women are comparatively free from the family responsibilities (since they able to delegate work to younger daughters-in-law). Moreover, it is also true that the women in this age cohort are also in need of some space since they did not have any chance to develop awareness about their own problems or self image. The presence of widows and separated women in Sangha meetings also is understandable and welcome as these women could come out of their social shackles due to this programme. However, the near absence of young married women or young girls in the meetings is quite conspicuous. Except for the education programmes in a few areas (like Bhiloda Taluka) or in the event of their facing problems in some areas, young women were not visible in the MSP. It appears clear that the implementators have failed to appreciate the advantages of involving young women who could function as a change agent in our rural society. However, of late younger women are also getting involved. The new batch of Sakhis has many women in the age group 25-40. In Sabarkantha and Rajkot, girls and young women are associated in the literacy activities.

2.16   One important objective of the MSP is "to draw on the credibility that non-government agencies have developed with women .... The programme has to gain their support through a mutually supportive system". However, it appears to us that the MSP Gujarat is not very clear about the role of NGOs in the programme and has not taken enough care to design the programme from this point of view. To start with, NGOs differ significantly with respect to their involvement, commitment and perspective on women's issue.

It is necessary therefore to lay down norms or procedure to identify appropriate NGOs. Further, the policy makers should be aware of the specific characteristics of the women's movement in Gujarat. They should have knowledge about the presence of autonomous groups, nature of development agencies, state of Left political parties and the prevalence of welfare orientation in handling the women's issues by the voluntary organizations in this State. Secondly, the MSP should have continuous communication and dialogue with the voluntary organizations which are working with them. So as to avoid miscommunication and misunderstanding unfortunately all these points are not taken care of in the MSP. For example, it was observed that in Baroda the NGOs, the University department and other autonomous groups had several complaints against the functionaries of the MSP. The programme did not have any mechanism to allow for dialogue between the NGOs and the MSP personnel and to promote conflict resolution. We believe that if the MSP has to work with NGOs, it is necessary to have Resource Persons and District Coordinators with experience, vision and maturity s• that they understand and appreciate the NGOs and can work and cooperate with them.

2.17   We believe that the framers of the MSP have not given sufficient thought to the overt and covert implications of launching a programme in the context of our patriarchal social structure. The power structure which tilts in favour of the men in the family; the unequal relationships between the female in-laws and the young bride; the overweight of caste hierarchy and norms of pollution are all generating unequal gender social structure. The MSP at every stage implies conflict with this present oppressive social structure. However, it is observed that the training programmes designed to train the MSP personnel do not emphasize the implications of this structure with the result that issues like family violence or institutional hegemonies received low priority. If we appreciate the fact that the logical consequences of awareness could be tension and confrontation which could be at the personal, familial, or State levels, if becomes clear that the MSP functionaries must be made aware of this eventuality and should be trained in conflict resolution and in controlling the situation.

2.18   It seems to us that the approach of the MSP, Gujarat does not appreciate enough the need for decentralization and for promoting participative culture. We believe that the practice of appointing top personnel from the government jeopardizes the basic principle of eliminating bureaucratic bottlenecks and promoting flexibility in the programme. The practice of referring every single decision or appointment to the State authority is a way towards bureaucratization which

tends to defeat the basic objective of this programme. We have observed that wherever the programmes like MS have succeeded, it has been due to the fact that personnel at the top have definite women's perspective and they generate an ethos of flexibility. We strongly recommend that this point is appreciated while implementing MSP in Gujarat.

2.19   To sum up, the concept of Mahila Samakhya is a sound concept. The objectives and the basic approach of the programme are also sound and valid. The translation of these in programme designing, however, seems to be a different task. The Gujarat model of the programme seems to be suffering from some weaknesses in this context.

2.20   In the following sections we shall examine the working of the programme at different levels.

3. STATUS OF MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME IN GUJARAT

The Programme:

3.1   As seen ea ' 'r, the MSP has been introduced in three states of India, namely, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat. Each of the states has set up a formal organizational structure to implement the programme. In the case of Gujarat there is "Mahila Samakhya, Gujarat (MSG)" Society registered under the Societies Registration Act at the apex level. The basic aim of the MSG is to implement programmes aimed at women's empowerment as envisaged in the NPE 1986 and in the Programme of Action for its implementation published by the Ministry of HRD (Department of Education), Government of India 1986.

3.2   The General Council of the MSG is headed by the Education Minister and consists of the concerned government officials, representatives of non-government organizations & educational institutions and the nominees of the Central Government. The GC is in the overall charge of the MSP in Gujarat. The GC is supported by the Executive Committee (EC) consisting of official and non-official members and headed by the Secretary, Education. It is expected to discharge all executive and financial functions of the MSG. The State Programme Director (SPD) who is the Member Secretary of the EC, is responsible for the executive functions and implementation of the MSP in Gujarat. She is also responsible for the supervision, control and coordination among the functionaries of the MSP. The SPD is supported by the office (at Ahmedabad) consisting of Consultants, Resource Persons as well as an accounts officer, an administrative officer and the supporting staff.

3.3 The District Implementation Unit which has been set up in each of the three districts (viz. Baroda, Sabarkantha and Rajkot) where the MSP is implemented, is headed by the District Programme Coordinator (DPC), who is supposed to be supported by 2 Resource Persons, 2 Consultants and the administrative staff.

3.4 In order to ensure some expert support to the programme from outside, State Resource Group (SRG) has been set up at the State level and District Resource Group (DRG) has been set up in each of the three districts. It must be mentioned, however, that the DRGs have only been informally existing since 1990.

3.5 Sahayoginis, Sakhis and Sanghas are the major functionaries at the below district levels. Each Sahayogini is in charge of implementing the MSP in about 5 to 10 villages. She is expected to open dialogue with village women, discuss their problems and aspirations, encourage them to come together as a group (via. Sangha), and help them to negotiate an independent space for themselves in the village. As the Sangha gradually comes into its own, the Sahayogini's role shifts to being a supporter, guide and an information link between the Sangha and the support structures at the DIU. Sakhis, who are selected from village women, are viewed as 'learners' and not as 'workers' in Gujarat. They are trained under the MSP and are expected to share their training and exposure with other village women. The Sakhi's post in Gujarat is rotating with the result that several women get the opportunity of training and exposure outside.

3.6 The MSP is not a typically government sponsored programme. The MSG which implements programme is an autonomous society. It is expected to work independently to fulfill the objectives of the MSP. The personnel of the MSP are also mostly drawn from outside keeping the unique needs of the programme in mind. Process-orientation, flexibility, participative culture and decentralized decision making are some of the basic characteristics of the programme.

The Performance

3.7 Table 1 gives information about some quantitative dimensions of the progress of the MSP in Gujarat. It shows that the programme, which is primarily a pilot or an experimental programme, covers three of the nineteen districts of the State, and is spread to about 25 of the total 35 talukas of the selected districts. In the selected talukas only about 10% of the villages are covered under the programme and about 5 to 10% of the women of the selected villages are brought under the Village Sanghas. In other words, the quantitative coverage of the programme is extremely small.

TABLE I
Mahila Samakhya Gujarat at a glance

	Baroda	Rajkot	Sabar-kantha	MS Gujarat
No. of talukas				
Total	12	13	10	
Under MS	7	12	6	24
Total villages	1689	865	1407	
No. of villages under MS	147 (40)	107 (30)	109 (30)	363
No. of Sahayoginis	22 (42)	19 (37)	11 (21)	52
No. of Sakhis Trainees	59 (26)	65 (29)	99 (45)	223
Completed one year	196 (51)	73 (19)	114 (30)	383
Active Sanghas (irrespective of time)	60 (40)	43 (29)	47 (31)	150
Sanghas completed 6 months	72	24	40	136
Sanghas below 6 months	15	40	22	77
Appx. No. of Sangha women	5600	2100	2500	10200

3.8 The activity profile of the programme, however, is relatively varied. A major activity of the MSP is Sangha meetings at the village level, and training, workshops and Sakhi cluster meetings etc. at higher levels - all of which aim at awareness generation among women. MSG reports that about 70% of Sanghas are active (in the sense of holding regular meetings) and meet 2 to 4 times in a month. In Baroda they meet about 4 times a month while in Sabarkantha they meet about twice a month. Sakhi cluster meetings vary from 50 per year in Rajkot to 120 per year in Baroda; and Sahayogini meetings vary from 22 per year in Rajkot to 27 per year in Sabarkantha. About 8 training workshops were held in 1991-92 at the State level and 19 to 25 at the District level (19 in Sabarkantha, 23 in Rajkot and 25 in Baroda).

3.9 Among the other activities of the MSP, the activities undertaken to resolve the day to day problems of women are important. Most Sanghas have started with these activities which include drinking water and handpump, bus service, approach road etc. Since the availability of adequate drinking water is a common problem of almost all the villages covered under the MSP, most Sanghas started with demanding hand

pumps or such other facilities. Though not all of them were successful in getting these facilities, the process did help in the formation of Sanghas and in creating confidence and boldness among women. Many Sanghas approached the Taluka office and some met even the district collector to represent their case. These women have now realized that they have a right on these facilities and that the government officials were expected to provide them.

3.10 Social Issues Several Sanghas have taken up social issues like domestic violence, caste/communal problems and atrocities on women. The issues were taken up mostly as individual cases. Some Sahayoginis also faced family tension because of their challenging the established values. These problems were also taken up mostly as individual issues. The only exception to this was the fact that some Sahayoginis in Rajkot have been accepted as members of the district Nari Suraksha Samiti which has given them some kind of power to help women against atrocities.

3.11 Some of the active Sanghas in Rajkot felt the need for a place of their own where they can hold their meetings and carry out other activities in the areas of health, literacy, income generation etc. A women architect was appointed as a facilitator who tried to involve women in the planning phase of the Kutir and wanted to involve them in the construction phase later on by providing them adequate skill training. Since the scheme of Mahila Kutir was accepted as a part of the MSP, many other Sanghas demanded the same. The overall progress of the scheme, however, has been small with some villages getting a plot of land for the Kutir.

3.12 On the basis of the 'felt needs' of Sanghas, the EC of the MSG has now identified five 5 major areas of work for the MSP. These are literacy, legal aid, economic development, child care and health. The EC had set up five committees, each headed by an expert, which studied the nature of the identified problems and recommended a plan of action. The MSP is now in the process of implementing these recommendations in all the three districts. It is felt however, that these are too many activities to be started simultaneously in the districts. It will be desirable if each district is allowed to focus on the activities according to its own needs and priorities.

3.13 As regards the financial aspect of the programme, it should be noted that the total expenditure on the MSP in Gujarat has increased from Rs.47,718 in 1988-89 (for one month only) to Rs.10.9 lakhs in 1989-90 and to Rs.41 lakhs in 1991-92. That is, the expenditure has increased about four fold during the past three years (not considering the first year). A close look at the expenditure pattern reveals that (1) there is considerable underutilization of the funds, the percentage of the utilized funds varying from 8% in 1990-91 to 21% in 1991-92, (2) the underutilization of the funds

is more in the case of the outlays on the objectives of the programme, 5% and 17% utilization rates in the years 1990-91 and 1991-92 respectively, and (3) several innovative schemes for which outlays are budgeted in the annual budgets are not really implemented in reality. (Refer to tables in Section 9) The details of that financial aspects of the MSP will be discussed later on.

3.14 b It must be noted that there some inter-district variations in the performance of MS in Gujarat. Baroda accounts for about 40 per cent of the villages and of the active Sanghas, whereas Rajkot and Sabarkantha account for about 30 per cent each. However, Sabarkantha has only 21 per cent of the Sahayoginis and accounts for 35 per cent of the total Sakhis (trainee and completed one year, whereas Rajkot has 37 per cent of the Sahayoginis and accounts for only 23 per cent of the total Sakhis (see table 3.1). These variations seem to arise out of the difference in the strength of the staff and the nature of the leadership.

3.15 The programme appears to have given relatively more weightage to Sahayogini and Sakhi training and less to Sanghas at the village level. On an average the Sanghas cover about 5% to 10% of the village women. Only a fraction of the total expenditure is incurred on Sangha activities directly. This is a serious matter as the strength of Sanghas will provide the real strength to the MSP.

3.16 In spite of all these limitations, however, it must be noted , that the impact of the programme is highly positive in the areas where Sanghas have become active. These Sangha women understand and articulate their problems; represent their problems to the authorities, including the district collector, with confidence; and they seem to have the courage to fight for their rights. These Sanghas, Sakhis as well as Sahayoginis can now be motivated to take up major activities for the upliftment of women. What is needed urgently is the encouragement, guidance and support from the higher level personnel of the MSP.

3.17 The evaluation team feels that on the whole, the programme is gradually getting more and more bureaucratized with the result that it is losing its capability to follow the innovative approach or achieve the goals set for itself. Though these issues will be examined in detail later, it is necessary to mention here that the non-government staff of the MSP, the voluntary organizations associated with it, and even the members of the SRG feel that the programme is gradually getting converted into a typical government programme with its focus on observing rules and regulations and on achieving the targets.

3.18 To sum up, it seems to us that the MSP in Gujarat has not really picked up as the level of activities is still very low accompanied by poor utilization of the allotted funds.

Though the dynamics of the programme is felt very well in some selected areas where Sanghas are very active, the overall structure and culture of the MSP is not conducive to achieving the innovative goals of the programme. There is a need to protect the programme from over-bureaucratisation and rigidities.

4. ORGANISATION STRUCTURE

4.1   We have described above the formal organization structure of the MSP starting from the Mahila Samakhya Society at the top to Sakhis and Sangha at the village level. On the whole, the formal structure seems to be clear and in keeping with needs of the programme. However, it will be useful to examine the responsiveness of the structure to the needs of this innovative programme of awareness generation in reality. The present section undertakes this task.

4.2   At the outset we would like to reiterate the point made by the Indo-Dutch team regarding the revision of designations of the positions in order to distinguish between long term positions needed for the entire duration of the programme and temporary positions needed for specific tasks. For example, Consultants should be treated as short term supporters called in for specific projects and tasks. The existing Consultants who function as Resource Persons should be designated as such.

4.3   Coming to the existing organization structure of the MSP, we would like to state with mentioning the gaps in the present structures at various levels. The DIU is a very crucial unit in determining the success of the MSP. However, we observed that several crucial posts are not filled in. In Sabarkantha, for almost two years now the post of DPC has been vacant. The Resource Person is looking after some of the functions of the DPC here. The other two DIUs are headed by government officers who hold this position in addtion to their regular appointment. Also the Rajkot DIU has been functioning without Resource Persons and Consultants for few months now. However, a Resource Person from Sabarkantha was transferred to Rajkot w.e.f. 1st July 1993. Also, Ahmedabad Resource Persons stayed in Rajkot for 20 days between 10.3.93 and 30.6.93. All these gaps tend to effect the performance of the programme adversely.

4.4   The structure of the MSP has a provision for a District Resource Group (DRG) in each districts. While a lot of discussion has taken place on this aspect, an action to set up functional resource groups at the district level has yet to be initiated. Consultants can be drawn from such groups if such groups are really made functional.

Personnel Policies (DIU)

4.5   The lack of attention to filling up staff positions in the DIUs is of great concern. However, the quality of the personnel occupying key positions must also be ensured. Though the leadership at the district level is very crucial for the success of the programme, the government has appointed a temporary DPC in one district, and the DPCs in the other two districts hold this office second or third charge and hence are overloaded. Since the MSP is perceived as low priority by them, adequate attention is not paid to the programme. While non-governmental people have been appointed in the past as DPCs, the experience is not always been positive. We were given to understand that the government is ready to appoint non-governmental personnel, but there are not many takers. Notwithstanding this, the issue is not whether government or non-governmental persons are most suitable. The special nature of the programme, its innovative approach, sensitiveness with respect to gender, process-oriented work, emphasis on building a committed cadre of functionaries, understanding the obstacles to growth etc demands people of a certain aptitude and commitment. The criteria for selection have to be specified in transparent detail and the right persons chosen by open processes. This approach should be adopted for selecting all programme positions including SPD, DPC and Resource Persons. The ad hoc recruitment policies, and disregard for ensuring replacements for people who have left the programme, should be replaced by a well designed staffing policy.

4.6   The MSG has attempted to recruit Resource Persons, who are usually young urban social workers, fresh from college but committed to social change. However, sometimes these persons do not command the respect of the village women or of the older staff members or the voluntary agencies with whom they are expected to work. They therefore need an induction training or a learning period to make up for the lack of experience; and proper direction from within the MSG so that skills for interpersonal relationships can be developed.

4.7   When the Resource Persons were given an option in the past regarding the manner of salary payment, they had opted for a consolidated amount. The EC had instructed the SPO to suggest a system of increments, but no action seems to have been taken so far. The DIUs therefore have two systems of salary fixation, depending on whether the employee is on deputation from the government or whether she or he is a direct recruit. While the government employees get many benefits, the non-government persons do not receive any and get lower travel allowances. It has to be ensured that there is no violation of labour legislation in these aspects. The EC should set up a committee to look into the grades, increments and other terms of employment of the staff.

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4.8 The roles of the Resource Person and Consultants do not remain distinct in practice. The Consultant (documentation) and the Resource Persons both seem to supervise and support the Sahayoginis, in addtion to carrying out other duties like training, documentation, networking etc. This pattern may be necessary given the team approach needed at the initial stages of the programme. Also, very often, the problems of daily routine or fire fighting are so overwhelming that the Resource Persons\Consultants appear overloaded. The right type of person at the DPC level may help here.

4.9 The system of additional charge should not be allowed at any level (the only exceptions being when there is a temporary gap to be filled). The setback to the programme on account of the additional charge at the DPC level has been commented upon. Even asking a Resource Person to handle the responsibilities of the DPC should be avoided. The additional burden of administrative responsibilities affects the functioning of the group. An optional arrangement could be to make the person Acting DPC, in which case, (i) the powers of a regular DPC should be given, and (ii) a replacement at the Resource Person level should be found. We also feel strongly that unless the right people are recruited, any expansion of the MSP should not be considered.

Growing Bureaucratization:

4.10 At the present, most of the important positions of decision making under the MSP, including the posts of SPD & DPCs, are occupied by government officers. The office space (at the State level), the rules and regulations, the mode of working etc. all are tinged with the government colour. We were given to understand that this trend may extend to the Sahayogini level also. We are afraid that the programme is getting highly bureaucratized with its spontaneity and innovativeness declining.

