

MAHILA SAMAKHYA
INDO-DUTCH REVIEW MISSION 2001

MAHILA SAMAKHYA GUJARAT

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A. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Gujarat is the second most industrialised state with the fourth highest per capita income in India. It has a high growth rate but a declining agricultural sector. The lack of irrigation facilities and erroneous water management slowed agricultural growth. The unregulated excavation of wells has contributed to the lowering of water tables and general environmental degradation. The uncontrolled and unregulated exploitation of Gujarat's water resources could lead to a serious drinking water crisis. The state's economic growth is thought to be at the cost of the environment. Gujarat food grain production ranks 13th in India, affecting household food security.

Status of Women and Current Issues

Gujarat figures low on the Gender Development Index, which is in contradiction with its high ranking in the economic field. This confirms the evidence that social development and not mere economic development holds the key for the emancipation of women in society. It has been argued that women's development in Gujarat is the outcome of macro variables, poor environment and ecology, low safety against violence in different types, and widespread regional disparities. Appropriate policy interventions are required to ensure that there are socio-economic and political gains for women from development of the state.

TABLE 1: Sex Ratio 2001

District	Sex ratio
India	933
Gujarat	921
The Dangs	986
Vadodara	919
Rajkot	930
Banaskantha	931
Sabarkantha	985
Panchmahals	939
Surendranagar	948

Source: Census tables 2001

While there have been notable initiatives from women's organizations in the state, there has been no major policy initiative regarding the enhancement of the position of women in Gujarat. Gujarat lacks a State Commission for women and a draft policy paper on gender is still to be finalized.

Literacy

Gujarat ranked fifth in literacy (1991) after Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Punjab. Its literacy rates are higher than the national average. However, tribal women have a very low literacy levels. In contrast, literacy among scheduled caste women is almost at par with the overall literacy levels. Low female literacy rates among tribals may be attributed to periodic migration by tribal males, resulting in double burden for

women and high drop-out rates. An effort to raise literacy levels for tribals is being made by the DPEP.

Table 2: Gujarat Female literacy rates-2001

India	54.16%
Gujarat	58.60%
<i>Banaskantha</i>	<i>34.54%</i>
<i>Sabarkantha</i>	<i>52.85%</i>
<i>Surendranagar</i>	<i>48.72%</i>
<i>Rajkot</i>	<i>67.64%</i>
<i>Vadodara</i>	<i>61.24%</i>
<i>The Dangs</i>	<i>48.99%</i>
<i>Panchmahals</i>	<i>45.43%</i>

Source: Census of India 2001

The incidence of child labour in Gujarat is less than the all India average and lower among girls in the state. About 1.7 % of girls in rural areas and 0.5 % in urban areas are working against 4.8% and 2.1% of boys in rural and urban areas. The Mission found that many boys and girls drop out of school as they migrate with their parents and family livestock to seasonal grazing grounds.

There are reasonably good infrastructure facilities for primary education. There were 33,119 primary schools in 1995-96, and 5713 secondary and higher schools. More than 90% of the villages have at least one primary school within the village. It is not the infrastructure but the administration and quality of primary education that essentially hampers efforts to reach universal literacy in the state. The teacher student ratio is 60, which is not conducive for learning. Teacher absenteeism and teacher supervision are problem areas.

The District Primary Education Programme with its objectives of raising enrolment, retention and achievement is being implemented in Banaskantha, Godahara, Dahod and Dangs districts. The DPEP is planned for extension to Jamnagar, Junangadh, Sabarkantha, Kutchch, Bhavnagar and Surendranagar. The Ministry of Human resource Development has also approved preparatory activities for 14 districts namely Anand, Kheda, Patan, Bharuch, Narmada, Surat, Valsad, Navsan, Ahmedabad (rural), Vadodara, Rajkot, Amreli, Gandhinagar and Mehsana districts under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan.

Health

Gujarat is above the all India average in the number of hospital beds per million persons. Life expectancy of women in Gujarat is close to the all India average, though, Gujarat's IMR is below the national average. Overall, Gujarat ranked low in terms of health indicators. This can be explained by the quality of the services rendered by the health institutes and also because the majority of facilities are in urban areas.

Nutrition

Under the Public Distribution System (PDS) the number of fair price shops in Gujarat has increased over time. However, this has not been able to keep up with population growth. The population covered per shop remains at 3200 since 1977 which is a poor record of PDS extension particularly with respect to tribal areas. MS has intervened

in distribution of the World Food Programme emergency food aid in earthquake affected areas.

E. MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME IN THE STATE

Activities of the MS Programme

The MS Programme was launched in Gujarat in 1989 and is presently being implemented in 36 blocks and 1,422 villages in Sabarkantha, Banaskantha, Panchmahal, Surendranagar, Vadodara, Rajkot and Dangs.

During 2000-2001 the programme was expected to cover 60 villages of the tribal Dangs district. However only initial mobilization efforts have so far been made.

Activities of MS Gujarat include:

- * Seminars and Training programmes on health, education, law, Panchayati Raj, ecology etc.
- * Information on development schemes in blocks and districts
- * Establishment of Nan Adalats, Mahila Kutirs
- * Literacy classes
- Small scale craft production and marketing
- Training in Micro Credit
- Creation of Mahasanghs

Table 3: Mahila Samakhya Gujarat: coverage

Distnct/ villages	Sabarkan tha	Baroda	Rajkot	Banaska ntha	Surendra nagar	Panchm ahal	Dangs
Total no. villages	719	1,183	813	435	245	344	311
MS coverage	250 (34.77)	322 (27.2%)	323 (39.7%)	170 (39%)	110 (44.8%)	120 (34.8%)	60 (19.2%)

Based on table in MS Annual Report, 2000-2001

The coverage of villages by MSG within each block remains fairly low. This needs to be considered to enhance the visible impact of the programme

Table 4: Formation and Functioning of Sanghas Between 1999-2000

Baroda	Banaskanth a	Rajkot	Sabarkantha	Panchmahal	Surendra -nagar
1. Training: Law, health literacy, Sakhi	1. Training: To strengthen sanghas to form dist. To vill. level committees	1. Formation of 55 Sanghas 2. Collabor- ation with govt. and NGOs	1. Training: in fishery 2. Nari Adalat: Functioning	1. Decentral- isation of the MS programme i.e. planning and execution of programmes in association with other organisations	1. Formation of Manch at block level 2. Literacy classes
2. Nari Adalat	2. Informatio n on govt. schemes, Nabard, SGSY	3. Formation of MS Federation	3. Sangha decentralis a-tion	2. Child Care Centre linked to	
3. Saving Group Nursery					

4. Sahyogini workers cover new villages to form	3. Planning: for co-operation of Sanghas with other institutions	Specific Activities not stated	effected	DPEP	
5. Mahasangh formation			4. Formation of Mahasangh and Collaboration with Govt. schemes	3. Formation of 13 Sanghas.	

Health

MS Gujarat has established and utilized forums such as Mahila and Yuvati Shibir, health fairs, Jilla Arogya Mela to raise awareness of health issues. Childcare centres have been set up in Rajkot and Sabarkantha districts. These need to be extended to other districts as well. Training of Sahyoginis and nurses has been carried out in Rajkot and Surendranagar districts. MS Gujarat has participated in AIDs awareness training programmes. MS Gujarat has collaborated with international organizations like WHO as well as local and state organizations like Chetna with reference to health programmes. A district-wise description of MS activities in this area are given below:

Table 5: Health related activities of Mahila Samakhya Gujarat

Rajkot	Banaskantha	Baroda	Panchmahal	Sabarkantha	Surendranagar
Aids training		Training of MS Sahyoginis	Information + Training on AIDS by Aids Control Society, Gujarat	Jilla Arogya Mela	Health Shibir
Follow up block level training by WHO for 288 women	18 Shibir on child health in collaboration with Chetna	Health and Aids Camp: Training on AIDS	Proposal for RCH in collaboration with Chetna	RCH + anaemia shibir	Gynaecological camp
Child Care Centre implemented under MS		Health Fairs Dissemination of material		Yuvati shibir	PHC assisted MS in shibir
				Child Care Centre implemented under MS	Training of nurses
					Health camp for 241 women

Legal Rights: Nari Adalats

Rajkot has been successful in establishing and using Nari Adalats to benefit women. In Baroda district, MS collaborated with an NGO Majlis from Mumbai, that gave legal literacy training for starting Nari Adalats. The districts of Banaskantha, Sabarkantha and Surendranagar have not been able to establish effective Nari Adalats. While Sanghas have been formed in six districts, their specific activities in Panchmahal, Sabarkantha and Surendranagar are not clear. The issues regarding the objectives

Emergence of Nari Adalats: The case of Rajkot district, Gujarat.

Nari Adalats are emerging as a vibrant alternative system of justice for women, with wide acceptability in the community, and the Mission Team visiting Gujarat was able to observe this at a Nari Adalat that was in session at Vankaner taluk in Rajkot district.

In the early Sangha meetings the issues raised by women related largely to the demand for facilities – water, roads, schools or ration cards and health. Rarely were issues related to gender like violence and harassment, which affected women at a personal level, raised in the meetings. Later though, at training conducted outside their own villages women began to talk freely and through a sharing of experiences realized they were not alone in experiencing violence and harassment. Women began to speak about violence in public and to address and adjudicate in cases brought up by Sangha members. But when these involved men from their own villages, women were subjected to threats and pressures and felt the need to conduct meetings away from their villages to be able to deal effectively with cases of violence. The most appropriate and central place for such meetings was seen to be the taluk headquarters, which the women used to visit from time to time. Meetings began to be held there on a fixed date every month.

The Nari Adalat was formally started in Rajkot district in June 1998 after the MS had organized a Legal Training Programme by Majlis, a Mumbai based NGO that had earlier facilitated the starting of the first Nari Adalat in Vadodara district. By 1999 there were 5 Nari Adalats functioning in Varodara; Dabhoi, Sankheda, Padra, Vaghodia and Pavi Jetpur. The Nari Adalat at Padra was registered. By December 2001 Nari Adalats were functioning in seven taluks of Rajkot, each having about forty women from about twenty villages. MS also conducted workshops where women from Nari Adalats of different villages and taluks shared their experiences and strategies and formed a strong network. By December 2001, 335 cases had been successfully resolved in the Nari Adalats of Rajkot and 56 registered cases had been withdrawn.

Nari Adalats are comprised of a wide cross-section of women. Apart from the Sangha women and one or two Sahayoginis they include some women whose cases have been solved earlier, some single and elder women, those from lower castes and women members from Gram Panchayats. The type of cases brought before the Adalats pertain mainly to domestic violence, physical and mental harassment, fraudulent marriages and bigamy, divorce and maintenance, alcoholism, child marriage and child abuse and the harassment of women not able to have children, specially sons. Cases related to economic issues like property are taken up if women are affected.

Other MS States that are in the process of starting Nari Adalats visit Rajkot/Vadodara to observe and study their functioning. The ICRW⁵ has been assisting MS Gujarat in documenting the Nari Adalat cases in Vadodara and Rajkot. The DIU Rajkot had also spoken highly of the effectiveness of the training provided by NGO Majlis from Mumbai. Other MS States could also be provided this training.

Legal Awareness Shibir, campaigns on the legal issues are conducted in all the districts. The local administration has also begun to focus attention on legal issues

⁵ International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) is conducting this research in Gujarat as well as in the Tehri district of UP MS and is facilitating the process documentation of cases thereby.

brought up by the Sangha women. As Sahayoginis started to work on this issue in partnership with the police in Vadodara they were issued identity cards.

During discussions with the DIU it emerged that the NAs involve time spent by Sahayoginis and RPs and expenses for traveling, documenting etc. The Sangha women also incur expenses in travelling for casework and incur loss of wages. No detailed plans for sustainability of NAs seem to be in place, apart from some mention of collecting a small fee for cases registered to "cover costs". Space is generally obtained free of cost at the *Tehsil* headquarters from government.

Impact of Nari Adalats

The concept of Nari Adalats has gained wide acceptance among Sangha women and their families and in the wider community. Women also bring cases from other villages where the news of the work done by NAs has reached. Nari Adalats have come to be supported and promoted by government (provision of free accommodation for meetings) and the police (cases referred by the police) that give them greater credibility. By bringing the women's perspective to the solution of women's problems, Nari Adalats have challenged the patriarchal structures and increased the participation of women in the process of obtaining justice.

Nari Adalats provide space for women to articulate problems of violence and harassment and have imbued them with the confidence that justice can be sought and obtained. They have created a new identity for women in the family, village and community. **Nari Adalats cut across caste, class and religious divides and are filling the gap created by a legal system that is perceived as patriarchal and unreachable, slow and expensive.** An infrastructure has been created where women can get justice that is accessible, affordable and gender sensitive. They have changed the way people perceive the problem of violence against women and have brought the women's perspective to the concept of justice and punishment. Nari Adalats have had an impact not only on the women whose cases were addressed but on their families and on adolescent girls, village leaders and panchayats, and on lawyers, police and MS personnel.

Support To Nari Adalats for Sustainability

While Sangha women play a lead role in the initiating and functioning of Nari Adalats, Sahayoginis continue to play a critical role in facilitating and documenting the process. This adds to their workload and affects the time available for their regular work. **There is also no budget line in MS for expenses related to the Nari Adalats and this needs to be included.** The Sangha women who participate in the Adalat incur transport costs for traveling to and from the Tehsil headquarters and also suffer loss of wages. Some of the Nari Adalats are in the process of working out a small fee to be charged for the cases that are being dealt with, however continuing support particularly for documentation would be necessary till they become self-sustaining. **The Annual Report mentions briefly that there have been discussions about federating Nari Adalats but details of this are not clear. This element should however be envisaged as part of the future cost components being provided as future support for NAs.**

Federations/Mahasanghas

MS teams and Sangha women have been discussing the eventual withdrawal of the MS Programme and the role of Federations in consolidating and sustaining the Sanghas. At the cluster level meeting of Sangha women representatives in Rajkot, most women who had been Sangha members were clear about the need, structure and functioning of Federations. They had identified five core issues: Education, Health, Legal Issues, Economic Development and Panchayat Raj - as areas necessary to focus on and had formed small Committees of Sangha women interested in these issues at the village and cluster level and taluk level to work in solidarity on these issues.

Night meetings and training of these committees have been conducted to create an understanding of the processes of federation, structure, registration, monetary requirements, roles and responsibilities. The process of forming Federations has been ongoing in Rajkot for two years. Sangha women and Sahayoginis have participated in defining the mandate of the federation as:

- coordinate at the taluk and district levels with government and NGOs
- provide support to Nari Adalats working at the taluk level to form a federation
- identify needs of Sanghas and place them before the Executive to carry them out
- inform Sanghas about government projects and schemes of benefit to them and help to secure them

MS Rajkot has also identified various possibilities of raising funds for Federation work which include

- government grants
- Sangha contributions
- voluntary contributions by Sangha women
- membership fees
- foreign aid
- collection of funds from Institutions, Trusts and Donors
- Sangha earnings from training
- Contributions from villages.

