THE NATIONAL RESOURCE GROUP

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THE NATIONAL RESOURCE GROUP

THE BACKGROUND

The MS programme developed out of the commitment to women's education made in the National Policy on Education [1986]. The formulation and conceptualisation process of MS provides a significant insight into the efforts made to design a programme which is flexible and open, and providing an opportunity for experiences/people from divergent backgrounds to bring in their expertise into the programme. The responsibility of formulating the MS project was given to two consultants from outside government who were deeply associated with women's issues /movements and with experience in the voluntary sector. The two consultants interacted with a wide range of programmes, people, activists and development workers, and then designed the MS project.

A major concern was to ensure that the programme continually innovates and responds and changes to the varied needs of the rural women it seeks to work with. To achieve this, at the formulation phase itself it was envisaged that the involvement of experts, activists and representatives from the Non-governmental sector in the programme would be a crucial and needed input to ensure that the programme does not get bureaucratised or become just another routine government programme. New ideas and experiences, debate and discussion were seen as imperative to retain the spirit of the programme.

It is this understanding that informed the creation of the National Resource Group, which is yet another example of the partnership that has been forged between government, activists and the non-governmental sector.

MEMBERSHIP

Members are nominated to the NRG by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. Every two years the NRG is reconstituted.

To ensure a national representation, members from various parts of the country are nominated thereby bringing in viewpoints and experiences from different regional and social contexts. Women who have achieved eminence in the fields of education, health, rural development, journalism, research on gender issues, activism, training have been and are members of the NRG. In addition there are also members from the government departments like education and women & child development. All State Programme Directors are also members. State Education Secretaries, who are Chairpersons of State MS Societies also participate in the NRG deliberations as special invitees.

This mixed membership enables a free and frank exchange of ideas and debate between the government, the non-governmental sector and the implementors of the programme.

DEFINING THE ROLE OF THE NRG

Unlike the Executive Committees and General Councils which oversee the running of the MS programme in a given state , the National Resource Group plays an advisory role. It is not directly concerned with the nitty gritty details of programme implementation . Its focus is to look at larger programme processes, interventions, directions and trends

As a body, the NRG itself undertook a reexamination of its role in August of 1991 Members expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the lack of clarity on the purpose of having an NRG. The August 1991 meeting of the NRG focused primly on the role of the NRG At this meeting the representatives of the State MS Societies gave their expectations of the NRG as follows.

a providing a policy perspective to all MS units and reviewing and revising the same from time to time

b protecting the non-negotiables of the programme and intervening whenever decisions seem to go counter these

c. providing the state level functionaries exposure to new ideas and knowledge

d. facilitating conceptualisation, analysis and evolving strategies

f. helping to build the long term vision of the programme

The consensus at this meeting was that the NRG be a group of eminent persons/women who though not involved on a daily basis with the implementation of the programme are committed to its philosophy and objectives and can protect the programme's space.

It would be a forum where programme functionaries can gain greater conceptual clarity and insights. It would also be a body that can liase and interact with government to advise and ensure more gender just policies and interventions at the national level

Out of these reflections and discussions, a clearer statement on the role of the NRG was made as follows:

1. ***to advise and guide GOI in policy matters concerning women's education ;and the future role of MS strategy in larger educational interventions.***
2. ***to safeguard the non-negotiables of MS and ensure they are treated as such at all levels.***
3. ***to plan the future expansion of the programme and contain it to an optimum size.***

4. ***to discuss and debate issues, concerns and concepts that arise from the field and evolve strategies.***

5. ***to participate in internal evaluations/reviews in order to be in tune with the emerging needs of the programme.***

6. ***to draw upon the experience and knowledge of similar interventions by different groups/individuals in the field of research and action.***

7. ***to devise mechanisms to safeguard the national character of the programme as members of the State ECs.***

[Source: Minutes of the NRG meeting held at Bangalore, August 28-29,1991]

FUNCTIONING OF THE NATIONAL RESOURCE GROUP

As the programme has grown in spatial terms and its strategies and processes have been validated and consolidated in different regions of the country over the past seven years , the demands on the National Resource Group have also expanded and in the proces.. its role has been more sharply delineated .

The involvement and inputs of the NRG have centered around the following:

1 Involvement as individual members in the operational aspects of the programme at the state level.

2. contributing significantly to the conceptual understanding and analysis of various issues that have emerged in the field; the demands being made on the programme and its implications

Operational involvement

It is at the periodic meetings of the NRG that the members gain an insight to the overall development of the MS processes as presented by the State Programme Directors and the thematic areas which come up for dissuasion. In addition ,to ensure a more direct involvement of the NRG, individual members are nominated on a rotation basis to various Executive Committees and General Councils of the State MS implementation Societies . The participation in the Executive Committee has enabled more direct inputs to the State programmes on a more regular basis, since State ECs meet every quarter. Further, the NRG is also represented on crucial State level committees like the Appointments Committees which recruits core personnel at the State and District Unit levels; in the Grants-in-aid Committee which gives financial assistance to NGOs to implement programmes which are in consonance with MS objectives

Over the past few years NRG members of State ECs have given enormous time and played an active role in resolving organisational problems that at times have

cropped in States like Karnatak.. ; have participated in internal evaluation and assessment exercises undertaken in states like UP; helped in formulating and consolidating training strategies in Gujarat, helped the states with their training programmes either by direct participation or providing the linkages with other organisations/trainers

A crucial support and help provided by the NRG members directly to the State Societies has been in the area of training / resource networking and sharpening the conceptual clarity of programme staff on specific programme interventions.

An NRG member, who was for awhile a Consultant at the National Office, has worked closely with the Gujarat team and helped them to concretize their training strategies at all levels and establish contact with a wide range of institutions and individuals who can assist in meeting the increasing training demands from the field During 1994 NRG members were actively involved in organising several thematic workshops for MS programme functionaries to collectively examine and explore some common progamme issues like literacy, health and documentation. The focus of these interactions was to strengthen the conceptual understanding of the teams and to evolve a strategy to effectively implement these components.

A more recent involvement in 1996 of two NRG members has been to undertake a participative research project to look at the role of the collective in MS A series of workshops at the district, state and national levels were held by the NRG members at all stages of the study, to finalise the research design, to facilitate district and state level reflection and analysis of sangha formation processes and to finally at the national level to evolve a consensus on a report format.

That the NRG is uniquely placed to safeguard the non-negotiables of the programme was underscored in the context of the MS UP programme when considering MS participation in the World Bank assisted UP Basic Education Project. This issue was extensively debated in the NRG and its implications for MS were discussed threadbare. It was decided to constitute a Sub-committee of the NRG to discuss and work out with the World bank the terms and conditions for the MS programme under the UP Basic Education project. The Sub-group was able to negotiate a favourable package for MS in UP by insisting on the autonomy of the programme; a gradual process oriented expansion strategy and most importantly retaining the monitoring and evaluation of MS within the evaluation process of the larger national level MS programme. The boundaries set by the NRG in this instance, have helped guide and define the programme's expansion in Madhya Pradesh and Assam where funds are provided the DPEP programme.

DEBATE, ANALYSIS AND INPUTS ON CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

The NRG has been a sensitive and energetic forum, willing to engage with the myriad issues and questions that have cropped up during the course of the implementation of the programme. Since its membership has been drawn from a far flung net, the quality of debate, discussion , analysis have been of a high order. The issues have ranged from organisational concerns of decentralised management, building resource

centres, to questions of convergence with other programmes, the centrality of education for children and adult literacy, mapping the future contours of MS and evolving parameters to assess the qualitative nature of change implicit in MS among many others. The NRG has been conscious that these endeavours address not only the immediate needs of the MS programme but are also of relevance to other programmes and policies for women in general.

It must be pointed out that all these issues have been addressed through position papers or notes written by individual NRG members or subcommittees constituted by the NRG over a period of time.

The following is a quick review of the issues addressed by the NRG. (the full text of the position papers/notes have been appended as annexures.

= One of the central issues continually discussed in the NRG has been the extent to which the educational concerns of children and girls and adult literacy is being addressed in the project areas. In its original formulation, the MS document had indicated that one of the principal purposes of collective formation would be to positively impact mainstream educational structures, definitely create educational opportunities either in the formal or non-formal stream for girls and in the process promote women's literacy.

The first Indo-Dutch Evaluation of 1989 had drawn attention to this aspect and commented that this had not been sufficiently addressed. In July of 1990, the NRG discussed the centrality of the educational component in the programme. The discussion centred around the question of whether in the mobilisation and organisation process with its focus on continual learning, specific educational interventions either by the organisation or by the sanghas would evolve later. The concern expressed by several members was that MS be not pressurized into a definite commitment on this issue. The reports from the states endorsed this view that as the sangha coalesces and becomes strong, the issue of literacy and girl's education become its central concern

This theme was picked up for further exploration in January of 1993, when the NRG discussed the paper on the role of MS in the promotion of Women's literacy and enrolment and retention of girls By this time at the field level in several states MS units/sanghas were active participants in the literacy campaigns of their states .At this meeting it was decided that there was indeed a direct demand for literacy by women, and MS must respond and build on the empowering potential embedded in learning to read and write.

By 1995, educational interventions at the village level involving closer interaction with the formal structure, innovations and community based alternatives for early child care education, non-formal education for out of school children especially girls Mahila Shikshana Kendras for adolescent girls and young women and literacy for adult women were all core activities in all the MS programmes.

.At this juncture several different issues cropped up, the question of MS participating /converging or not with larger educational programmes like District

Primary Education Programmes came up. In August of 1995 an NRG subcommittee prepared a note specifically on the educational impact of MS and partnerships with other educational programmes. This was further discussed at an NRG workshop in April 1996. The discussion focussed on how MS is well placed to develop a pedagogy of empowerment, and help in integrating life skills, self esteem and self confidence exercises could be integrated into the larger educational system. There was consensus that MS must integrate more consciously primary education concerns especially of girls into its processes. There was also consensus on the need to link with other educational efforts while safeguarding the spirit of the MS programme processes, this is an area that needs special attention in the light of the incorporation of the MS component in several Basic Education programmes.

= One of the major concerns in MS has been to operationalise the programme concepts of learning and empowerment within the organisation, facilitate the capacity building of its staff as well to create a working ethos and environment which is democratic and participative. This would go hand in hand with decentralising programme planning and decision making to the district and eventually to the block levels. It was also envisioned that there would be a situation in which all this would devolve completely to the sangha level. The concern in MS and of the NRG has been to be constantly alert to this issue and to work towards the creation of systems and a work culture which enshrine the ethos and spirit of the programme.

In October of 1992 a paper on Alternate Management Structures was prepared to look precisely into these issues. There was general recognition that there are no readily available alternative models that could be adopted. Nor were there any concrete examples of alternative exercises of power which would facilitate decentralisation and participation as envisaged in MS. There were other contradictions within the programme to contend with like the hierarchical management structure of the organisation. The development of an alternative participative management system presumes that the choice of personnel at key levels of the state and district is done carefully. Further, to translate these ideas into every day practice, it is imperative that the Programme Director be committed to the principle of decentralistion and institute participative decisionmaking processes which involve personnel at different levels of the programme. In discussing these issues the NRG concluded that each state will have to evolve its own systems which take into account the State specific context and that a balance needs to be maintained between democratic, open systems and prudent rules and regulations for administrative and financial monitoring.

The discussion on management issues was carried into 1993 when the need to decentralize the management structure to the block level was raised by several States and endorsed by several NRG members. In its March 1994 meeting, the NRG devoted considerable time to discuss a wide range of management issues- the setting up of block level units, the paid village level worker vs a situation where there are no paid workers, decentralising to the sangha level. Out of these deliberations emerged the decision to study various aspects and processes of the programme which relate to the issues before any definitive conclusive statement could be made. One of the outcomes of this NRG initiative as the preparation of a case

study document for the International Conference on Women's Education and Empowerment held in March of 1995.

= What is the responses/responsibility of the State towards its programme functionaries who are working as change agents in government sponsored programmes like WDP and MS? This critical issue was raised in the NRG in its meeting of January, 1993. This was discussed in the context of the Bateri incident, when Bhawari Devi, a sathin in the WDP programme was gang raped for trying to prevent a child marriage in her village. Several suggestions were made- apart from mobilising women's organisations, formal support from government must be extended immediately; creating a support group at the village level; MS could play an advocacy role and undertake gender sensitisation workshops for the police and members of the judiciary. Finally the NRG passed a resolution that in the event that an MS worker at any level if assaulted, intimidated or abused during the course of carrying out her responsibilities, the MS programme will extend full assistance and support be it " physical, emotional, legal or financial." This resolution was sent to the State Societies for implementation

= Assessing and evaluating a process oriented programme like MS which has no set targets or predetermined agenda is a difficult task. Conventional evaluation parameters cannot be applied. One of the most significant inputs of the NRG has been in continually developing evaluation parameters for MS. Prior to the National Evaluation of 1992, an NRG subcommittee along with representatives from the State programmes developed an evaluation matrix which incorporated parameters and indicators which had been worked out in some states . This then became the basis for the National evaluation.

One of the critical comments made in the National Evaluation was on the uneven focus on sangha processes and learnings in the various states. The NRG took the initiative to organise a brainstorming with State representatives to look at this issue and evolved a broad common framework within which sanghas could be assessed.

During 1995-96 this effort was taken further by an NRG sub-sommittee which developed the evaluation parameters and indicators for the Indo-Dutch evaluation . Building on the earlier evaluation matrix and the criteria for assessing various i. terventtons developed and being used by the State programmes, an evaluation matrix with common parameters applying across the board from village collectives, the district implementation units to the state level was evolved and finalised at a meeting of the NRG in April of 1996.

=During this same period, yet another NRG subcommittee looked at programme processes and their implications for the future as well as the financial and administrative changes that are required This became particularly imperative in the light of the fact that the MS programme was soon to enter into a new Plan phase Several different issues need addressing-- concretizing strategies to enable sanghas to function independently of MS this in turn setting in motion the withdrawal of MS from certain areas .A first step in this direction would be to operationalise and devolve management responsibilities to the block/cluster level unit. For the

programme to sustain its spirit, a sense of a movement has to be built in through diversification and organic expansion

The financial implications of some of the above processes like the block level unit which was also programme need were worked out. The NRG was unanimous in the view that each state unit set up a Resource Centre to meet the needs of the programme as well as the demands made from outside. This Resource Centre would be involved in action research, policy research, training, and collate information/material on various themes and prepare directories of organisations/training institutions/trainers etc. One of the principal aims would be to provide opportunities for in-house research and reflection.

= The political impact of the MS programme was highlighted in the paper written by an NRG member on the MS experience in the panchayat elections in Karnataka. This was discussed at the NRG meeting of February, 1996.

At this same meeting another critical issue of convergence was discussed. The issue of MS convergence with other programmes has been focus of much debate and discussion over the years in the NRG. The MS experience has shown that operationally at the village level functional convergence of resources/services/ ideas and efforts has taken place. This has not, however, been the result of planned strategy. It was generally agreed that convergences that evolve at the field level are more effective than if directed from above. Given the status of the programme in the older blocks, the questions of convergence at a more formal level need to be further analysed.

ANNEXEURES

1995

DRAFT

DISCUSSION PAPER

FOR

M.S. Form on education and impact on larger educational structures and processes; implications of partnerships with DPEP and other programmes

It it can be agreed that one of the most important aims?/ lessons? of M.S is to create a more humane world, then, the sharing, (incorporating) of this experience with other education systems is a must.

We need to more deliberately pursue this aim in M.S education efforts so that methodologies and modalities can be consciously systematized for facilitated sharing.

I. What is the thread between other aspects of M.S. and their NFE centres, MSKs. etc? What is different about M.S Education? What do we want of M.S education?

M.S. 'empowers' women:

- Become aware of themselves (I exist) and of their physical and especially social environments -develop an attitude of "we can do something to bring about a change for the better."
- Make decisions.
- They develop/fine-tune their abilities of getting on with other people.
- Learn to function in a team/group and to draw individual strength from this process.
- Their self-esteem/respect increases etc.

What of all this has got translated into the NYE, MSK situations?

- Self-confidence.
  Articulation.
- Spontaniety
- Creativity.