4.11 The heart of the programme is flexibility. Further, as articulated in the non-negotiable principles or the MSP, the role of the functionaries is facilitative and and not directive. In other words, the collective strength of village woemn is important in planning as well as implementation of the programme. The growing bureaucratization revealed in the appointment of the personnel and in the functioning of the programme therefore, will be dysfunctional for achieving the goals of the MSP.

4.12 Sahayoginis and Sakhis are expected to adopt participatory approaches (as per the spirit of the MS document) and are very often told to decide things for themselves. However, government people come into the programme with their own ideas which often contradict the

spirit of the programme. This leads them to overrule certain decisions of the Sahayoginis. An example cited time and again was the decision of the local women to go to Jaipur after the Bhavribai incident in 1992 and the State's decision to deny permission for the visit. A narrow interpretation of the rules by the District incharge also leads to what the Sahayoginis see as unnecessary delays which affect their credibility at the village level.

4.13 The Resource Persons and Sahayoginis feel that they are the ones who are primarily accountable to the field level Sanghas, being required to answer questions about the running of the programme and to solve field level problems. The upper levels are seen as accountable to the government. For instance, certain issues like unnatural death of women or battering of women are seen by Resource Persons\Sahayoginis as important issues. District authorities do not consider them as issues coming within their purview. The Sahayoginis, then, have to take a personal stand and not to demand any support from the MSP structure. This non-appreciation of pariarchal structures in generating gender issues at the higher level seem to be leading to the trend towards closing in of the Sahayoginis who help each other on personal and indiviual levels in the absence of any organizational support. In short, the structure does not make an effort to understand the problems at the field level and appreciate the work put in by Sahayoginis. Added to this is the perception of distancing of the DPCs and SPD from the field - their limited interaction with Sanghas and Sakhis, rare field visits, resulting in the lack of the "feel" of the programme at the grassroots. We beleive that concerted efforts should be made at the State level to resolve the problem.

Perceived change in role of Sahayoginis:

4.14 One aspect of the pressure from the government, according to many Sahayoginis, is the perceived move to change the role of the Sahayogins from that of a participant in a movement to that of an achiever of fixed targets. That is, instead of being involved in the process starting from discussions about a problem to its solution (participant in a movement), the shift is towards target orientation. This is reflected in the pressure to expand the number of villages under each Sahayogini. The Sahayogini is now expected to deal with Sakhis and Sanghas in ten villages from the present level of 5 to 7 villages. This may be difficult in some cases where Sahayoginis are already overloaded. We feel that the policy should be to allow for some variation in this norm depending on the difficulty of the terrain, the availibility of transport etc.

Dual culture of the MSP:

4.15 The organization structure of the MSP is unique as it is under the control of the government at the top, while it is expected to be flexible, open and decentralized at the lower levels. The split structure between the government and the non-governmental personnel as discussed above, however, has created several obstacles in the functioning of the programme. The absence of synthesis between the two cultures has generated tension and conflicts within the MSP structure. For example, in order to promote self regulation some Sahayoginis have set up "monitoring committees" comprising of some DIU members and Sahayoginis. These Committees pass sanctions against the Sahayoginis who are irregular in their visits and work. This informal arrangement has proved to be successful in maintaining high level of motivation and commitment of Sahayogins towards the programme and could be institutionalized better. The demands of the committees should not be perceived as "a misuse of autonomy".

4.16 An importance consequence of the dual culture of the MSP was the generation of tension between the officers deputed by the government and voluntary workers working at the grass root level. The impact of the field level work was building of strong personal links with village women. Some of the activists who were involved in developing such links found it difficult ot work in a growing, bureaucratic structure and consequently withdraw from the programme. This withdrawal which came as a "shock" to the lower level functionaries and village women, was interpreted by the government as "activities" being "eased out". In short, there has been a growing conflict between the government and voluntary cultures within the programme creating serious obstacles for the programme. The absence of capable and sensitive leadership at the district level is felt as a major bottleneck here.

Autonomy of the struture

4.17 The issue of the autonomy of the organization structure of the MSP was frequently raised in discussion at different levels. Though there is considerable autonomy of the MSG with respect to recruitment and administration and though the norms regarding purchase are relaxed at lower levels, the autonomy in terms of functioning, appointment of personnel and taking up issues is being gradully curtailed. The two work cultures, viz. the missionary zeal of the voluntary workers and the adherence to rules and regulations in the government culture have always been at loggerheads. Improvement in the personnel policy (for the top positions especially) and establishment of better communication within the programme personnel may help here. Grassroot participation has to be the major objective, and therefore the

interference and formalities have to be at the minimum.

4.18 While concluding our discussion in this section we would like to observe that the organization structure of the MSP is expected to be a step in the direction of "humanizing administration", to make it participatory, decentralized and flexible. It has been designed in such a fashion that it remains autonomous and is capable of implementing this innovative programme successfully. However, in reality the results are quite different. The structural autonomy in reality is limited and there is a clear failure in synthesizing the two cultures viz. the government culture and the voluntary sector culture, resulting in the bureaucratization of the programme. This has created a lot of tension and confusion within the structure.

5. DYNAMICS AT THE GRASSROOTS

5.1 We have seen above that formation of Sanghas at the village level and awareness generation among village women are important aspects of the MSP. This section highlights the dynamics of the MSP at the grassroots in order to study the micro level process.

Reaching Poor Women

5.2 In most villages that we visited, we found that Sanghas are formed among the Dalit women, mostly from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and from the other underprivileged castes. Compared to the other women, these women were found to be more ready to form a Sangha and get out of the village for training and other activities. In the initial phase, Sanghas were perceived exclusively for Scheduled Caste/Tribe women. However, with the visibility of Sangha activities at the village level, women from other underprivileged castes also joined in. It was observed that meetings of multi- caste group of women outside the village environment tended to weaken the caste barriers among them.

5.3 Membership in Sanghas has been shaped largely by the pattern of existing caste system at the village level. Most Sanghas have not been able to attract all Dalit women from different castes and communities. With the exception of a few Sanghas, participation of Muslim women is very limited. And as regards the higher castes, most Sanghas did not even envisage any scope for including them as they thought "they will never join us". A few Sanghas did not see the need to reach out to the other castes as they view Sanghas exclusively for underprivileged castes. In short, the Sanghas have been able to reach the Dalit women in the villages though they have not been able to weaken the caste barriers in most cases.

5.4 The programme has also succeeded in reaching the

most marginalised and neglected women, namely, widows and separated/deserted/divorced women. Sangha meetings and activities have to some extent, helped them to come out of their secluded life and share their problems with other women.

5.5 The age profile of Sangha women and Sakhis, however, shows that the participation of middle age and older women is much higher than that of younger women. It is obvious that older women have "time and space" to participate as there are less patriarchal controls on their social mobility and they have somewhat less reproductive and domestic responsibilities. Also, in the initial stages it is important to win their support since they enjoy some power in decision making in the family. However, it is important to involve young women also because their empowerment will have far reaching impact on gender relations in the family. We were happy to note that efforts are being made in Sabarkantha and Rajkot districts to select a young Sakhi along with an older one to increase young women's participation in Sangha activities.

Sangha Formation:

5.6 Sangha is one of the most important structures of the MSP at the grassroots. Though Sangha formation is a very time consuming process, it cannot be hurried or imposed by external incentives or pressures. It involves concerted efforts, patience and persuasion on the part of Sahayoginis and other functionaries to bring women together, who otherwise are isolated and have limited social interactions with each other. It also involves building up rapport with men and the entire community to gain their trust, confidence, approval and support for women's participation in Sangha activities and meetings outside their village. The MSP is therefore expected to focuses on building a strong foundation for the empowerment of rural women at the village-level through the formation of Sanghas.

5.7 In practice, however, strengthening Sangha as a collectivity has not received adequate attention of the implementers. We observed that the functionaries play a very active role in the initial stages to form a Sangha in a village. However, once a Sangha starts functioning, the task of strengthening it is left more or less in the hands of Sakhis. The solidarity among Sangha women and their collective empowerment through Sangha activities, therefore, mainly depend upon the dynamic role played by the Sakhi as a leader and facilitator. The Sakhi, who is close to Sangha women in terms of her socio-economic background and who can easily interact with Sangha women, can undertake this role only if she is trained for the purpose. However, we observed that the major thrust of Sakhi training is on her self-development and her empowerment as an individual and not

on Sangha formation or development of collectivity in a Sangha. Sakhis focus on their individual empowerment through new experiences, opportunities and exposure, and develop vertical support with Sahayoginis and horizontal support with the other Sakhis through their activities. We observed that only in a few Sanghas have Sakhis succeeded in building horizontal, loose network like support system with Sangha women and the other women in the village. Their "individual-centred" training does not equip them with skills to deal with creating a sustainable organizational form and with external and internal conflict situation.

5.8 Most Sangha women lack clarity about the long-term vision about Sangha. For majority of Sangha women, "Sangha" means a "mahila mandal" where they meet and discuss their problems. The idea that as a collectivity of women they have to fight for their rights and against their subordination in the society has not emerged in most Sanghas. Some women even perceive Sanghas as groups organized by the government to benefit women and do not envisage continuation of Sanghas without the government-support. Sahayoginis, Resource Persons and Consultants do have the long term vision of Sanghas as autonomous women's groups or organizations registered under a society or a federation. However this vision has not yet reached at the Sangha level. The articulation of the long-term vision of Sangha women will determine the future direction of the programme in the long run. The MSG needs to review its Sakhi and Sahayogini training critically.

The Strategy for Empowerment:

5.9 The MSP-Gujarat has adopted a conscious strategy to play a "catalyst" role in enabling poor women to get access to resources and development services through a process-oriented approach. A wide range of community-oriented issues and activities like Mahila Kutir, literacy, saving, ration cards, income-generation (nursery, Ambar Charakha), childcare centres, functioning of a village school etc. have been taken up by Sanghas. The strategy is to organize Sangha women on relatively non-controversial community issues, in which women face least opposition from men in the family and community and do not come into direct confrontation with the existing structures. Several Sanghas have achieved success in providing services to their village and earned some recognition, respect and support from the men in the family and community. On the other hand, interaction with the local bureaucracy and exposure to the outside world have contributed to developing self esteem and self confidence of these women.

5.10 As Sangha women come closer to each other, they start sharing their individual or family-related problems such as alcoholism, wife-beating, marital dispute, custody of a child

etc. The approach and strategy of the MSP, however, is not very clear about taking up such gender issues collectively. The MSP functionaries at the district-level often help Sangha women as individuals and not as functionaries of the programme. This approach of treating gender issues as "cases" and not as an integrated part of the process of empowerment has contributed to the low level of gender consciousness. Since awareness of gender issues is inevitable in a programme which attempts to empower rural poor women, the MSP must prepare for such consequences of empowerment and devise a clear cut strategy to deal with these issues. Efforts should be made to integrate practical, community-oriented issues with the gender issues in such a way that poor rural women gradually learn to question and change existing unequal social relations in the family and the community.

5.11   The MSP in Gujarat has adopted a conscious strategy to take up such issues (such as drinking water, ration cards, bus service etc.) in which women face least opposition from the men-folk. In the areas where women have been successful in mobilizing resources and services, men have realized that ultimately their families and the community benefits as a whole. Men have started looking at Sangha women with respect and have supported their activities in such places. In a few villages, however, we observed that the success of Sangha women in bringing a hand pump or other services has resulted in alienating men folks in the community particularly the sarpanch, as their male ego is hurt. They resented the fact that Sangha women achieved something in short duration which they could not achieve in the past. It must be noted that in the villages where deliberate efforts were made to involve men in Sangha activities, the resistance from men has been less.

5.12   How far men will be supportive of the MSP strategy of empowering women and allow Sangha women to grow is a question that still needs to be answered. Will men accept women questioning patriarchal values and oppressive social customs ? It is likely that men will feel threatened when such issues are taken up by Sanghas, and they will not support the programme if this happens. While sensitizing Sangha women about gender issues, therefore, it is necessary that they are made aware about anticipated conflict with men in the family and community. It is also necessary that support systems are built inside and outside the village for women and if possible supportive networks with men are built at the grassroots. It must be realized that reaching men along with women should be an integral part of the MSP strategy to ensure men's support for issues that Sangha women take up. Each DIU can organize a few workshops for youth and men at the village and district/taluka levels in order to familiarize them with the work of MSP and help them

understand their role in relation to women and society while sensitizing them about various women's issues.

Issues and Activities — Mahila Kutir :

5.13   Apart from taking up some of the day to day problems of rural women, several other activities have been undertaken under the MSP in Gujarat. One such activity is "Mahila Kutir". Mahila Kutir is expected to provide women a place where they can come together, and organize meetings, literacy classes, training or set up child care centres etc. The demand for Mahila Kutir, however, should emerge from Sangha women so that they willingly take on the responsibility for its construction and maintenance. The active participation of women in the construction of the Kutir can also contribute to strengthening the process of Sangha-building.

5.14   We observed that several Sanghas have initiated work related to Mahila Kutir with the assistance of Sahayoginis. The usual way is to start with involving Sangha women in the procedure for acquisition of land in the village. This involvement has enabled women to learn as to how to apply for land, get land records from the talati and how to follow up the application with the authorities. Two Kutirs have been built in Targhadi village of Rajkot and in Bandiya-nu-Talav in Sabarkantha. Land acquisition process is on in 62 villages and land has been acquired in 23 villages in Rajkot and Sabarkantha districts. Some progress in this area has been observed in Rajkot and Sabarkantha districts where a few women have received training in masonry. This training in male-dominated activity of building construction and the exposure to the training centre away from the village have enhanced women's confidence to undertake construction activities.

5.15   It is important to note that the size of the Kutir as per the design approved by the MSP is too small. It can accommodate 15 to 20 women only. The allocation of money (i.e. Rs.15000/-) also needs to be revised. It will be desirable if villagers also contribute to the funds for constructing the Kutir. However, on the whole, Mahila Kutir should not be treated as a priority item as it is, after-all, not an urgent need of the Sangha, except where lack of a meeting place is a problem.

Literacy:

5.16   Mahila Samakhya does not perceive literacy as merely transmission of congnitive skills in reading and writing, but as a strategy for empowerment. With the exposure to the outside world, several Sakhis and Sangha women in all the three districts are demanding literacy training. The DIUs have responded by undertaking these

activities. In Baroda district the focus is primarily on teaching basic literacy skills through self-learning methods and materials, developed by an educationist. A few attempts have also been made to impart literacy through residential literacy camps. With the introduction of the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) in Baroda the MSP has started collaborating with the TLC, in mobilizing women volunteers and learners.

5.17 In Rajkot district, literacy was imparted through literacy classes conducted by young girls and women with at least primary education and through residential camps in a few places. A variety of methods, such as teaching of alphabets through names, words and pictures, drawing to write their names and identify a few alphabets.

5.18 In comparison to Baroda and Rajkot districts, somewhat extensive literacy work has been done in Sabarkantha. Since the lack of relevant material in tribal dilect was a major constraint in undertaking the literacy work, a literacy primer ("Rakhama"), centering around different stages of life of a tribal woman and her own problems, and supplementary materials on topics such as afforestation, health, legal aid and drinking water, were prepared in the tribal dialect. Similarly, with technical assistance of a linguist, word-centred literacy material with pictures was developed to promote literacy through self-learning. Literacy was imparted through literacy classes conducted by voluntary literacy instructors (mostly educated girls) and periodic residential camps. While involving young girls in literacy work, the MSP functionaries also tried to raise gender awareness among them. In addition to these experiments, the MSP in Sabarkantha has collaborated with the TLC, a target-oriented and time-bound mass approach to literacy in the district. The MSP is planning to organize literacy classes for women in 60 villages.

5.19 Discussions with the MSP functionaries engaged in literacy work revealed that the main constraints in undertaking the literacy work are the lack of teaching material on gender sensitivity, non availability of voluntary instructors, and the lack of adequate guidance and training from experts on a sustained basis. Our quick appraisal of the literacy interventions in the field leads us to observe that though genuine efforts are made by the MSP functionaries, the interventions have remained rather ad hoc initiatives without a well thought out strategy and a long-term perspective. Discussions with various functionaries and literacy instructors, and observations of two literacy camps reveal that neither literacy instructors nor the MSP functionaries have adequate know-how about basic pedagogic principles in literacy teaching and learning. Almost no attention is given to post-literacy materials and continuing education.

5.20 No systematic efforts are made to study the actual demand for literacy among Sangha women or to assess the level of literacy attainment among women who have participated in various literacy experiments. Our impression is that though some women can sign their names and identify or write a few alphabets and words after the training for the majority of women, it is a long way to acquiring competency and fluency in basic literacy skills. We observed that literacy teaching in literacy camps was no different from traditional literacy classes. We are also sceptical about the extent to which young girls with low level of awareness about gender issues have succeeded in learning women's issues from the literacy primer.

5.21 We therefore believe that attention should be paid to the following issues while planning further work on literacy: To start with, it is important to assess the demand for literacy among Sakhis and Sangha women in each district. It needed, attempts should be made to motivate them to take interest in acquiring literacy. Secondly, assessment should be made of the literacy attainment among the women, who have participated in various literacy initiatives in each district. This will help in developing appropriate teaching and learning materials in the future. Such assessment will also provide base-line data for devising future interventions. Thirdly, assessment should also be made of the various literacy approaches, methods and materials utilized for making women literate. The MSP- Gujarat has so far tried out various approaches (literacy classes, camp etc.) and methods and materials (self learning, participatory). However, we do not know their effectiveness in promoting literacy among women. Participatory action research can be undertaken with the help of experts to examine effectiveness of different literacy strategies. Fourthly, in order to plan literacy interventions on a systematic and sustained basis, experts could be involved on a continuous basis. A panel of literacy experts/Consultants may be selected for various areas such as curriculum and material development, training, evaluation, etc. if the need is felt. Fifthly, the MSP functionaries should be involved with the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) being undertaken in the State. Fortunately this process has already started in Sabarkantha and Baroda districts.

Support Services

5.22 The MSP Gujarat does not directly provide support services to women. However, it has attempted to provide some support services in the areas of health, child care, economic activities, legal aid etc. with a view to promoting their active participation in development and ensuring some basic needs to them.

