

"TOGETHER WE ARE POWERFUL"
voices from the mahila sanghas

**REPORT OF THE INDO-DUTCH EVALUATION
OF THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME
JANUARY 1997**

MAIN REPORT

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**INDO-DUTCH EVALUATION OF THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME
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MAIN REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The task of the evaluation mission

The task of the Indo-Dutch evaluation mission was

- to review the progress of the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and
- to assess and analyse processes of empowerment at the sangha level.

In addition to this the mission was asked to look into financial management issues.

For the evaluation a set of leading questions have been formulated by the National Programme Office related to, among others,

- the impact of the programme on women's personal and family life in terms of women's autonomy,
- the ability of the programme
 - . to create a foundation for a grass-roots level women's movement,
 - . to facilitate women's political participation,
 - . to evolve a focus on women's legal rights,
 - . to address women's issues cutting across caste and class divides;
- the emerging trends in terms of pace, growth and impact;
- the interface of Mahila Samakhya with other educational programmes like DPEP;
- the adequacy of the reporting system in providing insight into the programme;
- the expansion strategies in Mahila Samakhya.

To guide the evaluation a set of parameters in the form of a matrix has been developed by a committee of State Programme Directors. The Terms of Reference including the matrix are attached to this report (ANNEX I).

The findings, joint conclusions and recommendations of the mission based on the field visits to various districts in four states: Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh are presented in the Main Report. The findings and conclusions for each of the States visited are reported in supplementary reports, Supplement A (Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh), B (Gujarat) and D (Karnataka).

Main findings and conclusions

Mahila Samakhya has taken a formidable task upon its shoulders and has succeeded in reaching out to women who have otherwise remained unreached, invisible and voiceless. From the first attempts to establish rapport with the poorest women in the villages, to gain their trust and confidence in a sometimes hostile environment, to start a process off through collective reflection, decision making, planning and concerted action, women's collectives have emerged (or are emerging) in more than 2500 rural villages in the areas covered by the Dutch assisted Programme. Including the number of villages reached under other programmes (UPEFA, Bihar Education Project, DPEP MP) the Mahila Samakhya coverage reaches more than 4800 villages. The scale of the outreach may perhaps be modest in respect to the entire nation, but it is larger than of most NGOs.

- The Mahila Samakhya Programme has empowered women all along the line, particularly the sahayoginis and sakhis. The hopes and expectations of village women and the visible energy speaks volumes of the programme. Women testify to the change they have experienced in their

lives in terms of self-esteem, human dignity and worth, as well as increased bargaining power in the community and in their families. They reported better health and education for their children. Sangha women have begun to assert their rights to control their lives. The impact of the Mahila Samakhya on the women in the sanghas is that women are now able to break out of both the physical, emotional and cultural barriers that confined them to their homes. Their increasing mobility, visibility, bargaining power and analytical-critical awareness of the environment are clearly evident. They are using their bargaining powers to access resources and schemes thereby improving the quality of life. Women have started conquering new public spaces through their involvement in the Panchayati Raj elections as voters and as candidates, and through their initiatives in setting up public support structures at the Block or cluster level such as a Women's court or a Mahila Samakhya Bank. And women are occupying new economic spaces by entering into new occupations like e.g. hand-pump mechanics or craftswomen. Their new roles seem to indirectly raise their status in the family.

- Mahila Samakhya is a national programme of the Government of India. The Programme is a translation in operational terms of the national policy with regard to the role of education in supporting women's empowerment and securing a status of equality. The Programme is characterised by its flexibility and its process-oriented approach without pre-set targets. The Government of India and the staff involved in the implementation of the Programme, the resource persons and activists supporting the Programme are to be given credit for having found successful ways of coping with the challenges of combining flexibility with the inherent rigidity existing within governmental structures. In the seven years of its existence the Mahila Samakhya Programme with its organisational set-up has shown that it can be a viable model for similar government programmes requiring flexibility and responsiveness to emerging processes from the grass-roots, if the basic principles of the programme are being ensured and adhered to.

- The strength of the Mahila Samakhya Programme lies in its basic philosophical principles (translated into a set of non-negotiable principles which guide the programme implementation) and its emphasis on a non-target, but process orientation whereby 'time' and 'space' are crucial for women to be able to analyse their situations, to articulate their priorities and needs, and to plan and initiate changes. The inherent flexibility precludes any form of blueprint development process or standard model. The Programme, as could be observed in the field, shows that the process of women's empowerment evolves along multiple paths, which differ per State and within the States. In spite of the differences and variations the mahila sanghas in all States have become visible and a 'power to reckon with' in the community, the village, the block and the districts. The fact that the programme allows for this flexibility is one of the major strengths, if it is combined with clarity of vision and a strong sense of direction.

- The Mahila Samakhya approach questions and challenges the very government structures of which it is a part. Although it is a government programme it is already slowly influencing the existing structures and has potential for providing new directions for the future.

- Mahila Samakhya has become recognised as an innovative programme that effectively reaches out towards women who belong to the poorest and marginal groups in the societal structure. And the Programme extends into areas where other development programmes and schemes have not been able to reach. Because of its presence and increased visibility Mahila Samakhya is being seen as a channel for linkages to social and economic development, while it also provides channels of information to government officials about issues which may have remained invisible. The inherent possibility that Mahila Samakhya becomes utilised as a channel for launching programmes without a proper understanding of the Mahila Samakhya philosophy and principles needs to be guarded against. The non-negotiable principles of MS provide a good basis for working out clear terms of partnership for the co-operation with other programmes.

- The National Resource Group (NRG) plays an important role in the MS structure and is an asset to the programme. It consists of experienced pool of highly qualified resource persons and activists. The NRG contributes to the programme implementation as a think-tank, a reflection and feedback mechanism and source of support to the State programmes, without direct interference in the programme implementation. NRG members are represented in the Executive Councils where policy decisions are taken and annual plans/budgets approved. The NRG played an important role

in the National Evaluation in 1993, in the thinking about and the development of indicators for following the progress of the empowerment processes. And recently the NRG has come out with studies and papers which will provide an input in the reflection & planning meetings within the implementation teams in the preparation of their future strategies. There have been various inputs from individual NRG members in e.g. training and for the study on the development of the mahila sanghas. Such interactions are highly appreciated by DIU staff and sahayoginis. Without violating principle of autonomy at State and lower levels the support from the NRG could be extended by providing a channel through which DIU staff could benefit more from direct interactions with members of the NRG for example for backstopping, technical assistance, development of innovative and combined strategies to meet new challenges and deal with new issues arising from the sanghas at a more strategic level.

- Mahila Samakhya as a catalyst for women's empowerment and for educational innovations is often perceived as a time-bound project which needs to phase itself out. However, the process of empowerment follows its own pace and by definition cannot be not time-bound. The role of the Mahila Samakhya in facilitating and sustaining women's development processes keeps changing in response to new issues arising from the mahila sanghas in their changing socio-political and economic environments. And now the time has come that Mahila Samakhya has to think seriously about defining a new relationship and role with regard to sanghas which have become independent from regular sahayogini support in order to meet their demands for sustaining and furthering their empowerment/learning processes. This has implications for the investment in human resources, capacity building and professional development of the staff at all levels in order to remain responsive the demands from the sanghas to further their knowledge and understanding, explore new options and opportunities and to learn new skills in order to implement their own agendas for development. The recommendation for the creation of a network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres has to be regarded in this context.

- It is the joint conclusion of the mission that the Mahila Samakhya has a great potential for effecting social change. It has to continue and grow with a perspective on a long term development towards equality, empowerment of women and gender justice. This development, given the changing demands of the programme may need a greater degree of systematisation and structuring in order to maintain its identity as an empowerment programme and to provide some direction. A mechanism for this is the formulation of forward-looking strategic (3 to 5 year) development plans for each District/State and the identification of a set of priority areas which will give coherence to the District and State programmes. In some districts the process of focusing the programme around such priority areas is already taking place: e.g. social justice and legal rights, women's (reproductive) health, education for equality and empowerment of women and girls, economic empowerment of women with capacity building and skill training for strengthening women's economic self-reliance. The prioritisation cannot be imposed from above but is to emerge from the issues raised at the sangha level, the socio-economic and cultural conditions and the experience gained over the years. Dealing with these focal points more consistently from a perspective of gender justice could help in enabling the programme to move beyond responding to women's practical needs and problem solving, and to address the issues from a more strategic perspective, maintaining the centrality of women's empowerment. This will require a continuing investment in human capacity building and a training policy which allows for renewal, furthering perspective building based on new experiences and understandings of gender.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Continuation of the Programme

1. Given its commitment to the empowerment of women through education and the successful seven years experience of the Mahila Samakhya Programme the Government of India is recommended to *continue the Programme and expand its outreach within the States wherein the Programme is currently being implemented as well as in new States*. The GOI is thereby to ensure that the philosophy of Mahila Samakhya, its operational strategy and its inherent flexibility, which are the foundation of its success, are being adhered to.

2. *The Government of the Netherlands is recommended to extend its financial support to the Mahila Samakhya Programme after the expiration of the current agreement with the Government of India by the end of 1997, for at least another period of five years. As it is expected that only part of the expenses can be met from the under-utilised funds under the current (1992 - 1997 phase) the Government of the Netherlands is advised to consider a possible increase of the funds to be committed for the 1998-2002/3 phase, in accordance with the recalculation of the budget.*

3. The National Programme Office of Mahila Samakhya together with the concerned State Programme Offices are recommended to *review and recalculate the entire financial scheme of the Programme and revise the five-year budget (1998 - 2002/3)*. This revision is to be based on a review, updating and recalculation of

- the unit costs for programme activities and provisions, taking into account inflation correction and costs changes,
- the salary structure and introduction of an differentiated salary structure for sahayoginis and programme staff,

and include

- adequate provisions for professional development of programme staff (including sahayoginis).

The recalculated budget should also take into account the expansion of the programme at different levels (block, district, new districts) within the state, and for the expansion into new States.

Implementation & Human Resources

4. The current status of the Programme with its plans for expansion, the expected differentiation related to the different stages of sangha development, the increasing emphasis on education for empowerment and education of (girl)children, requires *longer term investment in human resources and long term human resources development planning*, which provides mobility, new options and career paths for e.g. sahayoginis. Mahila Samakhya is recommended to *review its staffing and human resources development policies* including requirements and procedures for staff recruitment. The latter are to *ensure that qualified persons are appointed* who have the competencies, professional background, field experience and attitude required for clearly specified staff functions.

5. Related to this Mahila Samakhya is to *review its training policy and provide for more staff training at all levels of the implementation structure in order to ensure reinforcement of conceptual clarity, perspective building, renewal and re-orientation as well as professional and skills development*. In order to avoid the risk of stagnation of the growth of the empowerment processes at the sangha level and to move beyond responding to rural women's basic needs for survival and improvement of their daily lives, a more conscious and deliberate effort is needed on building new perspectives based on gender justice and women's human rights. Sangha women need new perspectives to be aware of options available to them and this reflects on the training and capacities of the catalysts, e.g. the sangha activists, the sahayoginis and those who train them. *The staff of the Mahila Samakhya at every level need much more training and a sharpening of their conceptual philosophical perspective in order to maintain the qualitative difference of Mahila Samakhya from other rural development or poverty alleviation programmes.*

Induction training which includes attention to self development, perspective building and the Mahila Samakhya philosophy, and skills is to be provided for all new staff at the State and District Offices. More emphasis needs to be given to training in management skills, conflict handling, planning and for building professional capacities for sahayoginis, resource persons, consultants, Programme Co-ordinators etc. Training in pedagogy, child development, didactical skills and perspective building is required for MSK teaching staff, literacy and childcare centre teachers. The staff training is also to include periodic re-orientation and reflection, as well as exposure and interaction with the women's movement and with resource persons and organisations outside the MS framework in order to build further strength and solidarity and to develop a common framework for understanding gender.

Empowerment at sangha level

6. For enhancement of the sangha strength and the empowerment processes within the sanghas more training is to be directed at the sangha level. Mahila Samakhya is to develop a *training strategy for learning/training programmes with women within the sanghas* which have an in-built gender perspective and are aimed at reinforcing the processes of empowerment and self reliance of and within the sanghas.

7. For the further development of empowerment strategies at the sangha level and for the development of strategies for sustaining the empowerment /learning processes of the 'independent' sanghas, more insight is needed in the internal dynamics of the sangha development and the dimensions of the empowerment processes of and among women at the sangha level. It is recommended to carry out an *in-depth study* in a sample of sanghas focused *on the internal and external dynamics guiding the processes within the sangha*. The study could further provide insight in e.g.

- . the understanding of sangha women of concepts like empowerment, social justice and equality, and their perception of what a mahila sangha is and could be;
- . their views on how the sangha has impacted their lives personally, within their families and in the community;
- . their experiences and perceptions of the changes in the relationships and power structures within their families and in the community;
- . their views on their potential, individually and collectively through the sangha, to affect and change the prevailing power-relations within their families, in the community and beyond,
- . their ideas about sharing power and responsibilities within the sangha and in their families;
- . their views on breaking caste, class and age barriers among women in the village; as well as
- . their views on the future development and growth of the sangha at village level and within a larger network of similar sanghas.

The study would have to be based on an action oriented and participatory approach with sufficient time and space for joint reflection and analysis, and for establishing rapport and mutual understanding.

Collaboration for economic empowerment of women

8. Dealing with the recurring economic demands of women is an area for which Mahila Samakhya has not yet found a suitable answer, nor has it been able to clearly define its role. The economic empowerment of women is an area which needs further thinking and strategizing. *With its clear focus on education for women's empowerment Mahila Samakhya is to play the role as catalyst, by providing a channel of information for sangha women on various schemes and services, by assisting women in analysing their economic conditions, needs and priorities, by facilitating (skills/vocational) training for economic development, and by empowering the sanghas to negotiate on their own terms.* However, *as an education programme Mahila Samakhya is not to become involved in setting up income generating activities, savings and credit schemes or Women's Banks.* The Mahila Samakhya Programme can facilitate access to organisations (governmental and non-governmental) which can provide the required professional inputs and experience. For that Mahila Samakhya can *focus on more active exploration into the possibilities for capacity building and vocational skills training, and training for strengthening economic support structures initiated by women.* Sangha women who want to engage in economic/income generating activities could be encouraged to set up and manage their own societies like the Society of Women Handpump Mechanics 'Vandana' in Banda District.

9. Besides this, Mahila Samakhya is recommended to become more active in seeking *collaboration with programmes for economic/rural/agricultural and environmental development* based on a participatory approach. The Mahila Samakhya Programme has been able to build a foundation for participatory approaches in rural, environmental and social development including health and education. It can facilitate access to such programmes and encourage rural

development programmes with an participatory approach to work in areas where Mahila Samakhya already has a presence.

Expansion strategies

10. The current situation with sanghas in different stages of strength (formation stage, consolidation stage, weakened, strong) calls for the formulation of *diversified, multi-stranded expansion strategies* which include

- capacity building for self reliance of the existing/older sanghas and de-linking from the strong sanghas
- promoting sanghas to become a community forum of women across caste, class or religious divides,
- strengthening networking among sanghas and the formation of cluster groups,
- strengthening and building of support structures at the block level,
- forming new sanghas in areas surrounding the clusters wherein Mahila Samakhya already exists,
- involving the old sanghas and clusters in the formation and strengthening of new sanghas, and for new districts
- selection to be based on transparent criteria e.g. poverty indicators, indicators for gender equality, female literacy rates, potential for linking up with DPEP and/or other schemes for poverty alleviation and socio-economic development,
- ensuring that staff and necessary infra-structure are in place and well prepared/trained before starting the activities in the new districts.

The expansion strategies are to include attention to the human resources component and capacity building for new and diversified roles at all levels of the Programme structure.

11. Related to the above Mahila Samakhya is to develop an *appropriate strategy for working in areas with mixed economies*, characterized by exposure to many external factors due to labour migration and exposure to urban life styles and attitudes, increased commercialism etc. Mahila Samakhya needs to take a decision on its strategy, its options and potential to achieve results. The situation may require a special kind of attention, closer cooperation with other programmes, focusing exclusively on social issues and training for capacity building, and leaving the running of economic schemes to other organisations.

Mahila Shikshana Kendras

12. The Mahila Shikshana Kendras fulfil a crucial role in providing alternative educational opportunities for teenage girls (and women) who otherwise remain unreached by the mainstream education system. Moreover, the MSK has a great potential for becoming a key institution for the creation of female cadre of future change agents for rural development. Yet in all States there is a need for development of a clearer forward looking vision for the Mahila (Balika) Shikshana Kendras, which gives direction to its mission and objectives, its curriculum, its teacher training needs and future strategies regarding the further development of (new) MSKs in the States. Mahila Samakhya is recommended to *organise an inter-state workshop on the Mahila Shikshana Kendras and the pedagogical/didactical requirements, which can be based on the report from the study done by the National Institute of Adult Education*. This is not to imply that the outcome of the workshop should be one uniform model, but the various options and modalities could be discussed with the perspective of building a vision and direction for the future role of the MSKs and their role in relation to the Mahila Samakhya philosophy and programme.

Interface with DPEP

13. The recommendations from the Workshop on the DPEP-MS Interface organised by the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resources development on July 11 1996 provide basic guidelines for further *collaboration in the field between the District Primary Education*

Programmes (DPEP) and the Mahila Samakhya Programme at the district and at State levels. In practice no follow-up has been given to these recommendations as yet. The collaboration needs to be given concrete shape in the form of e.g. a memorandum of understanding between the programmes and concrete workplans for implementation of the programmes in the respective districts.

In all four States the District Primary Education Programme is to expand into Districts covered by Mahila Samakhya. This offers an opportunity for both programmes to benefit from mutual cooperation. In order to ensue synergy it is recommended *to establish a joint MS-DPEP task force at State as well as at District levels* with the aim of e.g.

- increasing access to and retention in primary & continuing education of children and especially girls: sanghas could play a catalyst role in this and extend their activities across the entire community (of women);
- ensuring quality learning that is meaningful and gender relevant in the local environment: e.g. sanghas being represented in the VECs and PTAs for monitoring children's and teachers attendance as well as ensuring quality and meaningful learning; involving sahayoginis and MS/NFE teachers in training of VECs;
- making teaching/instruction gender relevant by involving Mahila Samakhya (education resource persons, sahayoginis and NFE/MSK teachers) in the training of teachers;
- joint development and sharing of learning materials, books and learning aids for formal as well as non-formal education and making use of the Mahila Samakhya experience in using songs, oral traditions and knowledge, drama, games and play;
- joint development of alternate forms of schooling for special groups, who are otherwise neglected by the mainstream school system based on models developed by Mahila Samakhya for NFE and MSK.

Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres

14. In line with the future developments of the programme, its new directions and the increasingly differentiating needs of sanghas, as well as the greater focus on the identity of Mahila Samakhya as an education Programme and the on-going debate about the establishment of Resource Centres Mahila Samakhya is recommended to consider the feasibility of *converting the DIUs and SPOs into a network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres with branches at Block and cluster levels*. These Resource Centres could provide or facilitate access to training resources (process, perspective building, issues based and/or training of trainers), assist in development of training curricula and manuals, assist in further development of effective training/learning methods as well as gender sensitive learning materials for self-directed learning at sangha level. The Resource Centres could have a role in collecting, converting and disseminating relevant information, in documentation and research, in dissemination of newsletters, in advocacy and influencing policy decisions and their implementation etc. And the centres could provide social, legal, job-career counselling as well as training and library facilities. These Resource Centres will provide a multi-purpose support network which can be flexible and responsive to the needs of the Programme and varied processes in the field. The development of this support structure will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy in line with the recommendation under 4 and 5 above.

Technical Assistance

15. Technical Assistance can play an important role in facilitating further capacity development of functionaries in the programme at different levels such as exposure visits to and interaction with programmes in other countries, training at relevant institutes abroad, participation in international conferences and seminars, hosting seminars and workshops on issues relating to women's education empowerment and development. The optimal utilisation of the TA provision requires that the *information on the provision will be shared with the States at all levels, and that criteria and guidelines be prepared* and agreed upon, so that is clear at all levels how to access and benefit from the available provision.

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MAIN REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Programme

The Mahila Samakhya Programme or 'Education for Women's Equality' was started in 1988/9. It is a Programme of the National Government of India which was designed in response to the National Policy on Education 1986 regarding education as an agent of change in the status of women. The Programme aims at empowering women by the creation of a conducive environment and generating a demand for learning. The main characteristics of the Programme are its philosophy based on women's equality and social justice, its process orientation, flexibility in structure and mode of operation, its contextuality and responsiveness to local conditions, a participatory ethos or culture and decentralised decision making. The inherent flexibility and autonomy at State level encourages the emergence of multiple options and modes of operation for each State and District Programme in response to the prevailing conditions and the issues raised by women.

The Programme was implemented first in three States: Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh through autonomous State Societies. From 1992, after the first pilot phase, the Programme was extended to Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and later in Madhya Pradesh and Assam. The Government of The Netherlands has provided financial assistance to the Government of India for Programme since 1989. The Agreement between the two governments covers the implementation of Mahila Samakhya in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. In the other States the Programme is implemented under different schemes: the Bihar Education Project, and the District Primary Education Project in Madhya Pradesh. In Uttar Pradesh the Mahila Samakhya Programme is being extended in new districts under the EFA Programme. The current Agreement between the Government of India and The Netherlands covers the 1993-1997 period.

The design of the Mahila Samakhya Programme provides for periodic evaluations or reviews by teams of external experts. The last joint Indo-Dutch evaluation took place in 1991. A National Evaluation was carried out in 1993/4 by a team of 15 Indian experts. And this report presents the outcomes of the joint Indo-Dutch review mission which took place in January 1997.

The evaluation team

The evaluation was carried out by two Indian and two Dutch senior experts who are familiar with gender issues and who are sensitive to the process orientation and philosophy of Mahila Samakhya. One member of the team participated in the Indo-Dutch evaluation of 1991. One of the Dutch team members is a financial expert who has been given the assignment to look into the financial management of the Programme.

The task of the evaluation mission

The task of the Indo-Dutch evaluation mission was

- to review the progress of the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and
- to assess and analyse processes of empowerment at the sangha level.

In addition to this the mission was asked to look into financial management issues.

For the evaluation a set of leading questions have been formulated by the National Programme Office related to among others

- the impact of the programme on women's personal and family life in terms of women's autonomy,
- the ability of the programme
 - . to create a foundation for a grass-roots level women's movement,
 - . to facilitate women's political participation,
 - . to evolve a focus on women's legal rights,
 - . to address women's issues cutting across caste and class divides;
- the emerging trends in terms of pace, growth and impact;
- the interface of Mahila Samakhya with other educational programmes like DPEP;
- the adequacy of the reporting system in providing insight into the programme;
- the expansion strategies in Mahila Samakhya.

To guide the evaluation a set of parameters in the form of a matrix has been developed by a committee of State Programme Directors with the guidance from the National Resource Group and with inputs from preparatory work done by an external consultant. The Terms of Reference including the matrix are attached to this report (ANNEX I).

Other preparations for the Indo-Dutch evaluation included a number of studies initiated by the National Resource Group (NRG) on various aspects of the Programme such as the study on ~~Empowerment through the Mahila Sanghas~~, the study on Feminist Training in Mahila Samakhya and a study on the Mahila Shiksan Kendras. In July 1996 the Department of Education (Ministry of Human Resources Development) has organised a national level workshop on the interface between the Mahila Samakhya Programme and the District Primary Education Programmes to explore areas of mutual interest and co-operation. The reports of this workshop and the NRG studies together with the Progress Reports, National and State Overviews, case studies written for the International Conference on Mahila Samakhya (1995) and some external studies have been made available to the members of the evaluation team.

Women's empowerment

In the context of the Mahila Samakhya Programme and the Terms of Reference empowerment of women refers to the process whereby women gradually take more control over their lives, are able to negotiate with society from a position of strength, gain access to and control of resources, participate in political processes and challenge existing power structures. It implies a process of personal and collective development, which includes: gaining self-respect and a sense of worth, gaining confidence and courage to challenge authority structures, developing a shared identity as women, building of inner and collective strength in order to be able to influence social and political processes and the direction of social change.

The area of women's empowerment has many dimensions which interact and are related to the autonomy concept in terms of control over one's life and ability to take decisions independently. They refer women's identity, dignity and self-respect, to women's reproductive rights and control over their own lives, to economic and social justice and right to have access to and control of economic resources, and to political empowerment and women's right to vote, to participate in decision making and to influence the direction of societal development. The process of women's empowerment in Mahila Samakhya is seen in relation to equality, social justice and women's legal and human rights.

The execution of the mission

The evaluation mission took place within a period of two and a half weeks between January 2 and 18, and covered the four States where the programme is being implemented under the agreement between the Governments of India and The Netherlands. Two members of the evaluation team, Vasantha Kannabiran and Dana Broft, visited Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Leela Gulati and Claudine Helleman visited Karnataka and Gujarat. Within each State the visits in the field took not longer than five days, which required at times ~~again~~ splitting up of the teams in order to get a wider coverage or to be able to pay attention to ~~to~~ specific aspects of our assignment, such as the

financial management.

The programmes for the visits to the districts have been prepared by the State and District teams. They have taken a lot of effort to include a varied scope of field encounters in order to give us the opportunity for meetings with sangha women, sakhis, sahayoginis, teachers, resource persons, representatives of partner organisations, government officers, DIU and SPO staff, as well as representatives from the Executive Councils, education officers and friends of Mahila Samakhya. It also provided us with the opportunity to be exposed to different aspects of the Programme at different levels. This necessarily created timing problems given the short time period for the visit, long distances to cover between various meetings, and the need not to short cut discussions once interesting points were coming up.

The shortage of time did not allow us to engage in an in-depth assessment of the Programme, doing justice to all of its facets. We feel that a brief external evaluation is not suitable for getting an insight into the internal dynamics of the sangha development and the dimensions of the empowerment processes of and among women at the sangha level. The entire programme evolves around the processes within and the development of the sangha and that is the node we were unable to fully uncover. And unfortunately, there was no time left during the evaluation period for looking at the National level apart from the briefing meetings, which have been organised at the beginning and the end of the mission period. A visit to the Netherlands Embassy after the mission period made it possible to look into some financial matters and have a meeting with the Financial Controller.

Although we have talked to many persons and were able to see as much as could be done given the short period of time, we have not been able to fully cover the entirety of the Programme. In the analysis we were able to refer to the documentation made available to us in the form of reports and case-studies which provided supplementary information and helped to place our observations and findings in a broader perspective.

Reports

After the visit to the field we prepared a working paper based upon the preliminary findings and conclusions from the field visits. The paper was presented and discussed in a final meeting with the Education Secretary (MHRD), the joint Secretary Department of Education (MHRD) and senior Education Officers, the National Programme Director and the National Resource Persons, members of the National Resource Group and representatives from the Royal Netherlands Embassy. Based on the discussion we formulated the Aide Memoire which was presented to the Department of Education and the Royal Netherlands Embassy on January 23, before we dispersed to our respective home places. The findings, joint conclusions and recommendations of the mission based on the field visits to various districts in the four States (Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh) are presented in the Main Report. They do not deviate very much from the preliminary conclusions in the Aide Memoire which is now integrated in the main text, elaborated and complemented with a set of main recommendations. These recommendations are presented in the Executive Summary.

The findings and conclusions for the States visited, as well as the findings on financial management are reported separately in Supplement A (Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh), B (Gujarat) and C (Karnataka). These reports are supplementary to the Main Report and provide more detailed findings related to various aspects of the Programme, which could be observed during the field visits and discussed with the State teams. However, these supplementary reports are not to be seen as evaluation reports of the individual State Programmes. The supplementary reports have been compiled and written by individual team members in consultation with and with contributions from her partner in the field. Each report has its own style and each report reflects a different emphasis and perspective on the programme depending on the situation encountered and the professional/personal point of view of the authors. In this respect the reports complement each other and some of the observations made in one State could be State specific or they could just as well apply to another State as well. No attempt has been made to streamline the State reports as the contents depend on the visit programmes and meetings which were different in each of the

States visited.

The circumstances

Something need to be mentioned about the circumstances under which we have been doing this assignment and which undoubtedly have affected the outcomes of the mission, especially in terms of depth of our assessments. The main questions of the Terms of Reference for the evaluation call for participatory methodology, which would have been in line with the basic Mahila Samakhya philosophy and principles. However, the organisation of the evaluation, its time frame, the pre-planned visits and meetings, and its output orientation precluded a truly participatory approach. The core elements of the Mahila Samakhya approach in terms of 'time', 'space', (collective) 'process' and 'reflection' were virtually absent and not provided for in the evaluation set-up. This has put limits to our ability to co-ordinate and communicate as a team, to develop a common and participatory methodology, to share and reflect on our findings. More importantly, it has also put limits to the quality and depth of our interactions in the field with the sanghas, the district, state and national teams. More time for and better planned interactions at various levels could have enriched our findings. We feel that this external evaluation cannot match the outcomes of the National Evaluation which included 15 evaluators, covered three States and allowed for a two to three weeks field visits in each State.

In spite of these limitations it has to be stated that in most cases we were met with friendly and open attitudes. We felt that the opportunity given to share experiences and ideas has been welcomed and appreciated at different levels (women, sakhis, sahayoginis, DIU staff, NGO partners, State level officers). Evaluations like this sometimes become loaded with high expectations, which cannot always be met fully, especially not in situations where time is short, the programme is as complex as Mahila Samakhya. One of the reasons being that outcomes of the external evaluation are perhaps directed more at the perspective of the parties commissioning the evaluation instead of it being directed at and providing solutions for the immediate needs and questions facing the implementers in the field and, mostly, the sangha women. Nevertheless we do hope that our findings and recommendations will provide for conditions that allow for 'space' and opportunities to give attention to and address the major questions at the field level in the different States.

To take part in an evaluation of a Programme like Mahila Samakhya is an exhilarating experience, particularly if one has been given the privilege of being with and following the Programme over a longer period of time and witness its progress and how it has affected the sangha women in terms of self esteem, confidence, energy and strength. We are grateful to the Government of India through the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development and to the Government of The Netherlands through the Netherlands Embassy for the opportunity given to be part of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. And we would like to express our thanks and appreciation to all persons within and outside the Mahila Samakhya network who were willing to share their views and who have contributed to our insight in and assessment of the Programme.

In spite of the shortcomings we hope that our findings and recommendations will make a meaningful contribution to the discussions and the development of strategies for the furthering of the empowerment processes in the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

CHAPTER 1. FINDINGS RELATED TO THE IMPACT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAMME

As an education programme of the National Government of India Mahila Samakhya is unique in its ideologically based approach aimed at initiating and sustaining a process of empowerment. The main target group are rural women living under conditions of poverty and marginalisation from societal, political and economic developments, and living in a social environment dominated by the prevailing caste system and a patriarchal structure. The Programme aims at creating conditions - in terms of providing 'time', 'space' and an emotionally safe environment - for women to realise a collective process of empowerment, enabling them to manage their own lives, plan their futures and take action to change their social and material environments.

The main characteristics of the Programme are its philosophy based on women's equality and social justice, its process orientation, flexibility in structure and mode of operation, contextuality and responsiveness to local conditions, a participatory ethos or culture and decentralised decision making. The inherent flexibility and autonomy at State level encourages the emergence of multiple options and modes of operation for each State and District Programme in response to the prevailing conditions and the issues raised by women. This flexibility combined with clarity of vision and strong sense of direction is one of the strengths of the Mahila Samakhya Programme formula.

The thrust of the Programme is on the building of village-level mahila sanghas or women's collectives as a forum for sharing experiences and ideas, for learning and building knowledge, for raising and discussing common issues, for joint decision making, planning and taking action, and for shouldering joint responsibilities for management of collective initiatives such as a childcare centre, a savings scheme or a sangha hut. Ultimately the sangha collective is the epicentre which gives direction to the process of empowerment and which generates self-directed development and learning processes.

The formation of a sangha is a process of building solidarity and strength among women. In this process of building solidarity collective action and collective struggle appear to be the major binding factors. Concrete achievements and successes are important in creating and reinforcing women's self-confidence. The process of sangha formation takes its own time and experience has learned that it cannot be short circuited nor hurried by external factors without the risk of interrupting the fragile bonding and breaking the process.

Given this Mahila Samakhya has taken a formidable task upon its shoulders and has succeeded in reaching out to women who have otherwise remained un-reached, invisible and voiceless. From the first attempts to establish rapport with the poorest women in the villages, to gain their trust and confidence in a sometimes hostile environment, to start a process off through collective reflection, decision making, planning and concerted action, women's collectives have emerged (or are emerging) in more than 2500 rural villages in the areas covered by the Dutch assisted Programme. Including the number of villages reached under other programmes (UPEFA, Bihar Education Project, DPEP MP) the Mahila Samakhya coverage reaches more than 4800 villages. The scale of the outreach may perhaps be modest in respect to the entire nation, but it is larger than of most NGOs.

1.1 The impact of Mahila Samakhya on women's personal and family lives

The impact of the Mahila Samakhya programme is the most visible and strongest in the formation of women's collectives at the village level. It has empowered women all along the line, particularly the sahayoginis and sakhis. The hopes and expectations of village women and the visible energy speaks volumes of the programme. Women testify to the change they have experienced in their lives in terms of self-esteem, human dignity and worth, as well as increased bargaining power in the community and in their families.

Women at meetings reported that they had gained courage and increased confidence to confront their families and assert their rights to mobility and the time and space to come together. Women reported the enormous strength they draw from the sangha and its solidarity in solving their

personal problems. The mission is impressed with the capacity of the sangha women to organise their meetings, conduct them efficiently, manage their funds and planning their development for the future. Women who have been in the literacy classes show their pride in being able to sign their names, read words, recognise numbers and read their saving accounts. They have been able to stop their men from using the scarce money on liquor and reported better health and education for their children. Sangha women have begun to assert their rights to control their lives.

The impact of the Mahila Samakhya on the women in the sanghas is that women are now able to break out of the physical, emotional and cultural barriers that confined them to their homes. Their increasing mobility, visibility, bargaining power and analytical-critical awareness of the environment are clearly evident. They are using their bargaining powers to access resources and schemes thereby improving the quality of life. Women have started conquering new public spaces through their involvement in the Panchayati Raj elections as voters and as candidates, and through their initiatives in setting up public support structures at the Block or cluster level such as a Women's court or a Mahila Samakhya Bank. And women are occupying new economic spaces by entering into occupations like e.g. hand-pump mechanics or craftswomen.

The new public spaces that women occupy as a result of Mahila Samakhya and their new roles seem to indirectly raise their status in the family. While culturally the issue of equality / power within the family is a contentious one, the public recognition seems to favourably impact their personal and family lives to a larger degree. This has the potential for a spread as it provides role models and alternatives to women outside the sanghas.

In the meetings with the sanghas the women were impressively articulate and powerful. Often, however, the spokes women were mainly the women who have attended the sakhi training. Questions can be raised as to what extent they have been able to share what they have learned with the sangha women and to which extent their empowerment has percolated down to the women in the sangha. Moreover, a long term perspective on sustaining the empowerment processes of and within the sanghas is absent. Therefore the internal training system which needs to be made more strategically oriented towards capacity and perspective building of women in the sanghas.

1.2 Towards a grassroots level women's movement, women's political participation and women's rights

Mahila Samakhya has been able to lay the ground for a grassroots level women's movement in most areas it is working in. This is largely in terms of mobilising women around their basic survival needs and to access the resources and infrastructure. Given the present socio political environment where women are entering spaces created for them, Mahila Samakhya has been able to build their capacities and train women to participate effectively in forums like the Panchayati Raj. The Mahila Samakhya sanghas are beginning to network and effectively lobby with the women elected to secure their interest.

Mahila Samakhya has successfully dealt with the issues related to needs raised by women which are based on their experienced realities. Women define and organise themselves around their survival issues and have not only found solutions but have started building their own institutions. In some districts women have begun to understand their 'personal' problems related to violence in the family as legal issues. The establishment of e.g. the Nari Adalats or women's courts are an example of women moving into asserting and using their legal rights. In the political sphere women are moving into the Panchayati Raj and claim their spaces.

Mahila Samakhya could play a more active role in facilitating linkages between the sangha women and the women's movement and organisations in the districts and at State and (inter)national levels.

1.3 Cutting across caste and class divides

Mahila Samakhya has been successfully addressing women's issues within specific caste and income groups. As yet it has not met with equal success in breaking the age, marital status, class and caste barriers in all the states and districts. There are varying degrees of success in different states. In some areas sanghas unintentional have become restricted to specific caste groups. There are also many examples of sanghas where women from different religious and caste groups have joined. In some villages where the caste barriers are very strong, women from other caste groups bring their personal issues before the sangha for justice and action. And in many cases women from other caste groups attend and join in the meetings without being an 'official' member of the sangha. Where water is a community issue the maintenance of hand-pumps has become a channel for breaking caste barriers. The literacy centres, child-care centres and non-formal education (NFE) centres for children are forums where women from various caste and religious backgrounds come together. Apart from economic reasons the mission has not come across other serious constraints from the side of the sangha women to have women from other groups join the sangha. It seems that women's personal problems, health issues, education and other common interests provide spaces for women from different backgrounds to come together. But different economic and socio-political interests act as constraining factors for breaking the traditional barriers.

With Mahila Samakhya being stronger after seven years and moving into new villages and districts perhaps the time has come to strategize on addressing caste issues along with sangha formation or soon after so that strong sanghas are established at the onset and unintended divides are avoided.

In some of the sanghas there is a predominance of women from older age groups. The sanghas could give more attention to involving young women and look into their needs, and to reviewing relationships of power and authority among women within the family from a perspective of equality.

1.4 Emerging trends, pace and growth

Accessing resources

Mahila Samakhya has been a good liaison agent in bridging the gap between the various government programmes and women. In some areas this has been more successful than in others due to prevailing conditions, the available infrastructure, the presence or absence of schemes and services in a particular area.

In its attempt to reach the un-reached, its involvement has been greater in terms of infrastructure like water, roads and financial loans, especially in the initial stages. Areas related to women's health, education, women's human rights and social justice are being raised and addressed in almost every district in a greater or lesser systematic way. These are the areas that require more focused attention in the future in order to rethink and learn from past experiences and to develop more strategic approaches providing new responses and options and moving beyond responding primarily to the practical needs of women.

Economic empowerment

The economic empowerment of women is an area which needs further thinking and strategizing. The need for economic development, regular work, higher and stable incomes is high on the priority list of sangha women. But dealing with the recurring economic demands of women is an area for which Mahila Samakhya - as a process oriented, non-input delivery organisation - has not yet found a suitable answer, nor has it been able to define its role. This is not to say that Mahila Samakhya is not paying attention to women's economic needs. On the contrary, as indicated in the progress reports a lot is being done in the area of skills training and initiating income generating activities. In savings and assets building, in accessing resources and development

schemes such as watershed development programmes. However, these activities sometimes tend to become and end in itself and are not part of a wider scheme for women's empowerment. Moreover, there are limits as to what a programme like Mahila Samakhya can do in this area as it is not an employment creation programme.

With its clear focus on education for women's empowerment Mahila Samakhya can play the role as catalyst, by (i) providing a channel of information for sangha women on various schemes and services, by (ii) assisting women in analysing their economic conditions, needs and priorities, by (iii) facilitating (skills/vocational) training for economic development, and by (iv) empowering the sanghas to negotiate on their own terms. However, as an education programme Mahila Samakhya is not to become involved in running income generating activities, savings and credit schemes or Women's Banks, as it does not provide the inputs and professional services required. Furthermore, active involvement of Mahila Samakhya staff in such economic initiatives has a risk as it may deviate the direction of the processes away from the development and empowerment processes of and within the sanghas. And particularistic economic interests may take precedence over sangha solidarity. There are various instances reported where financial interests have shown to interfere with the Mahila Samakhya principles of equality. Therefore the role of the Mahila Samakhya Programme is to facilitate access to organisations (governmental and non-governmental) which can provide the required professional inputs and experience. Sangha women who want to engage in economic/income generating activities could be encouraged to set up and manage their own societies like the Society of Women hand-pump Mechanics ' Vandana' in Banda District.

More systematic attention should be given to capacity building (skills training) for economic empowerment of women and facilitating women to connect with income-generating and self-employment schemes. With the Ninth Plan focus on participatory development planning and a stronger thrust on poverty alleviation and human resource development, it is important for Mahila Samakhya to be well informed on the new - government as well as NGO - programmes which are focused on rural/environmental development, health and shelter and to ensure its reach.

In relation to this, Mahila Samakhya can also become more active in seeking collaboration with programmes for economic/rural/agricultural and environmental development based on a participatory approach. The Mahila Samakhya Programme has been able to build a foundation for participatory approaches in rural, environmental and social development including health and education. It can facilitate access to such programmes and encourage rural development programmes with an participatory approach to work in areas where Mahila Samakhya already has a presence.

Support structures

There is a clearly emerging trend towards greater self-reliance and decreasing dependency on the sahayoginis at the sangha and taluka/block levels. Sangha women show greater autonomy in assessing their needs, planning their strategies and taking initiatives without consulting or informing their sahayoginis. They independently plan their visits to block level officials for accessing schemes and services, some sanghas have set up their own women's courts, monitor the non-formal education centres and have their own cadre of trained herbalists, para legal counsellors, pre-school teachers and trained birth attendants. A parallel trend is the emergence of support structures or institutions at the block level such as e.g. a legal/social counselling centre, a shelter for women, a women's bank, a women's resource & training & information centre, MSK or other educational facilities.

Sangha networking and federations

Related to this there is a trend towards building cluster groups or federations of sanghas which will have the advantage of networking across villages, mutual strengthening in accessing support networks and mobilisation for common issues. This would provide greater strength to sangha women both economically and politically. Strengthening the human resources for these sangha networks and the support structures is important and that is an area that needs to be addressed in

the development plans for the future. It will provide new opportunities and career-paths for sahayoginis, sakhis and other women from the sanghas.

The pace of growing strength of and within the sanghas is uneven. In more than half of the sanghas attention needs to be given to consolidation and further development of their inner strength. Focusing attention on federation building without paying sufficient attention to furthering the sangha development process is making a jump that could interrupt the empowerment processes of and within the sangha.

Mixed economies

The pace and growth of the Programme has been uneven between states and districts and varies within and between districts and states. Areas with mixed economies and a high influence from urban life styles and commercialism are problematic, requiring rethinking the presence and role of Mahila Samakhya and its strategy in such environments. The Mahila Samakhya Programme finds itself at a juncture of roads moving into different directions along with the pace and growth of developments of and within the sanghas. The lessons of the past provide the basis for a consolidated approach regarding formation of new and consolidation of existing sanghas. The growth and expansion of Mahila Samakhya is a result from the earlier experiences, the examples of successes, the notable impact and the visibility of the existing sanghas. Now the demand for new sanghas comes from village women unlike in the initial stages when it took a period of 8 to 10 months to build a foundation of trust before starting a sangha.

New relationships between the 'independent' sanghas and Mahila Samakhya

Yet, Mahila Samakhya has to redefine its role in relation to the sanghas which have made themselves independent from sahayogini support, but which may be requesting (training) inputs for further development and implementation of their strategies and for sustaining their empowerment processes.

1.5 The reporting system

Over time successful improvements have been made to systematise the collection and recording of information such as sangha profiles, village profiles, case studies and reports of meetings. Such information is collated in district reports that provide the basis for e.g. annual reports and studies on the achievements of the programme. In some areas sahayoginis and sakhis' have been trained in and conduct PRA, resource mapping and micro-planning exercises related to e.g. water, health, education. As a result a great deal of excellent documentation and reporting exist, which needs perhaps more systematisation, collating and quantification where possible and relevant. The documentation available at the DIUs provides a wealth of valuable information that can be used in future strategic planning, for development of learning materials based on local knowledge, practices and experiences, and for advocacy purposes on women's issues.

Measuring the impact of a programme like Mahila Samakhya raises the whole problem of qualitative and quantitative indicators. How does one match the empowerment and growth of the sanghas with joint forest management or thrift and savings programmes? One way of assessing this would be in looking at the numbers of women who come to the MS melas or block meetings. One could also link the achievements to quantifiable indicators related to poverty, health and education, gender equality and social issues, e.g. fertility, health and child/maternal mortality, child marriage, literacy levels and enrolment figures, changes in wages and earnings, savings and gains from utilisation of loans. Women's contributions to the sangha in terms of money, labour, materials and time could be calculated and matched to the material and immaterial gains from being part of the sangha. More quantification than is happening now should be possible and is necessary as it will substantiate the achievements, making it possible to trace changes and progress in relation to poverty alleviation, social issues and gender equality through periodic updates over a longer period of time. Further research may be carried out within Mahila Samakhya to

relate the achievements of the programme in improving the status of rural women in backward communities with regard to Social/Human Development indicators as well as Gender Empowerment Indicators (GEM) related to income earning power, and to economic and political participation.¹

The matrix of parameters has mainly been used as a *checklist* during this evaluation and is a useful tool for checking the status quo if used properly. However, the matrix has its limitations as it easily leads into descriptive and affirmative responses. It is also not a tool for quantification and it does not sufficiently provoke critical reflection. Moreover, it does not provide insight in how processes evolve, unless there is a mechanism for systematic up-dating. The matrix could perhaps be used as format and checklist for the formulation of progress reports and - if supplemented with quantitative indicators and followed consistently over some time - allow for tracing the trends and processes in the Programme.

1.6 Expansion strategies

During the last five years Mahila Samakhya has gradually expanded its coverage by moving into new states e.g. Andhra Pradesh and into new districts in states where the Programme has already a presence. The expansion has been uneven in terms of pace and depended on the prevailing structures, and the need to give priority to consolidation of the existing sanghas before moving into new areas. It is too early to compare and assess the differences of the expansion strategies adopted.

Yet it is clear that the new states and districts have been able to benefit from the experiences and lessons learned during the initial stages, as well as from the visible presence and the recognition of Mahila Samakhya in the districts and states. In the strategizing and planning of its expansion strategies Mahila Samakhya could capitalise on this.

Sanghas are asking for expansion of the programme into neighbouring villages for widening of their network for mutual co-operation, mobilisation and activism and for building a critical mass of empowered sanghas at block and district levels. Women in surrounding villages are seeking assistance in forming their sanghas and the older sanghas can play a role in this process which altogether will save time and effort in the formation stage. The process of expansion is to be seen in connection with the process of de-linking the strong sanghas and strengthening of their capacities to become self-reliant.

1.7 Capacity building and training

Within the programme a lot of effort goes into capacity building and training of sahayoginis, sakhis and other functionaries. Training is one of the most important components in the programme. However, in the States there are or have been some signs of fatigue, repetitiveness and stagnation. This is visible in some shading of the Mahila Samakhya concept and of the ideological principles of the Programme in the course of dealing with strategies related to the immediate issues raised from within the sanghas. The discrepancy between sangha women prioritising their basic survival needs and the Mahila Samakhya's empowerment agenda is a problematic area. Finding the right balance is a problem facing the sahayoginis and the District staff. Given their levels of poverty and deprivation the agendas of the sangha women are based on their experienced realities within the framework of their geo-political and socio-cultural environments and the accepted values and biases that shape their positions in their gendered societies. They naturally articulate their needs in terms of basic survival and improvement of the quality of life. Without a conscious and deliberate input on building new perspectives based on equality, social justice and women's human rights there is a risk of stagnation of the growth of the empowerment

¹ One should be aware of the limitations of such quantitative indicators: quantitative indicators for GDI (Gender related Development Index) or GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) can only capture what is measurable and therefore do not cover important dimensions of gender equality such as e.g. women's participation in family/community life and decision making, consumption of resources in the family, dignity and social security.

processes. Women need new perspectives to be aware of the options available to them. This problem area is directly linked to capacity building of sahayoginis and sangha leaders who are the catalysts, and those who train them. *The staff of the Mahila Samakhya at every level need much more training and a sharpening of their conceptual philosophical perspective in order to maintain the qualitative difference of Mahila Samakhya from other rural development or poverty alleviation programmes.*

Overtime as the experience and competencies have grown the State teams have become more and more self-reliant in meeting the training needs. Although this is a very positive development it also can have some draw backs if the training becomes recycling and too much dependent on inner developments only. There is a noticeable tendency of a drawing together of the Mahila Samakhya family to solve its own problems within its context and a withdrawal from outside movements and influences. Training programmes with women who share the values and ideology of Mahila Samakhya have shown to be instrumental in providing the opportunity for women to build strengths and solidarity, and develop a collective framework for understanding gender. Such training programmes with women from outside need to become regular in the State Programmes. This will provide links with the larger women's movement and help in the development of forward looking strategies that will prevent any sense of stagnation in the Programme.

CHAPTER 2. THE EDUCATION COMPONENT IN MAHILA SAMAKHYA

Over the last five years the activities related to the education of children and to women's literacy and adult education have increased and intensified. Mahila Samakhya has actively participated in the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) and (post-)literacy activities are continuing in many of the sanghas. In all states residential training centres for women and teenage girls have been established, which provide alternate educational opportunities for out-of-school girls and young women. Sangha women are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of good education for their children and particularly for girls. Besides taking an active role in the monitoring of local schools and teachers, various initiatives have been taken to provide for non-formal education classes in the villages aimed at coaching school-age children and particularly girls for getting (re) entry into the mainstream system. At policy and implementation level the importance of inter-linkages between Mahila Samakhya and the District Primary Education Programme increasingly is being recognised and the possibilities for (further) collaboration between the two programmes are being explored and put into action.

2.1 Education for literacy

In the early stages of Mahila Samakhya various interesting initiatives have emerged in a number of districts for the development of innovative methods and materials for literacy in the mother-tongue with and for rural women. However most of these initiatives seem to have been overtaken by the Total Literacy Campaign which has been launched nation wide in the early nineties.

Mahila Samakhya teams have actively participated in the Total Literacy Campaign, e.g. in the mobilisation for literacy, in identification and training of literacy teachers, in setting up and monitoring literacy groups and in some cases in the development of learning materials. In most of the districts covered by Mahila Samakhya the TLC has been completed with great success. Mahila Samakhya has sometimes been able to make changes in the set TLC implementation framework making it more flexible by e.g. including older women (35+) in the literacy classes, by ensuring a learner friendly environment and by adapting the time and pace of learning to the needs and time patterns of the learners. In some cases it was necessary for MS to break away from the TLC framework and continue the literacy/adult education groups on its own terms after the TLC was over. Under the Ninth Plan the literacy drive is to be extended at post-literacy levels. Mahila Samakhya, from its experience in the area of adult education could make a contribution to the new initiatives and could also benefit from further co-operation e.g. in areas of training of adult education teachers/facilitators, and in joint development and sharing of innovative learning materials. Precondition is that Mahila Samakhya will become involved in the design and planning stages to ensure flexibility and to determine the nature of its contribution in line with its identity and principles.

The experience in education as literacy with sangha women in the form of regular classes or camps is mixed, because of difficulties in maintaining women's interest and motivation after reaching the stage of being able to write their names, reading words and sentences, writing simple letters. Efforts to integrate literacy skills with function-related training such as the training of balsakhis, hand-pump mechanics, para-legal workers etc. appear to be more effective, because of the direct linkage of the literacy to the area of work.

Through their experience in the Mahila Samakhya Programme women have come to realise that they can learn, become empowered, effect changes, without necessarily becoming literate themselves. What the experience in literacy has achieved is that women have come to better understand the importance of relevant literacy and school education for their daughters. They have learned that there are alternative ways of making learning and teaching meaningful and interesting in the lives of women. *Mahila Samakhya has created a positive environment for learning and schooling of children, especially for girls' education.*

2.2 The education of out-of-school children, especially girls

The education of girls is an emerging issue in the programme, it is on the agenda of sangha women, who have taken initiatives to obtain scholarship funds for their children's education, and to form committees checking on school attendance and teaching by teachers in village schools. Various forms of non-formal initiatives have emerged for teaching out-of-school children in order to get them into the mainstream education system. And the Child Care Centres set-up under Mahila Samakhya provide pre-school education to children who otherwise would have little chances to have access to and complete primary school.

In all States the presence of Mahila Samakhya has evoked a great demand not just for schooling of children, but for quality and relevance of learning/instruction in a child friendly and safe environment for girls. At the local level there is active co-operation and interaction between the centres set-up under Mahila Samakhya (early learning centres, NFE centres, MSK) and the village schools: children from Mahila Samakhya centres joining the mainstream school, or children from the local school getting extra coaching in the NFE centre, teaching assistance, sharing of learning materials, joint celebrations etc.

Most of these initiatives in non-formal education by running coaching classes for children are dependent on voluntary workers who receive a minimum of training and hardly any professional guidance from the Mahila Samakhya staff. More attention needs to be given by Mahila Samakhya to the pedagogical/didactical aspects of the NFE initiatives, to the adaptation of the formal curriculum in the local context and a non-formal learning environment, to the professional training and guidance needed in order to support the voluntary workers and reinforce their motivation, to help them cope with classroom situations, with creative teaching methods, with creating learning aids and materials, and with understanding gender.

2.3 The impact of the Mahila Shiksha Kendras

The Mahila Shiksha Kendras (MSK) reach out to adolescent girls, who would otherwise have not been reached by any educational process. The most significant impact of the Mahila Shiksha Kendras for these young women is their gained confidence in their ability to learn, to learn about themselves and their health and to understand their environment better. It can provide them with new opportunities and seems to be delaying the age of marriage, protecting them from abuse or being drawn into child labour. The MSK provides them with education in a safe and learner friendly environment and succeeds to mainstream them in the formal system. In some cases the girls who are accepted in the MSKs become role models for other children in the village and parents are becoming convinced that the MSK is able to provide their children with meaningful education in a safe environment. As such the MSK could become a model for an alternate form of schooling for out-of-school youth, especially teenage girls who often, because of early marriage are forced to step straight from childhood into womanhood or widowhood and who loose out on the stage of adolescence having become an invisible category for social and education development.

Except in rare exceptions, the curriculum planning and future vision for the students is insufficient. In most of the MSK the curriculum follows the formal school and the development of teaching methods relies very much on the improvisation and creativity of the teachers who receive little or no guidance in pedagogic skills, curriculum planning and development of creative learning aids. Although some MSK provide practical courses in sewing and typing no conscious efforts are made to provide practical training in non-traditional skills which could lead to meaningful occupations in rural development.

If the MSK is to be a key institution of the Mahila Samakhya Programme for producing the change agents of the future, especially in rural development, then more planning and perspective is needed to fulfil its creative potential. It is also necessary to adopt a more professional approach.

Nevertheless, the fact of young girls undergoing a residential training and acquiring skills has definite impact on the village and creates an increasing demand for more such centres or village-based NFE centres.

2.4 The interface with the District Primary Education Programmes (DPEP)

So far co-operation with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) is limited to areas covered by both programmes, which are very few. The DPEP is planning to move into new districts, which are also covered by Mahila Samakhya. DPEP will be focusing on improvement of the quality of instruction, teacher training, curriculum development and development of gender sensitive learning/instruction materials, community participation, and development of alternative learning modes for out-of-school children. The Mahila Samakhya experience shows that empowering of women can be a precondition for the creation of demand for education of girls and for an environment for community participation in improving access to and quality of school education. In all of the components of DPEP Mahila Samakhya can build on its presence in the State/Districts and contribute in e.g. community mobilisation, participation and environment building, involving women in Village Education Committees (VECs) and training of VEC members, provision of training inputs on dealing with gender issues for the training of DPEP staff and teachers, development of gender sensitive learning materials and methods, alternative models for drop-outs and out-of-school girls. And Mahila Samakhya will be able to benefit from DPEP in strengthening the pedagogic quality of the education components as well as the use of learning materials and aids.

It means that both Mahila Samakhya and DPEP will benefit from mutual co-operation in the future. In order to ensure synergy a joint MS-DPEP task force could be set-up at State /district levels who will work out the plans and terms for co-operation for the districts covered by both programmes. The outcomes of the national level Workshop on the DPEP-Mahila Samakhya Interface, organised by the Department of Education (MHRD) in July 1996 provide the initial guidelines on which such co-operation can be based and worked out in further detail for each District and State Programme.

2.5 Education for women's empowerment

Education for women's empowerment is central in Mahila Samakhya. In this Programme education is understood in a holistic and broad meaning as an empowering learning process which enables learners to question, to analyse, to seek answers, to act and reflect, and thereby to discover their inner strength and realise their potential. It involves a life long process of interactive learning, based on sharing of knowledge and life experiences, critical analysis and reflection, creating new kinds of knowledge and understanding.

In the study on 'Empowerment through Mahila Sanghas' by Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurthy a distinction is made between three interrelated aspects of education: education as life skills, education as knowledge and information, and education as literacy.² Education as life skills relates to the ability to manage life and is based on gaining confidence and self-esteem. It is underlying all of the activities in Mahila Samakhya and in the on-going processes of collective action/reflection/learning/ deciding/planning/action. Education as information and knowledge refers to accessing and analysing knowledge and information, and using it effectively. It is part of awareness workshops and training related to e.g. health, law, the environment, etc. In both aspects of education being literate in the sense of reading and writing is not directly essential for learning taking place, for feeling empowered and having confidence in one's strength to make changes.

In Mahila Samakhya education as literacy comes in when women discover the importance of literacy in dealing with the outside literate world with its written rules and procedures. It comes when the need arises for writing application letters, keeping records of savings, recording and checking minutes of meetings, getting clarification on procedures etc., and when the women experience its importance for furthering their knowledge and accessing new information. Thus in principle demands for literacy (reading, writing, numeracy skills and a wider body of knowledge) emerge from the developments within the sanghas.

² Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurty 1996, pp. 27 ff.

Education for women's empowerment is definitely taking place in all districts and has made significant impacts on the lives of rural women as is clear from the foregoing sections. However, if the concept of education is used in its limited understanding of education as literacy, or just reading, writing and numeracy skills, the level of success is limited. This is particularly the case for forms of education taking place in regular classroom-like sessions with materials brought from elsewhere, which perhaps have no bearing to women's lives, or which are not directly linked to women's area of work.

It seems that women feel that they have become stronger and empowered, that they can access information and resources and that they feel capable to make changes in their lives without necessarily being able to read and write. And another explanation could be that providing education in any kind of class setting beyond a certain time-span is not the most suitable approach. On the whole the reasons for the supposed decline of interest on the part of the women have not been fully investigated and analysed.

There are signs that sometimes the attention to adult education and to the creation of a consistent, holistic gender relevant approach to education for empowerment, which includes and integrates the different aspects of education (e.g. life skills, information and knowledge, literacy and numeracy) seems to be waning. What we could sometimes observe is that the centrality of education in Mahila Samakhya appears to have given way to other priorities, like e.g. the running of savings group, the building of the sangha hut, accessing schemes and services, and other activities aimed at keeping the collectives going. Through the Literacy Mission more and more women have become exposed to reading, writing and numeracy skills. Instead of standing back and letting women loose interest in further learning (with the help of their literacy skills) and allowing the learning process to stagger, *Mahila Samakhya could and should refocus its attention and make education for empowerment its foremost and central issue.* With their literacy skills and with the gains achieved in terms of empowerment women are ready to move ahead and use their newly acquired skills, to access and further their knowledge, to strengthen their information base, to counter dis-information and abuse, and to participate in family, community and further political decision making from a position of strength.