The general philosophy/essence of M.S has become internalized enough, so that it is an almost non-conscious transfer

Can we systematize the transfer of process?

The transfer of process has taken place (can take place) at 2 levels.

1. **M.S. Women interact with the community:**
   via their families, as members of the sangha, in dealing with issues, in facing authority - in short, the process is continually in operation in one forum or another.

2. **Literacy-related education** has consciously been imbued with actively **creative inputs** and with the spirit of 'humane-ness' which is central to M.S.

The very definition of process precludes immediate/ instant made-to-order outcomes. And this applies to both areas of process operation as detailed above.

Whereas interaction with the community at its different levels is a very complex matter and needs space and time to understand the many input variables and to make outcomes visible, perhaps literacy-related inputs are more easily visualized eg. to have a Village Education Committee (VEC) which is truly effective, is dependant on the general facilitating environment prevailing in the community; to introduce creative ways of teaching is a relatively easier task. However, to introduce confidence and self-esteem building components into the curriculum is again, not easy, but still concretely visualizable in the limited setting of the class-room.

The concept of MLL and its focus on competencies, is in fashionable circulation - whatever be its place in the world of classroom realities, it is certainly up front in the educational jargon of the day. There are certain facets of the MLL concept which are relevant in the context of M.S.

For instance, can we adapt the rather useful concept of competencies to fit the M.S. situation and come up with/ build on, a listing somewhat like this?

COMPETENCIES RE:

Literacy-related Skills	**Life/Social Skills**
- Speaking	Trust/Faith in oneself and others
- Listening	Treating others equally/with respect (not just elders)
- Reading	Sensitivity to others'points of view; empathy; getting on with others.
- Writing	Co-operativeness.
- Questioning	Controlling one's anger/temper.
- Curiosity	Awareness re: self and environment (physical and social) and the inter-relationships resulting therefrom
- Reflection	Decision-making.
- And?	**And?**

If we think upon it, the proper realization of competencies be they literacy or life-related, is only possible if grounded in (an increase in) self-confidence and self-esteem.

To speak freely, to question without fear, to trust in oneself have faith in others, to be empathetic, etc. all call for a level of self-awareness, confidence and esteem which not many people have.

Moreover, the acquiring of these life skills, not only facilitates the acquisition of literacy skills, but also enhances the quality of skills acquired.

And yet, we not only leave the development of these essential qualities to the vagaries of chance but often in the real world (which includes the formal education system), do everything to corrode what confidence and esteem others may possess.

II. The present education system

So much has been written about the education system that there is little need to labour further on the subject. Enough to re-emphasize (specially in the M.S context) that **the formal system weights congnitive learning against all else.**

We need to "market" life/social skills and draw active attention to the practicalities of promoting right competencies and the underlying factors which make them so.

III. What has happened in M.S. so far?

Creativity, fun and games, spontaniety - all that makes education interesting - are common ingredients of M.S teaching-learning efforts.

We have felt the lack of a systematic pedagogy and of disciplined teaching.

There are organizations and projects like Eklavya, Indian Institute of Education (Project Propel), the Rishi Valley School, etc - from whom we can learn the more pedagogical aspects of the teaching-learning process.

How? What are the modalities of networking with these and other organizations?

We perhaps need to publicize our positive experiences with the camp method, jathas, melas, the M.S Ks, newsletters, teaching-learning materials, libraries, etc.

Let us systematize our plus points and propagate them within and outside M.S. Again, how? In practical terms?

And, what are the ingredients of a syllabus and curriculum for women.

An interesting experiment has been tried out by Banda M.S. team working in tandem with Niranther. The experiment raises a lot of interesting discussion points.

Can we ask them to make a presentation? To NRG.

IV. Evaluation

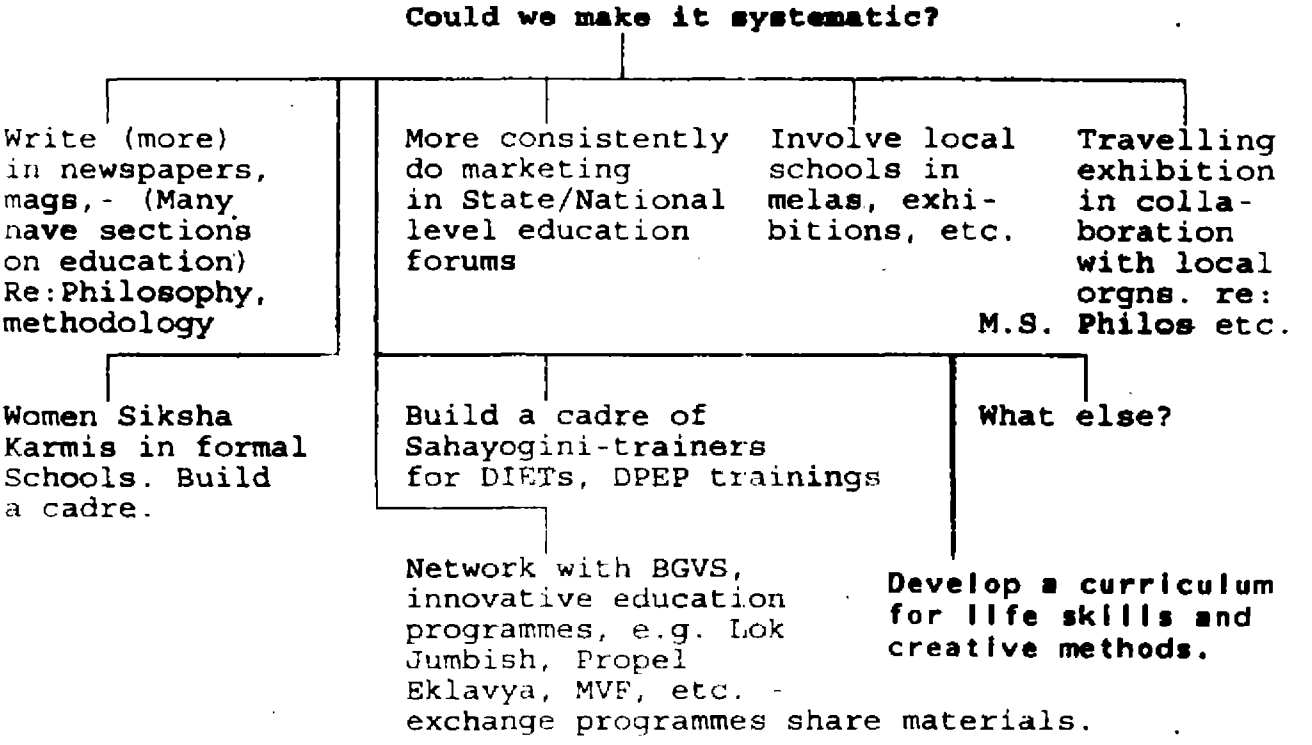
1. Can we devise methods for evaluating the teaching and not just the learning?

eg. Can we evaluate M.S teaching methods, including - materials, by the yardstick of - do they support/ increase self-confidence and esteem; to what extent are we promoting life skills. How can we make our methodologies more efficient etc.

2. Can we adapt anything from the thinking that has gone into M.S evaluations, to suit the evaluating of our educational efforts, e.g. the listing of indicators for evaluating the qualitative?

V. Impact on the mainstream. Possible articulation with/inputs into, DPEP, other programmes.

Again unplanned.



In interacting with DPEP and other education programmes, perhaps a beginning should be made at the classroom level -how can we include life skills and creative methods in the curriculum so as to enhance the quality of education?

Action at the community level, to create awareness of and motivation for education can be operationally effective only in the long run. In other words, community action cannot be counted on as one of the immediate variables to providing quality education.

ITEM NO.4 : Discussion Paper for Women's Literacy and role of Mahila Samakhya.

Background:

There are by and large two approaches to women's literacy. The traditional approach is functional in the sense that women are made literate so as to increase their efficiency. Literacy is presumed to make them efficient - make them better housewives and better mothers. Economic activities that generally accompany such literacy programmes centre around such stereotypical activities as tailoring, embroidary, pickle and papad-making etc.

This traditional approach to literacy is now criticized by women's groups. For according to them, literacy must 'empower' women, not 'domesticate' them. According to this approach, literacy is not just a mechanical skill of reading and writing but a means whereby women can exercise more control over themselves, their bodies, and decisions that affect their lives in home, the community and society at large. Literacy then takes on a larger meaning and is basically a tool whereby women's access to information, knowledge, and thereby to power, is made possible.

The concept of 'education for women's empowerment'--has been the guiding principle of Mahila Samakhya. That being so, efforts to introduce literacy for women will have to ensure that the 'empowering' role of literacy is constantly emphasised. In other words, the existing process of Mahila Samakhya, of women coming together on issues that affect their lives, of the process of critical analysis and reflection leading to collective action, must continue. Any effort to introduce literacy must dovetail with the on-going processess and activities in order to strengthen the process of empowerment.

Furthermore, it would have to be recognised that literacy is central to all efforts of Mahila Samakhya and linked to all the issues and activities that are taken up by the programme.

2. Experience of Mahila Samakhya in Literacy (Gujarat Experience):

The need for literacy was articulated by women in all the three districts of Mahila Samakhya in Gujarat. As a response to the need, some experimentation was undertaken by Mahila Samakhya functionaries in each of the three districts. In Khedbrahma and Bhiloda taluks of Sabarkantha, village women said they did not want to be educated the way their children were, and that materials should be developed in their own dialect. In response to this demand, literacy materials were developed with the participation of women, along with technical expertise provided by a linguist. This process ensured that the content of the materials addressed gender issues, with sufficient attention being paid to the local dialect. The Bhiloda experience proved to be very effective for it also succeeded in mobilising student volunteers. As a result, 200 village women participated in the literacy programme. Subsequently, in order to strengthen the literacy skills acquired by women, literacy camps were held. In Rajkot and Baroda districts, village woemn showed interest in attending such literacy camps. As a result, successful 5-7 day camps have been held in the Mahila Samakhya villages. The advantage of these camps is that because learning takes place in a group, the pace of learning becomes faster. Also, the motivation levels are very high. Clearly, the camp approach to literacy becoming an interesting model that needs to be replicated in certain situations.

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3. Strengthening the Literacy Activities in Mahila Samakhya

Presently Total Literacy Campaigns (TLCs) have been initiated in a number of districts in the country. The advantages of TLCs are:

i) a positive environment for literacy is created;

ii) due to the creation of positive environment, social sanction for women's literacy is obtained;

iii) since the approach is extensive, large numbers of people are made literate within a short period of time;

iv) since people are mobilised on a large scale, there is a possibility of TLC becoming a people's movement.

It is now anticipated that most of the MS districts will initiate TLCs sooner or later. Given this possibility, rather than MS planning its own strategy for undertaking literacy work, it would be desirable to dovetail MS literacy work with such campaigns. However, the level of involvement of district level MS functionaries is likely to vary. That being so, it might be best to spell out varied strategies for involving MS functionaries in the literacy efforts.

4. Options before MS:

i) Taking up specific responsibility for the campaign in villages

Presently MS functionaries are assisting in the Total Literacy Campaigns in several ways. There is an expectation from them to take up principle responsibility for running the campaign in selected clusters of villages. It has been suggested that a group of 50 villages be covered in such a manner, by the MS programme, so that a certain 'critical mass' is generated for the campaign to have an impact.

ii) Engaging in the environment building phase of the campaign

This is a crucial area for generating a momentum for the campaign. MS functionaries could arrange an all women 'Kala Jatha'

that could take up women specific issues. MS functionaries could also devise other strategies for creating a positive climate for literacy. If this happened, more female volunteers could possibly get identified for the campaign.

iii) Getting involved in the training programmes at all levels

Presently, a 3-tier training is envisaged for the TLC. These training programmes could be strengthened by the MS functionaries with respect to methodology and content. The participatory methodology of training is the forte of MS, work so also that it focusses on gender specific issues. The training programmes for TLC functionaries could thus get suitably strengthened by MS.

iv) Developing suitable supplementary materials during basic literacy and post-literacy phases

There are several districts, however, where TLCs have not yet been initiated. Given the financial resources and provision for equipment at the district level, it should be possible for MS functionaries to develop materials that reflect women's experiences and these could be widely circulated/disseminated.

v) Ensuring women's active participation in decision-making bodies at all levels

If the TLC has to become a peoples' movement for literacy, peoples' participation would have to be elicited at all levels. MS functionaries would have a lobbying responsibility to ensure women's participation in the decision making bodies at the district and block levels. At the village level, it is proposed that a village education committee would be set up whose principal responsibility would be to monitor the educational activities that take place during and after the campaign. The MS functionaries could ensure that women are not only

adequately represented in VECs but that they take active interest in its functioning. Women's participation in VEC's would be particularly crucial to ensure that anganwadis and balwadis are provided for small children and children of school-going age are enrolled and continue to remain in school or attend non-formal education centres. In this manner, integration of early childhood education, formal and non-formal education for children (in 6-14 age group) and adult literacy would become feasible at the village level.

vi) Organising literacy camps in non-TLC districts

In non-TLC districts, DIUs can work out their own Action Plans for literacy but with focus on small continuous areas. The experience of organizing literacy camps showed that they were particularly successful in villages that were inaccessible or had single teacher schools. That being so, villages with low levels of literacy, as well as those with single teacher schools could be idnentified. Literacy camps could then be organised for a cluster of such villages. By doing so, a cadre of literacy volunteers could be gradually developed. In this manner, as and when the TLC work is initiated in the two districts, MS functionaries will have already done some preparatory work.

DISCUSSION PAPER : 1 1992

ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES FOR MAHILA SAMAKHYA

I INTRODUCTION

The empowerment of poor rural women through innovative education is the essence and the main objective of the Mahila Samakhya programme. Thus, by its very nature, it demands a flexible, *responsive and empowering management system.* MS has, in its philosophy, set out certain non-negotiables, one of which is the right of poor women to set the pace and direction of the programme. This means a bottom-up approach to planning and implementation, and the administration of the programme has to reflect this inversion of the usual management pyramid.

Mahila Samakhya's management structure should be based on the following maxim: If I am empowered, I can empower others. In other words, an empowerment programme must first empower those working within it.

II THE PROBLEM:

Unfortunately, the management structure originally designed for implementation of the programme was a very conventional model, with the greatest financial and administrative power being vested at the top. If anything, the MS structure ironically reflects a progressive disempowerment of those who bear the greatest functional responsibility for reaching poor women and making the empowerment process successful: the district teams.

For example, while the sanctioning powers of the State Programme Director was to the tune of Rs.25,000 , the District Programme Coordinator's powers were restricted to a mere Rs.2,000. This limitation of the financial authority of the districts inevitably leads to red tape. Prior permissions have to be sought from the top for virtually every activity of the district, resulting in papers going back and forth, queries being made and answered, and programmes in the field being denied permission, or sanctions arriving too late to make the activity meaningful any more.

Similarly, powers of selection and appointment of staff, purchase, entering into contracts, hiring of consultants, etc., were concentrated in the hands of the Director, who is most distant (literally and metaphorically) from the field of action. This is paradoxical, because the Director, by virtue of her distance and limited familiarity with the district context, is in the worst position to make strategically advantageous decisions.

By stripping of decision-making power those in whose hands the success of the programme rests, we seem to have created

ipe for internal conflict. The district teams, who must position to respond most rapidly to the manifestatio of 's rising conciousness, are the most powerless to do so.

The situation is even more ironical because of the time-frame of the project: 7-8 years. If genuine and lasting empowerment of women has to occur in such a short space of time, and if this empowerment has to manifest itself in rising female literacy, and enrolment and retention of girls in school, then we have to work very fast indeed. But if time is of the essence, then the management structure should have been designed to promote speedy decision-making and action; as it stands, it ensures delays of precisely the kind that plague other government programmes.

This rather traditional management structure has led to several problems which have handicapped the development of the programme and the achievement of its objectives at several levels. Only in one state was a relatively flexible, decentralised system evolved in the first year; in the others, a centralised, bureaucratic and undemocratic approach has suffocated the functionaries, limiting the energy, creativity and responsiveness of the programme at the grassroots level.