5.23 With the growing awareness among Sangha women about health issues, about 212 villages have voiced concern

about the access to primary health services and the availability of health workers (ANMs, Malaria workers etc.) and PHC staff. In some villages, women have succeeded in getting female health workers as well as improved health services.

5.24 Training of midwives (dais) has been organized under the MSP with the help of a voluntary health organizations, viz SEWA-rural (Jhagadia). This training focuses on new methods of delivery and prenatal and postnatal care of mothers. Our discussions with dais who have attended dai training showed that the training was a very enriching experience for them not only in acquiring new knowledge, but also in terms of exposure to SEWA-Rural and the outside world. The trained dais have started practicing new methods of delivery and have shared their newly acquired knowledge with the Sangha women.

5.25 Childcare centres under the MSP are not viewed merely as "services" provided by an external agency for children, but as alternatives to provide "time and space" to women and the girl child. Young girls, who are often assigned the responsibility of looking after younger children in the family will get an opportunity to attend the school with the child care centres. These centres are also perceived as educational centres; since they initiate young children into educational activities through toys and games and as health centres since they look after the health and nutrition of the children.

5.26 Of the total 22 child care centres functioning under the aegis of the MSP, 16 are in Baroda, 5 in Rajkot and 1 in Sabarkantha (1991-92). While the centres in Rajkot have been set up at the initiative of the Sanghas, the centres in Baroda have been initiated by the DIU. In some places in Baroda, therefore, specially where the Sanghas are weak women often viewed childcare centres as services provided by the government. They are also reluctant to make small contributions to meet the expenses. There is no doubt, however, that the child care centres have proved to be a great support to women workers. With some persuasion they can be motivated to contribute at least a part of the total cost.

5.27 With the growing confidence of Sangha women with the local bureaucracy, the demand for income-generation is also emerging in several Sanghas. However, work in this area is very limited at this stage. Many Sangha women want information on government schemes on income-generation for poor women, but not much efforts are made to provide this information to Sanghas. Except for a few Sanghas who have taken up activities like nurseries and ambarcharkhas, income generating activities have not been taken up by most Sanghas. Since the approach of the MSP is to improve the access of women/Sanghas to the existing

set of activities, it will be desirable if complete information about the income and employment generating programmes is made available to the Sanghas. Efforts should be made to provide links between Sanghas and the development administration.

5.28 Savings has been taken up spontaneously by several Sanghas in all the three districts. Savings groups have been set up by these Sanghas where women save small amounts regularly. The MSP functionaries have helped them in opening accounts with banks. However, there are some problems here. Since a Sangha is not a registered society, a group account cannot be opened. Savings are, then, to be deposited in the name of each and every member which is not manageable easily. The account can be opened under the names of a few selected women. Usually women find it difficult to trust only one or a few women fully. The role of Sahayogini becomes very crucial here.

5.29 The idea of setting up a savings group is generally found to be welcome by Sangha women as it can help them in rainy days. It is observed, however, that there is not much clarity about what other things to do with the savings. With the development of this activity the MSP functionaries will have to learn to tap the other advantages of savings groups, namely, giving out loans for promoting self employment, starting group based economic activities etc. with the Sangha women.

5.30 In a few villages, Sanghas have taken up legal issues, particularly related to atrocities on women, domestic violence and marriage disputes. However, legal support to women is a contentious issue. In general, legal support is perceived by the MSP as a "sensitive" area. The MSP strategy is to provide information about the existing legal aid and not to get involved directly with such matters. With growing awareness of Sanghas, legal issues will emerge and the present strategy, will not be adequate to meet women's needs. It is necessary to devise adequate strategy in this area.

5.31 While concluding this section, we would like to observe that the MSP Gujarat has taken a wide range of issues to increase women's access to development opportunities and services. However, without full staffing at the DIU level, adequate support system and linkages with government and non-government organizations, the efforts are not likely to be very successful.

5.32 The strategy of empowerment of the MSP has succeeded to some extent - to a large extent at Sahayogini and Sakhi level and to a small extent at Sangha level where Sakhis have been the exception of a few Sanghas (15 to 20%). Most Sanghas are weak in terms of developing a collective identity and group solidarity.

6. LINKAGES WITH OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS

6.1   The linkages among the major actors of MS, namely, voluntary organizations, government personnel and non-government personnel of the MSP should be positive and strong enough to promote the programme. Unfortunately, however, these linkages are found to be too weak to support the programme. The three major actors of MS have failed to create a sense of partnership among themselves with the result that each of them has complaints regarding the working of the programme. In this section we shall study the nature of the linkages and analyse the underlying factors. The discussion will examine the linkages between the MSP and voluntary organizations, government and non-government personnel of MSP and between the MSP and other organizations like research institutions, panchayat bodies, experts etc. This will be followed by an examination of the dynamics of the underlying factors and conclusions and recommendations.

The MSP and Voluntary Organizations

6.2   Involvement of voluntary organizations in the MS programme is essential for several reasons. To start with, the MSP is not a conventional government programme that can be implemented by a government department. As articulated in the objectives, the MSP aims at educating women for their empowerment. It presupposes that education can be a decisive intervention towards women's equality as it helps them to understand their own predicament and it enables them to determine their own lives and influence their environment which ultimately serves the process of their development. The programme therefore aims at providing learning opportunities and time and space to women to reflect on the issues that affect their life and at promoting their collective efforts through formation of Sanghas and through organization of training programmes, workshops etc. for the purpose. It is obvious that these activities cannot be carried out by government administration alone without the support of women's and people's organizations which are likely to be decentralized, flexible and responsive to local needs.

6.3   Secondly, it must be realised that the MSP is not a permanent programme. It is a short term or a transitional programme which helps women to reach a stage when they have equal access with men to opportunities for growth. As expressed by the Secretary, Education, the programme will not be needed once women are aware, organized and are able to demand their rights. In other words, the programme is primarily meant to empower women and strengthen women's movement in the country. Consequently, if women's organizations are not involved in the programme, the Sanghas

and Sahyoginis will not be reflecting the pulse of women's movement.

6.4   The designing of the MSP provides plenty of scope to voluntary organizations to participate in the programme. First of all, the MS Society or Gujarat, which is registered under the Societies Registration Act 1860, is an autonomous body established by the government in public interest. The Governing Council and the Executive Council of the MSS consists of government members as well as representatives of voluntary organizations. The SRG and DRS also have non- official members. In other words, representatives of voluntary organizations are expected to have considerable say as advisors and as implementors (as members of the executive committee) in the functioning of the MSP. Local women's organizations are at the level of strategy formulation and implementation of the programme. In short, the multi-level involvement of voluntary organizations of different types was considered necessary for the success of the MS programme.

6.5   Surprisingly, no voluntary organization is involved in the actual implementation of the programme in any region today. Most voluntary organizations have withdrawn and the others were asked to leave. Also, no voluntary organization is involved in any specific activity also as those which were involved earlier were not asked to continue. Training experts/institutions also have withdrawn or were asked to leave. The only involvement of voluntary organization today is either in sporadic training activities or peripherially in Mahila Kutir activity or at the individual level as members of EC or SRG. Here also some of the representatives of voluntary organizations and experts are frustrated and unwilling to participate in the programme. This dramatic change in the position of the voluntary sector is indeed amazing and disturbing.

6.6   How has this happened ? Our discussions investigations, visits etc. lead us to observe that there were two main developments which seem to be responsible for this state of affairs: (1) Conflicts between voluntary organizations and non-government personnel, and (2) conflicts between voluntary organizations and government personnel. The indication of the conflict of the first type was visible in June 1990, when the DPC of Sabarkantha reported to the EC about the strained relationship between the voluntary organizations in Sabarkantha and the DIU. In the October meeting of the EC the DPC reported that three voluntary organizations had withdrawn from MS in Sabarkantha. Similar experiences were repeated in the other districts also.

6.7   Our discussions revealed that the main factors responsible for the conflict between the non-government personnel (DPC, RP and Consultants) and the concerned voluntary organizations were these: (1) Some voluntary

organizations did not like the interference of the district staff in the form of monitoring, supervision etc. (2) Some organizations felt that the young district staff was too immature and too radical for their liking. They felt that the radical approach would not help the women or the programme, (3) Some organizations felt that they did not enjoy enough freedom to follow their own ideology and approach, and (4) Some others felt that the approach of the MSP was not consistent and they did not get enough cooperation of the district personnel. On the other hand the district personnel felt that (1) the voluntary organizations which were well established and had experienced workers were too dominating, (2) their ideological stance did not exactly match with the basic approach of the programme especially with regard to women's empowerment and equality, (3) their vested interests and political equations with the power groups did not allow them to support suppressed women folk and (4) some of the organizations were not well-equipped (in terms of personnel, administration etc.) to implement the programme.

6.8   Simultaneously, there were conflicts between voluntary organizations and government staff also. Voluntary organizations were unhappy because (I) they felt that the functioning of the government did not match with the spirit of the programme. Government's approach was too centralized and too rigid, and its functioning was hierarchial, authoritarian and arbitrary with the result that they found it difficult to work with the government, (2) the bureaucratic rigidities did not leave much scope for flexibility, innovation and experimentation, and (3) the government was not committed enough to the cause of women and was not prepared to take a bold stand when the need arose. On the other hand the government felt that (1) voluntary organizations tend to misuse the financial autonomy and even indulge in corruption sometimes, (2) they do not abide by rules and regulations as well as do not respect the targets which are afterall essential for the programme, (3) they unnecessarily encourage confrontation in field level situations and (4) they inculcate anti- establishment feelings among Sakhis, Sahyoginis etc.

Government and Non-government Personnel of the MSP

6.9   It was expected that the government and non-government personnel would work in close cooperation with each other for the success of the programme. This expectation does not seem to have been fulfilled. However, since this issue is discussed at length in the section on the organizational structure of the programme, we shall make only some observations pertinent to our section here. It is observed that about 8 non-government persons (DPC/RP/C) have resigned from the MSP so far and some more are

willing to leave. This seems to be mainly due to one or the other conflict which is more or less the same as discussed in the earlier section. For example, the concerned government officers felt that the non-government personnel were too radical and entered into unnecessary conflicts, they did not abide by the minimum rules and did not adhere to the required discipline, and they were anti-establishment in their approach and therefore did not cooperate with the top government officers. On the other hand, those non-government personnel who left or are inclined to leave complained of the rigidities, centralization and lack of commitment to the cause of women on the part of the government. In short, the conflicts seem to arise from the clash between the two different perspectives.

The MSP and other Organizations

6.10   A people-oriented and process-oriented programme like the MSP needs to have strong linkages with a large number of organizations - other than voluntary organizations - like other government departments, panchayat bodies and research institutions/academicians. Considering the fact that an important objective of the MSP is to make women aware of their rights and make them demand these on their own, it is necessary that the programme extracts cooperation from different departments. On the basis of our discussions and visits it can be observed that only a limited success was achieved in this area. Not all departments, even at the micro level, know about the programme or recognize its importance. Those who know or recognize the programme, frequently have mainly a male-oriented patronizing attitude. It appears that no serious effort has been made to orient the other government departments towards the need and the objectives of the programme. It must be added, however, that in some pockets the programme has been successful in establishing positive links with the local machinery in terms of getting their cooperation in a few activities.

6.11   In the same way, the linkages between the MSP and the related programmes like ICDS, DWCRA, and other programmes of welfare and social defence etc. are also observed to be weak. The child care centres of the MSP do not have direct links with the ICDS. However, there is some coordination. For example, in Sabarkantha, 'nasta' for CC centre is obtained from ICDS centre and ICDS sub-centre has been set up where ICDS centre is far off. The economic activities of the MSP (not much developed yet) are not yet closely linked with DWCRA, etc). A lot is yet to be done therefore in this area of strengthening the links of the MSP with the related government programmes and schemes. It appears to us that this is partly because of the low importance attached to the programme in the government and partly because of the low level of the progress of the programme.

6.12 Cooperation between the Sangha and the village panchayat can go a long way in satisfying women's demand for basic facilities like drinking water, fuel and fodder, approach road etc. If both of them demand these facilities collectively, it will not only improve the chances of getting the facilities but will also strengthen the village community. Our observations show that Sanghas, Sakhis as well as Sahyoginis usually do contact the Sarpanch while demanding facilities etc. and that the Sarpanch quite often is sympathetic and cooperative also. What is missing, however, is the acceptance of the concept of equality between men and women.

6.13 The MSP at the all India level as well as at the State level has always drawn upon the strengths of experts and academicians. The EC and SRG in Gujarat have a few academicians as their members who have been involved with the programme right from its inception. Our discussion with some members, however, revealed that they are far from satisfied with the functioning of the MSP as well as with the treatment they received from it. Their major complaints are (a) the role of academicians/experts in the programme was never defined clearly with the result that they did not know as to what was expected of them, (b) there were no proper communication channels between them and the programme functionaries and therefore their involvement was intermittent and marginal, (c) the programme has become bureaucratized and has a very limited space, if at all, for the involvement of academicians, and (d) on the whole their interaction with the MSP has not been very meaningful or fruitful. The poor level of documentation, the weak research component and the less than satisfactory training material for the training programmes under the MSP appear to be some of the consequences of the poor linkages between the MSP and academicians in the state. Though one does not expect that the programme should spend a lot of energy and money on research, one definitely expects that an innovative programme like this needs to be properly documented so that the insights acquired are used fruitfully for promoting the programme as well as for strengthening the literature on women's empowerment.

6.14 It is worth noting, however, that the five committees set up to formulate strategies and actions in the five identified areas of activities of the MSP, are headed by experts who have prepared reports on the five areas, viz. literacy, legal aid, economic activities, child care and health for women.

Dynamics of the Linkages:

6.15 The general picture that emerges out of the discussion suggests that the programme has not only weak but frequently negauve links with other organizations resulting in conflicts and tensions. We believe that at the roots of

this is the organizational structure of the MSP, the designing of the MSP which has left ambiguity about the roles of different actors in the programme, and the weak leadership of the programme. We shall discuss these factors in the following paragraphs.

6.16 The organizational structure of the MSP is unique in the sense that it is bureaucratic at the top and non-bureaucratic below. This innovative model is a part of the recent attempts of the government towards humanizing administration. However, as seen in the earlier section, the model has failed to synthesize the two different cultures of the government and the voluntary sectors. Consequently there is a clear dividing line between the centralized, authoritative, rigid and hierarchical culture of the government staff and the flexible and open mode of working of the voluntary sector. Both these sectors differ distinctly in their commitment to the programme, priorities, approach, speed, as well as in their methods of working. The conflict between the two is therefore inevitable.

6.17 The second major root of the conflicts is in the designing of the programme. To start with, the design is quite vague about the specific roles of the different organizations involved in the programme. Consequently when voluntary organizations were invited to participate, they did not know what exactly was expected of them. Each of them interpreted its role in its own way and started implementing the programme. Also, some of these voluntary organizations had their representatives on the SRG with the result that appropriate steps could not be taken to restrict their role in the programme when they failed to act. In the same way, intermittent and unplanned involvement of experts, social workers, activists etc also did not help the programme much. The programme design also does not have a proper mechanism for the supervision and monitoring of the day to day work as well as for conflict resolution. Consequently conflicts frequently resulted in deadlocks and bitter feelings. Some voluntary organisations felt that they had no opportunity to express their side, while some others have vowed never to work with the government again.

6.18 The third major root of the weak linkages and conflicts seems to be the absence of a strong and committed leadership. Tasks like synthesizing the government and voluntary cultures, establishing rapport with the DPC/RP/C etc., providing guidance and advice to them, keeping communication channels open and providing opportunities to all involved for conflict resolution as well as generating an environment that is conducive to collective actions can become much easier if the leadership is capable and committed. Of course, the structural constraints would work on the leadership also making the tasks very tough. In the absence of this leadership conflicts could not be managed successfully.

Concluding Observations:

6.19   On the whole, it appears that instead of creating a sense of partnership among the different persons/organizations involved, the MSP has created divisions among them with the result that the programme is not only in a rough weather right now, but it has alienated women activists, experts, academicians etc. What is gratifying is the fact that the situation is not so bad at the grassroots i.e. at the level of Sanghas, Sakhis and Sahayoginis. Some of them have built good linkages with the local organizations.

6.20   It appears that these problems have their roots in (a) the organization structure and organization culture of the MSP, (b) the vagueness of its designing and (c) in the inadequate leadership of the programme. The solution to the problems, therefore, lie mainly in these areas. It must be noted that there are no two opinions about the necessity of involving voluntary organizations in the MSP. The minutes of the latest meeting of the EC also show that the EC is very keen on strengthening this relationship. The crucial question however, is how to promote this relationship. We have specific recommendations on this which will be discussed in the last section of the report.

7. TRAINING AND RECRUITMENT

7.1   Given the innovative approach and philosophy of the MSP, continuous training has been seen as a significant component of the programme. This section will cover the following dimensions of training: the stated aims of training and their implications, levels of training (according to target group/areas/content of training, the role of outsider groups of trainers. District Training Teams and Sakhi Training.

Stated Aims of Training

7.2   The stated aim of the training programmes under the MSP is to "equip workers to facilitate women's empowerment through education". Equipping workers, therefore, implies: (1) training in specific skills, (2) training in "new values, attitudes and behavior patterns". Both these should function to empower the functionaries themselves before they can empower others. Keeping this aim in view, the stated approach to training within MSG requires that the training experience be "a microcosm of the values and processes of the programme itself". Therefore, training must "actualise the following norms":

(a)   It must be participatory: trainees, once they are familiar with the programme, should control and determine the shape, structure, content and goals of training. Training should also be continuous.

(b)   Training must be experiental: sharing of experiences can create an environment for participatory learning.

(c)   Training must provide time and space: a sense of openness and security and a pressure-free environment. As the Programme Document says, "Training must occur in an environment of learning. This means that (i) there should be no haste to impart mechanical skills or sets of information (ii) hierarchy between trainers and trainees must be broken down (iii) knowledge of all must be respected (iv) the training process must be interactive".

7.3   The general aim and the approach to training outlined above is more or less accepted by many professional development training organisations which integrate into their work the philosophy of participatory training. The awareness and group building training provided in the past to the Sahayoginis and Resource Persons has followed the tenets of participatory training, with the result that, among the Sahyoginis there is a high degree of awareness of this type of training. However, people on deputation from the government, not having been exposed to such an approach, do not show the same sensitivity. Consequently, many perceptions about the kinds of training inputs, the pace of training, the parameters to be used for judging training effectiveness, the speed with which the programme should expand etc. differ sharply. Any action to promote a common understanding of training within MSG would contribute to a reduction of the misunderstandings between the two groups which have vitiated the internal functioning.