The experiences of Mahila Samakhya in the adoption of innovative non-conventional approaches to adult education, - which include needs based education related to life skills and education as information and knowledge, with or without a literacy component - may pave the way for widening the scope of adult education and the adoption of holistic non-structured approaches with a long term perspective of creating opportunities for self-directed learning.

An the area to venture in by using its flexibility and creative powers is *to evolve together with the sangha women innovative and participatory learning strategies for learning in pre- and neo-literate stages maintaining the focus on supporting women's empowerment processes.* Strategies which combine awareness, information and skills, which are directed at learning groups with women who are barely literate and women who want to use and further their literacy skills. Strategies which include gender-relevant methods and pedagogy, development of learning materials and aids on relevant issues and skills for use in self-directed learning groups. And strategies providing for short and intermediate term training programmes, residential as well as non-residential, for selected women as functionaries in e.g. water or village education committees, and as specialists like local health workers, rural extensionists, village level workers for veterinary services, plant protection, environment-aware technologies, water management, horticulture etc. It further is to include modes and forms of learning which do not conform to conventional classroom like settings and are flexible enough to respond to the time patterns, mobility and environments of the learners. Banking on the lessons learned from seven years of experience Mahila Samakhya will be on its way to the creation of a truly alternative approach to adult education.

Refocusing the Programme on education for empowerment requires *changes in the human resources staffing and development policy.* At present there are no resource persons in the organisational structure of Mahila Samakhya with a professional background in educational methodology or pedagogy, for curriculum development, development of learning materials and use of media. Such experts are needed if Mahila Samakhya is to move into the direction of developing innovative learning strategies. Each District Implementation Unit as well as the State Programme

Office is to have an experienced education expert on its staff who together will form a team for backing-up and supporting the education component in the Programme. Mahila Samakhya has a great resource of in-house practical experience in training methodologies, use of drama and cultural expressions, teaching by improvisation in non-formal settings. These experiences can be brought up to a higher professional level with a well directed staff development plan.

CHAPTER 3. MAHILA SAMAKHYA AS A RESOURCE ORGANISATION FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Mahila Samakhya is perceived as a time-bound programme that is to phase itself out after a certain period of time. This perception is in contradiction with the understanding of empowerment as an on-going process of growth, reinforcement of inner strength and expansion towards broader horizons, as well expansion in terms of dealing with new issues and struggles. What can be time-bound is the process of sangha formation and consolidation, and the period a sangha needs in order to de-link itself from the regular support of its sahayogini.

Sanghas as they are becoming stronger, develop confidence and capabilities to be self-reliant in managing their own meetings and financial affairs. More and more sanghas are seen taking their own decisions, solving their problems, accessing resources independently from sahayoginis' involvement. They are planning, strategizing and executing their activities, they share their joint responsibilities and by this they play a greater role in determining their futures and influencing social change. Such processes of change do not evolve without resistance from the environment, without disappointments and compromises, without recurring struggles, which might require fresh inputs to reinforce the process of empowerment. In these processes of growing self-reliance and strength of the sanghas the relationship of the mahila sanghas with Mahila Samakhya is bound to be changing and needs to be redefined in new terms.

In recognition of the sanghas as mature, self-sustaining organisations in their own right, capable of making their own decisions and determining the direction of their development process, the Mahila Samakhya Structure has to diversify and change its role. From this point of view Mahila Samakhya can be regarded as one of the resource organisations to be accessed by the sanghas for provision of (gender-sensitive) training inputs and materials, for providing information, knowledge and new perspectives on issues coming up in the sangha, for facilitation of access to other resource organizations or assistance in setting up and sustaining support structures. Mahila Samakhya will still have a role in facilitating inter sangha networking at block and district levels and in capacity building for support structures at cluster or block levels initiated by sangha networks. The role of Mahila Samakhya with regard to providing gender-sensitive pedagogic and other training support to teachers for nfe, child care centres, formal schools and for village education committees is bound to be getting greater emphasis and importance in the future. And at the same time Mahila Samakhya will have to maintain its presence for formation of new sanghas in new villages and for strengthening the sanghas which are not yet ready to be self-reliant.

Instead of phasing itself out the Mahila Samakhya Programme structure is able to build on the strength of its presence and its credibility gained in the Districts and the State. Its future is to expand and differentiate its role in order to be responsive to the needs related to the different stages of development of the existing and the new sanghas: independent self-reliant sanghas; weaker sanghas that want to become self-reliant; young and emerging sanghas; sangha networks and federations etc. Furthermore, Mahila Samakhya has created a strong role for itself in initiating and supporting gender-sensitive educational innovations for children as well as adults. The on-going new developments related to the expansion of DPEP in MS districts, as well as the future developments in adult (post) literacy calls for the establishment of tripartite partnerships between the concerned education programmes (MS, DPEP, AE) and requires the experience and continuing presence of Mahila Samakhya in order to ensure the focus on education for girls' and women's empowerment to which the Government of India has committed itself in its education policy (1986). And Mahila Samakhya as a support structure of the Mahila sanghas could play a stronger role in advocacy and policy development in support of women's equality and empowerment.

By converting the existing structure of DIUs and SPO into a network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres with accessible branches at taluka and cluster levels it can provide a flexible, accessible and multi-functional support structure. These Resource Centres could provide or facilitate access to training resources (process, perspective building, issues based and/or training of trainers), assist in development of training curricula and manuals, assist in further development of effective training/learning methods, as well as gender-sensitive learning materials for self-directed learning. The Resource Centres can have a role in collecting, converting and disseminating relevant information, in documentation and research, in dissemination of newsletters etc. And the

centres can provide for social, legal, job/career counselling, as well as training and library facilities. These Resource Centres will provide a multi-purpose support network which can be flexible and responsive to the needs of the Programme and varied processes in the field.

The District Resource Centres and their branches at block level could be staffed by sahayoginis who will be the resource persons and by professional resource persons and (temporary) consultants with specific assignments or tasks. The District Programme Co-ordinator will be Resource Centre Co-ordinator and remain in charge of the Programme in the District be it from the perspective of a Programme support structure.

At State level a similar conversion could be considered, although a State Resource Centre might be taking a slightly different role with a stronger emphasis on advocacy and influencing policies, on studies and compilation & analysis of data, on providing for professional development of the Programme Staff and on networking with other resource organisations. Its tasks could include e.g. the following:

- . the identification of training resources within and outside the State,
- . providing assistance in developing and implementing internal monitoring mechanisms, documentation, evaluation and studies,
- . the conversion and dissemination to the districts of information and learning materials from elsewhere,
- . organisation of state and national level reflection workshops for Programme staff and external resource persons,
- . the facilitation exchange and exposure visits (in two directions),
- . development and implementation of strategies for advocacy and influencing the policy structures (policy and decision makers, policy changes, the implementation of policies and the public) in collaboration with other organisations like e.g. the national Alliance of Women (NAWO).

The network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres which is flexible and adaptable to the needs of the empowerment/development processes, can provide a more permanent support structure in the State and in the Districts that can branch out to the blocks and clusters, and co-operate with other (education) resource centres by exchanging services in order to avoid duplication.

The creation of a support structure as proposed will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy. It requires a human resources development plan which provides for staff development, staff training and capacity building including new possibilities for horizontal and vertical mobility, for new and differentiated career-paths for sahayoginis and district staff. To accompany the recommended changes a review of the financial pattern and financial management procedures will also be necessary.

CHAPTER 4. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The mission's financial expert has actively interpreted the request for an financial impact assessment and conducted a thorough document analysis combined with an extensive field study. The outcome of which has lead to the conclusion that the continuation of funding of Mahila Samakhya Programme by the Dutch Government is both feasible and necessary.

The fieldvisit took place from January 3 until January 18, 1997 and concentrated on the Mahila Samakhya Programmes in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. In both States the mission's financial expert visited with the representatives of the management at State level and district levels, responsible for planning and budgeting, as well as with the ultimate "clients" of the Mahila Samakhya Programme, being the sanghas (village level women's groups). The detailed discussions at national level and those with the Royal Netherlands Embassy were unfortunately not possible to plan due to the rather full mission schedule. Before her departure to The Netherlands the teamleader of the evaluation team had a long session at the Royal Netherlands Embassy with the Finance Officer and studied the files and documentation available at the RNE. The information collected is integrated in this chapter on the Financial Management.

4.1 The Facts

4.1.1 Funds

In 1988 the Dutch government, represented by the Ministry for Development Co-operation, started funding the Mahila Samakhya Programme in the three States initially covered by the Mahila Samakhya Programme, notably in Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. The fourth State - Andhra Pradesh - started the MS programme in the autumn of the 1992/1993 fiscal year.

The funding, according to the first side-letter, was intended for an initial period of 6 years and was to cover ten selected districts in the three states of Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka, reaching 5,000 villages at the end of the 4th year. The Department of Education of the Indian Ministry of Human Resources Development was appointed as the executing agency for the implementation of this co-operation programme. In 1992 this was replaced by the second side-letter covering the period between 1992 and 1997. This support was extended to ten additional districts in the three above mentioned States and in three districts in Andhra Pradesh, this within the period until 1997.

The Dutch contribution to the Mahila Samakhya Programme included both financial and technical support, the value of which was estimated to be Fl. 30.295.097,=, or Rs. 492.603.203/= including Fl. 330.000,= meant for Technical Assistance to support the Programme's activities during 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997 (i.e. Fl. 82.500,= per year).

During the first year an amount of Fl. 10.150.000,= was planned to support the activities of the programme including the administrative costs at district and State levels, of which an amount of Fl. 10 million was made available as a grant through the Financial Assistance Procedure. Another Fl. 150.000,= was made available from Technical Assistance Funds for consultancy support and evaluations. All assistance funds were disbursed by the Dutch Government to the Indian Government, notably to the Education Department of the Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD), the Indian Executive Authority. A first advance payment of Fl. 2 million was paid to Government of India (GOI) after the completion of the side-letter. Then the GOI was to submit claims up to an amount of Fl. 8 million every 6 months.

The Government of India has been releasing funds to the bank accounts of the autonomous Mahila Samakhya Societies in the respective (initially three, later four) "Programme States".

Costs occurred at the State level have been paid from those accounts. For expenditures at district level and below, funds have been transferred by the State Programme Offices to the Programme accounts in the 10 districts. At all levels the amount to cover management and operational costs has been transferred to the respective bank accounts.

Import duties, clearance of goods, insurance, taxes, fiscal charges involved in the project, the cost of land acquisition etc. were to be paid by the Government of India.

4.1.2 Financial roles and responsibilities

Federal Level

The Department of Education, as a GOI highest delegated Executive Body of the Programme, has presented quarterly claims for reimbursement to the Royal Netherlands Embassy via the Department of Economic Affairs of the Ministry of Finance. The Netherlands Bank for Investment in Developing Countries (N.I.O.) has effectuated these payments after the approval of the Embassy.

The Technical Assistance amount has been disbursed from the Royal Netherlands Embassy, New Delhi, in close co-operation with the Government of India. Payments were made from the Embassy account for the a total of Fl. 138.370, = .

State Level

At the State level the by-laws of Association of Mahila Samakhya, give the highest overall authority in the Mahila Samakhya Programme to the *Executive Committee* of the Society. At present, with regard to the financial affairs, a representative of the Department of Planning and Finance is included in this policy making body as one of its ex-officio members. *The General Council*, intended to meet annually, is expected to review and approve the following documents submitted by the State Programme Office/Executive Committee:

- the Annual Budget of the Society
- the balance sheet & audited accounts of the previous year
- the Annual Report.

The *Executive Committee* is given the powers:

- to review annual plans, reports and accounts of the Society for the consideration of the General Council
- to approve the allocation of grants to its branches and units at district, block and village levels and also to approve the bodies with which it enters into collaborative ventures.

The *State Programme Director* in turn is responsible for:

- the proper administration of the Society's funds
- the planning and monitoring of the DIUs' financial affairs
- the preparation of the Annual Budget based on the DIUs activity plans and their submission to the Executive Council of the MS Society for approval
- the preparation of the Society's Annual Reports and accounts for the consideration of the General Council
- the payment and recovery of fees and charges for services rendered by the Society.

The *District Programme Co-ordinator* has the same powers and responsibilities for the District Branch of the Society as the State Programme Director has at State level.

4.2 Findings on financial management

4.2.1 General impressions

Despite the differences in the initial approach to the implementation of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in the individual states, the current status of the programme shows many similarities. Some of them can be summarised as follows:

- * the philosophy of the Mahila Samakhya Programme seems to remain intact and relatively strong against the internal and external interventions,
- * the Mahila Samakhya Programme enjoys the full confidence and commitment of all parties involved,
- * in four visited states and their districts the ultimate "clients" of the Mahila Samakhya have been reached,
- * the programming of the activities of Mahila Samakhya has been decentralised to village level, so that the present planning, implementation and reporting takes place "on-site" (at-the-bottom"),
- * the project structure, however, needs further reinforcement in terms of the standardisation and strengthening of its internal overall capacities.

The strength of the Mahila Samakhya Programme is the involvement of the main players - the sahayoginis - the impact of which is mirrored in the relationship between them and the sangha women.

The functionaries above that level are selected and trained on the same principles. The strong "we" feeling and confidence in own internal strength of the programme has to withstand a great deal of pressure from external influences.

Mahila Samakhya Programme, as an open and process-oriented programme is often exposed to "hijacking" or other intervention by external parties and programmes. The programme seems to protect itself quite successfully against such external disturbances.

4.2.2 Findings related to the funds

An overview of the funds involved in the Mahila Samakhya Programme up to the date of the mission's visit (mid January 1997) is given in the table on the next page.

Out of the total committed budget of approx. 30 million Dutch guilders, only a quarter has been spent (for further analysed reasons). This amount has even increased due to the devaluation of the Indian Rupee, so that the amount currently available is even higher compared to the amount initially foreseen, which was 487.237.272,- (exchange rate: 0,0615). The funds under Dutch financing, initially foreseen until 1997, have accumulated in this way.

4.2.3 Utilisation of the provision for Technical Assistance

An amount of Fl. 555.000,- was committed per side-letter (March 31, 1994) as the provision for Technical Assistance. This was intended to cover the cost of

- * supportive materials
- * study tours in the region
- * international exchanges and attendance of workshops, conferences etc.,
- * technical assistance by Dutch or other experts,
- * exchange visits of fellows from educational institutions in The Netherlands (educationists, teachers).

So far the provision for Technical Assistance has been used for an international workshop with participants from African countries and neighbouring countries in Asia and for Technical Assistance by resource persons in the area of Training and for development of evaluation indicators.

The international workshop met with a very positive response from the side of the international participants. In at least one country (Uganda) it has inspired the participants to formulate a participatory women's empowerment programme which is being implemented in the West Nile Province. Further sharing of experiences on implementing women's empowerment and education programmes were recommended.

OVERVIEW OF THE FUNDING

Total funds provided:

year	committed	planned	spent
1992	0,-	0,-	0,-
1993	0,-	0,-	0,-
1994	29.965.097,-	1.094.386,29	1.094.386,29
1995	0,-	2.182.484,-	2.182.484,-
1996	(*) - 330.00,-	1.700.000,-	1.751.240,40
1997	0,-	2.000.000,-	0,-
1998	0,-	2.500.000,-	0,-
1999	0,-	3.000.000,-	0,-
2000	0,-	17.488.226,71	0,-
2001 on	0,-	0,-	0,-
Total	26.965.097,-	29.965.097,-	5.028.110,69
Prepared for payment			249.300,95
Current balance			24.687.685,36 =====
Balance in Indian Rupees			513.257.491,80
(*) Technical Assistance of Fl. 330.000,- and Fl. 225.000,- for evaluations are not included.			

The impact of the conference and especially the visits and exchanges at field level for the Mahila Samakhya Programme is unknown. But the conference has led to the reconfirmation of the validity of the Mahila Samakhya approach to adult education and women's empowerment, to the formulation and publication of valuable case studies and reflections, and to publicity about Mahila Samakhya, increasing its visibility at national and international levels.

One resource person was involved in the international workshop, the second resource person assisted in the development of evaluation criteria. Both resource persons were engaged by the Netherlands Embassy.

Information of the provision for Technical Assistance does not appear to be available at the implementation level of the Programme, at State and District level. Consequently the facility is not accessible and no claims or proposals have been made by the State Societies.

At the national level it is felt that Technical Assistance can play an important role in facilitating further capacity development of functionaries in the programme at different levels e.g. for

- organising exposure visits/study tours to countries in the region as well as other developing countries and to interact with women/girl child education and development projects;
- training and capacity building in international institutions for State and National level MS personnel on issues like gender sensitivity planning and management, educational planning, development of gender sensitive indices for monitoring and evaluation etc.;
- to host seminars, workshops on issues relating to women's education empowerment and development, and
- participation and paper presentation in international conferences, seminars, workshops on relevant issues organised by other organisations/institutions in other countries.

For optimal utilisation of the provision for Technical Assistance it is required that the information on the provision will be shared with the States at all levels. Based on the feedback from discussions with the district and State teams the National Office could draft a proposal with criteria and guidelines for the utilisation of the TA provisions, as well as procedures for submission of proposals, to be shared with the respective teams.

Table for Technical Assistance

Total TA funds provided:

BUDGET			225.000,-
Evaluations	mid-term:	75.000,-	
	final:	150.000,-	
TA Component			330.000,-
Total budget under Technical Assistance			555.000,-
EXPENDITURE			
Evaluations	mid-term:	76.064,-	76.064,-
	final:	0,-	
Technical assistance			138.370,07
	international workshop:	132.677,09	
	expert 1:	382,98	
	expert 2:	5.310,07	
Total expenditure			214.434,07
BALANCE IN FI. FOR TA AND EVALUATIONS			
Evaluations	mid-term:	- 1.064,-	148.936,-
	final:	148.936,-	
TA Component			191.563,93
Total available under TA and evaluations			340.563,93

4.2.4 Findings regarding financial roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities within the scope of financial management correspond to a large extent with the guidelines given in the Delegation of Financial Powers of Mahila Samakhya. Some differences have been caused by optional further delegation in specific situations, such as the absence of skilled personnel. In such cases, the final responsibility - financial powers - tend to go upwards in the hierarchy.

Nevertheless, although the main functionaries within the financial management are familiar with their job description, the specific role and responsibilities required are not always transparent, neither to them nor to the other members of the respective teams. When, for example, the District Programme Co-ordinator for whatever reason does not have the right to sign the books or checks for payment, it does not mean that he/she is not co-responsible for their correctness.

Finally, it can be stated that the involvement of the national level is in general very modest leaving all necessary space for the States themselves to manage their own affairs.

The situation at sangha level is that sanghas are becoming gradually more involved in the management of their own sangha fund, the details regarding this issue can be found in the State reports (Supplement A).

So far sangha involvement in the budgetary procedures of the Programme has been limited to activity planning and to a certain extent to the management of the sangha honorarium (or fund), the management of sangha members' savings and the resources and loans elicited from other sources. *Sangha capacity for financial self-management and planning is an area that will need further attention in the future to help the sanghas become financially self-reliant (in terms of being able to tap existing schemes and resources).*

4.2.5 Findings related to financial planning

The system for preparing the financial estimates within the Mahila Samakhya Programme does not fully correspond with the principles of budgeting, being the translation of strategy planning into financial terms. Moreover, the budgetary control also somewhat lacks the power of feedback relevant for management actions. In most cases, the activity planning is prepared in a joint meeting of all parties involved. The sahayoginis (and sakhis, if relevant) assess the needs at sangha/village level in discussions with women at sangha meetings and report on these accordingly.

The summary of these needs is discussed during the district meeting with sahayoginis and the district staff, and translated into operational activities (mainly counselling on-the-spot, advice and/or guidance in the problem solving actions and practical training activities focusing on the most urgent issues). The selected activities are subsequently planned to comply with the time and capacity of the individual members of the implementation team and, if relevant, clustered for the individual blocks or mandels of villages.

Although this process takes place under the supervision of the district (management) representatives, the assessment of the total demand within the scope of resources available and the formulation of the total plan of actions, which can be translated into financial terms, does not ensure the expected outcome. Furthermore, these plans often do not include the actions required by and for the district teams.

The same pattern appears at State level. As the core teams are occupied in assisting the preparation of plans for others, their own training needs often do not get full attention, not to mention the aspect of intentional and, preferably continuing, professional development of various specific management and communication skills, including the planning and budgeting issues.

Although the preparation of activity planning starts at sangha level, the financial planning remains still in hands of district and State management.

4.3 Methodology of budgeting

Current zero budgeting tends to keep the clarity and uniformity of planning funds as a guarantee of the proper use of these funds. The Mahila Samakhya budget is based on the national GOI guidelines and headings. These guidelines, however, in terms of headings do not always fit into the reality of the programme implementation structure (such as position of an assistant accountant, a stenographer etc.), some other headings require further diversification (such as contingencies) and some headings need to be added (such as medical and/or social care for the staff, especially for those field workers exposed to high risks).

The above mentioned built-in ambiguity of these guidelines, together with their inflexibility as to performance assessment and career planning require full attention in the immediate future.

4.4 Budget implementation - utilisation of funds

The implementation of planned activities and, as such, the utilisation of funds, needs conscious and close monitoring. The experience during the previous project years has shown certain patterns of similarities in the recurring unit prices and other costs related to the activities. The differences between the planned and actual spending can also offer some ideas as to the factors which may influence the estimation of certain kinds of expenditures.

Examples of such norms can be: the price of purchased materials, influenced by the inflation rate or level of depreciation, the variable cost of training activities for certain size of groups, transportation and accommodation etc.

Some cost are rather beyond any realistic long-term projection, such as the rent of office space which increases constantly in the changing market, or the frequency of the purchase of equipment and its maintenance. The cars used for the project can suffer damage and accidents while driving on bad roads in bad traffic and need to be replaced, the computers which may not be adequate and compatible in the long run.

Another example of posts requiring proper attention is staff salaries at all levels. The programme staff is contracted for a certain period of time for fixed payments, including allowances. The system seems to be rather rigid and therefore negative and de-motivating if the assessment of personnel performance cannot be expressed adequately in a flexible scale of differentiated salaries and if the staff involved do not see any future career development. The situation is most striking for sahayoginis, who as the most important drivers of the Mahila Samakhya Programme are seen as low-level operational personnel receiving only honoraria.

Due to only partial achievement of the activities planned the funds budgeted for these activities were not fully utilised. On top of that, the amount of funds unspent grew due to the "cost-cutting expenditure and saving" attempts of the Programme staff and clients.

The final effect was that the Programme funds plus this amount transferred to the following year's budget as "capital fund" grew significantly.

4.5 Budget administration

In the States visited by the mission various good attempts to standardise financial processes had already been made. The accounting system chosen shows systematically prepared cash books, balances, ledgers, books of vouchers, annual plans and annual reports, etc. These instruments include a great deal of data, which, however, is not processed into information relevant for the sound management of the Programme. The finance officers and accountants who prepare the financial data are not always capable of recognising the most relevant kind of information; and the final decision takers at management level, are not capable of assessing what kind of information they need and how to use it. Moreover, the system of reporting does not always provide appropriate feedback, enabling the management to take corrective decisions and/or actions.

4.6 Budget monitoring and control

In the State Programmes of Andhra Pradesh and of Uttar Pradesh the activity plans together with the budgets are at present monitored mainly by the State Programme Directors and the District Programme Co-ordinators. The past experience has shown that wherever there were attempts to perform monitoring jointly with the accountants, clarity as to the roles and responsibilities for decision taking was missing.

In order not to interfere with the responsibilities of the managers, the accountants prepare the necessary financial overviews for the monthly meetings, showing only the status of the budgets, but not the complexity of the real situation.

4.7 Recommendations for financial management

4.7.1 Recommendation related to the funds

The funds financed by the Netherlands, initially foreseen until 1997, have accrued significantly. Therefore the question arises, whether or not to continue financing the Mahila Samakhya Programme until the year 2002.

The funds currently remaining in the State budgets have not been spent for various reasons mentioned in the previous paragraphs of this chapter. As the Programme progresses the activities will gradually intensify. It is obvious that more funds will also be needed in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, the funds available are not allowed to be spent outside the scope of the budget heads listed in the GOI guidelines, although there is an urgent need to cover various other items, such as insurance, medical care and building of special reserve funds for unforeseen circumstances.

As the image of the Mahila Samakhya Programme has already been broadly spread and, as experience shows that the necessary lessons have been learned, (not forgetting the economical principle of scale) the Programme could be rather effectively disseminated to other regions (villages, districts and States of India). Therefore, *provided that the necessary steps are taken to standardise and professionalise the Programme implementation structure, the mission recommends the continuation of the funding.*

4.7.2 More clarity regarding financial roles and responsibilities, and transparency of procedures

The current function of an accountant is still more that of a bookkeeper than that of a provider of relevant information for the management of the programme at the respective level. The manager, in turn, often only executes the Programme whereas the actual financial decision-making management is in the hands of the Executive Committee. In many cases, of course, there is no alternative, as the capacity of the functionaries rarely matches the required profile for the positions. This, again, is a result of the choice of Programme, which deliberately does not wish to recruit people motivated only by salaries.

Moreover, the procedures regarding the preparation of the annual budget may have become clearer and more effective. But looking at the procedures regarding the expenditures and release of money within the framework of the approved budgets, the question remains to what extent is there really decentralisation of financial powers.

If decentralisation of financial powers is to be achieved there should be more clarity regarding the financial roles and responsibilities at different levels and concerned staff officers need to be prepared and trained accordingly. There should also be greater transparency with regard to the procedures and requirements regarding expenditures and release of funds.

4.7.3 Recommendations regarding the financial planning

The programme structure's capacity for more realistic planning for the next fiscal year could be enhanced by the initial in-depth analysis of the current status of the Mahila Samakhya Programme, its plans and actual outcome. The actual expenditures should be reviewed and compared with the budgeted ones, with an immediate analysis of the reasons and motives for the discrepancies. This review could be performed in the same way as during the evaluation mission.

The suggestion might be to organise initially the joint group session, including all persons involved both in the planning and implementation levels of activities to create overall awareness and strengthen the capacity of relevant and realistic planning and budgeting, which might then serve more as a management tool and not solely as pure cost estimation.

4.7.4 Recommendations regarding budget methodology

The GOI guidelines cannot be treated as absolute norms for any achievement-oriented project. They should be seen as indications, guidelines, being open for the necessary and relevant modifications. The entire planning and budgetary period can remain in correspondence with the national planning, i.e. five year term. (For the purpose of extension into new States, the first five-year period can be extended into a second term).

This allows a perspective generally accepted and absorbed. Within the project itself, the five year period should result in annual plans which, when necessary, can be broken into further smaller and relevant periods of quarters or, depending on the kind of actions/expenditures, months. The shorter the period, the better the opportunity for monitoring and required management actions.

The budget plans should be visible. Each participant in Mahila Samakhya should be informed about his/her responsibility within the budgetary planning and control and the entire system should be documented in a complete and transparent way.

The current zero-budgeting, based on the detailed and strict planning needs to be completed to allow it to be flexible and fit into the perspective of the Programme growth and development and cope with changing external circumstances.

4.7.5 Recommendations regarding budget implementation - utilisation of funds

Experience from the programme implementation in the previous years should be taken into account when preparing future budgets. The developed norms, patterns in the recurring unit prices and other costs related to the activities and all other differentiation factors, may all influence the future estimation of certain kinds of expenditures. When cost may be unpredictable, more insight into the market mechanisms and sensitivities may be needed. This could be built into a required continuous professional training scheme.

Proper attention should be paid to the estimation of the salaries of the staff at all levels. The proposed flexibility could be added by breaking the contract period in two shorter periods of, say two years or, even more simple, to build in the performance assessment moment after two years functioning with the possible increase of salary of, say 20%. The sahayoginis should be treated as the other Programme staff and as professionals.

The under-spending which has accumulated every following year's budget as "capital fund" needs to be taken into consideration accordingly. The past reasons for the under-spending were mainly caused by an insufficient insight in the programme dynamics. The initial years evidently (and logically) needed more time and money for the set-up of the programme structure while the activities could be accelerated only after this structure was put in place.

Moreover, as these gains cannot be used for other purposes than those indicated in the budget and complying with the GOI guidelines, it can be expected that the current problem of under-

spending will continue, unless a solution in the form of additional utilisation of these reserves is found.

A proposal for some items to realise this suggestion comprises:

- * some part of the current under-spending to be rolled-over to the following year for its accelerated activities,
- * another part to be added to the contingency fund for miscellaneous purposes (to be specified),
- * a third final part to be allotted for a special reserve fund at State level to be used at the discretion of the Programme Managers, (e.g. supplementary funds for Technical Assistance or Programme extension to other districts).

4.7.6 Recommendations on budget administration

The norms and formats for budgetary processes, both for planning and monitoring should be simple to use, uniform throughout the states and standardised for all States where the Mahila Samakhya Programme is being implemented. Only then will budget monitoring be relevant and user-friendly and offer the valid comparative data.

Proposed is that accountants should prepare reports for monitoring the utilisation of funds in reasonable and relevant periods of time and based on valid information from the implementers. Such periods could correspond with the periods of regular monthly team meetings both at State and district levels. This would not create another line of communication and would allow the accountants to contribute effectively to the planning and control processes. They should also be involved in the preparation of the formulation of the strategic plans of their unit, further specified in activity plans, so that they can not only assist these units in the translation of these plans into financial terms but actually participate and contribute to the monitoring processes necessary for management actions, without interfering with the final decision of the SPDs and DPCs.

4.7.7 Recommendations regarding budget monitoring and control

The plans and budgets should be monitored jointly by the core team (management team) of the respective unit, each of the members having his/her specific responsibility. The manager will have final responsibility for the performance (both operational and financial) of the entire structure under his/her supervision. This requires the continuation of a simple, flat management structure, with more transparent professional links, recognisable roles and responsibilities. Such a structure allows the team to be aware of the information which they need to provide in their fields of operation.

The accountant, as stated in the previous paragraph prepares the financial overviews with an explanation/justification of mutations incorporated, the team members prepare the report on the status of project in their activity fields. Only then can the manager follow the progress of the project and take timely decisions. The manager, in turn, informs the team about the possible modifications from outside the Programme, which might be of importance for the progress of the entire Programme.

4.8 Summary of the main conclusions regarding financial management linked to the terms of reference

a) Expenditure and the utilisation of funds in relation to approved budgets

All expenditures are part of the Government of India Guidelines and include:

- * field (sangha) activities
- * staff salaries
- * staff training

as sub-heads in the Guidelines.

Main reasons for under-spending during past programme years:

- too ambitious activity planning and budgeting
- understaffing - staff turnover and vacancies - due to lengthy recruitment procedures and problems in finding suitable candidates, esp. for management or specialist positions
- *cost cutting caused by female sense for the sound management of household money, in the villages combined with influence of women's own contributions, their improved negotiating skills and abilities to tap other available resources*
- absence of a professional staff development scheme in the activity and budget planning at all levels due to workload and lack of time.

Problems experienced by the implementing staff regarding financial planning:

- lack of clarity in interpretation of budget heads and absence of headings for certain expenditures (e.g. health checks and security provisions for staff)
- unit prices, calculated in 1988, are too low considering inflation, the changing market and rising cost, and have not been adjusted to current rates and changes in salary structures within the government and outside. This refers especially to the following:
 - remuneration (salaries and allowances) of sahayoginis, teachers of childcare centres, literacy teachers and MSK teachers, honoraria for resource persons, external trainers etc.
 - rates for renting buildings for office space and MSK
 - Sangha hut
 - maintenance, replacement and acquisition of equipment (vehicles, office equipment, VHR, PCs, fax etc.

b) Parties involved in the financial planning and their understanding of the budgetary procedures

All levels of the Mahila Samakhya Programme, from the sangha to the State Office are involved in activity planning. However, activity planning and financial planning remain separate entities. The finalisation of financial planning is still, to a large extent, in hands of the State Office even though it is prepared by district co-ordinators together with their accountants and based on the activity planning designed "bottom-up". The final responsibility for approval of annual plans and budgets is with the Executive Committee.

The procedures regarding the preparation of the annual budget may have become clearer and more realistic in recent years, but the question remains to what extent is there really decentralisation of financial authority. There is still lack of clarity and transparency as to the delegation of powers for expenditures and release of money within the approved budgets. The financial powers at all levels of the Mahila Samakhya Programme structure appear to be clearly formulated in the articles of the Mahila Samakhya Association. In practice however, possibly due to (a) the power of further delegation given to the State Programme Directors, and (b) the lack of sufficiently competent and motivated personnel, especially at the district level, it may happen that the SPD tend to keep more power in their own hands (e.g. signing the invoices, signing the approvals for purchases etc.). This is perfectly understandable and effective as to elimination of the financial errors, but not always progressive in the scope of learning and motivating processes. The same can happen between the district and the village levels. On the other hand the Executive Committees which delegate many powers to the SPDs tend to keep the final decision-making powers to the EC regarding issues they feel are important (such as allocation of money for involvement of external expertise). Such situations could become a cause for frustration and delay in the implementation of activities and a reason for under-spending (because the release of the budget has not been approved and consequently activities are postponed or not taking place). The recommendation would be an enhancement of transparency by means of clarification of the ambiguities in the formulation of the 'delegation of financial powers'.

The positive attempts to streamline budgetary procedures by training the Mahila Samakhya Programme staff need to be encouraged and continued for the relevant parties at all levels. Increased acceptance of responsibility by the sanghas for their support structures should lead, in the future, to added financial decision-making by the sanghas.

c) Extended budget neutral financial and management planning

An extension of the Dutch financial assistance is justified, if the basic philosophy of the programme is maintained, ensured and where necessary strengthened, requiring a revision of the five-year budget (1998 - 2002/3). The revision is to be based on the following:

- * review, updating and recalculation of unit costs for programme activities and provisions, taking into account inflation correction and costs changes
- * review and recalculation of the salary structure and introduction of an differentiated salary structure for sahayoginis and programme staff allowing
 - promotion on merit and performance
 - compensation for inflation
 - adjustments to remain compatible with (changes in) salary levels in the Government and in the NGOs-world,
 - incentives (house rent allowance and/or hardship allowance for work under extreme conditions)
 - medical care and insurance for staff and sahayoginis
- * adequate provisions for professional development of programme staff (including sahayoginis)
- * provisions for maintenance, replacement and purchase of new equipment

The recalculated budget should also take into account the expansion of the programme at different levels (block, district, new districts) within the state, and for the expansion into new States.

d) Directions for future planning:

The following measures are recommended:

- * to organise an in-depth review of planned budgets and realised expenditures at district and State levels with all parties involved (see above) offering a better insight in procedures, relevant division of tasks and responsibilities and identification of problems and training needs with regard to the (financial) planning
- * to visualise the effect of sangha financial input, savings, funds from other sources within the scope of sanghas becoming financially self-reliant
- * to strengthen the acceptance of responsibility of sanghas for their support structures (e.g. all types of educational and literacy centres) which might increase the feasibility of linking this with greater financial responsibility. This would imply handing over to the sanghas the Mahila Samakhya provisions for e.g. teachers of childcare/pre-school education centres, non-formal education and adult education centres and related costs.

e) Technical Assistance

The use of the provision for Technical Assistance has been limited to the organisation of a successful international workshop with participants from African countries and neighbouring countries in Asia and for technical assistance by resource persons.

At national level it is felt that the provision of Technical Assistance can play an important role in facilitating further capacity development of functionaries in the programme at different levels such as exposure visits to and interaction with programmes in other countries, training at relevant institutes abroad, participation in international conferences and seminars, hosting seminars and workshops on issues relating to women's education empowerment and development.

The optimal utilisation of the TA provision requires that the information on the provision will be shared with the states at all levels, and that criteria and guidelines be prepared and agreed upon, so that is clear at all levels how to access and benefit from the available provision.

f) The role of the Royal Netherlands Embassy

Within the time frame of the evaluation mission there was no opportunity to assess the role of the RNE.

The overall impression gained from the field discussions is that there is a regular contact of embassy staff with the National Programme Director. There is no direct involvement of embassy staff with the implementation of the State Programme, which is as it should remain.

TERMS OF REFERENCE INDO-DUTCH EVALUATION MAHILA SAMAKHYA

MAHILA SAMAKHYAINDO-DUTCH EVALUATION, 1996BACKGROUND

Manila Samakhya emerged in response to the National Policy on Education, 1986, which envisaged education as an agent of change in the basic status of women. The programme aims at empowerment of women through creating a conducive environment and generating a demand for learning. The programme is sponsored by the Netherlands Government in four States, i.e., Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat. Mahila Samakhya fits in with the four inter-related principles of physical, economic, political and socio-cultural aspects of the autonomy principle of the Indo-Dutch Development Cooperation programme.

The programme is flexible and facilitative in nature and its process, rather than, target oriented. The programme is guided by the 'non-negotiable' principles, i.e., allowing sufficient space and time to women to come together and to influence the shape and pace of the programme, to create an environment of learning that will enable them to question, conceptualise, seek answers, act and reflect on their actions and also acquire the necessary skills and capacities to determine their own development. In this process, the role of the project functionaries and agencies is facilitative and not directive. All programme interventions are developed in response to articulated local needs and demands.

The Mahila Sangha women's collective at the village level is the nodal point of the programme and all activities are planned around the Sangha.

The MS programme started in 1988-89 in Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh and was extended to Andhra Pradesh at the end of 1992. In addition to these four Dutch funded MS programmes, the programme is also functioning in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Assam. In Bihar, it is part of the Bihar Education Project and in Madhya Pradesh and Assam, autonomous MS societies have been set up by the District Primary Education Project.

Given the existing scope for self-definition and organic expansion, MS is at different stages of development in the four States and even within each State.

MS has a provision for both external and concurrent internal evaluations. Each State has a continuous process of self-evaluation. There have been two external evaluations: the

Indo- Dutch evaluation of 1991 and the National Evaluation in 1993.

In a review of the total Indo-Dutch Cooperation programme during 1982-92, the Inspection advised that indicators for measuring progress and impact be developed. In a series of simultaneous efforts, parameters have been developed (by Mahila Samakhya, Jamsheda Khan and Bouhuls) for internal and external evaluation. The mission is urged to use the matrix in Annexure A.

1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

To review the progress of the programme over the last 5 years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women.

To assess and analyse processes of empowerment at the Sangha level (village collective).

2. PARAMETERS FOR EVALUATION

The evaluation team will utilise the set of parameters (Annexure A) to assess the progress and process of empowerment of rural women through the Mahila Samakhya Programme. In addition, the mission will address the following as well:

Is there an impact of the programme on women's personal and family life using the autonomy principle?

To what extent has MS been able to lay the ground for a grassroots level women's movement; facilitate women's political participation and evolve a focus on women's rights?

How successful has MS been in addressing women's issues cutting across caste and class divides?

What is the emerging trend across the four States in terms of pace of growth and impact?

During the programme Mahila Shiksha Kendras have emerged as a strong part of the programme. What impact do the MSKs have?

Is the reporting sufficient to give a clear insight into the programme?

Assess the interface of MS with other educational programmes like DPEP.

Is the evaluation matrix an effective and workable tool? Can it be applied to the different States?

Assess the expansion strategies in MS.

Recommend measures to disseminate MS strategies in non-MS areas/programmes both within and outside the country.

Financial Management

Assess and analyse expenditure and utilisation of funds in relation to approved budgets. In view of underspending in the current project period, how realistic is budget planning in MS? Provide directions for future planning.

Who is involved in planning? How far are planning and budgetary procedures understood by project personnel? To what extent are these processes transparent?

Is an extended budget-neutral financial and management planning feasible?

Is the Technical Assistance amount well used? Can it be better used?

Assess the role of RNE.

3. EVALUATION PROCESS

Team Composition

1. The evaluation team will comprise of two senior Dutch experts and two senior Indian experts who are familiar with the MS process and philosophy as well as with gender issues.

1. Claudine Hellman
2. A financial/management expert
3. Vasant Kannan
4. Leela Gulati

Duration

1. The evaluation will be done during the period 11th to the 28th of November, 1996.
2. The evaluation will begin with a briefing in Delhi on the 11th November, 1996 by the National Office and RNE.
4. The evaluation team will visit all the four States, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka and interact at various levels, i.e., the village, the district and the State.
6. The evaluation mission will interact with representatives of the National Resource Group of MS and the GOI at the national level.

4. DOCUMENTATION

The following documentation will be made available to the team:

1. Mahila Samakhya, Ministry of Human Resource Development (Project Document)
2. Mahila Samakhya, National Overview, 1992-93; 1993-96
3. Mahila Samakhya, National Evaluation Report
4. Knowledge is like flowing water, 1995
5. We can change our world, 1995
6. Women's Collectives in Mahila Samakhya -- A Study, 1996
7. Mahila Shikshan Kendras, 1996
8. Training in Mahila Samakhya, 1996
9. Annual Reports of Mahila Samakhya programme in Karnataka, UP, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh.
10. Indo-Dutch Evaluation Report, 1991.

5. REPORTING

The Mission will craft a summary of findings including conclusions and recommendations in an Aide Memoire. This will be presented and discussed at a joint meeting of representatives of the Government of India and the Netherlands Embassy on 28th of November, 1996, before the Mission leaves.

The report will be presented in a draft form before 31st of December, 1996.

Annexure A

1. Dutch Review Mission
2. Internal Evaluation

Parameters/Levels	Village Level (Sangha)	District (DIR)	State lev (State Office)
Processes	Start-up/Entry point creating one's space and time (Initiation, coming together, evolution of loose structure/groups).	Operationalising inputs, continuous reflection/action. (Field level working as per MS Operational process in a phased manner) creative of a facilitative and open working environment/ensuring solidarity and a team spirit.	-Planning critical inputs with teams. -Timely direction to the programme. -creation of a facilitative and open working environment. -ensuring solidarity and a team spirit. -expansion of programme qualitatively & quantitatively (spatially & programmatically).
1. Growth	Concept of sangha, stages of strengthening.	-Programme expansion with integration of new sanghas, new activities, processes & initiatives - decentralised planning and decision making. -Initiating changes in roles individual growth.	-Assessing staff requirements, programme needs. -empowerment & perspective of MS personnel at all levels- individual growth. -Delegation, operational support, crisis management, strengthening programme components, ensuring policy changes when required.
Qualitative/quantitative parameters for	-sangha formation- levels of participation/no. variants. -Initiatives taken and negotiations at various levels- family, community, village administration and political structures. -acquisition of new skills & their application, ability and strength to influence the social environment. -conflict resolution. -sharing of information at all levels.		
2. Issues	How Sanghas mobilised to act	-Response to field demands for multiple issues. -Interlinking issues giving the momentum. -Perspective building on issues. -Information flow for action and sustenance.	-Resource support for action and sustenance -Perspective building. -Conflict management. -Initiation/involvement in trainings, capacity building, role clarity. -Trust building and team cohesion
Range of issues addressed	-collective/individual -family based -community/social -village -area/regional Different levels of participation of the various actors and their perspective for taking action (MS & non MS).	-Assessing training needs, building capacities of core-team & field functionaries, developing conceptual clarity on issues & activities needs/action etc.	
3. Activities	-Problem solving, widening circles/triples of activities & action. Moving from practical needs to strategic gender interests.		
4. Descending Accountability	-Making government systems and MS/non MS personnel accountable.	-Accountability to village level processes and MS programmes.	-Accountability to village/district level & larger MS programmes as a whole.
5. Resources	-Range of schemes accessed and assets/ acquires at individual & sangha level. -Nature of assets/schemes skills.	-Human resources develop within the organisation and accessed from outside. -Material resources accessed from outside and developed within the organisation. -Documentation - skill developed, documents created - usage within the programme.	-Facilitation of resources and training inputs at all levels. -Support in the creation of resources as and when required. -Critical usage of documentation within the programme.
6. Visibility / Mobility	-Terms of visibility - self image and identity individual/sangha/community/male perceptions. -Recognition in the eyes of govt. departments and functionaries. -Participation at village/block level meetings.	-Image and visibility of the programme at district level. -Recognition of DIR & core team.	-Visibility of the programme by virtue of its performance in field and its credibility at village/district/State level.

Linkages	-Horizontal and vertical at village level with institutions government, intra-sangha.	-Liaison and networking of programme at various levels within the district and inter district networking with NGOs, agencies, Govt departments and training institutes/organizations.	-Ensuring that NS non-negotiables are maintained. -Involvement of specialists, resource persons as per programme needs from time to time. -Liaising at state level with other NS programmes.
Capacity building	-Ability of sanghas to act and work independently and collectively to develop and build capacities. -Emergence of new and varied leadership patterns.	-Strengthening skills and capacities of programme teams. -Facilitating capacity building at village level setup terms of their interaction with others.	-Democratization/decentralization of decision-making in the context of evolving programme. -Strengthening skills and capacities at village/district level.
Monitoring/ follow-up &	-Degree/kind of accountability sought from NS personnel.	-Mechanisms/Methods for: a) monitoring inputs and activities. b) performance of team in the context of task & responsibilities. c) impact of inputs.	-Monitoring financial expenditures/ programme components and activities in relation to NS processes/principles. -Evolution of innovative strategies for follow-up inputs & sustenance.
Vision	-Sanghas vision for themselves for the future, independent of NS. -Strategies to realize vision.	-Functionaries vision for themselves and for the programme. -Operational changes to achieve the vision. -Efforts for further evolving and sharpening this vision. -Processes for sharpening vision.	-Vision for the future (ROI back and sustainability). -Developing concrete strategies to realize the vision. -Facilitating change in inputs for changing dynamics. -Working towards sustainability.
Budgets/ Plans	-Learning financial operations, maintenance of accounts, credit and thrift, sharing financial responsibilities.	-Decentralization & delegation of financial operation. -Planning inputs - financial & human resources timely. -Facilitating fund flow.	-Planning budgets in consonance with and in response to field demands. -Delegation of financial powers. -Planning expansion & planning withdrawal. -Planning various programme inputs in consonance with needs.

Key challenges / trends
Sustainability (eco-prod, facility, energy consumption, (activities) & (programme).
Evolving structures, strategies, processes.

Identify different parameters for old and new states with certain common denominators.
4 members from the previous mission to be included in this mission.
Briefing meeting at Delhi with Review Mission to discuss these parameters
4 members go to the States.

Members of the Committee:

Sujitha	- M.S., Bihar.
J. Ramachandri	- M.S., A.P.
S. Mahapatra	- M.S., D.P.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE FIELDVISITS IN ANDHRA PRADESH AND UTTAR PRADESH

1. Major conclusions and some reflections

The overview of the issues and trends in the Mahila Samakhya Programme as outlined in the Mahila Samakhya National Evaluation Report (1993) is generally confirmed by the findings of the team in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

The Mahila Samakhya Programme has brought about major changes in the lives and situations of the women involved. Like the National Evaluation Report we emphasise the following as important achievements.

- 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 mobilise 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 for families.
- Sanghas have been able to identify and articulate their needs. They have mobilised 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 women themselves, rather than by any pre-set targets or blueprints. There has been no dilution of the emphasis on process.

Regarding the issues and concerns that emerge the report of the National Evaluation (1993) refers to the following:

1. empowerment at the sangha level
2. structures and systems

3. strengthening need based interventions
4. training
5. prospects of sahayoginis
6. long term perspective for sanghas.

The National Evaluation Report points out that the empowerment processes have progressed unevenly for the sakhis, sahayoginis and sangha members. It points the fact that programme interventions such as training opportunities and skill building are more frequent and intensive at this level. This is confirmed by our findings. The report also points out that the perspective and understanding of the philosophy of the programme is limited at the sangha level. The sanghas seem issue-based with a focus on short strategies rather than on organisation building in the long term. This is completely confirmed by our findings as well.

The only long term vision seems to be that the children will be educated and go to school. This does reflect a major concern of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. The role of the sanghas in ensuring children's education is one of the indicators of empowerment in the Programme.

While sangha women have begun to compromise, confront and create a space for themselves within the family and community there is no visible evidence yet of consistently building on, or consolidating this space. In Andhra Pradesh, especially, the main emphasis is on access to resources, while the reference to violence or collective struggle around social practices is limited to child marriage and jogini initiation. Issues of violence against women up incidentally but not yet addressed in terms of power and legal justice¹. The programme in Andhra Pradesh is younger and the process of consolidation is yet to begin.

The priority of social issues seems to be coming from the Karyakarthis (sahayoginis) who did express as one of their frustrations the fact that they were forced to set aside their own agendas and respond to the women's survival needs. The discrepancy between sangha women prioritising their basic survival needs and the Mahila Samakhya's empowerment agenda is a very problematic area.

Given the levels of poverty and deprivation that exist in these districts survival needs will keep emerging all the time. It is also a fact that women simply do not articulate their oppression or suffering but silently accept it as a fact of life. To be able to see the violence they suffer as an abridgement of their right or dignity women need to be aware of the options available to them. And that emphasis on options is lacking. And this is directly linked to capacity building of sahayoginis and sangha leaders who are the catalysts.

The report of the National Evaluation (1993) points out that "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."

¹ And this is in spite of having mobilised a rally on violence in Medak. Although a large rally on violence had been held in the district following incidents of rape, neither the Karyakarthis nor the sangha women mentioned it as an achievement. One Karyakartha mentioned violence but more in the nature of disaster than as an aspect of power.

While we agree in principle with this we feel that to achieve this two things are required

1. *The staff of the Mahila Samakhya at every level need much more training and a sharpening of their conceptual philosophical perspective.* In the Andhra Pradesh team we felt that there was a distinct need for training and strengthening right up to the level of the district co-ordinators, and district resource persons.

In Uttar Pradesh this was much more uneven. There was a great degree of conceptual clarity among the experienced Sahayoginis and the resource persons who were also confronting the problem of burnout and lack of avenues of career advancement and challenge. Among the newer ones there was an evident need for more training.

2. The Mahila Samakhya philosophy of allowing women at the sangha level to decide the pace and direction of their development may affect seriously the likelihood of women being sufficiently empowered to form that "cadre of empowered rural women who will take forward the process of collective action for change." Women, however, can define their development and priorities only within the parameters of their lived experience and reality. Without the presence of options, without a conscious and designed catalysing effect they will continue to define their empowerment purely in terms of accessing resources - whether it is housing, JRY or DWCRA.

This is not to dismiss the significance of these measures, but to urge the *need for a forward looking strategy that will prevent any sense of stasis or stagnation in the programme.* In Tehri for instance women connect their survival need to the 'jal', 'jungle' and 'jameen' (water, forest and land) and their struggle becomes a struggle to protect and preserve the environment. This link is important and qualitatively different from accessing resources.

In Banda and Saharanpur the critical concern is violence and it is difficult to deal with an issue like violence without the support of other movements and groups. We reiterate the warning in the National Evaluation Report: "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.*" (Emphasis VK)

Talking of the need to strengthen and consolidate need based interventions the report points out that several innovative strategies and approaches have been evolved in response to local needs. "It is emphasized that these interventions have now progressed beyond the preliminary stage and more focused 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.(Emphasis VK).

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."

Regarding training the evaluation report points to the fact that training programmes with women who share the values and ideology of Mahila Samakhya have initiated processes that were instrumental in providing the opportunity for women to build strengths and solidarity and develop a collective framework for understanding gender. These trainings also provide networks and links with the larger women's movement. What is in evidence now is a kind of drawing together and a certain degree of 'closing in' as experiences and competencies within the programme have grown.

Yet, training seems to have become to be considered as an informal and internal process of reflection and exploration. This 'closing in' can be seen as a result of reluctance to interference from other NGOs and external organisations which might perhaps have another philosophy. It could also result from reluctance of interference of NGOs in a Government programme. Or it results from the need to build a coherence and unity within the team, which can then link the issues to the concrete problems on the ground.

The problem here is that while a training that explores the self and makes women aware of their inner resources and energies can build capacity and leadership quality, it cannot substitute for specific skills or information. The ideal would be to balance the two. What has happened in most instances is that when sahayoginis ask for more information on specific demands from the sanghas the provision of such information in training or reflection meetings becomes a substitute for perspective building. This is not necessarily deliberate, but could be a result of the pace of the programme and lack of time. Gradually in the process of responding to the growing demands from the field, perspective building and conceptual clarity take a back seat.

It is also good to remember that not everybody is a good trainer and that not every resource person and Karyakartha can replace experienced trainers however much we value participatory processes.

The balance between building capacity internally and tapping to the fullest, resources available externally is also a difficult issue and needs to be considered. *The Report of the National Evaluation (1993)* points out that "however, the evaluation shows that there is a change in the nature of the activities of 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." The evaluators 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 focused and strategic training programmes which will be tailored to meet specific learning needs and which will strengthen and reinforce concepts and skills built earlier."

This is something we would also urge strongly from our findings.

2.2 Recommendations

- * More training and perspective building for the staff.
- * More emphasis on management skills, planning and professional capacity. This does not mean that the process orientation is sacrificed. It means that while the process is prioritised for the sangha women, the karyakarthas and staff must be strengthened to deal with the increasing demand from the field. Commitment by itself does not replace competence and the organisation needs to concentrate on building competence.
- * The whole programme seems to revolve around voluntarism, dedication and the indefinite availability of a single woman (without family responsibility). This needs to be streamlined to allow women to work for a given period intensively and then be able to have predictable timings so that there is not burn out or rapid turnover of staff.
- * Staff salary, allowances, health & accident insurance, housing, childcare need to be attended to and improved if women are to work to their best capacity without sacrificing their own interests.
- * Periodic reorientation and fresh interactions outside the MS family at all levels to fulfil the promise of the programme.

OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS BASED ON THE FIELDVISIT IN GUJARAT

SUMMARY

1. The Programme

In Gujarat Mahila Samakhya has been in existence since 1989 and started to be implemented in three districts. The Programme has gradually extended its coverage within the districts and has extended its outreach in a fourth District. The thrust of Mahila Samakhya is on the building of village-level mahila sanghas or women's collectives. The sangha collective is the epicentre which gives direction to the process of empowerment generating self-directed development and learning processes. Mahila Samakhya has taken a formidable task upon its shoulders and has succeeded in reaching out to women who, under the prevailing conditions in Gujarat, have otherwise remained unreached, invisible and voiceless. From the first attempts to establish rapport with the poorest women in the villages, to gain their trust and confidence in an often hostile environment, to start a process off through collective reflection, decision making, planning and concerted action, women's collectives have emerged (or are emerging) in more than 600 rural villages in Gujarat.

The key actors in the building of a sangha are, apart from the village women, the sahayoginis and the sakhis. Most of the sahayoginis we met seemed remarkably capable and strong women, highly motivated and with a great commitment to their work, their 'mission' and to the sangha women. As the result of the sakhi rotating system more than 2000 women have been trained, each sangha having a cadre of five to six trained and committed sakhis. They have become strong, assertive and articulate.

In the initial stages of sangha formation mainly infra-structural and community issues like access to water, road repair, electricity have been taken up. Such issues are relatively non-controversial and do not threaten the existing power structures and gender relationships. But they involve some amount of collective struggle and have helped in building solidarity and confidence in collective action.

Prevailing issues which over time have emerged and given attention to in the districts show a varied profile of activities related to e.g. health care and women's health awareness, female literacy and education of girls, legal issues and women's rights, economic empowerment, women's participation in politics. Special features of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat are the organisation of learning/awareness raising camps for adolescent girls and the mobilisation of thousands of women during celebrations and melas around relevant issues.

2. The impact of Mahila Samakhya on women's lives

2.1 Empowered women

The Programme as it has evolved has made an empowering impact on the lives of women participating in the Programme at different levels. The strongest noticeable effect is demonstrated in the existence of women's collectives in the villages. The impact of the Mahila Samakhya on the lives of rural women is that the sangha has become a source of strength upon which they can draw for solving personal and community problems individually as well as collectively. The sangha has provided women with the social and emotional space which enables them to shed their fears

and break out of physical and cultural barriers that have confined their lifespaces. The sangha confirms their identity as women and gives space and right to a dignified life for single women. Slowly and gradually women are beginning to assert their rights in order to get greater control of their lives and make changes.

The areas where Mahila Samakhya, through the mahila sanghas, has achieved most apart from gaining dignity and self-respect is in accessing government schemes and services, in health awareness and care, in literacy education. The approach used is based on women's assertion of their (equal) rights and entitlements to social welfare services, community provisions, economic schemes, educational provisions and health services. They do not challenge power structures and particularly gender relationships directly. But they affect the balance of powers in an indirect way, not in the least by the public respect and recognition gained. And this reflects back on the status and bargaining power of women in their families, their increased control of financial resources and family decisions, and their ability to fight and resist violence. The direct improvements are mainly noticeable in the area of basic survival needs and improving the circumstances in the personal and family sphere.

Women have started conquering new public spaces during the last two years through their involvement in the Panchayati Raj elections as voters and as candidates, and through the initiatives of women in e.g. Baroda to establish women's courts (nari adalat) at the Block level in front of the police and magistrate's office. And women are occupying new economic spaces by entering into new occupations like hand-pump mechanics and masons.

Political rights

Sangha women used their right to vote in supporting female candidates, women contested unfair election politics and resisted pressurising and being bribed. 284 MS women got elected and a number of them became a Sarpanch. The experience has helped to demystify the notion that political functions are beyond reach for rural women with their backgrounds. And now women begin to realise the enormous challenge they are coping with from their new positions in the current socio-political environment and its inherent gender biases against women. The involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the elections have strengthened its visibility and has created high expectations about women's power and ability to influence political decision making from a perspective of social justice and equality. By now almost a year after the elections it is a good time for a review and assessment of the impact on the elected women, and look into the need for effective support in the form of further training and the development of a common women's agenda.

Women and law

In all districts attention is given to legal issues and violence against women in the sangha meetings. Recognition that such cases are legal issues led to the initiative of sangha women to set up a voluntary support structure in the form of a women's courts or 'nari adalat' at the Block level. The nari adalats have a great impact on the public recognition of women's legal rights, on the visibility of Mahila Samakhya, and on the credibility of the court as a trustworthy support structure, because of its transparent rules and procedures. It has created a change in the attitude of officials and in their application of the rules: they now take women's issues seriously. The initiative has commanded respect and co-operation from the local authorities. And the court has created a sense of sisterhood among women across caste and village divides as women from other caste groups and from other villages also bring their cases and they are treated equally.

Economic empowerment

Sangha women in all districts have started savings and loans schemes. These saving schemes give women a feeling of having more control over financial resources and access to cash when in need. Loans are mostly used for individual and personal purposes, seldom for investing in economic

and/or collective enterprises. There is a great concern about sanghas breaking apart because of conflicts arising from dealing with savings schemes and from the emergence of economic interest groups within the sanghas.