It is tragic indeed that the district-level teams have heroically struggled to empower women while being continuously shackled by their own state leadership, who are in fact supposed to guide, inspire, facilitate and support them, rather than make their work harder. The result is a structure which has increasingly become "a house divided". Different levels of workers are pitted against each other like gladiators, fighting over training programmes, Sangha hut construction, honorarium or travel paid to resource persons, expenditure on non-formal centres for children, and even, in one state, the right of district functionaries to meet with colleagues in other districts. Meanwhile, the women stand as silent, puzzled spectators, wondering where they will be at the end of it all.

This brings us to another critical aspect of the problem: MS should be accountable to the women it seeks to empower - but in most cases, the state leadership of the programme has felt answerable only to their own bureaucracies and political leaders, though MS was certainly not launched for the benefit of these persons. By the simple device of staying far away from the field, they do not have to face the dilemma of whether their bureaucratic approach harms the women who are the raison d'etre of MS. Safe in the world of files, rules and procedures, they steer clear of any decision which is, in their view, risky or lacking in bureaucratic precedent.

Who eventually suffers? The women, and thus Mahila Samakhya's success as an innovative programme.

The Sahayoginis and Sakhis, having to constantly face the women whom they have organised with promises of support, are

unable to understand why a training programme is cancelled or a Sangha hut (for which they have learnt a new construction technology) cannot be built. This is not only demoralising and demotivating, but also results in a "once bitten twice shy" approach to future actions in the field.

Who suffers? The women, and thus Mahila Samakhya itself.

The district-level staff - and especially the District Coordinators or those who are functioning in that capacity even without formal appointment - are in the most unenviable position of all in this scenario. They are trapped in the middle, having to deal with the demands of the women, Sakhis, and Sahayoginis for more programmes, trainings, workshops, literacy and child care centres, and what have you (the fruits of their successful mobilization strategies) on the one hand; and on the other the rigid rules, procedures, queries, refusals, red-tape and general tight-fistedness of the state authorities, who have no idea how their stance is damaging field processes.

Who suffers? The women, and thus Mahila Samakhya itself.

An interested observer may well raise the question at this point that if the management structure is so suffocating, how has so much good work has been done at the grassroots? How is was it possible for so many thousands of poor women have begun to break free of their gender bondage?

These are certainly valid questions. Only consider the many achievements in the field - the Udhan Khatolas of Benares, the handpump training in Banda, the wage struggle of Saharanpur, the non-formal centres in Tehri Garhwal, the literacy programme in Sabarkantha, the melas of Baroda, the struggles against atrocities in Rajkot, the successful construction of Sangha huts with community support in Bidar, the mobilization of women learners in the Literacy Campaign of Bijapur, and the struggle for land of tribal women in Mysore.

It would be erroneous in the extreme to attribute these successes to the support of the state leadership. With the exception of Karnataka (where undoubtedly the district teams have moved ahead very rapidly because of a much more decentralised system and consistent state-level support), the impact of the programme must be attributed to:

(i) The excellence of the training given to district and village-level workers. It must be remembered that the vast majority of the trainers were from outside MS; nevertheless, their deep commitment to the objectives and values of women's empowerment, their innovative training designs and methods, their own skills and experience and ability to touch something special in their trainees, all contributed to creating a level of motivation, clarity and

commitment which is quite exceptional. It is also the trainers who in many instances have intervened to prevent mass resignations or to dispel the growing frustration of district teams faced with restrictive state-level policies and procedures.

[ii] The quality of core personnel selected in the initial phase of implementation was also excellent - and once again the credit for this goes not so much to the State Office, but the NGOs, trainers and National Office. The individual women working in the programme at district level - sakhis, sahayoginis, Resource Persons and District Coordinators - are quite extraordinary, and extraordinary people tend to have greater determination, integrity and commitment; they thus function above par even under difficult circumstances.

[iii] As a result of both innate commitment and inspiring training, the women at the district level have refused to give up easily. They are determined to struggle against the forces that would keep women down and deny them the opportunity to become empowered. But it is unfortunate that this determination is being tested most often not by the external forces of oppression, but by their own leadership! It is regrettably true that many district workers of MS feel that the worst enemies of the programme are within the MS structure itself, occupying positions of power!

It thus boggles the mind to imagine how much more could have been achieved in the past three years had all the states had a facilitative and supportive management structure, and a modicum of decentralised decision-making authority. In the next section we will see how this is still possible, with a few simple changes in approach.

III SOME ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO MANAGING MAHILA SAMAKHYA:

[1] SELECTION OF STATE PROGRAMME DIRECTOR:

One of the key factors in the success of the programme at the state level is the choice of leader. In the "problem" states, if one may term them as such, the first mistake was in appointing a person deputed from the state government administrative cadre. For such individuals, this job poses a severe dilemma: it demands a method of functioning which is totally alien to their experience, and thus full of risks and dangers from their viewpoint.

For instance, while fairly detailed financial rules were worked out by GOI, no administrative guidelines were given; this was because GOI did not want the programme to run in a bureaucratic manner. But in the absence of such

guidelines and norms, the deputed functionaries were at sea not knowing, for example, on what basis to decide the expenditure on a training programme, what honorarium should be paid to experts, how much money to release to the district units and at what frequency, and a myriad other questions. So they solved the problem by introducing all the procedures and norms of other government programmes and thus, in one stroke, entangling MS in an administrative web completely unsuitable to its objectives. All the flexibility and responsiveness which GOI had hoped would be established vanished.

Nor would it be fair to blame them - they are naturally concerned that this posting should not create ructions in their career paths. Their favourite excuse sums up the dilemma from their point of view: "I don't want to get into trouble."

Another problem posed by the appointment of deputed persons is their inability to protect the programme's non-negotiables, when and if they are threatened. The eternal fear of the civil servant of getting a negative remark on their CR, forces compromises which could bring about serious distortions in the programme. This is particularly true if the pressure is coming from the state education secretaries or ministers, whose understanding of the MS approach and objectives is often less than adequate.

Consequently, the appointment of a woman from the non-governmental sector, who has experience of working with women at the grassroots level, and subscribes to the MS philosophy, is an essential first step in building up a supportive management system for MS. This is not to suggest that women from the NGO sector are all paragons with no drawbacks whatsoever - but they are less likely to suffer from bereaucratitis/red-tapism. Since they are not seeking advancement in government service, they are more capable of defending the programme's basic philosophy, and more willing to take risks when necessary. Such women are also less fixated about one particular approach to management, and can be more flexible and innovative in their approach.

[2] DECENTRALIZATION AND DELEGATION OF POWERS TO DISTRICTS

The Karnataka experience has demonstrated that effective decentralisation is possible and effective even within the existing financial and administrative guidelines of the programme as recommended by GOI. This was possible because decision-making power was separated from financial power. The principles which governed the Karnataka structure can provide several insights on innovative management methods for MS, and are hence described below:

i) In order to empower others, each functionary must herself feel empowered.....and this includes decision-making power at each level, after evolving a clear under-

standing of the role and responsibilities of each worker.

ii) To counter over-individualistic attitudes, however, collective decision-making processes were built up and emphasised. For example, each Sahayogini was initially encouraged to develop her own strategies at the village level, but these would be discussed intensively at a monthly staff meeting; other team members were encouraged to question her plans, especially with the litmus test of "How will it empower the women? Is this action based on their perception and need? How does it link up with our objectives?" Later, once effective sanghas were established, then programme-planning was in the sangha's hands to a large extent, and the Sahayogini's inputs changed to providing more information, critical analysis, and support.

iii) Similarly, district teams were given the authority to design their own action plans, including training programmes, workshops, cluster meetings, melas, etc. But since many of these programmes would involve expenditures exceeding the meagre financial powers of the District Coordinator, a technique of participatory annual programme planning was used to solve the problem:

Before the end of each financial year, the entire state team meets, reviews the past one year's activities, analyses them in the context of programme objectives, and develops a broad plan for the coming year. This plan is discussed, debated, analysed and ratified by all present, including the Director.

Using this as the base, each district submits a requisition for funds to the state office. In the requisition, an aggregate sum for workshops and training programmes for a quarter or six months is requested and released. No prior sanctions are required from the SPD as long as the programmes conducted fall within the programme plan discussed at the annual meeting (or "Sammelan" as the Karnataka team calls it), even if the amounts concerned exceed the financial sanctioning powers of the DPC. But for the record, a system of retrospective sanctions is used.

iv) In situations where field conditions or sangha-level developments necessitate an unplanned intervention, the DPC gives the SPD a quick cost-estimate by telephone, gets an oral approval, and the paperwork is done later. This prevents the problem of not being able to respond to a situation rapidly while the requisition moves back and forth in the post.

One example will serve to illustrate the point: an information fair for women farmers was organised by the local agricultural college in Bidar. They approached the MS DIU in Bidar and requested that as many women as possible should be brought to attend the mela. The DPC and Sahayoginis discussed the matter and felt that even though many of the Sangha women in Bidar were landless, the fair would be a good opportunity for large numbers to move out of their

villages and taluks and be exposed to new information.

But the expenditure involved in this case exceeded the DPC's powers - so oral approval was obtained from the SPD over the phone, and the written requests and approvals followed later. This experience proved to have great value, as when the Mahila Mahiti Mela of MSK was held, there was absolutely no difficulty in mobilising hundreds of Bidar women to attend.

v) This entire system is backed up by fairly strict checking of accounts and expenditures. Each district submits a monthly statement to the State Office, with explanatory notes for any deviations or extraordinary expenditures. The statements have separate columns for:

(a) budget allocation for each item;
(b) expenditure by type and activity in the given month;
(c) total expenditure on each activity or head from the beginning of the financial year; and
(d) the balance remaining under each head for the remainder of the year (See Annexure I for sample).

Inordinate delays in settling accounts (such as TA/DA bills) is dealt with strictly. One deputed accountant, for instance, was in the habit of harassing Sahayoginis and office staff by not settling their accounts for weeks together. He was warned that if all bills were not settled within ten days of receiving the claims, the bills would be reimbursed by the state office and a negative remark would be made on his CR. When he failed to improve, he was transferred.

vi) A system of internal audit has been established with the help of a chartered accountant hired on a consultancy basis. With quarterly internal audits, the scope for misappropriation has been minimised.

vii) Collective mechanisms have been established even for disciplinary matters. For instance, a Sahayogini who shirks going to the field, or fabricates reports, is disciplined by her entire team, not the District Coordinator. The problem is discussed at the staff meeting, and the offender given a chance to explain. The group may decide to pardon her with a warning, suspend her for a month or two, or even, as in one district, donate her salary to the sangha she has "cheated" by her conduct. In one or two cases of chronic non-performance, the team jointly demanded - and got - the resignation of the concerned persons.

This method has minimised the problem of the erring individual trying to create 'camps' and rally support against the organisation. In fact, some did try, on grounds of casteism, but failed miserably.

Peer pressure also works as an excellent deterrent to potential mischief-makers or idlers.

The same method is used at the District Coordinator/Resource Person level. Meetings are held prior to every Executive Committee meeting, and any problematic questions dealt with in the core group, rather than by the SPD alone. Interestingly, even if a warning is to be issued under the SPD's signature, this is done only if the team has decided on this course of action.

viii) The ethos that has been established in Karnataka is that work-shirking and financial dishonesty is equivalent to cheating poor women, not the Mahila Samakhya organisation. In the past one year, therefore, mechanisms of direct accountability to women have been successfully established. For instance,

- Sahayoginis have to take sanghas' permission to go on leave, or resign from their post;
- Sanghas write directly to the District Office if a Sahayogini has not come to their village on the stipulated date;
- Sanghas have to be informed before a Sahayaki/Sahayogini goes to a training programme/workshop;
- Accounts of all moneys entrusted to the Sahayaki/Sahayogini have to be presented to and ratified at the Sangha meeting, with bills and receipts.

In the same vein, being an accomplice to a colleague's dereliction of duty is also viewed as cheating poor women. Thus, the odd bad element has found it extremely difficult to gain support from others.

Since District and State Office staff have less direct interaction with women, their accountability is to their teams. For instance, District Coordinators/Resource Persons should take leave from the Sahayoginis, inform them if they are attending outside training programmes, etc. Recently, a policy was formulated in Karnataka that State and District Office staff cannot resign without the sanction of their teams and without making appropriate arrangements for their work to be carried on. The former SPD of Karnataka, for instance, tendered her resignation only after her core team of DPCs, RPs and Consultants had accepted her desire to leave the post.

ix) A system of tough peer evaluation is the cement which keeps the entire programme in place. At least once a year, each district team evaluates its own work using a framework they have developed together. Plans are now afoot for inter-district evaluations. The evaluation system also ensures that most non-performers leave the programme voluntarily, no matter at which level they may be.

x) Finally, and perhaps most important of all, Karnataka has followed a system of erring on the side of freedom and generosity, rather than tightfistedness, when it comes to the needs of sangha women, their own staff, or the many external resource persons associated with the programme.

Leave, TA/DA, Medical Allowance, and other rules are interpreted generously, so that the staff get the best possible deal financially. In addition, loans, special leave with pay, maternity leave even for honorary workers, help to staff members with family problems, etc., have all created a happy, motivated team which is prepared to work 24 hours a day for the programme.

This policy has also generated an invaluable "shadow" work force, consisting of scores of mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins, relatives, friends, neighbours and co-villagers. These people appear magically and work tirelessly whenever Mahila Samakhya needs additional hands! There is no cost involved either - they are happy to assist an organisation which, in their view, treats their own people with dignity and respect.

This management model has demonstrated its value in promoting creative, vibrant and flexible programme in the field, which has facilitated the rapid mobilization of women, and maintained high morale among MS workers. It has also resulted in a wide variety of activities taking root, since the energies of the staff can be fully used for their work, rather than being wasted on pointless struggles with their own leadership. Most significantly, there has been not a single instance of abuse of the freedom and flexibility which pervades the entire structure.

3) BUILDING TRUST AND RESPONSIBILITY:

The Karnataka management model is based on the precept "Innocent until proven guilty". Basically, management systems can be designed on two basic premises:

- People basically want to work and will be honest;

OR

- People basically don't want to work and will be dishonest.

By its very nature, the management system of a programme like MS must be built on the first premise, rather than the second. We must assume that given adequate training, a happy working atmosphere, and good compensation and working conditions, people by nature will try to work and make the programme succeed. Otherwise, our entire structure will have to be built on suspicion and negative values, which, experience shows, tend to bring out the worst in human beings.

There is also a gender factor involved here: the vast majority of people working for MS are women. And as women they have been surrounded by rules and regulations of many kinds all their lives. Inversely, they have experienced little or no freedom of thought or action. MS aims to empower women to change this state of affairs, and encourage them to think and act for themselves. How is this possible if the change agents, themselves women, are unable to experience and experiment with such freedom and decision-making power? If the MS structure is also based on suspicion and restriction, how is it any different from other societal structures which treat women with distrust - as if they are incapable of handling freedom with responsibility and for the larger good?

There appears to be some atavistic instinct to "beat the system" when one is surrounded by rules and regulations; whereas an open and trusting environment not only seems to bring out the best in people, but also attracts the best people.

This was clearly illustrated when a government accountant in Karnataka was trying to get himself transferred to the local MS DIU, but stopped trying when he found out there was no scope for embezzlement there because no one was willing to be an accomplice, least of all the DPC. And the same point is further illustrated by the fact that in another MS state, where extremely punitive and rigid rules were established, the entire district budget for furniture and equipment was spent without a single piece of either being visible in the DIU office!

By creating a trusting atmosphere, delegating authority within a framework of clear-cut but simple rules, dealing collectively - and strictly - with offenders, and maintaining a sense of accountability to the women, it is a simple task to build a positive and constructive management system. This is all the more essential in a women-dominated programme. When women are given trust and freedom, they treat it with great responsibility and cherish it in a very special way....perhaps because it is so rare and unique in their experience. Of course there are the exceptions who may misuse it; but what should be remembered is best summed up in the words of a Sahayogini, spoken after the team had disciplined a colleague:

"We should not be amazed that she did something wrong. We should be more amazed that the rest of us did not!"