7.4   Before going into the actual training undertaken, it is necessary to state at this point that continuity of training has not been maintained. About a year ago, the relationship between the MSG and its major trainer partner, was terminated owing to differences of opinion on the conduct of training. Since then the DIU staff members and Sahayoginis have been providing training inputs. The training of Sahayoginis and other MSG staff has been undertaken through reflection meetings at the state level and a one-month RP/Consultant Orientation training in June 1992. The comments in this section, therefore, are confined mostly to the initial three years of the MSP.

Levels and Content of Training:

7.5   The Revised Document of the MSP speaks of an integrated and multi-level training of functionaries. At least in the first phase, training must be vertically integrated, in other words, "functionaries from different levels of the structure must be brought together ... Specific training for different levels may subsequently be undertaken horizontally". This indicates that the training, intended to take place along a vertical axis and a horizontal axis, ultimately aims at integrating the various levels of the hierarchy into a cohesive team.

7.6   A review of the training programmes reveals that training has been conducted mainly for two groups: (a) the group of Sahayoginis and Resource Persons and (b) Sakhis and individual village women. Thus vertical integration has been more or less confined to the Sahayogini group and District Resource Persons. However, the review meetings, annual get-together, reflection meetings called by the SPD (for instance a two-day meeting held in Bharuch in April 1991) have been occasions when all levels including DPCs and SPD gathered together. Since almost all the Resource Persons were non-governmental people, such a pattern of training resulted in a close identification of the Resource Persons with the Sahayogini group and also in the development of a fairly strong team of Sahayoginis. An unfortunate consequence, however, articulated by the Sahayoginis themselves and former Resource Persons, was that progressively lower-level government functionaries were seen as adversaries, from whom nothing could be got without struggle. This trend was further strengthened by the perception that the programme was getting increasingly bureaucratized (dealt with elsewhere in this report).

7.7   Based on the material presented in the MSP document, the content of training may be identified as follows: (1) awareness raising and inclusion of specific new values, attitudes and behavior patterns at all levels; (2) training in specific skills such as training in midwifery, creche management, at the village level; skills in organization of women for Sakhis and observation, analysis, writing, planning and training skills at the Sahayogini level. The first year of the MSP was largely spent on identifying trainer resources and hence most of the training activities took place during 1990-1992. During this period of approximately two and a half years, 69 Sakhi awareness training and 28 other training were undertaken; (the data refer to the Sahayoginis and Sakhis of all three districts; the number of days of training may be slightly different from the actual since the district-level data have been reclassified). It included Resource Persons/Sahyoginis as trainees and/or trainers; the attempts with the DTTs were related to equipping them to become training centres. Three members of a training agency (two men and one woman) had taken up the responsibility of a the three districts with one member in each district.

In addition, adult education/literacy training, child-care training, agriculture training (conducted by BAIF), 'dai' and health training, hand-pump maintenance, masonry skills are some of the kinds of training provided to Sangha and Sakhi women on an ad hoc basis.

7.8   Since the present team could observe only training of Sakhis by the Sahayoginis, the following comments are based on the interactions with various groups of trained people. From the point of view of values and attitudes, the

Sahayoginis as a whole show profound involvement and a capacity to sympathies with the people in the field. While many of them have rural background, some, especially in Rajkot are from urban middle-class background. These women, in spite of certain failings, are also persons of great courage struggling against heavy odds in their personal and social lives, in the physically difficult environment of rural poverty with little direct support from the MSP organizational structure. They have succeeded in building a rapport with rural women. The team wishes to record its appreciation of the work of this group and of the personal courage of many of the Sahayoginis.

7.9   However, the area of skill acquisition leaves a lot to be desired. There is a tendency to focus on immediate, experimental practicalities with little concern for whys and wherefores. As a whole, levels of observational and analytical skills need considerable improvement; village group-handling tends to become over-anxious, (this did not seem to be related to the presence of the team members); in addition, a greater awareness of the impact of the interplay of various types of oppressive social structures on the human person could be built up. The inability to draw upon other resources (especially since the MSP is not visualized as a delivery agency) is another area of weakness. Exposure to audio-visual training material could also help. These gaps may be the result of the incomplete training, or a consequence of the break in training arrangements.

7.10   While the participation of the Sahayoginis and Resource Persons seems to have been well organized, training at the Sangha women level seems to be extremely and hoc, without a clear plan for identification of needs and implementation of training. The pattern of the development of the Sanghas, sustainability of the child care centres, viability of the Sanghas themselves, future structure of the Sanghas, emerging patterns of leadership and conflict resolution within the Sangha etc. are issues to which appropriate training responses have not been thought of. In fact a pro-active stance needs to be taken urgently. This calls for more thought to be given to such issues by the leadership at the district level and more focusing on the programme's impact at the village level.

Role of Outsider Training Agencies

7.11   During the initial phase, the programme drew upon many trainer groups, primarily because of its inability to identify a core group of trainers. This ad hoc approach to training, with its lack of consistency and continuity of trainers' and a confusing array of training approaches and philosophies, created dissatisfaction. To overcome these drawbacks a development training organization (established in 1987) was given the responsibility of process training and

of strengthening the district training team concept. This relationship with the training organization was discontinued less than a year ago. Initially, the training organization had agreed to participate in the training since it saw the reach of the programme as a major strength. However, the inability of the programme to integrate the bureaucratic and non-governmental sections (dealt with elsewhere in the report) had led to a distance between the SPO and district Resource Persons/Sahyoginis. The trainer partner was often forced to play the role of a buffer between the two groups and was expected to sort out organizational problems like conflicts between the two groups; this became "too much of a drain" on the organization. The desirability of a training partner also playing the role of an `organizational fire-fighter' is questionable and indicates a failure of conflict-resolution mechanisms within the MSP structure. However, one consequence of this multiple-role playing was that this training organization itself was accused of "interfering and trying to divide" the programme. The relationship between the MSP and the training organization ended thereafter.

7.12 In the future, the MSP should enter into professional partnerships with a clearer understanding of what is expected of the partners, clearly-stated contractual arrangements with well-defined parameters for monitoring and evaluation and modalities for revision, continuation or termination of the contract. Prior to that the MSP should understand that the primary responsibility for any organizational function (in this case, training) is MSG's own and that partners can only help achieve the goals the MSG has set for itself.

District Training Teams (DTTs):

7.13 It was hoped that the DTTs would become training centres at the district level within a period of five years, (that is by 1995) by which time the involvement of outsider trainers would be at a minimum. The concept of the DTT and the training model (a planning-action-reflection-learning spiral), described in the document titled 'The Unfolding', while not original, aimed at institutionalizing the training function within MSG. At the moment the activities of the DTTs are at a low ebb. Perhaps, the break in the continuity of training, and the departure of many Resource Persons in early January 1993 have affected the stability and morale of the DTTs, each of which now has three to four members, mainly Sahyoginis.

7.14 The Sahayoginis themselves appear to be ambivalent towards the concept; on the one hand they feel that their training is incomplete and that they need to enhance their group skills, on the other, they claim that any Sahayogini with village experience can perform the function; for instance, the Rajkot team includes a trainer who was not part of the original DTT trainee team and is helped by other experienced

sahayoginis. At the moment there is no mechanism for feedback and support to the DTT with the result that, according to the DTT members themselves, they are becoming unsure of themselves.

7.15 The DTT is not insulated from the politics of the organization. It has been used as a tool to settle organizational problems. For instance, in Rajkot, problems between the SPD and the Sahyoginis were reflected in a demand from the Sahyoginis for trainer fees. According to the Sahyoginis, when outside trainers could be paid Rs.150 to Rs.200 per day why could not the DTT be paid a fraction of that amount as additional honoraria ? Adding to the confusion is the ambivalent response from the SPD which seemed to agree and then disagreed on the question of trainers honoraria. The outcome was that the training activities of the DTT were suspended for almost six months, and resumed only in end-April 1993, with a delayed final round of a 3-day training programme for a batch of Sakhis. This batch had earlier been trained for four days, indicating a reduction in the time usually allotted for Sakhi training. This may only be an isolated incident specific to Rajkot, but it illustrates the need to prevent organisational problems from affecting training. It should, however, be noted that the training period indicated above does not include the cluster meetings, which are usually held every month, but which focus more on planning and execution of activities. What is of concern is that such gaps in Sakhi training affect the process of Sangha building adversely.

7.16 On the whole, the DTTs are far from the self-reliant training centres they were expected to become. The Sahayoginis who took part in the DTT training programme work as a group, many times along with other Sahayoginis. This has given the DTTs a sense of partial achievement. However, in future, this group should also consider coordination of training activities, rather than doing everything themselves. This implies that (a) the present narrow conception of training be expanded to include other kinds of training (b) an openness be created in order to tap outside resources and (c) a mechanism be established for more systematic identification of training needs at the Sangha level.

7.17 A linked concept is the Sakhi rotation system. This was ostensibly designed to achieve a wider distribution of leadership skills, through trickle-down from the Sahyogini level, while avoiding the negative effects of a permanent worker at the village level. However, this implies that the trained Sakhis would continue to be involved in the activities of the Sangha, even after they finish their one- year term as Sakhis. Available evidence indicates that by and large, this is not the case. In some areas the concept of rotation is not understood or accepted. There are significant exceptions

though. For instance, the old Sakhis in the 'Mahila Kutir' villages in Sabarkantha and Rajkot continue to play an active role in the Sanghas. The DTT does not keep track of the old Sakhis and so misses out on this training resource.

7.18 Our observations indicate that the focus has been on Sakhis and Sahayoginis as individuals (individual empowerment, which is no doubt important); but the question of how to move ahead — strengthening the Sanghas, transforming them from groups of women to a collective identity — needs to be answered. The maturity of the Sahayoginis to deal with communities, skills in conflict-resolution and negotiation are areas to be improved.

8. FINANCES

8.1 The main source of finance of this programme is the funds received from the Dutch government which are routed through the Central government. The MSG, received Rs. 110.65 lakhs as grants in 1988-89 and Rs. 100 lakhs in 1991-92 which comes to about Rs. 52.7 lakhs of grant per year. In the next five years (i.e. 1992-1997) it is expected to receive Rs. 848.29 lakhs which comes to about Rs. 169.7 lakhs per year. This implies that the programme is expected to expand more than three times in the coming years.

8.2 The MSG Gujarat has the powers to raise resources through other measures like grants from the State government, project funds and other incomes/receipts from other sources. It can also borrow money, create special funds like reserve funds, sinking funds etc. and can draw from banks. However, it does not seem to have used any of these sources so far. It has received interests on the fixed deposits which came to Rs. 5.03 lakhs in 1989-90, Rs. 7.20 lakhs in 1990-91 and Rs. 9.58 lakhs in 1991-92.

8.3 We have examined the budgets as well as audited reports of the MSG for the past 3-4 years to understand its financial position. We would like to make two important observations at the outset in this regard. Firstly, the classification of the financial outlay in the budget differs significantly from the the classification of the expenditure in the audit reports with the result that it is not easy to compare the actual expenditure with the budgeted outlays for the different activities of the programme. For example, the budget presents the outlays in State level, district level and below district level activities, while the audited reports divide the expenditure under major activities without any reference to the level of the expenditure. It becomes difficult therefore to examine whether the pattern of expenditure matches with the budgeted pattern at different levels. Secondly, the classification of expenditure in the audit reports is not correct. The establishment expenses, for example, include such

expenditure heads which should be actually classified under the objectives of the society. In order to overcome these problems we have reclassified the data on outlay as well as expenditure.

8.4 A striking feature of the finances of the MSP is the underutilization of the funds (Table 8.1). The table shows that in the year 1990-91 about 8.22% of the budgeted outlay was actually spent, while in the year 1991-92 the percentage was 21.49. It is worth noting, however, that the underutilization was much more in the case of the objectives/ activities than in the case of the administrative expenditure. It is indeed striking that only about 5% and 17% of the budgeted outlays were spent on the objectives of the MSP in the years 1990-91 and 1991-92 respectively ! It is worth mentioning that the percentage share of the expenditure on administration/establishment has declined steadily between 1988-89 to 1991-92 though, it should be noted that this percentage is much more than the budgeted percentage (table 8.1).

8.5 The underutilization of funds in the initial one or two years is understandable as an innovative programme like this would take some time to stabilize. However, the low use of the funds in the later years would indicate that the programme has not really picked up. The likely reasons for this could be the lack of commitment towards the programme, vacant key posts under the programme and the inadequate leadership. A close look at the expenditure pattern reveals that several innovative activities presented in the budget have either not started at all or have performed miserably in reality. For example, Mahila Shikshan Kendra, Vocational training, vocational course for school girls, non-formal education centre etc. have hardly made any beginning in any of the districts.

8.6 It appears that Sangha level expenditure constitutes a very small fraction of the total expenditure. Though our data do not provide information about the expenditure incurred at different levels, our limited information suggests that the expenditure on Sanghas comes to less than 15% of the total expenditure of the MSP.. This once again suggests that the programme pays more attention to the higher level activities and neglects the major task of organizing women's groups.

8.7 The MSP has adopted the unit cost approach in undertaking several activities. This has created some problems since the costs are not updated according to the price rise. It will be desirable therefore to adopt a project approach rather than the unit cost approach in undertaking the activities.

8.8 While concluding we would like to observe that (a) the poor utilization of the funds indicates that the programme has not yet picked up and it is not yet taken very seriously by the government, (b) the total dependence

on the Dutch government funds and the near absence of any efforts on the part of the MSG to raise funds locally does not appears to be proper and once again indicates the poor involvement of the government in this programme, and (c) there is a need to reclassify the budget as well as the expenditure incurred under the MSP.

8.9   The total expenditure / outlay of the MSP in Gujarat

is quite small, around Rs.40 lakhs or so per year. It is difficult for us to understand why we should depend on the Dutch government for this small amount and allow their intervention (i.e. evaluation under their leadership, visits of their scholars, and their access to our rural areas) in the process. We believe that the amount could be easily spared by the Government of Gujarat.

TABLE 8.1

Mahila Samakhya, Gjuarat State Administration & Activities Budget & Expenditure Year-wise (In Rs. Lakhs)

Year	Budget	Administration Exp. Rs.	Budget	Objective/Activities Ex. Lakhs
1988-89	-	0.43		0.05
1989-90	-	4.29		6.65
1990-91	39.75	11.97 (30.15)	289.88	15.16 (5.21)
1991-92	41.49	14.85 (35.79)	150.1	26.23 17.48
1992-93	56.98		139.1	
1994-95	64.88		149.29	

Table 8.1 contd.

	Budget	Total Exp. Lakhs	% Admn. Outlayto Budget	% of Adm. Exp. to Total Exp.
1988-89		0.48		89.98
1989-90		10.94		47.98
1990-91	329.63	27.1 (8.22)	12.08	44.17
1991-92	191.59	41.08 (21.49)	21.65	29.65
1992-93	196.08		29.07	
1994-95	214.17		30.29	

TABLE 8.2

MAHILA SAMAKHYA BUDGET

	1990-91	91-92	92-93	93-94
OFFICE OF STATE PROG.DIRECTOR	1000000	20.39	20.00	21.91
DIV (3) MANAGEMENT COST (3) ACTIVITY COST	1402000 5318000	46.66	73.03	72.32
SAHAYOGINI (3)	1147000	23.50	21.05	21.00
MAHILA SANGHAS	14906000	101.54	82 00	98.94
VOCATIONAL TRG.	1666000			

	1990-91	91-92	92-93	93-94
MAHILA SHIKSHAN KENDRA	1646000			
VOCATIONAL COURSE FOR SCHOOL GIRLS	1512000			
NON-FORMAL ED. CENTRE	266000			
ADULT ED. CENTRE	252000			
NEW ITEMS FOR SPD OFFICE	759000			
NEW ITEMS FOR DIU (3) (M.C.)	1492000			
District Resource Unit for Adult Education and Non-formal Education	1396000			
SITARA	200000			
TOTAL	32963000	191.59	196.08	214.17

TABLE 8.3
MAHILA SAMAKHYA - GUJARAT STATE

Administrative Cost

Year	Stationary	Postage & Telephone	Misc	Advertisement	Office Exp.	Rent & Taxes	Salary & Allowance	Audit Fees	Deprecia- tion	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		
1988-89	114	11735	332				30076	750		43007
%	0.26	27.29	0.77				69.93	1.74		(100)
1989-90	24764	40246	33471	862	1208	9313	263136	2500	53991	429491
%	5.77	9.37	7.79	0.2	0.28	2.17	61.27	0.58	12.57	(100)
1990-91	19387	123521	45653		9554	107176	758911	5000	128179	1197481
%	1.62	10.31	3.81		0.81	8.95	63.38	0.42	10.7	(100)
1991-92	50821	155334	60022		42297	132201	932011	7000	105756	1485442
%	3.42	10.46	4.04		2.85	8.9	62.74	0.47	7.12	(100)

OBJECTIVE COST

Year	Shibir	Seminar	Training	Sahayoginis Hanorarium & Travelling	Project Documentation	Woman's Day Celebration	Mahila Sanghs Exp.	Mahila Nursery Exp.
	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1988-89	44600	7993	101860	242969	26399	42401	8878	379
%	6.71	1.2	15.33	36.57	3.97	6.38	1.34	0.06
1989-90	198824		95629	495132		50275	290902	492
%	13.15		6.32	32.74		3.32	19.24	0.03
1991-92	216819		450374	501778			563429	
%	8.27		17.17	19.13			21.48	

Table 8.3 contd.

Year	Contingencies paid to Sakhi	Adult Edn.	Honoraium & Fees	Vocational Training	Child Care Centre	Consultation Fees	Travelling Allowances	Hired Motor Charges
	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
1988-89							3020	1690
%							64.12	35.88
1989-90	1800						61103	16282
%	0 27						9.2	2.45
1990-91		2325	69576	2352	20843		106776	
%		0.15	4.6	0.16	1.38		7.06	
1991-92		107199	34542	12200	145559	87012	189901	
%		4.09	0.47	0.47	5.55	3.32	7.24 ·	

Table 8.3 contd.