2.2 Areas needing attention

Meeting women's basic survival needs and the Mahila Samakhya empowerment agenda

The empowerment agenda of Mahila Samakhya is bound to be at odds with the non-interventionist approach of the Programme and the emphasis on sangha women identifying their needs and priorities. Finding the balance between this is a problem facing the sahayoginis and the District staff. The agendas of the sangha women are based on their experienced realities within the framework of their geo-political and socio-cultural environments and the accepted values and biases that shape their positions in their gendered societies. Given their situation of poverty and deprivation they naturally articulate their needs in terms of basic survival and improvement of the quality of life. Without a conscious and deliberate input on building new perspectives based on equality, social justice and women's human rights there is a risk of stagnation of the growth of the empowerment processes. The day to day practice of constant preoccupation with running after meeting women's immediate needs may overtake (non-intended) the long term empowerment perspective. And this may create a risk that Mahila Samakhya becomes more of a demand driven organisation facilitating access to information and development resources, thereby losing its identity as an empowerment Programme.

This is a very complex issue that the Programme needs to continuously come back to in its training strategy and that should remain on the agenda for critical reflection.

Strengthening of the sanghas

The women we met in the meetings with the sanghas were impressively articulate and powerful. We noted, however, that spokes women were mainly the women who have attended the sakhi training. Questions can be raised as to what extent they have been able to share what they have learned with the sangha women and to which extent their empowerment has percolated down to the women in the sangha. Moreover, a long term perspective on sustaining the empowerment processes of and within the sanghas is absent. The internal training system needs to be reviewed and made more strategically oriented towards capacity and perspective building of women in the sanghas.

About 45% of the sanghas in Gujarat have been identified as being strong in terms of identity, internal dynamics and sharing of responsibilities, sensitivity to women's equality and social justice, use of collective strength. Yet, they need to become more self-reliant in managing their own affairs and able to connect their activities to a clearer and holistic perspective on gender.

Besides, more than half of the sanghas need further strengthening and support in terms of sangha consolidation and perspective building. More attention need to be given to training at sangha level and it will be a great challenge for the programme staff with the sakhis and sahayoginis to engage in evolving special training/learning programmes to be conducted with women in their sanghas around issues raised by them focused on enhancement of a gender perspective, strengthening of the sangha from within and capacity building for the self-reliance of the sangha.

For the further development of empowerment strategies at the sangha level more insight is needed in the internal dynamics of the sangha development and the dimensions of the empowerment processes of and among women at the sangha level. The initiative of the Programme to start a project of participatory documentation of the sangha development process with the sangha members can be considered as a start for getting into the heart of the sangha. This can be

supplemented by an in-depth study focused on the internal and external dynamics guiding the processes within the sangha.

Women's economic empowerment

Economic issues in areas of e.g. wages, improved labour conditions, employment creation and income generation seem to be difficult to deal with. The need for economic development, regular work, higher and stable incomes is high on the priority list of sangha women. But dealing with the recurring economic demands of women is an area for which Mahila Samakhya - as a process oriented, non-input delivery organisation - has not yet found a suitable answer, nor has it been able to define its role. The economic empowerment of women is an area which needs further thinking and strategizing, perhaps by exploring possibilities for capacity building and vocational skills training, and for strengthening economic support structures initiated by women in combination with developing partnerships with economic/rural development programmes.

Collaboration with other organisations

Mahila Samakhya has expanded its collaboration with other, like minded, organisations, particularly in the areas awareness training and capacity building. The lessons learned from such collaborative efforts could help in evolving more active approaches to collaboration with other agencies especially in the area of economic/rural/ agricultural and environmental development based on a participatory approach. Instead of focusing on organisations which are already present in a certain geographical area Mahila Samakhya could encourage rural development organisations to come to areas which have been unreached and are now uncovered by Mahila Samakhya.

Women's rights under tribal law

One of the obstacles in dealing with family violence and abuse of women from a legal perspective is that a number of the sanghas are in tribal areas which have their own tribal laws. A study about women's rights under tribal law in different tribal systems is required in order for women to know their rights and how to make use of them in order to seek justice. A better understanding of the tribal legal system is also relevant in relation to other legal issues such as property and inheritance rights and rights to the use of tribal land e.g. for the building of the sangha hut.

Mahila Kutir

The building of a Mahila Kutir - providing 'space' for women to come together - has become a lengthy learning process requiring stamina from the sangha women and sahayoginis. The process has met with many disappointments and a certain fatigue seems to have set in because of sometimes insurmountable obstacles. The main constraints are

- problems of getting land allocated, particularly in the tribal areas where land issues fall under the Tribal Area Development Programme,
- the allocation for the sangha hut under the Mahila Samakhya is insufficient to meet the costs involved,

and perhaps some inflexibility in the adherence to the Mahila Samakhya rules regarding the transfer of land to the sanghas. One problem might be the lack of understanding about the tribal legislation regarding the use and allocation of land and the implications in respect to the status of the sanghas as autonomous entities within a government programme.

Sanghas have been very resourceful in finding solutions for the lack of funds. In many cases they have been able to raise funds from other sources, to find low cost solutions and to provide their own labour. Yet it is necessary to review the budgetary allocations for the sangha huts under the Mahila Samakhya budget and to bring it in line with the current price levels.

3. Cutting across caste and class divides

Most of the sanghas in Mahila Samakhya are limited in caste composition to Scheduled Castes or belong to specific tribal groups. Women from other caste groups sometimes attend sangha meetings and have started to bring cases of violence and injustice to the sanghas. The nari adalats in Baroda District deal with legal cases from women regardless of their caste background. The melas and celebrations organised by the sanghas are a start for breaking class/caste barriers. Child care centres, literacy classes, securing access of girls to good education, women's health and legal rights, and community issues like water are areas of common women's interests where traditional caste divides can be broken.

In the sanghas there is a predominance of women from older age groups. The sanghas could give more attention to involving young women and look into their needs, and to reviewing relationships of power and authority among women within the family from a perspective of equality.

4. Toward a grassroots women's movement

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat has an impressive record in mobilising more than ten thousand women around issues like women's health, political participation, women and law, women's literacy etc. during melas and international celebrations. And sanghas have started networking and building linkages outside their villages. Their lobby and mobilisation activities are increasingly centred around women's legal and political rights, their right to health and education. The seeds for the emergence of a grassroots women's movement are there. Its growth is linked to the ability of Mahila Samakhya to broaden its coverage within the villages, within the blocks and within the districts, and develop a certain 'critical mass' of sangha women.

The Programme could perhaps make more intensive efforts of linking the sanghas with the developments within the women's movement and establishing closer contacts with women's organisations and groups within the districts and in the State.

5. Emerging trends

The emerging trends in Mahila Samakhya relate to the process of re-orientation and include

- the new emphasis on conscious integration of a gender perspective to the issues raised in the sanghas,
- the identification of a limited number of focal points per district around which activities will be centred,
- renewed attention to the role of Mahila Samakhya in relation to the economic empowerment of women and collaboration with other agencies,
- mobilisation of women around women's issues and the gradual emergence of a grassroots women's movement,
- the increasing emphasis on training at sangha level aimed at perspective building and capacity building for self-reliance of the sangha.

One of the emerging trends in the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat is the transition from the sakhhi rotation model to the so called sangha model. This is an important step towards decentralised financial management and decision-making, and towards self-reliance of the sanghas, if it is accompanied by training of the sangha members in financial management and skills required to be self-reliant.

An on-going debate in Mahila Samakhya concerns cluster forming and the building of a federation of sanghas in combination with the development of support structures at the block level. Sanghas are already actively engaged in networking and mobilisation around common issues above sangha level. Sakhis are seeking support from sakhis in other villages to strengthen their voices and powers when dealing with authorities at block or district levels. And sanghas have initiated their own legal support structure by establishing their women's courts. These dynamics emerging from the sanghas are very positive in terms of growing strength. The role of Mahila Samakhya is then to strengthen the human resources for these sangha networks and support structures. This will provide new roles for sangha women and sakhis, such as the para-legal counsellors in Baroda. For sahayoginis it may offer opportunities for horizontal and vertical mobility, for role differentiation and specialisation, and for new career paths.

6. Expansion strategies

The current situation with sanghas in different stages of strength (formation stage, consolidation stage, weakened, strong) calls for a diversified strategy. This strategy is to be based on the lessons learned in the past, the increased presence and visibility in the State and within the districts and the current momentum of spontaneous expansion via the sanghas:

The process of expansion is to be seen in connection with the process of de-linking the strong sanghas and strengthening of their capacities to become self-reliant. The following points of attention can guide the formulation and implementation of the expansion strategy:

- reinforcing the sangha strength and capacity building for self-reliance of the older sanghas;
- de-linking the strong and self-reliant sanghas from direct sahayogini support;
- promoting sanghas to become a community forum of women across caste, class or religious divides,
- strengthening networking among sanghas and the formation of cluster groups,
- strengthening and building of support structures at the block level,
- forming new sanghas in areas surrounding the clusters wherein Mahila Samakhya already exists,
- involving the old sanghas and clusters in the formation and strengthening of new sanghas. and for new districts
- selection to be based on transparent criteria e.g. poverty indicators, indicators for gender equality, female literacy rates, potential for linking up with DPEP and/or other schemes for poverty alleviation and socio-economic development,
- ensuring that staff and necessary infra-structure are in place and well prepared trained before starting the activities in the new districts.

The expansion strategy is to include attention to the human resources component and capacity building for new and diversified roles at all levels of the MS structure (including the sangha level), as well as the continuous (re-) orientation and intensive training at all levels of responsibility.

7. The education component and linkages to the other education programmes

Education is central in the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Education is understood in its broadest meaning as an empowering learning process which enables learners to question, to analyse to seek answers, to act and reflect, and thereby to discover their inner strength and realise their potential. It involves a life long process of interactive learning, based on sharing of knowledge and life experiences, critical analysis and reflection, creating new kinds of knowledge and understanding.

7.1 Education as Literacy

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat started taking up education as literacy in the early nineties on an experimental basis. However these early initiatives were short-lived as they have been overtaken by the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) which started in Gujarat in 1993. Mahila Samakhya has become actively involved in the TLC in two districts. The Mahila Samakhya contribution made the campaign into a success in the districts. The credit is not just for the efforts of Mahila Samakhya during the campaign. Recognition is to be given to the fact that the involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the success of the TLC is also an outcome of the preceding empowerment processes among village women and of the holistic Mahila Samakhya approach to education as empowerment. A culture of learning has been created among sangha women, which made them assert their rights to literacy and to benefit from the Total Literacy Campaign.

After the completion of the TLC literacy activities were continued in the form of motivational camps, followed by literacy classes, training of volunteer literacy teachers, preparing materials for neo-literates. The experience in education as literacy with adult women in the form of regular classes or camps is somewhat mixed, because of difficulties in maintaining women's interest after reaching the stage of being able to write their names, reading words and sentences, writing simple letters. Efforts to integrate literacy skills with function related training such as the training for balsakhis, hand-pump mechanics, para-legal workers etc. appear to be more effective, because of the direct linkage to the area of work.

Women have come to realise that they can learn, become empowered, effect changes without necessarily becoming literate themselves. What the experience in literacy has achieved is that women have come to better understand the importance of relevant literacy and school education for their daughters. They have learned that there are alternative ways of making learning and teaching meaningful and interesting in the lives of women. Mahila Samakhya has created a positive environment for learning and schooling of children, especially for girls' education.

7.2 Education of children

The education of girls is an emerging issue in the programme, it is on the agenda of sangha women, who have taken initiatives to obtain scholarship funds for their children's education, and to form committees checking on school attendance and teaching by teachers in village schools. In some villages informal initiatives have emerged such as coaching classes for out-of school girls (and sometimes also boys) in order get them into the mainstream education system.

Child Care and Education

The establishment of child care centres was first seen as a local support structure which would provide women with 'time' to spend for her own and for collective purposes. In various villages or neighbourhoods not reached by the Government run ICDS centres sangha women have set up childcare centres on a voluntary basis with support from Mahila Samakhya and in some form of collaboration with ICDS. One of the differences with the ICDS Child Care Centres are that the MS Centres are 'owned' by the sanghas.

There are good linkages with the local schools, children from the Child Care Centres enrol in the schools, are well adjusted to the school rhythm, they speak out and seem to be performing well. In some centres balsakhis are teaching school age girls and prepare them for admission in the village school. What is clearly coming out is that the child care centres are more than just taking care of young children, they have become important in environment building for school education, especially for girls, and they provide the children with a child-friendly learning environment and

prepare them for school. Areas to look into are the training of the balsakhis who could be given more training in e.g. pedagogic skills for pre-school learning and child psychology.

Balika Shiksan Kendra

In Sabarkantha the District team has established a residential school (Balika Shiksan Kendra) for out-of-school-girls in the age group of 9-14 years, who dropped out of school after four years. The BSK is meeting a demand for the provision of meaningful education for girls in a safe environment. According to the teachers and parents there are visible changes in the behaviour attitudes of the girls. They have lost their fears and initial shyness, they talk openly and are motivated to learn more, they have become confident and no longer consider themselves drop-outs. Parents (fathers), who had little faith that their daughters had learnt anything in school, expressed that after four months they have come to realise that in this school their daughters can learn.

The short experience of the BSK begins to have effect on further thinking not only about the establishment of BSKs in each block, but also about finding other alternative modes of schooling for drop-out girls at village level. This is an area wherein Mahila Samakhya could cooperate with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

There are some areas that need further attention and improvement, such as training in child psychology, pedagogy and class room methods. Serious attention needs to be given to the development of a clear vision and clarity about the objectives of the BSK. There is no longterm vision which guides the curriculum and no clarity about the duration of the BSK programme.

There are plans for establishing a Mahila Shiksan Kendra e.g. in Baroda District, but with different objectives in mind and for a different target group (adolescent girls and sangha women). The MSK will provide three to four months residential training programmes aimed at creation of local cadre linked to the emergence of sangha initiated support structures.

7.3 Co-operation with other education programmes

Mahila Samakhya has actively collaborated in the Total Literacy Campaign and further cooperation in the next post-literacy phase of the TLC is envisaged.

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in Gujarat is almost ready to start in Gujarat. DPEP will be focusing on improvement of the quality of instruction, teacher training, curriculum development and development of gender sensitive learning/instruction materials, community participation, and development of alternative learning modes for out-of-school children. The Mahila Samakhya experience shows that the empowerment of women is a precondition for the creation of demand for education of girls and for an environment for community participation in improving access to and quality of school education. In all DPEP components Mahila Samakhya can build on its experience and contribute e.g. in community mobilisation, participation and environment building, involving women in Village Education Committees (VECs) and training of VEC members, provision of training inputs on dealing with gender issues for the training of DPEP staff and teachers, development of gender sensitive learning materials and methods, alternative models for drop-outs and out-of-school girls. Mahila Samakhya will be able to benefit from DPEP in strengthening the pedagogic quality of the education components as well as the use of learning materials and aids.

As DPEP will be implemented by the State and District Departments of Education and the Gujarat Council for Education Research and Teacher Training (GCERT) the feasibility of forming a three partite (MS-DPEP-GCERT) task group could be considered with the task to work out the plans and

terms for co-operation at general State level as well as for the districts covered by both programmes.

8. Reporting and documentation

Over time Mahila Samakhya has produced a wealth of documentation for internal as well as for external purposes. However there is need for more systematisation and consolidation of the resource materials which allow for following the processes overall longer period. Since 1995 various training workshops have been conducted on process documentation at different levels of the programme structure. This is a very positive initiative as it is expected to provide a better understanding of how the learning and empowerment processes evolve.

9. The structure

The Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat has gone through a troublesome period with a succession of staff changes at the State and District levels. The re-orientation process which has been started within the Programme needs to be continued in all districts and reinforced by strategic training inputs on perspective building at all levels of the implementation structure. In this process more interaction with NRG members as resource persons is welcomed as it will help in sharpening of the feminist perspective, provide professional support as well as access to a broad range of experiences and linkages to the wider women's movement.

Furthermore, Mahila Samakhya needs to reconsider its staffing and staff training policies from a structural point of view in order to enhance professional development, and put in place an adequate staff training mechanism at all levels in order to be able to provide the necessary support to the field processes in line with the changing needs of the Programme. Conditions need to be created, which will ensure the autonomy of the Programme and adherence to the Mahila Samakhya Programme principles, as well as flexibility in its mode of operations by making it a principle to appoint functionaries at SPD and DPC levels, who have experience in the NGO sector and affinity with the women's movement in Gujarat.

The District teams of sahayoginis and the sakhis are the strongest link in the implementation structure. The State Programme Office and the DIUs are found to be the weaker links.

In line with the future developments of the programme, its new directions and the increasingly differentiating needs of sanghas who are in different stages of developing their strengths, as well as the greater focus on the identity of Mahila Samakhya as an education Programme supporting non-formal self-directed learning processes, a total review of the support structures needed at District and State levels is called for.

Mahila Samakhya could consider the establishment of a network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres at State, district and block levels. Instead of a DIU which is responsible for the implementation and Programme in the Districts the DIUs could be converted into a District Mahila Samakhya Resource Centre which has branches at the block level. These Resource Centres could provide or facilitate access to training resources (process, perspective building, issues based and/or training of trainers), assist in development of training curricula and manuals, assist in further development of effective training/learning methods as well as gender sensitive learning materials for self-directed learning. The Resource Centres could have a role in collecting, converting and disseminating relevant information, in documentation and research, in dissemination of newsletters etc. And the centres could provide social, legal, job/career counselling as well as training and library facilities. These Resource Centres will provide a multi-

purpose support network which can be flexible and responsive to the needs of the Programme and varied processes in the field.

At the State level a similar conversion could be considered, although a State Resource Centre might be taking a slightly different role with a stronger emphasis on providing for professional development of the Programme Staff, on networking with other resource organisations and on advocacy and influencing policy decisions and implementation.

The network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres which is flexible and adaptable to the needs of the empowerment/development processes, can provide a more permanent support structure in the State and in the Districts that can branch out to the blocks and clusters, and cooperate with other (education) resource centres to avoid duplication by exchanging services.

The development of a support structure as proposed will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy. This is to be accompanied by a total of the financial pattern and the financial management procedures.

ANNEX 4 OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS BASED ON THE FIELDVISIT IN KARNATAKA

SUMMARY

Background

The task of the evaluation mission was to review the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and to assess and analyse the processes of empowerment at the level of the sanghas or women's collectives. In addition to this the mission was to look into financial management issues.

The visit in Karnataka lasted five days and took place between January 4 and 9. During this period we had meetings in Bangalore and travelled through three of the five districts wherein the Mahila Samakhya Programme is being implemented: Raichur, Bijapur and Bidar. The programme for the visit has been prepared by the State and District teams who provided us with excellent support and arrangements.

The mission is impressed by the resilience and the inner strength of the programme on the ground enabling it to continue and progress on its own steam during a period without much leadership or guidance from the top of the programme structure. The problems the Mahila Samakhya Programme Karnataka faced at State level were many, including lack of clarity of vision, strategic thinking, planning and communication between the state and districts. Under-staffing at the state as well as the district levels created further problems. The new staff learnt by trial and error without any systematic introductory training. As a result some dilution of the concepts, principles and philosophy have crept in and has led to overall stagnation in recent years.

It is to be noted that at present the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka is in the midst of a process of re-orientation of the entire programme, which is to lead towards a redefinition of the vision of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka and affirmation of its nature as a education programme for the empowerment of women. It will also lead to redefinition of the programme goals and objectives, to development of forward looking strategies and plans, and to identification of strategic partnerships with like-minded organisations in e.g. participatory rural development, innovation of educational methods and approaches, and to identification of resource organisations for training inputs aimed at reinforcing and furthering perspective and capacity building. From our observations and findings in the field we fully endorse this initiative.

The coverage

In 1997 the Mahila Samakhya Programme is working in 900 villages in five districts in the State of Karnataka. The choice of the districts has been made most judiciously with four of these districts considered the most backward in terms of their economic and social indicators. In all these districts Mahila Samakhya has deliberately focused on and reached the most poor and backward population groups.

At present Mahila Samakhya is present in 12,5% of all blocks and 3,4% of the villages in the State. In 1996 there were 773 active sanghas or women's collectives and taken together the sanghas have a membership of more than thirty thousand women. Through them their families and communities are also reached. The Mahila Samakhya Programme has taken strong roots in the districts and talukas, in which it is located. Yet, there is still a great scope for expansion in the

future in terms of membership of the sanghas within the villages, as well in as terms of expansion into new villages in the talukas covered, in new talukas and in new districts in the State of Karnataka.

The impact of the Programme on women's lives

The impact on women who are members is really impressive. They have not only established a collective identity, but have also gained recognition in the community. These women are a visible force and exude a great sense of self-confidence. Their visibility, mobility and maneuverability both in the community and within the family have increased enormously. Their empowerment in terms of self-confidence and sense of solidarity speaks volumes for the solid ground work that Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka has established, particularly among the most impoverished sections of Karnataka rural society. The programme has definitely given support, strength and feeling of hope.

Membership of the sangha has changed their self-image and given them an identity of women who belong to a visible and increasingly influential group in the village community. Their sangha membership has raised their image in the perception of their families. As a result, men no longer resist but encourage the women to go for meetings and support them in various ways. Thus women have earned the time, space and mobility to come together. Now women feel that they can raise their voices in public meetings confidently and without fear, and they feel that their voices are being listened to. The sangha gives them strength and supports them through difficult times, they feel the strength of acting together.

The activities of the sanghas and the exposure to training, information and knowledge has an impact on women's changing attitudes to and understanding of social traditions which reflect and endorse women's oppression. They increasingly challenge social practices which perpetuate women's inequality. Their attitudes towards the education of their children and particularly girls has changed and now they start demanding accountability from the local schools and teachers in providing good education.

Although the actions of women do not directly challenge the existing gender relationships or the local power structures subtle changes are becoming visible in the attitudes of male family members, in women's decisions making powers in their families, in recognition they get from women and men from other caste communities, and the recognition and respect gained from village authorities and government officials.

On the whole the impact is most visible in improvement of the survival base and living conditions. Further impact in changing the balance and practices of power will require continuation of the process of careful and creative strategizing with a long term vision on women's equality which determines the direction.

Approximately 34% of the sanghas in Bidar and Bijapur can be considered as strong sanghas in terms of taking initiatives, responsiveness to issues of exploitation and violence on women, having an image as 'a power to reckon with' at community level, taking decisions and action without guidance from the sahayogini. The capability of the sangha to function in this manner tells much about the formidable impact of the Mahila Samakhya Programme on the women who before the presence of the Programme were living in the dark corners of their homes, afraid to go outside, to take initiative and raise their voices.

Yet more than two thirds of the Mahila sanghas are still in the process of reaching this stage of strength. The process of empowerment and building of inner strength of and within the sanghas is an area that needs the full and continuing attention of Mahila Samakhya in the future and cannot

issues. Instead of establishing its own Mahila Banks Mahila Samakhya could direct its strategy towards influencing the banking system, assisting the sanghas in negotiating their terms of co-operation with local banks or with elsewhere existing women's banks. Perhaps banks could be convinced to open special women's branches which fulfil the criteria and terms set by sangha women.

Women's political participation

One of the most impressive achievements of the Mahila Samakhya is in enabling women to participate in the political process. The Programme has helped women understand issues around political participation and empowered them in the real sense of the term. What is truly remarkable is that more than half the women who contested the elections got elected. The elected members, who have become strong, still need Mahila Samakhya to help them function in their new roles and to train them in public speaking, literacy and awareness of issues. A further step ahead might be to assist the elected women (sangha and non sangha) to formulate a common women's agenda and to form a network of elected women who can support each other and join their forces for their common women's interests.

Women's legal rights

In all district programmes legal issues are continuously on the agendas in the sangha meetings. It relates to dealing with cases of domestic violence, family disputes, land and property issues etc. and activism of the sanghas often evolves around issues related to social injustices. No initiatives have been taken as yet for addressing the area of women's legal and human rights, and women's rights under tribal law in a systematic manner with the aim of enhancing women's awareness about how to use their legal rights. This could be an area to give more systematic attention to in the future in the entire Programme.

The impact on breaking caste and class divides

Most of the sanghas in Karnataka are affiliated with specific caste or tribal groups. Efforts of enlarging sanghas by including women from other caste groups have met disappointments and have not been encouraging further efforts. Caste divides are strongly ingrained in the texture of the society and are probably the most difficult boundaries to break through. This is especially the case when caste interests are inter-twined with class and political interests.

There are areas where caste barriers are overcome e.g. health, education and solving problems related to domestic violence. A potential scope for reaching more women, including women from upper castes is very much there. Mahila Samakhya could play a role in the promotion of a village-community based open women's forum, which is open for women regardless of their caste, class or communal background and which brings them together around common women's issues and interests. Although difficult the effort to broaden the sangha membership and build towards a community of women remains a long term challenge within the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

The emergence of a grass-roots women's movement and building federations

Sangha activism about women's issues and forms of social injustice are clear indications of the emergence of a grass roots women's movement. Sanghas are actively seeking lateral relationships with other sanghas to enlarge their collective strength. Mahila Sanghas have become visible

entities with voices that need to be listened to and sangha women are ready to use that capacity more effectively.

The building of sangha federations is on the agendas for discussions at different level of the Programme. The idea of a federation seems to have become an end in itself which is linked to the goal of achieving self-reliance and sustainability of the sanghas after withdrawal from Mahila Samakhya as a support structure. However, how the formation of federations is linked to women's empowerment processes in the sanghas is no longer very clear. There is a danger that the investment in the forming of federation will be a drain on the attention that need to be given to the strengthening of the sanghas. Priority is to be given to reinforcing the empowerment processes of and within the sanghas, two thirds of which have been found to be needing further strengthening. In addition to this the sangha initiatives in networking among sanghas at cluster and taluka level are to be supported and strengthened without necessarily making it into a formalised structure.

Sahayakis and sahayoginis

The impact of empowerment is not just on the sangha members but on all women working with the Mahila Samakhya Programme. It is most visible and pronounced on the sahayoginis and sahayakis.

In total more than 2000 *sahayakis* have been trained and have become empowered beyond expectation. They are strong in terms of self-confidence, verbal skills, mobilising women, organisation of the sangha meetings and representing their sanghas in cluster, taluka and district level meetings. However it is reported that sometimes sahayakis individually or as group have become overactive and dominating the sangha preventing its growth. The internal dynamics of sharing information, power and responsibilities within the sangha is an area that needs to be better understood in order to evolve strategies for strengthening of the sanghas through training programme directed at the sangha level.

The *sahayoginis* are the key actors for the empowerment of women at the grassroots level. They mobilise the collective strength of women, bringing about an attitudinal shift from age old beliefs and practices. With their commitment and hard work they have made a great and valuable contribution over the last seven years. And strong and lasting relationships have been built between the sahayoginis and 'their' sanghas, which may have given some sahayoginis a certain degree of power and control over their sangha which they might be unwilling to relinquish.

Sahayoginis are in a contradictory position as they are expected to be responsive to the development agendas of the sangha women which focus on their basic survival needs and improvement of their living conditions. At the same time they are to bring this in line with the empowerment agenda of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Besides, day to day problems may override the attention for broader perspectives and long term strategies. This inevitably leads to stagnation in the Programme, in losing its conceptual clarity, vision and sense of direction as an empowerment Programme. The signs can clearly be observed in the attitudes and expressions of sahayoginis. To come out of this situation it is suggested, a.o. to jointly evolve a forward looking human resources development plan which provides for role differentiation and for lateral and upward mobility, and for career paths, and to implement a training plan for sahayoginis and programme staff with a fresh approach which includes exposures to new perspectives and inspiration coming from the women's movement as well as building of professional capacities.

Education for empowerment and adult education

Education for women's empowerment is definitely taking place in all districts and has made significant impacts on the lives of rural women. However, if the concept of education is used in its limited understanding of education as literacy, the level of success is limited. This is particularly the case for forms of education taking place in regular classroom-like sessions with materials brought from elsewhere, which perhaps have no bearing to women's lives, or which are not directly linked to women's area of work.

In general the attention to adult literacy and to the creation of a consistent, holistic gender aware approach to education for empowerment, which includes and integrates the different aspects of education (e.g. life skills, information and knowledge, literacy and numeracy) is waning in the Karnataka Programme. The centrality of education in Mahila Samakhya appears to have given way to other priorities, like e.g. the running of savings group, the building of the sangha hut, accessing schemes and services, and other activities aimed at keeping the collectives going. In Karnataka Mahila Samakhya is operational in the districts which are most backward in terms of women's development and literacy. *Mahila Samakhya could and should refocus its attention and make education for empowerment its foremost and central issue.* With their literacy skills and with the gains achieved in terms of women's empowerment women are ready to move ahead use their newly acquired skills to access and further their knowledge, to strengthen their information base and to counter disinformation and abuse, and to participate in family, community and further political decision making from a position of strength.

For the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka the area to venture in is *to evolve together with the sangha women innovative and participatory learning strategies for learning in pre- and neo-literate stages maintaining the focus on supporting women's empowerment.* Strategies which combine awareness, information and skills, which are directed at learning groups with women who are barely literate and women who want to use and further their literacy skills. Banking on the lessons learned from seven years of experience Mahila Samakhya will be on its way to the creation of a truly alternative approach to adult education.

Refocusing the Programme on education for empowerment requires *changes in the human resources staffing and development policy.* Each District Implementation Unit as well as the State Programme Office is to have an experienced education expert on its staff who together will form a team for backing-up and supporting the education component in the Programme. Mahila Samakhya has a great resource of in-house practical experience in training methodologies, use of drama and cultural expressions, teaching by improvisation in non-formal settings. These experiences can be brought up to a higher professional level with a well directed staff development plan.

Education of children

The focus on education for empowerment naturally includes the next generation by giving attention to the education of children and particularly girls. Mahila Samakhya is enhancing a growing awareness about the values of children's and particularly girls education. The activism of the mahila sangha directed at the local schools indicates that a foundation for community interest and participation in improving the quality of education in the schools on the part of women exists and that other education programmes like the District Primary Education Programme could build upon this.

Child Care Centres

The primary function of the Child Care Centres seems to be child care with perhaps some attention to preschool education. Generally the centres have become regarded as a service from the government and a sense of ownership and shared responsibility by the sangha seems to be missing in many cases. One could question if there still exists a qualitative difference between the ICDS centres and centres run through Mahila Samakhya and if it is not duplicating the services from the Department of Child Development. Instead Mahila Samakhya could focus on collaboration with the concerned Departments and on influencing the policies and the policy implementation in order to make them more responsive to the needs and situations of rural women who are currently not being reached through the existing services.

Non-formal education centres for children

The non-formal education initiatives run by the sanghas are meeting a need for alternative modes of education, which provide a learner-friendly and safe environment for girls, who otherwise would remain excluded from participation in formal education. The numbers of NFE centres are growing and there is a lot of scope for further growth, the non-availability of teachers being the most severe constraint. We noted that the preparation and training of the teachers for non-formal education is limited. Training in pedagogic methods, alternative learning approaches are needed. In addition to engaging its own professional resource persons in the District and State teams Mahila Samakhya needs to work at further networking and co-operation with educational resource organisations in the further development of its education component.

Mahila Shikshana Kendras

The Mahila Shikshana Kendras are the most outstanding contribution of Mahila Samakhya in the area of girls' education. They provide a residential school for teen-age girls between 14 and 18 years of age who for various reasons have stopped going to school after Standard four. This is a most relevant age group as they are the adult women and mothers of tomorrow. Being given this opportunity allows them to delay the age of marriage and get a certain level of education first, to escape from being drawn into bonded labour, to escape from an existence as prostitute, and to prepare for a new future and life in dignity.

Without doing injustice to the relevance and importance of the MSK as an extremely valuable alternative educational provision for girls, which will definitely change their prospects in life, there are areas which need to be addressed like the curriculum and curriculum development, the training of teachers in pedagogy, child development, classroom methods, dealing with gender in education etc. Moreover, there does not seem to be a clear vision with a forward looking perspective on the future development of the MSK. The original objective was to provide for an educational facility which would help to create an educated cadre of women for development of education in backward rural areas and for rural development. That vision has gradually faded away as the MSK has become like an alternative boarding school for girls. Mahila Samakhya needs to reconsider its vision and strategy for the future of the MSK.

Co-operation with DPEP

The presence of Mahila Samakhya in the districts wherein the DPEP is planning to operate provides scope for co-operation between the two programmes in areas of e.g. village mobilisation, community participation, gender training for teachers and DPEP staff, development of gender relevant learning materials, and creation of alternate modes of education for out-of-school children. In this respect the formation of joint MS-DPEP task group is recommended who will work out the further plans for co-operation at general State level, as well as for the districts to be covered by both programmes with the aim of increasing access to and retention in primary & continuing education of girls, and ensuring quality of learning that is meaningful and gender relevant.

Expansion of the Programme

During the next five year plan Mahila Samakhya intends to further extend its outreach into three more districts, which means that by the year 2000 the Programme will be present in almost half of the total number of districts in Karnataka. The current situation with sanghas in different stages of strength calls for a diversified strategy based on the lessons learned in the past, the increased presence and visibility in the State and within the districts, and the current momentum of spontaneous expansion via the sanghas. The process of expansion is to be seen in connection with the process of de-linking the strong sanghas and strengthening of their capacities to become self-reliant.

Documentation and reporting

Over the years Mahila Samakhya has produced a wealth of documentation which provides a rich resource of information for internal as well as for external purposes. For a better insight in the progression and evolution of the programme in a long time perspective and in relation to the basic principles and objectives of Mahila Samakhya a greater degree of systematisation and analysis is necessary. The creation of a data base of gender relevant development statistics, could help to place the contributions from Mahila Samakhya in a wider development perspective.

Mahila Samakhya as a resource organisation for the empowerment of women

Mahila Samakhya is perceived as a time-bound programme that is to phase itself out after a certain period of time. This perception is in contradiction with the understanding of empowerment as an on-going process of growth. What can be time-bound is the process of sangha formation and consolidation, and the period a sangha needs in order to de-link itself from the regular support of its sahayogini.

Instead of phasing itself out the Mahila Samakhya Programme structure is able to build on the strength of its presence and its credibility gained in the Districts and the State. Its future is to expand and differentiate its role in order to be responsive to the needs related to the different stages of development of the existing and the new sanghas. In recognition of the sanghas as mature, self-sustaining organisations in their own right, capable of making their own decisions and determining the direction of their development process, the Mahila Samakhya Structure has to diversify and change its role. From this point of view Mahila Samakhya can be regarded as one of the resource organisations to be accessed by the sanghas for provision of (gender-sensitive) training inputs and materials, for providing information, knowledge and new perspectives on issues coming up in the sangha, for facilitation of access to other resource organisations or assistance in setting up and sustaining support structures. As a support structure of the sanghas Mahila Samakhya could play a stronger role in advocacy and policy development in support of women's equality and empowerment.

By converting the existing structure of DIUs and SPO into a network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres with accessible branches at taluka and cluster levels it can provide a flexible, accessible and multi-functional support structure. This will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy. It requires a human resources development plan which provides for staff development, staff training and capacity building for sahayoginis and district staff. To accompany the recommended changes a review of the financial pattern and financial management procedures will also be necessary.

ITINERARY (entire team)

- January 2 Arrival of the members of the evaluation team in New Delhi
- January 3 Briefing meeting at Shastri Bavan, Department of Education (MHRD)
with
- Joint Secretary Department of Education (MHRD)
 - Counsellor Development Section, Royal Netherlands Embassy
 - Sector Specialist Women and Development, Royal Netherlands Embassy
 - National Programme Director Mahila Samakhya, Department of Education (MHRD)
 - National Resource Person Mahila Samakhya Programme
- Lunch, meeting and discussion with members of the National Resource Group on the concept and methodology of Mahila Samakhya and presentation of three studies commissioned by the NRG
- January 4-9 Field visits Andhra Pradesh (Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran)
Field visits Karnataka (Leela Gulati, Claudine Helleman)
- January 10-15 Field visits Uttar Pradesh (Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran)
Field visits Gujarat (Leela Gulati, Claudine Helleman)
- (details about the field visits are in the respective reports)
- January 16-17 Drafting of preliminary findings for the Aide Memoir
- January 18 Presentation of the Preliminary Findings at a meeting at Shastri Bavan with
- Education Secretary, Department of Education (MHRD)
 - Joint Secretary Department of Education (MDRD)
 - Sector Specialist Women and Development, Royal Netherlands Embassy
 - First Secretary OS, Royal Netherlands Embassy
 - National Programme Director Mahila Samakhya, Department of Education (MHRD)
 - National Resource Person Mahila Samakhya Programme
 - State Programme Officers Andhra Pradesh
 Gujarat
 Karnataka
 Uttar Pradesh
 - Members of the National Resource Group
- Team meeting for the finalisation of the Aide Memoire
- Departure of Leela Gulati and Vasanth Kannabiran
- January 22 Departure Dana Broft to The Netherlands

January 24

Presentation of the Aide Memoir to the National Programme Director

Meeting at the Royal Netherlands Embassy with

- Programme Officer *Women and Development*
- First Secretary OS
- Financial Controller

Departure Claudine Helleman to The Netherlands

ITINERARY Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh visits

The programme began with a briefing meeting on 3 January 97 at Shastri Bhavan, New Delhi.

The Joint Secretary, Mr R.S.Pandey made the opening remarks regarding expectations from the Evaluation Mission. This was followed by some remarks from Mr Kuperus, Counsellor, Development Section, Royal Netherlands Embassy. Then the Mahila Samakhya Programme was presented by Ms Vrinda Sarup, Director, Mahila Samakhya. Ms J.Kameshwari, Consultant, Mahila Samakhya then introduced the Evaluation parameters and material was distributed to the mission. This was followed by discussion and clarifications.

The team then met the National Resource Group members at lunch which was followed by a meeting where NRG members presented three studies, and the methodology and concept of Mahila Samakhya.

On the 4 January Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran left for Andhra Pradesh.

4 January 1997: Team Meeting with the Secretary, Department of Education, A.P. and EC members at the conference hall. Ms Padma, State Programme Director then briefed the team on the AP Mahila Samatha Society. The afternoon was a team meeting to discuss strategies and parameters followed by a dinner where the team met the resource groups and other NGO's and academies connected with Mahila Samatha.

5 January 1997: Dana Broft remains in Hyderabad meeting with the State office. Vasanth Kannabiran leaves for Mahaboobnagar and visits the Mahila Sikshana Kendra at Mahaboobnagar. She then left for Makthal to attend a sangham leaders planning and review meeting there. After that she visited Lingampalli village, saw the sangham hut, interacted with sangha members, went to Tipparasapalli to attend a sangha meeting, met the watershed committee visited the Balamitra Kendra (children's night school) at Bondalkunta and returned to Makthal at 10 pm for a night halt.

6 January 1997: Vasanth Kannabiran met with Karyakarthis (Sahayoginis) individually and then had a group meeting with the while DIU. She then proceeded to attend a cluster meeting at Kungsi(a new village) and then left for Hyderabad.

7 January 1997: Both the team members proceeded to Sangareddy. There they visited the Mahila Sikshana Kendra, and met the DIU and MSK teams.

8 January 1997: They visited the sangha Hut and met the members of Esogipet Sangham. They then proceeded to the sangham leaders planning and review meeting at Alladurg. From Alladurg they visited a cluster health training at Paladugu and then left for Sangareddy and then returned to Hyderabad.

9 January 1997: They visited the Mahila Sikshana Kendra run by MVF an NGO, and then met with the sangha members from the 20 villages mobilised by MVF.

On the 9th evening the team returned to Delhi.

On the 10 January Vasanth Kannabiran left for Haridwar to visit Tehri while Dana Broft left for Varanasi to see the programme in that area.

After reaching Lambgaon on the 10th night Vasanth Kannabiran had a meeting with the Sahayoginis of the district.

On the 11th morning she had a meeting with the more experience Sahayoginis. She then proceeded to Bounsari to visit a Phulkandi, a children's literacy centre. This was followed by a sangha meeting at the village.

After this she visited a women's literacy camp in Ramole and had a discussion with the women learning to read and write.

In the evening she had a meeting with four sakhis who came on their own to meet the mission on coming to know about it. This was followed by a meeting with the newer sahayoginis.

11 January 1997: Vasanth Kannabiran attended a sangha meeting at Kurangaon. After this she visited a Thikana at Jawalgaon colony.

12 January 1997: She left for New Tehri and met members of the District Resource Group over dinner.

13 January 1997: She had a meeting with the DIU Core Team and left for Haridwar and Lucknow.

14 January 1997,

Lucknow: Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran visited two villages with new literacy centres in Sitapur district.

15 January 1997: Lunch meeting with state resource group, consultants, officials and state team. In the afternoon Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran attended an extended meeting with the state level team of the Uttar Pradesh programme.

15 January 1997: Return to New Delhi

LIST OF PERSONS SPOKEN TO in relation to financial management

New Delhi

Secretary Department of Education (MHRD)
Joint Secretary Department of Education (MHRD)
National Programme Director Mahila Samakhya, Department of Education (MHRD),
Resource Person National Programme Office Mahila Samakhya
Royal Netherlands Embassy Staff
Members of the national Resource Group

Andhra Pradesh

State Programme Director APMSS (current)
Former State Programme Director APMSS
Members of the Executive Committee APMSS
Accounts Officer SPO (previous period)
Accounts Officer SPO (current period)
Resource Persons and staff State Programme Office
District Programme Co-ordinators APMSS
Friends of Mahila Samakhya

District Implementation Unit Medak
Accounts Officer DIU and staff

Sahayoginis
Sangha women in the villages visited
NFE teachers BMK
Management and teaching staff MSK Medak
Management and teaching staff MSK MV Foundation
Sakhis, sangha members, sahayoginis at Block planning meeting

Uttar Pradesh

State Programme Director

District Implementation Unit Varanasi:
Accounts Officer
Resource persons
Sahayoginis
Sakhis and sangha women in the villages visited
Friends of Mahila-Samakhya
Representatives of donor organisations
NFE teachers and learners in sangha classes

State Programme Office Lucknow:
Resource Persons
Accounts Officer
Junior accounts officer
Sahayoginis at sahayogini meeting
Sakhis and sangha women in the visited villages

Teachers and sangha women in sangha classes

ITINERARY KARNATAKA (Leela Gulati - Claudine Helleman)

- January 4 Arrival in Bangalore
- Meeting at the State Programme Office with
- . State Programme Director, Dr Revathi Narayanan,
 - . District Programme Co-ordinator Mysore, Dr C.P.Parimala,
 - . Resource Person on traditional Healthcare C.M. Gangamma
 - . Junior Resource Person, Ms B.S.Vani
- Meeting with the Secretary Department of Education, Chairperson of the Mahila Samakhya Society, Mr S.V.Ranganath
- Meeting at the SPO with
- . Financial Advisor, Sri A.R.Achyuta Rao and
 - . Accountant, Ms H.R.Sreelatha
- Dinner with friends of Mahila Samakhya
- . Ms Shoba Nambisan (member Executive Committee)
 - . Ms Shoba Raghuram (member General Council and Deputy Representative HIVOS)
- and State Office staff
- Departure for Raichur
- January 5 Arrival in Raichur
- Meeting at the District Resource Unit with the District Programme Co-ordinator Raichur, Ms Sowbhagya, ex District Programme Co-ordinator Raichur, Dr C.P. Parimala (junior) resource persons and office staff
- Visit to Mahila Shiksan Kendra, meeting with students and teachers
- January 6 Sahayaki meeting at Kadarahalli, Raichur District meeting with sahayakis, sahayoginis and sangha women
- Inauguration of a Sangha Mane meeting with women from the Mahila Sangha
- Travel to Bijapur District
- January 7 Children's Chinnara Mela at Bagaikot (Agricultural Training Institute), meetings with - resource persons
- children from NFE centres and MSK
 - NFE teachers
 - sahayoginis
- Inter-taluk meeting of Sahayakis from entire District Bijapur at Bagewadi

January 8 Meeting at District Implementation Unit Bijapur with District Programme Officer, Ms Nirmala Shiraguppy, Resource Persons and Office staff

Meeting with Sahayoginis at DIU

Meeting with resource persons from Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi (NGO Resource Organisation on innovative pedagogy for literacy and non-formal education in support of the Literacy Movement)

Visit to Mahila Shiksan Kendra, meetings with
- children
- teaching staff

Travel to Bidar

January 9 Meeting at District Implementation Unit Bidar District with District Programme Co-ordinator Bidar District, Ms Usha Rani, and District Programme Co-ordinator Gulbarga District, Ms Nirmala

Sangha Meeting at Bagdal in Bidar Taluk (Iambani)
meeting with sangha women, sahayakis, sahayogini and some village officials (Panchayat President)

Departure for Hyderabad and on to Gujarat.

ITINERARY, VISITS AND MEETINGS IN GUJARAT (Leela Gulati & Claudine Helleman)

- January 10 Arrival in Ahmedabad
Meeting with
. in charge State Programme Director, Ms Meena Batt
. District Programme Coordinator Sabarkantha, Ms Shakuntala Mehta
. SPO consultant, Ms Rashmika Modi
- January 11/12 **Baroda District**
Meeting at DIU Office with the District Programme Coordinator, Ms Indra Pathak and DIU team
visits to
. Nari Adalat at Massa Road, Padra Block,
meeting with members of the court, attending women, sahayogini
. Patod village (Padra Block),
meeting with sangha members of three sanghas
. Child Care Centre & NFE class at Haripura village, Naswadi Block,
meeting with balsakhis, children, mothers/sangha members
. Sakhi cluster meeting at Ghatasa village, Naswadi Block,
meeting with sakhis and sahayoginis
. Tree Plantation (Mahila Sangha) at Lunadra village, Naswadi Block
. Creativity Centre & Library at Tanakhla (DIU sub-office)
- Meeting with the Secretary, Education Department, Chairperson of the Executive Council Mahila Samakhya Society, Shri S.D.Sharma
- January 13/14 (LG) **Rajkot District**
Meetings with District Programme Coordinator, Ms Manisha Brahhbatt and DIU team and Sahayoginis
Fieldvisits for meetings with sahayoginis, sakhis and sangha women
- January 13/14 (CH) **Sabarkantha District**
Meetings at DIU Office with District Programme Coordinator, resource persons and consultant
- Meetings with member District Resource Group, Dr Prakash Josh) and representative of NGO partner (ARPAN)
- visits to
. Balika Shiksan Kendra at Khebrahma,
meeting with teaching staff, children
. Sahyogini meeting at Khebrahma
. Sangha Hut at Danmahudi village,
meeting with sakhis and sangha members from various sanghas
. Literacy Class at Jinjodi village (Bhiloda Block),
meeting with sangha members
. Child Care Centre at Jinjodi village
- DIU Office
. meeting with accountant and office staff
. meeting with BSK parents (fathers)
. meeting with representatives of the Sahayoginis

(representing the Mahila Kutir Committee, Health Committee, Literacy Committee, Savings Committee, Child Care Committee, District Training Team) and DIU staff

January 15 (CH)

State Programme Office
meeting with in charge State Programme Director and Accounts Officer,
Mr B.R.Shah

Meeting with Education Officers

- . Financial Advisor Education Department
- . Director Adult Education
- . Deputy Director Adult Education
- . Secretary GCERT
- . Director DPEP/Planning Primary Education
- . Officer dealing with MS in the Education Department
- . District Education Officer Sabarkantha
- . Controller Sabarkantha

January 15

Lunch meeting hosted by the State Programme Director
. education officers,
. members General Council
. friends of Mahila Samakhya,
. DIU staff

Wrap-up meeting with

- . Secretary Education Department
- . State Programme Director and consultant SPO
- . District Programme Officers and Resource persons/consultants
District Banaskantha
District Baroda
District Rajkot
District Sabarkantha

Departure for New Delhi

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GLOSSARY

<i>anganwadi</i>	child care centre of Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)
<i>bal mela</i>	children's fair or large gathering of children
<i>bala mitra kendra</i>	non-formal education centres for children (Andhra Pradesh)
<i>Balika Shiksan Kendra</i>	residential school for girls (school-leavers)
<i>balsakhi</i>	teacher of a child care centre
<i>devadasi/jogini</i>	women who are dedicated to the Goddess Yellamma who have the position of a prostitute (jogini in Karnataka)
<i>devadasi system</i>	system of sexual exploitation of women, usually from the subordinate castes, under the guise of ritual prostitution (jogini in Karnataka)
<i>jatha</i>	street theatre
<i>karyakartha</i>	literally: 'worker', term used for fieldworkers/cluster level coordinators in Andhra Pradesh
<i>kutir</i>	hut (in Gujarat)
<i>lakh</i>	hundred thousand (rupees)
<i>Mahila Samakhya/Samatha</i>	literally: 'women speaking as equals' (Mahila Samatha in Andhra Pradesh)
<i>Mahila Shiksan(a) Kendra</i>	residential training/education institute providing condensed residential courses for girls and women
<i>mane</i>	hut (in Karnataka)
<i>mandal/block</i>	administrative unit, consisting of a block of several villages
<i>mela</i>	fair
<i>nari adalat</i>	women's court
<i>(Gram) Panchayat</i>	village council, an elected body which constitutes the first tier of the system of local self-government
<i>Panchayati Raj</i>	three tier system of local self-government by elected bodies where a third of the seats are reserved for women
<i>Pradhan</i>	village leader
<i>sarnelan</i>	meeting (of all persons)

<i>Sarpanch</i>	(elected) member of the village council
<i>taluka/block</i>	administrative unit, consisting of a block of several villages
<i>thikana</i>	hut (Uttar Pradesh)
<i>sangha/sangham</i>	village level women's collective
<i>sakhi/sahayaki</i>	literally: 'woman friend', village activist of the mahila sangha
<i>sahayogini</i>	literally: 'a woman helper', field worker, coordinator of a cluster of (ten) mahila sanghas

ABBREVIATIONS

AE	Adult Education
AMN	Auxiliary Nurse/Midwife, government health worker at the village level
AP	Andhra Pradesh
APMSSS	Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samatha State Society
BSK	Balika Shiksan(a) Kendra
DIU	District Implementation Unit
DO	Development Officer (at block/taluka level)
DPC	District Programme Co-ordinator
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
DRG	District Resource Group
DTT	District Training Team
DWCRA	Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas
EC	Executive Council (of the State Society)
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme
GCERT	Gujarat Council for Education Research and Teacher Training
GOI	Government of India
GON	Government of The Netherlands
JRY	Jawahar Rogjar Yojana: employment scheme for the economic uplift of people living below the poverty line
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resources Development
MP	Madya Pradesh
MS	Mahila Samakhya
MSK	Mahila Shiksan(a) Kendra
NCERT	National Council for Education Research and Teacher Training
NFE	Non-Formal Education

NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NRG	National Resource Group
PHC	Public Health Centre/Primary Health Care Centre
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PTA	Parents Teachers Association
RNE	Royal Netherlands Embassy
RP	Resource Persons (at the District or State level)
SC	Scheduled Caste
SPD	State Programme Director
SPO	State Programme Office
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TLC	Total Literacy Campaign
TRYSEM	Training for Youth in Self-Employment
TWA	Training Women in Agriculture
VEC	Village Education Committee
UP	Uttar Pradesh
UPEFA	Uttar Pradesh Education for All

SUPPLEMENT A

**THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMMES IN
ANDHRA PRADESH AND UTTAR PRADESH**

**findings from the visit by
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997**

**Vasanth Kannabiran
Dana Broft**

**The Hague , July 1997
NUFFIC/Department of Educational Studies and Consultancy**

THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMMES IN ANDHRA PRADESH AND UTTAR PRADESH
findings from the visit by the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997

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THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMMES IN ANDHRA PRADESH AND UTTAR PRADESH findings from the visit by the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997

General introduction

The Mahila Samakhya Programme was launched by the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development in the three States Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka in 1989 and in Andhra Pradesh in 1992 as an empowerment Programme. The Programme is implemented with financial assistance from the Government of The Netherlands.

In a significant shift from the assumption that literacy equals education the Mahila Samakhya Programme is focused on enabling women to

- . gain access to information
- . build a critical understanding of their situation
- . undertake collective action in the process of changing the situation.

Departing from earlier family based strategies it is based on the understanding that change for individual women and communities can come through collective action and through pooling human and material resources. As a flexible and facilitative programme it prioritises process over targets.

The 'non negotiable' principles of the programme are to

- allow sufficient space and time to women to come together and influence the shape and pace of the programme;
- create an environment of learning that will enable them to question and critically reflect on their actions and reality;
- help women acquire the skills to determine their own development.

The programme revolves around the Mahila Sangha at the village level and all activities are planned around the sangha.

The Indo-Dutch Mid-Term Evaluation, was carried out by a team consisting of four team members, Claudine Helleman, Leela Gulati, Dana Broft and Vasantha Kannabiran between the 2-18 January 1997. Claudine Helleman and Leela Gulati were to look at Karnataka and Gujarat, while Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran visited Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

According to the terms of reference the task of the evaluation mission was to

- * to review the progress of the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and
- * to assess and analyse processes of empowerment at the sangha level (village collective).

The evaluation was to address the following questions:

- . Is there an impact of the programme on women's personal and family life?
- . To what extent has Mahila Samakhya been able to lay the ground for a grassroots level women's movement; facilitate women's political participation and evolve a focus on women's rights ?
- . How successful has MS been in addressing women's issues cutting across caste and class divides?
- . What is the emerging trend across the four states in terms of pace of growth and impact?
- . What is the impact of the Mahila Sikshana Kendras?
- . Is the reporting sufficient to give a clear insight into the Programme?

And the mission was to assess

- . the effectiveness of the evaluation matrix as a workable tool;
- . the interface of the Mahila Samakhya with other educational programmes like DPEP
- . the expansion strategies in Mahila Samakhya.

In addition to this one member of the evaluation team was to specifically look into the financial management issues. The Terms of Reference of the evaluation mission are attached to the Main Report.

The current report is based on the visits to Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh by Vasantha Kannabiran and Dana Broft. The Andhra Pradesh visit took place from January 4 to January 10 after a briefing meeting in New Delhi with the Department of Education (MHRD), the Royal Netherlands Embassy, the National Programme Office Mahila Samakhya and members of the National Resource Group. The visit to Uttar Pradesh was between January 11 and 15.

Part of the visits were done jointly and for another part the team had separate programmes due to the specific assignment of Dana Broft related to the financial management. This report is based on the joint findings of both members of the mission. The first part relates to the Programme and compiled by Vasanth Kannabiran. The findings and conclusions related to financial management are reported by Dana Broft in Part II.

PART I

FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD VISITS TO ANDHRA PRADESH AND UTTAR PRADESH

1. Conclusions and Recommendations

1.1 Major conclusions and some reflections

The overview of the issues and trends in the Mahila Samakhya Programme as outlined in the Mahila Samakhya National Evaluation Report (1993) is generally confirmed by the findings of the team in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

The Mahila Samakhya Programme has brought about major changes in the lives and situations of the women involved. Like the National Evaluation Report we emphasize the following as important achievements.

- 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 analyze 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 for families.
- Sanghas have been able to identify and articulate their needs. They have mobilised 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 women themselves, rather than by any pre-set targets or blueprints. There has been no dilution of the emphasis on process.

Regarding the issues and concerns that emerge the report of the National Evaluation (1993) refers to the following:

1. empowerment at the sangha level
2. structures and systems
3. strengthening need based interventions
4. training
5. prospects of sahayoginis
6. long term perspective for sanghas.

The National Evaluation Report points out that the empowerment processes have progressed unevenly for the sakhis, sahayoginis and sangha members. It points the fact that programme interventions such as training opportunities and skill building are more frequent and intensive at this level. This is confirmed by our findings. The report also points out that the perspective and understanding of the philosophy of the programme is limited at the sangha level. The sanghas seem issue-based with a focus on short strategies rather than on organisation building in the long term. This is completely confirmed by our findings as well.

The only long term vision seems to be that the children will be educated and go to school. This does reflect a major concern of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. The role of the sanghas in ensuring children's education is one of the indicators of empowerment in the Programme.

While sangha women have begun to compromise, confront and create a space for themselves within the family and community there is no visible evidence yet of consistently building on, or consolidating this space. In Andhra Pradesh, especially, the main emphasis is on access to resources, while the reference to violence or collective struggle around social practices is limited to child marriage and jogini initiation. Issues of violence against women come up incidentally but are not yet addressed in terms of power and legal justice¹. The programme in Andhra Pradesh is younger and the process of consolidation is yet to begin.

The priority of social issues seems to be coming from the Karyakarthas (sahayoginis) who did express as one of their frustrations the fact that they were forced to set aside their own agendas and respond to the women's survival needs. The discrepancy between sangha women prioritizing their basic survival needs and the Mahila Samakhya's empowerment agenda is a very problematic area.

Given the levels of poverty and deprivation that exist in these districts survival needs will keep emerging all the time. It is also a fact that women simply do not articulate their oppression or suffering but silently accept it as a fact of life. To be able to see the violence they suffer as an abridgement of their right or dignity women need to be aware of the options available to them. And that emphasis on options is lacking. And this is directly linked to capacity building of sahayoginis and sangha leaders who are the catalysts.

The report of the National Evaluation (1993) points out that "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."

While we agree in principle with this we feel that to achieve this two things are required

1. The staff of the Mahila Samakhya at every level need much more training and a sharpening of their conceptual philosophical perspective. In the Andhra Pradesh team we felt that there was a distinct need for training and strengthening right up to the level of the district co-ordinators, and district resource persons.

In Uttar Pradesh this was much more uneven. There was a great degree of conceptual clarity among the experienced Sahayoginis and the resource persons who were also confronting the problem of burnout and lack of avenues of career advancement and challenge. Among the newer ones there was an evident need for more training.

¹ And this is inspite of having mobilised a rally on violence in Medak. Although a large rally on violence had been held in the district following incidents of rape, neither the Karyakarthas nor the sangha women mentioned it as an achievement. One Karyakartha mentioned violence but more in the nature of disaster than as an aspect of power.

and direction of their development may affect seriously the likelihood of women being sufficiently empowered to form that "cadre of empowered rural women who will take forward the process of collective action for change." Women, however, can define their development and priorities only within the parameters of their lived experience and reality. Without the presence of options, without a conscious and designed catalysing effect they will continue to define their empowerment purely in terms of accessing resources - whether it is housing, JRY or DWCRA.

This is not to dismiss the significance of these measures, but to urge the *need for a forward looking strategy that will prevent any sense of statis or stagnation in the programme.* In Tehri for instance women connect their survival need to the 'jal', 'jungle' and 'jameen' (water, forest and land) and their struggle becomes a struggle to protect and preserve the environment. This link is important and qualitatively different from accessing resources.

In Banda and Saharanpur the critical concern is violence and it is difficult to deal with an issue like violence without the support of other movements and groups. We reiterate the warning in the National Evaluation Report: "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.*" (Emphasis VK)

Talking of the need to strengthen and consolidate need based interventions the report points out that several innovative strategies and approaches have been evolved in response to local needs. "It is emphasized that these interventions have now progressed beyond the preliminary stage and more focused 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.(Emphasis VK).