4) FINANCE MANAGEMENT:

The basic attitude of state leadership towards expenditure of MS funds is a vital element in constructive management of the programme. It is obvious that the funds provided to MSare to be spent for women's empowerment, not saved for some rainy day. This is not to advocate profligacy, but merely to emphasise that you get what you pay for. The penny-wise pound-foolish proverb is very apt in the MS context. The following are some of the

penny-pinching techniques that have afflicted the programme in some areas, to its own detriment:

- Underpaying staff, including splitting posts and thus employing two for the price of one (the lack of guidelines for this somehow don't seem to bother the practitioner);

- haggling over a few rupees of TA/DA, non-payment of TA to staff who made "unauthorised" (viz. without the prior permission of the SPD) visits to state office or other district MS units, and not settling travel bills for months at a time;

- withholding salaries because a report has not been submitted;

- paying the lowest possible fees to trainers and resource persons, and insisting the latter travel by the cheapest mode of transport;

- not sanctioning sangha hut construction funds because proper "norms and guidelines" have not been developed, but not taking the onus of developing those guidelines, either.

The consequences of this approach, however, are very expensive to the programme in the long-run:

- staff become hostile and antagonistic to the management, lose their moraleale and motivation, and gradually begin to work to rule, reducing MS to the level of any other government programme;

- trainers and resource persons of any calibre are unwilling to associate with the programme, not because they are trying to extract money from it but because they are put off by the attitude;

- worst of all, money that has been generously allotted for the education and empowerment of poor rural women ends up empowering the banks, who are sitting pretty with lakhs of unspent MS funds;

- when it is time for evaluation, the financial yardsticks applied - such as ratio of management to activity expenditure - show the programme (and the SPDs) in a very poor light. In fact, we end up reinforcing the widely-held belief of funding agencies that women's programmes are incapable of absorbing anything but paltry sums of money!

On the other hand, extravagance of any kind must naturally be shunned. The key is to examine where the bulk of expenditure is occurring. For instance, one should look askance at any SPD who buys an airconditioner for her own office, but raises a hundred queries about a low-cost construction training programme for a group of village women which costs half as much.

There are many such dilemmas to be confronted in MS.

In one state, the district teams took a decision that the food served at any women's meeting or gathering would be plentiful as well as of good quality, even though this would cost more. Their reasoning: poor women rarely get enough to eat, or eat good food; they are always sacrificing the better things for their husbands and sons. So when they come to an MS gathering, they will be fed well, as a token of the team's respect, and to give them a sense of importance. This was considered a part of the process of building self-esteem and create a happy "time and space" for women, and hence a justifiable expense.

Obviously, a balance of some kind has to be struck in the matter of expenditure - between spending a lot of money merely because it is there, and spending money because it is necessary to the aims of the programme. In the initial stages, the following litmus test could be applied:

- Will the given expenditure empower women in some way, directly or indirectly?

But as the process grows, takes root, and spreads, the test for expenditure must change to:

- Is the expenditure such that women's sanghas themselves could bear the cost in the near future?

This is because we cannot afford to forget that MS is a time-bound programme, and will have to be phased out at some point. If the task is to create an autonomous women's organisation which will become the support-structure for their long-term struggle, then our handling of financial aspects has to dovetail with this goal. But again, this is not a justification for tightfistedness of all kinds from the beginning - because then, the investment necessary for movement-building will never be made, and so no movement may ever emerge!

Therefore, finance management in MS must be guided by the same principle that directs all other processes in the programme: the empowerment of poor women, and hence of those working with women.

DISCUSSION PAPER 2

WHY DOES THE SUCCESS OF MAHILA SAMAKHYA DEPEND ON THE SPD?

In a meeting held to launch Mahila Samakhya in Andhra Pradesh, the factors that have contributed or hindered the effectiveness of Mahila Samakhya was discussed at length. A wide cross section of people - Union Education Secretary, Chief Secretary of AP, senior officials of GOI and GOAP, a State Programme Director, women activists, university professors, district level workers etc - had an opportunity to debate this issue . After a extended debate spanning over two days - the general consensus was - get a dynamic Director who can be a bridge between the programme and the government. The need to identify someone from the non-government/academic sector was stressed.

Participatory decision making processes are seen as being rather cumbersome. Each person is accountable to her team. The Sakhi/Sahayaki to the Mahila Sangha, the Sahayogini to the Sakhi/Sahayaki, the District staff to the Sahayoginis and the Sanghas, the State Office especially the State Programme Director to the district teams. The National office functioning as a support structure. At each level, the project officers are expected to be facilitative and not directive.

District teams feel trapped when they have internalized these values, and the SPD functions in a directive mode. This tends to happen more often when the SPD is drawn from the administration for her administrative experience alone - rather than commitment or aptitude for the post. Suspicion about the "intentions" non-government persons [euphemistically called non-officials] coupled with the inability to speak / understand a different language of discourse and the tendency to adopt the principle of - "when in doubt do it as per government rules", can be an explosive combination. There have been times when entire units wanted to resign and quit. The tiredness associated with fighting the same battles over and over again, explaining the same basic principles a hundred times - sometimes to the same official, defending the space that they managed to create within the structure, fighting to activate / revive legitimate decision making forums - culminated in the Gujarat team wanting to call it quits and the UP district team becoming disillusioned with the programme.

These issues were addressed in the Annual Mahila Samakhya Conference held in February, 1992 and a workshop on "Addressing demotivation and tiredness" in July, 1992. The quintessential point that emerged was the inherent contradiction associated with a participatory management style embedded in a hierarchical system. This contradiction is not particular to government alone. Experience of the programme with some NGOs was not different. Essentially the consensus was that struggle is inevitable when we choose to alter the language and style of discourse. But the same group of individuals cannot continue to

carry the torch ad-infinitum. A gentle turn over of staff, with the new group coming with higher levels of energy can take over where the tired one left off.

As the players who control the purse - namely the Chairpersons of the Executive Committee and the official members in each state - change with frequent transfers, the task of communicating the project view point has to be shouldered by the SPD. It has been felt that where the SPD shares the basic tenets / values of the project it is relatively easier. She can ally with the NPD, the NRG, the supportive EC members etc. But when the SPD is a relatively junior official herself - she approaches the problems with the entire baggage of hierarchy. Often she feels threatened by the outspoken and no holds bar approach of the non-officials in the programme. Finding herself alienated from her team, she can hardly defend the tenets / non-negotiable principles she does not share! There has been an instance where a SPD aligned herself with political heavy weights - thus politicizing the programme.

Being a project with an agenda to empower poor women, the SPD has to walk a tight rope - between some parts of the administration which willy-nilly becomes the target of anger / ire of the women, and other arms of the same administration that support. For example, when there is an incident of rape by forest guards / or police - the SPD has to weather the storm without letting her team down. In such a situation she cannot shrug responsibility. Similarly, when women decide to take on the health services, or the local school teacher - ability of an SPD to steer the programme becomes critical. At that point she cannot ask her team if their activity is "legitimate" - i.e, ask for written sanction in a government rule or the project document. A rule bound SPD may be okay in the initial phase when the structures are being built. But if the programme is to take off and truly respond to the needs of poor women, being rule bound can stifle growth and creativity.

Having discussed this, a diverse group of people who attended the meeting to discuss the launching of Mahila Samakhya AP - came to the conclusion that an innovative / unusual programme like Mahila Samakhya will need dynamic leadership.

DRAFT DISCUSSION PAPER

LOOKING BACK – **The Karnataka Case**

Arising from the discussion at the NRG meeting of Aug '95, on the developments in the M.S. Karnataka programme, various inter-connected, overlapping, questions have come up which call for deeper analysis, if the lessons of this experience are to become meaningful for the programme as a whole.

I. What are the **structural changes** required to ensure a more decentralized democratic mode of functioning and decision-making within the programme?

II. What are the **checks and balances** required to prevent/detect/dispel authoritarian and/or centralized decision-making on the part of all levels of players in the process, – from the sakhi to the EC?

III. What are the **critical qualities to be sought for in selecting** an SPD? Does this depend on the 'stage' at which the project is?

In a continually changing/growing programme, what new skills need to be acquired, what skills upgraded – to enable the SPD and others at State, District and sub-disctrict levels to function at optimal efficiency?

IV. What is the system we can put into place for **crisis anticipation and management**?

V. While keeping in constant view/focus the true objectives of the progamme, what are the **accountability systems** we need to out in place for a smoother (more-disciplined?) functioning of the programme? Accountability, not only in the area of the quantifiable e.g. finances, equipment, but also in terms of the processes which enshrine the essence of the programme.

I. *Re: Structural changes*

1. Devolve more financial powers to District

   plus

   speed up the process by which DPCs get sanction from SPD.

   BUT.

   The alleged borrowing/spending of sangha money by Sahayoginis? How is this to be seen? Exploitation? Right of the Sanghas to do what they want with their money?

   We *do not* have enough data - How much and how effectively does Sangha money go into income-generating activities: how much into crisis credit for Sangha members?

   What is the attitude of Sangha members to this money?

   What is the system they have put into place for management of these monies?

   We need a study of Sanghas: a comparative picture as between States: and as between M.P. and other programmes which work through the concept of sanghas/women's groups.

Involve District, sub-district staff in selection of resource persons consultants, etc.

3. An informal programme support committee (friends of M.S.) can play a non-threatening observer/advisor role. Revive/re-energize the State and District Resource Committees/Groups.

4. Involve EC members especially in-station ones, at field level. E.C. members have often felt wary of stepping on the autonomous toes of State and District Staff. As one member out it "we wait to be called". Why? If we are not capable of interacting with programme staff in a non-authoritarian way, on an equal basis, then what are we doing on the E.C.? e.g. The 'dharna' brought out our maternal 'taking care' instincts - rather than involving ourselves with a 'we care' attitude.

Can the E.C. reflect on itself, so that it avoids oppressing or smothering the programme, while yet staying involved?

II. Re: Checks and Balances

1. Revival of DRG and informal interaction of programme support group and E.C. members.

2. Self-evaluation/reflection at individual, group and inter-group levels. Can we build this on some on-going basis into the system, so that it becomes a routine task and not a threatening exercise?

3. Put communications on paper - not just verbal. This could prevent a certain amount of "tu-tu-mei-mei".

4. Transparency re: information, questions, reasons -

Can we find ways of constantly keeping in conscious focus - in every action, every situation - " Is it empowering? For me, for others? AT WHOSE EXXPENSE?

Make linkages re: "non-negotiables" at every group meeting. Processes tend to get taken for granted - need time-to-time overt focussing, for re-energizing.

III. Re: What are the critical qualities required of the SPD.

The SPD has to inter-act with the Govt., outside agencies, M.S. Staff at different levels and Sangha women.

She needs to be self-possessed, confident, senstive, poised. Have humour and humility. Weild authority without being oppressive. Be supportive without creating dependency. She must have the ability of being one step ahead - of trouble, of maintaining energy in the programme - such that people are continually involved in the growth of the programme. She must be able to look at horizons, not boundaries. Some of this she will pick up as she grows with the programme.

But we need to be able to guage potential: Have more elaborate interviews (discussions groups?) buttress our 'gut feelings' with help from professionals' Plan appropriate 'training' / and

experience visits to other areas. Observe her in field situations? HELP!

Some or all of this should apply for the selection of DFCs. resource persons. consultants. And finally. how equip people for the changing roles of a growing programme. We do this in life - daughter to wife to mother. etc. How to transfer this concept to the work situation?

IV. Re: Crisis anticipation and management

1. Inter-level grievance committee?
2. Feed-back from DRG. programme support committee. E.C. members?
3. Trainings at differentt levels?
4. Work on anticipation and prevention rather than wait for the moment of 'crisis'.

As regards the dharna. not all E.C. members knew the details. Just not meeting becomes a strong tool against the sharing of information and against the working of demoractic ways.

None of us E.C. members called for a meeting - it was certainly warrented in that emergency situation.

How bureaucratic were we being - waiting for the meeting to be called - through proper channels? Is this what we do in our homes?

V. **Re: Acccountability:**

1. Institute simple financial procedures and insist on adherence. Work out 'punishments' reprisals in inter-group meetings and stick by decisions.

2. Trainings based on nitty-gritty cases.

3. Involve sangha women in maintaining discipline?

4. Draw up job descriptions, again in inter-group consultations.

5. Draw up annual objectives monthly/quarterly individual and group plans. Match achievement pluses and minuses and analyse in a non-threatening constructive way.

Finally, can we in the NRB and E.Cs aspire to some of those SPD qualities?

AGENDA ITEM NUMBER 3 The Bateri incident where a government worker - Sathin of Women's Development Programme, Rajasthan was raped, subsequent developments and its implication for women working as change agents in government programmes in general the Mahila Samakhya Programme in particular.

1 Mahila Samakhya [MSP] was designed as an empowerment programme that would catalyse social change and bring about changes in the status of women. This programme was designed in 1988-89. The experience of Women's Development Programme, Rajasthan, its successes and problems helped us in designing MSP.

2 The idea of government supported change agents is not new. This was the concept behind the Community Development Programme in the 1950s. Similarly the job description of Aanganwadi workers, Adult Education Instructors, Prerak of Jana Shikshan Nilayam etc on the one hand and the volunteers of Total Literacy Campaigns on the other - include social change agent functions. They are expected to bring down incidence of Child Marriage, enroll girls in schools, propagate small family, focus on the status of women, nutrition habits and food distribution within the family. All these "expectations" demand that they swim against the accepted social currents. The role of administration as a vehicle of development and social change has been accepted in post Independence India. If and when such "government workers" initiate community based action to bring about social change - they experience a great deal of hostility from the powers that be. Often they meet with resistance among their own colleagues. Many ANMs have repeatedly pointed out the dangers involved in traveling alone - especially at night when they are expected to attend to women during child birth. Similarly, many women teachers, AE supervisors, ICDS workers - have talked about the problems associated with working in remote areas.

3 What happened to Bhovri could happen to any of us - especially if we are seen as "instigators of undesirable change" and not "agents of development". The dividing line is very thin. Stopping many child marriages or dedication of young girls as Devadasis may be appreciated by the State and Central Government. But within the districts, among a particular cast or community - they may be seen as trouble makers who must be "taught a lesson".

4 The administrative structure is pluralist in nature and therefore it does not act or react in a predictable pattern. One department may initiate social change, reform, or enforces the mandate given by the Directive Principles - especially with reference to women, Scheduled Castes / Tribes, other minorities etc. This may not be the policy / priority of another department. In particular there has always been tension between the law enforcement functions and development functions. Notwithstanding this inherent contradiction within all pluralist democracies, when government does support and appoint change agents, it is necessary to provide them with a supportive working environment. This is particularly necessary in the case of women and people

from weaker sections of society. If they are attacked, raped molested or socially alienated - the administrative structure should extend support. The plurality of administration precluden possibility of unified action.

5 It is therefore essential to create alternative support structures. In Rajasthan case, the views of the Department of Women and Child and the National Commission on Women were not shared by all. Within Mahila Samakhya itself- the State programme Directors of UP and Karnataka extended full support and encouraged Sakhis and Sahayoginis to participate in the ralley in Jaipur on 22/10/92; while the SPD of Gujarat did not empathize with the situation and denied permission to attend the Jaipur ralley. [There cannot be any "directive" from GOI or Education Secretaries - authorizing participation. At best, it can be a suggestion. The decision to "permit" participation entirely depends on the perception of the importance of such an event - especially by the SPD.] The Department of Women and Child of Rajasthan, the National Commission for Women, MSP of UP and Karnataka, Lok Jumbish Project etc felt it was important to stand up and be counted for if today a Sathin from Rajasthan has been raped, tomorrow it may be a Sahayogini from any state, an Aanganwadi worker, a Prerak or a ANM. They all felt the need to extend support as colleagues working as change agents in government sponsored programmes.

6 Today the Total Literacy Campaign has catalysed a women led anti liquor agitation in Andhra Pradesh, MSP-Banda has succeeded in organising women to get proper price for tendu leaves, MSP Bidar and Bijapur have stopped the dedication ceremony for Devadasis in a cluster of villages and Gujarat Government has set up Nari Suraksha Samitis to combat dowry and domestic violence. All those who are associated with such movements are as vulnerable as the Bateri Sathin.