MS Rajkot has formed five Taluk level Federations of which two are in the process of being registered. Federations are being formed in some of the other districts also. The model adopted for Sabarkantha district is given below:

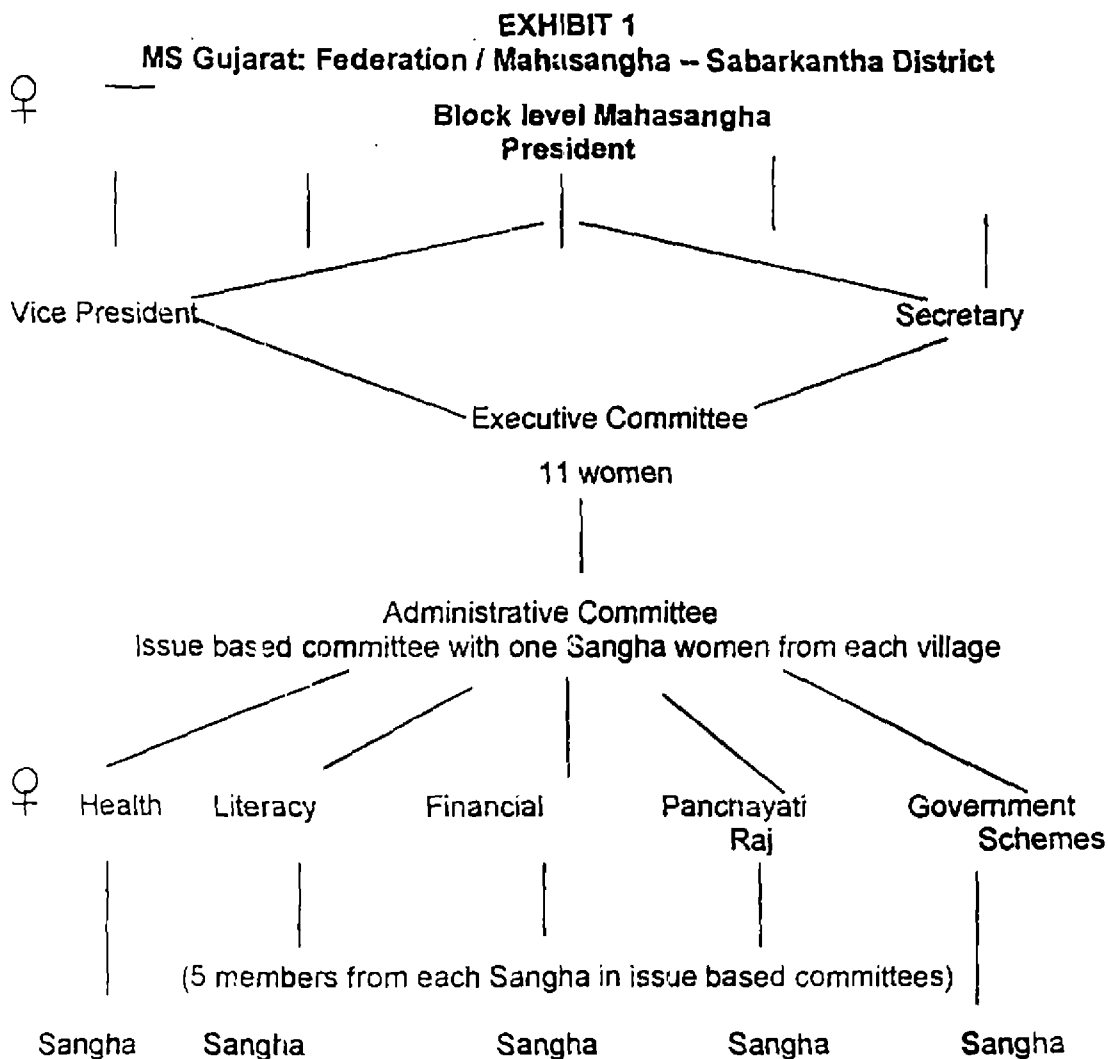
1. 4 Cutting across Class And Caste Divides

The MS Programme has been able to cover approximately 35,000 SC and ST women which is 0.02% of the total population of the districts in which MS is working.⁶ While MS has addressed issues within certain caste groups these are not specified.

MS Sanghas include women across caste/class divides. Some Sangha activities provide effective platforms to further inter-caste and inter-religious group interaction, though the constraints or difficulties in overcoming caste/class/religious differences are complex. MS has addressed women across religious boundaries as described in Rajkot Nari Adalat, which was attended by Muslim women. On occasions, women from other caste groups attend meetings without officially being part of the Sangha. Issues like water management and installation of hand pumps facilitate inter-caste interaction. The literacy and health programmes and childcare centres become a

⁶ MS Annual Report, 2000-2001.

space for various caste and religious groups to come together. MS provides an opportunity to bring women together in a secular manner across religious groups, irrespective of these barriers, to work in solidarity for social transformation towards equality and justice. This important issue needs greater attention in discussions within the organization and personnel oriented to ensure that it remains upfront within all organizational activities.



1.5 Towards Building a Women's Grassroots Movement

The MS Programme in Gujarat has raised awareness regarding women and social change in the regions of the six districts covered by it and has initiated the process in a cautious way in the Dangs district. However, the programme implementation and geographical outreach needs to be planned strategically for greater consolidation and impact in a given area. The number of villages covered within each block need to be expanded for greater intensification and the blocks covered increased. Efforts should thus focus on building alliances of women's Sanghas over a contiguous area for greater and visible impact.

According to figures provided by MS for the period 1997- 2000, the indication is that initiatives like the Nari Adalats, Mahila Kutirs and Yuvati Shibirs all need renewed effort in order to expand and to retain their momentum. The performance of

Panchmahal, Surendranagar, Banaskantha and Dangs district is of special importance in this respect where the progress of MSG over a five-year period remains poor. Women's political empowerment is confined to small pockets and it is hoped that future efforts shall be more widespread. The expansion of women's networks is essential towards increasing MS outreach across districts and facilitates women's mobilization for change.

The Sanghas expressed the need of building a meeting place of their own. So far 17 Mahila Kutirs have been constructed and a few more are under construction. The Sanghas have been resourceful in raising funds for the Kutirs, providing voluntary labour and building low cost structures. The Nehru Yuvak Kendra, the corporate sector, the Tribal Department and DRDA have all contributed to Mahila Kutir funds. Some Sanghas plan to house a child care center at the Kutir as well as use it for meetings. At least seven Sanghas are in the process of acquiring land and an additional eleven others have been successful in obtaining land. The main impediment to building Mahila Kutirs appears to be the difficulties and formalities concerning land acquisition.

1.6 Emerging Trends, Pace and Impact

Mahila Samakhya has been able to act as an intermediary and bridge the gap between women and mainstream development. Progress in different districts and areas is not similar and depends upon the infrastructure and available programmes/schemes in the district or region. Simultaneously women have also acted upon their own initiative at times as they did in Panchmahal where they successfully tackled the issues of alcoholism, violence against women and debt relief through public action. In practical terms therefore there is a shift in focus of the programme from Sahyoginis to women's autonomous initiatives and action. What is required however is for women to be visible in larger numbers within an administrative or spatial unit to have the requisite visibility or exert the required pressure on the various institutions and forums of governance and power. Without that women's energies may only dissipate with little effect.

Some of the good/positive practices and the related challenges within MS Gujarat were:

- Sahayoginis who have been trained have acted as resource persons and trainers of new Sahayoginis and Sangha training, and others need similar systematic orientation and inputs at frequent intervals.
- The formation of Sanghas and Mahasanghas has rendered women and their needs visible and strengthened women's self-perceptions.
- Nari Adalats have created a public space for women to debate issues regarding women's legal rights within the family and invested them with substantive bargaining power as well as public visibility and mobility.
- The Sanghas and Nari Adalats have functioned as pressure groups/agents for change. The successes of MS will serve as incentive and inspiration for women who are not yet part of Sanghas or women's collectives.

Women have set up their own courts and acted as pressure groups to address women's issues, monitor literacy programmes and direct local Panchayats to consider equitable access to water. Women have also initiated counselling centres, established women's banks, trained health workers, established Mahila Shikshan Kendras (that were unfortunately subsequently shut down), initiated loan schemes and other facilities for women. Yuvati Shibiris are useful initiatives where younger

women are imparted training on issues including family, health, cleanliness and sanitation, information on government facilities and schemes and other social issues. Since progress across districts has not been uniform, despite its successes there is a need to assess the past and see how the limitations can be overcome in order to expand and strengthen the programme as women's movement across all seven districts.

There is also a need to reflect upon the deterrents in taking the programme forward for evolving and developing strategies in order to strengthen the programme. On the whole, MS Gujarat still has a long way to go in terms of reaching out to the majority of subaltern women in the seven districts and the processes in place needs to be strengthened substantially to lead to empowerment.

2. EDUCATION

2.1 Women's Education And Governance Of Education

The Mahila Samakhya programme was developed as a result of the emphasis of the National Education Policy (NPE) 1986 to initiatives with a 'positive, interventionist role' in catalyzing women's empowerment. The NPE saw a strategic conceptual shift from providing equal educational opportunities for women to educating for women's equality.

Mahila Samakhya was initiated to ensure that poor, powerless women understood the structures that kept them poor and powerless and of their own volition acted to redress the impediments. One major tool that MS provides women with in their action to raise their status is education.

The concept of literacy within the MS programme is not restricted to reading and writing skills. It includes the ability to critically analyze ones' environment and position and take measures to improve these. Thus literacy requires to be systematically paired with gender orientation and training to enable it to play its role in an overall strategy for empowerment.

The Female literacy rates in Gujarat State (Census 2001) are higher than the national average but are very uneven for the districts that MSG is working in. MS requires to be alert about the SC/ST Female Literacy Rates and study the reasons for low literacy indicators. For example, the ST Female Literacy Rate in Banaskantha is only 9.45%. On the other hand, Vadodara with high Female Literacy Rate has only 919 females to 1000 males. MS may like to discuss and analyze these issues among programme personnel and with experts from the women's movement so that MS activities may be planned after taking such variations into consideration.

Districts have approached literacy in different ways. Some literacy initiatives in MS Gujarat arose when the women realized the importance of being literate while addressing their problems like lack of water, electricity and road. Sabarkantha developed learner materials in the local language; Varodara concentrated on self learning method; Rajkot preferred the classroom approach. All districts have organized literacy camps, night classes and campaigns frequently to impart literacy at a time convenient to the learner. MS Gujarat has also used literacy materials developed by Gujarat Vidyapeeth. Sabarkantha Sanghas running literacy classes between 1989 and 1999 had conducted self-evaluation and made monitoring

committees. It was found that women learnt more efficiently when literacy is linked to knowledge about women's rights, law and government schemes.

MS started working with the Education Department to implement the Total Literacy Campaign from 1993, especially in Rajkot, Sabarkantha and Varodara. Women from all ages have been included in the TLC implementation. It would appear from the annual report that MS Gujarat hopes that this initiative will lead to women being able to voice their needs, demands, become knowledgeable about various subjects, recognize their right to equality, and be capable of resisting violence and harassment. MS also hopes that literacy will help women acquire an enhanced status within the family. **An objective review of the situation leads to the concern that perhaps the expectation from mere literacy classes without any additional input for enhancing analytical thought processes may be unrealistic. Thus an unplanned literacy initiative may be limited in its ability to reach MS objectives. Literacy initiatives require to be strengthened with simultaneous awareness and concientization inputs.**

The tables below give a bird's eye view of literacy efforts between 1989-1999 and subsequently between 1999-2001.

Table 8a. Women and Girls Covered Under Literacy Programme In MS, Gujarat, between 1989-1999.

Districts	Sanghas	NFEs	Women enrolled	Girls enrolled
Sabarkantha	9	9	925	70
Varodara	70	12	70	50
Rajkot	57	37	347	508
Banaskantha	22	22	-	210
Surendranagar	-	7	18	95
Total	247	87	1340	933

Source: *A Cursory Glance at Mahila Samakhya Gujarat, 1989-1999.*

Table 8b : Women Covered Under Literacy Programme In MS, Gujarat, between 1999-2001.

Districts	Number of literacy classes	Total women enrolled
Rajkot	45	630
Sabarkantha	18	270
Banaskantha	15	300
Surendranagar	03	55
Panchmahal	07	129
Baroda	02	20
Total	90	1,404

Source: *MS Gujarat Annual Report, 2000-2001.*

Progress in literacy initiatives is uneven across districts in the 1999-2001 period. For example Banaskantha, Sabarkantha and Rajkot districts have had a reasonable number of literacy initiatives, similar progress seems not to have taken place in others. Literacy efforts in the Dangs have yet to take off. The target group varies from a maximum of 630 to 20 women between 1999-2001.

MS is associated with the Post literacy and Continuing Literacy programme at block level. MS requires to work in partnership with these programmes in the development of post literacy material. The availability of appropriate post literacy reading material

would be beneficial in keeping many Sangha women from lapsing into illiteracy. This material should be developed with a clear understanding of the information and entertainment requirements of the women. Subsequently the material could form resource material for Sangha training. Thus it would be in the interest of MSG to be associated in the development of post literacy material from the beginning.

2.2 Girls Education

There has been some demand for including girls in the Sangha activities as may be seen by the number of Yuvati Shivirs organized. The Yuvati Shivirs have, among other issues, discussed the status of women, the importance of education, information regarding the role of local institutions like banks, post offices and health centers. A fall out of this has also been a number of short duration literacy camps for girls and women. In Surendranagar women's own initiatives have resulted in MS facilitated public funding for girls' primary education. Balika Shikshan Kendras have facilitated education of school dropouts in Vadodara and Surendranagar.

In 1996 Sabarkantha district took the initiative to start Mahila Shikshan Kendras with the intention of catalyzing interest in education among girls who for a variety of reasons may have either not had an opportunity to complete primary education or have never enrolled at school. The initiative had the two-fold aim of

- mainstreaming those girls young enough to return to primary school
- offering an opportunity to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills to those who may have passed that age
- offering a variety of life skills.

The first batch of graduates from this residential programme showed visible change in attitudes towards education and life. By 1999 Sabarkantha had conducted 3 batches of MSKs, while Rajkot and Varodara had conducted 2 batches each. The duration of the residential course varied between 3 months (Rajkot) to 9 months (Sabarkantha). Some of the students were helped to appear for regular school examinations. The 1989-1999 MS document reports a need to improve the inputs for pedagogy, class room methods, tenure of MSK and availability of trained teachers.

After the last batches completed the programme and a number of the students were successfully streamlined, the programme took the decision to close the centers down. Similarly, the Balika Shikshan Kendras have also been closed down, apparently due to difficulty in hiring appropriate accommodation and the cost ineffectiveness of too few students.

Table 8c: Mahila Shikshan Kendras, 1997-1999.

Distncts	Blocks	Girls enrolled	Appearing for Exams.
Varodara	6	106	88
Rajkot	7	93	25
Sabarkantha	2	94	79
Total	15	293	193

Source: A Cursory Glance at Mahila Samakhya Gujarat, 1989-1999.

The Balika Shikshan Kendras and Mahila Shikshan Kendras serve a niche requirement not fulfilled by any other education programme. This is especially true of the tribal areas such as Dangs. The initiative may have been the last opportunity for many adolescents at receiving an education before being engulfed by adulthood and an opportunity for many younger left-outs to be mainstreamed and continue their education. **The Mission was therefore concerned to learn that the MSKs were**

no longer functioning. The Mission recommends that the scheme be re-examined for reintroduction.

The curricula of the Kendras may be reviewed before restarting to ensure that they address the needs of the clientele group. The group would probably consist of

- some girls young enough to be mainstreamed after a short preparatory period
- Some others within the group could be those young women and girls who may need additional inputs for enhancing their quality of life.

Thus curriculum must be carefully developed to answer these varying needs. Teaching methodologies and teacher training would require to be in line with the objectives of the initiative.

From 1997 MS Gujarat has also established linkages with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). DPEP aims at raising quality of primary education and lowering gender and social group disparities in enrolment, retention and achievement. The MS State Programme Director (SPD) and the District Programme Coordinator (DPC) are ex-officio members of the DPEP Executive Committee and District Resource Group respectively.

DPEP is present in five of the seven MS districts (Sabarkantha, Panchmahal, Banaskantha, Dangs and Surendranagar). DPEP is poised for expansion in at least 6 more districts (3 with NRE funding) and may offer more opportunity for partnership. Sangha women are members of the Village Education Committees (VECs) in some places but there is no formal Government order for the inclusion of MS representation in all VECs as in some other states. MS Sanghas have taken part in enrolment drives and have been associated with some amount of VEC monitoring of schools. Sahayoginis have been associated with DPEP community mobilization activities at block level.

Unfortunately, this association of Sangha women with enrolment drives has not resulted in a uniform reaffirmation and commitment to girls' formal school education among Sangha members. Field visits clearly showed that not all Sangha women were sending their daughters to primary schools. The point of greater concern was the fact that the women did not seem to regard the situation as one needing to be addressed (mothers laughingly commented that girls stayed behind to look after goats!). There was also little evidence that the importance of girls' education, as an issue, had been discussed at previous Sangha meetings. Girls' are commonly burdened with household chores but some situations may have solutions; such as requesting a village grandmother to share the girls' burden. In view of a general trend evident in MS (more positively in other states) in the direction of engaging in the education of girls, Gujarat Sangha women's lack of (universal) commitment to the issue reflects negatively upon the clarity and commitment within the state MS structure.

MS has not been associated in the curriculum or textbook development of DPEP. Nor has it been involved in teacher training or contributed to development of any other gender sensitization materials. The mission is of the view that a closer association of the MSG with teacher training and curriculum development in DPEP would help to engender these initiatives and be beneficial to both programmes. DPEP plans to start Alternate Schools (AS) or Education Guarantee Scheme schools (EGS) in hard to service areas. MSG would have knowledge of the most needy habitations from its grassroots work and could direct DPEP interventions to the appropriate locations.

Activities undertaken to achieve broader educational aims between 1999-2001 are enlisted below:

Table 8c: Educational Efforts of MS Gujarat.

Rajkot	Banaskantha	Vadodra	Panchmahal	Sabarkantha	Surendranagar
45 literacy classes, 630 enrolled	15 Literacy classes are conducted for 300 women Literacy Camp for 17 women from one village	Balika shiksha kendra formed by MS provides education for School drop-outs. 2 literacy classes, 20 enrolled.	7 literacy classes, 129 enrolled. Women from MS study after completion of Sangh Training Facilitated Attendance of children to attend Anganvadi in Jambughoda Block	Balikaashiksha kendra caters to drop-outs 18 literacy classes for 270 women 66 girls attend school	3 literacy classes with 55 enrolled. Voluntary public contribution Facilitated by MS to ensure education for girls Literacy classes for girls and married women MS literacy camp with 120 women from 3 villages

Source: MS Gujarat Annual Report, 1989-1999 and 2000-2001.