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."

Regarding training the evaluation report points to the fact that training programmes with women who share the values and ideology of Mahila Samakhya have initiated processes that were instrumental in providing the opportunity for women to build strengths and solidarity and develop a collective framework for understanding gender. These trainings also provide networks and links with the larger women's movement. What is in evidence now is a kind of drawing together and a certain degree of 'closing in' as experiences and competencies within the programme have grown. Yet, training seems to have become to be considered as an informal and internal process of reflection and exploration. This 'closing in' can be seen as a result of reluctance to interference from other NGOs and external organisations which might perhaps have another philosophy. It could also result from reluctance of interference of NGOs in a Government programme. Or it results from the need to build a coherence and unity within the team, which can then link the issues to the concrete problems on the ground.

The problem here is that while a training that explores the self and makes women aware of their inner resources and energies can build capacity and leadership quality, it cannot substitute for specific skills or information. The ideal would be to balance the two. What has happened in most instances is that when sahayoginis ask for more information on specific demands from the sanghas the provision of such information in training or reflection meetings becomes a substitute for perspective building. This is not necessarily deliberate, but could be a result of the pace of the programme and lack of time. Gradually in the process of responding to the growing demands from the field, perspective building and conceptual clarity take a back seat.

It is also good to remember that not everybody is a good trainer and that not every resource person and Karyakartha can replace experienced trainers however much we value participatory processes.

The balance between building capacity internally and tapping to the fullest, resources available externally is also a difficult issue and needs to be considered. The Report of the National Evaluation (1993) points out that "however, the evaluation shows that there is a change in the nature of the activities of 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." The evaluators also emphasize 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 focused and strategic training programmes which will be tailored to meet *specific learning needs* and which will strengthen and reinforce concepts and skills built earlier."

This is something we would also urge strongly from our findings.

1.2 Recommendations

- * More training and perspective building for the staff.
- * More emphasis on management skills, planning and professional capacity. This does not mean that the process orientation is sacrificed. It means that while the process is prioritised for the sangha women, the karyakarthis and staff must be strengthened to deal with the increasing demand from the field. Commitment by itself does not replace competence and the organisation needs to concentrate on building competence.
- * The whole programme seems to revolve around voluntarism, dedication and the indefinite availability of a single woman (without family responsibility). This needs to be streamlined to allow women to work for a given period intensively and then be able to have predictable timings so that there is not burn out or rapid turnover of staff.
- * Staff salary, allowances, health & accident insurance, housing, childcare need to be attended to and improved if women are to work to their best capacity without sacrificing their own interests.
- * Periodic re-orientation and fresh interactions outside the MS family at all levels to fulfil the promise of the programme.

2. Findings regarding Mahila Samatha in Andhra Pradesh

2.1 Introduction

The Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samatha Society (APMSS) was launched in January 1993.

The Programme was introduced in Mahaboobnagar and Medak districts in blocks or mandals chosen for backwardness, poverty and absence of NGOs. By the end of March '94 the Programme covered four mandals and 91 villages in Medak and two mandals and 67 villages in Mahaboobnagar. The APMSS deliberately adopted the Karnataka model of strengthening a collective of four or five women in each sangha rather than adapt a sakhi model. The sangha formation is seen as going through four stages, rapport building, group formation, consolidation and an independent sangha.

The programme has been rapidly expanding into new areas more easily as the APMSS has become known and accepted in all the areas. The sanghas have established linkages with each other and with government departments and programmes. They are key actors in all the developmental activities. Through the district melas, which are a combination of information inputs and interactions women are becoming visible in the public arena.

The APMSS is now concerned with strengthening sangham leaders with training. It is emphasising the need to address sensitive social issues such as jogini, child marriage and violence against women. For 1997 the focus will be on education, health resource building, legal awareness and political participation.

2.2 Findings related to empowerment

Looking at the progress of the programme over the last four years in Andhra Pradesh it is clear that a foundation for empowerment has been laid. Women as a presence and a constituency to reckon with have been established in the public domain.

It is also evident that the sanghas have begun to take collective action and are now a factor to reckon with on community issues. However, there does not seem to be a grasp of the Mahila Samakhya philosophy or vision.

The Karyakarthis (or sahayoginis) are a motivated network and are key agents in providing the resources for change. The emphasis on process as against goals and targets has been maintained. To this extent the findings of the Mahila Samakhya Evaluation Report (1993) are confirmed.

With regard to the empowering outcomes mentioned in the Programme our findings confirm that

- . there is a changed self image
- . enhanced access to new information and skills
- . a larger knowledge base
- . a capacity for organisation and collective action
- . and a capacity for mobilisation, negotiation and networking.

Impact on women's personal lives

In terms of the impact of MS on women's personal lives this can be seen in terms of direct and indirect impact.

As a result of women meeting together and becoming a visible and physical presence in the village, and as a result of their capacity to access resources and credit their value within the family has undoubtedly gone up. What we also need to consider is the priorities of rural women. After dealing with survival issues, women want to plan for a better life. And their indicators are education for their children, health care, food security, ration cards, housing, water, electricity, credit and then infrastructure like roads, bore-wells, primary health centres etc.

Rural Women do not think in terms of autonomy but of connectedness. And there is the long

practice of a sacrifice one's needs and interests rather than an assertion of ones rights. To change this it means that Mahila Samakhya has to critically reflect on its policy of allowing women to decide their agendas and the pace of their development.

At what point will Mahila Samakhya think it viable in introducing a consideration of rights? If women do not begin to assert themselves in relation to their rights as individuals then how far is it possible to sustain and consolidate the process of empowerment? The whole issue that APMSS had to confront in the beginning of taking a more directive role has to be re-addressed. The balance between an empowerment agenda and the women's own agendas (defined by their needs) has to be critically examined.

Sanghas

There is a lot of visible energy and hope in the sanghas. There is a lot of initiative taken at the levels of the community in terms of sending children to school or the Bala Mitra Kendras. The sanghas find space for the Bala Mitra Kendra, send children, identify teachers and take pride in running it well. The Bala Mitra Kendras are bright and active in each village with the sangha prioritising education for their children. The kit that is used, the methodology, and the teachers's commitment seems very good and holds promise for the future.

The sangha's have all begun to intervene in the village administration and have begun to negotiate resources, programmes, wages and community needs. The sanghas have also facilitated the women entering into political structures and demonstrating their legitimacy, through collective support.

Women have learnt masonry, brick-making and bore-well repairs and are beginning to apply their skills to their advantage. They have become a visible force and so influence the social environment by their presence. Conflicts at the village level are resolved by them and information is absorbed and shared with great eagerness.

The sanghas deal with both individual and collective issues. They do not seem to interfere much on family based issues except when a case is brought to the sangha for justice. They deal with community issues and try to address issues of caste, like drinking water and separate tea cups. On the issues of wages they would like to spread across the region for greater efficiency.

They demand a degree of accountability from the government system and the Mahila Samakhya personnel. They have been able to access all the JRY and DWCRA schemes, pensions, housing, electricity etc. They also negotiate for land for the sangham hut and for the landless.

Sangha women find an increased sense of self worth and identity.

From a life of constant invisible struggle to survive they are now making plans for the future, counting their assets and have a presence and a voice not only in the village but in neighbouring villages as well. Caste barriers are broken by their newly acquired respectability and they feel confident to speak of their interests. The community sees them as assets and the men are generally sympathetic and supportive because the demands of the sangha do not yet affect the male perception or power.

They are now invited to participate in Block level meetings, general bodies and play an active part in the government at the doorstep programme. There is, however, a tendency to remain within the framework of practical needs and survival strategies and the empowerment is likely to remain within these parameters.

Women's movement, political participation and women's rights

The Mahila Samakhya Programme has definitely created a grassroots level movement where women actively came together for information, access and for political participation. The Panchayati Raj trainings also help women to grasp their roles and responsibilities.

It is true that as attention and mobilisation for practical needs builds up in quantitative terms there is also a qualitative shift to strategic interests. But given the way gender rigidly structures lives of women in rural communities unless a gender perspective is brought in consciously and deliberately there is a risk of the gains being dissipated.

Women in the sanghas, when they spoke of collective action or conflict resolution always gave instances from the public arena. In the only case of marital dispute that I came across it was to advise the woman to go back to her husband and put the family together again. The issue here is of priorities. Given the fact that women generally support and uphold traditional values and biases because of their gendered positioning in society, how can they be sustained to assert and exercise political power in a larger context especially in the face of the very biases that ensure their subservience and dependence.

As women meet they are found to deal with issues of caste. Within Mahila Samakhya there is a *slow breaking down of caste barriers* with people eating together and addressing caste discrimination as a social issue in tea shops and hotels. Caste however remains a reality of rural Andhra and there is a polarisation around caste.

2.3 Emerging trends

The emerging trend that one sees in Andhra Pradesh is a horizontal spread of the programme, with a growing demand coming in from neighbouring villages to be part of the programme. The growth and impact in quantitative terms is admirable. What we need to be aware is the fact that women are hungry for space and opportunity. Mahila Samakhya provides that and there is a great hope and energy generated. The needs and demands that come from the group are also immense. There is a serious risk of the Mahila Samakhya programme being trapped into a facilitating and delivery service for development measures. While the staff and district teams are extremely committed and hard working there appears to be at present an acute lack of a broader perspective and long term vision of the MS goals and philosophy. If this is not purposefully addressed through training and capacity building there is a danger of a stagnation setting in. The requirements for jumping a level need to be seriously addressed here. And unless the karyakarthis are strengthened this gap will remain.

2.4 Mahila Sikshana Kendras and co-operation with other education programmes

The Mahila Sikshana Kendras (MSK) are one of the key components of the programme. As an innovative alternative for girl children, who are drop-outs or at risk of violence they are excellent.

The fact of providing a space, attention, love and care makes a world of difference to the children who join the MSK. They are full of hope and energy. The MSK run by MV Foundation has a clear objective of *mainstreaming the children* and a clearly designed curriculum and principles. It is easily one of the most professionally run and competent institutions in the programme. The MSKs in Mahaboobnagar and Medak seem to be much more adhoc with an add on curriculum. There is an emphasis on health and child marriage, but no clear planning on the children's future. Also the rationale of the time frame of one year is not very clear.

If the MSK is to be a key institution of the MS programme producing the change agents of the future then a lot more of planning and perspective is needed. It is also necessary to adopt a more professional approach to the institution. This is not to criticise what exists so much as to suggest that for the MSK to fulfil its creative potential it requires a lot more of planned effort and vision. At present there is plenty of time, commitment and good will but not enough clarity of perspective. The general idea is that you delay the age of marriage a little, get the child some education, teach her a few skills and add a lot of hope and affection and stir !!

The impact of the MSKs is considerable. The sight and performance of these children, their interaction with community opens up a whole area of possibility for girls and their education.

The Mahila Samakhya seems to work effectively with other education programmes. The value of MS ethos seems to impact the other's approach.

2.5 Reporting

The reporting is more than adequate. As a matter of fact the Mahila Samakhya Programme seems to be over documented and more systematisation may be required. There is a lot of material that is produced, a lot of documentation. The journals, newsheets and health material is excellently produced in the local dialects.

2.6 The District Implementation Units

The district units in Andhra Pradesh are busy with operationalising inputs and in creating a facilitative environment. They also work for expansion into new areas. They are planning the next phase of activity for the district and are often caught up in responding to the demands from the field on multiple issues. While they keep up the information flow and sustain the momentum of the programme they need a lot of strengthening on perspective. They are very hardworking and committed to the programme but require a lot of training and intensive input to help them fulfil their potential tasks. While they address the training needs of the sangha the core team and field functionaries need a lot of strengthening of conceptual clarity and support if they are to be able to help the sanghas more from developmental activity, towards empowerment.

There is also a visible drawing together of the Mahila Samakhya family to solve its own problems within its context and a withdrawal from outside movements and influences. The major interaction seems to be with government and government programmes. This has its obvious advantages but it also creates an atmosphere that does not nurture creativity.

The interaction between the MSKs and the villages are also vehicles of change. The DIU team has a great degree of visibility and good image at the district unit level.

2.7 The State Programme Office

The State level team works closely with the DIUs, provides direction, builds team spirit and provides operational support.

It works diligently on policy and provides resource support for action, conflict management and is involved in all team trainings. It ensures the visibility of the programme through ensuring its credibility at village, district and state levels.

However, there is a perceptible gap between the perspective and capacity of the State level team and the district level team. This is something that needs to be addressed seriously with the Programme.

3. Findings on the Mahila Samakhya Programme in UTTAR PRADESH

3.1 Introduction

The genesis of Mahila Samakhya Uttar Pradesh is traced to a training by Jagori in 1988 when the Mahila Samakhya was not even a project on paper. In Uttar Pradesh, Mahila Samakhya was not initiated as a state programme but through NGOs in the four districts of Varanasi, Saharanpur, Tehri, and Banda. Slowly as the State programme and the DIUs were set up in 1989-90. The shift from the NGO culture of beneficiaries and target groups to that of partners and activists opened up spaces for greater participation of women though not without struggles.

The central issue in Varanasi was wages (fair and equal wages) and most other issues revolved around it. The issues of the single women has also been articulated helping them to build a sense of solidarity and identity.

In Banda the issues has been water and violence. Banda is a turbulent district where law and order problems often arise. Education has been a powerful tool and the MS broadsheet has been a useful weapon to expose perpetrators of violence. Saharanpur is a prosperous district where violence against women has been the critical issues. In Tehri the women's lives are linked organically to a fast disappearing forest. So their struggle is linked to 'jal', 'jungle' and 'jameen' in search of which their whole labour and time is spent. Alcoholism which is another drain on their scarce resources is another point of struggle.

The geo-political landscape of Uttar Pradesh thus shapes the character of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in each district as it responds to the demands and issues that come up.

In Uttar Pradesh the initial emphasis was on building up strong sakhis, but around 1995 the emphasis shifted to a direct focus on sangha. So while a weak sangha is defined as one that does not understand the philosophy, is dominated by a sakhi or is merely issue based, the strong sanghas are defined as possessing a social space, where women draw strength from the collective, take initiative and have an active social identity.

3.2 Findings

The literacy which is an integral part of sangha building is seen as a vehicle of empowerment. The literacy camps have specific curricula. In Saharanpur it revolves around violence, in Varanasi around Panchayat Raj and fair wages, in Banda around water and wages and in Tehri around the forest and its regeneration. The women in the sanghas speak with pride of a sense of identity that the collective gives them. They tell of how earlier they were not allowed to leave their homes but now no one dares to stop them. With the struggle against alcohol they have found community support and added legitimacy. They find respect in the community and the family.

In the Tehri district the Mahila Samakhya Programme has been able to connect with the struggle to preserve the environment. As part of this struggle women articulate their needs and their right to forest produce in political terms. When survival needs are linked to a struggle the degree of politicisation is qualitatively different from accessing resources from the state for survival. This is where the key difference between the Programmes in Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh lies. This has not only to do with the age of the programme but also the geopolitical conditions and the early perspective building.

The Programme has been able to cut across class and caste divides in small ways and depending on issues. However caste, class are not easy to overcome or cut across in the space of a decade.

The promise of the programme becomes evident when one witnesses the joy and celebratory nature of the women's groups that are just starting off. Women value the space and possibility implicit in that space. The growth and impact are difficult to measure in absolute terms especially in a state like UP which is a stronghold of patriarchy and violence. With direction and dedication the programme can continue to bring a change in women's lives.

The extension strategies in Uttar Pradesh are adequate. Experienced sahayoginis and resource

persons are being used to set up the programme and train new sahayoginis and this seems to be working well.

The broadsheets and children's journals and literacy material produced are excellent. The documentation on violence and other issues is also excellent. The use of local dialects for the learning material is effective.

In terms of impact on their personal lives women speak of the support and strength of the sangha. The fact that they are now able to travel to other places and leave home legitimately for meetings. As a result of their struggles against alcohol and their bargaining skills women claim they have gain a legitimate voice within the family and the community.

The Mahila Samakhya has created a grassroots level movement where women actively come together to demand their rights and access resources. They have also linked with the struggle to preserve the environment. Women are able to confront government local authorities to demand their rights and for information on "budgets". They actively mobilise and lobby around issues relating to reserve forests, illegal encroachment of forests and set limits on the forest produce that they can collect free of cost. They send representatives to local bodies and rotate the pradhan's post between two or three sanghas. Caste and class issues are slowly impacted. The women bore-well mechanics for instance break a barrier by repairing bore-wells in the upper caste villages. In marital and man-woman disputes the sangha is called upon for justice regardless of caste.

Women find that learning to read and write opens a window on the world and helps them to break their isolation.

Many traditions though valued are transformed to include widows and single women.

The MSKs in Tehri are planned as institution that will produce the foresters of tomorrow.

The sanghas are a space filled with energy and dynamism. They work to ensure space and teachers for the children's centres. They also intervene in the village administration and negotiate programmes wages and other resources of the community.

The struggle against alcohol has made them a marked force to be reckoned with in the villages.

They are able to demand accountability and want the Mahila Samakhya to spread to all the nearby villages.

PART II

FINDINGS ON FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

4. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT - ANDHRA PRADESH

4.1 Introduction

The Programme in Andhra Pradesh has changed significantly since its launch in January 1993. This report attempts to assess the current status of financial affairs within the Mahila Samakhya Programme, reflecting, where needed, the past developments and indicating possible future trends. It is based on a thorough study of available documentation, in-depth discussions with the Programme planners and implementers, on interviews and observations in the field and discussions within the mission team.

The Mahila Samakhya Programme in Andhra Pradesh is now in its fifth year (since 1993). The highest priority is given to:

- educational component, focusing especially on the girl-child. The regular education channels are not adequate
- income generating aspect
- wages
- health sector
- other - ad hoc - issues arising when initiative needs to be taken - legal illiteracy

The institution of paid village workers (sakhis) does not exist in Andhra Pradesh, attention is fully paid to collectives (sanghas).

4.2 Funds

An overview of the funds is presented on the following page.

4.3 Financial roles and responsibilities

The overall policy of the Mahila Samakhya Programme is to decentralise all management responsibilities and power decision making as far as possible. This involves the complete package of tasks/responsibilities and rights, namely the strategy preparation, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and follow-up.

Financial management at State and district levels fully corresponds with the guidelines given by the MS Society's Articles. The financial management at village level can be described as follows:

Sangha fund, being 400 Rs. per month, is valid for three years and paid in instalments or as a lumpsum. It is a starting fund, so-called "seed money", not a fund leading to any financial dependency. The villages use this fund freely with some directives. There is a requirement of an own symbolical contribution for full commitment, own savings, to cover various sangha expenditures, such as payment for village teachers, building of a sangha hut, purchase of equipment, sangha members' travelling expenses, cost of collective leasing and purchasing. There are also ideas for collective insurance.

Women have to gain more experience in financial management, to ensure that a sangha of poor marginalised women can utilise much larger amounts in the future to resource their activities. And Sangha women should be part of the Executive Committee. Now villages are given solely administrative and personnel costs. Ideas to empower women in financial management do already exist, notably in some UNDP programmes, but also show some limitations in terms of defining of salary and travelling provisions.

1 LAKH = 100.000 Rs

Expenditure versus projected budget:

year	estimated budget	expenditure	utilisation of funds
	Rupees in lakhs	Rupees in lakhs	in %
1992-93	50.00	1.13	2,3%
1993-94	63.55	11.63	18,3%
1994-95	68.45	21.44	31,3%
1995-96	89.73	40.74	45,4%
1996-97	86.12	est. 70 - 75	

Management cost involved:

year	total budget	Management cost cost estim.		Mgt cost spent
	Rupees in lakhs	Rupees in lakhs	in %	in %
1992-93	50.00	1.01	2,02%	89,63%
1993-94	63.55	29.07	45,74%	64,72%
1994-95	68.45	27.51	40,19%	53,74%
1995-96	89.73	33.86	37,74%	33,48%
1996-97	86.12	32.44	37,67%	39,21%
upto Sept.96				

Activity cost involved:

year	total budget	Activity cost estimated		Act.cost spent
	Rupees in lakhs	Rupees in lakhs	in %	in %
1992-93	50.00	0.12	0,24%	10,37%
1993-94	63.55	34.48	54,26%	35,28%
1994-95	68.45	40.94	59,81%	46,26%
1995-96	89.73	55.87	62,26%	66,52%
1996-97	86.12	53.68	62,33%	60,79%
upto Sept.96				

4.4. Financial planning

THE FIRST YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1992 - 1993

The programme in Andhra Pradesh commenced in December 1992 - January 1993. The State Programme Office started with a limited number of staff (3) and an initial cheque with an amount of 56 lakhs to be utilised according to the GOI guidelines for this Programme as stated on an allocation sheet of unit costs and number of activities. From the funds, a project car (jeep), some basic office equipment and initial running costs for the State Office and two selected districts were paid.

As the end of the fiscal year approached the plan for the next financial year had to be prepared within the time span of three months, before March 1993. There was neither the time nor the capacity for any strategic and budgetary planning.

THE SECOND YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1993 - 1994

The annual plan for 1993/94 which was prepared by the Mahila Samakhya staff (three persons) at State level in March 1993, indicated the envisaged numbers of personnel, villages and activities. This plan was approved and launched in July 1993.

The programme focused on setting-up the organisational structure at the State level and launching the programme at village level, with special regard to the aspects of team building, training, reflecting and planning strategy. There were practically no activity costs, only running costs.

THE THIRD YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1994 - 1995

When the planning of 1994/95 was compiled there was already a better understanding gained from experience in the previous year. The number of personnel also increased as the districts were staffed. During meetings of the entire team (including districts) discussions were held as to how the budget should reflect reality instead of centrally proposed estimates. Nevertheless, the initiative for planning was remained with the State Programme Office.

The Programme focused on consolidation and further institutional building at district and village levels, team building and gradual decentralisation. The issue of activity planning was familiar but planning money was still relatively strange. The budget based on the plans was prepared at state level.

THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1995 - 1996

The 1995/96 plan was based on some basic procedures, it is more a district plan as the districts gained, in turn, the required knowledge and experience in the learning process during the planning exercise last year.

Despite the lessons learned, it still appeared to be rather an ambitious plan. The on-going processes achieved were, however, of great importance.

The year of further gradual consolidation concentrated mainly on the capacity building of the organisational structure. The budget started to be based on the activity plans at, respectively, district and village levels.

It was effectively the third year of the programme when financial thinking started. Funds were essentially needed for organising training, workshops, basically oriented on village level, (fairly strong sanghas). There was no usage of documentation.

THE FIFTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1996 - 1997

The plan already reflected reality, as it was based on certain costs and projections, e.g. on three-monthly district activity plans derived from the annual plan. There was a more general understanding of and experience with funds. People were already aware of the importance, contents, meaning and price of some headings/items (like documentation, newsletter) and certain norms had already evolved. Nevertheless the original design of the GOI budget was still used. It was, however, better understood and reviewed as this was the final year of the 8th Five-year planning.

It was a year of further re-enforcement of the organisational structure. There was already more consolidation in place. Less attention was required for the building of team capacity and was therefore paid to the sanghas and their teachers.

The growing consciousness of past achievements made people want to keep the momentum (videos). The volume of activities and interventions (training, Mahila Shiksan Kendras) and number of participants increased.

Collective strength was still slightly overestimated, e.g. in plans to set a hut, to expand (requires so many people) and to recruit people (needs much time and organisation). There was also a lack of knowledge of village dynamics, such as planning during peak seasons (of crops) and the inadequate frequency of activities. Insufficient capacity and capability and inefficient communication at various levels also hampered many activities.

The financial year of the Mahila Samakhya Programme started with 54 lakhs (14 lakhs transferred from the previous year 1995/96, 20 lakhs disbursed as the first instalment for the current year and 20 lakhs of the second instalment available in May 1996). In December 1996 almost 52 lakhs were spent effectively.

In the meantime another 25 lakhs have been requested for the expenditures already committed and another 20 - 25 lakhs are likely to be spent in the period of January - February 1997. The total expected expenditures per March 1997 are 70 - 75 lakhs.

PROJECTIONS FOR THE SIXTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1997 - 1998

Based on the lessons learned from the previous years of the Programme, the preparers of the financial plan for the next financial year will ensure that this plan reflects the reality as described in the activity plans for the sanghas, districts and state office. It will indicate norms based on real costs and proved financial estimates for the various budgetary headings, such as sangha huts, sahayoginis, etc.

4.5 Utilisation of the funds

In order to obtain a sound view on the pattern, kind and size of expenditures, as well as the reasons for the under-spending, a practical case of the thorough budgetary analysis was implemented. (See next page) This was done jointly with the representatives of the management team (SPD and accountant).

4.6 Reasons for under-spending

There is an entire spectrum of possible specific motives for under spending, which can be summarised as follows:

- * rather ambitious planning based on insufficient experience with financial planning/budgeting,
- * lack of time caused by initial underestimation of the complexity of setting up the organisational structure,

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CASE 1- ANALYSIS OF THE 1995/96 EXPENDITURES:

State level:

Management costs: under-spending

- allocation for 1 resource person not spent, as there was no relevant need

Activity costs: under-spending

- cluster meetings for sahayoginis completed only for 60-65%,
- turnover and lack of capacity of sahayoginis,
- masonry training not organised as DIUs failed to do it,
- accounts training for DIUs and Sanghas was not executed as neither the state nor district offices had the capacity to organise the training,
- Panchayati Raj training was not implemented, though prepared, due to the changed political situation.

District level:

Management costs: - under-spending, partial utilisation - approx. 6.5 lakhs

- unused allocation for 1 extra resource person, various reasons, personnel not available,
- not fully used allocation for consultants as the external expertise was not relevant for the current Programme scale,
- unused allocation for 1 technical staff person as his/her support was not relevant for the current Programme scale,
- not fully used allocation for the new district, except for the jeep, as extension slow, office not operational, activities not yet started.

Activity costs: - DIU office: - under-spending:

- concurrent & external evaluation - partly utilised as not enough activities required,
- fee and honoraria - not fully spent as not enough activities required,
- fuel and maintenance - not fully used, see above.

Activity costs: - Sahayogini level: - under-spending:

- allocation for number of personnel good personnel not easy to find,
- marginal under-spending on Sangha Fund, slightly overestimated,
- Sangha Huts - not achieved due to the legal problems, time costly registration process,
- training, documentation - used for 75% as materials prepared by hand only, printing technically impossible,
- publication, newsletter - never used, even in past, as not enough motivation and experience,
- MSK - marginal under-spending, slightly overestimated,
- New MSK - only about 30% will be used as Medak situation not yet ready for setting-up the MSKs,
- Bal Mitra Kendra - partly used although in district Mb. expenditures may even exceed the planned budget, but in M. only 30% will be utilised, due to turnover of sahayoginis,
- not enough motivation by sanghas,
- Grant-in-aid - only 15% spent due to a strong overestimation of the Executive Council, which added this amount to the grant allocation.

There were adequate expenditures on:

- stationary, books - fully spent;
- musical instruments - fully spent;
- workshops/seminars - completely utilised.

The fiscal year 1995/96 ended with approximately 50% under-spending.

1996/97

Based on similar analysis of the available documentation of the 1996/97 expenditures, it seems most likely that the fiscal year 1996/97 will end with marginal under-spending.

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- * understaffing - lack of key persons to implement the Programme and to perform the expected tasks, including adequate financial planning,
- * unseen intentional savings - contributions by individuals, sanghas, free-of-charge facilities and resource persons offered by the Government, subsidies/funding from other projects, programmes, better negotiated prices,
- * intensification of other programmes organised by the Government and/or foreign donors, de facto affecting the Mahila Samakhya Programme because addressing the same target group,
- * strong intentional "saving" efforts by better negotiating and the "cost-cutting on expenditures and saving" attempts of the Programme staff and clients.

4.7 Problems occurred

Nevertheless some problems arose.

- * Due to only partial achievements of the activities planned and the overestimation of collective strength and underestimation of the economic and legal constraints with regard to the fulfilment of some activities (e.g. purchase of a sangha hut troubled and considerably delayed by the problems of purchasing land, legal obstacles) the budgeted utilisation of funds was not fully achieved in the time planned.
- * The planned expansion of staff created problems, too. To recruit people required much more time and effort than was possible with the heavy workload of the existing staff was under.
- * On top of that, as the amount of funds unspent grew and so did every following year's budget.

4.8 Conclusions regarding financial management Andhra Pradesh

Based on the study of materials and interviews in the field the conclusion can be drawn that one of the major reasons for the phenomenon under-spending is most probably the anxiety to make the sanghas dependent on support funds and thereby creating the new dependency structure.

Despite a rather high level of under-spending in the years 1993/94 - 1995/96, it can be stated that the funds utilised were, in the opinion of the mission, spent on items of fundamental importance for the project. One of the major accomplishments which the mission observed on - the-spot in the villages and throughout the whole organisational structure is the enormous commitment to the philosophy of the Programme of all parties involved.

There are also many achievements which are not to be found in the activity plans or in the budget, as they were not predictable and planned. They cannot be quantified as they are of the rather qualitative and process-oriented kind. And yet they consumed a lot of time and effort:

- * the sanghas which were not all registered were recognised and respected by the majority of the banks approached for the depositing the Sangha Fund,
- * some of this "seed money" was already used in a way which serves the objective of "sanghas becoming independent",
- * large "saving" efforts in the villages meant for the enhancement of self-confidence, independence and group commitment,
- * the requirement of an own (symbolical) contribution to this fund, intended to achieve higher commitment of the sangha members was largely accepted,
- * the achievements of some planned activities caused reverse effect in the budget, e.g. they "cut the costs and saved the funds rather than spent them",
- * successful negotiations with the banks about better interest rates for their deposits, with the merchants about lower prices for collective purchases, conscious personnel planning and remuneration, and saving, certain gains were made which contributed to the growth of "capital",
- * there were also some money flows of no importance for the Programme. They were recorded correctly but their appearance on the Expenditure statement might need an explanatory note².

² In the scope of a UNICEF project complying with the Mahila Samakhya philosophy, computer equipment was purchased.

The recommendation of the mission for the Programme in Andhra Pradesh is to continue the Programme with safeguarding its identity and the structural professionalisation of the Programme structure in terms of staff training (on management and communication issues, notably the financial management), development of systematised, relevant and transparent job requirements and an adequate scheme of career planning.

It would also help to start thinking about the systematic definition of various stages of the programme, including the envisaged gradual withdrawal of the Programme structure in the foreseeable future.

As UNICEF did not have the funds available when this equipment was needed, the Programme (SPD) prepaid this amount, recorded it as advance payment and later, when the Society was finally paid, recorded advances recovered.

5. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT - UTTAR PRADESH

5.1. Introduction

Uttar Pradesh was one of the three states in which the Mahila Samakhya Programme started (from the very beginning) in 1989/90. Therefore its progress has been slightly different from that of Andhra Pradesh. The Programme was launched at "bottom" line, e.g. at village level. The first implementers of the Programme were not the functionaries of the Programme staff, as there was no structure in place. The implementation was given to the association of existing NGOs and their structure and these took care of the initial activities. Only later, in the third year of the Programme implementation, was the current structure built.

Certain results of Mahila Samakhya Programme have already become visible.

- * The sangha is a platform for sharing problems, learning (even to read and write), group-feeling, dissemination of information, it is a "pressure, support and suggestion" group.
- * Many villages are co-ordinated by sakhis, the selected sangha women. They organise the village meetings and distribute the relevant information. They enjoy the full trust of the village women in all matters and are asked for advice, even in private matters.
- * Sahayoginis come and share and teach and help very often, they do the counselling, help to establish the literacy centre, organise education camps and training on various issues.
- * The strong sanghas send their representatives to Panchayati, the lowest administration unit of the state, which is responsible for the realisation of women's rights, communication with the village headmen, care for village infrastructure and passing on the necessary information to block level.
- * The implementers focused till 1994 primarily on strengthening the institution of sakhis as the focal point for the creation of strong villages but since 1995 attention has been transferred more to sahayoginis as the trainers for the capacity building of the sanghas.

5.2 Funds

The budget estimation for the first three years of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Uttar Pradesh cannot be seen as representative for the financial analysis as these were not kept separate from the other funds of the respective NGOs.

Therefore only after the nomination of the present State Programme Director can the situation be considered representative. The following overview shows the situation from the third year of implementation. (See for an overview of the funds the next page)

5.3 Financial roles and responsibilities

The overall policy of the Mahila Samakhya Programme is to decentralise all management responsibilities and decision-making powers as far as possible. This involves the complete package of tasks/responsibilities and rights, namely the strategy preparation, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and follow-up.

In Uttar Pradesh the Mahila Samakhya Programme was implemented as early as 1988 and, from the very beginning, before there was any structure at all, there were activities in villages.

Financial management at State and district level fully corresponds with the guidelines given by the Mahila Samakhya Society's Articles. The financial management at village level can be described as follows:

Expenditure versus projected budget:

1 LAKH = 100,000 Rs

year	estimated budget	expenditure	utilisation of funds
	Rupees in lakhs	Rupees in lakhs	in %
1992-93	222.75	41.72	18,79%
1993-94	180.19	56.28	31,27%
1994-95	286.34	88.69	31,01%
1995-96	289.43	107.43	37,17%
1996-97	276.83	84.65 (Dec.96)	30,56%

Management cost involved:

year	total budget	Management cost estim.	Mgt cost spent		
	Rupees in lakhs	Rupees in lakhs	in % of tot.budg.	Rupees in lakhs	in % of tot.budg.
1992-93	222.75	52.75	23,65%	17.23	7,72%
1993-94	180.19	44.10	24,5%	22.81	12,67%
1994-95	268.34	42.77	15,95%	35.36	13,19%
1995-96	289.43	44.79	15,49%	40.98	14,18%
1996-97 upto Dec.96	276.83	46.99	16,96%	24.99	9,02%

Activity cost involved:

year	total budget	Activity cost estimated	Act.cost spent		
	Rupees in lakhs	Rupees in lakhs	in % of tot.budg.	Rupees in lakhs	in % of tot.budg.
1992-93	222.75	170.00	76,23%	19.98	8,96%
1993-94	180.19	133.59	74,22%	29.23	16,23%
1994-95	268.34	223.57	83,42%	53.33	19,90%
1995-96	289.43	237.51	82,18%	66.45	22,99%
1996-97 upto Dec.96	276.83	212.71	76,80%	52.66	19,01%

priorities. Therefore these sanghas are often strongly involved in saving and other income generating activities. In addition to this, once the sanghas are ready to build their sangha hut they become eligible for the Mahila Samakhya funds allocated for this purpose. The internal mechanism for managing the sangha money is strongly developed, very effective and built on complete trust.

5.4 Financial planning

The budgetary planning corresponds to a large extent with the activity planning. This was not so in the initial years of the project.

THE FIRST YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1989 - 1990

The launching of the Mahila Samakhya Programme was realised by a group of associated NGOs. The internal division of tasks was such that some NGOs were responsible for planning the implementation of field activities while others focused specifically on the conduct of a major component of the Mahila Samakhya Programme, such as the training component. Both the implementation of field activities and training were time-consuming although the actual cost remained rather moderate. No other expenditure was necessary. The costs involved were kept reasonably low as the programme utilised the existing NGO infrastructure.

THE SECOND YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1990 - 1991

The second year can be described as a year of further initiating the Programme, with the initial organisational set-up of offices at district level. Only small financial inputs were needed to cover the initial cost of setting up the DIU offices.

THE THIRD YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1991 - 1992

As the establishment of DIUs started, the links with NGO structure became loose. The organisational set-up continued to focus on establishing the state office. Some management cost were allocated for the recruitment of the office staff and initial expenditure for furniture, cars and other equipment was incurred. This resulted in a number of initial problems related to the recruitment of personnel which, in some cases had to be appointed only temporarily, e.g. the position of SPD.

The field activities for the villages operated by the DIUs and aimed at the crucial issues of solidarity, unity and mobilisation of women were low-cost. The other "more costly" activities, like the literacy centres and camps, Child Care Centres etc. were introduced gradually. There was no structural planning in time and money at this stage.

THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1992 - 1993

The personnel problems continued and some other shortcomings appeared, such as DIU staff's insufficient knowledge of their roles and responsibilities. The core team had limited financial and other responsibilities and operated under restrictive measures.

There was still no full time SPD with the knowledge and skills to plan the activities and expenditures. The budget was planned top-down and, when utilised, done so rigidly according to the GOI guidelines.

THE FIFTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1993 - 1994

The newly established SPD was delegated the necessary financial powers and started its work by gradually decentralising all relevant responsibilities to the DIUs and villages, explaining the rules and contents and introducing a more structural approach. More staff was recruited and the

number of activities finally increased. The planning, however, was still based on the assumption that expenditure matters more than the financial planning. Some allocations for sanghas were made without considering their urgent needs or the specifics of the area.

THE SIXTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1994 - 1995

It was only in this year that planning activities in terms of the unit cost was fully adopted. The first results of investment in activities started to show, the first rise in salaries could take place. The overall confidence in one's operations was achieved, the Mahila Samakhya structure consciously started to furnish its offices.

Also the aim, advantages and constraints of structured financial planning has been digested; the first specialist training for the core-team and accountants, all functionaries with some share in financial responsibility, was conducted and, in such way a better understanding of the budget headings was achieved.

The planning exercises for the annual budget started with DIU core teams at state level. The expenditure of the previous year was reviewed and the coming financial year was estimated with an attempt to understand why the planning had not been achieved and why certain items were un-foreseen.

However, some expenditures, such as the larger investments for sanghas (Sangha fund, child centre, etc.) were still allocated from the point of view of overall strategy as seen from the national Programme level without any realistic planning.

THE SEVENTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1995 - 1996

In this year the real expansion of Mahila Samakhya started. More districts and more blocks were added to the initial number. These new districts and blocks already profited from the experience gained in previous years and therefore it was possible to accelerate activities significantly. Also the expertise acquired in financial planning aspects provided a better basis for financial planning. The financial planning had already been prepared with a proper analysis per item of spending. But, as not all the sanghas were strong in all districts or did not have the same pattern of needs, the need for spending again varied.

THE EIGHTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1996 - 1997

The high turnover of staff in management positions is a problem. Of the total of ten districts implementing the Mahila Samakhya Programme, only two have District Programme Co-ordinator.

It was the first year of intensive reflective thinking about the future strategy of the Programme in general and its consequences for the individual districts.

5.5 Utilisation of funds

Under-spending based on the total budget requested can be shown as follows:

1992-93 - 81,21%
1993-94 - 68,73%
1994-95 - 68,99%
1995-96 - 62,83%
1996-97 - 69,44% until Dec. 96, foreseen about 50%.

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CASE 2 - ANALYSIS OF THE EXPENDITURE FOR 1996-97:

State level:

Management costs: under-spending

- allocation for resource persons not spent, as there was no knowledge of the possibility to book the short-term consultants under this category, wrongly booked,
- office expenses were not so relevant for this year of the programme, some cost was shared by other programmes,
 - rent under-spending not so relevant,
 - furniture bought although not allocated, adjustment made from other items
 - audio-visual material needed and paid although not allocated,
 - petrol almost spent, consequence of maintenance cost,
 - stationary spent.

Activity costs: almost realistic, where under-spending then only marginal:

- training just started, budget will be spent,
- workshop realistic planning,
- concurrent & external evaluation - partly utilised as not enough activities required,
- most of the activities will take place in the last quarter of the year.

District level:

Management costs: - marginal under-spending, maybe adequate:

- unused allocation for one District Programme Co-ordinator and two District resource persons, for various reasons personnel was not available.

Activity costs: - DIU office: - some under-spending, especially during the first four years of the Programme implementation:

- innovative educational programmes will not be utilised fully,
- publication material, products and newsletter - unused until 1993-94,
- workshop for sangha women little utilised during the first 4 years.

Activity costs: - Child care centres: under-spending:

- contingencies - unused,
- medical care - weekly visits of doctor - unused,
- medicine grant provided only twice.

Activity costs: - Sahayogini level: under-spending:

- honoraria and fees will not be spent fully,
- stationery, books and magazines: 60% will be spent,
- contingencies also not utilised.

Activity costs: - Sangha level: under-spending:

- equipment not utilised at all,
- training cost for vocational training practically unused,
- sangha huts utilised for 30%,
- publication, newsletter - never used, even in past, too little motivation and experience,
- MSK - spent for 30%,
- stationery and contingencies partly used,
- books, journals and other educational material - start of utilisation after more literacy training.

The fiscal year 1996/97 will end with approximately 50% under-spending.

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In order to obtain a sound view on the pattern, kind and size of spending, as well as the reasons for the under-spending, a practical case of the thorough budgetary analysis was implemented (see page 26). This was done jointly with the representatives of the management team (SPD and accountant).

5.6 Reasons for under-spending

The reasons can be summarised in the following overview:

- The initial lack of understanding the idea of financial planning being the translation of the strategic planning into financial terms. The budgeting was seen as the overview of planned expenditures, initiated by the proposed GOI guidelines and allocations from the national programme office.
- The insufficient knowledge of the purpose of budget planning, implementation and control and the confusion of the contents of individual budget headings by the DIU financial managers played major role in under-spending the budget. As they were not capable of understanding their role and responsibilities in financial planning, for whatever reason, they could not guide their teams in sound financial planning.
- The budgets formulated at the beginning of the financial year were not always, for whatever reasons reviewed during the year and therefore the reasons for under-spending were not analysed and visible nor were possible corrective management actions.
- The planning was often done mechanically (quantitatively) without proper attention for the specifics of the beneficiary or expenditure, e.g. expenditure was multiplied by number of villages without considering their strength, needs or priorities.
- High turnover of staff - lack of key persons to implement the Programme and to perform the expected tasks, including adequate financial planning.
- The activity planning was largely overestimated as it was obvious that it is the main issue of the programme. Moreover, the funds were in place, there was enough money and the intention of the programme management and all implementers involved was very enthusiastic.
- The limitation of time was crucial in situations where all other necessary conditions, such as the sound division of financial management responsibilities and their overall understanding and influence of external circumstances were not adequately fulfilled.
- Lack of time caused by initial underestimation of the complexity of organisational setting-up. The same expenditure was also booked wrongly as the headings of the GOI budget were not understood properly.
- Unseen intentional savings - contributions by individuals, sanghas, free-of-charge facilities and resource persons offered by the Government, subsidies/funding from other projects, programmes, better negotiated prices.
- Intensification of other programmes organised by the Government and/or foreign donors, de facto affecting the Mahila Samakhya Programme because the same target group was addressed.

In order to clarify the problem of under-spending even further another case is included which contains a thorough analysis of all budget headings, the budget utilisation and the reasons for possible deficiencies.

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CASE 3 - ANALYSIS OF THE VARANASI DISTRICT SPENDING THROUGHOUT THE PROGRAMME YEARS:

Management costs: under-spending

major under-spending only in the first year, improvement in the second year and with the present SPD almost corresponds with the planning

STAFF:

co-ordinator - job requirements too high, personnel not available

1993-94 - part of the year

1994-95 - full time

1995-96 - not available

1996-97 - still required

consultant - not understood that this money can be used also for the short-term interventions, wrongly booked

1995-96 - understood and booked correctly

1996-97 - ditto

resource persons - allocation 1 per 100 villages, initially more used, recently a pool of resource persons trained for future coverage

1994-95 - fully used

1995-96 - less, as 1 of 2 asked for a transfer because of poor working atmosphere

1996-97 - even less

accountant

1990-91 - only 5 months

1992-93 - left

1993-97 - fully utilised

office assistant

1990-91 - nobody

1995-96 - nobody

in the remaining years fully utilised

stenotypist - provision for 2 (1 per district)

until 1994 only one position utilised

from 1994-95 onwards fully utilised

When a computer became available the post of operator replaced the need for a shorthand typist. Up to this moment this cost had been booked under this heading.

driver - 1 position allocated

1994-96 - utilised only part-time for the co-ordinator, paid from contingencies

messenger

first three years not fully utilised, recently full utilisation

OFFICE EXPENSES:

rent

1990-91 - allocation only for 5 months

1991-92 - for 12 months

1992-93 - for six months

1993-97 - full utilisation and even some overspending due to the unforeseeable escalation in rent

furniture - almost exhausted

first 4 years hardly any expenditure

1994-95 - maximum spent
1995-97 - not so relevant

AV equipment
first 4 years nothing spent
1994-96 - funds fully used

petrol, fuel and maintenance
first year no jeep, no expenditure
1991-94 - fuel cost only, as there was no maintenance of new vehicles
1994-95 - jeep repaired after accident, also stolen
1995-96 - utilisation of unspent maintenance money for purchase of new jeep
1996-97 - fuel only
first 3 years over-budgeted, once the work expands more maintenance will be needed, then the expenditure will become normal

stationery
up to 1992-94 - utilisation remains under 0.5 lakhs
1994-95 - gradual growth, as phone and post are also included

books
first 3 years little spent, only after 1994-95 almost 1 lakh
TA/DA
first year no spending, then stabilised
1996-97 - minimum spent as only DIU staff is booked, initially all TA/DA recorded as management cost now recorded by activities

contingencies
first year not relevant
1991-93 - normal booking
1993-94 - part-time messenger included
1994-96 - part-time driver booked here
1996-97 - normal booking

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5.7 Problems occurred

The implementers of the programme were also confronted with some problems.

- The rather rigid planning of management cost including the office rent led to some major problems of unrealistic financial planning.
- The high turnover of personnel at the state and district offices caused major problems with the establishment and continuation of professional management as well as building up an effectively operating team.
- The GOI guidelines served their purpose in the initial phases of the programme but did not fit in the scope of purpose of later programme years. They appeared to be incomplete, did not include some items as buffer for rent and salary increase but, on the other hand, did include allocations for items not equally relevant for all districts and all stages - programme years.
- Due to the only partial achievement of the activities planned the utilisation of funds was not fully completed in the time planned.
- On top of that, as the amount of funds unspent grew so did the budget for each subsequent year.

5.8 Conclusions

The major cause for under-spending was the overestimation of activity budget. Although under-spending on management cost played a role until 1994-95, since that year the planned proportion of management costs has almost corresponded with the reality. The activity cost, however, has not yet reached the level of the planned budget. The spectrum of activities has started to increase only gradually and under-spending has remained significant (less than the quarter of planned budget) until present.

There is a need to readjust the proportion of management cost and activity cost, whereas the activities should be planned according to the needs of the respective programme period and current priorities of clients - sanghas within the context of their development stage.

There is also a need to adjust the management cost, being the salaries and office rent, at least every third year in line with external developments.

Mahila Samakhya is a Programme of processes, of an attitudinal change and as such it cannot possibly be planned in the same way as other more "product"-oriented programmes. Although it may have some of the features of a project, it is still a large scale programme without any visible deadline, oriented to quality aspects more than quantitative objectives within the scope of a long-term perspective, of a continuous process.

As a process-oriented Programme, many of the lessons learned were learnt through trial and error, and also many errors were made. And yet the Programme has achieved extensive goodwill among the targeted group of clients, being the sangha women.

The recommendation of the mission for the Programme in Uttar Pradesh is to continue the programme and safeguard its identity and the structural professionalisation of the Programme structure in terms of staff training (on management and communication issues, notably the financial management), development of systematised, relevant and transparent job requirements and an adequate scheme for career planning.

It would also help to plan in line with the experience acquired from the various stages of the Programme, including the envisaged gradual withdrawal of the programme structure in the foreseeable future.

ANDHRA PRADESH DIARY

At the briefing meeting on 4 January 97 with the Secretary, Education, other government officials and the Mahila Samakhya team the thrust of the briefing was as follows.

- It was difficult to capture the quality of the programme through statistics.
- The thrust of Mahila Samatha was to prioritise education with emphasis on the girl child
- To promote mother's association to achieve universal enrolment and retention of girl children.
- To improve the quality of life and reduce drudgery
- To work in the area of health
- To implement other education programmes like District Primary Education programme
- To support NGO's with a good track record in areas where AP Mahila Samatha Society cant reach.

Issues that confront APMSS are what is the optimal presence in a district? Perhaps a 1/4 of the district would provide the critical mass for change. Another problem was how to develop a Mahila Samakhya ethos at the field? How to strengthen a conceptual understanding of the Programme? How to maintain the pace of the programmes, responding to demands especially with the rapid turnover of staff. How to define a strong sangha? How to build a federation of sanghas that can mobilise around issues like minimum wages.

5 January

Mahila Sikshana Kendra, Mahaboobnagar

Mahila Sikshana Kendra Mahaboobnagar has about 28 girls in the age group of 9-14 years. The girls were happy, bright, outgoing and confident. They had learnt about health, some science and mathematics, handicrafts. They were eager to learn more and to stay on longer if possible.

The positive observations about the Mahila Sikshana Kendra are the affection and goodwill of all the staff, the confidence of the children and the sheer hope that is generated by reaching out and providing this supportive and nurturing space for girls who have never experience this care before. Most of them want to go back and start "tailoring centres" or teach at the Balkendras in the village. Two or three will be joining a hostel and continuing their education. The problems were rapid turnover of staff, total lack of training or vision on the part of the teacher and need for design and planning in the curriculum, pedagogic skills and a clear vision for the future.

To maximise the impact and use of the MSK one needs to pay attention to this.

Sangha Leaders Meeting, Makthal

Nearly 70 women from around 31 villages had come for the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to review their past activity and plan for the next two years. The women spoke of the issues they had taken up in the past.

They felt they had gained information, visibility and bargaining power. They were able to wrest the resources due to the community from the Sarpanch. They had gained in increase in wages, they had applied for and secured government housing. They could buy rice for consumption during a famine, gain some education for themselves and create the possibility of education for their children. They had also prepared for and contested elections. Their health and children's health had improved due to education as well as the confidence to access health care. They planned to set up a mandal level federation to help them network on common issues and to increase their strength and bargaining. On the question of a collective struggle that had changed their lives or vision of the future there were no clear answers.

Sangham Hut, Lingampalli

The next visit was to the Sangham hut being built at Lingampalli.

The women had contributed their labour, picked up stones on the wayside and brought them in for the basement. There was a lot of pride and anticipation at the prospect of having their own space, but they had not yet learnt to calculate the value of their labour or other contribution.

Tipparasapalli Sangham meeting

The next visit was to the Tipparasapalli sangham meeting and the watershed committee meeting. The women spoke with pride of their literacy, of the knowledge they had gained and the confidence it had brought them.

Men who were present said that they were happy at the progress their wives had made; it was good for the community. Significantly enough they said it will be good for them to go up one step at a time and not try to walk on a wire straight away. This sangha is at the II (group formation) stage moving towards the III (consolidation) stage.

Meeting with Karyakarthis

I met all the Karyakarthis in two and threes and had an intensive discussion on their perspective of Mahila Samakhya, their problems, future etc. They are hardworking and seemed caught up with the problem of accessing resources for the villagers. No clear articulation of Mahila Samakhya philosophy.

Bondalkunta Bal Mitra Kendra

The Bondalkunta Bala Mitra Kendra was running well with children wanting to escape the drudgery of housework through schooling. The sangham is in the second (sangha building) stage, the women want to get electricity etc. This sangham still needs to be strengthened and sees Mahila Samakhya as a means of tapping resources.

Kunsi Sangha Meeting

At Kunsi there was a meeting of village women. This is an early sangham. Despite a funeral and a wedding in the village the women had cooked a meal and came to the meeting. They are eager for some change, some bettering of their condition but, as yet inarticulate. The key here is the hope and possibility that Mahila Samakhya arouses.

Mahila Sikshana Kendra, Medak

In Medak we started with a visit of the Mahila Sikshana Kendra. The children are bright and happy and full of eagerness. They seem better skilled and more competent than the children in the Mahaboobnagar MSK girls. This can be explained by the fact that mandal is not as backward as Mahaboobnagar. But it is also clear that a lot more of thought and planning has gone into the MSK here.

The warden is a karyakartha with experience, who can no longer travel for reasons of health so her approach and perspective on MSK is much clearer. The content of the curriculum is better and the girls hope to become NFE teachers or karyakartha after they leave. Those are the role models they have before them and who they perceive as change agents in their society.

The question is whether just one year of residential learning is enough to equip them to stand up in their local context. The rationale offered for the decision for one year is that many more girls were waiting to come in. Also the cluster MSKs that are being demanded and which might be implemented have not been thought through thoroughly.

The question of whether the investment of one year will simply be lost or how it can be sustained or strengthened in the village has not been considered. No follow up (except in the cases of the girls who will join government hostels) has been planned or considered.

Karyakartha Meeting

Next the team had a meeting with Karyakarthis. The capacity of the Karyakarthis is quite impressive. They travel long distances, sit with the women, face great difficulties (like attacks saying they are child lifters or naxalites) and build a sangha.

They demand more skills and training. But none of them were able to articulate their vision of what development for women should be. They are caught into responses to the immediate practical needs of the women and running the Bala Mitra Kendras etc., but are unable to move beyond that. They have great clarity on the survival issues of women, how to mobilise women for meetings, desire to build federations of sanghas, the need for horizontal spread of mandal level networks etc. There is a sense of stagnation with the more experienced ones and a great deal of the problem is on building the capacity to jump levels both professionally and conceptually.

Sangham Meeting Qamsanpalli

We then attended a sangham meeting at Qamsanpalli. The women were vocal, energetic and very clearly listed all their achievements, which included accessing resources and collective bargaining. However, on discussing the sangham fund they were nervous and diffident and lacked information.

The Bala Mitra Kendra was very impressive with the children reciting off historical dates, geographical information etc. This again proof of the teachers commitment and pedagogic skills.

Esogipet Sangha Meeting

The next day we visited Esogipet. This is a three year old sangha. The women sound strong and articulate. They listed their achievements in terms of education, health training, new borewells, housing, reduction of toddy prices and had resolved a marital dispute. They were thorough on their accounts and the sangham fund.

Visit to the Sangham Hut

They estimate it will cost another 10,000 and two women are being trained as masons.

Alladurg - Sangham Leaders Meeting

Women from the Mandal had come to review their past activities and plan their activities for the future. There had been an attempt to use Participatory Rural Appraisal methods to get the women to map their requirements. But the perception of the charts was very uneven. The teachers who were monitoring the charts need more training in this area. The market stuff is brought by the Mahila Samakhya Office.

The activities that women suggested at the review meeting were:

Sangham Hut, education, land lease, toilets, kitchen gardens, tamarind contracts, vegetable vending, training in brick making, masonry, borewell mechanics, negotiating with mid-wives, government officers around land for landless, dealership of rations, help for disabled etc.

Cluster meeting

The APMSS tries to reduce expenditure of cluster meetings by sharing local resources, asking local households to supply the glasses and plates and the women to bring local available vegetables.

The next visit was a cluster meeting and health training by a local resource person from the village. The meeting was attended by 16 members. It is meant to build up training skills for the more capable village women and re-orient the slightly weaker ones. The local remedies are effective and saleable. There is a clear understanding that this is a small measure, a stop gap for minor ailments while major ones need to be taken to the doctor or ANM.

Visit to Mahila Sikshana Kendra, Hayatnagar

The next visit was the MSK run by the MV Foundation. The MSK at Hayatnagar was the most effectively planned and managed. The MVF is an NGO and works around NFE for children and children's rights, and has continuous training and research on curriculum and pedagogic methods.

The training evolves around natural resource management, overall physical and social development of the girls and environmental activism. In addition to regular science and social science lessons children are also taught about laws, children's rights, they talk to the managers of factories and to mandal officials.

A lot of attention is paid to the training of teachers who are teaching the change agents of the future. The girls learn karate, crafts etc. The children would compare favourably with children of the most privileged schools. What marks the MSK here is the professional management of the place and the planning and design.

What needs strengthening is the gender perspective. Right now it is that these are under privileged children at the risk of violence and child marriage. But a little more clarity on the political dimensions of gender would fulfil its potential of being a matchless institution.

Meeting with sangha women

This was followed by a meeting with approximately 40 women from 20 sanghas. The women are working a joint forest management and accessing resources. The level of awareness among the

women either regarding collective action or empowerment or the need for a sangha was the lowest among all the sanghas visited so far. They simply see the Coordinator as the provider of knowledge, resources and pointing the way. This orientation is totally at cross purpose with the Mahila Samakhya philosophy, but is effective for joint forest management and conserving natural resources which is the main thrust of the programme. Only two young women out of the thirty to forty women, who were assembled, could understand the question of collectives or empowerment despite repeated probing. As long as this is viewed as a JFM programme or any other development programme there is no problem at all. As a women's empowerment programme it is far from the mark.

UTTAR PRADESH DIARY

10-1-1997: Lambgaon Gahrwal, Meeting with Sahayoginis

We discussed the main issues in the sanghas. For the Gahrwali women the main issues are the forest and alcohol.

As more and more forests are being declared Panchayat areas or Resource Forests by the Government women are fast losing their right to minor forest produce and their fuel and fodder sources. Add deforestation and the fact that women have to trek 20-25 km to find the family need of fuel and fodder. The issue of the forest thus is both a survival issue for women and a gender issue.

Most of the men are away serving in the armed forces or are back burnt out and drinking heavily. The women are the backbone of the community and the Mahila Samakhya programme revolves around jal, jungle and jameen around which women's lives revolves. The fight against alcohol was taken up by most sanghas in the areas and all the illicit breweries have been smashed. Women have not been able to deal with government liquor which is freely supplied.

The Sahayoginis had quite a good degree of clarity on the Mahila Samakhya philosophy and vision. They said that it was difficult initially, when they took up individual issues. As soon as they moved to issues of forest and alcoholism which were community issues they began to find more acceptance and confidence in the community. The major issues they take up are health, forest and alcoholism.

Training

The Sahayoginis felt that the earlier training gave them self-confidence, a sense of identity and clarity of vision. Gradually they felt the need for more training to handle the issues they confront on a daily basis. But while sectoral and need based training is important they feel that interaction with other groups and exchange will keep them more strong and vibrant. These Sahayoginis were the strongest and clearest on the MS philosophy that I met.

Visit to Bhounsari Village Children's Centre

There were 36 children here. The literacy material is being developed in the local language and around issues of the environment.

Bhounsari Sangha Meeting

This was a 1 1/2 year old sangha. Almost 70 women were there. They were very articulate, happy to be together and said the sangha gave them power made them a force to reckon with. Although they were confident, they said that the Sahayogini had a critical role. She provided the information, support and direction. This sangha has begun to combine older and younger women in a single forum, something that was unheard of earlier.

Women's Literacy Camp, Ramole

The women were all able to read and some of them write. They just left their homes in the morning and sat together each day to learn. They claim that learning to write increases their self worth, helps access resources and provides a window to the outside world. They see education as a means of joining the mainstream. They have actively preventing illegal encroachment of the forest land and are planting trees to conserve the environment.

They express the need for Mahila Samakhya work to spread beyond the sangha to the entire village and neighbouring villages so that their protection of the forest can be complete.

Meeting with Sakhis

These Sakhis came to Lambgaon to meet the mission on their own. They spoke of their initial fear, timidity and ignorance which lifted with the first Jagori training. They understood that the fear came from within, stifling their movements and gradually learnt to set it aside and assert their identity.