7 It is therefore very important for Mahila Samakhya to initiate a debate on such issues in the districts. May be we could reach out to women teachers, ANMs, Aanganwadi workers, AE and NFE workers and volunteers and build a support group in each district. The MSp District Units could take the initiative in this matter.

8 This could be discussed in the monthly meeting of Sahayoginis, especially with reference to creating a support structure for women workers in rural areas.

1992

DISCUSSION PAPER # 3

DESIGN FOR ANNUAL EVALUATION OF MAHILA SAMAKHYA

The National Programme Office organised a meeting in New Delhi on the 8th & 9th October by to evolve a design for the annual evaluation of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. The following representatives of the state units as well as the National Resource Group participated in the meeting:

Gujarat:	NRG:
Ms. Nita	Chanda Jain
Ms. Shakuntala	Abha Bhaiya
Ms. Meera	Anjali Dave
	Srilatha Batliwala
Karnataka:	H.O.:
Ms. Uma Kulkarni	Ms. Kanchan [illegible]
Ms. Nirmala Shiraguppi	Ms. Shashi Mishra
NPO:	Invitee:
Ms. Vimala Ramachandran	Ms. C. T. Mishra

The specific purpose of this meeting was to:

1) Develop a preliminary set of parameters for evaluation based on the present content and processes of the programme in all areas. These would then be discussed and further elaborated or modified by the district teams;

2) Identify possible evaluators for each state panel;

3) Suggest a suitable time-frame and methodology.

The first day's discussion began by focussing on who the primary consumers of the evaluation should be. It was unanimously felt that the evaluation is for the women of the sanghas for whom the programme was designed and launched, and there could be no argument or further discussion about this.

Secondly, some important points were made regarding the purpose of the evaluation:

* To identify the emerging patterns and trends in Mahila Samakhya;

* To gain feedback on the effectiveness of the processes and structures of the programme, and indeed on the validity of the MS concept itself; and

* To combine micro-evaluation, which gives authenticity, with macro-evaluation, which establishes the adequacy of the concept as a whole.

This new approach to evaluation in MS arose as a result of reviewing the past experience, which essentially consisted of internal systems and the two Indo Dutch reviews in 1990 and 1991. It was felt that some via media, an "internal-external" method, was required. This way, the paradox between the disruptiveness or superficiality of external reviews on the one hand, and the tendency to question the objectivity and comparability of purely internal reviews on the other, could possibly be resolved.

It was therefore decided that each state unit should have a panel of evaluators who were external to the programme, but committed to women's empowerment and sensitive to field processes. These persons could undertake systematic annual evaluations which could qualitatively improve the programme at all levels, and at the same time provide objectivity.

While discussing how the MS design itself could be evaluated, a point was raised that the management structure of the programme seemed to be a reversal of its philosophy; i.e., those who bore the greatest responsibility for the empowerment of women in the field have the least decision-making and financial power. This creates constant functional problems and red-tape. Any evaluation of the programme would have to look into the appropriateness of the structure vis-a-vis objectives.

In response to this, an interesting counter-point was made that perhaps this view of the structure is based on a very homogenous notion of power, based only on financial and administrative measures. But if we apply a more disaggregated understanding of power, we may well find that those who are closest to the village women in the MS structure, have a great deal of power too: the power of the women, which has perhaps not been recognised and hence lies unused.

Following this was a brief discussion on the need for evaluation to focus on the inherent limitations of such state-initiated programmes, linked to the nature of the state itself. The recent gang-rape of a WDP Sathin in District of Jaipur Dt., and the shocking conduct of state machinery such as the police, triggered this discussion. It was felt that it is important for MS functionaries to understand this issue at a deeper level, in view of the similarities between MS and WDP.

After the preliminary discussion, the group began to look at actual parameters for the forthcoming annual evaluation. In the course of the next one and a half days, through discussion and debate, sixteen broad parameters were identified by the group. It must be stressed that the framework evolved at this meeting is not final, but will be fleshed out through further discussion with each district team. It was also felt that in order to bring out the varying texture and nature of the process

in different districts, the actual indicators for measurement of parameters and sub-parameters should be identified at a later stage, when the evaluators could interact directly with district teams, Sahayoginis and Sakhis.

Finally, it was felt that all the above parameters must be scanned with the following lenses:

1. Emerging strategies;

2. Women's rising strength and conciousness; and

3. Sustainability of the processes initiated by the programme.

PARAMETERS TO IDENTIFY EMERGING TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN MS:

I. Theoretical and Operational Understanding of Sangha Concept and Women's Leadership roles (in the view of sangha women, sakhis, sahayoginis, district and state functionaries, trainers, and support structures), including

   a) Range of issues involved;
   b) Strengths and weaknesses;
   c) Nature of women's withdrawal from or identification with the sangha, especially in conflict situations;
   d) Economic and non-economic factors; and
   e) Strategies and techniques of mobilization and sangha-building.

II. Programme Content:

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

III. Processes:

   a) Campaigns and struggles;
   b) Breaking silences - articulation and expression;
   c) Flow of information; and
   d) Documentation and communic-[illegible]

X. Functioning of Programme Structures:

   a) Nature of functioning of Executive Committee, State Prog. Office, Dt.Impl.Units, National Prog. Office, National Res. Group, trainers/training instns, sanghas;
   b) Assessment of individuals within the structures; and
   c) Assessment of structures alone.

XI. Democratisation and Decentralisation:

V Interactions with Power Structures and Institutions:

a) Family;
b) Community;
c) Political structures;
d) Govt. structures; and
e) NGOs and any others.

VI. Visibility:

a) Changes in women's self-esteem and self-image;
b) Changes in social and cultural image;
c) Changes in role perceptions (of self, of others);
d) Social and political space gained;
e) Articulation and assertion; and
f) Changes in role and status of girl child, if any.

VII. Resource Creation:

a) Information/knowledge resources;
b) Physical resources;
c) People/human resources; and
d) Financial resources.

VIII. Training:

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

IX. Expansion and Growth:

a) Sangha level, including:

1) Outreach/coverage of women;
2) Meetings/workshops/trainings attended;
3) Sangha meetings held with and without external facilitation; and
4) Integration of sanghas (Eg: by caste, community).

b) Number of villages covered/Sahayoginis (including ratio of villages to sahayogini);
c) No. of blocks/taluks/districts covered;
d) Expansion of staff at district and state level;
e) Changes in roles at all levels;
f) Expansion and growth of relationships and linkages;
g) Involvement in new/unplanned/creative activities and processes; and
h) Location of MS within the larger women's movement and linkages with others within it.

X. Functioning of Programme Structures:

a) Nature of functioning of Executive Committee, State Prog. Office, Dt.Impl.Units, National Prog. Office, National Res. Group, trainers/training instns, sanghas;
b) Assessment of individuals within the structures; and
c) Assessment of structures alone.

XI. Democratisation and Decentralisation:

a) Decision-making processes;
b) Forums for problem-solving, interaction and decision-making, and strengths and weaknesses of these; and
c) Processes of selection/recruitment.

XII. Finance Management:

a) Relationship between functional responsibility and financial authority;
b) Analysis of expenditure pattern; and
c) Financial decision-making patterns and processes.

XIII. Environment:

a) Internal environment of the programme, including:

1) Relationships within teams;
2) Relationships between teams/levels;
3) Power dynamics;
4) Culture/ethos of the organisation; and
5) Multiplicity of roles.

b) External environment of the programme, including:

1) At community/village level;
2) At block/taluk level;
3) District level; and
4) State and National levels.

XIV. Areas of Neglect and Weakness:

a) Information flow and communication;
b) Relationships within and between teams;
c) Extent of planned critical inputs; and
d) Trust building.

XV. Risks and Opportunities.

XVI. Demands and Pressures on the Programme.

PANEL OF EVALUATORS:

Before suggesting names of persons for the evaluation panels, it was felt that some criteria for selection of evaluators should be evolved. It was pointed out that while great care and elaborate criteria are applied for recruiting sakhis and sanayoginis, this is often not the case with others who are to be actively associated with the programme. The group then evolved the following criteria for selection of evaluators for MS in all states:

1. Belief in the MS philosophy, concept and familiarity with the MS structure and strategy;

2. Understanding of and familiarity with the rural environment;

3. Sensitivity to and respect for rural women and ability to conduct themselves appropriately in villages/sanghas;

4. "Competent friends" who possess skills of evaluation;

5. Familiarity with government structures and their functioning;

6. At least one person per team with specific competence in the evaluation of developmental interventions;

7. At least one member per team with command of local language;

8. Reading, writing and communication skills;

9. Not a member of the Executive Committee of the same state;

10. Perceptive, intuitive persons, who can be critical but supportive.

Having set out these criteria, the group then suggested the names of various persons for each state panel who possessed these qualities. Each panel would consist of four evaluators, but a total of six names were suggested for each state, anticipating the unavailability of some of those in the first list.

GUJARAT	KARNATAKA	UTTAR PRADESH
Sonal Shukla	Poornima Vyasulu	Kamla Bhasin
Sushma Bhangar	Madhu (Vimochana)	Anita Das
Vijay Padaki	Ammu Joseph	Vijay Mahajan
Mirai Chatterji	Babu Mathew	Misha Shrivastav

Back-up list:

Ratna Kapur	C.K. Sujaya	Renuka Mishra
Anjali Dave	Mina Swaminathan	Atreyi Cordeiro

TIME-FRAME:

Finally, the group discussed the question of the time-frame for the evaluation. While there was general consensus that the seven to ten days per state spent on evaming the programme by the past Indo-Dutch missions were most inadequate, it was also felt that the people suggested for the evaluation panels were unlikely to be able to give large slots of time to MS. A possible via-media therefore was to request the panelists to spend approx. 30 working days on the evaluation, but spread out over a 3-month period.

The evaluation exercise should ideally begin by January and be completed by April (1993).

In terms of procedure, Ms. Vimala Ramachandran was requested to contact the panelists by telephone before the next NRG meeting (to be held in Lucknow on the 15th & 17th October) to determine their willingness to participate and availability. The names of those who have orally accepted would then be presented to the NRG for ratification, after which formal letters would be sent to the concerned persons. The NRG would also review the preliminary parameters developed at this meeting.

Fees payable to the panelists and other terms would be as per Govt. of India norms. It was also decided that the National Project Office would bear the cost of the evaluation, while the state units would bear the cost only of local travel and accommodation (boarding and lodging).

Finally, it was decided that Ms. U.T. Mishra (IAS) would be appointed as the full time Coordinating Officer for the MS evaluation, and would be based at the NPO. She would, however, make visits to the states as and when necessary for the smooth functioning of the evaluation.

The meeting concluded at 5 P.M. on 9/10/92.

1995

Parameters for evaluation of MS have been derived from the experience of the programme over the past 6 years. These parameters could form the basis of the Indo-Dutch Review Mission of 1996. Over the past two years the different states have individually been continually evolving parameters to assess the programme in their states. These different efforts have informed this exercise. In addition the earlier evaluations ,formal and informal have to an extent provided the basis of the current exercise.

The previous evaluations focused on the viability of the MS concept. Over the years the principal strategy has been mobilising and organising rural poor women into collectives. The attempt is to enable/facilitate collective initiative and action at village level. The following parameters have been evolved primarily to assess the above.

We would like to point out that the identified parameters can be applied across the board for --the village groups/district implementation units and the state offices. The stated objectives of the project document of creation of 'space and time' for women; enabling them to control their lives and influence their environment; creation of suppoprtive structures--are all implicitly addressed in these parameters.

The major strategy for empowering women through education has been the creation of collectives at the village levels. This notion of the collective is central to the programe in all the states, the form , however, varies. It must be noted that the collectives have emerged from three diffenrent models:
a. the collective working with the help of a paid vilage level worker (the sakhi)
b. the collective working with a village level worker who is rotated
c. the collective working without a paid village level worker

The collectives (sangha/sangham) need to be broadly assessed on the strength of the collective in terms of numbers; learning and acquiring of new information and acting upon it; initiatives taken and negotiations at various levels,individual/family/community /other structures; acquisition of new skills and their application; ability to influence the social environment; conflict resolution, the extent to which caste /class barriers have been transcended,the different strategies used to address identified problems--negotiation/confrontation/lobbying as presure groups/rallies/morchas etc.

Dutch Review Mission
Internal Evaluation

Parameters/Levels	Village Level (Sangha)	District (DIU)	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).
2. Growth Qualitative/ quantitative parameters for	Concept of sangha, stages of strengthening. -sangha formation- levels of participation/non, 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.	-Programme expansion with integration of new Sanghas, new activities, processes & initiatives - decentralise 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.
3. Issues Range of issues addressed	New Sanghas mobilise to act -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).	-Response to field demands for multiple issues. -Interlinking issues giving the momentum. -Perspective building on issues. -Information flow for action and sustenance. -Assessing training needs, building capacities of core-team & field functionaries, developing conceptual clarity on issues & activities needs/action etc.	-Resource support for action and sustenance -Perspective building. -Conflict management. -Initiation/involvement in trainings, capacity building, role clarity. -Trust building and team cohesion.
b. Activities	-Problem solving, widening circles/triples of activities & action. -Moving from practical needs to strategic gender interests.	------	
c. Demanding Accountability	-Making government systems and NR/non MS personnel accountable.	-Accountability to village level processes and MS programme.	-Accountability to village/district level & larger MS programme as a whole.
4. Resources : Created/access to resources.	-Range of schemes accessed and assets/ acquired 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.
5. 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 DIU & core team.	-Visibility of the programme by virtue of its performance in field and its credibility at village/district/state level.

6. 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/organisations.	-Ensuring that MS non-negotiable are maintained. -Involvement of specialists, resource persons as per programme needs from time to time. -Liaising at state level with other MS programmes.
7. 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 team. -Facilitating capacity building at village level setup terms of their interaction with others.	-Democratisation/decentralisation of decision-making in the content of evolving programme. -Strengthening skills and capacities at village/district level.
8. Monitoring/ Follow-up &	-Degree/kind of accountability sought from MS-personnel.	-Mechanisms/Methods for: a) monitoring inputs and activities. b) performance of team in the content of task & responsibilities. c) impact of inputs.	-Monitoring financial expenditures/ programme components and activities in relation to MS processes/principles. -Evolution of innovative strategies for follow-up inputs & sustainance.
9. Vision	-Sanghas vision for themselves for the future, independent of MS. -Strategies to realise 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 (Exit back and sustainability). -Developing concrete strategies to realise the vision. -Facilitating change in inputs for changing dynamics. -Working towards sustainability.
10. Budgets/ Plans	-Learning financial operations, maintenance of accounts, credit and thrift, sharing financial responsibilities.	-Decentralisation & 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. -Phasing expansion & planning withdrawal. -Planning various programme inputs in consonance with needs.

Emerging Challenges / trends
Sustainability eco-prod, family, energy consumption, (activities) & (programme).
Emerging structures, strategies, processes.

-Slightly different parameters for old and new states with certain common denominators.
-Some members from the previous mission to be included in this mission.
-A briefing meeting at Delhi with Review Mission to discuss these parameters before members go to the States.

Members of the Committee:

Mr. Gupta	-M.S., Bihar.
Mr. J. Ramaswami	-M.S., A.P.
Mr. S. Mahrotra	-M.S., U.P.

NRG SUBCOMMITTEE ON MS PROGRAMME PROCESSES

KAMESHWARI /ABHA/ KALYANI

16 OCTOBER 1995 AND 27 OCTOBER 1995

The programme is now at a crossroads, where critical choices have to be made regarding

* relating with other programmes like DPEP and grassroot interventions by large development agencies.

* sustainability.

Since funding for the 9th Plan period seems assured, there will have to be a comprehensive redesign of the project document in the light of the above.

DETERMINANTS OF PROCESSES

* The greatest strength of the programme has been the open-ended and relatively unstructured project document.

* The fact that MS is an all-woman organisation has been a critical factor in influencing both the form and the content of the programme. This is a factor which should not be underplayed.

* In practice, the principal objective has been to organise women, and all other activities have grown from this base. This has ensured that programme interventions are linked to the women's needs, and has enabled ownership, effective implementation, optimum use of resources and learning in a real sense.