2.3 Contribution To Reduction Of Child Labour

There is widespread involvement of children, specially girls, in household chores, sibling and livestock care which impedes their education. Seasonal work on family fields or even for wage payment may lead to irregular school attendance and dropping out. More regular work for wage payment may lead to non-enrollment. Though MS Gujarat encounters child labour regularly the programme has not undertaken any specific campaign or initiative addressing the issue.

MS Gujarat has been addressing child enrollment, including of working and non-enrolled children, through its involvement with DPEP VECs, P/MTAs and enrollment drives. Even so, the mission is of the opinion that more targeted advocacy against child labour and reaffirmation of the importance of school enrollment and attendance at an appropriate age requires to be undertaken. MS may require to identify villages where the problem is particularly rampant and initiate dialogue with other local stakeholders like parents, community and PRI members to formulate strategies to address the problem. MSG needs to be more proactive regarding the issue.

Recommendations.

The following measures are recommended to improve the quality and efficacy of the educational interventions of the MS programme in Gujarat

- Literacy classes require an additional input for enhancing analytical thought processes towards strengthening empowerment efforts.

- MS requires to work in partnership with Continuing Education Programmes of government and other agencies in the development of post literacy material. The availability of appropriate post literacy reading material would be beneficial in keeping many Sangha women from lapsing into illiteracy.
- A closer MS association with teacher training and curriculum development in DPEP would help to engender these initiatives and be beneficial to both programmes.
- The need to restart the MSKs and BSKs cannot be overstated since the Balika Shikshan Kendras and Mahila Shikshan Kendras serve a niche requirement not fulfilled by any other education programme.
- More targeted advocacy and pre-active measures against child labour are required.

3. LINKAGES WITH GOVERNMENT, NGOs, WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND RNE PRIORITIES

3.1 Linkages with Government Departments and Agencies

MSG has initiated linkages with a number of Government schemes. It is not immediately apparent whether this followed any serious dialogue and introspection within MSG regarding the benefits of such linkages to the Sangha women. It is also not clear whether these partnerships contributed to meeting the objectives of MS in any way. Linkages have been established with DWCR, DRDA, TRYSEM, NABARD, DPEP ICDS, the Tribal Department and Mahila Samridhi Yojana. MSG role in the partnerships appear to be that of an extension/implementation agency of the government. Many of the activities undertaken by MSG seem one off activities, not linked organically to the overall empowerment process of the Sangha women. MS Sangha women have been trained in various income generating skills. MS requires to review the end results of these trainings and make a judgment regarding similar future trainings. Activities and partnerships entered into by MS should be in conformation with MS principles and objectives.

MSG has also collaborated with NGOs like CHETNA, Ahmedabad in awareness building for health. MSG is implementing the Swa-Shakti project in Surendranagar District. MSG requires to generate internal review and dialogue regarding whether it is appropriate for a strongly process oriented programme like MS to partner a target oriented project like Swa-Shakti. MS stresses strengthening the women themselves to make informed choices. Overall, MSG must decide which activities are the most beneficial for the Sangha women. These issues should be discussed with NRG advisors and within the organization before arriving at a decision. MS Gujarat may like to dialogue with other state MS programmes like MS Karnataka and U.P. where negotiation and operational strategies are planned to ensure that the fundamental concerns of the MS philosophy are not compromised through collaborations and partnerships for economic/rural development programmes

3.2 Linkages with NGOs and Women's Movement

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) has been working in partnership with selected Sahyoginis, District Coordinators and Junior District Coordinators to process and ongoing documentation of the development of Nari Adalats. The ICRW team is also assisting the MS team to systematically record the essentials of the cases handled by the NAs. The research project has the two-fold objective of MS Sanghas by women members, at least 2 to 4 Sanghas each. Expansion of the project has been decided on both fronts. In Valathooval Panchayat, for example, there has been a snowballing of MS Sanghas by women members, imparted to other women. In Valathooval Panchayat, there has been a

benefit of the NA processes being documented and the MS personnel gaining hands on training in the requirements of documentation.

It is felt that MSG requires to be in closer touch with NRG members and draw upon other women's groups for advice and for use as sounding boards. MSG has had few trainings and workshops for its own personnel on gender orientation in the last two years. This is urgently requires to be corrected. There also appears a lack of dialogue within the organization regarding direction for action, especially dialogue prior to introduction of new activities.

There is an ongoing discussion and movement within MSG towards formation of Mahasanghas and Sangha Federation as independent bodies. These will serve as a scope for increased linkage, greater support for women's networks and a general strengthening of the programme across the districts. The formation of Yuvati Shibir which focus on gender inequality is a useful initiative where younger women are imparted training on issues including family, health, cleanliness and sanitation, information on government facilities and schemes and other social issues. These initiatives are need based and initiated from the Sangha women instead of on the instigation of the demands of other programmes. The expansion of women's networks is essential towards increasing MS outreach across districts and facilitate women's mobilization for empowerment and towards building a women's movement. There is a need to assess the past and see how the limitations of the past can be overcome in order to strengthen the women's movement across all districts.

It is far too early to comment on the involvement or influence of MS in the tribal development plan since its work in the Dangs has only just begun, and nor was any mention made of the recent tension in the area. It would be important however to observe and ensure that these issues are incorporated in a future strategy and action plan.

3.3 Added Value and Linkages with RNE Sectoral Approach Priorities

The last decade saw a near universal focus on basic and primary education in all the international donor community activities. Much of this attention has now shifted to poverty alleviation. Education has remained a major focus in Dutch development co-operation policy and is now being seen as crucial for social well-being and economic progress, both of which are key inputs for poverty alleviation. The Netherlands has not reduced its budget for education while including an emphasis on poverty alleviation.

Dutch Development Policy on education concentrates upon basic education in order 'to meet people's learning needs and to enable them to acquire the basic knowledge and the essential skills and values they need for their personal and social development, and to play an useful role in society.' NRE believes that this goal may be reached through either formal or non-formal education.

The Dutch Development Policy has been arguing that the perspective in which Universal Primary Education is seen is required to move beyond traditional 'formal' paradigms. It is perhaps time that the formal system is no longer seen as the standard and legitimate one while the non-formal becomes the 'second', 'also ran' or 'stop gap'.

The formal and the non-formal should start to complement each other as parts of the same system. At present non-formal education for adults is seen as legitimate but not for children. Strategies to facilitate learning in and out of school need to be

integrated. Non-formal education requires to leave behind its low cost, small scale, local image and move on to possessing the same value, status and quality as the formal since both these paradigms have a role in meeting the needs of poor people in society.

Additionally there is sometimes the difficulty that the norms for opening formal schools do not allow a school to be opened in remote or very small habitations thus negatively impacting certain already deprived groups. Therefore, RNE is now stressing the need to include innovative outreach approaches. In this context, the MS innovation of Mahila Shikshan Kendras and other educational initiatives are of interest.

The holistic view of education requires to make place for the non-formal as well as other inputs like Early Childhood Education. introducing the Early Childhood Development (ECD, which includes education, nutrition, clothing and health and is the presently accepted nomenclature) is an effective strategy to overcome some of the impediments that many disadvantaged children face in the pre-school period. The disadvantages faced in the pre-school period impact their performance in primary school. In this context the MS child care centers are of interest.

In keeping with this thinking RNE has been supporting the second phase of the centrally sponsored scheme, DPEP II. DPEP began in 1994 and supports replicable, sustainable and cost effective programme development in primary education. DPEP is presently being implemented in 271 districts in 18 states. RNE supports the programme in three districts of Gujarat of Banaskantha, Dangs and Panchmahal through a co-financing agreement with the World Bank.

DPEP works for improved pedagogy, enhanced learning achievement and bridging gender and social gaps in education. The Government of Gujarat (GOG) proposed to fund three additional districts (Jamnagar, Junagadh and Bhavnagar) and invited RNE to fund three others (Surendra Nagar, Kutch and Sabarkantha). Additionally all the reconstruction and repair costs for schools in the post Gujarat Earthquake (26 Jan 2001) period (minus those being funded privately or through NGOs) are being provided by RNE in DPEP districts. Basic educational infrastructure were affected in 18 districts which included Banaskantha, Panchmahal, Kutch, Surendranagar, Sabarkantha, Bhavnagar, Jamnagar and Junagadh. In order to minimize school disruption, GOG plans to complete repair and reconstruction work within 18 months. RNE is contributing approximately 40 million US dollars.

Gujarat is one of the three states identified for concentration of RNE initiatives as part of the revised strategy and based on the Sectoral Approach. Within the Dutch policy objectives and the objectives of GAVIM (Dutch Acronym for Good Governance, poverty reduction, institution building, and the environment) the sectoral focus identified for collaboration in the state of Gujarat includes area of Education, Mental Health, Water Management, and reconstruction.

The Universalization of Elementary Education and full functional literacy has been given high priority in the GoG's Social Infrastructure Action Programme as outlined in the policy document 2010. RNE has also been engaged in dialogue with GOG and some professional institutes (IIM, Ravi Mathai Centre for Educational Innovations) NGOs (Pratham, Eklavya and SEWA) regarding educational reform. RNE is also facilitating CARE's dialogue with GOG regarding a partnership in ECE, mother's education, dropouts, monitoring, mapping of various schemes that have an impact on education. RNE is working with NOVIB (Dutch funding agency specializing in development and educational projects) and the Center for Educational Management

(CEMD) in educational management and urban education. It is hoped that these initiatives will support MS educational efforts in 7 districts.

MS in Gujarat is funded by the RNE. The programme is presently being implemented in 36 blocks and 1,422 villages in Sabarkantha, Banaskantha, Panchmahal, Surendranagar, Varodara, Rajkot and Dangs. The Mahila Samakhya programme offers the potential to address a number of the issues that have been prioritised for the state within the framework of the RNE sectoral approach and within the GAVIM framework.

Women in Sanghas have prioritized water as a key issue of survival and could well prove a resource towards involvement in **effective water management strategies** by communities. The **educational initiatives** of MSG strengthen ties with DPEP and help engender the programme, bridge gender gaps in enrollment. However, MSG requires to take more constructive roles in developing content and teacher training inputs.

MSG has been involved in the **relief and rehabilitation efforts** in the State following the devastating earthquake in and beyond its area of work. MSG requires to **address the social reconstruction agenda and institution building** by providing space for Sanghas, Federations and Nari Adalats to work across class /caste/religion barriers towards a more inclusive approach to empowerment.

4. REPORTING AND MONITORING

Information flow in Mahila Samakhya Gujarat (MSG) has been captured in a flow chart in Exhibit 2. It shows nature, time, frequency and direction of information flow between various actors of the structure.

The different levels at which information is generated and reports produced can be categorized as:

- Field: consists of Resource Persons and Sahayoginis;
- District: consists of supervisory and administrative employees like RP, accountants, DEOs and headed by DPC;
- State: consists of supervisory and administrative employees like RPs, Consultants, accounts officer, internal auditor, SPD. Policy bodies like Executive Committee are also at the State level; and
- National Level: Office of the National Project Director and RNE.

Appendix I has more details on reporting.

MSG like other State Societies has been producing a fairly high volume of monthly, quarterly, biannual and annual reports, which capture all the activities being performed within the program. Reflection, analysis and feedback on these reports are carried out in day to day interaction among program functionaries.

There is a need to add **greater analytical depth** so that reporting captures not only the itinerary of events but **assesses problems, hurdles and learning**. Follow up on previous reports is not integral to the reporting process, it is also advised to include action taken component as a standard feature. The process of feedback on reports needs to be formalized. Reporting procedures have to improve in order to lend

themselves to analysis against objectives, as well as formatted appropriately for comparability. The Mission advises improved reporting procedures.

Besides regular reports, **documentation** in MSG covers a wide spectrum, which includes process documentation, workshop reports, exchange visit reports, special events reports like Melas etc. Some of these have immediate use and therefore have shorter shelf life whereas others have potential of long term use and would benefit a wider community. There is a need for greater systematization, analysis, indexing and utilization of these for future planning as well as for wider dissemination.

5. PLANNING AND BUDGETING

MSG follows the guidelines issued by Center in the Green Book⁷ to prepare its annual plans and budgets as is the practice in other states. An outline of this process is represented in Exhibit 3.

5. PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION AND ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

Organization Structure

State

Exhibit 4 shows organizational set up of MSG upto district level. Program at the State level is headed by a State Project Director who is guided by Executive Committee which in turn is responsible to the Governing Council.

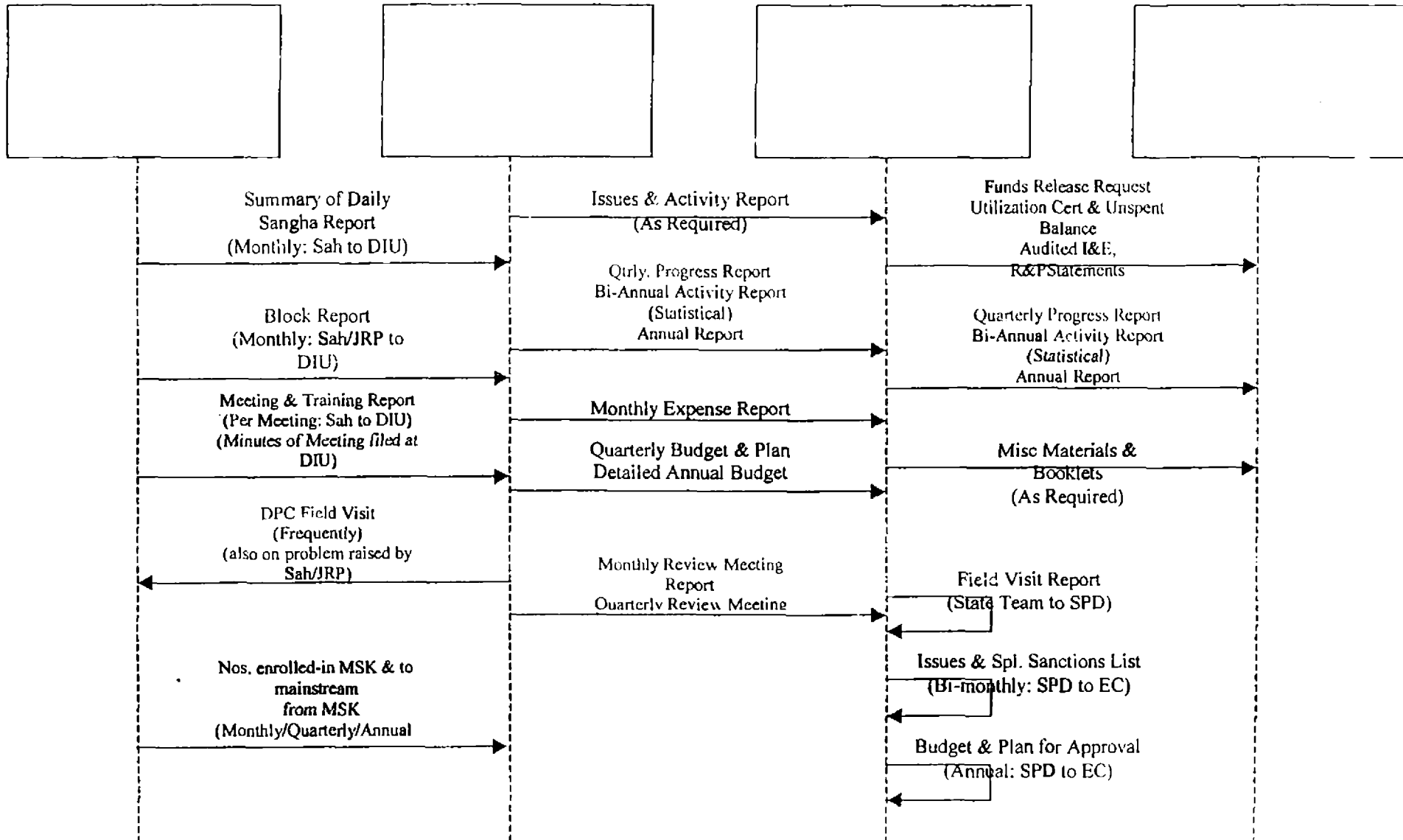
State Level structure is described in brief below:

- sahayoginis carry out discussions with their sanghas to assess members' expectations and priorities in the coming year.
- Based on these discussions sahayoginis prepare plans and this is discussed with DPC.
- After assessing expectations of sanghas through the sahayoginis, DPCs visit State to share these with SPD/ RPs/ Consultants and appreciate State level thrust areas.
- DPCs finalize and submit their plans to the SPD after contextualizing them in the light of State level thrust areas.
- After the submission of annual plans by the districts, activity wise costs are established and plan is consolidated for the whole State.
- Accountants at the district level as well as State level prepare Management Budget based on guidelines that are provided in the Green Book and number of villages in which the program is being implemented within each district.
- District wise budget is consolidated into a State budget and sent for an informal feedback to the Center.
- Center studies the budget and sends it back to SPD along with their comments.
- Annual plan or the budget is revised to incorporate Center's comments and placed before the EC for their approval.
- After the budget has been approved by the EC it is finally submitted to

Center receives an annual budget statement, which has been approved by the EC.