They claimed that working for Mahila Samakhya was more difficult than rearing a child. They faced physical attack, rejection and humiliation. But they feel it is worth it now. The sakhi has now three office bearers (a President, Secretary and Treasurer) to support her work. Today the government programmes like Jawahar Rozgar Yojana come straight to the sanghas. They contribute a day's wage to appoint a watchman for a the common forest.

Meeting with new Sahayoginis

These women, young and inexperienced, always felt the desire to do something - it was Mahila Samakhya that provided the opportunity. They said they need training, information, knowledge to deal with the issues in the sanghas. For a lot of them balancing family responsibility with Mahila Samakhya duty, and confronting the opposition from their families to women travelling and working was difficult indeed.

Sangha Meeting Khurangaon

This seems a good strong sangha and they see Mahila Samakhya as a source of knowledge and information. They see Mahila Samakhya as having ushered in change both within the home and in the community. They say that sitting together helps them to think creatively and critically. It was Mahila Samakhya that helped them to think about issues.

Examples:

- The village bull used to roam loose wasting things. The sangha took responsibility for feeding the bull and keeping it in control.
- The sangha appointed a watchman to prevent monkeys from destroying fruits and crops.
- The sangha allotted mohallas (hamlets) to take turns to protect the jungle.
- The sangha decided that each family would contribute a bundle of firewood and a handful of rice to each wedding thus easing the strain on the forest as well as the family.
- The sangha saw the it that children went to school.

They said that earlier to men tried to keep them home but now no one could hold them back.

Jamalgaon Colony: Tikhana and Children's School and Meeting with Sangha Women

The Tikhana (Sangham Hut) is being built by the sangha members and is very important to them. Material is scarce, many insufficient and yet they are trying. The children are taught on the roof of one of the houses. When it rains - one house finishes cooking quickly so the children can learn in that house. They are trying to raise other resources. The village is just 12 families all Harijan. There are not men in the village, they say they are all dead. But the women are determined to ahead.

They went to the Block office and asked what budgets had been allocated to them.

They cleared a path to their village and went to the Block office to demand wages for their labour.

After dealing with one Pradhan who was corrupt they have now elected an Mahila Samakhya member as Pradhan and the post will rotate between the three villages that the Pradhan covers. They said that they wanted training on their rights.

Meeting with the District Resource Group

The next meeting was with an informal district resource group at the New Tehri office.

Meeting with DIU staff

The next day was a lengthy meeting with the District Unit Staff. Problems that came up were

- the tension between the senior and junior staff
- the need for training new recruits to that they understand the Mahila Samakhya philosophy and vision.

The staff mentioned low wages and the low travel allowance so that they have to constantly use good will and personal contacts to survive. There seems to be lack of clarity on finances. Given the terrain there has to be health and accident insurance for the staff as well as some savings and increments and other incentives for long service. The rent of housing and living is exorbitant in the Tehri areas and that has to be considered.

However, the team seems to have jelled together quite well and have come through a difficult period of crisis. They are articulate, dedicated and very hardworking. As the Mahila Samakhya Programme here has taken on the nature of a movement around jal, jungle and jameen there is a coherent long term vision and philosophy visible in the staff.

Sitapur District, Pipri and Hussainpur

These are two new villages just meeting around learning to read and write. What is important is the hope, that the women see the value of the support that a collective provides and see this as equipping them to change their lives. Although new these new groups are alive and vibrant, eager to dance and sing and learn.

Meeting with the Uttar Pradesh State Unit Staff

At this meeting all the District Programme Co-ordinators, resource persons and consultants were present. There was an extended discussion on the need for training, the need for external inputs and skills, the need for group building and solidarity, the prioritising of issues etc. The impression of this group was that they are very politically aware, critical, reflective, thorough, able to see where their strengths and shortcomings lie. They spoke of Banda where the gun rules and all disputes including crimes like rape are settled either with the gun or money. The sangha began to publish names and incidents in its own paper and that created some discomfort.

They all spoke of the need for more exposure, training skills and reinforcement of their capacity. There was also some discussion of the "life" of a Sahayogini. How long can women survive and lead a life of commitment and voluntarism that is not matched by benefits ?

ITINERARY Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh visits

The programme began with a briefing meeting on 3 January 97 at Shastri Bhavan, New Delhi.

The Joint Secretary, Mr R.S.Pandey made the opening remarks regarding expectations from the Evaluation Mission. This was followed by some remarks from Mr Kuperus, Counsellor, Development Section, Royal Netherlands Embassy. Then the Mahila Samakhya Programme was presented by Ms Vrinda Sarup, Director, Mahila Samakhya. Ms J.Kameshwari, Consultant, Mahila Samakhya then introduced the Evaluation parameters and material was distributed to the mission. This was followed by discussion and clarifications.

The team then met the National Resource Group members at lunch which was followed by a meeting where NRG members presented three studies, and the methodology and concept of Mahila Samakhya.

On the 4 January Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran left for Andhra Pradesh.

4 January 1997: Team Meeting with the Secretary, Department of Education, A.P. and EC members at the conference hall. Ms Padma, State Programme Director then briefed the team on the AP Mahila Samatha Society. The afternoon was a team meeting to discuss strategies and parameters followed by a dinner where the team met the resource groups and other NGO's and academies connected with Mahila Samatha.

5 January 1997: Dana Broft remains in Hyderabad meeting with the State office. Vasanth Kannabiran leaves for Mahaboobnagar and visits the Mahila Sikshana Kendra at Mahaboobnagar. She then left for Makthal to attend a sangham leaders planning and review meeting there. After that she visited Lingampalli village, saw the sangham hut, interacted with sangha members, went to Tipparasapalli to attend a sangha meeting, met the watershed committee visited the Balamitra Kendra (children's night school) at Bondalkunta and returned to Makthal at 10 pm for a night halt.

6 January 1997: Vasanth Kannabiran met with Karyakarthis (Sahayoginis) individually and then had a group meeting with the while DIU. She then proceeded to attend a cluster meeting at Kunsi(a new village) and then left for Hyderabad.

7 January 1997: Both the team members proceeded to Sangareddy. There they visited the Mahila Sikshana Kendra, and met the DIU and MSK teams.

8 January 1997: They visited the sangha Hut and met the members of Esogipet Sangham. They then proceeded to the sangham leaders planning and review meeting at Alladurg. From Alladurg they visited a cluster health training at Paladugu and then left for Sangareddy and then returned to Hyderabad.

9 January 1997: They visited the Mahila Sikshana Kendra run by MVF an NGO, and then met with the sangha members from the 20 villages mobilised by MVF.

On the 9th evening the team returned to Delhi.

On the 10 January Vasanth Kannabiran left for Haridwar to visit Tehri while Dana Broft left for Varanasi to see the programme in that area.

After reaching Lambgaon on the 10th night Vasanth Kannabiran had a meeting with the Sahayoginis of the district.

On the 11th morning she had a meeting with the more experience Sahayoginis. She then proceeded to Bounsari to visit a Phulkandi, a children's literacy centre. This was followed by a sangha meeting at the village.

After this she visited a women's literacy camp in Ramole and had a discussion with the women learning to read and write.

In the evening she had a meeting with four sakhis who came on their own to meet the mission on coming to know about it. This was followed by a meeting with the newer sahayoginis.

11 January 1997: Vasanth Kannabiran attended a sangha meeting at Kurangaon. After this she visited a Thikana at Jawalgaon colony.

12 January 1997: She left for New Tehri and met members of the District Resource Group over dinner.

13 January 1997: She had a meeting with the DIU Core Team and left for Haridwar and Lucknow.

14 January 1997,

Lucknow: Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran visited two villages with new literacy centres in Sitapur district.

15 January 1997: Lunch meeting with state resource group, consultants, officials and state team. In the afternoon Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran attended an extended meeting with the state level team of the Uttar Pradesh programme.

15 January 1997: Return to New Delhi

LIST OF PERSONS SPOKEN TO in relation to financial management

New Delhi

Secretary Department of Education (MHRD)
Joint Secretary Department of Education (MHRD)
National Programme Director Mahila Samakhya, Department of Education (MHRD),
Resource Person National Programme Office Mahila Samakhya
Royal Netherlands Embassy Staff
Members of the national Resource Group

Andhra Pradesh

State Programme Director APMSS (current)
Former State Programme Director APMSS
Members of the Executive Committee APMSS
Accounts Officer SPO (previous period)
Accounts Officer SPO (current period)
Resource Persons and staff State Programme Office
District Programme Co-ordinators APMSS
Friends of Mahila Samakhya

District Implementation Unit Medak
Accounts Officer DIU and staff

Sahayoginis
Sangha women in the villages visited
NFE teachers BMK
Management and teaching staff MSK Medak
Management and teaching staff MSK MV Foundation
Sakhis, sangha members, sahayoginis at Block planning meeting

Uttar Pradesh

State Programme Director

District Implementation Unit Varanasi:
Accounts Officer
Resource persons
Sahayoginis
Sakhis and sangha women in the villages visited
Friends of Mahila Samakhya
Representatives of donor organisations
NFE teachers and learners in sangha classes

State Programme Office Lucknow:
Resource Persons
Accounts Officer
Junior accounts officer
Sahayoginis at sahayogini meeting
Sakhis and sangha women in the visited villages
Teachers and sangha women in sangha classes

SUPPLEMENT B

MAHILA SAMAKHYA GUJARAT

**observations and findings based on the visit of
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997**

**Leela Gulati
Claudine Helleman**

**The Hague, July 1997
Nuffic/Department of Educational Studies and Consultancy (DESC)**

MAHILA SAMAKHYA GUJARAT

**observations and findings based on the visit of
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997**

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MAHILA SAMAKHYA GUJARAT

observations and findings based on the visit of the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997

SUMMARY

1. The Programme

In Gujarat Mahila Samakhya has been in existence since 1989 and started to be implemented in three districts. The Programme has gradually extended its coverage within the districts and has extended its outreach in a fourth District. The thrust of Mahila Samakhya is on the building of village-level mahila sanghas or women's collectives. The sangha collective is the epicentre which gives direction to the process of empowerment generating self-directed development and learning processes. Mahila Samakhya has taken a formidable task upon its shoulders and has succeeded in reaching out to women who, under the prevailing conditions in Gujarat, have otherwise remained unreached, invisible and voiceless. From the first attempts to establish rapport with the poorest women in the villages, to gain their trust and confidence in an often hostile environment, to start a process off through collective reflection, decision making, planning and concerted action, women's collectives have emerged (or are emerging) in more than 600 rural villages in Gujarat.

The key actors in the building of a sangha are, apart from the village women, the sahayoginis and the sakhis. Most of the sahayoginis we met seemed remarkably capable and strong women, highly motivated and with a great commitment to their work, their 'mission' and to the sangha women. As the result of the sakhi rotating system more than 2000 women have been trained, each sangha having a cadre of five to six trained and committed sakhis. They have become strong, assertive and articulate.

In the initial stages of sangha formation mainly infra-structural and community issues like access to water, road repair, electricity have been taken up. Such issues are relatively non-controversial and do not threaten the existing power structures and gender relationships. But they involve some amount of collective struggle and have helped in building solidarity and confidence in collective action.

Prevailing issues which over time have emerged and given attention to in the districts show a varied profile of activities related to e.g. health care and women's health awareness, female literacy and education of girls, legal issues and women's rights, economic empowerment, women's participation in politics. Special features of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat are the organisation of learning/awareness raising camps for adolescent girls and the mobilisation of thousands of women during celebrations and melas around relevant issues.

2. The impact of Mahila Samakhya on women's lives

2.1 Empowered women

The Programme as it has evolved has made an empowering impact on the lives of women participating in the Programme at different levels. The strongest noticeable effect is demonstrated in the existence of women's collectives in the villages. The impact of the Mahila Samakhya on the lives of rural women is that the sangha has become a source of strength upon which they can draw for solving personal and community problems individually as well as collectively. The sangha has provided women with the social and emotional space which enables them to shed their fears and break out of physical and cultural barriers that have confined their lifespan. The sangha confirms their identity as women and gives space and right to a dignified life for single women. Slowly and gradually women are beginning to assert their rights in order to get greater control of their lives and make changes.

The areas where Mahila Samakhya, through the mahila sanghas, has achieved most apart from gaining dignity and self-respect is in accessing government schemes and services, in health awareness and care, in literacy education. The approach used is based on women's assertion of their (equal) rights and entitlements to social welfare services, community provisions, economic schemes, educational provisions and health services. They do not challenge power structures and particularly gender relationships directly. But they affect the balance of powers in an indirect way, not in the least by the public respect and recognition gained. And this reflects back on the status and bargaining power of women in their families, their increased control of financial resources and family decisions, and their ability to fight and resist violence. The direct improvements are mainly noticeable in the area of basic survival needs and improving the circumstances in the personal and family sphere.

Women have started conquering new public spaces during the last two years through their involvement in the Panchayati Raj elections as voters and as candidates, and through the initiatives of women in e.g. Baroda to establish women's courts (nari adalat) at the Block level in front of the police and magistrate's office. And women are occupying new economic spaces by entering into new occupations like hand-pump mechanics and masons.

Political rights

Sangha women used their right to vote in supporting female candidates, women contested unfair election politics and resisted pressurising and being bribed. 284 MS women got elected and a number of them became a Sarpanch. The experience has helped to demystify the notion that political functions are beyond reach for rural women with their backgrounds. And now women begin to realise the enormous challenge they are coping with from their new positions in the current socio-political environment and its inherent gender biases against women. The involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the elections have strengthened its visibility and has created high expectations about women's power and ability to influence political decision making from a perspective of social justice and equality. By now almost a year after the elections it is a good time for a review and assessment of the impact on the elected women, and look into the need for effective support in the form of further training and the development of a common women's agenda.

Women and law

In all districts attention is given to legal issues and violence against women in the sangha meetings. Recognition that such cases are legal issues led to the initiative of sangha women to set up a voluntary support structure in the form of a women's courts or 'nari adalat' at the Block level. The nari adalats have a great impact on the public recognition of women's legal rights, on the visibility of Mahila Samakhya, and on the credibility of the court as a trustworthy support structure, because of its transparent rules and procedures. It has created a change in the attitude of officials and in their application of the rules: they now take women's issues seriously. The initiative has commanded respect and co-operation from the local authorities. And the court has created a sense of sisterhood among women across caste and village divides as women from other caste groups and from other villages also bring their cases and they are treated equally.

Economic empowerment

Sangha women in all districts have started savings and loans schemes. These saving schemes give women a feeling of having more control over financial resources and access to cash when in need. Loans are mostly used for individual and personal purposes, seldom for investing in economic and/or collective enterprises. There is a great concern about sanghas breaking apart because of conflicts arising from dealing with savings schemes and from the emergence of economic interest groups within the sanghas.

2.2 Areas needing attention

Meeting women's basic survival needs and the Mahila Samakhya empowerment agenda

The empowerment agenda of Mahila Samakhya is bound to be at odds with the non-interventionist approach of the Programme and the emphasis on sangha women identifying their needs and priorities. Finding the balance between this is a problem facing the sahayoginis and the District staff. The agendas of the sangha women are based on their experienced realities within the framework of their geo-political and socio-cultural environments and the accepted values and biases that shape their positions in their gendered societies. Given their situation of poverty and deprivation they naturally articulate their needs in terms of basic survival and improvement of the quality of life. Without a conscious and deliberate input on building new perspectives based on equality, social justice and women's human rights there is a risk of stagnation of the growth of the empowerment processes. The day to day practice of constant preoccupation with running after meeting women's immediate needs may overtake (non-intended) the long term empowerment perspective. And this may create a risk that Mahila Samakhya becomes more of a demand driven organisation facilitating access to information and development resources, thereby losing its identity as an empowerment Programme.

This is a very complex issue that the Programme needs to continuously come back to in its training strategy and that should remain on the agenda for critical reflection.

Strengthening of the sanghas

The women we met in the meetings with the sanghas were impressively articulate and powerful. We noted, however, that spokes women were mainly the women who have attended the sakhi training. Questions can be raised as to what extent they have been able to share what they have learned with the sangha women and to which extent their empowerment has percolated down to the women in the sangha. Moreover, a long term perspective on sustaining the empowerment processes of and within the sanghas is absent. The internal training system needs to be reviewed and made more strategically oriented towards capacity and perspective building of women in the sanghas.

About 45% of the sanghas in Gujarat have been identified as being strong in terms of identity, internal dynamics and sharing of responsibilities, sensitivity to women's equality and social justice, use of collective strength. Yet, they need to become more self-reliant in managing their own affairs and able to connect their activities to a clearer and holistic perspective on gender.

Besides, more than half of the sanghas need further strengthening and support in terms of sangha consolidation and perspective building. More attention need to be given to training at sangha level and it will be a great challenge for the programme staff with the sakhis and sahayoginis to engage in evolving special training/learning programmes to be conducted with women in their sanghas around issues raised by them focused on enhancement of a gender perspective, strengthening of the sangha from within and capacity building for the self-reliance of the sangha.

For the further development of empowerment strategies at the sangha level more insight is needed in the internal dynamics of the sangha development and the dimensions of the empowerment processes of and among women at the sangha level. The initiative of the Programme to start a project of participatory documentation of the sangha development process with the sangha members can be considered as a start for getting into the heart of the sangha. This can be supplemented by an in-depth study focused on the internal and external dynamics guiding the processes within the sangha.

Women's economic empowerment

Economic issues in areas of e.g. wages, improved labour conditions, employment creation and income generation seem to be difficult to deal with. The need for economic development, regular work, higher and stable incomes is high on the priority list of sangha women. But dealing with the

recurring economic demands of women is an area for which Mahila Samakhya - as a process oriented, non-input delivery organisation - has not yet found a suitable answer, nor has it been able to define its role. The economic empowerment of women is an area which needs further thinking and strategizing, perhaps by exploring possibilities for capacity building and vocational skills training, and for strengthening economic support structures initiated by women in combination with developing partnerships with economic/rural development programmes.

Collaboration with other organisations

Mahila Samakhya has expanded its collaboration with other, like minded, organisations, particularly in the areas awareness training and capacity building. The lessons learned from such collaborative efforts could help in evolving more active approaches to collaboration with other agencies especially in the area of economic/rural/ agricultural and environmental development based on a participatory approach. Instead of focusing on organisations which are already present in a certain geographical area Mahila Samakhya could encourage rural development organisations to come to areas which have been unreached and are now uncovered by Mahila Samakhya.

Women's rights under tribal law

One of the obstacles in dealing with family violence and abuse of women from a legal perspective is that a number of the sanghas are in tribal areas which have their own tribal laws. A study about women's rights under tribal law in different tribal systems is required in order for women to know their rights and how to make use of them in order to seek justice. A better understanding of the tribal legal system is also relevant in relation to other legal issues such as property and inheritance rights and rights to the use of tribal land e.g. for the building of the sangha hut.

Mahila Kutir

The building of a Mahila Kutir - providing 'space' for women to come together - has become a lengthy learning process requiring stamina from the sangha women and sahayoginis. The process has met with many disappointments and a certain fatigue seems to have set in because of sometimes insurmountable obstacles. The main constraints are

problems of getting land allocated, particularly in the tribal areas where land issues fall under the Tribal Area Development Programme,

the allocation for the sangha hut under the Mahila Samakhya is insufficient to meet the costs involved,

and perhaps some inflexibility in the adherence to the Mahila Samakhya rules regarding the transfer of land to the sanghas. One problem might be the lack of understanding about the tribal legislation regarding the use and allocation of land and the implications in respect to the status of the sanghas as autonomous entities within a government programme.

Sanghas have been very resourceful in finding solutions for the lack of funds. In many cases they have been able to raise funds from other sources, to find low cost solutions and to provide their own labour. Yet it is necessary to review the budgetary allocations for the sangha huts under the Mahila Samakhya budget and to bring it in line with the current price levels.

3. Cutting across caste and class divides

Most of the sanghas in Mahila Samakhya are limited in caste composition to Scheduled Castes or belong to specific tribal groups. Women from other caste groups sometimes attend sangha meetings and have started to bring cases of violence and injustice to the sanghas. The nari adalats in Baroda District deal with legal cases from women regardless of their caste background. The melas and celebrations organised by the sanghas are a start for breaking class/caste barriers. Child care centres, literacy classes, securing access of girls to good education, women's health and legal rights, and community issues like water are areas of common women's interests where traditional caste divides can be broken.

In the sanghas there is a predominance of women from older age groups. The sanghas could give more attention to involving young women and look into their needs, and to reviewing relationships of power and authority among women within the family from a perspective of equality.

4. Toward a grassroots women's movement

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat has an impressive record in mobilising more than ten thousand women around issues like women's health, political participation, women and law, women's literacy etc. during melas and international celebrations. And sanghas have started networking and building linkages outside their villages. Their lobby and mobilisation activities are increasingly centred around women's legal and political rights, their right to health and education. The seeds for the emergence of a grassroots women's movement are there. Its growth is linked to the ability of Mahila Samakhya to broaden its coverage within the villages, within the blocks and within the districts, and develop a certain 'critical mass' of sangha women.

The Programme could perhaps make more intensive efforts of linking the sanghas with the developments within the women's movement and establishing closer contacts with women's organisations and groups within the districts and in the State.

5. Emerging trends

The emerging trends in Mahila Samakhya relate to the process of re-orientation and include

- . the new emphasis on conscious integration of a gender perspective to the issues raised in the sanghas,
- . the identification of a limited number of focal points per district around which activities will be centred,
- . renewed attention to the role of Mahila Samakhya in relation to the economic empowerment of women and collaboration with other agencies,
- . mobilisation of women around women's issues and the gradual emergence of a grassroots women's movement,
- . the increasing emphasis on training at sangha level aimed at perspective building and capacity building for self-reliance of the sangha.

One of the emerging trends in the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat is the transition from the sakhi rotation model to the so called sangha model. This is an important step towards decentralised financial management and decision-making, and towards self-reliance of the sanghas, if it is accompanied by training of the sangha members in financial management and skills required to be self-reliant.

An on-going debate in Mahila Samakhya concerns cluster forming and the building of a federation of sanghas in combination with the development of support structures at the block level. Sanghas are already actively engaged in networking and mobilisation around common issues above sangha level. Sakhis are seeking support from sakhis in other villages to strengthen their voices and powers when dealing with authorities at block or district levels. And sanghas have initiated their own legal support structure by establishing their women's courts. These dynamics emerging from the sanghas are very positive in terms of growing strength. The role of Mahila Samakhya is then to strengthen the human resources for these sangha networks and support structures. This will provide new roles for sangha women and sakhis, such as the para-legal counsellors in Baroda. For sahayoginis it may offer opportunities for horizontal and vertical mobility, for role differentiation and specialisation, and for new career paths.

6. Expansion strategies

The current situation with sanghas in different stages of strength (formation stage, consolidation stage, weakened, strong) calls for a diversified strategy. This strategy is to be based on the lessons learned in the past, the increased presence and visibility in the State and within the districts and the current momentum of spontaneous expansion via the sanghas.

The process of expansion is to be seen in connection with the process of de-linking the strong sanghas and strengthening of their capacities to become self-reliant. The following points of attention can guide the formulation and implementation of the expansion strategy:

- reinforcing the sangha strength and capacity building for self-reliance of the older sanghas;
- de-linking the strong and self-reliant sanghas from direct sahayogini support;
- promoting sanghas to become a community forum of women across caste, class or religious divides,
- strengthening networking among sanghas and the formation of cluster groups,
- strengthening and building of support structures at the block level,
- forming new sanghas in areas surrounding the clusters wherein Mahila Samakhya already exists,
- involving the old sanghas and clusters in the formation and strengthening of new sanghas, and for new districts
- selection to be based on transparent criteria e.g. poverty indicators, indicators for gender equality, female literacy rates, potential for linking up with DPEP and/or other schemes for poverty alleviation and socio-economic development,
- ensuring that staff and necessary infra-structure are in place and well prepared/trained before starting the activities in the new districts.

The expansion strategy is to include attention to the human resources component and capacity building for new and diversified roles at all levels of the MS structure (including the sangha level), as well as the continuous (re-) orientation and intensive training at all levels of responsibility.

7. The education component and linkages to the other education programmes

Education is central in the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Education is understood in its broadest meaning as an empowering learning process which enables learners to question, to analyse to seek answers, to act and reflect, and thereby to discover their inner strength and realise their potential. It involves a life long process of interactive learning, based on sharing of knowledge and life experiences, critical analysis and reflection, creating new kinds of knowledge and understanding.

7.1 Education as Literacy

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat started taking up education as literacy in the early nineties on an experimental basis. However these early initiatives were short-lived as they have been overtaken by the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) which started in Gujarat in 1993. Mahila Samakhya has become actively involved in the TLC in two districts. The Mahila Samakhya contribution made the campaign into a success in the districts. The credit is not just for the efforts of Mahila Samakhya during the campaign. Recognition is to be given to the fact that the involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the success of the TLC is also an outcome of the preceding empowerment processes among village women and of the holistic Mahila Samakhya approach to education as empowerment. A culture of learning has been created among sangha women, which made them assert their rights to literacy and to benefit from the Total Literacy Campaign.

After the completion of the TLC literacy activities were continued in the form of motivational camps, followed by literacy classes, training of volunteer literacy teachers, preparing materials for

neo-literates. The experience in education as literacy with adult women in the form of regular classes or camps is somewhat mixed, because of difficulties in maintaining women's interest after reaching the stage of being able to write their names, reading words and sentences, writing simple letters. Efforts to integrate literacy skills with function related training such as the training for balsakhis, hand-pump mechanics, para-legal workers etc. appear to be more effective, because of the direct linkage to the area of work.

Women have come to realise that they can learn, become empowered, effect changes without necessarily becoming literate themselves. What the experience in literacy has achieved is that women have come to better understand the importance of relevant literacy and school education for their daughters. They have learned that there are alternative ways of making learning and teaching meaningful and interesting in the lives of women. Mahila Samakhya has created a positive environment for learning and schooling of children, especially for girls' education.

7.2 Education of children

The education of girls is an emerging issue in the programme, it is on the agenda of sangha women, who have taken initiatives to obtain scholarship funds for their children's education, and to form committees checking on school attendance and teaching by teachers in village schools. In some villages informal initiatives have emerged such as coaching classes for out-of school girls (and sometimes also boys) in order get them into the mainstream education system.

Child Care and Education

The establishment of child care centres was first seen as a local support structure which would provide women with 'time' to spend for her own and for collective purposes. In various villages or neighbourhoods not reached by the Government run ICDS centres sangha women have set up childcare centres on a voluntary basis with support from Mahila Samakhya and in some form of collaboration with ICDS. One of the differences with the ICDS Child Care Centres are that the MS Centres are 'owned' by the sanghas.

There are good linkages with the local schools, children from the Child Care Centres enrol in the schools, are well adjusted to the school rhythm, they speak out and seem to be performing well. In some centres balsakhis are teaching school age girls and prepare them for admission in the village school. What is clearly coming out is that the child care centres are more than just taking care of young children, they have become important in environment building for school education, especially for girls, and they provide the children with a child-friendly learning environment and prepare them for school. Areas to look into are the training of the balsakhis who could be given more training in e.g. pedagogic skills for pre-school learning and child psychology.

Balika Shiksan Kendra

In Sabarkantha the District team has established a residential school (Balika Shiksan Kendra) for out-of-school-girls in the age group of 9-14 years, who dropped out of school after four years. The BSK is meeting a demand for the provision of meaningful education for girls in a safe environment. According to the teachers and parents there are visible changes in the behaviour attitudes of the girls. They have lost their fears and initial shyness, they talk openly and are motivated to learn more, they have become confident and no longer consider themselves drop-outs. Parents (fathers), who had little faith that their daughters had learnt anything in school, expressed that after four months they have come to realise that in this school their daughters can learn.

The short experience of the BSK begins to have effect on further thinking not only about the establishment of BSKs in each block, but also about finding other alternative modes of schooling for drop-out girls at village level. This is an area wherein Mahila Samakhya could cooperate with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

There are some areas that need further attention and improvement, such as training in child psychology, pedagogy and class room methods. Serious attention needs to be given to the development of a clear vision and clarity about the objectives of the BSK. There is no longterm vision which guides the curriculum and no clarity about the duration of the BSK programme.

There are plans for establishing a Mahila Shiksan Kendra e.g. in Baroda District, but with different objectives in mind and for a different target group (adolescent girls and sangha women). The MSK will provide three to four months residential training programmes aimed at creation of local cadre linked to the emergence of sangha initiated support structures.

7.3 Co-operation with other education programmes

Mahila Samakhya has actively collaborated in the Total Literacy Campaign and further cooperation in the next post-literacy phase of the TLC is envisaged.

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in Gujarat is almost ready to start in Gujarat. DPEP will be focusing on improvement of the quality of instruction, teacher training, curriculum development and development of gender sensitive learning/instruction materials, community participation, and development of alternative learning modes for out-of-school children. The Mahila Samakhya experience shows that the empowerment of women is a precondition for the creation of demand for education of girls and for an environment for community participation in improving access to and quality of school education. In all DPEP components Mahila Samakhya can build on its experience and contribute e.g. in community mobilisation, participation and environment building, involving women in Village Education Committees (VECs) and training of VEC members, provision of training inputs on dealing with gender issues for the training of DPEP staff and teachers, development of gender sensitive learning materials and methods, alternative models for drop-outs and out-of-school girls. Mahila Samakhya will be able to benefit from DPEP in strengthening the pedagogic quality of the education components as well as the use of learning materials and aids.

As DPEP will be implemented by the State and District Departments of Education and the Gujarat Council for Education Research and Teacher Training (GCERT) the feasibility of forming a three partite (MS-DPEP-GCERT) task group could be considered with the task to work out the plans and terms for co-operation at general State level as well as for the districts covered by both programmes.

8. Reporting and documentation

Over time Mahila Samakhya has produced a wealth of documentation for internal as well as for external purposes. However there is need for more systematisation and consolidation of the resource materials which allow for following the processes overall longer period. Since 1995 various training workshops have been conducted on process documentation at different levels of the programme structure. This is a very positive initiative as it is expected to provide a better understanding of how the learning and empowerment processes evolve.

9. The structure

The Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat has gone through a troublesome period with a succession of staff changes at the State and District levels. The re-orientation process which has been started within the Programme needs to be continued in all districts and reinforced by strategic training inputs on perspective building at all levels of the implementation structure. In this process more interaction with NRG members as resource persons is welcomed as it will help in

sharpening of the feminist perspective, provide professional support as well as access to a broad range of experiences and linkages to the wider women's movement.

Furthermore, Mahila Samakhya needs to reconsider its staffing and staff training policies from a structural point of view in order to enhance professional development, and put in place an adequate staff training mechanism at all levels in order to be able to provide the necessary support to the field processes in line with the changing needs of the Programme. Conditions need to be created, which will ensure the autonomy of the Programme and adherence to the Mahila Samakhya Programme principles, as well as flexibility in its mode of operations by making it a principle to appoint functionaries at SPD and DPC levels, who have experience in the NGO sector and affinity with the women's movement in Gujarat.

The District teams of sahayoginis and the sakhis are the strongest link in the implementation structure. The State Programme Office and the DIUs are found to be the weaker links.

In line with the future developments of the programme, its new directions and the increasingly differentiating needs of sanghas who are in different stages of developing their strengths, as well as the greater focus on the identity of Mahila Samakhya as an education Programme supporting non-formal self-directed learning processes, a total review of the support structures needed at District and State levels is called for.

Mahila Samakhya could consider the establishment of a network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres at State, district and block levels. Instead of a DIU which is responsible for the implementation and Programme in the Districts the DIUs could be converted into a District Mahila Samakhya Resource Centre which has branches at the block level. These Resource Centres could provide or facilitate access to training resources (process, perspective building, issues based and/or training of trainers), assist in development of training curricula and manuals, assist in further development of effective training/learning methods as well as gender sensitive learning materials for self-directed learning. The Resource Centres could have a role in collecting, converting and disseminating relevant information, in documentation and research, in dissemination of newsletters etc. And the centres could provide social, legal, job/career counselling as well as training and library facilities. These Resource Centres will provide a multi-purpose support network which can be flexible and responsive to the needs of the Programme and varied processes in the field.

At the State level a similar conversion could be considered, although a State Resource Centre might be taking a slightly different role with a stronger emphasis on providing for professional development of the Programme Staff, on networking with other resource organisations and on advocacy and influencing policy decisions and implementation.

The network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres which is flexible and adaptable to the needs of the empowerment/development processes, can provide a more permanent support structure in the State and in the Districts that can branch out to the blocks and clusters, and cooperate with other (education) resource centres to avoid duplication by exchanging services.

The development of a support structure as proposed will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy. This is to be accompanied by a total of the financial pattern and the financial management procedures.

1. Introduction

This report is based on a brief visit by two members of the team for the Indo-Dutch evaluation of the Mahila Samakhya Programme which took place in the beginning of January 1997. The task of the evaluation mission was to review the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and to assess and analyse the processes of empowerment at the level of the sanghas or women's collectives. In addition to this the mission was to look into financial management issues. For this evaluation a set of leading questions have been formulated by the National Programme Office related to among others

the impact of the programme on women's personal and family life in terms of women's autonomy,

the ability of the programme

- . to create a foundation for a grass-roots level women's movement,
- . to facilitate women's political participation,
- . to evolve a focus on women's legal rights,
- . to address women's issues cutting across caste and class divides;

the emerging trends in terms of pace, growth and impact;

the interface of Mahila Samakhya with other educational programmes like DPEP;

the adequacy of the reporting system in providing insight into the programme;

the expansion strategies in Mahila Samakhya.

The Terms of Reference, including the evaluation parameters in the form of a matrix are attached to the Main Report.

The evaluation covers the four states where the programme is being implemented under the agreement between the Governments of India and The Netherlands for financial assistance during the 1992-1997 period. Two members of the evaluation team visited Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, and two members visited Karnataka and Gujarat.

The visit to Gujarat lasted five days and took place between January 11 and 15. The programme for the visit has been prepared by the State and District teams and included the three 'older' districts, Rajkot, Baroda and Sabarkantha, and meetings at the State level. The district teams have taken a lot of effort to include a varied scope of field encounters in order to expose the evaluators to different aspects of the programme at different levels. This necessarily created timing problems given the short time period for the visit, long distances to cover between various meetings, and the need not to short cut discussions once interesting points were coming up. Therefore, we suggested to split the team once again, one member spending two days with the Rajkot team, whereas the other member stayed two days with the Sabarkantha team, instead of a one day visit in each district and losing time for travelling in between. We are grateful that the district teams were able to accommodate our wishes for changing the programme. Looking back we felt this was the right decision: even by extending the district visits with a day we were not able to fully complete the visit programme prepared for us. Due to an emerging management crises in Rajkot District the visit there took a different shape.

The shortage of time did not allow us to engage in an in-depth assessment of the programme, doing justice to all of its facets. We feel that a brief external evaluation is not suitable for getting an insight in the internal dynamics of the sangha development and the dimensions of the empowerment processes of and among women at the sangha level. The entire programme evolves around the processes within and the development of the sangha and that is the node we were unable to uncover. The initiative of the Programme to start a project of participatory documentation of the sangha development process could be considered as a start for getting into the heart of the internal dynamics guiding the processes within the sangha.

We further would have liked to include in our assessment the views of persons not connected to Mahila Samakhya, especially at village level, such as women who are not members of the sangha,

or women who belong to other caste or age groups, husbands, village leaders, teachers from the formal school. But unless it happened incidentally, time did not allow for such encounters.

Throughout the visit we remained looking at the Programme with an outsiders view. Moreover, we did not cover all aspects and were unable to cover the entirety of the Programme in Gujarat. The documentation made available to us in the form of reports and case-studies provided supplementary information and helped to place our observations and findings in a broader perspective.

We regret not having been able to meet the State Programme Director, who had been on leave for a few months due to illness. She has been temporarily replaced by the acting State Programme Director who has the Mahila Samakhya Programme on added charge and whose day to day involvement in terms of time is limited. However, she seemed to be managing very well and provided us with meaningful information and her views on the programme to which she has been connected off and on during the past years.

In spite of these limitations it has to be stated that in most cases we were met with friendly and open attitudes, we felt that the opportunity given to share experiences and ideas has been welcomed and appreciated at different levels (women, sakhis, sahayoginis, DIU staff, NGO partners, State level officers). Evaluations like this sometimes become loaded with high expectations, which cannot always be met fully, especially not in situations where time is short, the programme is as complex as Mahila Samakhya, and the focus of the evaluation is perhaps directed more at the perspective of the parties commissioning the evaluation instead of it being directed at the immediate needs and questions facing the implementers in the field and, mostly, the sangha women. Yet, we hope that our findings and recommendations will make a meaningful contribution to the already on-going process of re-orientation that is taking place in the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat.

2. The coverage

In Gujarat Mahila Samakhya has been in existence since 1989 when the programme was registered as an autonomous State Society under the Societies' Registration Act. The programme started to be implemented in three districts, Rajkot, Baroda and Sabarkantha in 19 blocks. The districts had been identified during the programme design and formulation phase based on criteria related to caste/class factors, existence of (pockets of) rural poverty, the existing knowledge about the situation of women and the availability of locally based Voluntary Agencies or NGOs. Initially the programme was launched through Voluntary Agencies working in rural development, who helped the programme to get an entrée into the rural villages. However, like in the other States, soon there were problems arising from divergences between the NGOs and Mahila Samakhya in terms of basic orientation and vision, objectives, operating style and agenda's, and from NGOs not being able to come to grips with the implications of a non-target oriented process approach aimed at empowering women to themselves determine, shape, plan and execute their actions, and to determine the direction of their processes. This required a different attitude and operating style from the NGO leadership than they were accustomed to and ready to adopt. From 1990 onwards the programme was implemented through the District Implementation Units established by Mahila Samakhya at the District Headquarters.

During 1992 and 1996 the programme has gradually extended its coverage within the districts by expanding into five new blocks in Rajkot and Sabarkantha (1992) and by expanding into a new District, Banaskantha since 1994. In Banaskantha Mahila Samakhya is in the stage of sangha formation in 80 villages in two blocks (according to the most recent information). The main criteria for the selection of the new district are the low rate for female literacy, which belongs to the lowest in the State, the prevalence of tribal population, and its adjacency to Sabarkantha district.

OVERVIEW OF THE COVERAGE OF MAHILA SAMAKHYA IN GUJARAT

1. Expansion of the coverage of Mahila Samakhya in Gujarat 1992 - 1996

DISTRICT	nr sahayoginis		nr trained sakhis, including trainees		nr villages covered	
	1992	1996	1992	1996	1992	1996
Banaskantha	--	5	--	--	--	33
Baroda	22	28	255	697	147	264
Rajkot	19	16	138	522	107	154
Sabarkantha	13	32	213	798	109	211
State	54	81	606	2017	363	662

Sources: Mahila Samakhya Gujarat, Annual Report 1995-96
Mahila Samakhya, National Overview for 1992-93

2. Blok wise coverage per district (1996):

Banaskantha 2 out of 11 blocks
Baroda 6 out of 12 blocks
Rajkot 12 out of 13 blocks
Sabarkantha 6 out of 10 blocks

Source: Mahila Samakhya Gujarat, Annual Report 1995-96

3. Village wise coverage per district 1996):

Banaskantha 33 villages (rapport building phase)
Baroda 264 (151) out of 1689 villages: 15.6% (8.9%) of all villages
Rajkot 154 (109) out of 865 villages: 13.3% (12.6%) of all villages
Sabarkantha 211 (85) out of 1407 villages: 14.9% (6.04%) of all villages
() refers to villages with sakhis

Source: Mahila Samakhya Gujarat, Annual Report 1995-96

4. Average number of sakhis per sangha

DISTRICT	nr of villages covered	nr of villages with sakhis	nr of trained/trainee sakhis	average nr of sakhis per sangha
Baroda	264	151	697	4.6
Rajkot	154	109	522	4.8
Sabarkantha	211	85	798	9.3
	629	345	2017	5.8

Source: Mahila Samakhya Gujarat, Annual Report 1995-96

5. Sangha strength Gujarat

nr of sanghas	strong sanghas	intermediate strength	weaker/fallen apart sanghas
554	259 (46.7%)	192 (34.6%)	103 (18.5%)

Source: Empowering women through Mahila Sanghas, The Mahila Samakhya Experience by Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurty, December 1996

Another criterium is that there are not many other development organizations operating in the area. The expansion of the coverage during the 1992-1996 period is illustrated on page 13.

During 1992-1996 the number of villages covered has almost doubled from 363 to 662. The number of villages with sakhis in the three 'older' districts is reported to be 345. It is not clear what the status is of the remaining 284 villages. The number can include new villages where the sanghas are in formation stage. It may include 'old' villages which never reached the stage of a sangha being formed and consolidated, it may include villages where sanghas have been fallen apart, and it could refer to villages with sanghas where the training of sakhis has been completed after five or six rounds of sakhi training. The study of the Mahila Sanghas by Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurty (1996) refers to a total of 554 sanghas in Gujarat. Almost 48% of these are considered strong sanghas. Approximately one third (34,6%) are sanghas of intermediate strength, whereas 18.5% or 103 sanghas are weak or have fallen apart. This would mean that in the three 'older' districts more than 80% of the villages covered have active sanghas.

Mahila Samakhya is present in almost 15% of the villages in three out of nineteen districts in Gujarat (the 33 villages in Banaskantha are not included in the calculation because no comparable figures are available). Villages with sakhis comprise slightly more than 9% of the villages in the three districts Baroda, Rajkot and Sabarkantha. Geographically and in quantitative terms the coverage is modest, but the overall coverage has increased significantly since the National Evaluation in 1993.

3. The context and the population reached

The four districts differ in terms of demographic, female employment and work participation and educational statistics (see annex 1). Both Rajkot and Baroda have a mix of urban and rural population and developing industrial, commercial and urban sectors. With its university Baroda is also an educational centre. In both districts there are vast discrepancies among the 'newly rich' commercial, industrial and educated classes, and the rural poor. The latter are among the landless rural population who depend for their living mainly on seasonal agricultural labour. They belong to the scheduled caste or impoverished caste groups, who are marginalised from the mainstream developments and mostly illiterate. These groups live in a social environment dominated by caste and patriarchal values which are reflected in the low status of women in the family and in society, and in for women oppressive social customs and traditions. Women are subjected to triple exploitation based on caste, class and gender factors, they have little or no control over their lives, over resources, they have little powers to influence decision making processes. Their lives are focused primarily on daily survival and they cannot rely on resources which help them to withstand incidences of violence and abuse in the family and in society. Whereas in Rajkot the dominance of industrialism and commercialism may be widespread over the entire district, Baroda seems to have remained more rural in the predominantly rural areas. In the east of the district there are backward tribal villages with a tribal system of governance based on patriarchal values.

In both districts roughly 10% of the female population has had any kind of formal education, which is slightly higher than the 9% average for the entire State. The female literacy rates are also higher than the State average of 32.3%, approximately 37% for Baroda and almost 40% for Rajkot. The rates for female literacy among the rural SC population in Baroda is 30% whereas in Rajkot it does not reach the 12%. For the tribal population groups the female literacy rates are lower, 6.3% in Baroda and 4.4% in Rajkot.

Both Sabarkantha and Banaskantha belong to the poorest districts in the State. They have a large proportion of tribal population groups, who live according to their own tribal laws and customs and who speak their own language. Female literacy rates are below the average for the entire State, 25.5% for Sabarkantha and 11.36% for Banaskantha. Female literacy rates among the SC and ST populations in Sabarkantha seem more favourable than for Banaskantha and reach almost 20% for

the SC population and 12% for the tribal population. This is partly due to missionary activities in some parts of the district under which schools have been established providing education for both boys and girls. In contrast to this the female literacy rates among the rural SC population in Banaskantha is much lower 8.2%, whereas among the female tribal population only 1.5% is literate. In Sabarkantha almost 8% of the female population has had any kind of school education, in Banaskantha this is only 2%.

The low educational level of the female population in a district like Banaskantha will have implications for the ability of Mahila Samakhya to identify and train local women who have at least a minimal educational background required to function as *sahayoginis*, particularly in the tribal areas. It may have implications for the coverage of the programme and its expansion, as well as for the training component and the support and guidance structure for the *sahayoginis*. This will put a heavy burden on the DIU and will require careful selection of a District Co-ordinator and Resource Persons ensuring that capable and qualified persons will be appointed with solid professional and field experience. At present the DIU staff consists of one Resource Person and support staff who operate under supervision and guidance from the District Programme Coordinator in Sabarkantha.

In all districts the Mahila Samakhya Programme has deliberately concentrated on the rural poor in multi caste areas as well as in tribal areas and by doing so has succeeded in reaching these groups. The *sangha* women we met, were for their living engaged in irregular and seasonal agricultural labour on the fields of landowners who belong to the higher caste groups. They earn wages up to 20 rupees per day depending on the season and the kind of labour. In addition to this they receive payment in kind and are given vegetables and fodder, which are extremely valuable in their survival economies. Most are landless, some keep goats or buffaloes. Livestock is important for survival because they provide dung (for fuel) and dairy products, they can be sold if cash is needed and therefore serve as a year round safety net. Cash availability is very low for labour is not available throughout the year. Until they became involved in the *sangha*, women had little say over their own and the family incomes and how it was spent:

According to a study done in Baroda *sangha* women make working days of 16 to 18 hours. About 34% is spent on agricultural labour, 23% on domestic activities, including outdoor activities like fetching water, collecting dung and making fuel, 8% is spent on care for cattle and 9% on child and self care. About 24% remains for sleeping. Illness is a constant threat as health care centres are a long walking distance away. Long working days and preoccupation with survival and feeding the family, as well as the constant concern about and care for small children give women little or no space to think that they could change their lives. "We women are destined to live a life of drudgery and oppression -seemed to be their attitude" (Rajalakshmi Sriram, 1996).

The pattern maybe slightly different for tribal groups and in other districts, for instance in Raikot where wages are higher and attitudes seem to be more influenced by commercialism.

4. The growth of the Programme

The Programme

As an education programme of the National Government of India Mahila Samakhya is unique in its ideologically based approach aimed at initiating and sustaining a process of empowerment. The main target group are rural women living under conditions of poverty and marginalisation from societal, political and economic developments, and living in a social environment dominated by casteism and a patriarchal structure. The Programme aims at creating conditions - in terms of providing 'time', 'space' and an emotionally safe environment - for women to realise a collective process of empowerment based upon a common understanding of social justice and equality, enabling them to manage their own lives, plan their futures and take action to change their social

and material environments. In this context empowerment refers to the process whereby women gradually take more control over their lives, are able to negotiate with society from a position of strength, gain access to and control of resources, participate in political processes and challenge existing power structures. It implies a process of personal and group development, which includes, gaining self-respect and a sense of worth, gaining confidence and courage to challenge authority structures, developing a shared identity as women, building of inner and collective strength in order to be able to influence social and political processes and the direction of social change.

The main characteristics of the Programme are its philosophy based on women's equality and social justice, its process orientation, its flexibility in structure and mode of operation, its contextuality and responsiveness to local conditions, a participatory ethos or culture and decentralised decision making. The inherent flexibility and autonomy at State level encourages the emergence of multiple options and modes of operation for each State and District Programme in response to the prevailing conditions and issues raised by women.

Sangha formation

The thrust of the Programme is on the building of village-level mahila sanghas or women's collectives as a forum for sharing experiences and ideas, for learning and building knowledge, for raising and discussing common issues, for joint decision making, planning and taking action, and for shouldering joint responsibilities for management of collective initiatives such as a childcare centre, a savings scheme or a sangha hut. Ultimately the sangha collective is the epicentre which gives direction to the process of empowerment generating self-directed development and learning processes.

The formation of a sangha is a laborious process of building solidarity and strength among women who at the onset are very shy, sometimes hostile and full of distrust, have a low image of themselves and little confidence in their ability to change things. The process takes its own course and is built upon shared experiences of achievements, hopes, disappointments, struggles and successes. In this process of building solidarity collective action and collective struggle appear to be the major binding factors. Concrete achievements and successes are important in creating and reinforcing women's self-confidence. The process of sangha formation takes a long time and experience has learned that it cannot be short circuited nor hurried by external factors without the risk of interrupting the fragile bonding and breaking the process. Given this Mahila Samakhya has taken a formidable task upon its shoulders and has succeeded in reaching out to women who, under the prevailing conditions in Gujarat, have otherwise remained unreached, invisible and voiceless. From the first attempts to establish rapport with the poorest women in the villages, to gain their trust and confidence in an often hostile environment, to start a process off through collective reflection, decision making, planning and concerted action, women's collectives have emerged (or are emerging) in more than 600 rural villages in Gujarat.

Sahayoginis and sakhis

The key actors in the building of a sangha are, apart from the village women, the sahayoginis and the sakhis. The sahayoginis are the field workers and motivators who initiate and guide the process of sangha formation at village level and look after a cluster of ten villages each. Between 1992 and 1996 the number of sahayoginis has increased from 54 to 81, in line with the expansion of the programme into new villages, blocks and the new District. Although there has been some turn-over because of sahayoginis moving away or leaving the programme, more than half of the sahayoginis have been with the programme from its initial stages (before 1992). Contrary to the sangha women most of the sahayoginis have been educated up to SSC level (a few are higher educated), and a considerable number come from an Upper Caste background. Half of the sahayoginis in Baroda belong to the tribal or SC population. Most of the sahayoginis we met

seemed remarkably capable and strong women, highly motivated and with a great commitment to their work, their 'mission' and to the sangha women.

The sakhis are sangha women who have been delegated by the sangha to act as activist once the sangha has been formed. In this respect the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat has a different approach from other States, e.g. Uttar Pradesh where sakhis are being trained first and then become the major activists in the sangha formation stage. It is not possible to determine which approach is more effective as they have evolved in response to the specific situation and because of all other intervening factors and specific conditions in the respective areas. The sakhis participate in the sakhi training, which consists of three to four condensed training periods during the year and monthly reflection/planning meetings at cluster and/or block levels. Another characteristic of Mahila Samakhya Gujarat is the adoption of a sakhi rotation system aimed at developing a small cadre of women at sangha level who have benefited from the exposure to the sakhi training. As the result of the sakhi rotating system more than 2000 women have been trained, each sangha having a cadre of five to six trained and committed sakhis. (For sanghas which started later the number is less.)

Capacity building and the training of sahayoginis and sakhis

The continuing process of training and capacity building of sakhis and sahayoginis has been and is crucial in the process of sangha building. A lot of effort has been invested, particularly in the initial stages of the Programme implementation, in the creation of a cadre of empowered, articulate, motivated and capable sahayoginis who in their turn would participate in the training of sakhis. The initial process training during the first years of the programme was conducted with assistance from an external training organisation based in Ahmedabad. The Sahayoginis who initially have been recruited in the districts and the first batches of sakhis have gone through an intensive learning/training process focused on their self-development and empowerment, perspective building, development of methods and skills for fieldwork with villagers, development of a participatory working ethos in line with the philosophy of Mahila Samakhya. The training has been reinforced by the system of monthly reviews and training related to up-coming issues. Over time the training/learning processes have been given content and shape along with the evolution of the programme in the respective districts. This is an outcome of the inherent flexibility which has been built into the programme.

During the last five years the system of sakhi and sahayogini training has become internalized. Since 1992 Districts Training Teams (DTT) have been formed in all districts consisting of a group of sahayoginis, sakhis and district staff, who take care of the training of sakhis and sahayoginis. The reliance on outside training organisations has been reduced to inputs on certain issue based training. Last year the team district team in Baroda has taken the decision to dissolve the DTT. Each sahayogini will now conduct the sakhi training in her own cluster, with the assistance from other sahayoginis. A similar decision is being debated in Sabarkantha. Through the sakhi training and the regular reflection meetings strong bonds have been created between the sakhis and the sahayoginis as well as among sakhis from different villages which are reaching above and beyond the village level.

One of the advantages of internalising the sahayogini and sakhi training is the strengthening of internal capacities for training and increased self-reliance of the Programme in meeting the internal staff training needs. It also allows to evolve a training programme in response to the specific working conditions and the issues which emerge as the process evolves. However, the advantages can also turn into weaknesses. For example if the training system relies too much on the examples of successful experiences and approaches, if the training becomes like a recurring routine lacking innovative inputs and external perspectives, and if the training becomes more skill-oriented gradually losing its feminist or gender perspective, and leads to a stagnation in the process of building collective strength within the sangha.

District Implementation Unit and the State Programme Office

The State Programme Office (SPO) and the District Implementation Units (DIU) are responsible for the co-ordination of the Programme and the liaison with other organisations at the State and District levels. The State Programme Office has a State Programme Director (SPD) who is the main executive of the Programme in Gujarat, and two resource persons, a consultant, an accounts officer and support staff. The District Implementation Units are responsible for the facilitation of the implementation of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in the District. The District Programme Co-ordinator (DPC) is in charge of the DIU. The staffing depends on the number of villages covered and consists of two resource persons, a consultant (who often act as a third resource person), an accounts officer and the necessary support staff.

At the State level there has been a succession of State Programme Directors, all of them Government Officers and some of them having the responsibility for Mahila Samakhya as added charge. At District level there has been absence of, or there were temporary District Co-ordinators. There were changing resource persons and consultants, or these posts being vacant for longer periods. Three resource persons have remained with the programme from the very beginning one of them having become the District Co-ordinator in one of the districts. Since about one year non-government District Co-ordinators have been appointed in the three 'older' districts. The DPC Sabarkantha, who as a resource persons has a long standing field experience dating from the beginning of the Programme is also in charge of Banaskantha. A few of the newly appointed resource persons have been working as *sahayoginis*. Those who have been recruited from outside the Programme at State and District levels are young and motivated, college educated women who have had little working experience prior to joining the Programme. They may have to give extra attention to building communication skills and to gaining the respect from older and experienced *sahayoginis*, from *sakhis* and *sangha* women, from local authorities and representatives from NGO partners. In this respect Mahila Samakhya Gujarat might think of developing an institutional mechanism for induction and in-service training of new resource persons and consultants, which at present is lacking. They learn on the spot by doing and by exposure to the field experience of others and by attending training workshops organised by other organisations, or in other States.

Stagnation and re-orientation

When the new District Co-ordinators took charge at the end of 1994/beginning 1995 a certain degree of stagnation in growth had set in, the emergence of which had already been observed by the National Evaluation conducted in 1993. The stagnation was manifest in e.g.

- shading of the Mahila Samakhya concept and of the ideological principles of the Programme,
- focus on group-solidarity building as an end in itself and losing sight of building strength and sharing power within the *sanghas*;
- focus on too many different issues simultaneously and a tendency of Mahila Samakhya becoming a mobilisation and issue based programme with an emphasis on achievements and targets rather than on how the achievements relate and contribute to women's learning and empowerment processes;
- emphasis in the training on capacity and skills building at *sakhi* and *sahayogini* levels and less attention to perspective building and to building of capacities and empowerment within the *sanghas*,
- and an overall lack of direction.

From 1995 onwards interventions have taken place in response to the outcomes of the National Evaluation (1993), which have set off a process of reorientation and re-direction of the entire Programme. Apart from the measures related to the staffing the interventions included a series of re-orientation training sessions focused on feminist perspective building, on gender awareness and

sensitivity, and on sangha-process documentation at different levels for all districts, as well as district-wise. The National Training Consultant, the resource person from the National Office and members of the National Resource Group have played a vital role conducting the various training sessions. A number of sahayoginis and staff members attended gender sensitivity training workshops organised by other organisations.

The process of re-directing the Programme is taking a different pace and shape in each of the 'older' districts and still needs to continue. In Baroda it has led to a stronger focus on the integration of a feminist perspective in all programme activities and training, and the identification of three major focal issues which will give direction to the District Programme: women's legal rights, (reproductive) health as a right of women, and the rights of women and girls to basic education. The Programme in Rajkot may perhaps need further external inputs in the process of re-orientation and regaining clarity about the direction of the Programme. At the time of the evaluation visit the Rajkot team was facing a number of difficult questions and decisions. The problems do not seem to be limited to mere management issues, but relate to the orientation and direction of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in the District.

5. Major features of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat

In spite of the structural and ideological problems mentioned above the Programme has gained momentum in all districts particularly on the activity side, thanks to the strengths and resilience at the field level e.g. the sahayoginis, the sakhis and the resource persons who all along have remained with the programme, and thanks to the support from various quarters within and outside the Programme structure e.g. members of the Executive Committee, the General Council, the National Resource Group, the District Resource Groups, partner organisations and others who believe in the Mahila Samakhya approach.

In the initial stages the emphasis of the Programme has been on

- . establishing a cadre of trained sahayoginis of fieldworkers who were to cover a circle of approximately the villages in order to establish rapport with the women and start the formation of village level women's collectives,
- . facilitating the formation and consolidation of a sangha or women's collectives, part of this process is,
- . the organisation of sangha meetings where issues are being raised and discussed, where learning takes place and actions are planned,
- . building solidarity by mobilising women around common interests and sharing the experience of realising that they can effect changes by using their collective strength,
- . the selection by the sangha's of village activists or sakhi's,
- . the orientation and skills training of sakhi's in yearly recurring training cycles according to the sakhi rotation system.

The process of sangha formation has been and is being supported and reinforced by

- . regular review and planning meetings at cluster, block and district levels for development of strategies in response to the issues raised in the sangha meetings,
- . supporting sangha initiatives by organizing relevant inputs in terms of information, training, facilitating linkages with other programme's and agencies,
- . organising and mobilisation of women for events like the International Women's Day and International Literacy,
- . capacity building at DIU, sahayogini, sakhi and gradually also at sangha levels on common issues related to e.g. child care, women's (reproductive) health and sexuality, legal issues and women's rights, literacy, post-literacy and numeracy skills, the participation of women in the Panchayati Raj system, repair and maintenance of hand-pumps, masonry and building skills.

In the initial stages of sangha formation mainly infra-structural and community issues like access to water, road repair, electricity have been taken up. Such issues are relatively non-controversial and do not threaten the existing power structures and gender relationships. But they involve some amount of collective struggle and have helped in building solidarity and confidence in collective action.