* Attempts to refine and crystallise the essentials of the programme beyond a point may ultimately become self-defeating, and may limit the ability of the programme to respond to control and direction by field processes.

* Determinants of the process at the village level include the nature of training inputs, the perspectives and strengths of women within the programme, a certain degree of isolation in the initial period, conscious and continuous efforts to build in action-reflection at all levels and openness to outside inputs and viewpoints in the later stages.

* The experience of the last six years shows that women at the village level have been able to control the pace of the programme, and have both slowed it as well as speeded it up to suit their own needs.

* A certain pace is required to avoid stagnation in the field, give a sense of movement and challenge for village women as well as for programme functionaries, and create the possibilities for growth into new roles. Speeding up the pace with external stimuli may be necessary from time to time.

* Speeding up the pace may be required at the level of processes in the village groups as well as in terms of expansion into newer areas.

* The model for expansion should not be a mechanically additive one, but should be derived from an understanding of an optimum presence, both in terms of number of villages covered as well as duration of interaction in a particular village.

* The balance between expansion to new areas and withdrawal from older areas should also not be an arithmetical one, but should be rooted in the pace of field processes.

SUSTAINABILITY

* The issue of sustainability of MS women's groups cannot be discussed in isolation, but must be seen in the context of the increasing presence of other programmes and interventions in the same areas.

* Programmes with related agendas like DPEP offer the possibility of expansion through piggybacking. However, there is also the inbuilt risk of MS becoming submerged, and having to locate its activities and processes in the context of the objectives of the larger programme.

* The presence of strong and cohesive women's collectives in the field offer an opportunity to other programmes to route their own interventions through MS groups, and create pressure on MS for a merger of interests. It is now necessary to consciously build capacities at the village level, so that women's groups are able to set the terms of their engagements and interactions with other actors and forces.

* As a part of the strategy to encourage autonomy and reduce the dependence on MS, the system of paid village workers will have to be phased out. All material inputs from MS to the village-level groups should be time-bound and conditional on a contribution from the group.

* Since autonomous women's groups will continue to need support both from MS and from each other in order to increase their bargaining power and influence the larger environment, the idea of federating must be built in from the initial stage, and a definite time frame must be set for formally handing over control.

MAHILA SAMAKHYA

NATIONAL PROJECT OFFICE

Rupees in Lakhs

S.No.	Item of Expenditure	Posts	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	TOTAL
A.	Salaries							
1.	Project Director**	1	1.44	1.44	1.44	1.73	1.73	7.78
2.	Consultants***	2	1.92	1.92	1.92	2.31	2.31	10.38
3.	Desk Officer	1	.96	.96	.96	1.16	1.16	5.2
4	Assistant	1	.72	.72	.72	.86	.86	3.88
5.	Accounts Assistant	1	.72	.72	.72	.86	.86	3.88
6.	Typist	1	.42	.42	.42	.51	.51	2.28
7.	Stenographers	3	1.62	1.62	1.62	1.95	1.95	8.76
8.	L.D.C.	1	.36	.36	.36	.43	.43	1.94
9.	Driver	1	.36	.36	.36	.43	.43	1.94
10.	Peons	2	.66	.66	.66	.79	.79	3.56
	TOTAL SALARIES		**9.18**	**9.18**	**9.18**	11.03	11.03	**49.60**

S.No.	Item of Expenditure	1997-98
B.	Documentation Publication	.50
C.	Evaluation	2.00
D.	Fee & Honoraria	1.00
E.	Workshops & Seminars	1.50
F.	Office Equipments (Non-Rec.)	2.00
G.	Telephone & Stationery	1.50
H.	Fuel & Maintenance	1.50
I.	T.A. & D.A.	5.00
J.	Contingencies	1.00
	TOTAL	16.00

** Project Director - 11800-15000 PM
*** Consultants @8000 PM for 2
*** All other pay scales as per approved norms.

1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	TOTAL
.50	.50	.50	.50	2.50
2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	10.00
1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	5.00
1.50	1.50	1.50	1.50	7.50
0.50	--	0.50	--	3.00
1.50	2.00	2.00	2.00	9.00
1.50	1.75	1.75	1.75	8.25
5.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	28.00
1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	5.00
14.5	**15.75**	**16.25**	**15.75**	**78.25**

MAHILA SAMAKHYA

STATE PROGRAMME DIRECTOR's OFFICE

Rupees in Lakhs

S.No.	Item of Expenditure	Posts	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	TOTAL
A.	Staff							
1.	State Project Director @13000 PM	1	1.56	1.56	1.87	1.87	1.87	**8.73**
2.	Consultants @6000 PM	2	1.44	1.44	1.73	1.73	1.73	**8.07**
3.	Resource Person @5500 PM	1	.66	.66	.79	.79	.79	**3.69**
4.	Accounts Officer (Deputation)	1	.70	.70	.84	.84	.84	**3.92**
5.	Accountant @3500 PM	1	.42	.42	.50	.50	.50	**2.34**
6.	Stenographers @2400 PM	3	.86	.86	1.03	1.03	1.03	**4.81**
7.	L.D.C. @2000 PM	1	.24	.24	.29	.29	.29	**1.35**
8.	Driver @1800 PM	1	.22	.22	.26	.26	.26	**1.22**
9.	Peons/Messenger @1500 PM	2	.36	.36	.43	.43	.43	**2.01**
	TOTAL SALARIES		**6.46**	**6.46**	**7.74**	**7.74**	**7.74**	**36.14**

S.No.	Item of Expenditure	Norms (Present)	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	TOTAL
B.	Programme Launching	1.00	1.00	1.00	--	--	--	2.00
C.	Documentation, Pubication, Library	1.50	2.00	2.00	2.50	2.50	3.00	12.00
D.	Concurrent & External Evaluation	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.50	3.50	16.00
E.	Workshops & Semirars	1.50	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	10.00
F.	Fees & Honoraria	1.00	2.00	2.00	2.50	3.00	3.00	12.50
G	Training	2.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	15.00
H.	Office Expenses :-							
i	Equipment (Computer, A/V etc)	1.50	2.00	2.00	--	--	--	4.00
ii.	Office Rent	.60	1.20	1.20	1.50	1.50	1.50	6.90
iii.	Fuel & Maintenance	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.50	1.50	1.50	7.00
iv.	Stationery Postage &Others	1.25	1.50	1.50	1.50	1.50	1.50	7.50
I.	Legal Support Fund	0.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	10.00
J.	T.A & D.A.	1.15	1.25	1.25	1.40	1.40	1.40	6.70
K.	Contingencies	.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	3.75
	TOTAL		22.95	22.95	21.65	22.65	23.15	113.35
	Non-Recurring - Vehicle (New Programme)		3.5					

Note : In case of new state programmes operational cost would be 30% of those projected above.

MAHILA SAMAKHYA

DISTRICT IMPLEMENTATION UNIT

Rupees in Lal

S.No.	Item of Expenditure	Norms (Present) Rs. PM	Posts	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	TOTAL
A.	Staff								
1.	District Programme Coord. @ 6500 PM	5333	1	.78	.78	.94	.94	.94	**4.38**
2.	Consultants @5500 PM	4000	2	1.32	1.32	1.58	1.58	1.58	**7.38**
3.	Resource Person @ 5500 PM	5000	2	1.32	1.32	1.58	1.58	1.58	**7.38**
4.	Accountant @3000 PM	3000	1	.36	.36	.43	.43	.43	**2.01**
5.	Stenotypists @2400 PM	2041	2	.58	.58	.70	.70	.70	**3.26**
6.	Office Assistant @2400	2000	1	.29	.29	.35	.35	.35	**1.63**
7.	Driver @1800 PM	1583	1	.22	.22	.26	.26	.26	**1.22**
8.	Peons/Messenger @1500 PM	1000	2	.36	.36	.40	.40	.40	**1.92**
	TOTAL SALARIES			**5.23**	**5.23**	**6.24**	**6.24**	**6.24**	**29.18**

S.No.	Item of Expenditure	Norms (Present)	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	TOTAL
B.	Office Expenditures :-							
i	Rent	.36	.60	.60	.70	.70	.70	3.30
ii	Furniture & Equipments	1.50	2.00	--	--	--	--	2.00
iii	A/V Equipments	1.50	2.00	--	--	--	--	2.00
iv	Petrol, Fuel & Maintenance	1.50	1.25	1.25	1.50	1.50	1.50	7.00
v	Stationery, Office Expenses & Others	1.00	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	1.25	6.25
vi	Books Magazines & Journals	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	2.50
C.	T A. & D.A.	.50	.75	.75	.75	.75	75	3.75
D.	Training & Documentation	2.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	17.50
E.	Publication, Material Prod.& Newsletter							
i	Recurring	1.25	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	10.00
ii	Non-Recurring		.50	--	--	--	--	.5
F.	Workshops, Meeting of Sangha Women & Monthly Quarterly Meetings	1.50	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	10.00
G.	Innovative Educational Programmes	1.50	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	10.00
H.	Contingencies	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	.50	2.50
	TOTAL		**18.85**	**14.35**	**14.70**	**14.70**	**14.70**	**77.3**
	New Districts Vehicle	**3.50**						

Note : In case of new district programmes operational costs would be 30% of those projected above.
In Old districts if vehicles are excessively damage beyond repair provisions may be made for purchase of new ones.

ACTIVITIES **- Projections for Ninth Plan**

1. CHILD CARE CENTER	Rs. PA	8th Plan
1. Honorarium to two workers total (Rs.1000.00 per month)	12,000.00	6,000.00
2. Educational Material and toys	6,000.00	5,076.00
3. Contingencies	500.00	480.00
4. Weekly visit by doctor and medicines @ Rs. 150.00 PM	1,800.00	1,800.00
5. Non-Recurring grant	5,000.00	4,000.00
6. Training stipend per worker (@ Rs 350.00 in lieu of Honorarium)	4,200.00	4,200.00
TOTAL	**29,500.00**	**21,556.00**

** A subsequent grant of Rs. 1,500.00 PA will be given towards replacement of consumable stores on cent percent basis.

2. MAHILA SANGHA

2A RECURRING COSTS:	**Rs. PA**	
1. Coordinators of the Mahila Sangha Sakhi/Sahayaki depending upon the model adopted in the State. (ie. Rs 400.00 P.M. for Two)	9,600.00	4,800.00
2. Stationery and Contingent Expenses	1,000.00	1,000.00
3. Books, Journals, Charts, and other Educational Material	2,000.00	2,000.00
TOTAL RECURRING COSTS	**12,000.00**	**7,800.00**
2B NON RECURRING COSTS:		
1. Durrie, desk and other equipments	2,000.00	2,000.00
2. Musical Instruments	1,000.00	1,000.00
3. Mahila Sangha Hut construction with local material and design.	30,000.00	15,000.00
TOTAL NON RECURRING COSTS	**33,000.00**	**18,000.00**

3 SAHYOGINI THE COORDINATOR IN-CHARGE OF THE 10 MAHILA SANGHAS

	Per Month	Per Annum	8th Pla
1. Honorarium of Sahyogini @ Rs. (ie. monthly rem. 1,500.00 T.A. & D.A. Rs.300.00)	1,800.00	21,600.00	15,600.
2. Stationery, Books, Magazines		2,000.00	1,000.
3. Contingencies		500.00	500.
TOTAL		24,100.00	17,100.

4 A.LONG TERM COURSE

--- course of 30 days for approximately 20 women

	Amount (Rs)	
1. Stipend including boarding @Rs.35 per day	35,000.00	25,000.
2. Training Costs, equipment and material	8,000.00	6,250.
3. Fee for trainers, resource persons and promotional activities.	10,000.00	8,750.
TOTAL	53,000.00	40,000.

B. SHORT TERM COURSE

One short term course of 5 days for approximately 20 women

1. Stipend including boarding @Rs.35 per day	3,500.00	2,500.
2. Equipment and material	500.00	200.
3. Training costs	1,000.00	500.
4. Promotional and follow up activities	500.00	150.
TOTAL	5,500.00	3,350.

MAHILA SHIKSHAN KENDRA

A. Non-Recurring Costs	(Rs. Lakhs)	8th Plan
1. Furniture and Kitchen Equipments	2.00	1.50
2. Preperatory cost for setting up	.50	.30
TOTAL	2.50	1.80

** (Construction not envisaged)

B. Recurring Costs (30 Candidates)	(Rs. Lakhs) Per Annum (Rs)	
1. Maintenance per trainee @Rs.600.00	2.16	1.80
2. Stipend per trainee @Rs.100	.36	.86
3. Salary for full time teachers (4) @Rs.1500.00 per month	.72	.36
4. Salary for Part-time teachers (4) @Rs.1000.00 per month	.48	.24
5. Support staff - Accountant/Assistant, peon, chowkidar & cook	.60	.40
6. Library books, course books, stationery and other educational material	.75	.50
7. Vocationnal training/specific skill training	.50	.35
8. Examination Fees	.05	.05
9. Medical Care and contingencies	.25	.25
10. Miscellaneous/day to day expenses	.25	.20
[illegible]	.25	0.00
12. Rent	.84	0.00
TOTAL	7.21	4.91
TOTAL A + B	9.71	6.71

** In the 8th Plan there is provision for construction of an M 4.2 Lakhs hence, the cost for MSK is 6.71 + 4.2 = 10.91 Lakhs.

In pursuance of the cabinet's approval to set up a national resource unit it is recommended that two regional resource units, affiliated to state office be created. They could function as

- a clearing house to facilitate the collation and dissemination of information and experience and to respond to the state offices in the region.

- centres to initiate inter-state co-ordination.

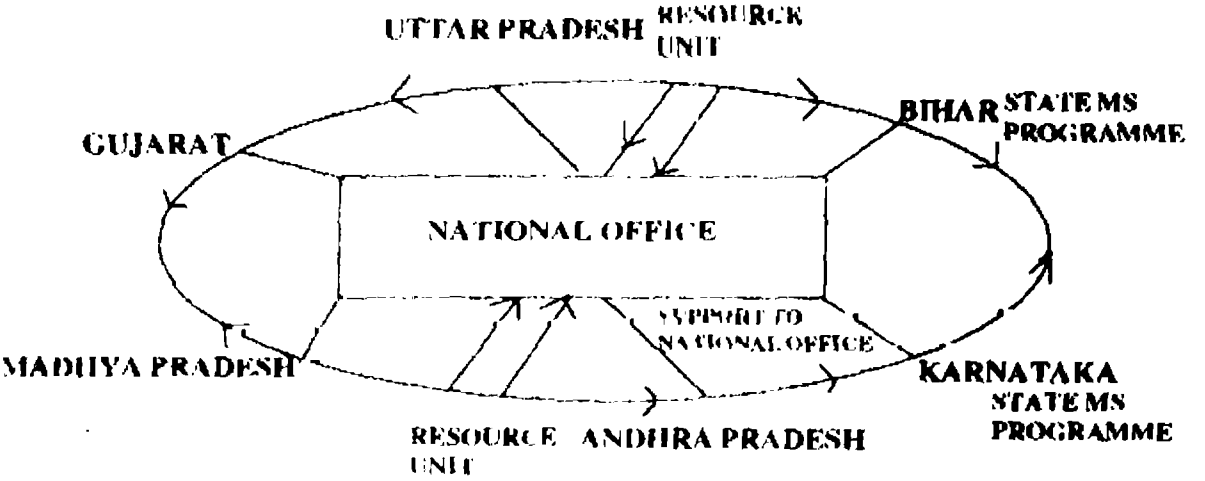
- core documentation centres and organise regional [illegible] workshops and meetings.

- support centres for periodical internal and external reviews.

Since its inception, in the past six years the MS programme had expanded to three thousand villages in fifteen districts of Andhra Pradesh, Gujerat, Karnataka & Uttar Pradesh. The state programme shave developed som neccessary expertise in providing resource support (within), developod need based materials for health literacy etc. and have become self sufficient in conducting workshops for various activities for the same. The state socities have also initiated the documentation of MS case study and have set up training resource groups to orient / train Mahila Samakhya personnel.