⁷ MAHILA SAMAKHYA (Education For Women's Equality) (Ninth Plan Document 1997-2002) 1997, Ministry of HRD, (Deptt. Of Education) Govt of India, New Delhi.

Exhibit 2: Information Flow in MS Gujarat



themselves to analysis against objectives, as well as formatted appropriately for comparability. The Mission advises improved reporting procedures.

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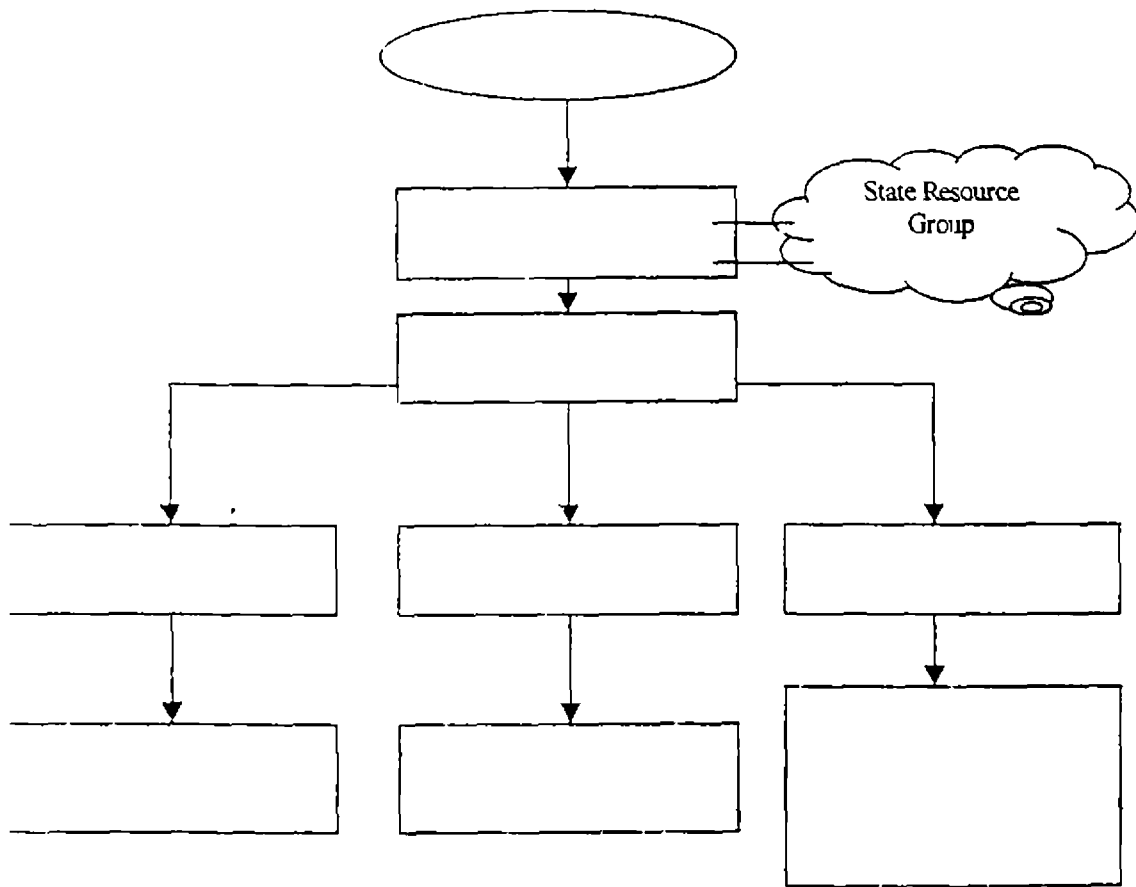
State Level structure is described in brief below:

- Sahayoginis carry out discussions with their Sanghas to assess members' expectations and priorities in the coming year.
- Based on these discussions Sahayoginis prepare plans and this is discussed with DPC.
- After assessing expectations of Sanghas through the Sahayoginis, DPCs visit State to share these with SPD/ RPs/ Consultants and appreciate State level thrust areas.
- DPCs finalize and submit their plans to the SPD after contextualizing them in the light of State level thrust areas.
- After the submission of annual plans by the districts, activity wise costs are established and plan is consolidated for the whole State.
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⁷ MAHILA SAMAKHYA (Education For Women's Equality) (Ninth Plan Document 1997-2002) 1997, Ministry of HRD, (Dept. Of Education) Govt of India, New Delhi.

**EXHIBIT 3: ORGANIZATION CHART OF MAHILA SAMAKHYA GUJARAT
STATE LEVEL**



RNE works on the principle of reimbursing the costs that have been incurred by the supported States for implementing MSG.

- The annual planning and budgeting exercise in MSG builds up on the expectations of the Sangha women in conformity with project principles. A detailed annual activity plan is drawn up which feeds into the annual budgeting process. There is a need to further strengthen this process and to strengthen the role of Sanghas in undertaking such planning and determining their activities especially in districts where these processes have been weak. Moreover, as in the case of other states, Gujarat also follows the national guidelines (objectives) for the preparation of their budgets. It is recommended that they should frame their own objectives, which should then become the basis for planning activities, budgeting, analyzing progress and variances. The progress as well as the monitoring can become more focussed and more state specific.

General Council is the top most body in the Society. It is the final authority at the State level which provides policy support, considers annual budget, audited accounts, forms bye laws and rules and delegates powers to EC so that it can discharge its duties effectively. The Governing Council cannot add and amend any rules. It cannot form any bye-laws without the approval of GOI.

The State Executive Committee is an empowered body that takes decisions relating to governance and program direction. It is responsible to the Governing Council. Executive committee puts its plans into action through the State Program Director (SPD). SPD is responsible for overall execution and smooth running of the program within the State. The majority of the representation in EC is either Government's ex-officio members or their nominees. It would be in the best interest of the program that its autonomous nature be fortified by making its representation even broader by including greater representation of local NGOs and public figures that have credentials in these areas. Greater involvement of the NRG representatives may also serve to strengthen the programme perspectives and capacities to deal with empowerment concerns.

Unlike the NRG, State Resource Group (SRG) at the State level is not a formal body. MS Societies have forged their own linkages with other NGOs and like-minded individuals whose resources and expertise are drawn from time to time.

A formal status for the SRG is recommended, as this would be useful in binding the current informal network of the MSG together. SRG because of its proximity to MSG and state specific expertise would be able to give much greater context specific advice. At certain points they might also be able to help MS negotiate on an operational level by making their networks and contacts available to them.

SPD has a team of following personnel to help her:

Table 9: Personnel at State Level in MSG

Position	Number of Posts
Assistant SPD	1 (Vacant)
Resource Persons	1
Consultants	1
Internal Auditor	1
Accounts Officer	1
Stenographer	2
Data Entry Operator	1
Lower Div. Clerk	1 (Vacant)
Assistant	1 (Vacant)
Peon	2
Dnver	1

SPD is heavily loaded with routine administrative work. Whereas the position of Assistant SPD has been created but this is not the real requirement. SPD should be provided personal secretarial assistance so that her work can be better organized. It is suggested that the post of Assistant SPD should be changed to Executive Secretary to the SPD.

In case of some positions at the state level there is an overlap and lack of clarity in the respective roles. Overlapping Job descriptions of two positions may lend flexibility in the

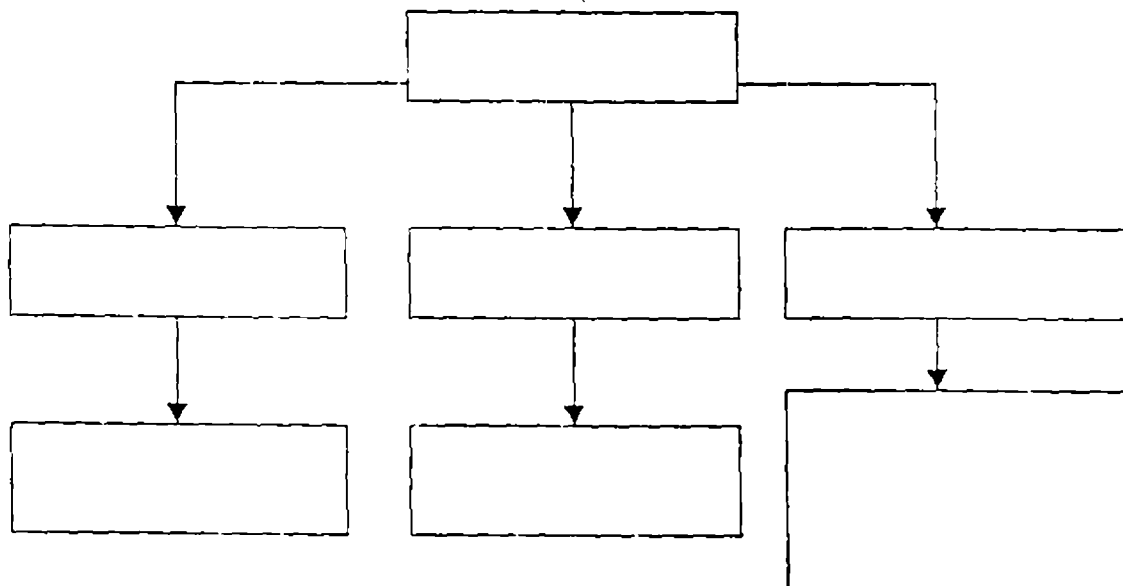
short term but could cause problems in the long term. There is a need to review and rationalize the job descriptions and roles.

State Resource Center. MS Program in Gujarat has been running for the last twelve years. While the program has performed well at some places and on some aspects (eg Nari Adalat) there is a need to provide fresh impetus especially in the direction of developing competencies and conceptual foundations of project functionaries. It would be useful for Gujarat to have its own State Resource Center in the long run, as this would accelerate and mainstream MS processes but this should be preceded by intensive action to develop competencies of functionaries on perspectives, key principles and strategies of the programme. This is all the more imperative in the context of the demands on MS to become a delivery mechanism for other programmes, without consideration to the processes that are the foundation of MS and essential for empowerment.

District

1. Exhibit 4 shows Organization Chart at the District level.

Exhibit 4: Organization Chart Of MSG – District Level



The DIU is headed by the District Project Coordinator who is supported by following staff:

Table 10: Staff at District level

Position	Number of Posts
Resource Person	Depends upon number of villages
Junior Resource Person	Depends upon number of villages
Accountant	1
Stenographer	1
Data Entry Operator	1
Lower Div. Clerk	1
Assistant	1
Peon	1
Driver	1
Sahayogini	Depends upon number of villages

Number of RP/ JRPs varies by the number of villages being covered in a district. It has been observed that DPC is overloaded with routine administrative tasks which leaves her with lesser time in her role as a coach and leader of the DIU. It is recommended that some provision for secretarial assistance should be made at this level also.

With the process gradual process of federation formation in the next phase there would be newer and higher expectations of Sahayoginis. It is proposed that in each district, positions for five 'Issue Based Coordinators' (IBCs) should be created. IBCs would be at the same level as RPs presently are in the organizational hierarchy and would be responsible for guiding and building capacity of sahayoginis and federations and providing support in the areas of their expertise. They would also be expected to work along with sahayoginis for federations.

7.HUMAN RESOURCES

Staff: MS has been able to carve a special position for itself and make its presence felt on the ground due to its dedicated personnel. However, there is a serious problem of staff turnover. Table 10 shows staff turnover in MSG at the State and district level. Problem of turnover is more acute at the State level as compared to District level. However, even small degree of staff turnover at senior supervisory levels in districts is extremely disturbing to the program as it is this level which provides critical leadership and direction to the program in the field.

Table 10: Staff turnover in MSG

Year	State Resignations as % of total Employees	Districts Resignations as % of total Employees
1997-98	7	1
1998-99	27	2
1999-00	20	5
2000-01	20	13
2001-02	13	8

Honoraria and travel allowance were fixed in 1997 (five years ago) and have since not been revised. This is leading to serious morale and retention issues. Program stands the risk of losing its momentum and jeopardizing its gains if this issue is not handled immediately. There is a need to benchmark MS compensation and employee benefit practices to other programs to be able to attract and retain proficient personnel. The recommended revisions should also incorporate provisions to account for general inflation as well as performance based incentives, which need not always be monetary.

The mission also found to its surprise that in Surendranagar, the DPC and four MS Sahayoginis are on Swa Shakti payroll and are housed in the MS DIU. There is no clear strategy how MS involvement would influence the strategy and functioning of the Swa Shakti programme, and nor has the process been adapted to changed to respond to women's needs. Swa Shakti as implemented by MS remains as target oriented and economic focussed as in other parts of the state. Besides this, the DPC being on the payroll of Swa

Shakti may compromise the MS programme objectives, given that there is likelihood of priority to targets of that programme at the cost of facilitation of the processes required for the MS programme. The mission is of the view that collaboration with other programmes and schemes must not be at the cost of Mahila Samakhya principles and objectives. Any collaboration should be analyzed for its programmatic implications and its potential to facilitate empowerment and the terms of such collaboration/ partnership should be negotiated and placed in writing, to reflect the adherence to the non violable principles of the programme.

Table11 shows Compensation of some of the positions in MS compared to similar projects.

Table11: MS Compensation compared to DPIP

	Mahila Samakhya Rs per month	DPIP Rs per month
State Program Director	10000	14000-20000
District Program Coordinator	6000	10000-15000

Vacancies: MSG has found it difficult to attract well-qualified people. This leads to positions lying vacant which has negative fallout on the program. There are numerous examples in Gujarat when key positions like DPCs have remained vacant or when positions have been filled on an adhoc basis without going through the laid down process of filling in vacancies.

Table 12 shows organization wide appointments as a percentage of total sanctioned posts on specific positions. Key positions like RP, Consultant and Auditor have remained vacant at the State Level for one or more years. Situation in districts has been worse. Appointments on the position of DPC has never increased beyond 67% in any of the years. Similarly there has been high level of vacancies for other positions in districts.

Table 12: Appointments as Percentage of Total Sanctioned Positions

	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
State Level Positions					
SPD	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
ASPD	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
AO	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Auditor	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
RP	0%	0%	100%	100%	100%
Consultant	100%	100%	0%	100%	100%
Accountant	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Stenographer	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
DEO	0%	100%	100%	100%	100%
LDC	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Assistant	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Peon	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Driver	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

District Level Positions					
DPC	17%	50%	67%	67%	29%
RP	63%	63%	50%	63%	56%
JRP	20%	40%	40%	36%	42%
Accountant	33%	33%	50%	83%	71%
Stenographer	40%	40%	33%	40%	33%
DEO	0%	20%	40%	40%	33%
LDC	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Assistant	0%	33%	17%	33%	14%
Peon	43%	67%	43%	57%	50%
Driver	20%	50%	67%	67%	43%
Sahayogini	33%	58%	52%	59%	58%

Status as on April 1st of every year. This table does not capture variations within a year.

Vacancies at the field level of DPCs, RPs and JRPs are bound to have a qualitative impact on the programme and need to be addressed urgently. It is expected that improvement in compensation will serve to correct the situation. It is important that the processes prescribed for appointments are followed in letter and spirit. Ad hoc appointments should be limited to emergency situations and suitable arrangements should be made as soon as positions fall vacant.

Social Security: MSG personnel especially Sahayoginis work under extremely difficult conditions, which also raises concerns of their safety and security. These issues should be closely looked into and necessary organizational arrangements made, which could be in the form of insurance-cover, etc. Mission noted that some of the states like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have instituted medical benefits for their employees.

Employment Contract: One-year-contract system of employment leads to insecurity in employees. There is a need for permanency of tenure, however to address the issue of an eventuality when funding to MS may stop, the contract of employment should be restricted to the period of the program and also subject to availability of funds from the GOI. In certain instances Sahayoginis have not been given a proper appointment letter. It is advisable that appointment letters should be given to Sahayoginis.

Appraisal: Whereas there is regular interaction between levels of functionaries which is quite facilitative in achieving organizational objectives collaboratively, a formal personnel appraisal system should be put in place, on the basis of which further renewal of contract, promotions and all other personnel decisions should be based. Annual employee appraisal should also feed into the Training Needs Assessment, which should further feed into Annual Plan in accordance with State's strategic objectives. Wherever induction into the organization is through an on-the-job process, it has been found to be insufficient. It is felt that there is a need for formal induction and orientation program when new personnel are recruited or when a person is promoted.

Workload: There is a need to specially account for and make room for additional administrative resources to support the DPC and the PD in the administration of the programme. Additional admin resources are also necessary whenever additional projects like Swa Shakti are taken up.