	Vehicle		Books Periodicas	Meeting Exp.	Total	Grand Total
	Repair	Petrol				
	28	29	30	31	32	33
					4710 (100)	47718
	13669	65199	2425	28374	664331 (100)	1093824
	2.06	9.81	0.36	4.27		
	52296	123829	3098		1512349 (100)	2709831
	3.46	8.19	0.2			
	102655	199669	11446		2622583 (100)	4108026
	3.91	7.61	0.44			

9. DOCUMENTATION AND RESEARCH

9.1   Documentation and research are important for any programme of social transformation as they can be used for various purposes such as monitoring, evaluation, teaching, planning, training, advocacy, publicity, data source for further inferences and research. Documentation, monitoring and evaluation have been built into the operational strategy of the MSP as per the National document of the programme. It will be useful here to reflect upon the existing status of documentation and research under the programme. The revised document of 1991 mentions two kinds of documentation viz. recorded perceptions of the District and State level functionaries and their problems, bottlenecks, successes etc; and the material generated by women at all levels, such as letters, reports, work diaries etc. We shall examine both these documentations in this section.

9.2   Process documentation of the process taking place at the Sangha level is essential in order to get feedback on the changes taking place among Sangha women and to use this information to shape the direction of the programme at the village level. The reporting of Sangha activities is done primarily by Sahayoginis as most Sakhis and Sangha women are not literate. Sahayoginis maintain a diary to keep a track of Sangha activities and processes undergone. The quarterly reports of the DIUs are based on these diaries. In addition, reports of various training programmes, workshops, meetings, tours and special visits are also maintained by the MSP functionaries at the district level.

9.3   Besides the above mentioned documents there is a newsletter entitled 'Aapni Vaat' to disseminate general news and the progress in different districts and announcements of events. It has also provided a forum for the Sakhis and Sangha women to express their views. Given the low level of education among the Sangha women the newsletter is

generally read to them by Sahayoginis or an educated Sakhi during Sangha meetings. Two district units are also running newsletters designed on the same lines excepting the fact that the district news get wider coverage. These newsletters are handwritten in bold letters and are very easy to follow. The newsletters at both the levels have provided some space to women for showing their creative talents when they compose songs or articulate their feelings and views through letters and illustrations.

9.4 Two video cassettes about the programme have been prepared. The State Unit is also having a few audio visual aids. Besides these items there is not much evidence of documentation. The State Unit has one documentation officer appointed for the documentation work.

9.5 The important questions with regard to documentation are: What is the role of documentation and research in a programme of developing self-initiative and self-confidence and how is it used under the programme ? It must be noted that documentation is not an end in itself, but should be used for drawing inferences for action. For instance, diaries of Sahayoginis or Sakhis report their activities, difficulties, problems etc. which could be used in arriving at some useful inference about the role of the social background, the function of educational status, influence of exposure in varieties of experiments at grass root level work etc. In other words, documentation should not be viewed merely as collection of data from internal activities but should also to be viewed as a source of material which could be developed to acquire a broader vision of the programme. In this sense documentation and research are two interconnected activities nourishing each other.

9.6 When we examine the documentation and research under the MSP in the context of the above mentioned perspective the following points can be made: Firstly, the MSP has a very narrow concept of documentation. The material prepared by external sources is not looked upon as useful for documentation. For example, the District Officers hardly get any women's journal in English or Gujarati. Talking to some of the Resource Persons we found that they were not aware of certain basic material on gender-based issues or feminism, and did not know about the alternate media material. They also knew little about the women's movement in India or in Gujarat. We therefore, suggest that each district office should have some basic material on women such as Towards Equality, Shramashakti etc.and should subscribe to magazines like Ansuya, Manushi, Nari Mukti & Naya Marg. Some of the 1991-92 issues of Gujarati Femina which contain important material on women in Gujarat should also be procured. Secondly documentation should also include cuttings, clipping etc. from newspapers; collection of photographs, artefacts, songs, scripts of dramas

etc., as well as songs and audio visual material. It is worth noting here the efforts of Sabarkantha DIU in preparing the primer for Adivasi women in the local dilect. And thirdly, documentation and research need not be carried out only by higher level functionaries. Sakhis & Sanghas as well as Sahayoginis should also be involved in this. For example, village level reporting of Sangha activities, preparation of case studies on different issues or life history of a few Sakhis could also be useful material for documentation. Training and guidance from the district level functionaries can be useful here.

9.7 Materials for advocacy or publicity of the programme play an important role in familiarizing government officials and voluntary organizations about the MSP's work and approach, and sensitize them to women's issues. However, this is a most neglected area of the documentation under the MSP. In the beginning, MSP has followed a strategy to keep a low profile and inward-looking approach in order to create space for the programme implementation. However, now it can undertake a more outward looking communication strategy to develop linkages with government agencies and NGOs. During our visits to the districts, we met many government officials and representatives from NGOs who do not know about the work of the MSP. Our discussions with Sahayoginis, Resource Persons and Consultants revealed that most of the time information about the programme is orally communicated. Occasionally, materials prepared for internal use, such as progress reports, newsletters, video documentary, etc. are used for informing the outsiders. There are no specific documents and materials developed by the MSP for external use only.

Research:

9.8 We have been distressed at the absence of the research component in the entire MSP. This is both at the conceptual and practical levels. Research is quite often looked upon as an activity more related to academics or is interpreted merely as a data collection activity or a survey of a few families. Research in its broader sense, however, is looking at the data afresh for further understanding and guidance. It could also mean a tool to draw conclusions for grasping the dynamics of complex situations. We therefore, feel that the MSP should pay serious attention to this neglected area. This will help understanding the role of State sponsored programmes in generating empowerment of women and also the limits and potentials of the programme to change the status of women in a given context. The role of socio-economic environment, the caste system with its overt and covert tentacles, varied manifestations of the patriarchal structures, the eco-system, the issues involved in building solidarity, attitudes to domestic violence and many other

issues which could be systematically and usefully studied. This kind of applied research can surely direct policy and can also enrich the conceptual understanding of various factors influencing social change. An illustration of combining the theory and practice is the article written by Ammu Joseph," Education As If Women Mattered" in Economic and Political Weekly. It analyses the Mahila Mela organised by the Karnataka MSP.

9.9 The MSP functionaries, including Sahayoginis, do collect some data at the village level. Some of them with a background in social sciences can be trained in action and participatory research techniques to understand the dynamics of social structure and power relations at the grassroots. For instance while involving Sakhis and Sangha women in critical reflections of their own social reality the MS functionaries can generate systematic baseline data on various indicators of empowerment, which can enable policy planners to understand the impact of MSP on women's lives over time and devise appropriate strategies. Similarly the case studies of Sakhis as emerging leaders, and life histories of Sangha women can be prepared from the available data. Quantiative evidences and qualitatives insights could be generated through such action research.

9.10 Though considerable amount of information on programmes of empowerment is gencrated, it is important to critically analyse them in the wider socio-cultural, economic and political context of agrarian society and the context of women's movement in Gujarat. Academic research can be undertaken with a critical perspective to examine how the MSP in different contexts generates differential outcomes and which factors affect programme implications and processes of empowerment at the grassroots.

9.11 In sum, research can perform various useful functions in the entire MSP. The absence of this component suggests that perhaps the implementors of the programme are afraid of the programme getting more theory- oriented, neglecting the field work. However, this need not be so. We believe that the MSP could be a very relevant illustration of fruitful combination of theory and practice. An appropriate priority should be given to this component and some time should be allotted to this work also. We have observed that the Resource Persons now recognise the significance of the research and do feel that it is very essential for the programme.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 The discussion in the above sections leads us to observe that the MSP in Gujarat cannot be rated as a highly successful programme. Quantitatively, the programme is very small as it has not yet really picked up. The underutilization of funds and the vacant key posts indicate that the programme is not perhaps backed by the kind of commitment it needs. Qualitatively, the programme has achieved some success in (a) the formation of some active Sanghas (15% to 20% of the total Sanghas) whose women members are aware and are empowered in some ways, (b) in creating a cadre of Sakhis, Sahayoginis and Resource Persons/Consultants, most of whom are enthusiastic and committed and (c) in achieving some success in a few pockets in the areas of literacy, child care, drinking water, health etc. This success has created aspirations, enthusiasm and expectation among the women at lower levels. The main job of the programme now is to expand this success to larger areas and to fulfill the expectations though appropriate actions at higher levels. This, however, does not seem to be forthcoming easily.

10.2 The MSG has not emerged as an autonomous body with a healthy organization structure and culture committed to the cause of empowering rural women. There is a clear dividing line between the government and non-governmental personnel of the organization leading to conflicts and tension. The gradual bureaucratization of the organization and the absence of a matured and committed leadership have alienated a large number of women's organization, activists, academicians and experts from the programme with the result that the programme is facing . rough weather at present.

10.3 We do believe that the Mahila Samakhya programme is a sound programme which has the capacity of empowering rural women. However, an innovative programme like this needs special care and support. It seems to us that the MSG has not been very successful in translating the objectives and approach of the programmee into reality as enough care has not been taken to meet the special needs of this programme. We therefore recommend some basic changes in the organization structure, design and implementation of the programme in the following paragraphs.

Autonomy

10.4 To start with, there is an urgent need to give the MSG a truly autonomous status so that it is not overpowered by the bureaucratic culture. This calls for the following steps:

A. The GC and EC of the MSG should have two third members from outside the government - from women's organizations activists, experts etc. (This is as per the National and State documents) These committees should meet frequently so that they can play the role which they are expected to play.

B. The posts of the SPD, DPCs, RPs and Consultants should be filled in from the open market and not from the government cadres. Attempts should be made to select experienced, mature, expert and

committed persons who can lead and support the programme successfully.

C. The administrative posts in the State office and in DIUs should also be filled in from the open market. The culture of the officers on deputation breeds bureaucratization and rigidities in the organization.

D. The office of the SPD should not sit in a government building, but should have a place outside. This helps in building an independent culture for the organization.

E. The MSG should have its own rules and regulations as per the specific needs. There is no need to accept government rules blindly.

10.5 The autonomy of the structure along with committed leadership will have its impact on the implementation of the programme in many ways. First of all, this will enable the SPD to introduce some basic organizational characteristics for the successful working of the programme namely, decentralized decision making, participative culture, flexibility, openness etc. Secondly, this will also remove the present duality of the structure and the consequent tensions and conflicts. And thirdly, it will give the leadership a free-hand to translate the objectives and the approach of the programme into reality more successfully.

10.6 We would like to draw attention to the fact that there are certain important implications and some logical consequences of awareness generation among women. The aware women are likely to challenge the unequal relationship between men and women within and outside the family sooner or later. The MSP will have to take a stand on these issues as it will not be possible to treat them merely as isolated cases at individual level. In other words, MSG will have to be prepared to take a stand for the overt and covert implications of awareness generation and will have to have a collective strategy for the purpose.

Strengthening Sanghas

10.7 There is a general feeling that the MSP has given more weightage to the empowerment of Sahayoginis and Sakhis and less to Sangha women. Since strengthening of Sanghas will go a long way in promoting the goals of the programme, we recommend that more attention should be paid to making Sanghas strong. This can be done not only by allocating larger funds to Sanghas but also by (a) training Sakhis to involve village women in the programme, (b) drawing benefits of trained Sakhis (past) by allotting them some responsibilities, and (c) by undertaking activities which meet the needs of women directly (F.E childcare centres, savings groups etc.)

10.8 We have observed earlier that some of the Sanghas have been able to create awareness among women about their plight, and are able to articulate their demands and needs. However, these Sanghas do not receive proper support from district level functionaries to develop further with the result that the concerned Sahayoginis feel let down and the Sanghas feel disappointed. We therefore, suggest that the district level functionaries should adopt a deliberate approach of appreciating the needs of Sanghas and provide support and strength for their development. For example, efforts should be made to make them more active (at present about 15% to 20% Sanghas are active), to expand their membership, to diversify their activities as per the local needs, and to widen their exposure to the outside world. The MSP should promote both economic activities and savings groups so that more women are attracted to Sanghas.

10.9 There is a move in some Sanghas to abolish Sakhi training completely so that the funds can be used for Sangha activities. Though this decision is to be taken primarily by Sanghas, it must be kept in mind that the exposure through Sakhi training has proved to be highly advantageous for the empowerment of Sakhis. Alternative ways, such as Sakhi rotation after six months, if found feasible, or Sangha Training could be considered.

10.10 It is observed that Sahayoginis find it difficult to visit villages when there are no buses or when there is only one bus service in a day. They therefore reduce the number of village visits which has an tends to have an adverse impact on Sangha activities. We recommend that Sahayoginis should either be given a vehicle (for example, a moped) or be given a night halt allowance so that they visit villages more frequently.

10.11 The personnel of the MSP needs to have a clarity about the long term vision of Sanghas. If it envisages Sanghas to be self-reliant and autonomous in the long run, efforts should be directed to this area. The decision about organizing autonomous groups of women and registering them under a society or federation should emerge from the Sangha level. The MSG should start thinking about the consequences and legal implications of such an approach.

Strategy For Empowerment

10.12 During the initial phase of the programme implementation, the MSP's strategy for empowerment focused on community oriented practical issues at the village level. However, as a logical consequence of the process of empowerment gender issues will emerge (and have emerged in some areas) gradually. The MSP must specify its stand on these issues. At present the approach is contradictory as on one hand the MSP talks about gender equality while on the other hand it refuses to take up gender issues collectively. It is necessary that the MSP supports the gender issues explicitly as a collective strategy.

10.13   Instead of waiting for the demand to emerge in the area of literacy, education of girls and skill training for income generation, the MSP should anticipate this demand and prepare accordingly. The economic empowerment is crucial in the overall empowerment of women and the MSP should work in this sector.

10.14   Support of men is essential in the MSP as the process of empowerment is bound to change the gender relationships within and outside the family.   Efforts should be made at the grassroots to develop supportive network with men such that Sangha women receive support for their activities.   A few orientation workshops can be organized for youth and men in the community to familiarize them about the objectives and approach of the MSP and sensitize them about women's issues.   The MSP also needs to devise a strategy to deal with the anticipated conflict with men at the grassroots through negotiations and support systems.   Sakhi training and Sahayogini training can incorporate training in this area.

10.15   The MSP need not start with a large number of activities simultaneously.   At least all these activities need not be implemented in each village.   Otherwise, the efforts will be diffused and no concrete results will emerge.   Each village / area can decide to undertake only a few activities depending on the needs and the priorities of local women.

Training

10.16   *Acceptance of training responsibility*: It must be realized that training is not a function to be contracted out. In fact, it must be accepted that the primary responsibility for training is of the MSG. The MSG has to formulate the training strategy for its own personnel. It can, however, draw upon outside experts/organizations as and when needed. The development of DTTs is important in this context.

10.17   *From training to human resource development*: The present narrow concept of training seen as an intervention providing content to fill a void or lack of something should be expanded to a broader concept of human resource development as an eliciting of, or building upon existing potential. This shift has to be accomplished from the bottom upwards starting with the Sangh and Sakhi levels. While the implications of this shift are many, only one instance of a direct impact will be given as an example: the area of self-concept and sustainability of the Sanghas. Within this area, for instance, the present ad hoc training approach looks for skills which are needed but absent, and should therefore, be provided, regardless of their relevance or long-term utility. What is also required, more importantly, is an approach which identifies already existing knowledge and skills and provide ways and means to draw them out and add value to them.

10.18   The general curriculum of training at each level needs revision.   Specific modules on items like office management, documentation etc. should be introduced for Resource Persons and Sahayoginis. The gaps identified in the availability of training material for the use by Sahayoginis and Sakhis, use of audio-visuals etc. will be taken up later on.

10.19   If necessary, the MSG should appoint a training or human resource development Coordinator at the state level. This person can   devise   a training strategy for the MSP personnel at different levels.

Strengthening Linkages with Other Organizations

10.20   There is a need to create and promote a sense of partnership among the MSG, women's organizations, concerned government departments, panchayat bodies, academics etc. However, the MSG should retain the overall control over the relationships. That is, it should be able to draw upon the strengths of different organizations as and when needed.

10.21   Voluntary organizations should be involved in the programme only after proper screening.   The MSG can prepare a list of screened organizations, describing their specializations, at the State and district levels. Such a list can be very handy when the need arises.   Before preparing such a list, however, opportunity should be given to all interested organizations to be considered by the screening committee.

10.22   Formal mechanisms - in the form of monthly meetings, workshops, seminars etc. - should be devised to promote regular interaction between the MSP personnel and the voluntary organizations, activists etc involved with the programme.   These communication channels will promote a sense of participation among them.   Efforts should be made to strengthen the linkages with the different government departments at different levels.   A representative of the MSP may be formally nominated on a few selected committees at the district and taluka levels.   This representative will help Sanghas, Sakhis and Sahayoginis to participate in the relevant government programmes such as programmes related to health, literacy, social defence and economic activities. (It has been reported to us that now "with the formal membership in DRG, all concerned government departments have been associated with MSG", communication dated 20.11.1993.

10.23   Village Sanghas, Sakhis and Sahayoginis should be specifically instructed and guided towards strengthening their association with the local panchayat bodies, including the Sarpanch and other members/women members.   They should also be advised to work with the talati, VLW and other local

government staff. It is realized that there are possibilities of conflicts between women's interests and the interests of these rural elite. However, it will be desirable to involve them in whatever possible way as their support is essential for village level work.

Finances

10.24   The MSG has made no efforts so far to raise its own funds though there are provisions for the purpose. The programme in Gujarat therefore depends entirely on the Dutch grants. If the MSG has any faith in the utility of the programme, it should try to raise some funds on its own. We also believe that the total expenditure on the MSP in Gujarat is so small that the government can easily afford to spare the amount. There is no need to depend on the Dutch grant for this small money and allow their intervention (i.e. evolution under their leadership, visits of their scholars, and their access to our rural areas) in the process.

10.25   There is a need to reclassify the expenditure (audited accounts) of the MSG so that the expenditure on the objectives of the programme comes out clearly. There is also a need to modify the presentation of the MSP budget and the accounts so that it is possible to compare the budgeted amount and the actual expenditure under a budget head.