Prevailing issues which over time have emerged and given attention to in the districts show a varied profile of activities related to e.g.:

- access to and availability of water (Rajkot, Sabarkantha). Particularly in Rajkot water seems to have become a dominant caste related issue influenced by ideas about pollution;
- solving immediate problems by accessing government schemes and resources for road repair, electricity, widow's pensions, supply of rationed goods, as well as for credit and employment schemes such as DW CRA and TRYSEM (all districts);
- legal issues and women's rights (Baroda, Rajkot), including issues related to violence against women and abolishment of alcoholism (Sabarkantha); in Baroda the emergence of a voluntary legal support system through the women's courts (nari adalat), and legal awareness + literacy training for sangha women;
- health care and women's health awareness (Sabarkantha, Baroda); in Baroda it has been given a new dimension by focusing on health as a right and on women's reproductive health and sexuality; implementation of a health survey, training of local healers and birth attendants (dais), attention to witch-hunting;
- adult literacy and education (all districts), with special attention to female literacy in local languages in the tribal areas (Sabarkantha, Baroda); involvement in the Total Literacy Campaign (all districts);
- childcare (Sabarkantha, Rajkot, Baroda), in Baroda with special attention to voluntary childcare centres run by the sanghas;
- girls education in formal schools, non-formal education classes for girls, accessibility and use of scholarship funds for girls (all districts) and in Sabarkantha the establishment of a Balika Shiksan Kendra as a residential school for out-of-school girls from tribal communities;
- women's participation in politics, particularly related to the Panchayati Raj elections (all districts);
- economic empowerment by accessing government schemes and programmes for income generating activities (Rajkot) and setting up saving schemes managed by sangha women for personal and group purposes (all districts);
- building a space for women, Mahila Kutir: continuation of the processes involved in obtaining land, designing, planning, resourcing and building of a Mahila Kutir (Rajkot, Baroda, Sabarkantha);
- (financial) self-reliance of the sanghas by the adoption of the sangha model and the transfer of the sangha honorarium to the sangha as seed money for future collective or sangha related activities, for which rules are to be formulated and decided upon by the sangha membership.

One of the special features of the Mahila Samakhyas Programme in Gujarat is e.g. the attention being given to adolescent girls by the organisation of 'Yuvati Shibir' in Sabarkantha, Baroda and later Rajkot, and 'Mahiti Mela' in Banaskantha. Health awareness and sexuality are among the issues dealt with in these camps. The participating girls are supposed to share what they have learned with their age-mates in the villages. Sometimes these girls have formed their own groups.

Another feature of the Gujarat Programme are the 8th of March (International Women's day) and International Literacy Day celebrations, which are turned out into festivals of melas lasting a whole week. They are organised around specific themes of common interest or linked to current events, like women's health, Panchayati Raj, legal literacy, the inauguration of a Mahila Kutir. Such celebrations are organised cluster, block, or even district-wise and attracted more than ten thousand women. 1995 was a peak year with 28 programmes attended by 25,000 women.

These issues are seen by the staff as playing a role in the sangha building process as they involve collective analysis, planning, decision making and actions.

The achievements of the Programme in terms of numbers of childcare centres and literacy classes, mahila kutir construction, results of Panchayati Raj elections, Youth Camps, Melas etc. have been well documented in recent Programme brochures and the Annual Reports and need not be repeated here.

6. The impact of the Mahila Samakhya Programme on women's lives

6.1 Women's personal and family lives

The Programme as it has evolved has made an empowering impact on the lives of women participating in the programme at different levels. The strongest noticeable effect is demonstrated in the existence of women's collectives in the villages. Sangha women give testimony that the collectives or sanghas have emerged out of a growing sense of sisterhood, an increased sense of worth, dignity and self-confidence, and increased understanding of the power of collective action in order effect changes such as availability of water or fighting alcoholism.

What women reported

For sangha women the most important changes mentioned are that

- . they have come out of isolation in their former lives hidden in the shadows of the kitchen and behind their veils,
- . their world has broadened and they dare to face the world with dignity, with an upright face and opened eyes,
- . the sangha gives them a space where they feel safe to share their life problems, and they have shed their fears of talking openly,
- . they have gained the courage to address and challenge people in positions of authority demanding their rights and making them accountable (government officers, village leaders, school teachers, the police etc.),
- . the sangha as a source of solidarity and support has given them the courage to fight social and family issues, to resist their dominating husbands and in-laws,
- . they can move around and go to meetings without asking permission or being questioned,
- . they have developed aptitudes for family counselling and providing services to others,
- . they are able to successfully undertake joint actions and access government schemes and resources which improve their situation,
- . they have awareness about the banking system and are capable to deal with savings in order to improve the survival base of their families, they know how to run their own saving system, which provides them with cash in times of need,
- . they have learned to put their signature instead of a thumbprint, this gives them pride and a feeling of dignity,
- . they are aware of the importance of schooling for girls and are determined to let their daughters go to school up to the tenth grade,
- . they can take care of their and their children's health better,
- . they get more respect from their husbands, their families, the community and feel that their voices are being listened to,
- . they can influence family decisions and are able to prevent their men from using the scarce family resources on alcohol,
- . they are aware of their voting rights, they have cast their votes for the panchayati raj elections and supported a female candidate,
- . they are able to run their sangha meetings without the assistance from the sahayogini,
- . and they have come to understand that together they are powerful and have become a

force to be reckoned with.

They further reported better health and use of family planning methods, they have shed their fear for raising intimate and personal issues related to their bodies and health. Their traditional notions about their bodies, their reproductive system, and their sexuality have been demystified. They are no longer afraid of being treated by male physicians. They use local medicines, they have managed to get the health workers to come to their villages and they visit PHC centres, which they have become to trust.

The impact and women's empowerment

The impact of the Mahila Samakhya on the lives of rural women is that the sangha has become a source of strength upon which they can draw for solving personal and community problems individually as well as collectively. The sangha has provided women with the social and emotional space which enables them to shed their fears and break out of physical and cultural barriers that have confined their life-space. The sangha confirms their identity as women and gives space and right to a dignified life for single women. Through their ability to access knowledge and analyze their situation critically, and their ability to use their collective powers and negotiate changes from a position of strength, they can further expand their life-space. Slowly and gradually they beginning to assert their rights in order to get greater control of their lives and make changes.

The area of women's empowerment has many dimensions which interact and are related to women's identity, dignity and self respect, to women's reproductive rights and control over their own lives, to economic justice and right to have access to and control of economic resources, and to political empowerment and women's right to vote, to participate in decision making and to influence the direction of societal development. It relates to equality, social justice and woman's legal and human rights and it relates to the demystification of ideologies based on patriarchal values.

The areas where Mahila Samakhya, through the mahila sanghas, has achieved most apart from gaining dignity and self-respect is in accessing government schemes and services, in health awareness and care, in education and particularly education for girls. The approach used is based on women's assertion of their (equal) rights and entitlements to social welfare services, community provisions, economic schemes, educational provisions and health services. They do not challenge power structures and particularly gender relationships directly. But often the access to such provisions is limited to or monopolised by the dominant power groups. The successes of the sangha not only give women a sense of achievement, reinforcing their inner strength, it also affects the balance of powers in an indirect way, not in the least by the public respect and recognition gained. And this reflects back on the status and bargaining power of women in their families, their increased control of financial resources and family decisions, and their ability to fight and resist violence.

The direct improvements are mainly noticeable in the area of basic survival needs and improving the circumstances in the personal and family sphere.

The empowerment agenda of Mahila Samakhya is bound to be at odds with the non-interventionist approach of the Programme and the emphasis on women identifying their needs and priorities. Finding the balance between this is problem facing the sahayoginis and the District staff. The agendas of the sangha women are based on their experienced realities within the framework of their geo-political and socio-cultural environments and the accepted values and biases that shape their positions in their gendered societies. Given their situation of poverty and deprivation they naturally articulate their needs in terms of basic survival and improvement of the quality of life. Without a conscious and deliberate input on building new perspectives based on equality, social justice and women's human rights there is a risk of stagnation of the growth of the

empowerment processes. A day to day practice of constant preoccupation with running after meeting women's immediate needs may overtake (unintended) the long term empowerment perspective. And this may create a danger that Mahila Samakhya becomes more of a demand driven organisation facilitating access to information and development resources, thereby losing its identity as an empowerment Programme.

This is a very complex issue that the Programme needs to continuously come back to in its training strategy and that should remain on the agenda for critical reflection.

Sakhis and sangha women

The women we met in the meetings with the sanghas were impressively articulate and powerful. We noted, however, that spokes women were mainly the women who have attended the sakhi training. Questions can be raised as to what extent they have been able to share what they have learned with the sangha women and to which extent their empowerment has percolated down to the women in the sangha. The sakhi rotation system has as result that the sanghas are led by a small group of well trained sakhis. There is a risk that the sakhis will take a dominating position and the effect on building strength within the sanghas among sangha women could be less.

As mentioned in the introduction the current evaluation visit did not allow us to get an insight in the internal dynamics of the sangha development and the dimensions of the empowerment processes of and among women at the sangha level. Such insight is necessary for the further development of empowerment strategies with women at the sangha level. The initiative of the Programme to start a project of participatory documentation of the sangha development process with the sangha members can be considered as a start for getting into the heart of the sangha. This can be supplemented by an in-depth study focused on the internal and external dynamics guiding the processes within the sangha. The study could further provide insight in e.g.

- . the understanding of sangha women of concepts like empowerment, social justice and equality, and their perception of what a mahila sangha is and could be;
- . their views on how the sangha has impacted their lives personally, within their families and in the community;
- . their experiences and perceptions of the changes in the relationships and power structures within their families and in the community;
- . their views on their potential, individually and collectively through the sangha, to affect and change the prevailing power-relations within their families, in the community and beyond,
- . their ideas about sharing power and responsibilities within the sangha and in their families;
- . their views on breaking caste, class and age barriers among women in the village;
as well as
- . their views on the future development and growth of the sangha at village level and within a larger network of similar sanghas.

The study would have to be based on an action oriented and participatory approach with sufficient time and space for joint reflection and analysis, and for establishing rapport and mutual understanding.

We further observed that the training system has also led to the creation of strong bonds between sakhis at cluster level and between sakhis, and sahayoginis. These bonds go beyond and above the level of the individual sanghas. Whereas sahayoginis and sakhis are discussing sangha federations and setting up mutual support mechanisms at cluster and block level, the sanghas and sangha women themselves might not have achieved sufficient strength and be involved in these discussions and ensuing initiatives.

In terms of identity, internal dynamics and sharing of responsibilities, sensitivity to women's equality and social justice, use of collective strength and self-reliance in managing its own affairs,

about 45% of the sanghas in Gujarat can be called strong. Yet, more than half of the sanghas need further strengthening and support.

Most of the training within the Mahila Samakhya Programme is directed a capacity building and awareness/perspective building of sahayoginis, sakhis and DIU staff. Apart from the health awareness training camps, literacy camps, activities around the Panchayati Raj elections and special training for selected groups of women (e.g. childcare centre teachers, local healers and health workers, para-legal counsellors, hand-pump mechanics, elected panchayati raj members) there have been no training programmes designed for and directed at empowerment of the sangha women. It will be a great challenge for the programme staff with the sakhis and sahayoginis to engage in evolving special training/learning programmes to be conducted with women in their sanghas around issues raised by them focused on perspective building, strengthening of the sangha from within and capacity building for the self-reliance of the sangha.

6.2 Political participation and women's rights

Women have started conquering new public spaces during the last two years through their involvement in the Panchayati Raj elections as voters and as candidates, and through the initiatives of women in e.g. Baroda to establish women's courts (nari adalat) at the Block level in front of the police and magistrate's office.

Panchayati Raj

Mahila Samakhya has facilitated women's participation in the elections by providing information, organising workshops and public events, providing guidance and support to women who were standing for the elections, providing training and support to elected women. Sangha women used their right to vote in supporting female candidates, women contested unfair election politics and resisted pressurising and being bribed. 295 women including sahayoginis, sakhis and village women stood for elections, 284 women got elected of which few resigned for personal reasons or because they had to make a choice between Mahila Samakhya and their political function. A number of sangha women have become a Sarpanch. The experience has helped to demystify the notion that political functions are beyond reach for rural women with their backgrounds.

The activities of Mahila Samakhya in relation to the elections have strengthened its visibility. It has been taken as a learning experience which has been analysed at different levels. It also created high expectations about women's power and ability to influence political decision making from a perspective of social justice and equality. And now women begin to realise the enormous challenge they are coping with from their new positions in the current socio-political environment with its inherent gender biases against women. By now, almost a year after the elections, it is a good time for a review and assessment of the impact on the elected women, and look into the need for effective support in the form of further training and the development of a common women's agenda.

Women's courts

In all districts attention is given to legal issues and violence against women. Legal awareness training has been on the agenda in the three older districts directed at sahayogini and sakhi levels. Legal committees have been established to solve and strategize about legal issues. And in Baroda women's legal rights has become identified as a central focus of attention in three blocks. In the same district an exciting initiative to establish a voluntary legal support structure for women at the block level under responsibility of women from mahila sanghas has emerged.

Women's issues related to family violence, divorce and custody cases are being raised during sangha meetings as individual cases and are solved through persuasion, counselling, and if necessary social pressure or public exposure. After such cases became recognised as legal issues sangha women of different villages in Baroda decided to establish a women's court or 'nari adalat' at the block level. This court holds weekly public meetings under a 'neem' tree in front of the police and village magistrate's office, or in a public space like a theatre. The court provides time and a public and accessible place where women can bring their cases. Everyone can join the meetings. Eleven sangha women and a sahayogini constitute the court and one of them, an elderly lady, is the judge. The reasons for establishing the court are that legal procedures are lengthy and women are unable to afford the costs. The women's court is in a better position than the official court to understand the situation from a women's point of view and the case is taken seriously. At present there are three nari adalats in two blocks in Baroda.

The cases taken to the court relate to family violence, alcoholism, wife beating, custody of children, separation, widows pensions, property issues, child abuse and rape. Women from the ten cluster villages bring their cases to the court and nowadays also cases from other villages in the block are brought in. The court procedures include the hearing of all parties and getting information, counselling aimed at reconciliation, getting a public statement in writing from the perpetrator, support to the woman, and if necessary involvement of the police, the judge, or the revenue officer. The initiative has been supported by the three months training course organised by the DIU on women and law, which was attended by 25 women from three blocks. The training focused on

- . legal awareness, women's rights and the use of their rights,
- . legal literacy and literacy for documentation,
- . information and problem solving strategies.

In its preparation of the course the team produced a book on the language of the court to be used in training for legal literacy. The local judge participated in the course as resource person and he co-operates with the women's court. The women who attended the training act as para legal counsellor in their villages and some are members of the nari adalats. After the training the courts were able to deal more effectively with women's legal cases, they have been able to solve a number of cases of rape and child abuse.

A second training is planned for another batch of women who are selected by the sanghas and who are willing to take the responsibility of running the court and/or provide legal counselling at village level. As the majority of trainees who attended the legal training course were elderly women it is suggested to pay attention to including younger women in the training course. And more attention is to be given to strengthening the self reliance of the women's courts and equip the trainees with skills that reduce the reliance of the courts on the support from the sahayoginis (who now takes records and writes the reports).

The nari adalats have a great impact on the public recognition of women's legal rights, on the visibility of Mahila Samakhya, and on the credibility of the court as a trustworthy support structure because of its transparent rules and procedures. It has created a change in the attitude of officials and in their application of the rules: they now take women's issues seriously. The initiative has commanded respect and co-operation from the local authorities. And the court has created a sense of sisterhood among women across caste and village divides as women from other caste groups and from other villages also bring their cases and they are treated equally.

In Sabarkantha cases of family violence and abuse against women are raised in the sangha meetings. One of the obstacles in dealing with these cases from a legal perspective is that most of the sanghas are in tribal areas which have their own tribal laws and do not fall under the jurisdiction of the national legal system. A study about women's rights under tribal law in different tribal systems is required in order for women to know their rights and how to make use of them in order to seek justice. A better understanding of the tribal legal system is also relevant in relation to

other legal issues such as property and inheritance rights and rights to the use of tribal e.g. for the building of the sangha hut.

6.3 Economic empowerment

Economic and income generating activities are a priority area in Rajkot where sangha women are engaged in saving and loans and in various income generating activities by successfully accessing schemes (DWCRA, TRYSEM). Women have moved into new occupations like hand-pump mechanics and masons and thereby they are occupying new economic spaces. The situation in Rajkot did not allow for an assessment of these activities on women's economic empowerment. In the other districts there is less attention to economic development in the Programme apart from engagement of sanghas in saving and loan schemes and efforts to access DWCRA loans.

Savings and loans

These saving schemes give women a feeling of having more control over financial resources and access to cash when in need. Loans are mostly used for individual and personal purposes, seldom for investing in economic and/or collective enterprises. Earlier investments in economic activities have not always been successful and seem to have been abandoned. There is also a great concern about sanghas breaking apart because of conflicts arising from dealing with saving schemes and from the emergence of economic interest groups within the sangha.

Economic development and interest groups

Economic issues in areas of e.g. wages, improved labour conditions, employment creation and income generation seem to be difficult to deal with. The need for economic development, regular work, higher and stable incomes is high on the priority list of sangha women. A one-sided focus on economic development and income generation activities can lead to uneven development within the sangha, conflicting economic interests between sangha members, closing the sangha off for new members, breaking the solidarity within the sangha and eventually breaking up of the sangha and interruption of the empowerment processes. One option to deal with such conflicting interest is that the economic interest group moves out of the sangha and forms a society which is independent from the sangha as happened with the hand-pump mechanics in Banda District in Uttar Pradesh who have established their own society. This does not imply that the women have to give up their membership and participation in the sangha as a forum of women as women.

Need for rethinking and strategizing

Dealing with the recurring economic demands of women is an area for which Mahila Samakhya has not yet found a suitable answer, nor has it been able to define its role. Mahila Samakhya is not an employment creation or economic development programme and is unable to deliver the necessary inputs and know how for economic development. As an education programme for women's empowerment Mahila Samakhya's role is not to engage in running income generating activities or saving schemes. Instead it can focus on environment and capacity building. The economic empowerment of women is an area which needs further thinking and strategizing perhaps by exploring possibilities for capacity building and vocational skills training in combination with developing partnerships with economic/rural development programmes.

The Gujarat Women Economic Development Corporation has recently issued a directory on Government Programmes for women which include a wide variety of schemes for training and capacity building, loans and financial assistance related to rural and agricultural development

aimed at agricultural labourers, population below the poverty line and the tribal population. Many of the schemes are known in Mahila Samakhya and are being accessed (such as DWCRA and TRYSEM), but active searching may lead to new options and possibilities for vocational training, training in various areas of rural extension or environmental resource management, scholarship funds, loans etc.. A similar active exploration can be made in the world of voluntary agencies and private organisations.

Collaboration with other agencies

There has been some reluctance in the past within Mahila Samakhya to seek co-operation with other development organisations due to the negative experiences in the early stages of the Programme and the concern about conflicting views on women's empowerment and development, and conflicting styles of operation. Over the last years there has been a marked increase in the collaboration with other agencies especially in the areas of health (CHETNA, ARPAN, SEWA), legal issues and violence against women (SHAKSHI), gender sensitivity and feminist perspective building (JAGORI, ICECD and others) and water (UNICEF). The lessons learned from such collaborative efforts could help in evolving more active approaches to collaboration with other agencies especially in the area of economic/rural/ agricultural and environmental development. Instead of focusing on organisations which are already present in a certain geographical area Mahila Samakhya could encourage rural development organisations to come to areas which have been unreached and are now uncovered by Mahila Samakhya. One of the disadvantages of the Mahila Samakhya policy to expand to areas where no other agencies are working is that there are also few opportunities for linkages. For instance the Training Women in Agriculture (TWA) programme is implemented in six districts in Gujarat. Only one district is also covered by Mahila Samakhya i.e. Banaskantha and initiatives to start collaboration have already been taken. Possibilities could be explored to have women from the other district attend some of the training programmes and/or the TWA could be invited to expand its activities into districts covered by Mahila Samakhya.

Earlier evaluations (1992, 1993) already emphasised the importance of developing a clear set of terms of agreement with the collaborating organisations in order to ensure that the ideological principles of Mahila Samakhya are not violated. The terms of agreement can be based on the non-negotiable principles of the Programme.

6.4 Mahila Samakhya support structures

Under the Mahila Samakhya scheme are provisions to facilitate the mahila sanghas in creating local support system in the form of

- childcare centres which would provide women with 'time' for themselves to participate in sangha meetings, for learning, and to be able to leave their young children safely while going for work;
- the construction of a sangha hut which gives women a 'space' for themselves, to come together, have meetings and joint activities, find relief and support from other women, for learning together and storage of the sangha goods.

The creation of these support structures requiring joint decision making and planning, visits to authorities, writing applications, mobilisation of resources etc. was also looked upon as a process building activity which would reinforce group solidarity and strength.

Mahila kutir

From the very beginning after the sanghas have been formed the women have been engaged in the process of hut or 'kutir' construction. Since then it has been an on-going struggle to go

through the procedures of sangha registration, obtaining land, designing the hut, planning its construction, finding alternative resources meet the costs and supplement the Mahila Samakhya provision, organising labour and building supplies, doing and supervising the construction etc. Each district has a Mahila Kutir committee to look into the progress made and develop strategies when new problems arise. At present ten Mahila Kutirs have been constructed whereas more than 70 sanghas are in the different stages of the process of obtaining land, finding resources, planning for and implementing construction work. The building of a Mahila Kutir has become a lengthy learning process requiring a great deal of stamina from the sangha women and sahayoginis. The process has met with many disappointments and a certain fatigue seems to have set in because of sometimes insurmountable obstacles. The main constraints are

- problems of getting land allocated, particularly in the tribal areas where land issues fall under the Tribal Area Development Programme,
- the allocation for the sangha hut under the Mahila Samakhya is insufficient to meet the costs involved,

and perhaps some inflexibility in the adherence to the Mahila Samakhya rules regarding the transfer of land to the sanghas. The issues have been raised frequently in the Executive Council but it has not resulted in creative solutions and perhaps more flexibility in application of the rules. One problem might be the lack of understanding about the tribal legislation regarding the use and allocation of land and the implications in respect to the status of the sanghas autonomous entities within a government programme.

Sanghas have been very resourceful in finding solutions for the lack of funds. In many cases they have been able to raise funds from other sources, to find low cost solutions and to provide their own labour. Yet it is necessary to review the budgetary allocations for the sangha huts under the Mahila Samakhya budget and to bring it in line with the current price levels.

Child Care Centres

The establishment of child care centres has been on the Mahila Samakhya agenda in Gujarat from the beginning. Activities started in sanghas which had gained sufficient strength to take up the responsibility of running a centre, where the demand was raised, where local balsakhis (teachers for childcare centres) could be found and where there was no accessible ICDS centre in the neighbourhood. In the tribal areas the first centres were set up as branches of the ICDS centres and with support from ICDS in the form of health visits and some snacks. Also in other areas there is co-ordination and co-operation with ICDS. In many villages child centres have been set up, part of them are still running, but quite a number have been closed down due to various problems related to the management of the centre, the balsakhis moving away or conflicts. Moreover, the child care centres seemed sometimes to have become regarded more as a government provision like the ICDS centres than as a centre of and running under the responsibility of the sanghas. In Baroda and Sabarkantha the situation with regard to the child care centres has been reviewed and amendments have been made to (re)link the centres to the sanghas and bring them under their full responsibility. In Baroda the child care centres are now run on voluntary basis by and with contributions from the sanghas. Parents pay a token fee of Rs 2.- per child per month. Systems have been set-up for monitoring and supervision by the sangha members. In the case of Baroda supervision is done by members from other sanghas.¹

The childcare centres visited were well run, lively and energising with care for the children's needs. The centres have three to four balsakhis sharing tasks in dealing with children of different ages. At least one balsakhi is literate and trained in pre-school activities. Anganwadi workers come to the centre and check the children's health. Parents are involved in the running of the centre,

¹ We were unable during this visit to talk to officers from ICDS and get their views on the interface between the MS centres and the ICDS centres, on the co-operation at policy and at field level and on how MS has influenced the ICDS approach.

especially mothers/sangha members who take turns in preparing food and ensure that foodstocks are supplied.

The differences with the ICDS Child Care Centres are that the MS Centres are nearby and accessible, that the environment is child friendly, that the balsakhis are from the local community and speak the familiar dialect, that teaching methods are innovative using local songs and games, that the sangha women are deciding about the timings, the place, responsible for paying the balsakhis' honorarium and the provision of food, and above all the centres are 'owned' by the sanghas.

There are good linkages with the local schools, children from the Child Care Centres enrol in the schools, are well adjusted to the school rhythm, they speak out and seem to be performing well. In one of the centres the balsakhi was engaged in teaching school age girls and prepare them for admission in the village school. And sometimes schools will sent some children to the centre for remedial coaching as the school is unable to provide the individual attention needed. After some time the children are ready to go back to school.

Areas to look into are the training of the balsakhis who could be given more training in e.g. pre-school methods, child psychology and development, dealing with children of different ages, toy making and use of local materials. What is clearly coming out is that the child care centres are more than just taking care of young children, they have become important in environment building for school education, especially for girls, and they provide the children with a child-friendly learning environment and prepare them for school. There is off course a risk of becoming over ambitious, expecting a higher professional pedagogical level than is feasible within the given framework, the local conditions and available means. A realistic balance need to be found between what is feasible and the need for strengthening the pedagogic skills for pre-school learning.

A total review of the financial pattern and provisions for the Child Care Centres is required (see also the recommendations from the study of the Child Care Centres in Gujarat by Rajalakshmi Sriram, 1996).

6.5 Cutting across caste and class divides

Most of the sanghas in Mahila Samakhya are limited in class composition to Scheduled castes or belong to specific tribal groups. There are mixed sanghas of harijan and tribal women if they happen to live in the same village. In principle there are no formal restrictions for women from other caste groups to join the sanghas. But so far there have been no active efforts to reach out to women from other groups to become a member of the sanghas. Women from other caste groups are welcomed and sometimes attend sangha meetings. Women from upper caste groups have started to bring cases of violence and injustice to the sanghas. And the nari adalats in Baroda District deal with legal cases from women regardless of their caste background. If the sanghas are to move towards becoming a community wide women's forum and collective the sanghas could perhaps more actively try to involve women from other castes in their activities. The melas and celebrations organised by the sanghas are a start for breaking class/caste barriers. Child care centres, literacy classes, securing access of girls to good education, women's health and legal rights, and community issues like water are areas of common women's interests where traditional caste divides can be broken. Half of the sahayoginis themselves are from upper caste background, they find no difficulty because of their background and they have developed strong bonds with sangha women from the SC or ST communities. They can support the sanghas' efforts to reach out to other women and be a kind of 'role model'.

In the sanghas we observed a predominance of women from older age groups. This seems logical as they are the women in the household who have perhaps more freedom of movement, time and decision making power. Younger women with small children who have the position of a daughter-

in-law are perhaps more difficult to reach and involve. The sanghas could give more attention to involving young women and look into their needs, and to reviewing relationships of power and authority among women within the family from a perspective of equality.

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat pays attention to adolescent women through the organisation of camps for this group. And young women have formed their own groups or sanghas which could become associated with the mahila sanghas.

6.6 Toward a grassroots women's movement

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat has an impressive record in mobilising more than ten thousand women around issues like women's health, political participation, women and law, women's literacy etc. during melas and international celebrations. These celebrations have become major events giving women from different backgrounds the opportunity to move out of their houses and get together, to celebrate and have fun, to listen to and participate in discussions. Nowadays the melas are planned and organised by the sanghas and reach out also to women outside the sanghas. The melas and celebrations have reinforced the visibility of Mahila Samakhya and the sanghas in the communities, in the block and the districts. And the sanghas give public evidence of their capacity to organise these events and for mobilising other women.

Sanghas have started networking and building linkages outside their villages. Their lobby and mobilisation activities are no longer limited to survival issues and their rights to access public services and schemes. By their involvement in the Panchayati Raj system women have started entering the political arena. And by establishing women's courts women are asserting their right to justice. The seeds for the emergence of a grassroots women's movement are there. Like other processes within Mahila Samakhya the building of such movement takes its own course and pace should not be hastened. Its growth is linked to the ability of Mahila Samakhya to broaden its coverage within the villages, within the blocks and within the districts, and develop a certain 'critical mass' of sangha women.

The Mahila Samakhya Programme is focusing on women in rural areas and seems to function, apart from individual and personal contacts, in relative isolation from the (perhaps urban oriented) women's movement in Gujarat. The Programme could perhaps make more intensive efforts of linking the sanghas with the developments within the women's movement and establishing closer contacts with women's organisations and groups within the districts and in the State.

7. Emerging trends

Most of the emerging trends have already been mentioned in the previous sections. They are related to the process of re-orientation and include

- the new emphasis on conscious integration of a gender perspective to the issues raised in the sanghas,
- the identification of a limited number of focal points per district around which activities will be centred,
- renewed attention to the role of Mahila Samakhya in relation to the economic empowerment of women and collaboration with other agencies,
- mobilisation of women around women's issues and the gradual emergence of a grassroots women's movement,
- the increasing emphasis on training at sangha level aimed at perspective building and capacity building for self reliance of the sangha.

One of the emerging trends in the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat is the transition from the sakhi rotation model to the so called sangha model. It means that sakhis are no longer treated

as learners who are receiving a stipend during the year that they are 'in training'. Instead the sakhi honorarium is converted into a sangha honorarium that is to be transferred directly to the sangha. This sangha fund is at the disposal of the sangha and serves as seed money for future collective or sangha related activities. The sangha is to develop a set of rules and procedures for the use of the money.

We have no information about the experience with the sangha model which has been adopted at the beginning of last year. It is seen by the Mahila Samakhya staff as an important step towards decentralised financial management and decision making by the sangha. As such it is to be seen as a very positive step towards self-reliance of the sanghas, if it is used well. And if it is accompanied by training of the sangha members in financial management and skills required to be self-reliant and not dependent on the recording and calculating skills of sahayoginis or literate outsiders.

The decision also calls for some caution, because it may create a wrong impression of Mahila Samakhya being an input delivery organisation which provides subsidies to mahila sanghas. In other States like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh decisions have been taken or debates are going on about putting a three year time limit to the period a sangha is eligible to a Mahila Samakhya input in the sangha fund. After that period the sangha is to be able to mobilise its own financial resources for its sustenance and self-reliance.

Having a sangha fund may also put limits to the willingness of the sangha members to enlarge its membership and grow into a village movement, because the fund is to be shared by a larger number of beneficiaries. These remarks are calling for caution and careful documentation of the processes involved in order to draw lessons for future strategizing.

Another emerging trend is the on-going debate in Mahila Samakhya about cluster forming and the building of a federation of sanghas in combination with the development of support structures at the block level. Sanghas are already actively engaged in networking and mobilisation around common issues above sangha level. Sakhis are seeking support from sakhis in other villages to strengthen their voices and powers when dealing with authorities at block or district levels. And sanghas have initiated their own legal support structure by establishing their women's courts. These dynamics emerging from the sanghas are very positive in terms of growing strength. The role of Mahila Samakhya is then to strengthen the human resources for these sangha networks and support structures. This will provide new roles for sangha women and sakhis, such as the para legal counsellors in Baroda. For sahayoginis it may offer opportunities for horizontal and vertical mobility, for role differentiation and specialisation, and for new career paths.

Internal mobility is another positive upcoming trend: a resource person becoming District Coordinator, sahayoginis becoming resource persons or Headmistress of the Mahila Shiksha Kendra and sakhis becoming sahayoginis. We have been told that many of the sakhis, balsakhis (preschool teachers) and sangha women are taking interest in becoming a sahayogini.

The pace of growing strength is uneven between districts, blocks and villages. As mentioned earlier in half of the sanghas attention needs to be given to consolidation and further development of their inner strength. And most of the sanghas need to become self-reliant and develop internal capacities for self-directed management before they are ready to function fully independent from sahayogini support. Focusing attention on federation building without paying sufficient attention to furthering the sangha building process is making a jump that could interrupt the empowerment processes of and within the sangha.

8. Expansion strategies

In Gujarat Mahila Samakhya has slowly expanded its coverage by moving into five new blocks

within the three original districts and by starting activities in two blocks of the new District Banaskantha. There are plans to expand further into two other districts which are selected on the basis of low rates for female literacy. According to our assessment of the current status of the Programme in Gujarat we feel that a diversified expansion strategy is called for². However, the current situation with sanghas in different stages of strength (formation stage, consolidation stage, weakened, strong) calls for a diversified strategy. This strategy is to be based on the lessons learned in the past, the increased presence and visibility in the State and within the districts and the current momentum of spontaneous expansion via the sanghas.

Sanghas are asking for expansion of the programme into neighbouring villages for widening of their network for mutual co-operation, mobilisation and activism and for building a critical mass of empowered sanghas at block and district levels. Women in surrounding villages are seeking assistance in forming their sanghas and the older sanghas can play a role in this process which altogether will save time and effort in the formation stage. The process of expansion is to be seen in connection with the process of de-linking the strong sanghas and strengthening of their capacities to become self-reliant.

The following points of attention can guide the formulation and implementation of the expansion strategy:

- reinforcing the sangha strength and capacity building for self-reliance of the older sanghas;
- de-linking the strong and self-reliant sanghas from direct sahayogini support;
- promoting sanghas to become a community forum of women across caste, class or religious divides,
- strengthening networking among sanghas and the formation of cluster groups,
- strengthening and building of support structures at the block level,
- forming new sanghas in areas surrounding the clusters wherein Mahila Samakhya already exists,
- involving the old sanghas and clusters in the formation and strengthening of new sanghas, and for new districts
- selection to be based on transparent criteria e.g. poverty indicators, indicators for gender equality, female literacy rates, potential for linking up with DPEP and/or other schemas for poverty alleviation and socio-economic development,
- ensuring that staff and necessary infra-structure are in place and well prepared/trained before starting the activities in the new districts.

The expansion strategy is to include attention to the human resources component and capacity building for new and diversified roles at all levels of the MS structure (including the sangha level), as well as the continuous (re-) orientation and intensive training at all levels of responsibility.

9. The education component and linkages to the other education programmes

Education is central in the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Education is understood in its broadest meaning as an empowering learning process which enables learners to question, to analyse, to seek answers, to act and reflect, and thereby to discover their inner strength and realise their potential. It involves a life long process of interactive learning, based on sharing of knowledge and life experiences, critical analysis and reflection, creating new kinds of knowledge and understanding.

In their study of the Mahila Sanghas Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurty make a distinction between three interrelated aspects of education: education as life skills, education as knowledge and information, and education as literacy (1966 pp. 27 ff.). Education of life skills relates to the ability to manage life and is based on gaining confidence and self-esteem. It is underlying all of the

². We (the evaluation team) have not been able to discuss the strategies for expansion have not been discussed with the State and district teams.

activities in Mahila Samakhya and in the on-going processes of collective action/reflection/learning/deciding/planning/action. Education as information and knowledge refers to accessing knowledge and information and using it effectively. It is part of awareness workshops and training related to health, law, the environment, etc. In both aspects of education being literate in the sense of reading and writing is not directly essential for learning taking place, for feeling empowered and having confidence in one's strength to make changes.

In Mahila Samakhya education as literacy comes in when women discover the importance of literacy in dealing with the outside literate world with its written rules and procedures. It comes when the need arises for writing application letters, for keeping records of savings, for registration of law cases, for recording and checking minutes of meetings, for getting clarification on procedures etc., and when the women experience its importance for furthering their knowledge and accessing new information.

This means that demands for literacy (reading, writing, numeracy skills and a wider body of knowledge) emerge from the developments within the sanghas and that in principle literacy is not imposed as part of the programme.

Education as literacy

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat started taking up education as literacy in the early nineties on an experimental basis when sahayoginis started with in-formal literacy classes or camps with sakhis and sangha women using materials from the State Resource Centre for non-formal and adult education. This was done on requests from the sanghas and according to their demands regarding timings, pace, and an informal, friendly way of learning. In Sabarkantha and Baroda interesting experiments in adult literacy have been initiated with women in the tribal communities, where there was a need for literacy teaching via the local dialects. The approach followed included participatory methods for development of gender-sensitive learning materials, use of local forms of expressions through songs and lyrics, combining didactic methods of reading and writing skills with knowledge building through discussion and critical thinking. With the assistance of experts in tribal culture, linguistics and pedagogy some primers and textbooks have been developed based on life issues of tribal women. Literacy was imparted through the camp method and with especially trained volunteers. In Sabarkantha educated girls became involved as voluntary teachers.

The materials and methods developed were appreciated by the learners, the camps gave proof that it could be done and a lot of experience has been gained. However, the experiments were short-lived because of various reasons. The camp method proved to be too costly, it was difficult to retain the volunteers, no follow-up could be given due to lack of resources for developing materials for self-learning, and the problem of retaining and reinforcing the basic literacy skills after returning home from the camps: women could not find time due to their domestic and agricultural work and retention was low due to the lack of follow-up.

The early initiatives have in fact been overtaken by the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) which started in Gujarat in 1993. Mahila Samakhya has become actively involved in the TLC, especially in Baroda and Sabarkantha. The district teams contributed to the campaign in various ways:

- conducting surveys to identify illiterate women and add them to the lists of participants (as often only the names of men were written on the lists produced by the district education offices),
- identification and training of volunteers, many women from Mahila Samakhya acted as voluntary teachers,
- environment building by participating in motivational rallies and International Literacy Day Celebrations, streetplays, discussing the TLC and women's right to education in the sangha meetings,
- participation in the training of voluntary teachers: creating awareness about the situation

of women and their problems;

- securing slates + pens for the participants, as well as lights for night classes,
- liaising with government officers and assisting in problem solving.

Mahila Samakhya succeeded in getting women above the age limit of 35 years into the classes and altogether the Mahila Samakhya contribution made the campaign into a success in the districts. The credit is not just for the efforts of Mahila Samakhya during the campaign. Recognition is to be given to the fact that the involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the success of the TLC is also an outcome of the preceding empowerment processes among village women and of the holistic Mahila Samakhya approach to education as empowerment. A culture of learning has been created among sangha women, which made them assert their rights to literacy and to benefit from the Total Literacy Campaign.

The impact on Mahila Samakhya is increased visibility, respect and co-operation from authorities in the villages and at block, District and State levels. Government officials have begun to listen to women, taking them seriously. The response of the women is visible in the numerous letters received from sangha women by the State office, their pride in being able to write and read their names, their ability to read and check their savings records and manage their own savings scheme.

After the completion of the TLC literacy activities were continued in the form of motivational camps, followed by literacy classes, training of volunteer literacy teachers, preparing materials for post literacy (in Sabarkantha). The DIU in Rajkot collaborates with the District Literacy Committee in the post-literacy phase of the TLC. Mahila Samakhya is contributing to the News letter for neo-literates, to development of neo-literate materials and training of volunteer teachers e.g. on dealing with gender issues.

At present there are 170 locally initiated literacy classes. In Sabarkantha almost half of the literacy classes are irregular because women find it difficult to make time and because of seasonal labour migration.

On the whole the experience in education as literacy with adult women in the form of regular classes or camps is somewhat mixed, because of difficulties in maintaining women's interest after reaching the stage of being able to write their names, reading words and sentences, writing simple letters. Efforts to integrate literacy skills with function related training such as the training for balsakhis, hand-pump mechanics, para-legal workers etc. appear to be more affective, because of the direct linkage to the area of work. Training in literacy and numeracy skills related to financial matters such as savings and banking, profits and investments seems to be an area of women's interest.

Women's loosing interest in further literacy training (unless related to concrete activities and responsibilities) is not too surprising as the learning goes slowly and maintaining writing skills requires exercising manual dexterity for which they have little time. Women have come to realise that they can learn, become empowered, effect changes without necessarily becoming literate themselves. What the experience in literacy has achieved is that women have come to better understand the importance of relevant literacy and school education for their daughters. They have also learned that there are alternative ways of making learning and teaching meaningful and interesting in the lives of women. The Mahila Samakhya Programme has created a positive environment for learning and schooling of children, especially for girls' education.

Education of girls

We have not been able to assess the impact of camps for adolescent girls and leave this issue aside. But the education of girls is an emerging issue in the programme, it is on the agenda of

sangha women, who have taken initiatives to obtain scholarship funds for their children's education, and to form committees checking on school attendance and teaching by teachers in village schools. In some villages informal initiatives have emerged such as coaching classes for out-of-school girls (and sometimes also boys) in order get them into the mainstream education system.

In one of the blocks in Sabarkantha preparations for establishing a Mahila Shiksan Kendra in the tribal areas have started two years ago. The preparatory activities included a survey on education of girls, meetings with parents, girls and schoolteachers, environment building activities and starting non-formal education classes with girls who dropped out of school.

The general situation is that in the tribal area boys tend to go to school up to Standard X or higher. Whereas girls have not been to school at all or leave school after Standard IV. Reasons for girls dropping out are that

- the residence style is very scattered and school facilities are far from the home,
- village schools go up to Standard IV, after that children have to go to another village,
- parents are concerned for their daughters safety,
- girls have domestic duties and look after the family's cattle (as boys are in school nowadays),
- parents feel that they do not get benefit out of education of their girls,
- girls get married at an early age.

Besides, girls have started to dislike schooling, have developed a hostile attitude to the school and they are not motivated to continue their education. In interviews with parents (fathers in this case) they gave the same reasons, but they also intimated to have little confidence in the ability of the school to provide meaningful education to their daughters, they are not satisfied with the quality of education provided by the school and have little trust in the teachers ability to teach. Based on the results of the survey the District team decided to focus on girls in the age group of 9 to 14 years who were drop-out from the formal school and start a residential school at the Block centre.

The non-formal education classes for girls were intended to gain the interest of the girls in other ways of learning than what they had been accustomed to in the school, for environment building and motivation.

Balika Shiksan Kendra

Because of its focus on children in the 9-14 age group the school is called Balika Shiksan Kendra and is different in this respect from the Mahila Shiksan Kendras in other States. The school started in October 1996 with 36 six girls from seven villages in the block. The children are graded in four groups after testing of their capacity levels. They are being taught according to the formal curriculum but in an informal and interactive way in small learning circles. The length of the programme was intended to be four months, but seems to have been extended to one year with the aim of getting the children admitted in the State Boarding School for further education up to Standard X. At this stage, after four months, it is too early to assess the impact.

What could be observed is that the BSK is meeting a demand for the provision of meaningful education for girls in a safe environment. According to the teachers and parents there are visible changes in the behaviour attitudes of the girls. They have lost their fears and initial shyness, they talk openly and show affection, they accept discipline and are motivated to learn more, they have become confident and no longer consider themselves drop-outs.

There is close interaction with the parents who take turns to visit on Sundays. There are monthly meetings between parents, teachers and DIU staff for review and discussing the children's progress. Parents (fathers) expressed that after four months they have come to realise that their

daughters can learn in this school. They have trust in the approach of Mahila Samakhya (individual attention, care and safety). Now they want their daughters to complete Standard X and become a teacher or a sahayogini. They also expressed concern about the equivalence to the government system and the recognition from the formal schools. They have consented in letting their daughters stay in the boarding school because of their confidence in their sahayogini, the sangha of which their wives are a member and in Mahila Samakhya. Now they feel that all of their daughters should have the opportunity to get this kind of education. They are open for initiatives to start similar (non-residential) schools for girls in their villages, if teachers can be found. And they feel that as parents they could approach and convince the Sarpanch of their villages to cooperate and provide for facilities (space).

The short experience of the BSK (not forgetting the initial preparations and environment building efforts) already begins to have effect on further thinking not only about the establishment of BSKs in each block, but also about finding other alternative modes of schooling for drop-out girls at village level. This is an area wherein Mahila Samakhya could co-operate with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

There are some areas that need further attention and improvement, this relates especially to the pedagogical side. The teaching staff (4) has hardly any prior teaching experience with children, and only one of the teachers, who had been trained as a sahayogini, is familiar with the Mahila Samakhya philosophy. There has been no preparatory course providing pedagogical/ educational training, and teaching methods apart from learning through songs. The teachers have had to overcome many difficulties in winning the trust of the children. They mainly rely on their own creativity and resourcefulness and on visits to school teachers to learn teaching skills. For some lessons they invite teachers from the formal school. There is frequent interaction with the formal school and the children are welcome to enrol in the school after completion of the BSK programme. But the teaching staff needs training in child psychology, pedagogical and class room methods, and in 'how to teach without books'. They want to upgrade their own subject matter knowledge and learn how to make learning aids. There is also a need for good learning materials for higher levels of education (upper primary/secondary) in subjects like numeracy and science, and for drawing and art.

Another area needing serious attention relates to the lack of a clear vision and clarity about the objectives of the BSK. There is no long-term vision which guides the curriculum and no clarity about the duration of the BSK programme. What is the 'mission' of the BSK? What are its objectives? Will the curriculum include practical and vocational skills preparing the girls for a role in community and rural development? What will be the policy of Mahila Samakhya in Sabarkantha, moving towards establishing more BSKs in the tribal blocks? Such questions, and more, need to be answered.

In the other Districts discussions are going on about the establishment of a Mahila Shiksan Kendra. The District team in Baroda has decided not to follow the BSK model of Sabarkantha, but to start an MSK for training of adolescent girls and adult women in condensed residential courses (e.g. legal awareness and literacy) following the Banda model.

Co-operation with other education programmes

As referred to earlier Mahila Samakhya has actively collaborated with the District Literacy Committees and the concerned education departments in the implementation of the Total Literacy Campaign. They have made significant contributions to its success. Further co-operation in the next post-literacy phase of the TLC is envisaged and is already taking place in Rajkot. The second phase will be launched in 13 districts which include the Districts covered by Mahila Samakhya, and is to be completed in two years. New gender-sensitive materials are being developed by the State Adult Education Department according to the Minimum Levels of Learning prepared by

NCERT. One of the books is based on the Mahila Samakhya experience with tribal groups in Sabarkantha.

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in Gujarat is almost ready to start in Gujarat. During the first phase DPEP will be concentrated on the educationally most backward areas which includes Banaskantha and two Districts where Mahila Samakhya is planning its extension. In these Districts the rates for female literacy are the lowest in the State. DPEP will be focusing on improvement of the quality of instruction, teacher training, curriculum development and development of gender-sensitive learning/instruction materials, community participation, and development of alternative learning modes for out-of-school children. The Mahila Samakhya experience shows that empowerment of women is a precondition for the creation of demand for education of girls and for an environment for community participation in improving access to and quality of school education. In all of the components of DPEP Mahila Samakhya can build on its presence in the State/Districts and contribute in e.g. community mobilisation, participation and environment building, involving women in Village Education Committees (VECs) and training of VEC members, provision of training inputs on dealing with gender issues for the training of DPEP staff and teachers, development of gender-sensitive learning materials and methods, alternative models for drop-outs and out-of-school girls. And Mahila Samakhya will be able to benefit from DPEP in strengthening the pedagogic quality of the education components as well as the use of learning materials and aids.

As DPEP will be implemented by the State and District Departments of Education and the Gujarat Council for Education Research and Teacher Training (GCERT) the feasibility of forming a three partite (MS-DPEP-GCERT) task group could be considered with the task to work out the plans and terms for co-operation at general State level as well as for the districts covered by both programmes with the aim of e.g.

- increasing access to and retention in primary & continuing education of children and especially girls: sanghas could play a catalyst role in this and extend their activities across the entire community (of women);
- ensuring quality learning that is meaningful and gender relevant in the local environment: e.g. sanghas being represented in the Village Education Committees (VECs) and Parent (Mothers)- Teachers Associations (PTAs) for monitoring children's and teachers attendance as well as ensuring quality and meaningful learning; involving sahayoginis and MS/NFE teachers in training of VECs;
- making teaching/instruction gender relevant by involving Mahila Samakhya (education resource persons, sahayoginis and NFE/BSK teachers) in the training of teachers;
- providing gender-sensitivity training for DPEP implementing staff and in the training of teachers;
- conducting participatory appraisal studies and micro-planning at village level by involving the Mahila Sanghas;
- joint development and sharing of learning materials, books and learning aids for formal as well as non-formal education and making use of the experience of Mahila Samakhya in using songs, oral traditions and knowledge, drama, games and play;
- joint development of alternate forms of schooling for special groups, who are otherwise neglected by the mainstream school system based on experience of Mahila Samakhya in non-formal education and the BSK model.

The monitoring of the co-operation between DPEP and Mahila Samakhya is important for it being effective and could be taken up in the regular monitoring visits of DPEP by an external expert who has sufficient expertise in gender and education and who is sensitive to process oriented Programmes like Mahila Samakhya.

Co-operation between Mahila Samakhya and other education programmes is also important for creating an environment for and acceptance of a more holistic, flexible and participatory approach to education in adult as well as in primary education.

10. Reporting and documentation

Over time Mahila Samakhya has produced a wealth of documentation for internal as well as for external purposes. The documentation consists of sangha and village profiles, case studies, reflection papers, brochures and video's. Sahayoginis keep diaries and records of meetings, women write letters from the field and newsletters are issued by the State and by the District. The various sources provide the basis for quarterly and annual progress reports. However there is need for more systematisation and consolidation of the resource materials which allow for following the processes over a longer period. Quantitative formats are apparently being used for reporting purposes, but they seem to be focusing more on 'products' than on progress. There is also no recording of gender relevant development statistics, which could help to place the contributions from Mahila Samakhya in a wider development perspective.

Further research could be encouraged for development of indicators through which the achievements of the Mahila Samakhya could be related to changes in the Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) for Gujarat.

Since 1995 various training workshops have been conducted on process documentation at different levels of the programme structure. This is a very positive initiative as it is expected to provide a better understanding of how the learning and empowerment processes evolve. At the time of the evaluation no information was available on the results of the projects on documentation of processes within the sanghas.

11. The structure, reflections on the role of the DIU/SPO

The role of the District Implementation Units and the State Programme Office in supporting the processes at village level could not always be optimal due to, among other reasons, recurrent understaffing because of frequent staff-turnover and difficulties in finding qualified and experienced staff. Other reasons are more of a bureaucratic nature and relate to position of the Programme in the structure of the Government. Mahila Samakhya Gujarat is the only State Programme with an Office inside the Government and with a government officer as State Programme Director. This situation could become open for conflicting interests between the autonomy and flexibility required for the implementation of the Programme and the typical bureaucratic culture within a government office.

Over the years the Gujarat Programme has been faced with the difficult problem of balancing a dual reality. As a government Programme Mahila Samakhya is part of a national administrative system with upward accountability, pre-occupation with rules and regulations, orientation towards concrete achievements and targets. At the same time Mahila Samakhya is a process oriented empowerment programme with a flexible structure, a focus on participatory development and accountability towards the grassroots, based on a feminist ideology, as well as a mission for challenging existing power structures including the government. From the beginning the equilibrium on the higher levels of the Programme structure seemed to be leaning towards the government. This is visible in e.g. the appointment of officers from the Government structure as State Programme Directors, and at times also as District Co-ordinators, and in the adoption of an operational style, which gives more weightage to administrative and bureaucratic matters, to meeting visible targets, and to observation of rules and regulations. Interaction with the field is reported at some times to have been minimal, which might be due to understaffing and the heavy workload. Such circumstances have sometimes led to a situation wherein DIU staff and fieldworkers have lost their belief that substantial support is to be expected from the side of the State Office (and incidentally from the DPC and DIU), compelling the fieldteams to rely on their own strengths, capacities and resourcefulness. In a situation with minimum interaction the strong and experienced sahayoginis with the resource persons are bound to strengthen their mutual bonds and at times close their ranks and follow their own course of action.

The DIUs are in an extremely difficult position being accountable to the sanghas in the field as well as being accountable to the higher authorities in the Government. This requires strong leadership from qualified, competent and experienced District Co-ordinators, who have credibility with the fieldteams. Although many staff changes have been effected during the last two years with the appointment of new non-government DPCs and new resource persons/consultants the problems are not easy to solve and the legacy of past developments has not disappeared completely. The effects of the staff changes are uneven between the districts, Rajkot being in a difficult situation.³ Apart from the necessity to pay attention to the immediate situation, Mahila Samakhya Gujarat needs to further reconsider its staffing and staff training policies from a structural point of view. The balance is to be restored in favour of the Programme principles and flexibility by making it a principle to appoint functionaries at SPD and DPC levels, who have experience in the NGO sector and affinity with the women's movement in Gujarat, and to provide for an adequate staff training mechanism at all levels in order to provide the necessary support to the field processes in line with the changing needs of the Programme.

The State Programme Office and the DIUs are found to be the weaker links in the programme structure. The DIUs have a role in facilitating the Programme implementation by

- . providing administrative support,
- . co-ordination and supervision of sahayoginis,
- . facilitating and providing training inputs,
- . documentation and compiling reports.

In practice the main focus of the work of resource persons and consultants in the Districts is on the co-ordination of sahayoginis, evaluation of their performance participation in their training and in working committees. Sometimes they focus on specific aspects of the programme like legal issues, health or the education component. But they have not been recruited on the basis of their professional experience as e.g. trainer and feminist, educationist, health or legal expert. The appointment of resource persons and consultants is based on the number of villages covered in the district, the rule seems to be that one resource persons will be appointed per 100 villages. They are working more as programme officers than as resource persons or consultants who bring a professional input or experience in the Programme. Calling them resource persons or consultant seems to be inappropriate in the current structure. Due to the absence of in-house professional and experienced resource persons - neither at DIU level nor at State level - the DIU is therefore not always able to function adequately as a support structure for the implementation in the field .

District Resource Groups are functioning and members of the DRG co-operate with the district teams in e.g. health awareness camps or as legal advisor and resource person in the para-legal training programme. From the side of the District teams there is a need for more direct interaction resource persons from the State and National level. The General Council does not meet regularly , though it should meet annually. There is no State Resource Group in a formalised sense, although there is co-operation with various support groups at State and at District level. The support given by individual members of the National Resource Groups is highly appreciated by the teams and more direct interactions with NRG members would be welcome as it will help in perspective building, provide professional support, as well as access to a broader range of experience and linkages with the wider women's movement.

In line with the future developments of the programme, its new directions and the increasingly differentiating needs of sanghas who are in different stages of developing their strengths, as well

³ An assessment of the situation is beyond the assignment of the evaluation. Immediate attention from the competent authorities, the SPD and the Executive Council, is required perhaps by creating a small team of (govt + non-gvt) EC members who is to look in the situation and to formulate a plan for decisions and actions that need to be taken.

which is responsible for the implementation and Programme in the Districts the DIUs could be converted into a District Mahila Samakhya Resource Centre which has branches at the block level.

These Resource Centres could provide or facilitate access to training resources (process, perspective building, issues based and/or training of trainers), assist in development of training curricula and manuals, assist in further development of effective training/learning methods as well as gender-sensitive learning materials for self-directed learning. The Resource Centres could have a role in collecting, converting and disseminating relevant information, in documentation and research, in dissemination of newsletters etc. And the centres could provide social, legal, job/career counselling as well as training and library facilities. These Resource Centres will provide a multi-purpose support network which can be flexible and responsive to the needs of the Programme and varied processes in the field.

The District Resource Centres and their branches at block level could be staffed by sahayoginis who will be the resource persons and by professional resource persons and (temporary) consultants with specific assignments or tasks. The District Programme Co-ordinator will be Resource Centre Co-ordinator and remain in charge of the Programme in the District be it from the perspective of a Programme support structure.

At State level a similar conversion could be considered, although at a State Resource Centre might be taking a slightly different role with a stronger emphasis on providing for professional development of the Programme Staff, on networking with other resource organizations and on advocacy and influencing policy decisions and their implementation. Its tasks could include e.g. the following:

- . the identification of training resources within and outside the State,
- . providing assistance in developing and implementing internal monitoring mechanisms,
- . documentation, evaluation and studies,
- . the conversion and dissemination to the districts of information and learning materials from elsewhere,
- . organisation of state and national level reflection workshops for Programme staff and external resource persons, and
- . the facilitation exchange and exposure visits (in two directions),
- . advocacy and influencing policy decisions and policy implementation.

The network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres which is flexible and adaptable to the needs of the empowerment/development processes, can provide a more permanent support structure in the State and in the Districts that can branch out to the blocks and clusters, and co-operate with other (education) resource centres to avoid duplication by exchanging services.

The development of a support structure as proposed will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy.

To accompany the recommended changes a review of the financial pattern and financial management procedures is necessary. The financial and administrative procedures are to be made more transparent and ensure the Programme's inherent flexibility as well as smooth and effective implementation. The financial pattern needs to be brought in line with current cost level and based on realistic estimates. The budget needs to accommodate for inflation correction, changes in the comparable salary structures of the Government and of NGOs allowing for more differentiation, for staff development and other changes in the programme. Staff training in financial management and planning as part of programme planning needs to be continued and reinforced at all levels.

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ITINERARY, VISITS AND MEETINGS IN GUJARAT

- January 10** **Arrival in Ahmedabad**
Meeting with
 . in charge State Programme Director, Ms Meena Batt
 . District Programme Coordinator Sabarkantha, Ms Shakuntala Mehta
 . SPO consultant, Ms Rashmika Modi
- January 11/12** **Baroda District**
Meeting at DIU Office with the District Programme Coordinator, Ms Indira Pathak and DIU team
visits to
 . Nari Adalat at Massa Road, Padra Block,
 meeting with members of the court, attending women, sahayogini
 . Patod village (Padra Block),
 meeting with sangha members of three sanghas
 . Child Care Centre & NFE class at Haripura village, Naswadi Block,
 meeting with balsakhis, children, mothers/sangha members
 . Sakhi cluster meeting at Ghatasa village, Naswadi Block,
 meeting with sakhis and sahayoginis
 . Tree Plantation (Mahila Sangha) at Lunadra village, Naswadi Block
 . Creativity Centre & Library at Tanakhla (DIU sub-office)
- Meeting with the Secretary, Education Department, Chairperson of the Executive Council Mahila Samakhya Society, Shri S.D.Sharma**
- January 13/14 (LG)** **Rajkot District**
Meetings with District Programme Coordinator, Ms Manisha Brahbhatt and DIU team and Sahayoginis
Fieldvisits for meetings with sahayoginis, sakhis and sangha women
- January 13/14 (CH)** **Sabarkantha District**
Meetings at DIU Office with District Programme Coordinator, resource persons and consultant
- Meetings with member District Resource Group, Dr Prakash Josh) and representative of NGO partner (ARPAN)**
- visits to**
 . Balika Shiksan Kendra at Khebrahma,
 meeting with teaching staff, children
 . Sahyogini meeting at Khebrahma
 . Sangha Hut at Danmahudi village,
 meeting with sakhis and sangha members from various sanghas
 . Literacy Class at Jinjodi village (Bhiloda Block),
 meeting with sangha members
 . Child Care Centre at Jinjodi village
- DIU Office**
 . meeting with accountant and office staff
 . meeting with BSK parents (fathers)
 . meeting with representatives of the Sahayoginis
 (representing the Mahila Kutir Committee, Health Committee, Literacy Committee, Savings Committee, Child Care Committee, District Training Team) and DIU staff

January 15 (CH)

State Programme Office
meeting with in charge State Programme Director and Accounts Officer,
Mr B.R.Shah

Meeting with Education Officers

- . Financial Advisor Education Department
- . Director Adult Education
- . Deputy Director Adult Education
- . Secretary GCERT
- . Director DPEP/Planning Primary Education
- . Officer dealing with MS in the Education Department
- . District Education Officer Sabarkantha
- . Controller Sabarkantha

January 15

Lunch meeting hosted by the State Programme Director
. education officers,
. members General Council
. friends of Mahila Samakhya,
. DIU staff

Wrap-up meeting with

- . Secretary Education Department
- . State Programme Director and consultant SPO
- . District Programme Officers and Resource persons/consultants
District Banaskantha
District Baroda
District Rajkot
District Sabarkantha

Departure for New Delhi

SUPPLEMENT C

MAHILA SAMAKHYA KARNATAKA

**observations and findings based on the visit of
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997**

**Leela Gulati
Claudine Helleman**

**The Hague, July 1997
NUFFIC/Department of Educational Studies and Consultancy (DESC)**

MAHILA SAMAKHYA KARNATAKA
observations and findings based on the visit of
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997

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MAHILA SAMAKHYA KARNATAKA
observations and findings based on the visit of
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997

SUMMARY

Background

The task of the evaluation mission was to review the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and to assess and analyse the processes of empowerment at the level of the sanghas or women's collectives. In addition to this the mission was to look into financial management issues.