Skill Upgradation: Considering the expansion of the program and the need to strengthen the programme a strategy for capacity development needs to be evolved for the new and old staff to systematically provide learning on the core principles and goals of the programme as well as on key strategic areas. The programme needs to invest in the capacities of State level and field staff as well as Sangha and Mahasangha leaders to bring about a more cohesive and visible shift in the gains of empowerment processes in the lives of women and girls through this programme. It would also be helpful if skills of MSG personnel are upgraded in following areas:

- Perspectives of Mahila Samakhya and key strategies to address the achievement of empowerment goals
- Designing and management of Educational programmes for women and girls within the MS framework.
- Building peoples institutions and processes to strengthen Sanghas and inter-Sangha networking
- *Documentation* – to enable personnel make their documentation more analytical in nature so that it notes hurdles, uncovers root causes to problems and shares lessons learnt.
- *Strategic planning including MIS:* to enable personnel align their activities with their strategy for achieving overall goals. MIS would be helpful in assessing how far they have achieved and analyze if the gaps are due to implementation or limitations in strategy.
- *Basic budgeting process & financial management skills:* Greater financial skills would not only enable informed management of program through greater understanding of finance-physical linkages but would also contribute in substantive terms as then better finance appreciation would also be transferred to sangha women.

8. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

8.1 Accounting

Accounting practices in MSG are professional and up to date. A national level workshop was convened for accountants of all states and these practices can be attributed to that process. Details about Accounting system are provided in Appendix II.

Payments: All payments above Rs 1000 in MSG are made through cheques, however payments for honoraria are made by cash. In keeping with overall recommendations it is advisable that MSG should make all payments above Rs 500 by cheques and it is also recommended that all the honoraria and stipends should be paid by bank transfer or cheques.

Bank Accounts: MSG keeps separate bank accounts for District and State offices. It also opens separate accounts whenever a new project, which has a separate funding source, is taken up.

Authorization of Vouchers: Authority for all routine vouchers such as utility payments are passed by the Accounts Officer directly. Accounts Officer also has power to purchase routine office supplies upto a limit of Rs 2000. For all other matters SPD and DPC are the final authorities.

It is felt that load of approving all the expense vouchers on SPD/ DPC can be further reduced. The authorization of expense vouchers should be delegated to the level of Resource Person depending on the person who has incurred the expense. Only a limited number of vouchers should come to the SPD/DPC. A limit could be fixed above which all the vouchers would need to necessarily be approved by the SPD at the State Office and the DPC at the District Office.

Community Contribution: Current accounting system does not report the contributions received from community, which become available to the program. The budgeting also does not keep in mind resources that would be available from this source. This also contributes to budget surpluses currently observed. Community contribution accounting would make the budgeting process more realistic.

8.2 Internal Controls

A strong system of internal control is maintained through proper distribution of workload right from the Sangha Level to the Executive Committee level. At the Sangha Level the internal control is exercised through checks at various stages by DPC/ DRP/ JRP/ Members of the Sanghas. For expense approval, actual payment handling, recording & authorization are all handled by different functionaries in the organization. Monthly internal audit exercise is carried out by the State Accountants who visit different districts by rotation and check all the vouchers at the DIU level. Accountants keep a check on items being spent and budgetary provisions.

There is however, no budgeted activity/amount v/s actual verification and analysis, which could show some variations, which need to be carefully analyzed. The same as given in the Budgeting section of the report.

8.3 Purchase Procedures

Purchase process adopted by MSG is similar to that being followed by government. Authority to purchase up to a specified amount limits has been delegated. Whenever a purchase decision exceeds an employee's limit then she has to take approval from the competent authority. The process of purchase is briefly given in Appendix III.

The purchase process in MSG is time consuming and imposes unnecessary burden on the program and needs to be simplified. It is recommended that simplified purchase procedures up to a limit of Rs. 20,000 should be instituted in MS Societies. The basic underlying principle for an effective purchase procedure is to be able to carry out all purchases under practical conditions of transparent system rather than be burdened by procedures and system followed by the Government. A feasible alternative has been provided in Appendix IV.

8.4 Funds Flow

Funds Flow: Funds have to flow from Center to MSG to finally the districts so that program activities can be implemented on ground in a time bound manner. The flow of funds from Center to MSG usually takes two months from the date of receipt of 'request for funds' to final issue of draft. Factors like the amount requested, utilization certificates, audited statements and rate of utilization are used by the center to determine the amount to be released. MSG send requests every quarter based on the projected quarterly expenditure that is submitted to the Center. Generally the National Office releases funds in 2 to 3 installments. The process of flow of funds is shown in detail in Appendix V.

None of the persons at any link in the chain at MSG expressed disconcert due to funds not being available at the right time.

Idle Funds: It was observed that MSG regularly invests idle funds in Fixed Deposits, whenever funds available are more than the projected expenses for the following month. However there is no fixed rule on the basis of which this decision is taken across Districts and State Office. Thus, there is a need to standardize this practice and idle funds should be invested at the State and district levels in Fixed Deposits of 45 / 60 / 90 days according to requirement of funds.

Budget Reappropriation: SPD has complete authority to reappropriate budget. However activity costs cannot be taken into management costs but the opposite is possible and valid. DPCs have to send the request to SPD for a reappropriation. This practice should continue the way it is

Legal requirements: MSG is filing an Income Tax Return. It is a good practice and it should continue to do so.

Computerization: Patchy efforts have been done by MSG in computerization. For example it has computerized its accounts at the Vidodara district office. Given the large volume of data likely to be involved in planning, budgeting, monitoring, and reporting and accounts processes it is recommended that these processes should be gradually computerized in a phased manner. The process of computerization should not create a parallel substructure within the organization but should be adopted by the existing management towards professionalization of their work. Some of these require substantial capacity building inputs and it is an area, which can be explored for Technical Assistance.

9.

9.1 Disclosures

8.6 Payroll System

VIRAT PLS SEND 2 MISSING SECTIONS

8.7 Utilization of Funds

Table 13 provides an overview of utilization of funds by MSG during the 1997-2002 phase of Program. It also provides a comparison of budget with the actual expenses.

Table 13: Budget versus Actual Expenditure of Funds (Total) by MSG during 1997-2002

Financial Year	Budget	Actual	Actual / Budget
1997-98	285.2	101.9	36%
1998-99	175.4	134.4	77%
1999-00	212.5	146.7	69%
2000-01	185	125.4	68%
2001-02	202		

Utilization of budget was closest to budget in 1998-99 but overall there is a tendency to either under spend or plan rather ambitiously. There is scope for bringing down this gap.

Table 14 gives actual versus budget analysis for management cost. It can be seen that these ratios are better than total cost actual-budget ratios. However, considering that management cost can be estimated to a greater precision there is opportunity for improving these ratios.

Table14: Budget versus Actual Expenditure (Management Cost) by MSG during 1997-2002

Financial Year	Budget	Actual	Actual / Budget
1997-98	95.73	42.67	45%
1998-99	73.44	54.52	74%
1999-00	97.42	71.05	73%
2000-01	86.19	62.54	73%
2001-02	88.32		

Table 15 gives actual versus budget analysis for activity cost. Expectedly these ratios are lower than total and management cost ratios to budgets. There is a need to make planning much more realistic.

Table 15: Budget versus Actual Expenditure (Activity Cost) by MSG during 1997-2002

Financial Year	Budget	Actual	Actual / Budget
1997-98	189.5	59.27	31%
1998-99	101.96	79.92	78%
1999-00	115.08	75.71	66%
2000-01	98.81	62.93	64%
2001-02	113.68		

Table 16 gives ratio of management cost to total cost over the last phase. Share of management cost has increased from 42% in 1997-98 to 50% in 2000-01. It is important to ensure that management costs share should not increase disproportionately. As per the original financial estimates for 1997-2002, this ratio for a state with five districts should have remained less than 38%.

Table 16: Management Cost, Activity Cost and Management Cost as ratio of Total Cost (Actual Expenditure) in MSG during 1997-2002

Financial Year	Management Cost	Activity Cost	Management Cost / Total Cost
1997-98	42.67	59.27	42%

1998-99	54.52	79.92	41%
1999-00	71.05	75.71	48%
2000-01	62.54	62.93	50%

D. NEXT PHASE

1. Structure And Programme Initiatives

The MS Programme in Gujarat has raised awareness regarding women and social change in the districts where the programme is implemented, although work in the Dangs has been initiated only recently. However, the programme implementation and geographical outreach needs urgent attention. Figures provided by MS for the period 1997- 2000 indicate that initiatives like the Nari Adalats, Mahila Kutirs and Yuvati Shibirs all need renewed effort in order to expand or (more often than not) just to retain their momentum. The performance of Panchmahal, Surendranagar, Banaskantha and Dangs district is of special concern in this respect where the progress of MS over a five-year period has been less than satisfactory.

Institutional Strengthening

Much work needs to be done with regard to strengthening Federations, beginning with the strengthening of Sanghas. Federation meetings that the Mission attended revealed little understanding among women assembled about federations.

The Mission found that while other states have been successful in building strong Sanghas and developing strong networks between Sanghas Gujarat's performance in building up and facilitating the emergence of Sanghas as agencies for social change remains poor. Evidence of the empowerment of women at the Sangha level is uneven. The Annual Report 2000-01 itself classifies only 30% of Sanghas in Gujarat MS as strong, 36% as medium and 33% are optimistically defined as 'normal'. It is futile to proceed with other processes without strengthening the present Sanghas as this is fundamental to the success of all other initiatives. The Mission notes the commendable initiatives to establish a strong programme of Nari Adalat and the interface with Panchayati Raj which has been facilitated by MS in various pockets. Specific strategies and efforts are also needed to strengthen the Sangha processes to bring them at par with the strong processes of the Nari Adalats and the interface with Panchayati Raj processes. This would infuse a new energy into the programme and enable it to influence mainstream processes more effectively since the Sangha women are finally the ones who participate and represent their needs on multiple platforms. Rajkot district stands out as a shining example of what could be possible by focussing on strengthening of Sanghas, although the education component needs greater attention.

While MS Gujarat has gone through a troublesome period with a succession of staff changes at the State level, it must reinstate the BSKs and MSKs to continue and take forward its literacy programme. The Balika Shikshan Kendra is a good concept and the 1997 Mission recommended that BSK be established in each block, providing alternative models of schooling for drop-out girls (9-14 years) at village level which is yet to be implemented. This Mission recommends that MSG explore means for collaboration with DPEP on the

BSK, while assuring adherence to the MS perspectives. The same also applies to the two MSKs that have not been functioning for the past two years.

The Mission is of the opinion that the concept and practical implementation of Sangha Federations needs to be worked out systematically. The limited scope of the Varanasi society initiated by the Sahyoginis, the Banda group starting a separate NGO or the disillusionment of the Baroda group are instances which need to be kept in mind while dealing with this issue. The Mission recommends that the conceptual, practical and financial aspects of the Federation be elaborated in a proper document.

Mahila Kutirs built some times with extra money provided by the Panchayat or the Corporate Sector has strengthened the Sangha. The Mission recommends therefore that reasonable budgetary allocations be provided for Sangha huts whenever possible, while women maybe encouraged to raise funds from other sources in order to gain confidence in the bargaining and achievement process.

The Mission is of the view that maximum autonomy of the programme should be secured. At SPD and DPC level staff needs to be appointed who have managerial capacities and are firmly rooted in the women's movement in Gujarat.

2. Staff Capacities

The Mission is of the view that inappropriate selection and inadequate training of staff has led to a situation where the Sanghas in Gujarat are often the weakest instead of being the strongest part of the Programme. The lack of conceptual clarity among the staff at the DIU and State level was reflected in the quality of training and processes followed for forming and implementation of programme with MS Sanghas.

There is insufficient conceptual clarity or understanding of the key principles of the Programme amongst staff and visible effort needs to be made to address these issues. Training of DIU staff and Sanghas are an essential component of strengthening Sanghas. MS Gujarat requires a concerted effort to develop conceptual clarity and mobilize Sahayoginis, an area that has received far from adequate attention in this phase. Adequate in-house capacity needs to be developed for staff training at all levels in order to be able to strengthen the field processes and equip the programme to respond to emerging needs. Sahayoginis, Resource Person (RP) and DIU training needs to be strengthened to overcome the dearth of such opportunities in the past couple of years and to enhance the momentum and efficacy of the programme.

The availability of training facilities, kitchen facility and space for sitting together and exchanging ideas is crucial for the Programme. For Gujarat, the Mission recommends the establishment of an appropriate office where all the necessities like the library, the Resource persons, Consultants and Sahayoginis can come together. Facilities should be available for overnight stay (as in UP and Karnataka). Change of the office to a decent location in Ahmedabad (not Gandhinagar) is recommended.

The interaction of MS Gujarat with NRG members and womens organizations is poor and it is recommended that this be vitalized in order to affirm its feminist perspective. The National Resource Group needs to exercise greater influence on the State programme as resource persons and advisors either as part of a State Resource Group or in the EC. The NRG can

also play a significant role to strengthen the conceptual understanding of the key principles of MS with the State team including the director.

The National office should ensure the linkage of the MS programme to the women's movement and development agencies and facilitate dissemination and sharing of experiences between States. The Mission recommends the enhancement of professional capacities of staff in order to take the programme forward instead of letting it peter out in small pockets.

There is also a need to consider and reflect upon possible drawbacks or deterrents in taking the programme forward. This is necessary not only in terms of assessing MS progress but also for evolving and developing strategies in order to successfully take the programme forward.

3. Spatial Expansion/ Consolidation

While the MS Programme has been largely successful in raising and facilitating awareness of women's issues, the progress of MS Gujarat has been less than satisfactory. Gujarat has 1399 Sanghas with a collective strength of over 34,000 women. Despite the numerical achievements, progress of MS programmes remains uneven and at times difficult to assess. While a number of activities have been initiated, the patterns of such activities have been spread thin and hence their contribution to women's empowerment is sporadic. The programme needs to undertake a comprehensive exercise of planning by objectives to address specific needs and issues in a comprehensive way towards achievement of the programme goals. The strengthening of the programme is a necessary prerequisite to expansion in the next phase.

The coverage of villages per block by MS Gujarat remains low. There is a need for MS Gujarat to connect with women's groups and the wider women's movement in Gujarat. There is little information regarding the programme in the tribal Dangs district. The Mission recommends caution in the appropriate appointment of staff within a tribal setting, and appropriate training and exposure opportunities to other tribal areas where MS is being implemented such as in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala for greater learning on strategies and processes.

The recommendations of the 1995-1996 Indo Dutch Evaluation Mission have not been complied with at all. Constant shuffling of the State and District Personnel of the programme can be detrimental to the programme. An E:C comprising of mainly bureaucrats and few links with activists or development workers further impedes conceptual clarity and progress towards goals of empowerment. The mission therefore recommends that the programme should consolidate its autonomous nature and that local non-government representation at state levels is increased.

The Mission expresses deep concern at the programme in the Dangs district. The recently employed staff (6 months) for the Dangs district need appropriate orientation and sensitivity to tribal population and culture. The mission is of the opinion that appropriate Sayoginis be selected who are sensitive to the culture and special needs of tribal groups and in taking the programme forward in Dangs district. Educational levels for qualification may be relaxed in order to recruit appropriate Sahayoginis as has been done in other states provided women and girls from the tribal community are recruited.

4. Steps Forward

With reference to MS Gujarat, the Mission recommends consolidation of the programme before planning the next phase. Intensive initiatives are required to formulate a Plan of Action in order to strengthen the programme towards achievement of its objectives.

The Mission understands from the National Office that a Resource Team is to be fielded to facilitate a state level vision workshop in the next month. This Resource Team can be assigned the additional task of formulating a Plan of Action with the team in Gujarat and the National Project Office to strengthen the programme to meet its objectives. This Resource Team should visit the State and facilitate the formulation of such a Plan of Action within a three month period before March 2002, and should further be required to track and report on the progress of the Plan of Action and its achievement by the end of the year 2002. Based on the achievement of this PoA, the next phase may be planned and considered.

The Resource team may chalk out a training programme by engaging a training institute preferably in Gujarat itself or through competent trainers from Mumbai which is not too far away. A training group needs to be based at State and district level. The Mission should also monitor and report on the progress of operationalization of the Plan of Action and its achievement by the end of the year 2002 at which point consideration may be given to withdrawal of support to dysfunctional districts. A winding up may be suggested in such districts, providing two years NGO grant in aid funding after which Dutch support for the district is either terminated or functions on its own without the MS support.

Appendix I: Reporting Process in MS

The reports that are produced in the organization at each level are described in brief in this Appendix. These reports have more or less similar format and frequency across districts within the State.

- Sahayoginis prepare a daily report, which contains an account of the activities that they complete during the day. These reports are submitted to RPs on a monthly basis. RPs read these report and provides comments to Sahayoginis so that they can improve upon their work.
- RPs also maintain a daily report which she submits to DPC at the end of month. These reports contain information about the happenings of each day. DPC goes through these reports and provide feedback to RPs about her work in the monthly staff meeting.
- DPCs submit a quarterly progress report about the district's performance to SPD. This report contains a snapshot of district's position on date as well as description of activities that were performed during the last three months.
- DPCs send a monthly expense statement, which contains information about all the expenses incurred during the month to the State Office.
- All MS Societies have a system of documenting each and every event that is organized or participated in. These events can be workshops, exposure visits, visits by outsiders, melas, camps etc. Reports that explain whatever transpired on these 4accounts are diligently maintained
- MS Societies also produce documents relating to their substantive area. Whenever a ground level process, which is innovative or has been proved to be extremely successful and popular is identified and documented for wider use.
- Besides reports, minutes of meeting and plans of action for the District are also sent by DPC to SPD.