Documentation and Research

10.26   Documentation and research have not received enough attention of the MSG. In fact, these are badly neglected areas. Considering the importance of these activities in monitoring, evaluation, teaching, planning, training, advocacy, publicity etc. We would like to strongly recommend that these activities should be strengthened.

10.27   The detailed recommendations made in Section-9 need not be repeated here. It will be important to State, however, that these activities should not be perceived as the activities of academicians sitting in "the ivory tower", but should be seen as an important input in promoting the programme, strengthening the personnel of the programme and in enriching the literature on women's empowerment.

10.28   While concluding our evaluation study we would like to emphasize the point that this innovative programme, which is facing rough weather in Gujarat today, can be saved and strengthened if the spirit underlying the National document is revived and steps are taken accordingly. However, we would like to add that our evaluation in no way says that the Gujarat programme is worse or better than the other State programmes. We have attempted to see the programme independently of the experiences of the other States.

APPENDIX-1

The members of the team met the following experts / activists / officials / non-officials.

At the State level

1. Ms. Elaben Bhatt,
   Member NRG and SRG: SEWA,
   Ahmedabad
2. Mr.K. Rammoorthy,
   Secretary, Education Dept. Government
   Gujarat,
   Gandhinagar.
3. Ms. Renana Jhabwala,
   Member, EC; SEWA,
   Ahmedabad
4. Ms. Nafisa Barot,
   Member, General Council; Mahiti-Uttam,
   Ahmedabad.
5. Mr. Gagan Sethi } Janvikas,
   Mr. P. Contractor } Ahmedabad
6. Ms. Usha Patel,
   SPD, Gujarat;
   Ahmedabad Officers and some other Staff of the
   State Office,
   Ahmedabad.

At the District level

Officials/MS Personnel

1. The DPC and the members of the DIU in all the districts
2. Sahyognis in a formal meeting in all the districts.
3. Selected Sakhis in Sakhi cluster meetings, Sakhi training workshops and in villages.
4. Dr. S.L. Soneji, Chief Dist. Health Officer, Himatnagar, Sabarkantha.
5. Mr. Gunavant Vaghela, Deputy D.D.O. Himatnagar, Sabarkantha.
6. Mr. Yadav, Mamalatdar, Khedbrahma
7. Ms. Shakuntala Patel, Health Visitor (Lambadia PHC Idar Taluka). Sabarkantha.

8. Mamalatdar, Taluka Panchayat President, Jasdan taluka, Rajkot.
9. Mamalatdar, TDO, Panchatat President, Upleta taluka, Rajkot.
10. TDO, Chhotaudapur, Baroda.
11. Mamlatdar, Chhotaudapur, Baroda.
12. Officer in charge of ICDS, Chhota Udapur, Baroda.
13. Deputy Mamlatdar, Nasvadi, Baroda.

Non-officials / Activists etc.

1. Functionaries of Narottam Lalbhai, Rural Development Group, Sabarkantha
2. Dr. Susheela Sheth, President Shri Kanta Stree Vikas Gruh, Rajkot
3. Shri Piyush Mehta, Member of Red Cross Society and Secretary at Navayug, Rajkot
4. Shri Chhelbhai Shukla, Chairman and Managing Trustee of Gram Swaraj Shikshan Kendra, Gopaldham (Jasdan Taluka), Rajkot.
5. Representatives of NGOs, Upleta, Rajkot.
6. Mr.Dilip, Field Officer, Centre for Environmental Education - Jasdan
7. Nr. Naranbhai, Ravindranath Tasore and Educational Charitable Trust, Rajkot.
8. Mr.Harivallabh Parikh, Rangpur Ashram, Baroda.
9. Prof. Amita Verma (Ms. Vimi), Baroda
10. Ms. Jyotsana Shah, Vikas Jyot, Vadodara
11. Ms. Prabha Parikh, Vikas Jyot, Baroda.
12. Mr.Pradhan, BAIF, Baroda.
13. Ms. Harshids Dave, NGO, Baroda.
14. Ms. Shruti Shroff, Shroff Foundation Trust, Kalali, Baroda.
15. Ms.Trupti Shah, Sahiyar, Baroda.
17. Ms. Jahnvi Andharia (Ex. RP, MSP)
18. Ms. Sejal Sah (Ex. RP, MSP)

APPENDIX-2

Villages visited by Members of the Evaluation Team

(A) **Sabarkantha Dist.**

1.	Andharia,	10.	Nava Mota
2.	Chikli	11.	Chikhala
3.	Bandiyanu Taluka	12.	Lambadia
4.	Panchmahudi	13.	Taragadi
5.	Vadia	14.	Khedva
6.	Govadi	15.	Bhiloda
7.	Dholra	16.	Vavadia
8.	Vaghapur	17.	Pipaliya
9.	Mungavavdi	18.	Kanodara.

(B) **Rajkot Dist.**

1.	Damalpur	10.	Kasaloliya
2.	Sompiparia	11.	Padola
3.	Navagam	12.	Nyara
4.	Kagavad	13.	Pipalia
5.	Samadhiyara	14.	Vadia
6.	Taravadi	15.	Dhobra
7.	Mangavavadi	16.	Jasdan
8.	Lobida	17.	Upleta
9.	Fulzar		

(C) **Vadodara Dist.**

1.	Mankodi	9.	Nasvadi
2.	Narmadpur	10.	Tava
3.	Sopla	11.	Pavalpura
4.	Rajali	12.	Husepur
5.	Malu	13.	Damapur
6.	Ghoda	14.	Rangpur
7.	Medhia	15.	Chhotudepur
8.	Bhangiawad		

PERSPECTIVES
MAHILA SAMAKHYA, UTTAR PRADESH, 1993

Districts : Banda
Saharanpur
Tehri Garhwal
Varanasi

EVALUATION TEAM
Ms. Renuka Mishra
Ms. Vibha Puri Das
Ms Neera Priyadarshi
Ms. Anuradha Joshi

PERSPECTIVES
Mahila Samakhya — Uttar Pradesh, 1993

INTRODUCTION

The present report perspectives is an evaluation of Mahila Samakhya programme Uttar Pradesh. Based on the findings of the four district evaluations, carried out in June-July of this year, this document attempts to analyze and expand upon the emerging views and debates and in turn provide a comprehensive overview of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Uttar Pradesh.

In order to set the parameters of the evaluation a meeting of two of the team members was held in Delhi alongwith the SPD and National Project Director, Mahila Samakhya. This was followed by a two day meeting with the district personnel, a Sakhi and a Sahayogini from each district in Lucknow. At this meeting philosophy and issues for evaluation were discussed and a plan of field visits was finalised in consultation with the district teams.

It is essential at this juncture, to stress the importance of an evaluative process, which has been envisaged from the very onset, as being integral to continued learning within the programme. Furthermore, evaluations of this nature most definitely need to understand the process-orientation of the Mahila Samakhya ideal as well as interact dynamically with members of the core staff teams, field staff as also the Mahila Sangha members. In addition, the ongoing (internal) self-evaluation process must also be examined co-terminously during an independent external evaluation. Lastly, it needs to be stated that any evaluation process must be done with time in hand, otherwise the findings are at best cosmetic in nature.

THE WOMENS' MOVEMENT AND ITS INTERFACE WITH STATE-RUN PROGRAMMES

One of the greatest strengths of the Indian Women's Movement (IWM) has been to continually negotiate with the State for an integration of the feminist perspective within various State policies and programmes, in its role as vigilante and via the media of pressure groups.

It is this dialectical relationship that brought into focus gender issues with a feminist perspective on the government agenda. The IWM has consistently articulated the aspirations of large sections of women and has been linked in an idiomatic relationship with the State -as the guardian of civil society- in taking up issues ranging from dowry and domestic violence to rape and the campaign for a common civil code, even while challenging the hegemonic domain of the State.

While the State has, on several occasions, conceded to the demands of the movement, as is reflected in the change of laws governing rape and domestic violence, at most other times the pendulum has swung between co-option and compromise. Whatever the outcome of a particular issue, the fact remains that gender issues have created anything from ripples to rumblings in the corridors of power. It is due precisely to the complex and dynamic relationship between the two that these processes of concessions, co-option and compromise have taken place.

Now, with substantial funds pouring in from international aid agencies for women's education, and the World Bank's new slogan of 'Adjustment with Gender Equity', State-run women-centred programmes are being prioritized by the government. This is hardly surprising in the context of an increasing dependence of the Indian State on external sources to meet its development needs. Furthermore, the fact that international aid is governed by economic motives and not benign gender concerns, is a foregone conclusion.

There is a serious danger of the State's mere appropriation of the idiomatic content of women's movement rather than the need to create a new and meaningful ideological base for its women's programmes. The very nature of the State could work against the organic processes of empowerment from reaching a logical end, resulting in the subversion of the theory and practice of feminism. The women's movement -on the other hand- has acted to prevent this superficial appropriation from being accepted as the norm.

In the light of this, two pertinent questions arise: Can

the autonomous women's movement remain insulated from the broader politico-economic realities in the country? ..and.. How is the movement to interface with present and ongoing State-sponsored women's programmes?

The IWM has been presented with a fait accompli as far as large-scale State intervention in women's education and empowerment programmes are concerned. There is also a realisation within certain sections of the women's movement that it would be self-defeating for the movement to shy away from playing a positive interventionist role in these programmes. It is true that while the IWM has played a role in critically clarifying gender issues vis-a-vis the State, it has neither had the resources nor the infrastructure to run such large mass-based programmes independently. By isolating itself from these State run programmes it would forfeit a right to determine trends and impose conditions at both a functional and policy level.

The fact of gaining concessions, critiquing co-option and striking compromises has, throughout the history of the IWM, effectively brought about legal and social changes. While it is important to guard against the subversion of feminist ideology and practice by the State, by opting out of interaction with State-sponsored programmes for women, the women's movement runs the risk of limiting itself to small sections of Indian women and men.

The challenge before the IWM is to evolve a dialecticodialogical relationship with these programmes, so as to effectively articulate the aspirations of vast sections of Indian women and create structures and institutions that are sensitive to their needs and will ultimately lead to their empowerment. Autonomous women's groups have an important role to play in these programmes as by their very nature they create tremendous possibilities of bringing about a dynamic interaction between theory and practice. It is through this process that critical feminist theory can evolve.

More importantly, victimization, repression and harassment of women within the programme are unfortunately inevitable in instances of opposing the status quo. It is here that the women's movement plays its most capable role in providing buffers for and support to these women. Government-run programmes such as Mahila Samakhya and the Women's Development Programme (WDP) are limited in their ability to back 'militant' struggles. The women's movement has far more laterality as it is not bound by bureaucratic structures and crass political considerations. Furthermore, autonomous women's groups are in a position to raise many more and diverse issues at the national level and to provide counter-strategies in situations of repression.

It is equally, if not more, important that programmes such as Mahila Samakhya -as a whole or as a sum of its parts- develop a rapport with diverse sections of the women's movement. This would necessitate initiating dialogues with activist groups, individuals, voluntary organisations and taking part in conceptual and theoretical debates- a process whereby the women within the programme can create a rightful space for themselves within the IWM.

The following statement by Gandhi & Shah summarizes and provides credence to this ongoing debate: "All women and women's organisations which consider themselves part of the Indian Women's Movement have as their starting point the belief that women are an oppressed section in society, though they may differ in their understanding of class and gender, the origins of women's oppression and its perpetuation."

MAHILA SAMAKHYA : NURTURING A DREAM

The process that Mahila Samakhya (Uttar Pradesh) has witnessed since its inception in April 1989, can best be compared to the central process of life conceived in the minds of women who have attained some measure of personal liberation as part of the Women's Movement. A vision, sowed in the hearts of some of the most disadvantaged women and given flesh, blood and spirit; assisted in its birth and nurtured to be able to survive and confront the harsh world of women's dis-empowerment.

It is of no mean significance, then, that the women who visualized the process affirmed it in the form of "non-negotiables", central to which was the process itself. The central theme of the process was "..to enhance the self-image and self-confidence of women and engender 'empowerment' through relationships, processes and questioning - enabling them to recognize their contribution to the economy and reinforcing their need for participating in educational programmes."

In the words of the Indo-Dutch Mission (IDM), the process which is the key word, characterizes the approach, and 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 Mahila Samakhya Program (MSP); laid down as "The centrality of education in the struggle to achieve equality..."

MAHILA SANGHAS : THE CENTRAL THEME

The Mahila Samakhya document makes a definitive statement regarding the Sangha (women's collective), making it the nodal point of the programme, around which all

activities are planned. The Sangha will provide the space where women can meet, be together and begin the process of reflection, asking questions, speaking fearlessly, analyzing and above all feel confident to articulate their needs through this collective forum. In the light of this formulation the Sangha means, simultaneously:

a) a physical space (thikana),

b) a social space (collectivity),

c) a human space (emotional and intellectual support), and

d) an organizational space (solidarity).

All four are integrally related to each other and focused on **The Central Task: Women's Empowerment**. The concept of empowerment itself implies five processes: affirmation, articulation, assertion, emancipation and empowerment. All five are linked, organically, to each other and to the environment in a dialectical manner and articulated at both the individual and collective level.

However, for reasons which will be elaborated later, the 'Sangha' is not a central theme, at present, in the UP-MSP. The IDM submits that the strategy for empowering rural women in UP is unlike the empowerment strategies of other States, where the emphasis is on building, strengthening and encouraging self-reliance of the Sanghas. The main focus of empowerment strategies in UP is on creating strong networks of committed Sakhis and Sahayoginis who function as catalysts, encouraging village women to meet around issues that are important to them, to collectively plan for action.

The evaluation however could not assign any reason or logic as to why MSP in UP has decided on this strategy. In Varanasi there are groups at the village level which are not organized -in the conventional sense- and have no formal membership. These fluid groups do, however, play an important role and their members converge over issues from time to time. When an issue emerges, women affected by it gather for meetings and intense discussions ensue. The Sakhis and Sahayoginis have regular meetings, and have been able to reach out to the poorest and most neglected. The notion of 'solidarity' and coming together to fight injustice, has no doubt percolated to the level of village women

The Sanghas in some of the districts are non-formalized, non-structured, flexible in their composition, challenging power structures and the status quo with a gendered understanding. They represent groups coming together around issues spontaneously, which is evident in decisions being made and issues taken up by the women, even in the absence of a Sakhi.

However fluid, to a limited extent, women identify with the Sangha as a forum which articulates their felt needs rather

than those imposed by Sakhis or the DIU. The process also reflects the Sakhi's contribution in identifying local leadership, consciously examining the potential of various women, making possible exploratory and skill-based training of Sangha members and an effective use of local leadership.

Sustaining Sanghas

It would not be out of place to reflect at this point on the current debate regarding the nature of the Sangha: as a registered body or as the informal association that it is at present. The unanswered question remains of sustainability of the present formation and the search for a 'replicable' model Sangha.

A common thread emerging from all the districts is that a measure of stagnation has crept in, in the absence of a methodology that enables taking the struggles of the Sangha members a step further. In addition to this, there is also the inability to distinguish between short and long-term strategies. There is also evidence of a lack of systematic planning, skill development and information sharing.

The evaluation shows that the reason why strong Sanghas have not emerged are:

a) The MSP finds it convenient to relate to the Sakhi compared to the village women. Programme inputs have primarily focused on the Sakhis and Sahayoginis.

b) Sakhis continue to depend either on Sakhis from other villages or Sahayoginis. The vertical support structure within the MSP is combined with a strong horizontal peer group support structure.

c) Work is issue-based and not geared to building organizational structures.

d) The MS programme has yet to come to grips with the complexities of social formation in UP and be able to locate the Sangha within the social community. The concept of creating a space for women is new and not emerging from within the community. It is an intervention from the outside that still needs to grow its roots and gain legitimacy within the rural context.

e) The training process has been abruptly short-circuited with its attendant ill-effects (to be elaborated in the section on training). This break in the MSP 'process' is probably due to problems related to the bureaucratic burden. Further, trained Sakhis have not been able to transfer their newly acquired skills to Sangha women.

f) The process of 'praxis' i.e. a continuous process of action-reflection requires to be strengthened. The Varanasi evaluation observes that the conceptual

understanding of the Sakhis and Sahayoginis regarding the Sangha is inadequate. Training towards analysis and understanding of Sangha formation is lacking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to evolve and strengthen the formation of Sanghas, a vision or commitment to 'Sangha' as an end is important. This would enable a focus on getting women to articulate their notions of Sangha form, content and structure. In addition, the Sanghas' interaction with the State, administration, NGOs and political structures would require more focus and information for accessibility. Through this interaction, the Sangha could emerge as a plausible forum for women.

While clarifying the issue of forming sustainable Sanghas, it would be imperative to reflect upon the merits and demerits of 'registration', to critique the experience of other NGOs, and address the following issues before reaching a decision:

a) The danger of emergent power struggles, hierarchies (perhaps along caste lines) resulting ultimately in disempowerment of the women, in a sense the antithesis of MSP itself, is implicit in institutionalising what are currently fluid, un-structured, non-hierarchical groups.

b) The ability of the Sanghas, as fluid, floating groups, to sustain themselves in the absence of programme support - ie Sakhis and Sahayoginis, is yet untested.

c) The introduction of the money-factor, carries the danger of bringing with it all its attendant ills.

d) The uphill task of administering and running small registered groups could very well end up becoming an end in itself to the detriment of the process of empowering women.

SAKHIS AND SAHAYOGINIS : CENTRAL ACTORS IN THE MSP

In the MSP scheme of things, the Sakhi and Sahayogini are the central actors and key players in the successful implementation of the programme. The IDM has rightly pointed out that the main focus of empowerment strategies in U.P. is on creating strong networks of committed Sakhis and Sahayoginis who function as catalysts, encouraging village women to meet around issues that are important to them and collectively plan and decide upon taking action.

In UP, the self confidence, enthusiasm, and vibrancy of the Sahayoginis is in particular striking. They form strong peer groups, mutually supportive of each other. Their strength is reflected in the more experienced Sakhis with whom they closely co-operate and who form an extension of their network. The four district evaluations have pointed out that the singular achievement of the MSP has been the development of a vast human resource at the village and Block level, ready to take on issues of injustice.

The Sakhis and Sahayoginis exude a confidence and exhibit an understanding that represents the most tangible achievement of the programme. From a state of apprehension, they are now playing the role of village leaders, articulating the needs and responses of the women, ready to challenge the pradhan and government officials, negotiating with the powerful elite, fighting against women's oppression and questioning deeply rooted value systems of patriarchy. Today, most Sakhis and village women move out of their homes freely for meetings and collective action.