The visit in Karnataka lasted five days and took place between January 4 and 9. During this period we had meetings in Bangalore and travelled through three of the five districts wherein the Mahila Samakhya Programme is being implemented: Raichur, Bijapur and Bidar. The programme for the visit has been prepared by the State and District teams who provided us with excellent support and arrangements.

The mission is impressed by the resilience and the inner strength of the programme on the ground enabling it to continue and progress on its own steam during a period without much leadership or guidance from the top of the programme structure. The problems the Mahila Samakhya Programme Karnataka faced at State level were many, including lack of clarity of vision, strategic thinking, planning and communication between the state and districts. Under-staffing at the state as well as the district levels created further problems. The new staff learnt by trial and error without any systematic introductory training. As a result some dilution of the concepts, principles and philosophy have crept in and has led to overall stagnation in recent years.

It is to be noted that at present the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka is in the midst of a process of re-orientation of the entire programme, which is to lead towards a redefinition of the vision of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka and affirmation of its nature as an education programme for the empowerment of women. It will also lead to redefinition of the programme goals and objectives, to development of forward looking strategies and plans, and to identification of strategic partnerships with like-minded organisations in e.g. participatory rural development, innovation of educational methods and approaches, and to identification of resource organisations for training inputs aimed at reinforcing and furthering perspective and capacity building. From our observations and findings in the field we fully endorse this initiative.

The coverage

In 1997 the Mahila Samakhya Programme is working in 900 villages in five districts in the State of Karnataka. The choice of the districts has been made most judiciously with four of these districts considered the most backward in terms of their economic and social indicators. In all these districts Mahila Samakhya has deliberately focused on and reached the most poor and backward population groups.

At present Mahila Samakhya is present in 12,5% of all blocks and 3,4% of the villages in the State. In 1996 there were 773 active sanghas or women's collectives and taken together the sanghas have a membership of more than thirty thousand women. Through them their families and communities are also reached. The Mahila Samakhya Programme has taken strong roots in the districts and talukas, in which it is located. Yet, there is still a great scope for expansion in the future in terms of membership of the sanghas within the villages, as well in as terms of expansion

into new villages in the talukas covered, in new talukas and in new districts in the State of Karnataka.

The impact of the Programme on women's lives

The impact on women who are members is really impressive. They have not only established a collective identity, but have also gained recognition in the community. These women are a visible force and exude a great sense of self-confidence. Their visibility, mobility and maneuverability both in the community and within the family have increased enormously. Their empowerment in terms of self-confidence and sense of solidarity speaks volumes for the solid ground work that Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka has established, particularly among the most impoverished sections of Karnataka rural society. The programme has definitely given support, strength and feeling of hope.

Membership of the sangha has changed their self-image and given them an identity of women who belong to a visible and increasingly influential group in the village community. Their sangha membership has raised their image in the perception of their families. As a result, men no longer resist but encourage the women to go for meetings and support them in various ways. Thus women have earned the time, space and mobility to come together. Now women feel that they can raise their voices in public meetings confidently and without fear, and they feel that their voices are being listened to. The sangha gives them strength and supports them through difficult times, they feel the strength of acting together.

The activities of the sanghas and the exposure to training, information and knowledge has an impact on women's changing attitudes to and understanding of social traditions which reflect and endorse women's oppression. They increasingly challenge social practices which perpetuate women's inequality. Their attitudes towards the education of their children and particularly girls has changed and now they start demanding accountability from the local schools and teachers in providing good education.

Although the actions of women do not directly challenge the existing gender relationships or the local power structures subtle changes are becoming visible in the attitudes of male family members, in women's decisions making powers in their families, in recognition they get from women and men from other caste communities, and the recognition and respect gained from village authorities and government officials.

On the whole the impact is most visible in improvement of the survival base and living conditions. Further impact in changing the balance and practices of power will require continuation of the process of careful and creative strategizing with a long term vision on women's equality which determines the direction.

Approximately 34% of the sanghas in Bidar and Bijapur can be considered as strong sanghas in terms of taking initiatives, responsiveness to issues of exploitation and violence on women, having an image as 'a power to reckon with' at community level, taking decisions and action without guidance from the sahayogini. The capability of the sangha to function in this manner tells much about the formidable impact of the Mahila Samakhya Programme on the women who before the presence of the Programme were living in the dark corners of their homes, afraid to go outside, to take initiative and raise their voices.

Yet more than two thirds of the Mahila sanghas are still in the process of reaching this stage of strength. The process of empowerment and building of inner strength of and within the sanghas is an area that needs the full and continuing attention of Mahila Samakhya in the future and cannot be overlooked or side-tracked in the midst of emerging issues like the building of sangha federations. Quite a number of sanghas have fallen apart or are no longer active. A better understanding is needed about this phenomenon and the factors involved in sanghas breaking up

or losing interest in order to draw lessons for future strategies related to strengthening the empowerment of and within the sanghas.

Women's health

Women's health and particularly the use of herbal medicines and traditional wisdom for treatment of a wide variety of ailments is one of the focal issues in the Programme. The impact on women is their better understanding of the function of their bodies and their reproductive systems, demystification of superstitious beliefs, eradication of harmful practices, awareness of traditional and modern health systems, and how and when to approach them, and increased ability to recognise problems and take appropriate actions. Some attention has been given women's reproductive health and, sporadically, AIDS. More systematic approaches could perhaps be evolved as women are increasingly showing their interest.

Women reported better health of themselves and their children. Due to the lack of village health statistics it is difficult to assess the impact of Mahila Samakhya on the health status. Sanghas could become actively involved in monitoring the health situation in their villages or at least in the community of which they are apart by keeping records of relevant health data. This could help in evolving more effective strategies for informing the health authorities, changing the systems and ultimately influence health policies and their implementation.

Economic empowerment

Accessing economic development schemes is on the agendas of all district programmes. However, it meets with different degrees of success and also with many problems and difficulties. More attention may need to be given to understand the factors involved, as well as to the identification of resource organisations (state as well as NGOs) involved in participatory rural development, environmental resources management and employment creation. Co-operation with such organisation in areas where Mahila Samakhya has already established a basis for women's involvement in participatory development need to be addressed in the future.

The main focus of activities in the area of economic empowerment evolves around savings and loans. More than 85% of the active sanghas are engaged in group saving schemes. Most of the loans taken are used for individual purposes. In terms of impact the savings schemes are reported to have given women greater control of their incomes and savings, it has increased women's awareness about their economic assets and how they can use them, increased their confidence in dealing with the bank system and taking financial decisions, and increased their decision making powers in their families on financial matters. And now sanghas have started forming federations with the aim of establishing their own Mahila Bank at cluster level.

The concept of the Women's Bank is related the idea of economic independence of sangha women and self-reliance and sustainability of the sanghas, which are valid arguments. But questions could be raised regarding the implications of an active involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the establishment of special Mahila Banks, and if available options with regard to alternative banking systems been sufficiently explored. We recommend Mahila Samakhya Karnataka to carefully review and reconsider its strategy, also in view of the sometimes negative experiences of the impact of the saving schemes on the sanghas, creating rifts and breaking them up. Banking and saving matters may become the predominant activity of the sangha overshadowing other issues. Instead of establishing its own Mahila Banks Mahila Samakhya could direct its strategy towards influencing the banking system, assisting the sanghas in negotiating their terms of co-operation with local banks or with elsewhere existing women's banks. Perhaps banks could be convinced to open special women's branches which fulfil the criteria and terms set by sangha women.

Women's political participation

One of the most impressive achievements of the Mahila Samakhya is in enabling women to participate in the political process. The Programme has helped women understand issues around political participation and empowered them in the real sense of the term. What is truly remarkable is that more than half the women who contested the elections got elected. The elected members, who have become strong, still need Mahila Samakhya to help them function in their new roles and to train them in public speaking, literacy and awareness of issues. A further step ahead might be to assist the elected women (sangha and non sangha) to formulate a common women's agenda and to form a network of elected women who can support each other and join their forces for their common women's interests.

Women's legal rights

In all district programmes legal issues are continuously on the agendas in the sangha meetings. It relates to dealing with cases of domestic violence, family disputes, land and property issues etc. and activism of the sanghas often evolves around issues related to social injustices. No initiatives have been taken as yet for addressing the area of women's legal and human rights, and women's rights under tribal law in a systematic manner with the aim of enhancing women's awareness about how to use their legal rights. This could be an area to give more systematic attention to in the future in the entire Programme.

The impact on breaking caste and class divides

Most of the sanghas in Karnataka are affiliated with specific caste or tribal groups. Efforts of enlarging sanghas by including women from other caste groups have met disappointments and have not been encouraging further efforts. Caste divides are strongly ingrained in the texture of the society and are probably the most difficult boundaries to break through. This is especially the case when caste interests are inter-twined with class and political interests.

There are areas where caste barriers are overcome e.g. health, education and solving problems related to domestic violence. A potential scope for reaching more women, including women from upper castes is very much there. Mahila Samakhya could play a role in the promotion of a village-community based open women's forum, which is open for women regardless of their caste, class or communal background and which brings them together around common women's issues and interests. Although difficult the effort to broaden the sangha membership and build towards a community of women remains a long term challenge within the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

The emergence of a grass-roots women's movement and building federations

Sangha activism about women's issues and forms of social injustice are clear indications of the emergence of a grass roots women's movement. Sanghas are actively seeking lateral relationships with other sanghas to enlarge their collective strength. Mahila Sanghas have become visible entities with voices that need to be listened to and sangha women are ready to use that capacity more effectively.

The building of sangha federations is on the agendas for discussions at different level of the Programme. The idea of a federation seems to have become an end in itself which is linked to the goal of achieving self-reliance and sustainability of the sanghas after withdrawal from Mahila Samakhya as a support structure. However, how the formation of federations is linked to women's empowerment processes in the sanghas is no longer very clear. There is a danger that the investment in the forming of federation will be a drain on the attention that need to be given

to the strengthening of the sanghas. Priority is to be given to reinforcing the empowerment processes of and within the sanghas, two thirds of which have been found to be needing further strengthening. In addition to this the sangha initiatives in networking among sanghas at cluster and taluka level are to be supported and strengthened without necessarily making it into a formalised structure.

Sahayakis and sahayoginis

The impact of empowerment is not just on the sangha members but on all women working with the Mahila Samakhya Programme. It is most visible and pronounced on the sahayoginis and sahayakis.

In total more than 2000 *sahayakis* have been trained and have become empowered beyond expectation. They are strong in terms of self-confidence, verbal skills, mobilising women, organisation of the sangha meetings and representing their sanghas in cluster, taluka and district level meetings. However it is reported that sometimes sahayakis individually or as group have become overactive and dominating the sangha preventing its growth. The internal dynamics of sharing information, power and responsibilities within the sangha is an area that needs to be better understood in order to evolve strategies for strengthening of the sanghas through training programme directed at the sangha level.

The *sahayoginis* are the key actors for the empowerment of women at the grassroots level. They mobilise the collective strength of women, bringing about an attitudinal shift from age old beliefs and practices. With their commitment and hard work they have made a great and valuable contribution over the last seven years. And strong and lasting relationships have been built between the sahayoginis and 'their' sanghas, which may have given some sahayoginis a certain degree of power and control over their sangha which they might be unwilling to relinquish.

Sahayoginis are in a contradictory position as they are expected to be responsive to the development agendas of the sangha women which focus on their basic survival needs and improvement of their living conditions. At the same time they are to bring this in line with the empowerment agenda of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Besides, day to day problems may override the attention for broader perspectives and long term strategies. This inevitably leads to stagnation in the Programme, in losing its conceptual clarity, vision and sense of direction as an empowerment Programme. The signs can clearly be observed in the attitudes and expressions of sahayoginis. To come out of this situation it is suggested, a.o. to jointly evolve a forward looking human resources development plan which provides for role differentiation and for lateral and upward mobility, and for career paths, and to implement a training plan for sahayoginis and programme staff with a fresh approach which includes exposures to new perspectives and inspiration coming from the women's movement as well as building of professional capacities.

Education for empowerment and adult education

Education for women's empowerment is definitely taking place in all districts and has made significant impacts on the lives of rural women. However, if the concept of education is used in its limited understanding of education as literacy, the level of success is limited. This is particularly the case for forms of education taking place in regular classroom-like sessions with materials brought from elsewhere, which perhaps have no bearing to women's lives, or which are not directly linked to women's area of work.

In general the attention to adult literacy and to the creation of a consistent, holistic gender aware approach to education for empowerment, which includes and integrates the different aspects of education (e.g. life skills, information and knowledge, literacy and numeracy) is waning in the

Karnataka Programme. The centrality of education in Mahila Samakhya appears to have given way to other priorities, like e.g. the running of savings group, the building of the sangha hut, accessing schemes and services, and other activities aimed at keeping the collectives going. In Karnataka Mahila Samakhya is operational in the districts which are most backward in terms of women's development and literacy. *Mahila Samakhya could and should refocus its attention and make education for empowerment its foremost and central issue.* With their literacy skills and with the gains achieved in terms of women's empowerment women are ready to move ahead use their newly acquired skills to access and further their knowledge, to strengthen their information base and to counter disinformation and abuse, and to participate in family, community and further political decision making from a position of strength.

For the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka the area to venture in is *to evolve together with the sangha women innovative and participatory learning strategies for learning in pre- and neo-literate stages maintaining the focus on supporting women's empowerment.* Strategies which combine awareness, information and skills, which are directed at learning groups with women who are barely literate and women who want to use and further their literacy skills. Banking on the lessons learned from seven years of experience Mahila Samakhya will be on its way to the creation of a truly alternative approach to adult education.

Refocusing the Programme on education for empowerment requires *changes in the human resources staffing and development policy.* Each District Implementation Unit as well as the State Programme Office is to have an experienced education expert on its staff who together will form a team for backing-up and supporting the education component in the Programme. Mahila Samakhya has a great resource of in-house practical experience in training methodologies, use of drama and cultural expressions, teaching by improvisation in non-formal settings. These experiences can be brought up to a higher professional level with a well directed staff development plan.

Education of children

The focus on education for empowerment naturally includes the next generation by giving attention to the education of children and particularly girls. Mahila Samakhya is enhancing a growing awareness about the values of children's and particularly girls education. The activism of the mahila sangha directed at the local schools indicates that a foundation for community interest and participation in improving the quality of education in the schools on the part of women exists and that other education programmes like the District Primary Education Programme could build upon this.

Child Care Centres

The primary function of the Child Care Centres seems to be child care with perhaps some attention to preschool education. Generally the centres have become regarded as a service from the government and a sense of ownership and shared responsibility by the sangha seems to be missing in many cases. One could question if there still exists a qualitative difference between the ICDS centres and centres run through Mahila Samakhya and if it is not duplicating the services from the Department of Child Development. Instead Mahila Samakhya could focus on collaboration with the concerned Departments and on influencing the policies and the policy implementation related to the child care centres in order to make them more responsive to the needs and situations of rural women who are currently not being reached through the existing services.

Non-formal education centres for children

The non-formal education initiatives run by the sanghas are meeting a need for alternative modes of education, which provide a learner-friendly and safe environment for girls, who otherwise would remain excluded from participation in formal education. The numbers of NFE centres are growing

and there is a lot of scope for further growth, the non-availability of teachers being the most severe constraint. We noted that the preparation and training of the teachers for non-formal education is limited. Training in pedagogic methods, alternative learning approaches are needed. In addition to engaging its own professional resource persons in the District and State teams Mahila Samakhya needs to work at further networking and co-operation with educational resource organisations in the further development of its education component.

Mahila Shiksha Kendras

The Mahila Shiksha Kendras are the most outstanding contribution of Mahila Samakhya in the area of girls' education. They provide a residential school for teen-age girls between 14 and 18 years of age who for various reasons have stopped going to school after Standard four. This is a most relevant age group as they are the adult women and mothers of tomorrow. Being given this opportunity allows them to delay the age of marriage and get a certain level of education first, to escape from being drawn into bonded labour, to escape from an existence as prostitute, and to prepare for a new future and life in dignity.

Without doing injustice to the relevance and importance of the MSK as an extremely valuable alternative educational provision for girls, which will definitely change their prospects in life, there are areas which need to be addressed like the curriculum and curriculum development, the training of teachers in pedagogy, child development, classroom methods, dealing with gender in education etc. Moreover, there does not seem to be a clear vision with a forward looking perspective on the future development of the MSK. The original objective was to provide for an educational facility which would help to create an educated cadre of women for development of education in backward rural areas and for rural development. That vision has gradually faded away as the MSK has become like an alternative boarding school for girls. Mahila Samakhya needs to reconsider its vision and strategy for the future of the MSK.

Co-operation with DPEP

The presence of Mahila Samakhya in the districts wherein the DPEP is planning to operate provides scope for co-operation between the two programmes in areas of e.g. village mobilisation, community participation, gender training for teachers and DPEP staff, development of gender relevant learning materials, and creation of alternate modes of education for out-of-school children. In this respect the formation of joint MS-DPEP task group is recommended who will work out the further plans for co-operation at general State level, as well as for the districts to be covered by both programmes with the aim of

- . increasing access to and retention in primary & continuing education of girls, and
- . ensuring quality of learning that is meaningful and gender relevant.

The report of the National Workshop on the interface between the DPEP and the Mahila Samakhya Programme, organised by the Department of Education (MHRD) in July 1996 provides guidelines that need to be further elaborated and put into practice.

Expansion of the Programme

During the next five year plan Mahila Samakhya intends to further extend its outreach into three more districts, which means that by the year 2000 the Programme will be present in almost half of the total number of districts in Karnataka. The current situation with sanghas in different stages of strength calls for a diversified strategy based on the lessons learned in the past, the increased presence and visibility in the State and within the districts, and the current momentum of spontaneous expansion via the sanghas. The process of expansion is to be seen in connection with the process of de-linking the strong sanghas and strengthening of their capacities to become self-reliant.

Documentation and reporting

Over the years Mahila Samakhya has produced a wealth of documentation which provides a rich resource of information for internal as well as for external purposes. For a better insight in the progression and evolution of the programme in a long time perspective and in relation to the basic principles and objectives of Mahila Samakhya a greater degree of systematisation and analysis is necessary. The creation of a data base of gender relevant development statistics, could help to place the contributions from Mahila Samakhya in a wider development perspective.

Mahila Samakhya as a resource organisation for the empowerment of women

Mahila Samakhya is perceived as a time-bound programme that is to phase itself out after a certain period of time. This perception is in contradiction with the understanding of empowerment as an on-going process of growth. What can be time-bound is the process of sangha formation and consolidation, and the period a sangha needs in order to de-link itself from the regular support of its sahayogini.

Instead of phasing itself out the Mahila Samakhya Programme structure is able to build on the strength of its presence and its credibility gained in the Districts and the State. Its future is to expand and differentiate its role in order to be responsive to the needs related to the different stages of development of the existing and the new sanghas. In recognition of the sanghas as mature, self-sustaining organisations in their own right, capable of making their own decisions and determining the direction of their development process, the Mahila Samakhya Structure has to diversify and change its role. From this point of view Mahila Samakhya can be regarded as one of the resource organisations to be accessed by the sanghas for provision of (gender-sensitive) training inputs and materials, for providing information, knowledge and new perspectives on issues coming up in the sangha, for facilitation of access to other resource organisations or assistance in setting up and sustaining support structures. As a support structure of the sanghas Mahila Samakhya could play a stronger role in advocacy and policy development in support of women's equality and empowerment.

By converting the existing structure of DIUs and SPO into a network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres with accessible branches at taluka and cluster levels it can provide a flexible, accessible and multi-functional support structure. This will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy. It requires a human resources development plan which provides for staff development, staff training and capacity building for sahayoginis and district staff. To accompany the recommended changes a review of the financial pattern and financial management procedures will also be necessary.

MAHILA SAMAKHYA KARNATAKA

**observations and findings based on the visit of
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997**

1. Introduction

Karnataka is one of the four States visited for the Indo-Dutch evaluation of the Mahila Samakhya Programme, which took place during the first weeks of January 1997. The task of the evaluation mission was to review the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and to assess and analyse the processes of empowerment at the level of the sanghas or women's collectives. In addition to this the mission was to look into financial management issues. For this evaluation a set of leading questions have been formulated by the National Programme Office related to among others

- the impact of the programme on women's personal and family life in terms of women's autonomy,
- the ability of the programme
 - . to create a foundation for a grass-roots level women's movement,
 - . to facilitate women's political participation,
 - . to evolve a focus on women's legal rights,
 - . to address women's issues cutting across caste and class divides;
- the emerging trends in terms of pace, growth and impact;
- the interface of Mahila Samakhya with other educational programmes like DPEP;
- the adequacy of the reporting system in providing insight into the programme;
- the expansion strategies in Mahila Samakhya.

To guide the evaluation a set of parameters in the form of a matrix has been developed by a committee of State Programme Directors. The Terms of Reference including the matrix are attached to the General Overview (Part A).

The evaluation covers the four states where the programme is being implemented under the agreement between the Governments of India and The Netherlands for financial assistance during the 1992-1997 period. Two members of the evaluation team visited Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, and two members visited Karnataka and Gujarat.

The visit in Karnataka lasted five days and took place between January 4 and 9. During this period we had meetings in Bangalore and travelled through three of the five districts wherein the Mahila Samakhya Programme is being implemented: Raichur, Bijapur and Bidar. The District Programme Coordinator of Mysore District accompanied us to Raichur where she had been in charge of the Programme until last year. The District Programme Co-ordinator of Gulbarga District met us in Bidar which gave us an opportunity to get some first hand information on the District Programmes not covered by our visit. During our travels we were accompanied by the State Programme Director and the Junior Resource Person of the State Programme Office. This allowed us to extend our discussions and exchange views while travelling on the road. Both have assisted us as interpreters during meetings with sangha women, sahayakis (sakhis), sahayoginis, children and teachers.

The programme for the visit has been prepared by the State and District teams who provided us with excellent support and arrangements. The visit programme included attendance of sahayaki meetings, the opening of a sangha hut, a children's mela, Mahila Shikshana Kendras (MSKs) and meetings with sahayoginis and staff at the District Implementation Units. The district teams have taken a lot of effort to expose us to different aspects of the Programme and as much as time allowed us we tried to use the opportunities given to interact with small groups of sangha women, teachers and children. However, the visit was short, we had long distances to cover between visits and we were constantly confronted with problems of timing. The shortage of time did not

allow for an in-depth understanding of the programme and its impact on the lives of the sangha women doing justice to all of its facets in the proper perspective of their daily socio-political, cultural and economic environments. We relied on what we could observe and what women could tell us during the meetings, and the cases reported in the documentation made available to us.

Due to a high level of staff turnover and changes at the State and District Offices there is hardly any institutional history left within the programme structure. With the exception of two District Programme Co-ordinators (one of them recently got transferred from Raichur to Mysore) and a few resource persons most of the staff in the State and District Offices have not more than one year experience in the Mahila Samakhya Programme. This limited our possibility to look into the historical dimension of the Programme and assess its progress over the last five years. It also means that unless the experiential knowledge laying with the older group of sahayoginis is being documented systematically, valuable knowledge from which lessons could be learned is disappearing. This applies for instance to the experiences regarding sangha development and factors related to breaking up of sanghas, or to the involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the National Literacy Campaign.

On the positive side, the mission is impressed by the resilience and the inner strength of the programme on the ground enabling it to continue and progress on its own steam without much leadership or guidance from the top of the programme structure. The problems the Mahila Samakhya Programme Karnataka faced at the State level during a transitional period were many, including lack of clarity of vision, strategic thinking, planning and communication between the state and districts. Under-staffing at the state as well as the district levels created further problems. The new staff learnt by trial and error without any systematic introductory training. As a result some dilution of the concepts, principles and philosophy have crept in and has led to overall stagnation in recent years.

It is to be noted that at present the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka is in the midst of a process of internal reflection on the conceptual understanding of the Mahila Samakhya principles and its visions for the future. This is done by looking at the impact made in the seven years of its existence and by reviewing the effectiveness of its approaches to the empowerment of women who live under conditions of poverty, marginalisation and caste/gender oppression. The re-orientation process has come after a series of changes at the top of the organisational structure. This was followed by an administrative re-organisation which included the solution of staffing problems, the streamlining and smoothing of administrative and financial procedures and putting in place an administrative system with greater transparency and consistency as well as inherent flexibility and responsiveness to local contexts and issues.

The process of re-orientation of the entire programme has begun with the organisation of an all State sammelan in October 1996 in which sangha women, sahayoginis, programme and administrative staff from all five districts and the State Office participated. It was the first sammelan after three years. Another input which set off the re-orientation process was the study done by two members of the National Resource Group (NRG), Lakshmi Krishnamurthy and Sharda Jain, to assess the development of the Mahila Sanghas in terms of empowerment, which involved interaction with sanghas in Bidar and Bijapur. The results of a study on the changing status of women in Karnataka¹, which included women from mahila sanghas in Raichur and Bijapur Districts, are expected to have an input in the process as well. As a follow-up to these studies Mahila Samakhya Karnataka is planning a three level evaluation study which is to provide a better understanding of the empowerment processes of and in the sanghas and help to develop a systematised mechanism for following the sangha development processes with a set of concrete,

¹

The study was implemented in 1996 by the Women's Advocacy and Policy Research Unit of the National Institute of Advanced Studies. The results of the study are expected to be available in the beginning of 1997.

and possibly quantifiable indicators, which can be computer-processed.

The re-orientation process is to lead towards a redefinition of the vision of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka and affirmation of its nature as a education programme for the empowerment of women. It will also lead to redefinition of the programme goals and objectives, to development of forward looking strategies and plans, and to identification of strategic partnerships with like-minded organisations in e.g. participatory rural development, innovation of educational methods and approaches, and to identification of resource organisations for training inputs aimed at reinforcing and furthering perspective and capacity building. From our observations and findings in the field we fully endorse this initiative and we hope that our findings will somehow feed into the process.

In spite of the problems faced by Mahila Samakhya Karnataka during the five year period under review the Programme has not only survived but has shown resilience. Staff members at the district and taluka level are showing great commitment and dedication to the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Given this broad overall picture what follows is a more detailed report of our findings on the Mahila Samakhya Programme in the light of the terms of reference given to the mission.

2. The Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka

2.1 The context

The Mahila Samakhya Programme was launched in Karnataka in April 1989 and started to be implemented in three districts: Bidar, Bijapur, Mysore. From 1992 onwards the Programme extended its coverage by moving onto two new districts, Gulbarga and Raichur which together with Bidar and Bijapur form a solid block with similar socio-economic and geo-climatic conditions in the northern part of Karnataka. These districts are characterized by the low rates for female literacy, poverty and backwardness of the rural population, by their drought prone areas with depletion of natural resources and meagre possibilities to make a decent living and by the existence of for women oppressive social traditions like the devadasi system and the custom of child marriages. Mysore District in the south of Karnataka is economically slightly better off, it was selected because a relatively large part of its population belongs to the scheduled tribes.

In all these districts Mahila Samakhya has deliberately focused on and reached the most poor and backward population groups. They mainly depend for their livelihood on seasonal, irregular and low paid agricultural labour, some livestock and on the scarce resources available in the environment. Seasonal migration to neighbouring States and Mumbai is prevalent among parts of the population and in some areas situations of bonded labour exist.

In 1997 the Mahila Samakhya Programme is working in five districts in the State of Karnataka. The choice of the districts has been made most judiciously with four of these districts considered the most backward in terms of their economic and social indicators. Table I in ANNEX I sets out some of these indicators as compared to the State as a whole.

2.2 The coverage

The coverage in terms of numbers of villages varies depending on the duration of the presence of Mahila Samakhya in the respective districts and the prevailing conditions which enhance or constrain its expansion e.g. distances to cover, responsiveness of the population etc. At present Mahila Samakhya is present in 22 of the 175 talukas (12,5%) and 914 of the 27,066 odd villages (3,4%) in the State reaching 30,618 women. On the assumption that each member comes from a separate household we can say that more than thirty thousand households are reached, including the men who belong to these households. Given that the average household size is around six

Overview I
Mahila Samakhya Karnataka 1995-96

Districts	Bidar	Bijapur	Gulbarga	Mysore	Raichur	Total
Nr. of villages	208	225	164	203	114	914
Nr. of active sanghas	200	200	70	175	70	715
Av. size of sangha	34 women	32 women	40 women	30 women	33 women	33/34 ww
Nr AE centres	92	33	20	--	--	145
Nr NFE centres	94	74	45	21	44	278
Nr MSKs (*)	1	1 (2)	(1)	1	(1)	3 (6)
Nr Child Care Centres	41	12	16	15	5	89
Nr Savings Groups	195	190	100	71	58	614
Nr Sahayoginis	20	18	15	19	11	83
Nr Sahayakis	1200	450	328	n.i.	174	2152 (+ Mysore)
Nr AE teachers	94	33	20	--	--	147
Nr NFE teachers	92	74	45	21	44	276
Nr CCC teachers	82	24	32	15	10	141
MSK teachers	2	3	.	2	.	7
Nr women trained as dai	--	8	--	--	69	77
Women elected in PR	n.i.	59	22	54	n.i.	
Total sangha women reached	7,000	7,258	6,560	6,000	3,800	30,618
Nr children reached through CCC, NFE, MSK	3,581	1,300	1,700	1,000	1,492	9,053

(*) : new MSKs in Gulbarga, Raichur and Bijapur (1)

AE : Adult Education

NFE : Non-Formal Education

CCC : Child Care Centre

MSK : Mahila Sahiksana Kendra

PR : Panchayati Raj system

Source : Mahila Samakhya Karnataka, Annual Report 1995/96

More than 30 thousand women are reached and through them their families, their communities and village authorities.

More than nine thousand children are reached through non-formal education (CCC, NFE and MSK).

Almost four thousand persons are involved as Sahayogini, Sahayaki, teacher (AE, NFE, CCC, MSK) or local birth attendant (dai).

persons in the State the outreach among the population is quite substantial. In Bidar this expansion has been most impressive both in terms of talukas covered, as well as number of villages reached. Yet, there is still a great scope for expansion in the future in terms of membership of the sanghas within the villages, as well in terms of expansion into new villages in the talukas covered, in the new talukas and in new districts in the State of Karnataka, (see ANNEX II).

2.3 Features of the Programme

Since 1992 the Programme has widened its scope in terms of content. During the initial stages the Programme focused in sangha formation and registration, accessing government services and schemes, land and environmental issues, challenging social traditions like the devadasi system and women's health. In 1991 Bijapur District got involved in the Literacy Mission, in other districts the momentum of the Literacy Campaign came during and after 1992. During the 1992-1996 period women's literacy and the education of children have emerged as central issues. Adult education (literacy and post literacy) classes are running more or less successfully in three of the five districts and in all districts sanghas take the responsibility for 278 non-formal education centres for out-of-school children and 90 centres for child care and pre-school education. A total of six Mahila Shikshana Kendras have been established, two in Bijapur and one in each of the other districts, which provide educational opportunities for teenage girls between the age of 14 and 18 years. The MSKs in Gulbarga, Raichur and the second MSK in Bijapur have been opened in mid-1996. Over nine thousand children are reached through these centres and prepared for (re) entrée into the formal education system or for an equivalent level of learning. Getting girls into the education system is seen as a strategy for delaying the age of marriage and combating child marriage as well as for preventing children from being drawn into bonded labour.

More than two thirds (67%) of the sanghas in all of the districts are engaged in saving and loans schemes which have taken off with tremendous speed especially in Bijapur and Bidar. Women's health and particularly the use of easily available, affordable and effective herbal medicine have become another central issues in the Mahila Samakhya Programme of Karnataka. And during and after the Panchayati Raj elections women's participation in politics was on the agendas of the sanghas in all five Districts and the Mahila Samakhya Programme provided political awareness training, and training in support of candidates and elected Panchayat members. In all districts Mahila Samakhya candidates got elected and quite a number have become president or vice-president.

Issues which are given attention to a greater or lesser extent in all districts are e.g.

- . women's literacy (Bidar, Bijapur, Gulbarga) and education of children (all Districts),
- . environmental protection and awareness (Mysore, Raichur),
- . social issues like the Devadasi system (Bijapur, Gulbarga), child marriage (all Districts), alcoholism and liquor trafficking (all Districts),
- . health awareness and use of herbal medicines (all Districts),
- . legal issues and awareness of legal processes (all Districts),
- . economic development programmes and accessing programmes like DWCRA or TRYSEM (all Districts, particularly Bijapur, Gulbarga and Raichur),
- . savings and loans (all Districts),
- . political participation and leadership training (all Districts).

Activities related to the construction of sangha huts are on-going in all of the Districts.

3. The impact of the Programme

3.1 Strength of the women's collectives

In 1996 there were 773 active Sanghas or women's collectives and of these 256 were registered. The average size of the sanghas varies between 30 (Mysore) and 40 (Gulbarga) women, and taken together the sanghas have a membership of more than 30,000 women. Thus Mahila Samakhya can be said to have taken strong roots in the districts and talukas, in which it is located.

The impact on women who are members is really impressive. They have not only established a collective identity, but have also gained recognition in the community. These women are a visible force and exude a great sense of self-confidence. In all the three districts where the evaluation mission visited and met the sangha members, the women were able to articulate clearly the gains they had achieved from the sangha. Their visibility, mobility and manoeuvrability both in the community and within the family have increased enormously. Their empowerment in terms of self-confidence and sense of solidarity speaks volumes for the solid ground work that Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka has established, particularly among the most impoverished sections of the rural society in Karnataka.

The Programme has definitely given support, strength and feeling of hope. Very poor peasant women, eking out an existence at wage rates of Rs 5 to 8 find time and space to come together with other women, share their life experiences and plan together for change for the first time in their lives. This was the most touching part of the Programme both in Raichur and Bijapur. Most marginalised groups of women, especially elderly agricultural workers and a sizable number of devadasis, were present at the sangha meetings. In Bidar the collective that the team met was of the Lambanis, a tribal group. Having been rehabilitated with government land and having a more egalitarian social structure the impact they experienced was more in the nature of an exposure to the outside world, a chance to interact with women from other sections of society, and access to schemes and resources which help them to improve their lives.

According to the NRG study on the strength of the Mahila Sanghas² approximately 34% of the sanghas in Bidar and Bijapur can be considered as strong sanghas, 30% are of medium strength, whereas 37.5% are weak or have fallen apart. Related to the way they function strong sanghas are characterised by the following indicators:

the sangha

- . takes initiative in identifying a common cause
- . responds with sensitivity to issues of exploitation/violence on women
- . integrates community concerns in its agenda
- . takes decisions without guidance from the sahayogini
- . builds an image of 'a power to reckon with' at the community level
- . pressurises the existing system for greater accountability to people
- . attracts and sustains participation from different sets of women and men over varied issues
- . holds regular meetings in which women take active interest and indulge in creative, open minded problem solving
- . encourages alternative forms of learning
- . provides leadership opportunities to greater numbers of women³.

The capability of the sangha to function in this manner tells much about the formidable impact of the Mahila Samakhya Programme on the women who before the presence of the Programme were

² by Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurty, 1996.

³ in Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurthy 1996, p. 24.

living in the dark corners of their homes, afraid to go outside, take initiative and raise their voices. The researchers involved in the study on the status of women in Karnataka were struck by the openness, the assertiveness, the strength of their voices and opinions and the freedom of movement of the sangha women as compared to other women living under comparable rural conditions in the State⁴.

Yet more than two thirds of the Mahila Sanghas are still in the process of reaching this stage of strength. The process of empowerment and building of inner strength of and within the sanghas is an area that needs the full and continuing attention of Mahila Samakhya in the future and cannot be overlooked or side-tracked in the midst of emerging issues like the building of sangha federations. Quite a number of sanghas have fallen apart or are no longer active. A better understanding is needed about this phenomenon and the factors involved in sanghas breaking up or losing interest in order to draw lessons for future strategies related to strengthening the empowerment of and within the sanghas. Frequently mentioned reasons are related to e.g.

- . internal power mechanisms in the sanghas and a dominating position of sahayakis or sahayoginis,
- . economic or money related factors such as predominance of economic interests, abuse of money, restrictions about the numbers of persons who can access loans,
- . out-migration of sangha members,
- . inter-family conflicts,
- . outside pressures.

However, to date no systematic in-depth study has been conducted.

3.2 Impact on women's personal and family life

Since the members of the Mahila Sanghas largely belong to the category of agricultural workers, they probably exercised some mobility and visibility as working women. Given their age and also the fact that they were earning members in the family their voices probably were heard to some extent even though muted. What the Sangha membership has done is to give them a feeling of belonging and togetherness, to instil a renewed sense of self-respect and dignity, to enlarge their sphere of movement, to increase their prestige in the families as useful members for accessing government facilities or services, to make them feel confident in their ability to approach and address village authorities and make them accountable.

Membership of the sangha has changed their self-image and given them an identity of women who belong to a visible and increasingly influential group in the village community. Their sangha membership has raised their image in the perception of their families. As a result, men no longer resist but encourage the women to go for meetings and support them in various ways. It was striking to note that the Mahila Sangha has come to be considered as one large Samakhya family and the husbands, sons and brothers consider themselves to be part of that family.

In the melas organised at Raichur, Bijapur and Bidar, the mission noticed that men were as active as women in organising the events and helping with household chores so that women can attend. It shows how women now have earned the time, space and mobility to come together and to meet formally in meetings. What is a meeting, how to conduct it, and its organisation and function has all become part of the Mahila Samakhya Sangha members' ethos. The english word meeting has become part of their Kanada vocabulary. And a Mahila Samakhya meeting has become a visible public event.

Now women now feel that they can raise their voices in public meetings confidently and without fear, and they feel that their voices are being listened to. The sangha gives them strength and

⁴ oral information.

supports them through difficult times, they feel the strength of acting together and as one group firmly asserted:

'we may have our differences and conflicts, but we can deal with those. Nothing can make our sangha fall apart, because we are there to make sure that the bond of the sangha will not be broken.'

The activities of the sanghas and the exposure to training, information and knowledge has an impact on women's changing attitudes to and understanding of social traditions which reflect and endorse women's oppression such as the devadasi-system, child marriage, certain taboos or prohibitions. They increasingly challenge social practices which perpetuate women's inequality. Their attitudes towards the education of their children and particularly girls has changed and now they start demanding accountability from the local schools and teachers in providing good education.

Although the actions of women do not directly challenge the existing gender relationships or the local power structures subtle changes are becoming visible in the attitudes of male family members, in women's decisions making powers in their families, in recognition they get from women and men from other caste communities, and the recognition and respect gained from village authorities and government officials. On the whole the impact is most visible in improvement of the survival base and living conditions. Further impact in changing the balance and practices of power will require continuation of the process of careful and creative strategizing with a long term vision on women's equality which determines the direction.

3.3 Women's health

Women reported better health of themselves and their children, as small children are being regularly checked in the child care centres, Primary Health Care centres are visited more frequently and health workers are called to the villages. In the area of women's health Mahila Samakhya has adopted a holistic approach which includes attention to the indigenous health system and revival of the knowledge and practice of herbal medicine.

We did not meet women who have become herbalists and local healers. But women's health and particularly the use of herbal medicines and traditional wisdom for treatment of a wide variety of ailments and illnesses including some common gynaecological problems, is one of the focal issues in the Programme. The spread of the use of herbal medicine is increasing as gradually more women become involved in the training on identification of medicinal plants, the preparation and use of herbal medicines, as well as growing of medicinal plants. In a number of villages herbal gardens are emerging and with co-operation of the Forest Department sanghas will become involved in starting nurseries for growing medicinal plants. It means a revival of traditional knowledge and experience as well as protection and multiplication of species which have medicinal value.

In some of the District local birth attendants (dais) have been trained and women have been involved in health awareness training programmes, which include nutrition, hygiene and sanitation, women's health and identification of diseases, understanding of the health system and services. Attention has been given women's reproductive health and, sporadically, aids. More systematic approaches could perhaps be evolved as women are increasingly showing their interest.

The impact on women is their better understanding of the function of their bodies and their reproductive systems, demystification of superstitious beliefs and misconceptions, eradication of harmful practices, awareness of traditional and modern health systems, and how and when to approach them, and increased ability to recognise problems and take appropriate actions.

Due to the lack of village health statistics it is difficult to assess the impact of Mahila Samakhya on

the health and nutrition status. In some areas Mahila Samakhya with the sanghas have conducted health surveys. Discussing the results of the survey in the sanghas can lead to sanghas becoming actively involved in monitoring the health situation in their villages or at least in the community of which they are a part, by keeping records of infant mortality, maternal mortality, occurrence of illnesses, use of herbal medicines, visits to the PHC or visits by AMN workers etc. This could help in evolving more effective strategies for informing the health authorities, changing the systems and ultimately influence health policies and their implementation.

3.4 Economic empowerment

The economic empowerment of women is an area we were not able to pursue during the visit of the mission. But the area of economic development and particularly women's activities regarding savings and loans, are reported upon in the annual reports as it is another of the major areas of attention in the Karnataka Programme.

The activities in the area of economic development are mainly related to the use of the sangha fund for accessing loans for income generating activities, either individually or as a group. However, little is reported about the effects of such schemes in terms of

- . skill improvement, new job opportunities, employment creation
- . increased incomes
- . improvement of living conditions, availability of food, improved nutritional status etc.

The impression is that accessing economic development schemes is definitely on the agendas of all district programmes perhaps more so in Bijapur, Gulbarga and Raichur. However, it meets with different degrees of success and also with many problems and difficulties. This could be partially related to the complexity of the procedures involved in accessing the schemes, restrictions with regard to groups size and other conditionalities, lack of possibilities for skill training, and the absence of accessible rural development and employment creation programmes in the area. More attention may need to be given to understand the factors involved, as well as to the identification of resource organisations (state as well as NGOs) involved in participatory rural development, environmental resources management and employment creation. Co-operation with such organisation in areas where Mahila Samakhya has already established a basis for women's involvement in participatory development may be a need for the future.

So far no activism is reported in the area of increased and equal wages or in changing the labour conditions of women. In Mysore and perhaps in other districts as well economic development is closely linked to the availability and protection of scarce natural resources. Watershed management schemes and environmental resource management programmes touch on areas wherein women's interests are involved. Women's active participation in the design, decision making and implementation of such programmes is an area whereby Mahila Samakhya can play a role in awareness raising, information and knowledge building, practical skills training and further capacity building of the sangha in terms of e.g. negotiating and management skills.

The main focus of activities in the area of economic development evolves around savings and loans. More than 85% of the active sanghas are engaged in group saving schemes and a total of savings up to 6 or 7 lakhs has been reported for Bidar and Bijapur. Most of the loans taken from the collective savings fund⁵ are used for individual purposes such as investment in livestock, in agricultural inputs, in equipment for income generating activities such as tailoring, for a shop or hotel or the for immediate emergencies, or for getting a loan from the bank. The rules for repayment are determined by the sangha and generally repayment seems to be good. No information is available about the results in terms of e.g. the money accessed and received by

⁵ this is not to be confused with and deliberately kept separate from the sangha fund or honorarium.

using the sangha loan as collateral, what it has been used for and how this has effected improvements or changes in the incomes, lives and living conditions of women.

In terms of impact the savings schemes are reported to have given women greater control of their incomes and savings, it has

- . increased women's awareness about their economic assets and how they can use them,
- . decreased their dependence on loan sharks
- . made women aware of how to handle money, banking procedures and how to access loans,
- . increased their confidence in dealing with the bank system and taking financial decisions,
- . increased their decision making powers in their families on financial matters,
- . created a buffer and security network for difficult times,
- . increased their confidence in their capabilities for handling money and savings and loan schemes.

And now sanghas have started forming federations with the aim of establishing their own Mahila Bank at cluster level. Bijapur District has already gone ahead in the preparations for the establishment of a Mahila Bank and formulated a set of rules and procedures.

The concept of the Women's Bank is related the idea of economic independence of sangha women and self-reliance of the sanghas. It is conceived as a credit system that will loan money to its members (sangha women) on easy repayment terms and for activities which regular banking system do not usually provide credit for. By creating this Women's Bank it is expected that high interest rates charged by official banks can be avoided. And the Women's Bank is seen as a factor for sustaining the self-reliance of the sangha after eventual withdrawal of the Mahila Samakhya support. The latter is linked to the sangha honorarium that is paid annually to those mahila sanghas that are of sufficient strength to deal with the sangha fund. It is to be expected that in the process of Mahila Samakhya phasing out its regular support to the sangha, the payment of the sangha honorarium will stop after some time. It means that by then the sangha is expected to be economically self-reliant and sustainable.

We fully endorse the validity of the arguments for self-reliance and sustainability of the sanghas as well as the economic independence of women. Questions could be raised regarding the active involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the establishment of special Mahila Banks.

- Have the available options with regard to alternative banking systems been sufficiently explored?
- Have the experiences of other women's organisations involved in women's banking like SEWA and/or Women's World Banking been sufficiently looked into?
- What will be the implications for the identity of Mahila Samakhya if it becomes banking system?
- What will be the costs in terms of investment in precious time, capacity building, skills training as well as attention and time spending of the sahayoginis, resource staff and the entire Mahila Samakhya apparatus?
- Is it going to divert the attention that needs to be given to strengthening of the empowerment processes of the mahila sanghas and other issues?
- What will be the implications of sangha women who are unable to pay the required membership fee for the bank?
- And what will be the implications for the relationships within the sangha if economic/commercial interests start interfering in the sangha?

We recommend Mahila Samakhya Karnataka to carefully review and reconsider its strategy and implications of its involvement in an economic and commercial activity like a banking system. Already we have seen that the running of the sanghas savings and loans system is taking a major chunk of the sahayoginis working time. And the question can be raised that if sangha women are not yet ready to run their small savings systems without the involvement of the sahayoginis how

will they be capable of running a Mahila Bank on their own (leaving aside the complications of organising the federation of a number of sanghas who are the 'owners' of the bank). Instead of establishing its own Mahila Banks Mahila Samakhya could direct its policy towards influencing the banking system, assisting the sanghas in negotiating their terms of cooperation with local banks or with elsewhere existing women's banks. Perhaps banks could be convinced to open special women's branches which fulfil the criteria and terms set by sangha women.

The recommendation for reconsideration of Mahila Samakhya's involvement in banking is also related to the sometimes negative experiences of the impact of the saving schemes on the sanghas: such as money related issues creating rifts within sanghas which eventually may lead to the sanghas falling apart. And savings may become the predominant activity of the sangha which comes to overshadow other issues. Some sangha women openly say that the savings scheme is to bond that keeps the sangha together. Savings schemes together with the sangha honorarium may cause sanghas to become reluctant to open up to new members who are unable to save and become closed for expansion. There is no information available on the scale of these phenomena, but the area of savings and women's economic empowerment is clearly an area that needs attention and looking into.

Without devaluating the argument that the experience in saving and banking shows women that they can handle money and deal with a banking system, we are of the opinion that Mahila Samakhya as an education programme for women's empowerment should not become engaged in running a bank or running e.g. income generating projects. With regard to banking and other issues related to women's economic empowerment we would like to refer to the Working Women's Forum in Karnataka who has an office in Bijapur. The possibilities for establishing a linkage to this programme and join forces in the areas of employment, wages, savings and banking need to be further explored.

3.5 Strength of women's political participation

Besides the formation of mahila sanghas, the second most impressive and useful function the Mahila Samakhya has been able to play is enabling women to participate in the political process. Among the seven hundred odd villages in which Mahila Samakhya is in operation with 30,000 Sangha members, more than two hundred women contested the elections. What is truly remarkable is that more than half the women who contested the elections got elected, among them are 10 devadasis. Some elected women have become presidents and vice presidents (see Table II). Mahila Samakhya has helped women understand the whole range of issues around political participation and empowered them in the real sense of the term.

One has to realise that - without the positive help and encouragement from Mahila Samakhya - political participation was way beyond the reach of most women in the villages. Many had no idea what politics was about. The women candidates did not have to spend any of their own money, and used the Sangha funds for clearing all legal formalities and took collective decisions about who should contest and what strategies to use. Most contestants had support from their families.

A few of the elected women (8) left the sangha afterwards, largely due to the pressure from their men. The elected members, who have become strong, still need Mahila Samakhya to help them function in their new roles. The Mahila Samakhya goes to great lengths to train them in public speaking, dress codes, literacy and awareness of issues. A further step ahead might be to assist the elected women (sangha and non sangha) to formulate a common women's agenda and to form a network of elected women who can support each other and join their forces for their common women's interests.

The focus and impact of these women in the Panchayats is most in asking for basic infrastructure facilities for their villages. The participation of sangha women in the public political arena is an

illustration of how Mahila Samakhya has changed women's self-image, enhanced their access to information, and has made them realise the strength of collective action.

District	No. Of women contestants	No. of women elected	No: elected as president	No. elected as Vice-president
Bidar	30	27		
Bijapur	90	59	6	7
Gulbarga	35	22	1	1
Mysore	30	13		
Raichur	14	14		
District	199	135	7	8

Source: M.S. K 1994-95 Annual Report

3.6 Women's legal rights

In one of the district programmes, in Bijapur, women's law is a major area of attention and training has been conducted to create awareness of the legal system and legal procedures. We have no information on the impact of the training. In all district programmes legal issues are continuously on the agendas in the sangha meetings. It relates to dealing with cases of domestic violence, family disputes, land and property issues etc. Sangha women support their members if they have to appear in court and activism of the sanghas often evolves around issues related to social injustices. The sanghas prefer to solve family related problems of e.g. domestic violence and property rights by using their own non-confrontational approach rather than taking it as a case into the legal courts which are costly and in which women do not have much confidence. Yet, if needed they will report cases to the police or go to court. The approach of women is through reconciliation, public exposure and publication. In Gulbarga District plans exist for establishing legal support and relief centres for women at cluster or taluka level.

In Mysore activism around legal land issues is an interest of the entire tribal community and Mahila Samakhya is actively co-operating with local NGOs and tribal collectives in fighting against programmes which do not recognise land ownership as a basic right of the tribal community.

As far as we are informed no initiatives have been taken as yet for addressing the area of women's legal and human rights and women's rights under tribal law in a systematic manner with the aim of enhancing women's awareness about how to use their legal rights. This could be an area to give more systematic attention to in the future in the entire Programme.

3.7 The potential for breaking caste and class divides

Generally, most of the sanghas in Karnataka are affiliated with specific caste or tribal groups. After the early stages of sangha formation conscious efforts have been made to include women from other caste or religious groups in the sanghas upon the condition that they would be willing to sit together with the sangha members and eat the food prepared by the sangha members regardless

of their caste background. In Bidar District some Muslim women have joined the sanghas. Almost 22% of the sanghas in Bidar are mixed and more than half of the sanghas have a Harijan membership. In Bijapur 31% of the sanghas are mixed. No data are available on Mysore, Gulbarga and Raichur. The sanghas in Mysore are reported to be linked either to the tribal community or to the scheduled castes. The likelihood of the tribal population to inter-mix with Harijan women seems to be very small, because of differences in social status. According to the outcomes of the study on the empowerment of the mahila sanghas⁶ women who belong to different castes will come together in one sangha as long as the joiners are of a lower caste. Purely upper caste sanghas or an intermixing of upper with lower caste women does not occur.

On the whole it can be said that the efforts of enlarging sanghas by including women from other caste groups have met disappointments and have not been encouraging further efforts. There is genuine fear among the sangha women who are predominantly from scheduled caste backgrounds that upper caste women might try to dominate the sangha. And apprehension exists that women from another caste community might have diverging interests which will destabilise the sangha. And women from upper castes belong to the landed classes, who are the employers of the sangha women from the SC or ST communities and exploit their labour. Caste divides are strongly ingrained in the texture of the society and are probably the most difficult boundaries to break through. This is especially the case when caste interests are inter-twined with class and political interests.

There are areas where caste barriers are overcome e.g. when women from upper caste communities come to sangha meetings or events organised by the sanghas. And sanghas deal with cases brought by women from other caste groups. Child Care Centres and non-formal education classes for children provide a space where women from different caste groups meet and interact. Sangha women who have become trained as practitioners in herbal medicines provide their services to women and men from upper caste community when they come for treatment. And in the training of elected Panchayat members women from other caste community have joined. The potential scope for reaching more women, including women from upper castes is very much there.

Increasingly Mahila Samakhya is confronted with requests from upper caste women who want to form their own collective and the Programme has to be prepared to consider and answer such requests, without compromising the basic Programme philosophy. Can Mahila Samakhya play a role in the promotion of a village-community based open women's forum, which is open for women regardless of their caste, class or communal background and which brings them together around common women's issues and interests as women? Such issues could be women's health, the education of girls and joint celebrations of festivals such as the International Women's Day. Although difficult the effort to broaden the sangha membership and build towards a community of women remains a long term challenge within the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

3.8 The emergence of a grass-roots women's movement

Sangha activism about women's issues such as widows' pensions, the abolition of the devadasi system and rehabilitation of devadasis, child marriage, anti-alcoholism and liquor trafficking and other forms of social injustice are clear indications of the emergence of a grass roots women's movement. Sanghas are actively seeking lateral relationships with other sanghas to enlarge their collective strength, to join forces and to mobilise women on common issues across village levels. And women from other villages are requesting the formation of sanghas in their villages in order to be able to join the 'movement'. Mahila Sanghas have become visible entities with voices that need to be listened to and sangha women are ready to use that capacity more effectively.

⁶ by Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurty, 1996.

3.9 Building a federation of Mahila Sanghas, an emerging issue

As mentioned above the seeds for the building sangha federations have been sown and the issue is on the agendas for discussions at different level of the Programme. The idea of a federation was voiced as a common vision of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka as early as in 1991 by the then Programme Director. To what extent this vision has been shared all the way down to the sanghas is an open question.

What seems to have happened is that the idea of federation has become an end in itself which is linked to the goal of achieving self-reliance and sustainability of the sanghas after withdrawal from Mahila Samakhya as a support structure. However, how the formation of federations is linked to women's empowerment processes in the sanghas is no longer very clear. Federations are seen as instrumental in strengthening women's voices at the Block Offices, to provide a network for mutual support of sahayakis when accessing resources and government officials at the Block Headquarters, for development of more effective strategies for addressing common women's issues like anti-liquor activities. And lateral linkages among sanghas may help individual sanghas to clarify their positions, to understand their problems in a broader perspective and feel stronger with the support from other sanghas. Cluster and block level meetings of sahayakis from different sanghas have proven to be a source of strength as well as a source of learning from successful experiences in other sanghas.

Most of these arguments are valid, but they do not necessarily lead to a structure in the shape of a formalised federation, at least not yet. Active networking among sanghas at cluster and block levels may have the same effects, but do not require investment in infra-structural arrangements. Earlier efforts in forming federations in Bidar and Gulbarga have not been successful because the process involved has not been given sufficient time and perhaps thought.

There is also a danger that the investment in the forming of federation will be a drain on the attention that need to be given to the strengthening of the sanghas. We feel that priority is to be given to reinforcing the empowerment processes of and within the sanghas, two thirds of which have been found to be needing further strengthening. In addition to this the sangha initiatives in networking among sanghas at cluster and taluka level are to be supported and strengthened with the related capacity building among sahayakis and sangha woman who could become a team of network promoters. All of this could be seen as steps in the process of growing towards the formation of federations of sanghas which are grounded from within the sanghas rather than promoted from above.

A parallel trend is the emergence of initiatives for support structures at cluster and block levels such as a women's resource and information centre, a legal support and relief centre for women, a women's bank etc. Room for supporting such initiatives and provision for related skills training and further capacity building could also be integrated in the future strategic plans of the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

3.10 Contradictory position of sahayoginis and sahayakis

It must be mentioned that the impact of empowerment is not just on the sangha members but on all women working with the Mahila Samakhya Programme. It is most visible and pronounced on the sahayoginis and sahayakis.

Sahayakis

The sahayakis are the village level activists who have been selected by the sangha members for training as sahayaki. They are expected to share their experiences and information received during

the training with the women in the sangha meetings. Most of the active sanghas have more than one trained sahayaki as most sanghas have adopted a rotation system and often two or more women are sent for the training. In Bidar 1200 sahayakis attended sahayaki training programmes with the result that the sanghas have an average of six sahayakis. In total more than 2000 sahayakis have been trained and have become empowered beyond expectation. They are strong in terms of self-confidence, verbal skills, mobilising women, organisation of the sangha meetings and representing their sanghas in cluster, taluka and district level meetings.

With regard to their position in the sangha there is a risk that some sahayakis individually or as group may become overactive and dominate the sangha preventing its growth. We were unable to see to what extent sahayakis have been able to share their learning experiences sufficiently within the sangha, but incidences have been reported of sanghas falling apart because sahayakis are taking a too dominating position. This calls for a greater understanding of the empowerment process of and within the sangha's, the evolving mechanisms for sharing power and control. The series of studies on the sangha development and the internal power mechanisms planned by the State Programme Office are to look into this issue.

Sahayoginis

The sahayoginis are the fieldworkers who co-ordinate the processes and activities of a cluster of usually ten sanghas. They play a crucial role in the formation mahila sanghas, in sustaining and reinforcing the sanghas' empowerment processes, in providing training and information aimed at perspective and capacity building of the sangha, in the training of the sahayakis. They assist the sanghas in preparing their activity plans, in consolidating these into plans for the cluster, block and the district, in budget preparations, in documentation and reporting on the sangha processes, in conducting surveys. They are the key actors for the empowerment of women at the grassroots level enabling them to improve their socio-economic status. They have been chosen for their communication skills and acceptability among villagers. The sahayoginis mobilise the collective strength of women to bring about an attitudinal shift from age old beliefs and practices.

With their commitment and hard work they have made a great and valuable contribution over the last seven years, particularly during the early years. And strong and lasting relationships have been built between the sahayoginis and 'their' sanghas. Although they have become fully professional as fieldworkers they are to a certain extent considered as paid volunteers in a job with an insecure future and without career perspectives. They feel fully capable and competent in doing their work, they have become vocal, assertive and exude a great sense of confidence. Over the years and particularly during a period of weak leadership from the top and increased reliance on their own experience and resourcefulness, fatigue has crept in with a sense of dissatisfaction. Training and work has become repetitive and more like a routine as new inspiration and perspectives are lacking.