MS Societies diligently monitor the activities performed by its employees and the inputs that have gone into these activities. These are adequately reflected in the current reporting system.

Center receives audited quarterly and annual financial statements from the State. It also receives quarterly progress reports, six monthly statistical reports and annual progress reports.

RNE receives Annual Reports and audited annual accounts.

Appendix II: Accounting System followed in MSG highlight distinct features as different from others

In MS Gujarat following books of accounts are generally maintained:

- Cash Book;
- General Ledger;
- Journal Voucher Register;
- Asset Register & Inventory register of consumables
- Advance Register

Usually separate books of accounts are maintained whenever an external funded project is taken up.

Expenses & income are recorded on accrual basis and a double entry system is followed.

All vouchers are properly receipted and revenue stamp is affixed for any cash payment of Rs.500/- and above.

Depreciation is charged on the assets as per the Income Tax Act, 1961.

Appendix III: Purchase Process

This Appendix presents key points of the purchase process followed in MS Gujarat.

- All purchases below Rs. 500.00 per item may be made directly from the market after making simple verbal inquiries regarding prices and quality.
- All purchases involving amounts above Rs 500 but below Rs. 75,000 shall be made on rate contract of State or Central Government or after inviting quotations or without inviting quotations from Hastkala board, Khadi and Gramodyog board, Panchayat Udyog or any other undertakings of state or central governments. In unavoidable circumstances if minimum quotation is to be overlooked or the above prescribed procedure is not followed the reasons should be recorded on file.
- Purchase of items involving more than Rs. 75,000.00 can be made under rate contract of the State or Central Government or after inviting tenders or without inviting tenders from Hastkala board, Khadi and Gramodyog board, Panchayat Udyog or undertakings of State and Central Government. But in case when the lowest tender is not to be accepted or the above mentioned purchase procedure is not followed the reasons should be recorded on files before placing the purchase orders. The purchase of vehicles for the project should be made from dealers who are authorized by the government.
- Procedure for purchase:
 - There should be a need of article to be purchased.
 - Sufficient provision in budget should be available.
 - Purchase should be sanctioned by competent authority.
 - Purchase should be made according to the procedure laid down
 - Article should be recorded in Stock Register and issued / utilized.
- Competent Authority

Limit of Expenditure	Authority	Other Limitations
Upto Rs 10,000	Distnct Program Coordinator	As per the availability of funds
Upto Rs 35,000	State Program Director	As per the availability of funds
More than Rs 35,000		On recommendation of following sub-committee: 1. SPD 2. Representative of EC 3. Representative of GOI 4. Representative of NRG

- Splitting of items of purchase is not permitted for the exercise of these delegated powers.

Appendix IV: Alternative Purchase Process

This Appendix present an alternative purchase process that is simpler compared to the existing process being followed. MSG can either use this or design their own taking help from this.

Whenever a purchase has to be made following step process should be followed:

- SPD appoints any one functionary to survey market and procure three quotations from reputed shops. She should then make a detailed report about her recommendations after discussion with the SPD.
- This note along with all the quotations and analysis of the same should then be handed over to the Accounts Officer who should through other sources confirm whether all the prices mentioned in the quotations are appropriate or not.
- After this the same note along with the process followed for verification and findings of the Accountant should be put in front of the SPD for approval.
- After the approval of the SPD, there should be a formal purchase order placed with the selected dealer in writing detailing all the terms and conditions agreed upon between the dealer and MS Society. On the basis of the above purchase order payments to the dealer should be released.

Appendix V: Funds Flow

This appendix explains in brief the process that is followed in transferring funds from Center to the State and then onwards to the Districts.

The flow of funds from Center to State follows following steps:

- After Center receives 'request for funds' it forwards it to the Ministry of Finance (MOF). In certain cases MOF may have queues which are answered either by Center or State depending upon to whom it has been addressed and who has an explanation on it.
- After the Financial Advisor clears the proposal, these papers go to the Internal Finance – 1(IF-1) division in the MOF.
- The IF- 1 certifies that the funds are available. After this the approval goes to Pay and Accounts Office (PAO) who formal sends instruction to the bank for preparation of a demand draft in favor of the respective MS Societies.
- This draft is then released either by Registered Letter or Speed Post to the State. The whole process takes about 2 months.

The flow of funds from State to District follows following steps:

- As soon as funds are received at the State Office most of the said amount is transferred to Term Deposits of duration of 46,60 & 90 days of lots of Rs.50,000/- each, based on the requirement of the said funds.
- Amounts are released in advance by the State Office to District Implementation Unit. Every quarter the District Offices send in a request of funds to the State Office along with their proposed expenditure in the coming quarter.
- State Office verifies request with that district's past expenditure statements and plan for future.
- State Office then releases funds based on balance available with district office and as and when funds become available from Center.

MAHILA SAMAKHYA

INDO-DUTCH REVIEW MISSION 2001

MAHILA SAMAKHYA GUJARAT

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D. NEXT PHASE

Annexures, Mission Itinerary, Abbreviations, Glossary

INDO-DUTCH REVIEW MISSION 2001

MAHILA SAMAKHYA GUJARAT

A. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Gujarat is the second most industrialised state with the fourth highest per capita income in India. It has a high growth rate but a declining agricultural sector. The lack of irrigation facilities and erroneous water management slowed agricultural growth. The unregulated excavation of wells has contributed to the lowering of water tables and general environmental degradation. The uncontrolled and unregulated exploitation of Gujarat's water resources could lead to a serious drinking water crisis. The state's economic growth is thought to be at the cost of the environment. Gujarat food grain production ranks 13th in India, affecting household food security.

Status of Women and Current Issues

Gujarat figures low on the Gender Development Index, which is in contradiction with its high ranking in the economic field. This confirms the evidence that social development and not mere economic development holds the key for the emancipation of women in society. It has been argued that women's development in Gujarat is the outcome of macro variables, poor environment and ecology, low safety against violence in different types, and widespread regional disparities. Appropriate policy interventions are required to ensure that there are socio-economic and political gains for women from development of the state.

TABLE 1: Sex Ratio 2001

District	Sex ratio
India	933
Gujarat	921
The Dangs	986
Vadodara	919
Rajkot	930
Banaskantha	931
Sabarkantha	985
Panchmahals	939
Surendranagar	948

Source: Census tables 2001

While there have been notable initiatives from women's organizations in the state, there has been no major policy initiative regarding the enhancement of the position of women in Gujarat. Gujarat lacks a State Commission for women and a draft policy paper on gender is still to be finalized.

Literacy

Gujarat ranked fifth in literacy (1991) after Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Punjab. Its literacy rates are higher than the national average. However, tribal women have a very low literacy levels. In contrast, literacy among scheduled caste women is almost at par with the overall literacy levels. Low female literacy rates among tribals may be attributed to periodic migration by tribal males, resulting in double burden for

women and high drop-out rates. An effort to raise literacy levels for tribals is being made by the DPEP.

Table 2: Gujarat Female literacy rates-2001

India	54.16%
Gujarat	58.60%
<i>Banaskantha</i>	<i>34.54%</i>
<i>Sabarkantha</i>	<i>52.85%</i>
<i>Surendranagar</i>	<i>48.72%</i>
<i>Rajkot</i>	<i>67.64%</i>
<i>Vadodara</i>	<i>61.24%</i>
<i>The Dangs</i>	<i>48.99%</i>
<i>Panchmahals</i>	<i>45.43%</i>

Source: Census of India 2001

The incidence of child labour in Gujarat is less than the all India average and lower among girls in the state. About 1.7 % of girls in rural areas and 0.5 % in urban areas are working against 4.8% and 2.1% of boys in rural and urban areas. The Mission found that many boys and girls drop out of school as they migrate with their parents and family livestock to seasonal grazing grounds.

There are reasonably good infrastructure facilities for primary education. There were 33,119 primary schools in 1995-96, and 5713 secondary and higher schools. More than 90% of the villages have at least one primary school within the village. It is not the infrastructure but the administration and quality of primary education that essentially hampers efforts to reach universal literacy in the state. The teacher student ratio is 60, which is not conducive for learning. Teacher absenteeism and teacher supervision are problem areas.

The District Primary Education Programme with its objectives of raising enrolment, retention and achievement is being implemented in Banaskantha, Godahara, Dahod and Dangs districts. The DPEP is planned for extension to Jamnagar, Junangadh, Sabarkantha, Kutchch, Bhavnagar and Surendranagar. The Ministry of Human resource Development has also approved preparatory activities for 14 districts namely Anand, Kheda, Patan, Bharuch, Narmada, Surat, Valsad, Navsari, Ahmedabad (rural), Vadodara, Rajkot, Amreli, Gandhinagar and Mehsana districts under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan.

Health

Gujarat is above the all India average in the number of hospital beds per million persons. Life expectancy of women in Gujarat is close to the all India average, though, Gujarat's IMR is below the national average. Overall, Gujarat ranked low in terms of health indicators. This can be explained by the quality of the services rendered by the health institutes and also because the majority of facilities are in urban areas.

Nutrition

Under the Public Distribution System (PDS) the number of fair price shops in Gujarat has increased over time. However, this has not been able to keep up with population growth. The population covered per shop remains at 3200 since 1977 which is a poor record of PDS extension particularly with respect to tribal areas. MS has intervened

in distribution of the World Food Programme emergency food aid in earthquake affected areas.

B. MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME IN THE STATE

Activities of the MS Programme

The MS Programme was launched in Gujarat in 1989 and is presently being implemented in 36 blocks and 1,422 villages in Sabarkantha, Banaskantha, Panchmahal, Surendranagar, Vadodara, Rajkot and Dangs.

During 2000-2001 the programme was expected to cover 60 villages of the tribal Dangs district. However only initial mobilization efforts have so far been made.

Activities of MS Gujarat include:

- * Seminars and Training programmes on health, education, law, Panchayati Raj, ecology etc.
- * Information on development schemes in blocks and districts
- * Establishment of Nari Adalats, Mahila Kutirs
- * Literacy classes
- * Small scale craft production and marketing
- * Training in Micro Credit
- * Creation of Mahasanghs

Table 3: Mahila Samakhya Gujarat: coverage

District/ villages	Sabarkan tha	Baroda	Rajkot	Banaska ntha	Surendra nagar	Panchm ahal	Dangs
Total no. villages	719	1,183	813	435	245	344	311
MS coverage	250 (34.77)	322 (27.2%)	323 (39.7%)	170 (39%)	110 (44.8%)	120 (34.8%)	60 19.2%)

Based on table in MS Annual Report, 2000-2001

The coverage of villages by MSG within each block remains fairly low. This needs to be considered to enhance the visible impact of the programme

Table 4: Formation and Functioning of Sanghas Between 1999-2000

Baroda	Banaskanth a	Rajkot	Sabarkantha	Panchmahal	Surendra -nagar
1. Training: Law, health literacy, Sakhi	1. Training: To strengthen sanghas to form dist. To vill. level committees	1. Formation of 55 Sanghas 2. Collabora- tion with govt. and NGOs	1. Training: in fishery 2. Nari Adalat: Functioning	1. Decentral- isation of the MS programe i.e. planning and execution of programmes in association with other organisations	1. Formation of Manch at block level 2. Literacy classes
2. Nari Adalat	2. Informatio n on govt. schemes, Nabard, SGSY	3. Formation of MS Federation	3. Sangha decentralis a-tion	2. Child Care Centre linked to	

4. Sahyogini workers cover new villages to form	3. Planning: for co-operation of Sanghas with other institutions	Specific Activities not stated	effected	DPEP	
5. Mahasangh formation			4. Formation of Mahasangh and Collaborati n with Govt. schemes	3. Formation of 13 Sanghas.	

Health

MS Gujarat has established and utilized forums such as Mahila and Yuvati Shibirs, health fairs, Jilla Arogya Mela to raise awareness of health issues. Childcare centres have been set up in Rajkot and Sabarkantha districts. These need to be extended to other districts as well. Training of Sahayoginis and nurses has been carried out in Rajkot and Surendranagar districts. MS Gujarat has participated in AIDs awareness training programmes. MS Gujarat has collaborated with international organizations like WHO as well as local and state organizations like Chetna with reference to health programmes. A district-wise description of MS activities in this area are given below:

Table 5: Health related activities of Mahila Samakhya Gujarat

Rajkot	Banaskantha	Baroda	Panchmahal	Sabarkantha	Surendranagar
Aids training		Training of MS Sahyoginis	Information +Training on AIDS by Aids Control Society, Gujarat	Jilla Arogya Mela	Health Shibir
Follow up block level training by WHO for 288 women	18 Shibirs on child health in collaboration with Chetna	Health and Aids Camp: Training on AIDS	Proposal for RCH in collaboration with Chetna	RCH + anaemia shibirs	Gynaecological camp
Child Care Centre implemented under MS		Health Fairs Dissemination of material		Yuvati shibirs	PHC assisted MS in shibir
				Child Care Centre implemented under MS	Training of nurses
					Health camp for 241 women

Legal Rights: Nari Adalats

Rajkot has been successful in establishing and using Nari Adalats to benefit women. In Baroda district, MS collaborated with an NGO Majlis from Mumbai, that gave legal literacy training for starting Nari Adalats. The districts of Banaskantha, Sabarkantha and Surendranagar have not been able to establish effective Nari Adalats. While Sanghas have been formed in six districts, their specific activities in Panchmahal, Sabarkantha and Surendranagar are not clear. The issues regarding the objectives

Emergence of Nari Adalats: The case of Rajkot district, Gujarat.

Nari Adalats are emerging as a vibrant alternative system of justice for women, with wide acceptability in the community, and the Mission Team visiting Gujarat was able to observe this at a Nari Adalat that was in session at Vankaner taluk in Rajkot district.

In the early Sangha meetings the issues raised by women related largely to the demand for facilities – water, roads, schools or ration cards and health. Rarely were issues related to gender like violence and harassment, which affected women at a personal level, raised in the meetings. Later though, at training conducted outside their own villages women began to talk freely and through a sharing of experiences realized they were not alone in experiencing violence and harassment. Women began to speak about violence in public and to address and adjudicate in cases brought up by Sangha members. But when these involved men from their own villages, women were subjected to threats and pressures and felt the need to conduct meetings away from their villages to be able to deal effectively with cases of violence. The most appropriate and central place for such meetings was seen to be the taluk headquarters, which the women used to visit from time to time. Meetings began to be held there on a fixed date every month.

The Nari Adalat was formally started in Rajkot district in June 1998 after the MS had organized a Legal Training Programme by Majlis, a Mumbai based NGO that had earlier facilitated the starting of the first Nari Adalat in Vadodara district. By 1999 there were 5 Nari Adalats functioning in Varodara; Dabhoi, Sankheda, Padra, Vaghodia and Pavi Jetpur. The Nari Adalat at Padra was registered. By December 2001 Nari Adalats were functioning in seven taluks of Rajkot, each having about forty women from about twenty villages. MS also conducted workshops where women from Nari Adalats of different villages and taluks shared their experiences and strategies and formed a strong network. By December 2001, 335 cases had been successfully resolved in the Nari Adalats of Rajkot and 56 registered cases had been withdrawn.

Nari Adalats are comprised of a wide cross-section of women. Apart from the Sangha women and one or two Sahayoginis they include some women whose cases have been solved earlier, some single and elder women, those from lower castes and women members from Gram Panchayats. The type of cases brought before the Adalats pertain mainly to domestic violence, physical and mental harassment, fraudulent marriages and bigamy, divorce and maintenance, alcoholism, child marriage and child abuse and the harassment of women not able to have children, specially sons. Cases related to economic issues like property are taken up if women are affected.

Other MS States that are in the process of starting Nari Adalats visit Rajkot/Vadodara to observe and study their functioning. The ICRW⁵ has been assisting MS Gujarat in documenting the Nari Adalat cases in Vadodara and Rajkot. The DIU Rajkot had also spoken highly of the effectiveness of the training provided by NGO Majlis from Mumbai. Other MS States could also be provided this training.

Legal Awareness Shibirs, campaigns on the legal issues are conducted in all the districts. The local administration has also begun to focus attention on legal issues

⁵ International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) is conducting this research in Gujarat as well as in the Tehri district of UP MS and is facilitating the process documentation of cases thereby.

brought up by the Sangha women. As Sahayoginis started to work on this issue in partnership with the police in Vadodara they were issued identity cards.

During discussions with the DIU it emerged that the NAs involve time spent by Sahayoginis and RPs and expenses for traveling, documenting etc. The Sangha women also incur expenses in travelling for casework and incur loss of wages. No detailed plans for sustainability of NAs seem to be in place, apart from some mention of collecting a small fee for cases registered to "cover costs". Space is generally obtained free of cost at the *Tehsil* headquarters from government.