The MS programme has also forged lonks with various other education programmes e.g. DPEP, since the DPEP has been launched by the MHRD Ministry a separate bureau has been set up. A Mahila Samakhya component has also been initiated under DPEP (and EFA). In view of this the circumstance for setting up an attached resource units to the national office are no longer there.

However, keeping in view the expansion of the programme during the ninth plan the functionaries of the resource units may be assigned to two regional cells consisting of core-teams of - a co-ordinator, consultants, documentation assistants and programmers with neccessary support staff. Bein gattached to a state office it would be a link between the other states, national office and other eductional programmes - central and state. Primarily these units would fullfil MS needs mentioned above, co-ordinating them, as well as extending support to the national office as and when required.



Attached to 2 Regional State Office

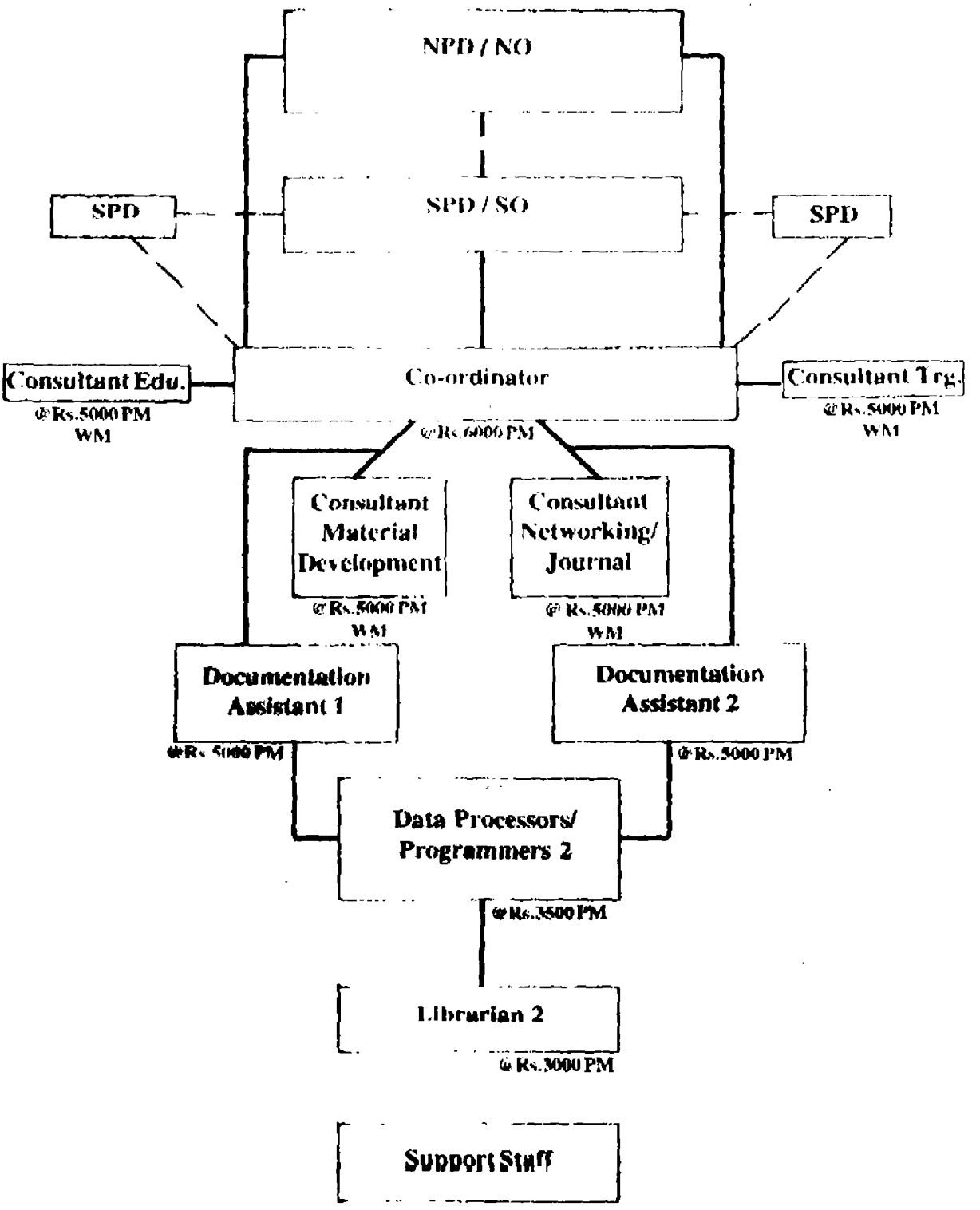
Rupees In Lakhs

S.No.	Heads of Expenditure	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	TOTA
	I.Staff & Administration						
	1.Coordinator (2)@Rs.6000/- PM	1.44	1.48	1.56	1.64	1.72	7.84
	2.Consultant (4)@Rs.5000/=PM (24 women months)	2.40	2.45	2.50	2.50	2.60	12.45
	3.Documentation Assistants (2) @Rs.5000/= PM	1.20	1.30	1.40	1.50	1.60	7.00
	4.Data Processors cum Programmers @ Rs.3500/=PM	.72	.80	.82	.96	1.04	4.34
	5.Librarian (2) @Rs.3000/= PM	.86	.90	.94	.98	1.00	4.68
	6.Machine Operators @Rs.1800/= PM	.40	.44	.48	.52	.56	2.40
	7.Messenger (2) @Rs.1500 PM	.36	.40	.44	.48	.52	2.2
	TOTAL I	**7.38**	**7.77**	**8.14**	**8.58**	**9.04**	**40.91**

Rupees in Lakhs

S.No.	Heads of Expenditure	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	TOTA
II.	Recurring :-						
1.	Fee & Honorarium (2 Units)	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	20.00
2.	Workshops / Seminars	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	20.00
3.	Training	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	10.00
4.	Networking for Documentation	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	5.00
5.	Library	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	5.00
6.	Publication / MS Journal	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	10.00
7.	Documentation	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	10.00
8.	Rent / Maintenance	2.40	2.40	2.80	2.80	2.80	13.20
9.	Stationery / Office Expenses	1.00	1.25	1.50	1.75	2.00	7.50
10.	TA / DA	1.00	1.25	2.00	2.50	3.00	9.75
11.	Postage / Telephone etc.	1.00	1.20	1.40	1.60	1.80	7.00
12.	Contingencies	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	5.00
	TOTAL II	**22.40**	**23.10**	**24.70**	**25.65**	**26.60**	**122.45**
III.	Non Recurring :-						
	Furniture	3.00					3.00
	Equipments	5.00					5.00
	TOTAL III	**8.00**					**8.00**
	TOTAL I + II + III	**37.78**	**30.87**	**32.84**	**34.23**	**35.64**	**171.36**

Resource Unit



Sub-Group on Financial Parameters and decentralization

1. Decentralization in Mahila Samakhya

The implementation of the Mahila Samakhya Project requires project structures which, rather than being centralised and directive, are facilitative and supportive of processes at the grassroots. The non-negotiable principles of the project also provide a mandate for structures and systems which are accountable to the women's collectives at the village level. Experience has also highlighted the need for a continuous process of evolution and refinement of structures and systems to meet the growing and changing needs of processes at the Village level.

The need for a new administrative structure at the Block or taluk level has been felt by DIUs in each of the MS States. This was also one of the issues addressed in the Report of the National Evaluation of the programme (1993). The implications of such a step were also discussed in subsequent meetings of the NRG sub-committee (May 1994) and several SPD meetings.

-With the heightened focus on strengthening Sanghas and emphasis on direct interventions at the Sangha level, facilitating and promoting interactions, sharing of resources and coordinated planning between Sanghas is a major thrust area in all the State and district action plans. There are practical difficulties in organising such interactions at either the district or the village level, which would be solved by setting up minimal structures at an intermediate level.

-Each MS State has been exploring the options for ensuring that Sanghas become autonomous, independent and self-sustaining. The autonomous Sanghas of the future will continue to need selected ongoing support through structures and networks external to the project. Given that block level structures have the potential of growing into permanent institutions managed by the Sanghas and geared to their needs, it seems logical to enable Sanghas to take charge of them as soon as possible.

-Sahayoginis who have been with the project since its inception have acquired an impressive level of understanding and skills. The creation of intermediate structures will give some of the outstanding Sahayoginis the chance to move into new roles and take on more responsibility for planning and implementation of block level.

-Block level structures will enable much closer coordination between Sahayoginis and Sanghas, and strengthen the processes of accountability mandated by the non-negotiable principles of Mahila Samakhya.

In this context, the following questions arise:

* whether these intermediate structures would be additional to the district structures?

* whether they would represent sub-division of the existing district structures?

* whether these alternatives would also have differing financial implications?

* The nature of activities which would take place - trainings and a resource support base or some administrative functions?

The Bihar and Uttar Pradesh Mahila Samakhya units have already taken some steps in the direction of setting up Block/cluster-level structures. Gujarat has recently decided to coordinate at taluk level on an experimental basis. In UP all new district programmes are being commenced from a DIU set up at the block level and selection of villages is more cohesive, within that block. In Gujarat too, a similar decision has been taken and even in existing districts, expansion of villages is to be undertaken block-wise. In Karnataka, while no formalised arrangements have been made, taluk level activities are being coordinated.

In all these efforts, the projects have made arrangements within DIU/Project budgets and have catered for a basic training-cum-resource support facility at the block/taluk level, managed by local sahayoginis. Trainings, meetings, resource support activities are conducted, while State level functionaries find it convenient to hold workshops and meetings there UP has reported that funding arrangements, within the given MS budgets is enough to cater to the demands of such a structure. Gujarat by its calculations, has said the same.

The State Projects have also clearly articulated that given the present flexibility of programme management in MS, decisions for decentralization should come about (i) when the particular district/state programme consciously desires it (ii) that they adopt modalities which they find most feasible and implementable and (iii) with an empowering decision of their own Executive Committee creates such facilities. The feeling is that a straight jacketed intermediate level between district and village will only add a layer and a rigidity which the programme can do without. Secondly, the States consciously feel that creation of an additional administrative layer will entail post creation for discharge of administrative functions, which can interfere with and affect the processes of empowerment and demand articulation from village level upwards, by adding another filter or level. The preference seems to be for a flexible system whose structure, functions and modality continue to be left to local Projects for decision-making.

However, to carry this process further and consolidate a lasting arrangement at block/taluk level, there are some suggestions. These are as follows:

Project Needs	Facilities Required	Modalities
1. Link creation of taluk/ block structures with phasing out of MS in clusters.	One big room for training sessions-cum-office. Funds for maintenance, stationary etc; activity costs; documentation costs, can be met out of given MS budgets at district/state.	Dovetail with MSKs that are set up. MSK will be node and additional block/taluk centre facilities built around. Will provide continunity and consolidation of educational component; will continue to provide forum for Sangha networking and tangible support for education. Consolidate sangha federation at decentralized levels and provide them steady resource support.
2. Block/taluk headquarter is logical/ accessible foci	Locate DIU at block headquarter in new districts	Discharge all functions of DIU in a more cohesive and accessible manner. As programme grows and expands switch to MSK as node concept as in 1 above.
3. In existing districts, with expansion of villages, DIU's are now too remote. Project villages are scattered.	As in 1 above: through DIU budgets.	As in 1 above: through MSK node.

Transforming of Political Culture

Mahila Samakhya Experience

Srilatha Batliwala

The experience of a small experiment undertaken by the Mahila Samakhya programme in Karnataka, which attempted to find solutions to the problems raised by women's participation in the panchayat raj institutions as a result of reservation policy shows that women's participation in government may serve to transform the culture and functioning of local government institutions.

SUSTAINABLE and long-term change in the subordination of women is essentially a political process and can be successfully completed only when women storm the formal institutions of political power that have thus far been controlled by men, particularly those of the dominant social groups. However, merely becoming representatives in corrupted and unaccountable political bodies is not the solution – the very nature of politics, and the very way political power is exercised has to be transformed. Obviously, there is no reason why only women should be concerned with this – it is a social project in which both men and women have a stake. However, women have a special opportunity to take the lead in this process because there is a strong and widespread women's movement in India. What is more, the movement itself is built on re-examining and challenging existing power relations, and is engaged in the quest for an alternative – and ethical – framework for the practice of power. Experience shows that in general, whenever and wherever women have entered politics and political institutions, one of two things have happened: they are either co-opted and corrupted by the dominant political culture, which also often means distancing themselves from the needs and issues of the mass of women; or, if they were unwilling to play by the rules of the game, they are rendered ineffective and marginalised. Either way, neither has the cause of women advanced, nor has the nature of politics itself been challenged or altered in any substantial way. There are three main reasons for this, in my view.

Lack of a critical mass of women in political institutions: The number of women entering formal political institutions like the state or national legislatures, or even the old Panchayati Raj bodies (which existed prior to the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments), has been woefully inadequate. Figures for the Lok Sabha, for instance, show several revealing trends: The increase in the percentage of women MPs to total MPs between 1952 and 1991 is only 3 percentage points – i.e., from 4.4 per cent in 1952 to 7.4 per cent in 1991. At the state level, the picture is little better: in Karnataka, for instance, the percentage of women MLAs in the state assembly has decreased from 5 per cent in 1952 to 3 per cent in 1994. Until the Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act, 1985, which made a 25 per cent reservation of seats for women, the nationwide custom of nominating one or two women members to the panchayats ensured that their presence in these bodies was virtually irrelevant. Even in West Bengal, whose panchayat system is considered a model because it broke the hold of the traditional rural elite over the panchayats, we find that women's representation prior to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment was dismal – less than 5 per cent.

It is therefore clear that there must be a critical mass of women – and that too, women with a radical, feminist consciousness – to materially affect the culture and functioning of political institutions; only then can they hope to usher in policies, laws and programmes for gender justice. Conceptually, this is where reservation policies must be placed: they create an enabling condition for a critical mass of women to enter the political arena. However, reservation is only a beginning, for it cannot ensure that the women entering politics through it will function any differently from their male counterparts.

Lack of a strategic link between the women's movement and women in politics: Women entering the formal political system in India have not necessarily come from, been supported by, or accountable to a mass-based and progressive women's movement in the country – especially a movement which has become a political force in its own right, and is thus capable of influencing the political system, while simultaneously maintaining a supra-political stance. Indeed, this could be said [illegible] the majority of our [illegible] exceptions, who have emerged from mass-based peasant organisations or trade unions. This means that most women in politics owe their allegiance to the political party that fielded them, and to the interest group, region, and constituency from which they hail, in that order. All of these have had an unimpressive track record on women's issues; in fact, some political parties have abjured any specific agenda for women as being divisive and reformist, while others are openly obscurantist in their position on women.

How can women in political institutions, coming from such diverse backgrounds and ideologies, play a positive role for the advancement of all women? Clearly, this is possible only if they have emerged from a progressive, feminist women's movement with a mass base, which not only continues to support them in both ideological and practical ways, but to which they are also accountable.

Women's experience of power in the private and public sphere: Finally, women's experience of power in the public sphere – or lack of it – is a critical factor affecting their performance and effectiveness in the formal political system. Since women have been denied power in the public domain for millennia, their only experience in the exercise of power is, by and large, in the familial or private sphere, and even here, has been exercised indirectly, through their influence on the key men of the household. Thus women have been conditioned, from earliest childhood, to uphold male power, and to seek power through men. They have little experience of joining together with men – much less with other women – in pursuit of wider social projects, or of using power in a different way, for different ends.

Conversely, women's only model for the exercise of power in the public sphere is that created by the dominant feudal and patriarchal forces. The culture of power that they have witnessed has thus been that of power over, not power on behalf of, or for a larger social good. The model of political power surrounding women in our society has increasingly come to mean bribes, corruption, patronage networks, and the promotion of narrow interests. Corruption and criminalisation of the electoral process has resulted in facile justifications of post-electoral corruption and malpractices. Women entering the political system for the first time thus have no alternative models or political culture to emulate or promote, but are under constant pressure to fall in line and conform to the existing norms.