MS has given a new distinct identity (by name versus a faceless 'tu': unknown, unrecognized, unnamed village women on the fringes of social life and marginalised by development and political processes) and thereby raised not just the status of the Sakhi but also that of her family - thereby, creating a greater space for her within the family. MS has also opened the space of interaction of the Sakhi and created possibilities for enhanced relationships with government officials and functionaries: the lekhpal, ANM, PHC doctor, panchayat secretary and school teacher. Relationships that are at times confrontational and at others, collaborative.

The involvement of the Sakhis has led to a demystification of the power of the panchayat, hitherto with its realm of authority beyond challenge. Sakhis working with pressure groups have made the government delivery system more accountable.

Similarly, the Sahayoginis, too, are discovering themselves as gendered beings - able to work with other women with sensitivity and involvement. The primary role of the Sahayogini is to affirm the Sakhi, in addition to establishing internal (horizontal) linkages between Sakhis and village women. The Sahayogini also provides vertical linkages between the Sanghas and the DIU. Like the Sakhis, the Sahayoginis have travelled a long way. The case histories of some reflect the struggle within and outside.

In Saharanpur, a significant proportion of Sakhis and Sahayoginis are single women - separated from their families, divorced, widowed, deserted, thrown out and often without alternate means of livelihood. MS provides the space and the arena for both a sublimation of their personal struggles, battles, successes and failures and the possibilities to forge

these trials and tribulations into the struggle for women's empowerment. Both Sakhis and Sahayoginis have evolved complex methods in creating their own space: combinations and permutations of compromise, confrontation, pressure and collective strength tactics.

Transformation of self in Sakhis and Sahayoginis is clearly visible in their life pattern, self image, confidence and awareness. This is truly inspiring, and even if the success of the MSP is limited to this one fact, it is worth the time, energy and resources. Some clear indications emerge from the district evaluations:

a) Economic and family status has improved with regular income.

b) Women have gained confidence and physical mobility.

c) General awareness and access to new knowledge has increased significantly.

d) Level of family violence and oppressive social customs is declining.

e) There has been a qualitative change in self esteem resulting in empowerment.

However, despite all this, there are problem areas which reflect not only a departure from the original MSP document, but more importantly, the new challenges facing the programme:

i) The method of staff selection reinforces the top down orientation - Sakhis and Sahayoginis have been selected by the NGOs or DIU (as the case may be) with very little participation of the community. Since those selected owe their job to the didi or "bhai", their allegiance lies there, with few exceptions. There is a need to strengthen the more recent trend of involving Sahayoginis and Sakhis in the identification and selection of new Sakhis.*

ii) The absence of a full-time State Programme Director has created considerable insecurity in the minds of the Sakhis and Sahayoginis. Nonetheless, the responsibility of the Sahayoginis under these adverse conditions is remarkable. Though there is no co-ordinator or Resource Person in the Varanasi DIU at present, the Sahayoginis have taken on the challenge of co-ordinating among themselves. This has been possible because of the strong foundation and sense of responsibility MS has been able to inculcate among them.

iii) What are the implications for MSP in the selection of destitute women, a significant proportion of whom are single? The unanswered questions centre around the chances of manipulation of their vulnerability, making them more susceptible to bureaucratization within the programme.

iv) The stipend that is paid to the Sakhis raises some fundamental questions that do not appear to be answered. What exactly is the scope of this stipend? What is the role function of the Sakhi and the demands on her time and energy? With the expanding nature of the programme, if she is working for a greater number of days in the month, exclusively for the MSP, does her stipend reflect the tendency to exploit volunteers? If the Sakhi essentially ensures the efficiency of the State welfare delivery system, does she not indirectly fall in the category of a State functionary?

v) With the Sahayoginis assuming responsibilities as trainers, their primary role of affirming and supporting Sakhis may be neglected.

vi) The issue of role clarity of the Sakhis is crucial. In the light of what has been said before, regarding the sublimation of their own oppression through MSP, the sense of personal liberation in the training workshops and the impetus that this liberation has given the Sakhis in their intervention in their local communities. That the Sakhis are caught in a dilemma when faced with their own situation within the village is apparent. In her new and still fragile incarnation as the vocal leader of the village, she requires all the support in the form of policy decisions and facilitation.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

It is evident from the evaluation that if the MSP in Uttar Pradesh is to create a valuable impact, the creation of networks and linkages at the district level is imperative. Organisational and other support structures must be strengthened, and continuity constantly reinforced at two levels:

a) within the internal MS organisational structure; and

b) at the level of external support.

This would entail establishing linkages and interacting closely with government departments and individual officials; NGOs members of the community and women's groups, both local and nationally. The programme in its current phase must consciously move from a low profile to a higher visibility.

District Implementation Units (DIU)

The DIU is the link between field workers and external networks, providing not only leadership and direction but also nurturance, both emotional and physical, to the women within the programme.

A major problem, namely short term appointments of

the functionaries at the DIU level, creates insecurity and retards effective long term planning. At present, a co-ordinator has been newly appointed in Varanasi district though there was none at the time of the evaluation. In addition to this, there are two Resource Persons. In Banda there is a Consultant and two Resource Persons, while in Saharanpur there is only a co-ordinator and in Tehri there is one co-ordinator and one Resource Person. This makes it abundantly clear that the district units are understaffed. As a result, sheer work pressure leaves little time for objective ongoing programme evaluations or interaction with supportive individuals and groups. Appointment of able persons is a must, following a careful assessment of the needs of the job, skills in communication, documentation and training, being given priority while selecting DIU staff.

Although difficult, it is also important for members of the DIU to strike a balance in their roles as decision makers and implementors, while being process-oriented, sensitive and flexible. In UP one sees wide variations, both positive and negative. There is a tendency amongst Sahayoginis to become overly dependant on the DIU. The DIU has to, meanwhile, guard against unilateral decision-making and authoritarianism. Members of the DIUs need to learn and grow to complement each other.

A systematic delegation of responsibilities among the DIU members needs to be worked out. This would probably ensure better time allocation and a more efficient work culture.

Reactivating the District Resource Groups (DRG), involving representatives from other women's groups is a crying need. As for DIU staff from outside the district, there is a need to provide an environment conducive to growth, learning, creativity and fun. All support systems must acknowledge the need for growth and provide the space to enhance their creativity with a place for creative leisure and fun within the programme.

The State Office

In the absence of a full-time State Project Director, the office has constantly played an obstructionist rather than a supportive role. It is to the credit of the DIUs, Sakhis and Sahayoginis, that they have kept the spirit of the programme alive. The State office, however, has come alive to the needs of the programme after the present SPD joined. At the State level, three sections need to come under the charge of the SPD, namely:

i) Training
ii) Documentation and dissemination of information
iii) Crisis management, monitoring of field level activities and evaluations.

Strengthening of State office does not in any way mean centralization of decision-making. On the contrary, it should facilitate decentralization in planning and implementation of field level activities.

Support Structures

In-built support:

The MSP presumes in-built support structures in terms of day to day functioning; from the Sakhis, Sanghas or Sahayoginis, District Implementation Unit, State Programme Director and State Office upto the National Resource Group. In practice, however, there are serious lacunae in the programme support structure, both at the State and the district level. No full-time State Programme Director was appointed for a very long time, and the districts are yet understaffed. Therefore, the supportive role of the State office, initially envisaged, has been virtually non-existent, demonstrating that merely providing for a certain structure does not necessarily imply its effective functioning. Considerable effort, on a regular basis, must be ensured to make this in-built structure responsive and non-hierarchical. Sharing between the districts should be regular and systematic.

Involving other government departments:

Interaction with other government departments and their functionaries, and creating support systems through linkages with the Gram Pradhans, ANMs, Village Level Workers, ICDS employees, etc are also essential to consolidate the programme at the village level.

The Banda water project is an excellent example of expediting inter-departmental collaboration. The impact of the project has been manifold, particularly in the arena of gender sensitisation where the (male) Jal Nigam fitters have begun to perceive the relevance of gender issues and to internalize new values. Today, these fitters play the role of mediators in instances of domestic violence. Furthermore, the interest shown and subsequent involvement of the Jal Nigam officials and other functionaries within the programme itself has given the MSP a boost. The Banda project also interacts closely with the National Institute of Adult Education (NIAE) and the Forest Department. In other districts, some linkages have been established but a systematic effort is necessary to create a widespread support base and better networks.

Similar linkages with relevant government departments should be examined at the State level.

Linkages with Groups & Professionals:

Efforts should be employed to draw lawyers, doctors, lecturers and other NGOs into the MS network. This is important in

terms of learning from their knowledge base and experiences, as well as in building e network around areas of common concern.

Support within the Village:

Efforts to elicit support of the village men for the programme and issues taken up by the Sanghas are also a must and must be examined carefully and strategically.

Linkages with the IWM:

Linkages with the larger women's movement and autonomous women's organisations, should become a priority for the programme at different levels (District, State and National).

ISSUES : ASSERTION OF SELF AND THE COLLECTIVITY

The IDM report observes that a strategic decision has been taken not to seek confrontation with the existing structures, but to devise tactics to resolve emerging issues to the advantage of the women concerned.

With the MSP first taking on community problems like water, electricity, road building, ration cards and distribution in the fair price shops, health, school fees, etc., the women have started to organize themselves around issues which are due to face least opposition from men in their community. Through mobilization of the community and active pressurizing, government agencies are made accountable towards the village. Such actions have solicited recognition, respect and support from various quarters, making the issues raised by the women into community issues. Similarly, women's problems within the family have been established as social issues, shared by the community, thereby broad basing the issue of the responsibility from individuals to the whole community. The strategies involved are very much influenced by the organizations who were responsible for the initial trainings (Jagori, Allaripu, Action India), and rely on experience gained from programmes such as the Women's Development Programme in Rajasthan.

The evaluations shows that the entry point is women and their problems. As and when specific issues arise, Sakhis, Sahayoginis and the Sanghas are activated for redressal/resolution. One major focus has been the anti-liquor agitation in Tehri-Garhwal and Saharanpur, which has taken on the form of a movement and faces strong opposition both from the traders and the State agencies. Other issues taken up are equal wages for women, the enforcement of civic entitlements: increasing the accountability of local functionaries such as ANMs and school teachers, ensuring the provision of old age/widow pension and ration cards, access to income generation opportunities like nursery raising and linking up with government departments around issues of afforestation, and drinking water.

The strength of MSP lies in its success in organizing and sustaining women around specific issues through which they have discovered their collective strength. However, it has also been pointed out that linkages for delivery services are easy approach mechanisms, but in the long run the programme must concentrate on value systems in society for long-term and permanent change.

A few observations on selection of issues and mobilization for struggle around issues need to be elucidated:

a) The first area centres around the choice of 'soft' targets. The reasons or logic of such choices are not known. It would be beneficial if the MSP functionaries and activists explore whether the decisions on the choice of issues are motivated by reasons of strategic positioning, expediency, inadequacy, inability or plain indecision.

b) Secondly, the programme needs to explore institutionalised structures of power and patriarchy that engender dis-empowerment of the women. The MSP functionaries also have to apply their minds on how they can include and involve men in this critique of patriarchy in order to move forward in the conceptual/action dialectic of empowerment.

c) It is evident from the evaluation that the Sangha women, whether organized in the Sangha or in informal groups, are quick to respond to events - something akin to a fire fighting operation. However, their involvement in the process of identification of and reflection on issues of disempowerment is weak.

d) The lack of involvement of village women and restrictive aspects of the programme structure could possibly be reasons for the Sakhis and Sahayoginis sense of inadequacy. This requires further introspection within the programme.

e) The fifth area is that of the abrupt cessation of outside training inputs for Sakhis and Sahayoginis. This has played an important role in the lack of progress on issues in greater depth and detail. It can be inferred that the initial focus of the training programmes/workshops was on the Sakhis and Sahayoginis, allowing for a process of self-affirmation and asserting their rightful place in the process among the women. In this process Jagori, Allaripu and Action India have been singularly successful. Their withdrawal has unfortunately aborted the ongoing process from organically taking root at the village level.

THE BANDA WATER PROJECT

In Banda, as in many other parts of the country, the availability of drinking water has been acutely problematic. Besides a shortage of water, there is the added factor of a majority of handpumps lying in a State of disrepair and hence disuse. The issue of water has been a recurring theme during village meetings, and over the years the women have developed a number of strategies from request and petition to demonstration in order to highlight this problem. Two years ago, in an effort to begin resolving this problem, MS in Banda teamed up with UNICEF and U.P. Jal Nigam to initiate a community-based hand-pump maintenance and repair project.

The main thrust of the project has been to train illiterate rural women as hand-pump mechanics. This process of training has incorporated a gender-sensitive approach right from its onset. Once trained, these women have begun to assist the Jal Nigam teams in upgrading the currently installed Mark II handpumps to Mark III, as well as carrying out regular repairs and maintenance.

Besides training women hand pump mechanics, the project aspires to establish sustainable village sanitation and water committees. The mechanics are accountable to the community in carrying out repair and maintenance work.

The water project has succeeded in giving high visibility to the MSP at all levels and most importantly, to the villagers for whom this aspect of the programme is the most tangible. At another level it has also served to demystify 'technology' and bring it within the reach of the community.

EDUCATION & LITERACY

In the early days of the programme, there appeared a conscious decision to delink literacy (a narrow notion of education in which 'learning' was restricted merely to the acquisition of a skill and perhaps irrelevant to the needs of the women themselves) with empowerment. It also flowed from an understanding that women experienced specific constraints in their attempts at literacy. Lack of self-confidence and a low self-image and esteem were the principal factors inhibiting women to internalise changes within their own lives.

The evaluators, too, feel that there is a certain resistance in the initiation of literacy programmes, with the role of literacy being initially underplayed - albeit with good reason - and different modes of communication given importance and credibility. Thus, the focus was on drawing from women's own experiences in order to analyze and conceptualise a framework for gender empowerment. This process created an awareness amongst the Sakhis that those who are incapable of reading and writing can nonetheless examine

situations critically and with clarity and furthermore, explore the influencing factors in their lives. Different modes of communication were utilised to stress the fact that illiteracy was not in itself crippling as made out to be. During this phase, the emphasis was on complementarity between literates and non-literates rather than false notions of superiority.

However, it is evident that the potential of the written word as a medium of expression, communication, direct access to information (knowledge as power) is being realized as can be best demonstrated with reference to the water project initiated in Banda.

It is no mean achievement that at first the Sakhis and later Sangha women, have themselves begun articulating their need for literacy. This is the culmination of processes that the MSP has successfully managed to bring about. The self-determined need for literacy has emerged as a result of:

a) an enhanced self-image,
b) need to gain information,
c) recognition of the power of the written word
d) creating an environment where women seek an active role in their own development process and that of their communities.

The MSP has begun responding to this need, but not in a very systematic manner. The methodology employed has been camp-based, filling a vacuum where the previous training programmes left off. The camps have been residential in nature which has definitely aided the learning process. Teaching has been imparted through the 'word' method using games, songs, music and innovative teaching aids as tools.

Since no detailed report on these education camps is available for analysis, reactions have been gauged directly from the Sakhis and Sahayoginis who underwent training. Women did acquire literacy skills, however fragile, but no real strategies for systematic support have evolved for this first generation of neo-literates.

Each district is, at present, conducting a few literacy camps. There is an urgent need to assess the achievements of these camps along the following lines:

a) a review of current efforts on the literacy front;
b) an examination of strategies for the future: how can the programme be made applicable to other village women and not just the Sakhis and Sahayoginis;
c) follow-up with neo-literates;
d) examine an expansion of the scope and applicability of literacy;
e) to understand and critique the existing educational infrastructure, resources (human and financial) and educational needs;
f) linking the educational component with skill training exercises and the introduction of non-traditional forms of income-generation; and

g) last, but most important to examine the role of education within the framework and continuum of empowerment.

Since education, in its multifarious expressions, is a central part of the empowerment strategy in the MSP document, one needs to also look specifically at two activities in that field, namely the Udan Khatolas/Bal Saksharta Kendras and the Mahila Saksharta Kendras.

The evaluations also reveal several areas of concern like weaknesses in Mahila and Bal Saksharta Kendras and the Thikanas. There are further weaknesses in curriculum and material development and serious communication gaps between functionaries. The role functions of the Sakhis, Sahayoginis and in particular the Anudeshikas need clarifying especially in the area of education.

With reference to Udan Khatolas, the evaluators have observed that these were started in early 1990 with the principal objective of reaching out to school children via the media of theatre, music, songs and puppets. The concept was to create unstructured fun and learning. However, at present, they have been turned into literacy centres with emphasis on the 'three Rs', rather than the earlier vision as centres of creativity The absence of fresh inputs to enable and sustain creativity and hence the essential essence and character of the Udan Khatolas needs careful consideration even though children prefer these centres rather than the formal school.

TRAINING : EXPANDING LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

It would be a misnomer to call the process that Jagori, Allaripu and Action India initiated with the women as training. Evident from the reviews, reports and evaluations is the fact that the process was essentially breaking the fetters that enclosed and encapsulated consciousness, unshackling the human spirit that lay bound by the web of regulation and control. The processes set into motion by Jagori, Allaripu and Action India have been instrumental in the transformation of self in Sakhis and Sahayoginis. 'Training' has taken on dynamic and relevant connotations - as an ongoing, continuous process with regular inputs. The evaluation further shows that the training programme has made the Sakhis and Sahayoginis extremely articulate, conscious of their rights, enabled a high degree of motivation and the ability to perform their catalytic role.

While the initial training was extremely useful in creating awareness and sensitization, the participation of the Sakhis and Sahayoginis in State and National women's liberation struggles has allowed a reinforcement of the motivation for building awareness, fostering growth... for reflection. The trainings have facilitated some linkages with National women's struggles, which has in itself been empowering.

The evaluation has posed one central question: why was the training, particularly that of Jagori, disrupted at great loss to the programme?

Recognising the need to develop training abilities within the district, in-house trainings were conducted. It has been observed as in Saharanpur, that unless trainers come from similar backgrounds and have emerged from similar - if not identical problems - the training might not prove very useful. Although the concept of internal training is a sound one, newer Sakhis have lost out on opportunities for formal in-house training by other groups.