Impact of Nari Adalats

The concept of Nari Adalats has gained wide acceptance among Sangha women and their families and in the wider community. Women also bring cases from other villages where the news of the work done by NAs has reached. Nari Adalats have come to be supported and promoted by government (provision of free accommodation for meetings) and the police (cases referred by the police) that give them greater credibility. By bringing the women's perspective to the solution of women's problems, Nari Adalats have challenged the patriarchal structures and increased the participation of women in the process of obtaining justice.

Nari Adalats provide space for women to articulate problems of violence and harassment and have imbued them with the confidence that justice can be sought and obtained. They have created a new identity for women in the family, village and community. **Nari Adalats cut across caste, class and religious divides and are filling the gap created by a legal system that is perceived as patriarchal and unreachable, slow and expensive.** An infrastructure has been created where women can get justice that is accessible, affordable and gender sensitive. They have changed the way people perceive the problem of violence against women and have brought the women's perspective to the concept of justice and punishment. Nari Adalats have had an impact not only on the women whose cases were addressed but on their families and on adolescent girls, village leaders and panchayats, and on lawyers, police and MS personnel.

Support To Nari Adalats for Sustainability

While Sangha women play a lead role in the initiating and functioning of Nari Adalats, Sahayoginis continue to play a critical role in facilitating and documenting the process. This adds to their workload and affects the time available for their regular work. **There is also no budget line in MS for expenses related to the Nari Adalats and this needs to be included.** The Sangha women who participate in the Adalat incur transport costs for traveling to and from the Tehsil headquarters and also suffer loss of wages. Some of the Nari Adalats are in the process of working out a small fee to be charged for the cases that are being dealt with, however continuing support particularly for documentation would be necessary till they become self-sustaining. **The Annual Report mentions briefly that there have been discussions about federating Nari Adalats but details of this are not clear. This element should however be envisaged as part of the future cost components being provided as future support for NAs.**

Federations/Mahasanghas

MS teams and Sangha women have been discussing the eventual withdrawal of the MS Programme and the role of Federations in consolidating and sustaining the Sanghas. At the cluster level meeting of Sangha women representatives in Rajkot, most women who had been Sangha members were clear about the need, structure and functioning of Federations. They had identified five core issues: Education, Health, Legal Issues, Economic Development and Panchayat Raj - as areas necessary to focus on and had formed small Committees of Sangha women interested in these issues at the village and cluster level and taluk level to work in solidarity on these issues.

Night meetings and training of these committees have been conducted to create an understanding of the processes of federation, structure, registration, monetary requirements, roles and responsibilities. The process of forming Federations has been ongoing in Rajkot for two years. Sangha women and Sahayoginis have participated in defining the mandate of the federation as:

- coordinate at the taluk and district levels with government and NGOs
- provide support to Nari Adalats working at the taluk level to form a federation
- identify needs of Sanghas and place them before the Executive to carry them out
- inform Sanghas about government projects and schemes of benefit to them and help to secure them

MS Rajkot has also identified various possibilities of raising funds for Federation work which include

- government grants
- Sangha contributions
- voluntary contributions by Sangha women
- membership fees
- foreign aid
- collection of funds from Institutions, Trusts and Donors
- Sangha earnings from training
- Contributions from villages.

MS Rajkot has formed five Taluk level Federations of which two are in the process of being registered. Federations are being formed in some of the other districts also. The model adopted for Sabarkantha district is given below:

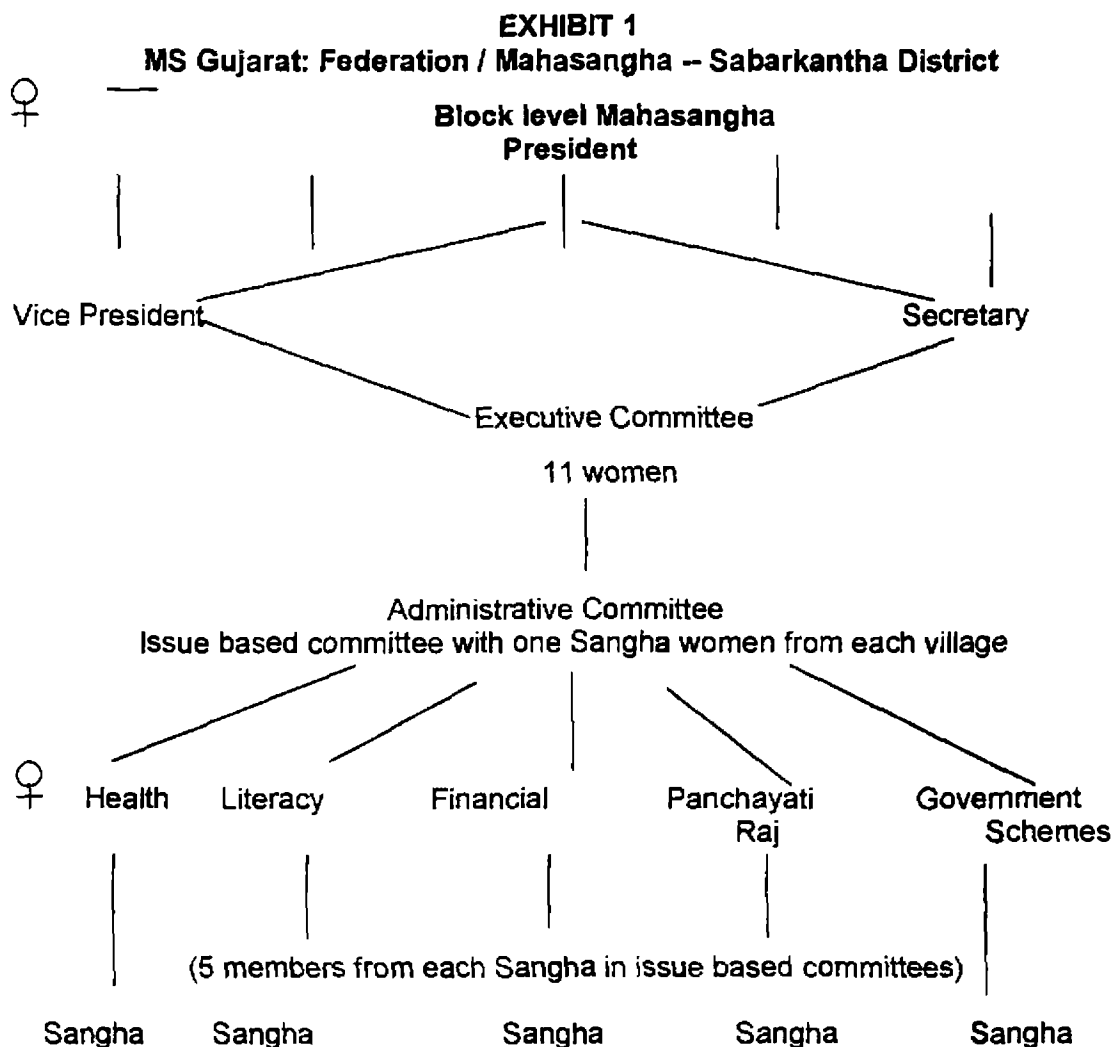
1.4 Cutting across Class And Caste Divides

The MS Programme has been able to cover approximately 35,000 SC and ST women which is 0.02% of the total population of the districts in which MS is working.⁶ While MS has addressed issues within certain caste groups these are not specified.

MS Sanghas include women across caste/class divides. Some Sangha activities provide effective platforms to further inter-caste and inter-religious group interaction, though the constraints or difficulties in overcoming caste/class/religious differences are complex. MS has addressed women across religious boundaries as described in Rajkot Nari Adalat, which was attended by Muslim women. On occasions, women from other caste groups attend meetings without officially being part of the Sangha. Issues like water management and installation of hand pumps facilitate inter-caste interaction. The literacy and health programmes and childcare centres become a

⁶ MS Annual Report, 2000-2001.

space for various caste and religious groups to come together. MS provides an opportunity to bring women together in a secular manner across religious groups, irrespective of these barriers, to work in solidarity for social transformation towards equality and justice. This important issue needs greater attention in discussions within the organization and personnel oriented to ensure that it remains upfront within all organizational activities.



1.5 Towards Building a Women's Grassroots Movement

The MS Programme in Gujarat has raised awareness regarding women and social change in the regions of the six districts covered by it and has initiated the process in a cautious way in the Dangs district. However, the programme implementation and geographical outreach needs to be planned strategically for greater consolidation and impact in a given area. The number of villages covered within each block need to be expanded for greater intensification and the blocks covered increased. Efforts should thus focus on building alliances of women's Sanghas over a contiguous area for greater and visible impact.

According to figures provided by MS for the period 1997- 2000, the indication is that initiatives like the Nari Adalats, Mahila Kutirs and Yuvati Shibirs all need renewed effort in order to expand and to retain their momentum. The performance of

Panchmahal, Surendranagar, Banaskantha and Dangs district is of special importance in this respect where the progress of MSG over a five-year period remains poor. Women's political empowerment is confined to small pockets and it is hoped that future efforts shall be more widespread. The expansion of women's networks is essential towards increasing MS outreach across districts and facilitates women's mobilization for change.

The Sanghas expressed the need of building a meeting place of their own. So far 17 Mahila Kutirs have been constructed and a few more are under construction. The Sanghas have been resourceful in raising funds for the Kutirs, providing voluntary labour and building low cost structures. The Nehru Yuvak Kendra, the corporate sector, the Tribal Department and DRDA have all contributed to Mahila Kutir funds. Some Sanghas plan to house a childcare center at the Kutir as well as use it for meetings. At least seven Sanghas are in the process of acquiring land and an additional eleven others have been successful in obtaining land. The main impediment to building Mahila Kutirs appears to be the difficulties and formalities concerning land acquisition.

1.6 Emerging Trends, Pace and Impact

Mahila Samakhya has been able to act as an intermediary and bridge the gap between women and mainstream development. Progress in different districts and areas is not similar and depends upon the infrastructure and available programmes/schemes in the district or region. Simultaneously women have also acted upon their own initiative at times as they did in Panchmahal where they successfully tackled the issues of alcoholism, violence against women and debt relief through public action. In practical terms therefore there is a shift in focus of the programme from Sahyoginis to women's autonomous initiatives and action. What is required however is for women to be visible in larger numbers within an administrative or spatial unit to have the requisite visibility or exert the required pressure on the various institutions and forums of governance and power. Without that women's energies may only dissipate with little effect.

Some of the good/positive practices and the related challenges within MS Gujarat were:

- Sahayoginis who have been trained have acted as resource persons and trainers of new Sahayoginis and Sangha training, and others need similar systematic orientation and inputs at frequent intervals.
- The formation of Sanghas and Mahasanghas has rendered women and their needs visible and strengthened women's self-perceptions.
- Nari Adalats have created a public space for women to debate issues regarding women's legal rights within the family and invested them with substantive bargaining power as well as public visibility and mobility.
- The Sanghas and Nari Adalats have functioned as pressure groups/agents for change. The successes of MS will serve as incentive and inspiration for women who are not yet part of Sanghas or women's collectives.

Women have set up their own courts and acted as pressure groups to address women's issues, monitor literacy programmes and direct local Panchayats to consider equitable access to water. Women have also initiated counselling centres, established women's banks, trained health workers, established Mahila Shikshan Kendras (that were unfortunately subsequently shut down), initiated loan schemes and other facilities for women. Yuvati Shibirs are useful initiatives where younger

women are imparted training on issues including family, health, cleanliness and sanitation, information on government facilities and schemes and other social issues. Since progress across districts has not been uniform, despite its successes there is a need to assess the past and see how the limitations can be overcome in order to expand and strengthen the programme as women's movement across all seven districts.

There is also a need to reflect upon the deterrents in taking the programme forward for evolving and developing strategies in order to strengthen the programme. On the whole, MS Gujarat still has a long way to go in terms of reaching out to the majority of subaltern women in the seven districts and the processes in place need to be strengthened substantially to lead to empowerment.

2. EDUCATION

2.1 Women's Education And Governance Of Education

The Mahila Samakhya programme was developed as a result of the emphasis of the National Education Policy (NPE) 1986 to initiatives with a 'positive, interventionist role' in catalyzing women's empowerment. The NPE saw a strategic conceptual shift from providing equal educational opportunities for women to educating for women's equality.

Mahila Samakhya was initiated to ensure that poor, powerless women understood the structures that kept them poor and powerless and of their own volition acted to redress the impediments. One major tool that MS provides women with in their action to raise their status is education.

The concept of literacy within the MS programme is not restricted to reading and writing skills. It includes the ability to critically analyze ones' environment and position and take measures to improve these. Thus literacy requires to be systematically paired with gender orientation and training to enable it to play its role in an overall strategy for empowerment.

The Female literacy rates in Gujarat State (Census 2001) are higher than the national average but are very uneven for the districts that MSG is working in. MS requires to be alert about the SC/ST Female Literacy Rates and study the reasons for low literacy indicators. For example, the ST Female Literacy Rate in Banaskantha is only 9.45%. On the other hand, Vadodara with high Female Literacy Rate has only 919 females to 1000 males. MS may like to discuss and analyze these issues among programme personnel and with experts from the women's movement so that MS activities may be planned after taking such variations into consideration.

Districts have approached literacy in different ways. Some literacy initiatives in MS Gujarat arose when the women realized the importance of being literate while addressing their problems like lack of water, electricity and road. Sabarkantha developed learner materials in the local language; Varodara concentrated on self learning method; Rajkot preferred the classroom approach. All districts have organized literacy camps, night classes and campaigns frequently to impart literacy at a time convenient to the learner. MS Gujarat has also used literacy materials developed by Gujarat Vidyapeeth. Sabarkantha Sanghas running literacy classes between 1989 and 1999 had conducted self-evaluation and made monitoring

committees. It was found that women learnt more efficiently when literacy is linked to knowledge about women's rights, law and government schemes.

MS started working with the Education Department to implement the Total Literacy Campaign from 1993, especially in Rajkot, Sabarkantha and Varodara. Women from all ages have been included in the TLC implementation. It would appear from the annual report that MS Gujarat hopes that this initiative will lead to women being able to voice their needs, demands, become knowledgeable about various subjects, recognize their right to equality, and be capable of resisting violence and harassment. MS also hopes that literacy will help women acquire an enhanced status within the family. **An objective review of the situation leads to the concern that perhaps the expectation from mere literacy classes without any additional input for enhancing analytical thought processes may be unrealistic. Thus an unplanned literacy initiative may be limited in its ability to reach MS objectives. Literacy initiatives require to be strengthened with simultaneous awareness and concientization inputs.**

The tables below give a bird's eye view of literacy efforts between 1989-1999 and subsequently between 1999-2001.

Table 8a. Women and Girls Covered Under Literacy Programme In MS, Gujarat, between 1989-1999.

Districts	Sanghas	NFEs	Women enrolled	Girls enrolled
Sabarkantha	9	9	925	70
Varodara	70	12	70	50
Rajkot	57	37	347	508
Banaskantha	22	22	-	210
Surendranagar	-	7	18	95
Total	247	87	1340	933

Source: *A cursory Glance at Mahila Samakhya Gujarat, 1989-1999.*

Table 8b : Women Covered Under Literacy Programme In MS, Gujarat, between 1999-2001.

Districts	Number of literacy classes	Total women enrolled
Rajkot	45	630
Sabarkantha	18	270
Banaskantha	15	300
Surendranagar	03	55
Panchmahal	07	129
Baroda	02	20
Total	90	1,404

Source: *MS Gujarat Annual Report, 2000-2001.*

Progress in literacy initiatives is uneven across districts in the 1999-2001 period. For example Banaskantha, Sabarkantha and Rajkot districts have had a reasonable number of literacy initiatives, similar progress seems not to have taken place in others. Literacy efforts in the Dangs have yet to take off. The target group varies from a maximum of 630 to 20 women between 1999-2001.

MS is associated with the Post literacy and Continuing Literacy programme at block level. MS requires to work in partnership with these programmes in the development of post literacy material. The availability of appropriate post literacy reading material

would be beneficial in keeping many Sangha women from lapsing into illiteracy. This material should be developed with a clear understanding of the information and entertainment requirements of the women. Subsequently the material could form resource material for Sangha training. Thus it would be in the interest of MSG to be associated in the development of post literacy material from the beginning.

2.2 Girls Education

There has been some demand for including girls in the Sangha activities as may be seen by the number of Yuvati Shivirs organized. The Yuvati Shivirs have, among other issues, discussed the status of women, the importance of education, information regarding the role of local institutions like banks, post offices and health centers. A fall out of this has also been a number of short duration literacy camps for girls and women. In Surendranagar women's own initiatives have resulted in MS facilitated public funding for girls' primary education. Balika Shikshan Kendras have facilitated education of school dropouts in Vadodara and Surendranagar.

In 1996 Sabarkantha district took the initiative to start Mahila Shikshan Kendras with the intention of catalyzing interest in education among girls who for a variety of reasons may have either not had an opportunity to complete primary education or have never enrolled at school. The initiative had the two-fold aim of

- mainstreaming those girls young enough to return to primary school
- offering an opportunity to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills to those who may have passed that age
- offering a variety of life skills.