All these factors imply that the Indian women's movement must have a clear political agenda and a strategy of entering and transforming political structures – including political parties, trade and peasant unions, and institutions of governance. The time has come for such an agenda to be formulated with maturity and farsightedness – which means a change in postures. For instance, the movement has often demanded accountability from women in politics, asking what they have done for the cause of women. Perhaps now, we must also ask ourselves what is the responsibility of the women's movement, to support and enable women in politics to work for the cause, and to alter the nature of politics itself?

With one-third reservation for women in the panchayati raj institutions – and serious lobbying for similar reservation in state assemblies and the Lok Sabha – the progressive women's movement in the country must now formulate a strategy for accessing political power while simultaneously maintaining a supra-political stance. It is in this context that a small experiment undertaken by the Mahila Samakhya programme in Karnataka can provide several insights about such a strategy.

Karnataka Experience

The Karnataka government, under the visionary leadership of rural development minister Nanjundiah, enacted a radical new Panchayati Raj Act in 1985, designed to genuinely devolve power to democratically elected local self-government bodies. The 1985 act created a two-tiered system of local government: the zilla parishad at the district level, and the mandal panchayat covering approximately 15,000 population at the village level.[1] The most unique and historical character of the act, however, lay in its reservation of 25 per cent of all seats in panchayat bodies for women, cutting across other reservation categories such as SC, ST, OBC, etc. In the panchayat elections held in 1987, therefore, 26.65 per cent of the 721 members elected to the zilla parishads, and 25.41 per cent of the 55,188 members elected to the mandal panchayats, were women. Further, 2,469 or nearly 18 per cent of the 14,025 women mandal panchayat members, and 18 of the 200 women zilla parishad members were scheduled caste and tribal women [Anand Inbanathan, *The New Panchayati Raj in Karnataka: An Evaluation, Manuscript 6*, Institute of Social Studies, 1993]. In the 1994 elections, according to government data nearly 44 per cent of members elected to the gram, taluk and zilla panchayats were women.

It was in the context of this fully functioning local self-government system that the Mahila Samakhya programme (hereafter, MS) was launched in three districts, Bidar, Bijapur and Mysore (the programme expanded into the districts of Gulbarga and Raichur in 1991, and currently covers over 700 villages in the five districts) early in 1989. The stated objective of Mahila Samakhya was 'Education for Women's Empowerment', where education was redefined to signify a process of consciousness-raising, organising and broadening the awareness and skills of poor rural women to take control of their lives. Literacy and girl child schooling were important goals of the programme, but rather than make them ends in themselves, the approach was to create a demand for them as one of the several means by which the nature of existing gender and social relations could be transformed.

In Karnataka, MS's basic strategy was to organise poor rural women into collectives. The focus was thus on the building of mahila sanghas by the programme's activists, known as sahayoginis, each working in about 10 villages/hamlets. The sanghas were to evolve gradually, over as much as a year or more, as a unique space and forum needed and owned by its members, rather than as externally created entities that collapse when MS withdrew. Since a significant number of grass roots women in the villages selected by MS were members of the mandal and zilla panchayats, it was quite natural that many women panchayat raj institution (PRI) members became active in the emerging mahila sanghas.

It soon became evident to MS staff that a majority of these women had been forced to contest elections by their male relatives and kin. The barriers to their effective participation were multiple: illiteracy, lack of awareness of their rights and responsibilities, manipulation by male upper-caste members or men of their own strata, lack of knowledge of the Panchayat Act and the rights and duties of the PRIs and their members and most importantly, the triple work burden that rendered the opportunity cost of participation very high.

As part of its consciousness-raising and political education strategy, MS district teams helped the village mahila sanghas to strategise on how best to lobby the mandal panchayats which, under the 1985 act, had allocatory powers over 90 per cent of the district's development resources. Women members of the panchayat became the natural targets of such lobbying, which raised the issue of their very poor capacity to function within, much less influence, panchayat decisions. This led, inevitably, to recognising the need for special training and support interventions for women members of the PRIs, and very soon, for all SC/ST and backward caste members, women and men.

A series of special workshops were then organised for local mandal panch.., at SC/ST members (men and women), and later, for all women members, regardless of caste. The latter were very useful exercises in learning to what extent women could transcend the social divisions amongst them, as a gender, and formulate some common agendas, regardless of caste and class. These workshops were sometimes quite explosive, but very good for sensitisation, since upper caste women had to stay and eat together with dalit women if they wanted to attend training opportunities being provided by MS. This forced both groups to introspect on the limits and the potentials of gender solidarity, on where their caste and class interests converged and diverged. For example, upper caste women representatives of one mandal supported the dalit members' demand for a separate cremation ground, but were not willing to back the dalits' alternative demand to cremate their dead in the upper caste ghat.

In this process, it became clear that the sanghas should strategise much more purposively to contest the next round of panchayat elections, identifying and preparing potential women, training themselves before, rather than after, entering the local bodies, and breaking out of the confines of reservation policy by contesting and campaigning to win open category seats. This naturally brought up several critical questions about what would be the relationship of such women with the sanghas during the election process and after they entered the panchayat bodies. These are in essence the same questions we would have to ask about the relationship between women entering politics from the women's movement and the women's movement as a whole, viz, (1) Would women candidates from the mahila sanghas be allowed to contest in the name of the sangha, or use their membership of the sangha as a campaigning

Table: Mahila Samakhya Women Elected to Gram Panchayats in MS Districts

District	No of Women Candidates	No of Women Elected	No of Women Presidents	No of Women Vice Presidents
Bijapur	90	59	6	7
Gulbarga	55	22	1	1
Raichur	14	14	–	–
Bidar	30	27	–	–
Mysore	20	13	–	–
Total	199	135	7	8

strategy? (2) If elected, would the women members continue to be members of the sangha and participate in its decision-making processes? (3) What would be the accountability of the successful women candidates to the sangha after election, in their capacity as members of the panchayat body? (4) How would the sangha, in turn, relate to the women panchayat members elected from amongst them, and to the panchayt bodies as a whole? (5) How would the sangha handle changes in the attitudes, behaviour, values, or goals of its members after they became panchayat representatives?

The women's sanghas in MS districts and villages prepared in various ways and with varying degrees of intensity to contest the 1994 gram panchayat elections. Countless workshops were held to build a critical analysis and awareness about key issues, and training programmes held to acquire skills in a number of practical areas, including
- the nature of the dominant political culture, structures, and institutions, and strategies for change
- the nature, powers, and functioning of political institutions like the PRIs, the state assembly, and national legislature
- the problems faced by women and SC/ST members and strategies for tackling these
- functionality literacy and numeracy
- the brass tacks of panchayat functioning including meeting notices, sitting fees, framing resolutions, keeping minutes, procedures, gram sabhas, etc

As Table shows, nearly 200 sangha women in five MS districts contested gram panchayat elections, including several who contested non-reserved general category seats. Of these, 135 women were elected – more than 100 of whom were dalits. Two sangha women won general category seats. Several of them have become presidents and vice presidents of their panchayats.

Quite naturally, there were problems and dilemmas. Friction sometimes arose between women wanting to contest for the same seat; some women who were enthusiastic to contest did not have the support of other sangha members because of doubts about their competence, fears about the undue influence of their male relatives, or past feuds within the group. Wherever more than one woman contested from the same sangha, this was usually at the instigation of their men. Similarly, women who left the sanghas after their election have done so at the behest of their husbands and other male relatives. In a few cases, this has led to the breaking of the local sangha.

But these negative situations were outnumbered by countless examples of carefully deliberated choices, and sacrifices made by individual women who withdrew from the fray to avoid breaking up votes, or to preserve the unity of the sangha itself. Most importantly, the entire process enabled the sanghas to hammer out answers to the above questions – and I believe that the answers some of them found have a great deal to teach us about the women's movement's role in enabling women's access to political power, while simultaneously struggling to alter the dominant political culture.
- Firstly, most sanghas decided that while selected women from amongst their memberships would stand for election in their own name, they could actively use their membership and political record in the sanghas in their campaigning. That is, they did not want the sangha to become tantamount to a political party, and be subverted by the unsavoury party politics surrounding them; but since their members would not woo voters with the usual means (distributing liquor, making untenable promises about distribution of benefits, etc), they would use, instead, the considerable respect earned by the sangha and its members for integrity and activism on behalf of poor women. What is more, the sangha members themselves campaigned for their candidates, capitalising on the sangha's record of struggles for equitable distribution of public resources, its militancy in protecting and promoting women's rights, and the greater awareness and preparedness of its candidates for effective participation in the panchayats. Consequently, electioneering did not entail much expenditure for the sangha candidates.
- Successful candidates are allowed to continue to be members of the sangha. Most sanghas viewed this as vital, both as an ongoing support to the women and in order to demand accountability from them. However, formal leadership positions or responsibilities within the sangha must be relinquished.
- Sangha members who became panchayat representatives have several responsibilities vis-a-vis the sangha: They must advocate the sangha's agenda for women's rights and development in the panchayat's decision-making processes (for example, selection of women beneficiaries for various schemes, proper application of poverty norms in beneficiary selection for schemes like IRDP, Jawahar Rozgar Yojna, etc); they must provide information about the panchayat's

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decisions and allocation of resources to the sangha; and they must inform the sangha of any decisions which are likely to be prejudicial to the interests of the larger constituency of poor women and their families.

– In turn, several kind of practical, intellectual and moral support are extended by the sangha to women representatives (in most cases, whether they are sangha members or not): they can appeal for the sangha's support in situations where their rights as women, or as panchayat members are being infringed, or their ability to function is being adversely affected (for example, sexual or caste-based harassment or discrimination, non-payment of sitting fees, resolutions passed in their absence or without requisite quorum, husbands or sons forcing them to stay at home and attending meetings in their stead, helping out with child care, fuel gathering, cooking or other tasks to enable her to attend meetings, etc); they can continue to access the various learning, awareness- and skill-building opportunities provided to the sanghas by MS or other NGOs.

– In cases where women's attitudes, values, behaviour, or solidarity with the sangha (and with the interests of poor women, which it represents) begins changing, or signs of corruption or co-option become evident, the sanghas have used several accountability weapons: There are several examples of women sangha members changing colour after becoming panchayat members.

– Usually due to the pressures exerted by their men, sanghas have dealt with these situations in a variety of ways: Firstly, there are open discussions in the sangha meeting, in the presence of the errant member, about the changes and what they represent. The individual is advised, warned, cajoled, persuaded. If there is no change despite this, sanghas have been known to terminate membership of the sangha; withdraw their support in material and psychological terms; organise protests; publicise and campaign against the errant individual and/or the lobby she has become part of; pose a public challenge at the gram sabha; and most importantly, deny access to the learning and skill-building opportunities provided to the sanghas by organisations like MS. These are powerful weapons which act as deterrents more often than they are actually used. The sanghas have acted not only as watchdogs, but also as guides and supporters. This dual role is critical to whatever little success they have achieved in the 200-odd villages where their members have become part of the gram panchayats.

This is where the role and importance of the relationship and links between women in politics and a larger, vibrant, politically conscious and ethical women's movement comes in. In the MS programme, a strong effort was made to build a different culture and model of power within the sanghas themselves. Through experiments with collective leadership, rotating leadership, strong mechanisms of collective planning, action, analysis and public accountability, an effort is being made to build a new culture of power, and a different value system. Simultaneously, the MS programme teams have maintained their inputs for consciousness-raising capability for critical analysis, and a continuous upgrading of information, knowledge, skills and collective strategies. Together, the sanghas and MS have attempted to strengthen the search for alternative values and new ways of exercising power, so that they do not reproduce the inequitable power relations of a patriarchal and socially stratified society.

This has not been an easy task. The external social and political environment is enormously powerful and resilient, and continually saps the process in multiple ways, quite often through women's own internalised attitudes. From within, women are struggling with their own conditioning in a feudal and patriarchal society, which has trained them to accept their place in the social and gender hierarchy, to embrace dependence and eschew autonomy. From without, it is all too easy for the politics of narrow, divisive identity, personal aggrandisement and affluence, patronage, and patriarchy to take over. After all, these women are swimming against the social tide, and it is inevitably that they often fail.

For instance, experiments in changing the dominant, patriarchal single-leader model have brought a host of problems in their wake: rotating joint leadership of the sanghas (such as the nomination of three or four members to act as sangha 'sahayakis' for a fixed period of time, after which a fresh group takes on this role), leads to situations where the 'best and the brightest' are unhappy when their turn is over – which is often when they are really feeling ready to 'take charge' – and not always willing to give of their insights and skills when the situation demands. Collective leadership alienates and frustrates highly motivated and articulate individuals who feel they are criticised for domination if they take the initiative in a given context, and damned when they don't, in hindsight, for not doing so. Finding gender unity across caste, community and ethnicity, even if within class, has been difficult – for instance, tribal and scheduled caste women or dalit Hindu/Buddhist/Muslim/Christian women, demanded separate sanghas, or were far more suspicious of each other than they were of the dominant castes.

It would be foolhardy [illegible] for MS in Karnataka to claim to have successfully changed such deeply ingrained social divisions, values and attitudes – but certainly, there are beacons of hope. The experiences of MS Karnataka (activists, film-makers preparing modules for training of panchayat raj members and at least one independent study (*Challenge and Opportunity: A Study of Women Panchayat Representatives in Karnataka*, Unit Resource Centre ISST 1995) confirm that women PRI members from the sangha areas of MS districts are a force to reckon with in the panchayats and are bringing changes – no matter how seemingly insignificant – in the functioning of panchayats. For instance, Hanumavva of Doddal gram panchayat requested Mahila Samakhya to provide training to all the lower caste members of her panchayat. Subsequently, this group has become a strong lobby within the panchayat, ensuring that they have a say in all decisions taken and that the interests of the poorest are central to all panchayat initiatives.

Sangha women who have become gram panchayat members have not only been found to be consistently more articulate, aware, assertive and effective as GP members, but appear to be challenging and bringing some change in the conduct and culture of the GP as a whole. To cite a few examples, ensuring that no drinking and carousing is done in the panchayat office, calling to order meetings where proper procedures are not being followed, demanding changes in declared meeting minutes, forcing disciplinary action against errant GP secretaries, and ensuring that gram sabhas are regularly held and the GP budgets properly prepared and presented.

These are no mean achievements, and bear testimony to a more important lesson the sanghas are teaching us: that they are actively analysing and transforming the culture of the institutions of political power, from both inside and outside. They are struggling to create viable mechanisms for changing the dominant model of power and politics in the public domain. This is a messy and laborious process, with many reverses and failures. But what is far more important is that it has been undertaken with great seriousness and a spirit of hope. These women are bringing change by believing in change. The women's movement at large can do no less.

Notes

[This article is based on the paper presented by the author in the sub-theme on 'Women, Political Participation and Politics of Organising' at the Seventh National Conference of the Indian Association of Women's Studies, Jaipur, December 27-30, 1995.]

1 This system was revised in the Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act of 1993, to a three-tier system of gram panchayats, taluk panchayats and zilla panchayats, in keeping with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. The reservation for women was also increased to 33.33 per cent.

Agenda Item No.6. Convergence of services between MS and other programmes including Indira Mahila Yojana.

Issues of convergence, though contentious, have been central to several discussions in MS in the recent past. In the recent NRG meeting, the trend and nature of MS interaction/participation with larger educational programmes like DPEP were discussed. There was general recognition that convergence as an issue needs to be addressed head on.

2. One of the long term desirable out comes of the MS programme and its impact would be convergence. This has to be seen and located both within the context of enhancing women's access to and control over various resources and the sustainability of MS processes in general.

3. The MS experience of the past few years has shown that convergence of resources/services/ideas/efforts has taken place, though not uniformly. This has not always been the result of a conscious planned strategy but a fall out of different interventions and field processes.

4. Convergence is, however, also fraught with questions of autonomy/identity and the spirit of the programme.

5. Convergence needs to be examined at 2 different levels:

a) At the village level where empowered MS groups could ensure convergence of services/resources and effective delivery of several women centred programmes and processes. There could be added responsibility to consider the possibilities/and potential of programmes like Indira Mahila Yojna for village Sanghas, DWCRA, Mahila Swasthya Sanghas etc.

6. It may be desirable to have a clear view of how to go about it. It requires strategic planning and interventions by MS to built such convergence.