Their day to day work is co-ordinating the sangha activities, being responsive to their demands and issues. Most have received a solid training, are clear about the Mahila Samakhya philosophy and its basic concepts, and have internalised a gender perspective in their approach to their work. But they lack new inspiration, growth and opportunities for further perspective building which help them to link the demands arising from the sanghas to gender and empowerment of women. They are in a contradictory position as they are expected to be responsive to the development agendas of the sangha women which focus on their basic survival needs and improvement of their living conditions. At the same time they are to bring this in line with the empowerment agenda of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Besides, day to day problems may override the attention for broader perspectives and development of long term strategies. This inevitably leads to stagnation in the Programme, in losing its conceptual clarity, vision and sense of direction as an empowerment Programme.

The signs can clearly be observed in the attitudes and expressions of sahayoginis. Some have left and joined other organisations. Others are seriously contemplating entering into politics or starting their own NGOs. And there are sahayoginis who have built strong rapport with and control over the sanghas, reinforcing the sanghas dependency on their presence. This gives them a certain legitimacy to their (insecure) position, which they sometimes find unable to give up in absence of alternative prospects. It also makes other and less experienced district staff rather helpless in giving them directions. And there is a danger that their position over the years has become so strong that they can break sangha or prevent its growth.

To come out of this situation the following approaches are suggested:

- to involve the sahayoginis actively in the process of creative thinking for the re-orientation, rethinking and re-directing the Programme,
- to jointly evolve a forward looking human resources development plan which involves the sahayoginis in different capacities, provides for role differentiation and for lateral and upward mobility, and career paths,
- to invest in human resources capacity building and implement a training plan for sahayoginis and programme staff with a fresh approach which includes exposures to new perspectives and inspiration coming from the women's movement as well as building of professional capacities related to the progression in the process of sangha empowerment,
- to approach and consider sahayoginis as professional workers in the programme structure rather than as paid volunteers;
- and to review and update the remuneration system and make it compatible with equivalent positions and functions in the government and the NGO sector.

4. The education component and linkages to other education programmes like DPEP

Education for women's empowerment is central in the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Education is understood in a holistic and broad meaning as an empowering learning process which enables learners to question, to analyze, to seek answers, to act and reflect, and thereby to discover their inner strength and realise their potential. It involves a life long process of interactive learning, based on sharing of knowledge and life experiences, critical analysis and reflection, creating new kinds of knowledge and understanding.

In the study of the Mahila Sanghas a distinction is made between three interrelated aspects of education: education as life skills, education as knowledge and information, and education as literacy'. Education of life skills relates to the ability to manage life and is based on gaining confidence and self-esteem. It is underlying all of the activities in Mahila Samakhya and in the on-going processes of collective action/reflection/learning/ deciding/planning/action. Education as information and knowledge refers to accessing and analysing knowledge and information, and using it effectively. It is part of awareness workshops and training related to e.g. health, law, the environment, etc. In both aspects of education being literate in the sense of reading and writing is not directly essential for learning taking place, for feeling empowered and having confidence in one's strength to make changes.

In Mahila Samakhya education as literacy comes in when women discover the importance of literacy in dealing with the outside literate world with its written rules and procedures. It comes when the need arises for writing application letters, keeping records of savings, recording and checking minutes of meetings, getting clarification on procedures etc., and when the women experience its importance for furthering their knowledge and accessing new information. Thus in principle demands for literacy (reading, writing, numeracy skills and a wider body of knowledge) emerge from the developments within the sanghas.

⁷ Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurty 1996, pp. 27 ff.

4.1 Literacy and education for empowerment

In Karnataka the Mahila Samakhya Programme has become actively engaged in the Literacy Mission since the beginning of the nineties, particularly in Bijapur and later also in Bidar and Mysore. The involvement of Mahila Samakhya varied per district and relates to motivational activities, the selection and training of local volunteers, development of materials and methods and the responsibility of running literacy centres in certain talukas. In Bijapur the involvement of Mahila Samakhya has made the literacy campaign a great success.

Between 1992 and 1995 Mahila Samakhya provided a Grant-in-Aid to an NGO, AIKYA, who has established a District Resource Centre with the task to assist the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Bidar with the development of an innovative learning system and with training support in educational methods and pedagogical skills related to adult literacy/education, and non-formal education of children. This co-operation is related to the involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the Literacy Mission. The results and the impact of this temporary collaboration and what happened after the withdrawal from AIKYA in terms of continuation of the literacy efforts has not been documented nor researched: what has been the significance of the innovations in methods, materials, approaches for (post) literacy? how has it contributed to women's motivation to further their literacy skills and how has it supported their empowerment?

There is also no systematic documentation and analysis of the experiences of the collaboration between Mahila Samakhya and the Literacy Mission keeping in view the non-target process oriented approach of Mahila Samakhya and the time/target bound campaign-like approach of the Literacy Mission. Such analysis would be necessary in view of further involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the second phase of the Literacy Campaign and future collaboration with the Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education. The experiences of Mahila Samakhya in the adoption of innovative non-conventional approaches to adult education, - which include needs based education related to life skills and education as information and knowledge, with or without a literacy component - may pave the way for widening the scope of adult education and the adoption of holistic non-structured approaches with a long term perspective of creating opportunities for self-directed learning.

It seems that during and after the literacy campaign Mahila Samakhya has followed its own way in the area of adult literacy allowing women learners including the 35+ age group to determine their time and pace of learning. In Bidar currently 92 adult literacy classes are running. Bijapur has 33 and Gulbarga has 20 adult literacy centres, whereas for Raichur and Mysore no adult literacy centres are reported. Successes and results in the area of adult literacy through a regular class-like method are modest and mixed. Reasons mentioned are e.g.

- . difficulties in keeping women motivated for literacy after they have reached the stage of being able to write their names, or read the destination of the bus,
- . women find it difficult to make time to attend classes regularly because of the seasonal nature of their agricultural labour and because part of the year they migrate for work elsewhere,
- . difficulties in finding local women who can teach,
- . non-suitability of the available (neo)-literacy materials, because they are not gender sensitive and/or do not make much sense in the living environments of (tribal) rural women.

Furthermore, a likely reason could be that women feel that they have become stronger and empowered, that they can access information and resources and that they feel capable to make changes in their lives without necessarily being able to read and write. And another explanation could be that providing education in any kind of class setting beyond a certain time-span is not the most suitable approach. On the whole the reasons for the supposed decline of interest on the part of the women have not been fully investigated and analysed.

Education for women's empowerment is definitely taking place in all districts and has made

significant impacts on the lives of rural women as is clear from the foregoing sections. However, if the concept of education is used in its limited understanding of education as literacy, or just reading, writing and numeracy skills, the level of success is limited. This is particularly the case for forms of education taking place in regular classroom-like sessions with materials brought from elsewhere, which perhaps have no bearing to women's lives, or which are not directly linked to women's area of work.

In general the attention to adult literacy and to the creation of a consistent, holistic gender aware approach to education for empowerment, which includes and integrates the different aspects of education (e.g. life skills, information and knowledge, literacy and numeracy) is waning in the Karnataka Programme. What we see is that the centrality of education in Mahila Samakhya appears to have given way to other priorities, like e.g. the running of savings group, the building of the sangha hut, accessing schemes and services, and other activities aimed at keeping the collectives going. Through the Literacy Mission more and more women have become exposed to reading, writing and numeracy skills. Instead of standing back and letting women loose interest in further learning (with the help of their literacy skills) and allowing the learning process to stagger, *Mahila Samakhya could and should refocus its attention and make education for empowerment its foremost and central issue.* With their literacy skills and with the gains achieved in terms of women's empowerment women are ready to move ahead and use their newly acquired skills, to access and further their knowledge, to strengthen their information base, to counter disinformation and abuse, and to participate in family, community and further political decision making from a position of strength.

In Karnataka Mahila Samakhya is operational in the districts which are most backward in terms of women's development and literacy. In these districts the seeds have been sown and now time has come for Mahila Samakhya to move ahead and come to terms with its nature as an education programme. And the area to venture in by using its flexibility and creative powers is *to evolve together with the sangha women innovative and participatory learning strategies for learning in pre- and neo-literate stages maintaining the focus on supporting women's empowerment.* Strategies which combine awareness, information and skills, which are directed at learning groups with women who are barely literate and women who want to use and further their literacy skills. Strategies which include gender-relevant methods and pedagogy, development of learning materials and aids on relevant issues and skills for use in self-directed learning groups. And strategies providing for short and intermediate term training programmes, residential as well as non-residential, for selected women as functionaries in e.g. water or village education committees, and as specialists like local health workers, rural extensionists, village level workers for veterinary services, plant protection, environment-aware technologies, water management, horticulture etc. It further is to include modes and forms of learning which do not conform to conventional classroom like settings and are flexible enough to respond to the time patterns, mobility and environments of the learners. Banking on the lessons learned from seven years of experience Mahila Samakhya will be on its way to the creation of a truly alternative approach to adult education.

Refocusing the Programme on education for empowerment requires *changes in the human resources staffing and development policy.* At present there are no resource persons in the organisational structure of Mahila Samakhya with a professional background in educational methodology or pedagogy, for curriculum development, development of learning materials and use of media. Such experts are needed if Mahila Samakhya is to move into the direction of developing innovative learning strategies. Each District Implementation Unit as well as the State Programme Office is to have an experienced education expert on its staff who together will form a team for backing-up and supporting the education component in the Programme. Mahila Samakhya has a great resource of in-house practical experience in training methodologies, use of drama and cultural expressions, teaching by improvisation in non-formal settings. These experiences can be brought up to a higher professional level with a well directed staff development plan.

The focus on education for empowerment naturally includes the next generation by giving

attention to the education of children and particularly girls.

4.2 Education of children

Mahila Samakhya is actively involved in education of children. Children's education is on the agendas of the mahila sanghas. In sanghas we visited the women reported that their primary school-age daughters are in school nowadays. Sanghas are taking actions to demand accountability from the school teachers that they come to school and teach. However, most villages have no school facilities beyond standard four. This means in practice that most girls leave school and drop-out before they have achieved a sustainable level of reading and writing skills. For boys the distance of the school from the homestead does not provide a restriction to their schooling. A brief interview with a group (male) literacy teachers who all belong to the 'sangha family' revealed that most young men continue their school education up to standard ten and many go beyond that level. Whereas their sisters, wives or daughters who are above primary school-age have never been to school at all.

Mahila Samakhya is definitely enhancing a growing awareness about the values of children's and particularly girls education. The activism of the mahila sangha directed at the local schools indicates that a foundation for community interest and participation in improving the quality of education in the schools on the part of women exists and that other education programmes like the District Primary Education Programme could build upon this.

The involvement of Mahila Samakhya in education of children, apart from the above mentioned activism on the part of the sanghas in making schools accountable, are the child care centres, non formal education centres for children and the Mahila Shiksha Kendras.

Child Care Centres

In Mahila Samakhya child care centres are primarily conceived of as a means to create time for women to be relieved from the responsibility of having to constantly look after their small children and to have more control over how to use her time. It also relieves older children from child care duties so that they can go to school. Child Care Centres have been established in all districts in places where the ICDS run anganwadis do not exist or where the services are inadequate e.g. in terms of timing. In some instances there is some form of co-operation between ICDS and Mahila Samakhya in the running of centres or in the provision of food and health services. There are indications that children who have been in the child care centres are going on to the primary school, but concrete information is not available. We did not come across concrete evidence that the training and guidance of the teachers for the child care centres is purposely directed at the creation of an environment that helps children to adjust easily into a classroom situation and pre-school education which prepares them for primary school. The primary function of the centres seems to be child care with perhaps some attention to pre-school education. Whether or not these centres have an impact on women's awareness and motivation for schooling of their children is a question we have not been able to give attention to.

The Child Care Centres have been running more or less successfully, some being closed down after some time, new centres coming up. Reasons mentioned are lack of interest, neglect, unsatisfactory teachers and conflicts in the sangha, or the fact that no food is provided.

Although we did not have sufficient opportunity to discuss the involvement of Mahila Samakhya in establishing Child Care Centres we have the impression that generally such centres are seen as service from the government and that a sense of ownership and shared responsibility by the sangha may be absent in many cases. One could question if there still exists a qualitative difference between the ICDS centres and centres run through Mahila Samakhya, or is it that the

MS centres are reaching places that cannot be reached through the ICDS programme? Related to this is the question that needs to be answered by Mahila Samakhya if it is not duplicating the services from the Department of Child Development and instead could pay more attention to co-operation with the concerned Departments. Through that Mahila Samakhya is in a better position to influence the policies and the policy implementation related to the child care centres in order to make them more responsive to the needs and situations of rural women who are currently not being reached through the existing services.

Non formal education centres for children

In forty percent of the villages the sanghas are running non-formal education centres which prepare children for entrée in the formal education system or for taking examinations at standard six or seven. They are using existing materials from the State Resource Centre and often men who are related to the sangha women and who have been involved in the literacy campaign are the literacy teachers. Systematic data on these classes and the results in getting the children admitted in the formal schools are not available. And there are no concrete data on the numbers of girls who have passed their Standard seven examinations and are now admitted in secondary or State Boarding Schools.

But in spite of the absence of data (which are not very difficult to obtain, systematise and compile) it is clear that these non-formal education initiatives are meeting a need for alternative modes of education, which provide a learner-friendly and safe environment for girls, who otherwise would remain excluded from participation in formal education. The numbers of NFE centres are growing and there is a lot of scope for further growth, the non-availability of teachers being the most severe constraint.

We noted that the preparation and training of the teachers for non-formal education is limited. Most of the teachers rely on their training and experience in the literacy campaign. The training inputs by Mahila Samakhya have been limited to a few days introductory training and regular review meetings. Training in pedagogic methods, alternative learning approaches are lacking and felt needed by the teachers.

At the time of our visit we were able to witness a children's mela for children from the nfe centres, from MSKs and their teachers. The mela was to introduce games, play and art in the process of learning. It was very lively and the experience was appreciated by all participants who were to transfer what they had learned to other children in their with the help of their teachers. The mela was organised by Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi. This NGO is a resource organisation on innovative pedagogy for literacy and non-formal education. Apart from engaging its own professional resource persons in the District and State teams Mahila Samakhya needs to work at further networking and co-operation with resource organisations like BGVS in the further development of its education component.

The non-formal education centres provide girls access to an alternate form of schooling. Eventually this is expected to have a positive impact on increasing the literacy rates of girls and decreasing the gender gap in literacy. However, there is no clear philosophy or vision regarding the future empowerment of these girls in their socio-economic and cultural environments which is backing these nfe initiatives. We also noted a lack of forward looking thinking and strategizing for the future of the girls: what will be their prospects in life? Does non formal education equip them with new perspectives and possibilities? Will they enter into marriage and live the lives of their mothers? Will they be able to learn cognitive and practical skills that help to use their talents and make a meaningful contribution to rural development? What forms of continuing education exist or could be developed? Can they create self-learning groups and access the Open School system? Will they become eligible for skills/vocational training programmes offered by the State or by other organisations? These are questions which Mahila Samakhya will need to address as well as to its

own role in development of innovative alternatives.

Mahila Shikshana Kendras

The Mahila Shikshana Kendras are the most outstanding and seminal contribution of Mahila Samakhya in the area of girls' education. They provide a residential school for teen-age girls between 14 and 18 years of age who for various reasons have stopped going to school after grade Standard four, mostly because no school facility for upper primary education is available in their village. The girls in the MSK include girls who have been dedicated as devadasi and became prostitutes, married and already separated girls and married girls who have become widows and have been rejected by their in-laws. The majority of the girls would be married off soon, if they had not been in the school and some have been married but are allowed to complete their school education till they are eighteen. For them being given this opportunity allows them to delay the age of marriage and get a certain level of education first, to escape from being drawn into bonded labour, to escape from an existence as prostitute, and to prepare for a new future and life in dignity. Efforts to prevent early marriage have not always been successful as pressures from the families in the villages remain. In consultation with and upon suggestion from the parents Mahila Samakhya now requires parents to sign a letter of bond stating that they cannot take their child from the school without being taken to court until they have reached the age of eighteen years. This serves as an illustration of the involvement of parents, their confidence in the school and their grown recognition of the importance of education for their daughters.

The MSK provides an educational curriculum which follows the formal system and prepares for examination at Standard seven and Standard ten in a formal institution. In addition the children get lessons in music and art, they get opportunities for learning vocational skills like tailoring and typing. By participating in the household management the girls are encouraged to practice management and planning skills, cooking and housekeeping, hygiene and self-care. Discussions on gender and other relevant issues are encouraged on the basis of video, tv programmes, reading the newspaper, newsletters or articles etc. Although initially planned for one year, the learners who come in at the age of 14 may stay until they have become eighteen. So far only very few have completed their Secondary School Level Certificate and left for further learning (e.g. becoming a nurse) or life as a married women in a village. The method of learning is informal, interactive and learner friendly through small groups divided by levels of competency. Much care is taken to create a positive learning environment, which stimulates questioning and further learning.

What we were able to observe when visiting two of the MSKs was a group of happy, bright, open and vocal young women, eager to learn and explore their ever expanding world. This was the more striking after being told the difficulties to overcome by the teachers in winning the learners' confidence and getting them to open up. The first MSKs were established in Bijapur, Bidar and Mysore, last year three new MSKs have been added in Raichur, Gulbarga and a second one in Bijapur. The two MSKs visited by the mission are running extremely well.

The girls have been selected by the sahayoginis in consultation with the sanghas. There is a great demand from the side of the parents in getting their daughters admitted in the MSK. This makes one wonder if parents would be reluctant about the schooling of their daughters if good quality and facilities for education are provided.

There are restrictions with regard to the numbers admitted, because of the limited capacity of the MSKs which does not reach beyond 50 learners. E.g. not more than one girl per family can be admitted. This means that the reality is that the MSK as a residential school is selective and open for a very small portion of eligible girls so that it can never be a true solution in providing educational opportunities for all teenage school leavers in the districts, who will remain many if schools do not improve and expand in numbers.

Without doing injustice to the relevance and importance of the MSK as an extremely valuable alternative educational provision for girls, which will definitely change their prospects in life, we also need to state that the same what has been mentioned above for non-formal education regarding the curriculum, pedagogy and the absence of a vision applies to the MSKs.

At present there does not seem to be a clear vision with a forward looking perspective on the future development of the MSK. The original objective was to provide for an educational facility which would help to create an educated cadre of women for development of education in backward rural areas and for rural development. The programme was planned for one year after which a new cohort of learners would get an opportunity to be admitted. By imperceptibly extending the duration of girls staying in the MSK to four years the quantitative in-take capacity has been reduced significantly. And there are no indications of a curriculum that is in itself gender-sensitive with a focus on a future life in rural development.

As with the entire education component Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka will need to address many questions and decisions regarding its future role in relation to further development of the Mahila Shiksha Kendra. Will it become an educational support structure consisting an MSK at each taluka or for each cluster? Is it a viable innovative model for alternate school education of out-of-school girls to be taken over, incorporated and multiplied under DPEP or non-formal education? Will Mahila Samakhya play a role in the (further) development of alternative learning approaches for girls and women and in development of gender-relevant methods and materials through the MSKs? Are MSKs to become seen as part of and complementing the non-formal education initiatives at village level and perhaps gradually to be replaced by extending nfe to become a village level open learning system that provides education beyond primary level? And/or will the MSK gradually be transformed in a training institute which provides condensed courses for a multiple set of purposes related to the formation of female cadre - equipped with a gender perspective - for rural development? These are a few of the questions that need to be considered in order to decide on the direction of a future strategy for the MSKs in Karnataka.

4.3 Co-operation with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)

So far there has been no experience in co-operation with the District Primary Education Programme. In the first phase of the implementation of DPEP Raichur will be the only District wherein both programmes are present. Plans are being discussed for involving Mahila Samakhya in micro-planning and training for the formation and training of village education committees. In the second phase DPEP will expand to Bijapur, Bidar, Gulbarga and Mysore where it can benefit from the rich experience and the presence of Mahila Samakhya. It means that there is scope for co-operation to be started now with a perspective on the future. Some areas for future co-operation have already been mentioned such as the involvement of sangha women in monitoring schools, and their role as catalyst for community participation and creating awareness about the importance of girls education. The MS centres for non-formal education and the Mahila Shiksha Kendras could become models for alternate forms of education to be incorporated in DPEP and Mahila Samakhya could become involved in gender training for DPEP staff, teachers and village education committees. From its experience in working with rural women Mahila Samakhya can contribute to and co-operate in curriculum development and production of gender-relevant learning materials. And Mahila Samakhya could benefit from learning materials made available through DPEP, as well as from professional pedagogic inputs in training of nfe teachers.

In this respect the formation of joint MS-DPEP task group is recommended who will work out the further plans for co-operation at general State level, as well as for the districts to be covered by both programmes, with the aim of e.g.:

- increasing access to and retention in primary & continuing education of children and especially girls: sanghas could play a catalyst role in this and extend their activities across the entire community (of women);

- ensuring quality of learning that is meaningful and gender relevant in the local environment: e.g. sanghas being represented in the Village Education Committees (VECs) for monitoring children's and teachers attendance as well as ensuring quality and meaningful learning; involving sahayoginis and MS/NFE teachers in training of VECs;
- making teaching/instruction gender relevant by involving Mahila Samakhya (education resource persons, sahayoginis and NFE/MSK teachers) in the training of teachers;
- providing gender sensitivity training for DPEP implementing staff and in the training of teachers;
- conducting participatory appraisal studies and micro-planning village level by involving the Mahila Sanghas;
- joint development and sharing of learning materials, books and learning aids for formal as well as non-formal education and making use of the experience of Mahila Samakhya in using songs, oral traditions and knowledge, drama, games and play;
- joint development of alternate forms of schooling for special groups, who are otherwise neglected by the mainstream school system based on experience of Mahila Samakhya in non-formal education and the MSK model.

5. Expansion strategies

In Karnataka the Mahila Samakhya has expanded in two phases. The Programme was launched in three districts, in Mysore and Bijapur with the assistance of local NGOs and in Bidar by Mahila Samakhya. After two years when the Programme had set its roots in these three districts, expansion was planned in two new districts which created a block of four Mahila Samakhya districts in the north of Karnataka. In the implementation the new districts could benefit from the earlier experiences and the human resources trained in the initial stage. In both districts different strategies have been adopted for the mobilisation of villages and women. In Gulbarga sahayoginis started campaigning through streetplays and in Raichur Gramsabhas were conducted in the villages to inform the community and attract their co-operation. We have not been able to discuss the merits of these different approaches. They have evolved from the earlier experiences in the Programme and in response to the prevailing conditions in the Districts. The expansion of the Programme within the 'older' districts has been relatively slow and not very actively pursued. During the next five year plan Mahila Samakhya intends to further extend its outreach into three more districts, which means that by the year 2000 the Programme will be present in almost half of the total number of districts in Karnataka.

The strategies for expansion have not been discussed with the State and district teams. However, the same situation exists as in other States with the sanghas in different stages of strength (formation stage, consolidation stage, weakened, strong). This calls for a diversified strategy based on the lessons learned in the past, the increased presence and visibility in the State and within the districts and the current momentum of spontaneous expansion via the sanghas.

Sanghas are interested in forming mahila sanghas in neighbouring villages in order to widen their network for mutual co-operation, mobilization and activism and to create a critical mass of empowered sanghas at block and district levels. Women in surrounding villages are seeking assistance in forming their sanghas and the older sanghas can play a role in this process which altogether will save time and effort in the formation stage. The process of expansion is to be seen in connection with the process of de-linking the strong sanghas and strengthening of their capacities to become self-reliant.

From the General Report we reiterate the following points of attention which can guide the formulation and implementation of a differentiated the expansion strategy:

for districts and talukas where Mahila Samakhya already has a presence

- reinforcing the sangha strength and capacity building for self-reliance of the older sanghas;
- de-linking the strong and self reliant sanghas from direct sahayogini support;

- promoting sanghas to become a community forum of women across caste, class or communal divides,
- strengthening networking among sanghas and the formation of cluster groups,
- strengthening and building of support structures at the block level,
- forming new sanghas in areas surrounding the clusters wherein Mahila Samakhya is present;
- involving the old sanghas and clusters in the formation and strengthening of new sanghas, and for new districts
- selection to be based on transparent criteria e.g. poverty indicators, indicators for gender equality, female literacy rates, potential for linking up with DPEP and/or other schemes for poverty alleviation and socio-economic development,
- ensuring that staff and necessary infra-structure are in place and well prepared/trained before starting the activities in the new districts.

The expansion strategy is to include attention to the human resources component and capacity building for new and diversified roles at all levels of the Mahila Samakhya structure.

In relation to expansion to new areas and consolidation in the talukas wherein Mahila Samakhya is already present attention needs to be given development of more special strategies for working in areas, which cause difficulties because of their mixed economies, a high influx from migration, from urban life styles, commercial attitudes and political activism. The strategies for working with a predominantly rural population may not be adequate to meet the social conditions of women under these circumstances. This situation applies for instance to one of the talukas in Raichur District.

6. Documentation and reporting

Over the years Mahila Samakhya has produced a wealth of documentation which provides a rich resource of information for internal as well as for external purposes. The documentation consists of sangha and village profiles, case studies, reflection papers, video's, brochures, diaries and records of meetings, newsletters etc. The various sources provide the basis for quarterly and annual progress reports, which record activities related to certain issues, illustrative cases, training programmes, events taking place and some reflections etc. These reports provide little insight in the progression and evolution of the Programme in a long time perspective and in relation to the basic principles and objectives of Mahila Samakhya. And there is a tendency in such reports to give attention to the successes and positive examples. A critical analysis of less positive experiences is also needed in order to identify and understand the working of constraining factors and to draw the lessons for future strategizing.

Due to the internal problems not much attention could be given during the last year to review the documentation and reporting system and to the development of an effective documentation strategy. There is need for more systematisation and consolidation of the resource materials which allow for following the different processes over a longer period. The creation of a data base of gender relevant development statistics, could help to place the contributions from Mahila Samakhya in a wider development perspective.

As mentioned in the introductory paragraph the State Programme Office is planning a three tier approach to getting better insight in the development processes of the sanghas which includes a mechanism for following the sangha development processes with a set of concrete, and possibly quantifiable indicators, which can be computer-processed. We fully endorse this initiative and recommend the State Programme Office also to look into the documentation systems which have evolved in the other state programmes. Furthermore, the process of reflection and re-orientation which is taking place already forces to Programme staff to look back critically for indicators that provide clear insight on what has been and is going on in the Programme in terms of its aims and objectives.

Studies are part of a documentation system, they allow for a deeper analysis of selected and relevant phenomena. In this report various areas for studies have been mentioned which could be integrated as part of a new documentation strategy.

7. Mahila Samakhya as a resource organisation for the empowerment of women

Mahila Samakhya is perceived as a time-bound programme that is to phase itself out after a certain period of time. This perception is in contradiction with the understanding of empowerment as an on-going process of growth, reinforcement of inner strength and expansion towards broader horizons, as well expansion in terms of dealing with new issues and struggles. What can be time-bound is the process of sangha formation and consolidation, and the period a sangha needs in order to de-link itself from the regular support of its sahayogini.

Sanghas as they are becoming stronger, develop confidence and capabilities to be self-reliant in managing their own meetings and financial affairs. More and more sanghas are seen taking their own decisions, solving their problems, accessing resources independently from sahayoginis' involvement. They are planning, strategizing and executing their activities, they share their joint responsibilities and by this they play a greater role in determining their futures and influencing social change. Such processes of change do not evolve without resistance from the environment, without disappointments and compromises, without recurring struggles, which might require fresh inputs to reinforce the process of empowerment. In these processes of growing self-reliance and strength of the sanghas the relationship of the mahila sanghas with Mahila Samakhya is bound to be changing and needs to be redefined in new terms.

In recognition of the sanghas as mature, self-sustaining organisations in their own right, capable of making their own decisions and determining the direction of their development process, the Mahila Samakhya Structure has to diversify and change its role. From this point of view Mahila Samakhya can be regarded as one of the resource organisations to be accessed by the sanghas for provision of (gender-sensitive) training inputs and materials, for providing information, knowledge and new perspectives on issues coming up in the sangha, for facilitation of access to other resource organisations or assistance in setting up and sustaining support structures. Mahila Samakhya will still have a role in facilitating inter sangha networking at block and district levels and in capacity building for support structures at cluster or block levels initiated by sangha networks. The role of Mahila Samakhya with regard to providing gender-sensitive pedagogic and other training support to teachers for nfe, child care centres, formal schools and for village education committees is bound to be getting greater emphasis and importance in the future. And at the same time Mahila Samakhya will have to maintain its presence for formation of new sanghas in new villages and for strengthening the sanghas which are not yet ready to be self-reliant.

Instead of phasing itself out the Mahila Samakhya Programme structure is able to build on the strength of its presence and its credibility gained in the Districts and the State. Its future is to expand and differentiate its role in order to be responsive to the needs related to the different stages of development of the existing and the new sanghas: independent self-reliant sanghas; weaker sanghas that want to become self-reliant; young and emerging sanghas; sangha networks and federations etc. Furthermore, Mahila Samakhya has created a strong role for itself in initiating and supporting gender-sensitive educational innovations for children as well as adults. The on-coming new developments related to the expansion of DPEP in MS districts, as well as the future developments in adult (post) literacy calls for the establishment of tripartite partnerships between the concerned education programmes (MS, DPEP, AE) and requires the experience and continuing presence of Mahila Samakhya in order to ensure the focus on education for girls' and women's empowerment to which the Government of India has committed itself in its education policy (1986). And Mahila Samakhya as a support structure of the Mahila sanghas could play a stronger role in advocacy and policy development in support of women's equality and empowerment.

By converting the existing structure of DIUs and SPO into a network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres with accessible branches at taluka and cluster levels it can provide a flexible, accessible and multi-functional support structure. These Resource Centres could provide or facilitate access to training resources (process, perspective building, issues based and/or training of trainers), assist in development of training curricula and manuals, assist in further development of effective training/learning methods, as well as gender-sensitive learning materials for self-directed learning. The Resource Centres can have a role in collecting, converting and disseminating relevant information, in documentation and research, in dissemination of newsletters etc. And the centres can provide for social, legal, job/career counselling, as well as training and library facilities. These Resource Centres will provide a multi-purpose support network which can be flexible and responsive to the needs of the Programme and varied processes in the field.

The District Resource Centres and their branches at block level could be staffed by sahayoginis who will be the resource persons and by professional resource persons and (temporary) consultants with specific assignments or tasks. The District Programme Coordinator will be Resource Centre Co-ordinator and remain in charge of the Programme in the District be it from the perspective of a Programme support structure.

At State level a similar conversion could be considered, although a State Resource Centre might be taking a slightly different role with a stronger emphasis on advocacy and influencing policies, on studies and compilation & analysis of data, on providing for professional development of the Programme Staff and on networking with other resource organisations. Its tasks could include e.g. the following:

- . the identification of training resources within and outside the State,
- . providing assistance in developing and implementing internal monitoring mechanisms,
- . documentation, evaluation and studies,
- . the conversion and dissemination to the districts of information and learning materials from elsewhere,
- . organisation of state and national level reflection workshops for Programme staff and external resource persons,
- . the facilitation exchange and exposure visits (in two directions),
- . development and implementation of strategies for advocacy and influencing the policy structures (policy and decision makers, policy changes, the implementation of policies and the public), e.g. via the National Alliance of Women (NAWO).

The network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres which is flexible and adaptable to the needs of the empowerment/development processes, can provide a more permanent support structure in the State and in the Districts that can branch out to the blocks and clusters, and co-operate with other (education) resource centres by exchanging services in order to avoid duplication.

The creation of a support structure as proposed will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy. It requires a human resources development plan which provides for staff development, staff training and capacity building including new possibilities for horizontal and vertical mobility, for new and differentiated career paths for sahayoginis and district staff. To accompany the recommended changes a review of the financial pattern and financial management procedures will also be necessary.

STATISTICAL DATA KARNATAKA

Table : III Social and Demographic Indicators						
Index	Bidar	Bijapur	Gulbarga	Mysore	Raichur	Karnataka
C.B.R (1991)	30.4	30.1	31.1	26.9	30.3	27.0
C.D.R (1991)	9.2	10.0	9.9	8.3	8.2	8.6
Sex Ratio (1991)	952	963	962	979	978	959
I.M.R	105	121	107	98	116	73
Mean Age at Marriage (1981)	16.9	16.7	15.80	16.20	17.0	19.2
Proportion of girls married 15-19 yrs (1981)	53.29	62.06	58.44	41.56	59.31	36.24
C.P.R (1993)	47.62	45.87	35.84	63.52	37.13	50.25
Per capita Income (in lakhs, 1993-94)	1628	2030	2065	2399	1753	2423
Scheduled Population (%)	20.9	16.8	26.6	24.1	25.0	19.4
Women Agricultural Labourers (1991)	42.0	38.0	39.0	22.0	43.0	49.06
Total Female Literacy rate (1991)	24.8	33.6	20.1	32.1	17.8	37.4
Sources:	Census of India 1991; Sheel C.Nuna, Women and Development; National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration; CMIE 1996					

Table: IV
Literacy Rates in Karnataka 1981 & 1991

States	1981			1991*		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
KARNATAKA	48.6	27.8	38.4	56.3	37.4	47.0
Bijapur	45.1	18.4	31.9	57.2	33.6	45.6
Bidar	38.7	14.4	26.8	47.6	24.8	36.5
Gulbarga	36.2	25.1	30.7	41.5	20.1	31.0
Raichur	36.1	13.6	24.9	39.5	17.8	28.8
Mysore	39.7	23.0	31.6	47.3	32.1	39.9

Notes: (i) * Crude Literacy Rate = $\frac{\text{Number of Literates}}{\text{Total Population (inclusive of 0-6 age group)}}$

(ii) Literacy rates exclude children in the age group 0-6 who are treated as illiterates in the 1991 Census.

Source: Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of Karnataka, (1993), Population Centre Bangalore.

COVERAGE AND EXPANSION OF THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME IN KARNATAKA

Districts	Total No. Of Taluks	No. M.S.P in	Total No. Of villages	No. of Villages M.S. in 1997	Rural Female population 1991 in million	M.S Members	% SC to total population of the district (1981)	% ST to total population of the district (1981)
Bidar	5	5	598	240	.49	7000	16.05	4.33
Bijapur	11	6	1244	226	1.0	7258	15.11	4.80
Gulbarga	10	6	1305	171	0.9	6840	21.89	4.69
Mysore	11	6	1641	203	1.0	6000	17.70	6.42
Raichur	9	4	1401	134	0.9	4466	15.12	9.94
Karnataka State	175	77	27,028	973	15.2	30,564	15.07	4.91

Note: M.S.P - Mahila Samakhya Programme
Source: Mahila Samakhya Karnataka, Annual Report 1995-1996, Census of India, Series - 11 1991

Districts	1989	1992-93	1995-96
Bidar	15	20	20
Bijapur	14	19	18
Gulbarga	-	15	15
Mysore	19	19	19
Raichur	-	9	11
Total	63	82	83

Source: Mahila Samakhya Karnataka, Annual Report 1995-96.
Mahila Samakhya, National Overview for 1992-93

Districts	1995-96
Bidar	1200
Bijapur	450
Gulbarga	328
Mysore	n.t.
Raichur	174
Total	2152

Source: M.S.K Annual Report 1995-96.

Expansion

Districts	No. Of villages M.S in 1992-93	No. of villages in 1995-96	Increase in nr of villages reached
Bidar	144	208	+ 64
Bijapur	215	225	+ 10
Gulbarga	120	164	+ 44
Mysore	200	203	+ 3
Raichur	82	114	+ 32
Total	761	914	+ 153

Source: Mahila Samakhya Karnataka. Annual Report 1995-96
Mahila Samakhya National Overview for 1992-93.

Districts	1992-93	1994-95	1995-96	Change 1992/3-1995/6	Registered Sanghas
Bidar	110	188	200	+ 90	n.i.
Bijapur	148	200	200	+ 52	99
Gulbarga	100	130	130	+ 30	105
Mysore	150	173	173	+ 23	2
Raichur	47	66	70	+ 23	30
Total	555	655	773	+ 218	256 (+ Bidar)

Source: MSK Annual Reports
Mahila Samakhya, National overview for 1992-93.

NOTES ON BIDAR DISTRICT

The Mahila Samakhya programme in Bidar began in 1989 in four of the five talukas of the district and in 1992 went on to cover all the five talukas. Bidar is the only district in the state where Mahila Samakhya is operating in all the talukas. The five lakh population of Bidar is distributed over 587 villages. Mahila Samakhya is well established in 144 or 24 per cent of the villages. In 1996-97 there were 7000 Sangha members. Assuming that each member came from one household the coverage could be said to be of a population of 40,000. This is on the assumption that the average household size in the state is around 5.6 members per household. The sanghas vary in the length of their duration.

Most of the work of the Mahila Samakhya in this district is among the scheduled caste and the tribal population. It must also be added in the context of this district that the proportion of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population is much higher than the state average. The population of the scheduled caste stood around 20.71 per cent and of the scheduled tribes 8.30 per cent. Together they form nearly 30 per cent of the district population.[Census of India 1991].

Taluk	Total No. Of Villages	No. of Villages M.S in	Rural Female Population	MS Sangha members
Aurad	149	50	1,03,114	
Bhalki	120	40	96,566	
Bidar	123	21	96,883	
Basavakalyan	113	36	10,0832	
Homnabad	82	39	98,861	
District	587	240	4,96,256	7,000
Sources: Census of India 1991, Series 11 Part 12-B, Karnataka. Mahila Samakhya Karnataka, Annual Report 1995-96.				

District Profile

Bidar is one of the most charming district of Karnataka full of history and legends, and replete with monuments. It is also the base for major social reform movements that shook the very structure of medieval hinduism. The heavy burden of its historical past is still weighing down upon it and shows very slow signs of recovery from centuries of exploitation. Today it presents a picture of neglect and ruin. The dice are loaded very heavily against the women of this district, be it in terms of education, health, work or social practices.

Bidar lies at the farthest north-eastern corner of Karnataka, located some 700 kilometres from Bangalore. Bidar forms the tri-junction of the three principal religions and cultures of the Deccan, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Manjara, a tributary of Godavari is the main river. Bidar is one of the smaller districts in terms of both area and population.

Major Characteristics of the District in Relation to Economic Resources.

It has a predominantly rural character. Agriculture is the mainstay of economic activities and more than 85 per cent of the lands are cultivable. There are no major irrigation projects and at present wells constitute the major source of irrigation. Dry farming, dependent on the vagaries of monsoon is the problem. Even within the district the northern and north-western parts are more backward even in agriculture. There are no large scale industries except for a sugar factory.

The soils are fertile, but it is the variation in rainfall that causes anxiety and distress. The ground water resources are considerable and with its systematic exploitation Bidar would be an agriculturally prosperous district. In the low lands all kinds of grains, sugar cane and especially grapes grow in abundance. Jowar, wheat, gram are the most important food crops. Among non-food crops are sugar cane and oil seeds. Three-fourth of the area is under food crops and one fourth under non-food crops.

Land Holdings

Land holdings are small and 35 per cent of the holdings are smaller than 2 hectares each. These account for only 8.6 per cent of the total cultivated area. Relatively large holding with areas of 5 to 10 hectares account for about 19 per cent of the total. The extent of landlessness in the district would be an useful information to have about the sangha members.

Agricultural Labour

The proportion of women working in agricultural labour is very high in this district. Thirty per cent of the women in the district are in the workforce and of those working seventy six per cent work as agricultural wage workers. Their wages are paid partly in cash and partly in kind. Moreover, variations of bonded labour still exist. Agricultural practices, are labour intensive and agricultural relations continue to be extremely exploitative and feudal. It is work in agriculture that provides a living and sustenance to the vast majority of the population and women's involvement in this activity in all castes is exceptionally high. The wage rates are extremely low, between 5 and 8 Rs. per days work. Though the minimum wages prescribed by the government is much higher, due to the abundance of cheap female labour and lack of alternative employment opportunities, it has not been possible to enforce higher wages. Mahila Samakhya is aware of the situation but is helpless to do anything about it. No strategies or systematic efforts to rectify the situation seem to have been taken so far. This could be an area to work in the future.

In spite of good infrastructure in terms of roads and electricity Bidar is amongst the most industrially backward districts in the state. There are no large scale or medium scale industries of any kind. Animal husbandry is an important economic activity besides agriculture.

As a result of these economic conditions the population growth rate in Bidar has been considerably lower than in the State at 20.83 per cent. This low growth rate may be largely because of heavy out migrations from the district for long periods to other neighbouring states due to the exceptionally low wage rates. All this seems to be changing as more economic activity seems to be slowly coming into Bidar, being at close proximity to Sholapur and Hyderabad.

Social Indicators

The choice of Bidar district by Mahila Samakhya was made on the basis that it had very low literacy rates, especially for women, and also for its general social backwardness. The literacy rate in Bidar is much lower than the state average. This has been so over four decades although compared to the base-line figures for 1951 some progress can be said to have taken place. Table XI shows the progress of rural female literacy in the district.

1951	1.48
1961	4.67
1971	8.69
1981	14.28
1991	24.51
Source: Census of India 1991.	

The literacy rates among the talukas vary still further. The socio-cultural attitudes and the grinding economic conditions make the parents keep the girl child at home. Birth rates continue to be high and family size large. As can be seen from Table XII, birth rates continue to be high, and infant mortality are way above the state average. More than half the girls (53%) get married in their teens.

Districts	Birth Rate Per 1000 Population (1990-91)	Couple protection Rate (1993)	Infant Mortality Rate per 1000 live births	Mean Age at Marriage of Female (1981)	% of Married Females Age 15-19
Bidar	30.1	47.62	105	15.70	53.29
Karnataka (Average)	27.0	50.25	73 (1992)	19.2	36.24
Sources: (i) Estimates of Vital Rates for The Districts of Karnataka 1951-91, Government of Karnataka; Population Centre Bangalore, by P.J.Bhattacharjee (ii) Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of Karnataka, (1993), Population Centre Bangalore.					

Availability of facilities for Education.

According to the 1991 Census figures for the district out of the 598 villages, 96.66 per cent have at least one primary school each within their limits. Within Bidar District there are 20 villages which do not have even a primary school. And as many as 12 primary schools are located in Bidar itself, as the concentration of schools is in the urban areas. Not only do some of the villages have no schools at all, but in those villages which have the school provides primary education only up to Standard four.

Among the nineteen districts of Karnataka, Bidar reports the lowest rate for literacy, particularly among rural women (see also Table II in ANNEX I).

Migration

Given the drought and famine prone conditions in agriculture and the extreme poverty of the peasant population there is large scale migration periodically from the districts. The women's

collectives faces this problem as families migrate in search of work for large part of the year. The work of Mahila Samakhya gets disrupted from time to time as a result of this.

Health Facilities

Medical facilities are inadequate in the talukas. Except for Bidar the other talukas have very few facilities. In 1981 only 10.37 per cent of the inhabited villages had medical facilities. Hopefully in 1991 the situation might have improved. According to the Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of Karnataka 1993¹ Bidar district had in 1993 a total of 262 health care facilities including 10 Community Health Centres, 35 Primary Health Centres and 217 Sub Centres for a total of 587 villages. It would appear that access to good facilities seems to be a problem. A great deal needs to be done in the area of health of women and children. Attention to women's reproductive health is called for.

Going by the low sex ratio itself women's chance of survival as compared to men's seems problematic.

Table: XIII Sex Ratio	
Taluk	No. Of Females per 1000 Males
Basavakalyan	981
Bhalki	971
Bidar	948
Homanbdi	964
Aurod	964
District	966
Source: Census of India, Series-11 Karnataka 1991	

There is a need for reliable village level data on the frequency of death of infants, and women in childbirth. Mahila Samakhya sanghas could play a role the collection and provision of information on such vital issues for the district, as well as information on the Primary Health Care Centres and their functioning in the talukas.

Conclusion

The most important needs of Bidar are related to women's education and better wages for women's work in agriculture, and women's (reproductive) health. And the Mahila Sanghas could play a role in conducting village level surveys in their villages, which provide relevant base-line data in the areas of education, women's health, women's involvement in wage labour and labour migration, bonded labour etc. This would be useful for development of effective strategies and for informing of and building linkages with relevant Departments of the Government with the aim of influencing the implementation of their policies.

¹ Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of Karnataka (1993), Population Centre Bangalore

NOTES ON MAHILA SAMAKHYA IN BIJAPUR

The district of Bijapur is one of the largest district of Karnataka. It accounts for 6.47 per cent of the State's population and covers 9 per cent of its geographical area. Bijapur district is located in the central sector of the northern most portion of Karnataka State. Though historically a city of great importance, it is today considered one of the most backward districts of Karnataka. Historically it is a very interesting district with its monuments exuding medieval charm and grandeur. The district is sparsely populated. The population growth rates are lower than those for the entire State.

Administrative Divisions

Bijapur was one of the first district in which the Mahila Samakhya programme was introduced in 1989. The programme was initiated through the zilla parishads located in the district. The Mahila Samakhya Programme is now operating in six of the talukas. Three of the talukas were taken up when the programme was started in 1989. Subsequently two more talukas were added in 1992 and since then the programme has not tried to expand further into other talukas.

The district contains 1,253 inhabited villages. Being a very large district, the area is very unevenly distributed among its villages and talukas. The three talukas of Indi, Singdi and Bijapur account for almost 40.62 per cent of the total area of the district. Three talukas Bilgi, Bagalkhot and Mudhol which are small and cover less than 1000 sq. Kilometres in area. The distances that need to be covered in a taluka varies a great deal for the Mahila Samakhya Programme workers, making access problematic in many of the large districts with the widely dispersed population.

The three large talukas were chosen for the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Taluk Mudhol is the smallest. Table XIV sets out the broad distribution of the programme in the district. The number of villages in a taluka varies between 65 to 160.

Taluka	Total No. of villages in the district	No. of villages M.S. is in	Total Female Population of the taluk	Area in Sq.kms	Mahila Sangha members
Bijapur	107	55	1,35,300	2,659 Sq. km	
Bagewadi	119	33	1,15,210		
Indi	122	32	1,34,319	2,225 Sq.km	
Muddebihal	149	42	88,435		
Mudhol	77	30	80,681	950 Sq.km	
Singdi	142	33	1,29,020	2,176 Sq.km	
District (11)	1,253	225	1,101,684	17,069 Sq.Km.	7,258

Average Taluk Population 266,181.: No. of Households 4.8 lakhs.
Source: Census of India 1991, District Census Handbook, Bijapur

Scheduled Castes

The district has a high concentration of the scheduled population. Scheduled castes constitute 17.39 per cent of the districts population and their proportion in the rural areas is 18.81 per cent. In many of the predominantly agriculture villages their proportion is more than 20 per cent. The presence of the scheduled tribes is negligible around 1.35 per cent. Their proportion is lower than the State average of 4.26 per cent. In seventy per cent of the villages they form less than five per cent of the population. In four villages they constitute more than fifty per cent of the population. The Mahila Samakhya programme concentrates on the scheduled caste population to a large measure.

Some Basic Social Indicators

The choice of the Bijapur district was made on the basis that its social indicators particularly those concerning women were very low. Table XV presents some of these indicators in comparison with the figures for the state.

Index	Bijapur	Karnataka
C.B.R (1991)	30.1	27.0
C.D.R (1991)	10.0	8.6
Sex Ratio (1991)	963	960
I.M.R	121	73
Mean Age at Marriage (1981)	16.7	19.2
Proportion of girls married 15-19 yrs. (1981)	62.06	36.24
C.P.R (1993)	45.87	50.25
Per capita Income (in lakhs, 1993-94)	2030	2423
Scheduled Population (%)	16.8	19.4
Women Agricultural Laborers % among main workers (1991)	69.47	49.69
Total Female Literacy (1991)	33.6	37.4
Source:	Census of India 1991; Sheel C.Nuna, Women and Development; National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration; CMIE 1996	

An important indicator that help us understand the status of women is the sex ratio. This gives us an idea of the broad survival chances women have in an area. The sex ratio in the state is low but rates in Bijapur district and the taluks are still lower and have been deteriorating between census periods, giving a cause for great concern.

As can be seen from the Table XVI the sex ratio for the rural population of the district expressed as the number of females per 1000 males, is lower than the State average of 973. Three talukas covered by Mahila Samakhya show a lower ratio than the district average of 968 females per

1000 males. Moreover, between 1981 and 1991, the sex ratio seems to have worsened for women in the district from 982 to 968. This gives us an indication of the deteriorating health condition of women in the district, at situation that will need the attention of the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

Table :XVI Sex ratio for Rural Population 1991		
Taluku covered by Mahila Samakhya	Sex Ratio	Proportion of Rural population served by medical amenities.
Bagewadi	969	66.44
Bijapur	936	47.75
Indi	935	43.50
Muddebihal	996	30.92
Mudhol	975	50.47
Sindgi	951	19.53
District Rural	968	40.81
Karnataka State (R)	973	

Source: District Census Handbook, Bijapur 1991.

Economic Characteristics

Bijapur is essentially an agricultural district with its population dependent on agricultural wage labour. Women in this district are active in the labour force. The work participation rates for women of all castes are high.

Table: XVII Work Participation (1981)						
District	% Female Main Workers in Female Population	% Female Marginal Workers in Female Population	% Females Workers (Main + Marginal) in Female Population (Rural)	% Female Cultivators in Female Main Workers (Rural)	% Female Agricultural Labourers in Female Main Workers (Rural)	% Non-Scheduled Female Agricultural Labourers in Non-Scheduled Female Main Workers (Rural)
Bijapur	19.96	8.57	33.00	18.17	73.66	70.98

Source: Sheel C.Nuns, Women and Development; National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration. (1990)

Virtually half of the women workers are dependent on agricultural wage labour (45.87) according

to the 1991 Census figures, land is by far the most important economic resource of Bijapur. The rainfall and climatic conditions are quite unfavourable. Lands utilised for agricultural and horticultural purposes constitute about 69 per cent. These lands until recently have been rainfed and totally dependent on the monsoon and the District has been known for the frequent occurrence of famines and scarcity conditions. Wells constitute the main source of irrigation and feed about 65.49 per cent of the total irrigated area. There are large number of pumpsets in the districts. Production of food crops such as jowar, bajra, wheat and dals are of great importance. Among cash crops cotton, groundnuts and safflower are important. In spite of many agricultural programmes launched to increase productivity, there has been a decline in the net area sown over the years.

Land Holdings

Since the productivity of the land has been low and cultivation carried out under dry, that is -un-irrigated conditions, the land holdings have all along displayed a tendency to be larger than elsewhere in the state. Besides dry farming, handloom weaving and rearing of livestock forms a subsidiary occupation.

Literacy

The district lags behind in the field of literacy in general and rural female literacy in particular. The rural areas lag behind in educational facilities. Children are required to work. This combined with lack of awareness of the benefits of education and non-availability of educational facilities have kept literacy rates low. Over the decades, since Indian independence the rates have improved, but large disparity between male and female literacy rates continues. Though primary education has been made compulsory by the state, female literacy stands around half of the male rates. According to the government reports 96 per cent of the villages have schools. There are 1730 primary schools in the district.

Table: XVIII Rural Literacy - Bijapur 1951-91		
Year	Female literacy rate	Male literacy rate
1951	5.86	28.63
1981	18.46	45.22
1991	35.29	66.09

Source: Census of India, District Census Handbook, Bijapur 1991.

Mahila Samakhya Literacy Intervention

The literacy rate among the scheduled caste women in extremely low (see ANNEX I, Table IV). These are the women with whom the Mahila Samakhya works in Bijapur. The Mahila Samakhya Programme's initial effort to take literacy to these women was through active participation in the Literacy Campaign in 1991. Mahila Samakhya has made a very substantial contribution when the campaign was on.

Table XIX on the following page gives an overview of the various efforts of Mahila Samakhya Bijapur in the field of education as literacy.

Table: XIX
MS Literacy Efforts - Bijapur (1996)

Index	No. of Centres	No. of Children
Non-Formal Education Centres	74	1,993
No. of Adult Education Centres	33	342
No. of Creches	12	330
Mahila Shikshana Kendras	2	50

Source: Bijapur MS Annual Report 1995-96.

NOTES ON RAICHUR DISTRICT

Raichur District is situated in the north-eastern sector of the state of Karnataka is a vast stretch of a plane. The epic Ramayana, narrates the events and episodes that took place in this tract of land during those legendary days. It was here that Lord Rama met Hanuman. These legendary references apart, the district has been the abode of man since early time. The mythological and historical importance of this district gives it an ambience of its own.

Until recent years Raichur ranked amongst the most backward districts of the state. Raichur in the past suffered frequently from droughts and famines. In the last few years it has been transformed into a flourishing tract. This has been possible mainly on account of the Tungbhabhadra Reservoir project which provided hydro electric power as well as water for the irrigation for the vast tracts of land. The two important rivers the Krishna and the Tungbhabhadra have been associated with the religious and cultural life of the people. With the harnessing of these two rivers, the landscape has undergone change due to the construction of the left bank canal. The South Eastern Belt of the district now has been turned into a wet farming zone. An idea regarding the tremendous increase in the area under irrigation may be had from the fact that in a matter of a decade between 1957-58 and 1966-67, the irrigated area rose from 14.5 thousands to 198,068 hectares.

The basic economy rests on agricultural land. Assured irrigation facility has given a boost to the agricultural sector. Nearly 85 per cent of the land is brought under cultivation. The district, known for the production of cotton, groundnuts, sunflower seeds and jowar. It ranks foremost among the cotton growing districts of the state. There are many cotton ginning and pressing factories.

The district has witnessed a substantially high population growth rate and within the districts different tracts have experienced growth at different rates. The areas which have been transformed on account of assured irrigation, have gained considerably in population while those in dry farming show low growth rates. The average population of an inhabited village of the district works out to 1028. The average population varies between 747 in Devadurga to 1369 in Sindhnur Taluka. The total number of households in the district in 1991 400,000. [Census, 1991].

The Mahila Samakhya programme in Raichur began in 1992 and has been in existence the last four years. In this period has spread into four of the nine talukas and in 114 of 1401 inhabited villages. These are the talukas of Yelburga, Devadurga, Kustagi and Raichur.

The coverage can be said to be in 50 per cent of the taluk and 10 per cent of the villages. Choice of Raichur was made on the relative backwardness of the district and the proximity to the three districts where the programme existed already.

Talukas	Total No of Villages	No. of M.S. villages	Sangha members	Rural Female Population	% irrigated to cultivable land	No. of beds in medical institutions
Devadurga	173	23	350	65,120	1.63	2.01
Kushtagi	163	23	480	62,883	1.00	1.53
Raichur	152	20	400	73,654	6.82	1.49
Yelbarga	138	50	1,230	73,771	1.63	5.30
District Total (9)	1,401	113	2,460	7,18,928	10.07	1.21

Source: Census of India 1981 Series 9, Karnataka.

Education

The rural female literacy rates in the district and in the talukas are very low. The rates among the scheduled population are even lower (see ANNEX I, Table III). The literacy initiatives under the Mahila Samakhya Programme are presented below.

Taluka	NFE Centres	No. of Children	Creches	No. of Children	A.E	M.S.K
Yelbarga	36		5	105	-	-
Kushtagi	7		2	65	-	-
Raichur	1		-	-	-	1
Devadurga	2		4	50	-	-
Total	46	1,230	11	222	-	1

Source: MS Annual Report 1995-96

Health

Health and Education are two areas of great urgency in Raichur District. As can be seen from the table presented the district shows very high birth rates and infant mortality rates. The couple protection rate is also considerably lower than the state average. The District has almost 60 per cent of girls married in their teens. The DIU's focus could be directed more on women's health issues. A District social and economic profile would help the DIU to focus its attention on the relevant needs.

Table: XXI
Reproductive Health

	C.B.R. 1991	I.M.R. 1981	C.P.R. (31-3-1993)	Mean age at marriage (1981)F	DPT3 Coverage 1988
Karnataka	27.0	77 - 81	50.2	19.2	NA
Raichur	30.3	116 -67	37.1	17.0	70

Note: C.B.R. - Crude Birth Rate ;
I.M.R - Infant Mortality Rate;
C.P.R - Couple Protection Rate;
NA - Not Available

Sources:

Estimates of Vital Rates for The Districts of Karnataka 1951-91, Government of Karnataka; Population Centre Bangalore, by P.J.Bhattacharjee: CMIE -1996:
Annual Report Health and Family Welfare 1993-94 Government of Karnataka (CPR).
Sheel Nuna, Women and Development (1990) (IMR 1981)

Itinerary

- January 4** **Arrival in Bangalore**
- Meeting at the State Programme Office with
- . State Programme Director, Dr Revathi Narayanan,
 - . District Programme Co-ordinator Mysore, Dr C.P.Parimala,
 - . Resource Person on traditional Healthcare C.M. Gangamma
 - . Junior Resource Person, Ms B.S.Vani
- Meeting with the Secretary Department of Education, Chairperson of the Mahila Samakhya Society, Mr S.V.Ranganath
- Meeting at the SPO with
- . Financial Advisor, Sri A.R.Achyuta Rao and
 - . Accountant, Ms H.R.Sreelatha
- Dinner with friends of Mahila Samakhya
- . Ms Shoba Nambisan (member Executive Committee)
 - . Ms Shoba Raghuram (member General Council and Deputy Representative HIVOS)
- and State Office staff
- Departure for Raichur
- January 5** **Arrival in Raichur**
- Meeting at the District Resource Unit with the District Programme Co-ordinator Raichur, Ms Sowbhagya, ex District Programme Co-ordinator Raichur, Dr C.P. Parimala (junior) resource persons and office staff
- Visit to Mahila Shiksan Kendra, meeting with students and teachers
- January 6** **Sahayaki meeting at Kadarahalli, Raichur District**
meeting with sahayakis, sahayoginis and sangha women
- Inauguration of a Sangha Mane
meeting with women from the Mahila Sangha
- Travel to Bijapur District
- January 7** **Children's Chinnara Mela at Bagalkot (Agricultural Training Institute), meetings with - resource persons**
- children from NFE centres and MSK
 - NFE teachers
 - sahayoginis
- Inter-taluk meeting of Sahayakis from entire District Bijapur at Bagewadi

January 8 Meeting at District Implementation Unit Bijapur with District Programme Officer, Ms Nirmala Shiraguppy, Resource Persons and Office staff

Meeting with Sahayoginis at DIU

Meeting with resource persons from Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi (NGO Resource Organisation on innovative pedagogy for literacy and non- formal education in support of the Literacy Movement)

Visit to Mahila Shiksan Kendra, meetings with
- children
- teaching staff

Travel to Bidar

January 9 Meeting at District Implementation Unit Bidar District with District Programme Co-ordinator Bidar District, Ms Usha Rani, and District Programme Co-ordinator Gulbarga District, Ms Nirmala

Sangha Meeting at Bagdal in Bidar Taluk (Iambani)
meeting with sangha women, sahayakis, sahayogini and some village officials (Panchayat President)

Departure for Hyderabad and on to Gujarat.