The need in MS today is for strengthening and reinforcing what has been built through the earlier workshops, and to provide fresh inputs. These inputs need to be in the nature of evolving a conceptual and strategic base for building communication and organizational skills for the future. While training has made Sakhis and Sahayoginis articulate, aggressive, aware, motivated and full of joyful anticipation, their inability to take their own efforts and struggles ahead, not for any fault of theirs, carries with it the enormous danger of disillusionment. The training needs that have been expressed by the districts are in the areas of administration, literacy, girl child issues, income generation, accounts and documentation.

A few issues need to be considered for further reflection:

a) The workshops (training) organized by Jagori, Allaripu and Action India have essentially and effectively been the process for the Sakhis and Sahayoginis to affirm their selves, their destiny and future. These workshops have meant a redefinition of a woman's identity (personal space), a woman's activity (social space) and a woman's intervention in the community (political space). This exploration of space has led to an explosion of enthusiasm and energy. The Sakhis have made efforts to take forward these processes to village women, drawing them into this orbit.

b) In continuation with the previous point, we have observed a tendency to underplay the specific demands of organizing women and the attendant skills of communication, process clarification, collective decision making and action, conflict management and resolution. These process skills should not be mixed up or submerged under motivating skills. In their new role as trainers, Sakhis and Sahayoginis require continuous interaction from the outside to reflect critically on their own training strategies.

c) While there is the merit of in-house training, MSP cannot adopt this process to the exclusion of an ongoing training input and exchange from external training groups. The involvement of an outside group provides the subjective-objective nexus to the training method. While admitting the soundness of MSP's concept of internal training, newer Sakhis and Sahayoginis must have opportunities for formal in-house training by other groups.

d) A certain lack of clarity as to the role function of the Sakhi and the Sahayogini is a recurrent theme. Whatever the definition of roles, there is no doubt that both groups of women need new or an upgradation of skills and demand specific intervention with their changing roles.

Based on the above observations, there is a need to:

i) Systematically develop district level training teams

In all districts, the Sakhis and the Sahayoginis who have developed as trainers rely exclusively on their own experiences of various training situations. While this experiential learning is critical, there is now the need to consciously develop these skills and train them as trainers. This would entail furthering a conceptual understanding on training, exposure to different methodologies, new tools, etc. Further, this will mean a recognition of the groups' skills as trainers which so far has been a mere part of their work, and not an essential element.

Concretely, as a first step, the DIUs should attempt to build a profile of the human resources that has been developed. Sakhis and Sahayoginis who have the potential of becoming effective trainers should be identified. This group should plan the kind of inputs they require to strengthen their skills as trainers. The DIU, State Office, and National Office should work towards providing these inputs.

ii) Creating Areas of Specialisation

It has been mentioned earlier that in this current phase of the programme, the training needs of the districts are both general and specific in terms of providing skill-based inputs. Different programmes and trainings arise from differing needs and concerns. Necessarily, approaches and methodologies of these trainings will vary. For instance, literacy training differs from gender empowerment training. Additionally, the needs of certain programmes are often specific and technical - training in the area of water or health for instance, require considerable technical knowledge.

In keeping with these needs, an effort should be made to develop within the training group, specialisation in different areas. These areas of specialisation should be in accordance with the priority issues of the area. Skill-based training would

then feed into a programme on the issue. For instance, a start has been made in Banda where they have chosen to focus on the issue of water. Similarly, in Tehri the issue of forests and the environment has been prioritised. The district teams might think of making this an area of specialisation and develop an action programme/training module accordingly.

iii) Develop Accountability

While it is legitimate for district units to demand specific training inputs, there is, simultaneously, a need for them to be accountable for translating skills and information absorbed from the training sessions into concrete action. Follow-up is crucial, and it is only when programmes reinforce training that it can actually become a dynamic and ongoing process. To cite an example: an effective legal literacy workshop was held in Varanasi about a year ago. Programme and concrete actions were planned during the workshop, but there was absolutely no follow up. This lack of accountability as far as training is concerned, needs to be questioned. Furthermore, it is essential to build into the training module the need for and possible form of follow up action. Training sessions cannot be viewed as either ad hoc or one-time, and must systematically build into the programme.

iv) Mahila Shikshan Kendras

The development of district training teams should be seen in the larger context of setting up MSKs in all the districts. As envisaged in the MS project document, the MSKs have an important role to play - both as resource and training centres. In the long run, MSKs should evolve as residential training centres which can provide opportunities to MS functionaries in upgrading their skills and qualifications. Further, MSKs would provide the space for rural women to learn.

DOCUMENTATION

Documentation should be viewed not as an end in itself, but as an essential element or tool for monitoring, evaluating, planning, teaching, training, advocacy, publicity, etc. Hence, developing new forms of documentation to record the voices, views and experiences of women and analyze the processes of their empowerment is a must. Lack of a knowledge of the role of process documentation and reporting skills has reduced report writing to a routine, mechanical process for internal monitoring by the DIU, hardly used for feedback, critical review or reflection and praxis in virtually all the districts.

All the districts have independently, felt the need for an in-house newsletter. In Varanasi ('Sakhi ki Pati'), in Tehri ('Behno ka Dukh') and in Banda ('Mahila Dakiya)' newsletters have been used as a medium of communication, promoting linkages between Sangha women, Sakhis, Sahayoginis, the DIU and the State office. Other than in Banda, the efforts have been ad hoc and intermittent. 'Mahila Dakiya' has managed to sustain its content, value and regularity.

It is unclear however, whether these newsletters are distributed amongst women of other MS districts for instituting exchanges and fostering linkages horizontally between the four districts.

The following areas require special attention:

a) documenting processes and developments at the Sangha level;

b) examining processes critically and using documentation as a means to critique, reflect and analyze;

c) actively involving neo-literates by training them in reporting and developing material aimed at governmental and non-governmental organisations; and

d) in the initial stages of the project, there was a definite need for MSP to maintain a low profile until the programme was able to concretise and take off sufficiently. However, having established a certain credibility on the ground, there is now a need to reach out to other government functionaries and organisations. Therefore, developing publicity/ educational material aimed at familiarizing government functionaries at the district and block levels, reaching out to other NGOs working in geographically contiguous areas or those working with women must be undertaken.

Mahila Dakiya

The 'Mahila Dakiya' experience demonstrates the viability and relevance of a participatory approach to literacy and the development of literacy materials. This approach has played a major role in building self awareness amongst the neo-literates and also enhanced levels of critical awareness where women continue to actively construct meaning. In developing the (literacy) material and linking the process to reflection and dialogue, the creation of this new knowledge base is imbued with an exciting dynamism.

Though the women began with a degree of ineptitude as also acute feelings of inadequacy, at the end of the process they came round to positions of self assurance and a belief in their own abilities: "..now we can write our own stories.."

The process of women working together, speaking, listening, discussing, reading, making notes and most importantly, sharing their ideas enabled the production of a relevant and readable series of broadsheets. Four issues have been produced by the women in Banda, the last one being produced without any external inputs.

BUREAUCRATIZATION vs. VOLUNTARISM ?

What was visualized in the MSP, as a definite departure from other State ventures, was strengthening the spirit of voluntarism and the sense of commitment to change. In some measure, initial attempts at weaving in 'voluntarism' in the State bureaucracy and personalizing processes of welfare management felt like a breath of fresh air in an environment of stifling red tape. But, what emerges through indepth reflections on this issue, as indicated in the various evaluations, is that the reverse of what was envisaged has taken place. The bureaucracy has overtaken the essential logic of the programme. In some districts, the structure of MS seems hierarchical and somewhat rigid. Since the programme content is defined and enforced by the State unit, somewhat rigidly, a top-down orientation is quite clear.

The DIU consists of motivated, sincere and hard working women, warm and easy in their relationships with the Sakhis and Sahayoginis. It enjoys both respect and confidence of the wider community (even police come to seek redressal) and has generated goodwill and support from the local administration, political leadership, press and staff.

On the other hand, the DIU has very limited funds, staff, information and Resource Persons. As a result, the support to the Sakhis and Sahayoginis is also inadequate. There is dissatis-faction with the State unit, and strained relations between the DIU and the State Programme Director are due to:

a) the inability of the State unit to provide resources when required;

b) lack of support from the State unit towards new initiatives planned by the DIU, Sakhis and Sahayoginis;

c) tight fisted and inflexible attitudes when it comes to sanctioning schemes and expenditures already authorized;

d) centralization, lack of trust, exercise of power by controlling disbursements, (demanding clearance even for smallest programmes or initiatives) resulting in delay, loss of face and non-participatory practices and thereby affecting the credibility of the DIU;

e) inability to clarify position between the DIUs and

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NGOs (specially in the case of Saharanpur) to foster a supportive and a mutually sustaining relationship; and

f) lack of clarity on extent to which a government sponsored programme can go when existing power structures are being questioned all the time. What are the mechanisms and structures of support in anti-establishment struggles?

Lack of Continuity

An important reason for the tug-of-war situations that have developed between the DIU and the State Office, are the constant transfers that take place at the SPD level. Often, before the SPD (invariably a Government functionary) can even familiarise herself with a project that is non-target oriented, flexible and participatory in approach, she is transferred. This has led to the State Office either setting its own priorities or not responding to the needs of the districts. It has also led to decisions not being followed through or being primarily dependent on the understanding of the new SPD.

Close Identification with the State

It is clear that the State unit identifies itself closely with the government, and therefore describes itself principally as a 'State-run' programme. This identification has led to a limited perception of the State units towards taking decisions that are geared to the needs of the programme. Since a majority of the SPDs are government functionaries, the effort is at governance. How best to control this appropriation of funds, work out minute details with regard to TAs and DAs, check expenditure incurred by the DIUs etc., have become the primary concerns of the State Office staff. There are also problems in communication as many SPDs who come on deputation are in-charge of two or three departments, simultaneously leading to a 'part-time' responsibility to the programme.

Inherent Contradictions

The State unit also suffers from a problem of role conflict. While MS, at the DIU level, subscribes to a participatory mode of management, where creative planning and innovative implementation are the tasks of the DIU, the State unit prioritises bureaucratic nitty-gritties. Minute details of the programme are handled at the State headquarters that severely impinge on the field staff and the DIU. Therefore, while talking of autonomy of the DIU in planning requirements for women of the area, the State unit questions or objects to feeding a battered Saheli for a few days. While talking of flexibility of the DIU in its varied activities, the

State unit frets over the 'recovery' of expenses of a cup of tea offered to the Sakhis and Sahayoginis during a six hour review meeting. The State Office has a formal and mechanical relationship with the field, and is primarily concerned with overseeing the observance of rules and regulations.

The MSP is one programme where the DIU, Sakhis and Sahayoginis have greater clarity of role, ideology and perspective than at the State level. The programme has reached a level where what is required is support in terms of finances, personnel, direction and expertise instead of suspicion and accusation. The existing staff is over-stretched making staff provision a priority, looking into the areas of projects undertaken. Administrative procedures need to be streamlined. It is also indicated that the practice of short term contracts is playing havoc with the programme leading to insecurity, lack of continuity, confusion, and shifts in perspective. It has been stated quite categorically that petty DA, TA disputes cause demoralization in the staff. Keeping in mind the quality of the work - flexibility in expenditure will have to be incorporated if the programme is to be made need based.

Lack of Visibility at the State Level

The MSP in Uttar Pradesh requires to make itself far more visible at the State level, so that its perspectives on women's development and education can be integrated at the policy level. Reaching out to academics, professionals, technocrats and bureaucrats for furthering the MS objectives and to gain institutional support has been limited. Poor communication and a severe lack of clarity on its role have led the State unit to largely ignore this area.

Lack of Mobility

The present structure provides limited possibilities to Sahayoginis and Sakhis for change or for taking on new roles. Having for the past five years mobilised women within her own cluster, the Sahayogini experiences stagnation and tiredness at having to merely repeat her supportive roles. Moving to work with other clusters and taking on responsibilities hitherto managed by the DIU would strengthen the programme and prevent stagnation and 'burnout'. The structure needs to respond to the new challenges facing it in order to keep the enthusiasm and spirit of its workers alive.

Limited Resources & Support in the District

The DIU, along with the DRG, is supposed to plan and give direction. But the DIU has always been understaffed with only one Resource Person, thus placing a tremendous

burden on that person. The one area where DIU has failed completely is in creating support structures and opening the MSP functionaries to outside ideas through interactions. Much effort is needed in strengthening the DIU.

Remuneration and Career Development

Whether one likes it or not, there is a duality of standards in employment and remuneration. While the expectation, and rightly so, is of a very high level of commitment, effectiveness and service, it is presumed that 'voluntarism' should substitute 'fair emoluments' or career development opportunity, so major an aspiration in the bureaucracy.

The debate about the exact character of MSP, governmental or non governmental, has existed from day one. Though rigidity, target orientation and bureaucratic red tape characterise government programmes, the dynamics at the grass roots in MSP are characterised by flexibility and autonomy. Even though the DIUs and Sahayoginis have experienced the constraints of the governmental style, the Sakhis have thankfully remained insulated. Individuals in the government have taken pains to ensure that MSP does not share the ills of other programmes by enlisting the support of non governmental organisations. The association of autonomous womens' groups is an indication of MSP's potential. The debate will continue, for MSP is a State run programme. The best bet however is for MSP to draw its own boundaries of flexibility, freedom and autonomy and allow for its further definition in a continuous dialectic with State bureaucracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation team felt personally enriched upon meeting the Sakhis and Sahayoginis, who were enthusiastic, motivated, aware and involved women of all ages. Moreover, it was startling to realise that the tiniest little spark is required to develop the potential in women with minimal education and exposure to the outside world. It is important to realize that MS has brought the Sakhis/Sahayoginis to a point where further inputs, knowledge, skills, support structures are essential. A number of areas of the programme need systematic and thorough examination, re-assessment and even re-definition, as the case may be:

Structure

1.1 Building a cluster level identity is an essential next step if Sanghas are to be effective, active and reach larger numbers of women. Gradually, efforts need to be made to build a block level organisational structure.

The process of organisation building requires a new dynamic vision. Appropriate structures need to be evolved through intensive discussions at the Sangha and cluster level.

This would require greater autonomy and devolution of power/ decision-making from the State to the DIUs and more specifically to Sakhis, Sahayoginis and Sangha women. Training, workshops and other activities need to planned at the cluster level.

1.2 The issue of sustainability with regard to the Mahila Sanghas needs to be taken up in MS on a priority basis. This would require far more in depth discussions, clarity of thought, training and interventions.

There is a need to expand and enlarge the concept of the Sangha, not just on immediate issues of redressal but on an ongoing basis.

1.3 Despite the MSP having been registered as an independent society, it remains a 'State' programme. The need for further independence and financial control is essential to maintain the effectiveness of the programme. To concretise this the Chairperson of the society should be a woman rather than the Education Secretary. This would be similar to the policy at the National Level, where the NRG is headed by a woman whose criterion for selection is her long involvement with the IWM.

1.4 Due to constant transfers, there are breaks in continuity at the State level. This severely limits the ability of the State office in understanding and determining needs, training areas and issues most relevant to the programme. Thus, continuity within the State Office is essential for focused and planned interventions in the future.

1.5 The structure needs to reorient in the direction of forming teams at the district level as well as at the State, which will undertake responsibility for initiating, sustaining and monitoring new components. These teams should be formed by including Sahayoginis, Anudeshikas, Sakhis, members of the DIUs and individual organisations working on these issues. DIUs too, would need far greater autonomy, especially in the areas of planning and implementation.

1.6 A State Resource Group which would encourage, critique and provide positive and ongoing inputs to the programme needs to be set up.

1.7 The State level team needs strengthening by employing personnel for the purposes of (a) training co-ordination; (b) documentation and information gathering/sharing; and (c) a field co-ordinator to monitor the programmes at the districts.

1.8 There is a need to facilitate mobility and change in roles within the structure of the MSP. If Sakhis and Sahayoginis whose abilities have grown considerably, continue to perform the same roles over a long period of time, stagnation - fatal to a programme such as this - is bound to set in.

1.9 It is imperative to deal with the issue of the Sakhi

honorarium, given the increasing demands made on her time and therefore on her ability to continue her regular remunerative work. Lessons need to be learnt from the WDP experience, where the issue has led to a great deal of bitterness and anger.

Training & Skill Development

2.1 It is important to recognise that training needs cannot be determined by the State Office. It can only respond to the demands made by the districts. In order to facilitate a cluster-level identity, training programmes will have to be planned by the block and district persons.

2.2 A programmatic review on training needs, its content, methodology and structure is required. There is a need at present to integrate empowerment, gender-based trainings with issue-specific and skill-based trainings.

2.3 Emphasis needs to be laid on training in the area of education and literacy. A comprehensive project that would cover the entire block, for intensive intervention in the field of education needs to be prepared.

2.4 A number of Sahayoginis have shown an inclination towards developing specialised skills in health, education, law and communication methodologies. These should be facilitated through training programmes in conjunction with other institutions, NGOs, etc.

2.5 The Panchayati Raj Bill makes provision for 33% reservations for women. In the current scenario, the MSP needs to take full advantage of this. Women with a feminist perspective participating within the structures of power, will necessarily make the panchayats far more sensitive to the needs and demands of women.

Organisational Structure

3.1 Apart from focusing on strengthening networking at district and State level, linkages with new groups is vital. Establishing informal linkages with other non-related government departments, professionals (doctors, lawyers, teachers, media persons, etc., universities, agricultural colleges and schools, can enhance the support structure by widening its base.

3.2 A reformulation of district resource groups is urgently called for.

3.3 MSP must begin articulating with and eliciting support from the women's movement, and that too not just from groups in Delhi who have been part of the MSP from its inception.

Evaluation, Documentation & Research

4.1 Methodology for evaluation should be worked out in considerable detail at all levels, especially so by the Sakhis, Sahayoginis and the DIU as to what kind of objective analysis they would benefit by in the short and long run. There is a need for a system of self-evaluation which would feed into a continuous process of learning.

4.2 A State level workshop must be organised to reflect on the present status of documentation, and also to identify future areas of intervention and needs.

4.3 To provide validity and develop a conceptual understanding, action-research projects need to be undertaken. A body of knowledge needs to be evolved for this, through the MSP collaborating with individuals and research organisations. This would also help in expanding the information base of MSP

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