The first batch of graduates from this residential programme showed visible change in attitudes towards education and life. By 1999 Sabarkantha had conducted 3 batches of MSKs, while Rajkot and Varodara had conducted 2 batches each. The duration of the residential course varied between 3 months (Rajkot) to 9 months (Sabarkantha). Some of the students were helped to appear for regular school examinations. The 1989-1999 MS document reports a need to improve the inputs for pedagogy, class room methods, tenure of MSK and availability of trained teachers.

After the last batches completed the programme and a number of the students were successfully streamlined, the programme took the decision to close the centers down. Similarly, the Balika Shikshan Kendras have also been closed down, apparently due to difficulty in hiring appropriate accommodation and the cost ineffectiveness of too few students.

Table 8c: Mahila Shikshan Kendras, 1997-1999.

Districts	Blocks	Girls enrolled	Appearing for Exams.
Varodara	6	106	88
Rajkot	7	93	25
Sabarkantha	2	94	79
Total	15	293	193

Source: *A cursory Glance at Mahila Samakhya Gujarat, 1989-1999.*

The Balika Shikshan Kendras and Mahila Shikshan Kendras serve a niche requirement not fulfilled by any other education programme. This is especially true of the tribal areas such as Dangs. The initiative may have been the last opportunity for many adolescents at receiving an education before being engulfed by adulthood and an opportunity for many younger left-outs to be mainstreamed and continue their education. **The Mission was therefore concerned to learn that the MSKs were**

no longer functioning. The Mission recommends that the scheme be re-examined for reintroduction.

The curricula of the Kendras may be reviewed before restarting to ensure that they address the needs of the clientele group. The group would probably consist of

- some girls young enough to be mainstreamed after a short preparatory period
- Some others within the group could be those young women and girls who may need additional inputs for enhancing their quality of life.

Thus curriculum must be carefully developed to answer these varying needs. Teaching methodologies and teacher training would require to be in line with the objectives of the initiative.

From 1997 MS Gujarat has also established linkages with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). DPEP aims at raising quality of primary education and lowering gender and social group disparities in enrolment, retention and achievement. The MS State Programme Director (SPD) and the District Programme Coordinator (DPC) are ex-officio members of the DPEP Executive Committee and District Resource Group respectively.

DPEP is present in five of the seven MS districts (Sabarkantha, Panchmahal, Banaskantha, Dangs and Surendranagar). DPEP is poised for expansion in at least 6 more districts (3 with NRE funding) and may offer more opportunity for partnership. Sangha women are members of the Village Education Committees (VECs) in some places but there is no formal Government order for the inclusion of MS representation in all VECs as in some other states. MS Sanghas have taken part in enrolment drives and have been associated with some amount of VEC monitoring of schools. Sahayoginis have been associated with DPEP community mobilization activities at block level.

Unfortunately, this association of Sangha women with enrolment drives has not resulted in a uniform reaffirmation and commitment to girls' formal school education among Sangha members. Field visits clearly showed that not all Sangha women were sending their daughters to primary schools. The point of greater concern was the fact that the women did not seem to regard the situation as one needing to be addressed (mothers laughingly commented that girls stayed behind to look after goats!). There was also little evidence that the importance of girls' education, as an issue, had been discussed at previous Sangha meetings. Girls' are commonly burdened with household chores but some situations may have solutions; such as requesting a village grandmother to share the girls' burden. In view of a general trend evident in MS (more positively in other states) in the direction of engaging in the education of girls, Gujarat Sangha women's lack of (universal) commitment to the issue reflects negatively upon the clarity and commitment within the state MS structure.

MS has not been associated in the curriculum or textbook development of DPEP. Nor has it been involved in teacher training or contributed to development of any other gender sensitization materials. The mission is of the view that a closer association of the MSG with teacher training and curriculum development in DPEP would help to engender these initiatives and be beneficial to both programmes. DPEP plans to start Alternate Schools (AS) or Education Guarantee Scheme schools (EGS) in hard to service areas. MSG would have knowledge of the most needy habitations from its grassroots work and could direct DPEP interventions to the appropriate locations.

Activities undertaken to achieve broader educational aims between 1999-2001 are enlisted below:

Table 8c: Educational Efforts of MS Gujarat.

Rajkot	Banaskantha	Vadodra	Panchmahal	Sabarkantha	Surendranagar
45 literacy classes, 630 enrolled	15 Literacy classes are conducted for 300 women Literacy Camp for 17 women from one village	Balika shikshan kendra formed by MS provides education for School drop-outs. 2 literacy classes, 20 enrolled.	7 literacy classes, 129 enrolled. Women from MS study after completion of Sangh Training Facilitated Attendance of children to attend Anganvadi in Jambughoda Block	Balikaashikshan kendra caters to drop-outs 18 literacy classes for 270 women 66 girls attend school	3 literacy classes with 55 enrolled. Voluntary public contribution Facilitated by MS to ensure education for girls Literacy classes for girls and married women MS literacy camp with 120 women from 3 villages

Source: MS Gujarat Annual Report, 1989-1999 and 2000-2001.

2.3 Contribution To Reduction Of Child Labour

There is widespread involvement of children, specially girls, in household chores, sibling and livestock care which impedes their education. Seasonal work on family fields or even for wage payment may lead to irregular school attendance and dropping out. More regular work for wage payment may lead to non-enrollment. Though MS Gujarat encounters child labour regularly the programme has not undertaken any specific campaign or initiative addressing the issue.

MS Gujarat has been addressing child enrollment, including of working and non-enrolled children, through its involvement with DPEP VECs, P/MTAs and enrollment drives. Even so, the mission is of the opinion that more targeted advocacy against child labour and reaffirmation of the importance of school enrollment and attendance at an appropriate age requires to be undertaken. MS may require to identify villages where the problem is particularly rampant and initiate dialogue with other local stakeholders like parents, community and PRI members to formulate strategies to address the problem. MS needs to be more proactive regarding the issue.

Recommendations.

The following measures are recommended to improve the quality and efficacy of the educational interventions of the MS programme in Gujarat

- Literacy classes require an additional input for enhancing analytical thought processes towards strengthening empowerment efforts.

- MS requires to work in partnership with Continuing Education Programmes of government and other agencies in the development of post literacy material. The availability of appropriate post literacy reading material would be beneficial in keeping many Sangha women from lapsing into illiteracy.
- A closer MS association with teacher training and curriculum development in DPEP would help to engender these initiatives and be beneficial to both programmes.
- The need to restart the MSKs and BSKs cannot be overstated since the Balika Shikshan Kendras and Mahila Shikshan Kendras serve a niche requirement not fulfilled by any other education programme.
- More targeted advocacy and pro-active measures against child labour are required.

3. LINKAGES WITH GOVERNMENT, NGOS, WOMENS MOVEMENT AND RNE PRIORITIES

3.1 Linkages with Government Departments and Agencies

MSG has initiated linkages with a number of Government schemes. It is not immediately apparent whether this followed any serious dialogue and introspection within MSG regarding the benefits of such linkages to the Sangha women. It is also not clear whether these partnerships contributed to meeting the objectives of MS in any way. Linkages have been established with DWCR, DRDA, TRYSEM, NABARD, DPEP, ICDS, the Tribal Department and Mahila Samridhi Yojana. MSG role in the partnerships appear to be that of an extension/implementation agency of the government. Many of the activities undertaken by MSG seem one off activities, not linked organically to the overall empowerment process of the Sangha women. MS Sangha women have been trained in various income generating skills. MS requires to review the end results of these trainings and make a judgment regarding similar future trainings. Activities and partnerships entered into by MS should be in conformation with MS principles and objectives.

MSG has also collaborated with NGOs like CHETNA, Ahmedabad in awareness building for health. MSG is implementing the Swa-Shakti project in Surendranagar District. MSG requires to generate internal review and dialogue regarding whether it is appropriate for a strongly process oriented programme like MS to partner a target oriented project like Swa-Shakti. MS stresses strengthening the women themselves to make informed choices. Overall, MSG must decide which activities are the most beneficial for the Sangha women. These issues should be discussed with NRG advisors and within the organization before arriving at a decision. MS Gujarat may like to dialogue with other state MS programmes like MS Karnataka and U.P. where negotiation and operational strategies are planned to ensure that the fundamental concerns of the MS philosophy are not compromised through collaborations and partnerships for economic/rural development programmes.

3.2 Linkages with NGOs and Women's Movement

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) has been working in partnership with selected Sahyoginis, District Coordinators and Junior District Coordinators to process and ongoing documentation of the development of Nari Adaiats. The ICRW team is also assisting the MS team to systematically record the essentials of the cases handled by the NRG. The research team has the two-fold

benefit of the NA processes being documented and the MS personnel gaining hands on training in the requirements of documentation.

It is felt that MSG requires to be in closer touch with NRG members and draw upon other women's groups for advice and for use as sounding boards. MSG has had few trainings and workshops for its own personnel on gender orientation in the last two years. This is urgently requires to be corrected. There also appears a lack of dialogue within the organization regarding direction for action, especially dialogue prior to introduction of new activities.

There is an ongoing discussion and movement within MSG towards formation of Mahasanghas and Sangha Federation as independent bodies. These will serve as a scope for increased linkage, greater support for women's networks and a general strengthening of the programme across the districts. The formation of Yuvati Shibir which focus on gender inequality is a useful initiative where younger women are imparted training on issues including family, health, cleanliness and sanitation, information on government facilities and schemes and other social issues. These initiatives are need based and initiated from the Sangha women instead of on the instigation of the demands of other programmes. The expansion of women's networks is essential towards increasing MS outreach across districts and facilitate women's mobilization for empowerment and towards building a women's movement. There is a need to assess the past and see how the limitations of the past can be overcome in order to strengthen the women's movement across all districts.

It is far too early to comment on the involvement or influence of MS in the tribal development plan since its work in the Dangs has only just begun, and nor was any mention made of the recent tension in the area. It would be important however to observe and ensure that these issues are incorporated in a future strategy and action plan

3.3 Added Value and Linkages with RNE Sectoral Approach Priorities

The last decade saw a near universal focus on basic and primary education in all the international donor community activities. Much of this attention has now shifted to poverty alleviation. Education has remained a major focus in Dutch development co-operation policy and is now being seen as crucial for social well-being and economic progress, both of which are key inputs for poverty alleviation. The Netherlands has not reduced its budget for education while including an emphasis on poverty alleviation.

Dutch Development Policy on education concentrates upon basic education in order 'to meet people's learning needs and to enable them to acquire the basic knowledge and the essential skills and values they need for their personal and social development, and to play an useful role in society.' NRE believes that this goal may be reached through either formal or non-formal education.

The Dutch Development Policy has been arguing that the perspective in which Universal Primary Education is seen is required to move beyond traditional 'formal' paradigms. It is perhaps time that the formal system is no longer seen as the standard and legitimate one while the non-formal becomes the 'second', 'also ran' or 'stop gap'.

The formal and the non-formal should start to complement each other as parts of the same system. At present non-formal education for adults is seen as legitimate but not for children. Strategies to facilitate learning in and out of school need to be

integrated. Non-formal education requires to leave behind its low cost, small scale, local image and move on to possessing the same value, status and quality as the formal since both these paradigms have a role in meeting the needs of poor people in society.

Additionally there is sometimes the difficulty that the norms for opening formal schools do not allow a school to be opened in remote or very small habitations thus negatively impacting certain already deprived groups. Therefore, RNE is now stressing the need to include innovative outreach approaches. In this context, the MS innovation of Mahila Shikshan Kendras and other educational initiatives are of interest.

The holistic view of education requires to make place for the non-formal as well as other inputs like Early Childhood Education. Introducing the Early Childhood Development (ECD, which includes education, nutrition, clothing and health and is the presently accepted nomenclature) is an effective strategy to overcome some of the impediments that many disadvantaged children face in the pre-school period. The disadvantages faced in the pre-school period impact their performance in primary school. In this context the MS child care centers are of interest.

In keeping with this thinking RNE has been supporting the second phase of the centrally sponsored scheme, DPEP II. DPEP began in 1994 and supports replicable, sustainable and cost effective programme development in primary education. DPEP is presently being implemented in 271 districts in 18 states. RNE supports the programme in three districts of Gujarat of Banaskantha, Dangs and Panchmahal through a co-financing agreement with the World Bank.

DPEP works for improved pedagogy, enhanced learning achievement and bridging gender and social gaps in education. The Government of Gujarat (GOG) proposed to fund three additional districts (Jamnagar, Junagadh and Bhavnagar) and invited RNE to fund three others (Surendra Nagar, Kutch and Sabarkantha). Additionally all the reconstruction and repair costs for schools in the post Gujarat Earthquake (26 Jan 2001) period (minus those being funded privately or through NGOs) are being provided by RNE in DPEP districts. Basic educational infrastructure were affected in 18 districts which included Banaskantha, Panchmahal, Kutch, Surendranagar, Sabarkantha, Bhavnagar, Jamnagar and Junagadh. In order to minimize school disruption, GOG plans to complete repair and reconstruction work within 18 months. RNE is contributing approximately 40 million US dollars.

Gujarat is one of the three states identified for concentration of RNE initiatives as part of the revised strategy and based on the Sectoral Approach. Within the Dutch policy objectives and the objectives of GAVIM (Dutch Acronym for Good Governance, poverty reduction, institution building, and the environment) the sectoral focus identified for collaboration in the state of Gujarat includes area of Education, Mental Health, Water Management, and reconstruction.

The Universalization of Elementary Education and full functional literacy has been given high priority in the GoG's Social Infrastructure Action Programme as outlined in the policy document 2010. RNE has also been engaged in dialogue with GOG and some professional institutes (IIM, Ravi Mathai Centre for Educational Innovations) NGOs (Pratham, Eklavya and SEWA) regarding educational reform. RNE is also facilitating CARE's dialogue with GOG regarding a partnership in ECE, mother's education, dropouts, monitoring, mapping of various schemes that have an impact on education. RNE is working with NOVIB (Dutch funding agency specializing in development and educational projects) and the Center for Educational Management

(CEMD) in educational management and urban education. It is hoped that these initiatives will support MS educational efforts in 7 districts.

MS in Gujarat is funded by the RNE. The programme is presently being implemented in 36 blocks and 1,422 villages in Sabarkantha, Banaskantha, Panchmahal, Surendranagar, Varodara, Rajkot and Dangs. The Mahila Samakhya programme offers the potential to address a number of the issues that have been prioritised for the state within the framework of the RNE sectoral approach and within the GAVIM framework.

Women in Sanghas have prioritized water as a key issue of survival and could well prove a resource towards involvement in **effective water management strategies** by communities. The **educational initiatives** of MSG strengthen ties with DPEP and help engender the programme, bridge gender gaps in enrollment. However, MSG requires to take more constructive roles in developing content and teacher training inputs.

MSG has been involved in the **relief and rehabilitation efforts** in the State following the devastating earthquake in and beyond its area of work. MSG requires to **address the social reconstruction agenda and institution building** by providing space for Sanghas, Federations and Nari Adalats to work across class /caste/religion barriers towards a more inclusive approach to empowerment.

4. REPORTING AND MONITORING

Information flow in Mahila Samakhya Gujarat (MSG) has been captured in a flow chart in Exhibit 2. It shows nature, time, frequency and direction of information flow between various actors of the structure.

The different levels at which information is generated and reports produced can be categorized as:

- Field: consists of Resource Persons and Sahayoginis;
- District: consists of supervisory and administrative employees like RP, accountants, DEOs and headed by DPC;
- State: consists of supervisory and administrative employees like RPs, Consultants, accounts officer, internal auditor, SPD. Policy bodies like Executive Committee are also at the State level; and
- National Level: Office of the National Project Director and RNE.

Appendix I has more details on reporting.

MSG like other State Societies has been producing a fairly high volume of monthly, quarterly, biannual and annual reports, which capture all the activities being performed within the program. Reflection, analysis and feedback on these reports are carried out in day to day interaction among program functionaries.

There is a need to add **greater analytical depth** so that reporting captures not only the itinerary of events but **assesses problems, hurdles and learning**. Follow up on previous reports is not integral to the reporting process, it is also advised to include action taken component as a standard feature. The process of feedback on reports needs to be formalized. Reporting procedures have to improve in order to lend

themselves to analysis against objectives, as well as formatted appropriately for comparability. The Mission advises improved reporting procedures.

Besides regular reports, **documentation** in MSG covers a wide spectrum, which includes process documentation, workshop reports, exchange visit reports, special events reports like Melas etc. Some of these have immediate use and therefore have shorter shelf life whereas others have potential of long term use and would benefit a wider community. There is a need for greater systematization, analysis, indexing and utilization of these for future planning as well as for wider dissemination.

5. PLANNING AND BUDGETING

MSG follows the guidelines issued by Center in the Green Book⁷ to prepare its annual plans and budgets as is the practice in other states. An outline of this process is represented in Exhibit 3.

6. PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION AND ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

Organization Structure

State

Exhibit 4 shows organizational set up of MSG upto district level. Program at the State level is headed by a State Project Director who is guided by Executive Committee which in turn is responsible to the Governing Council.

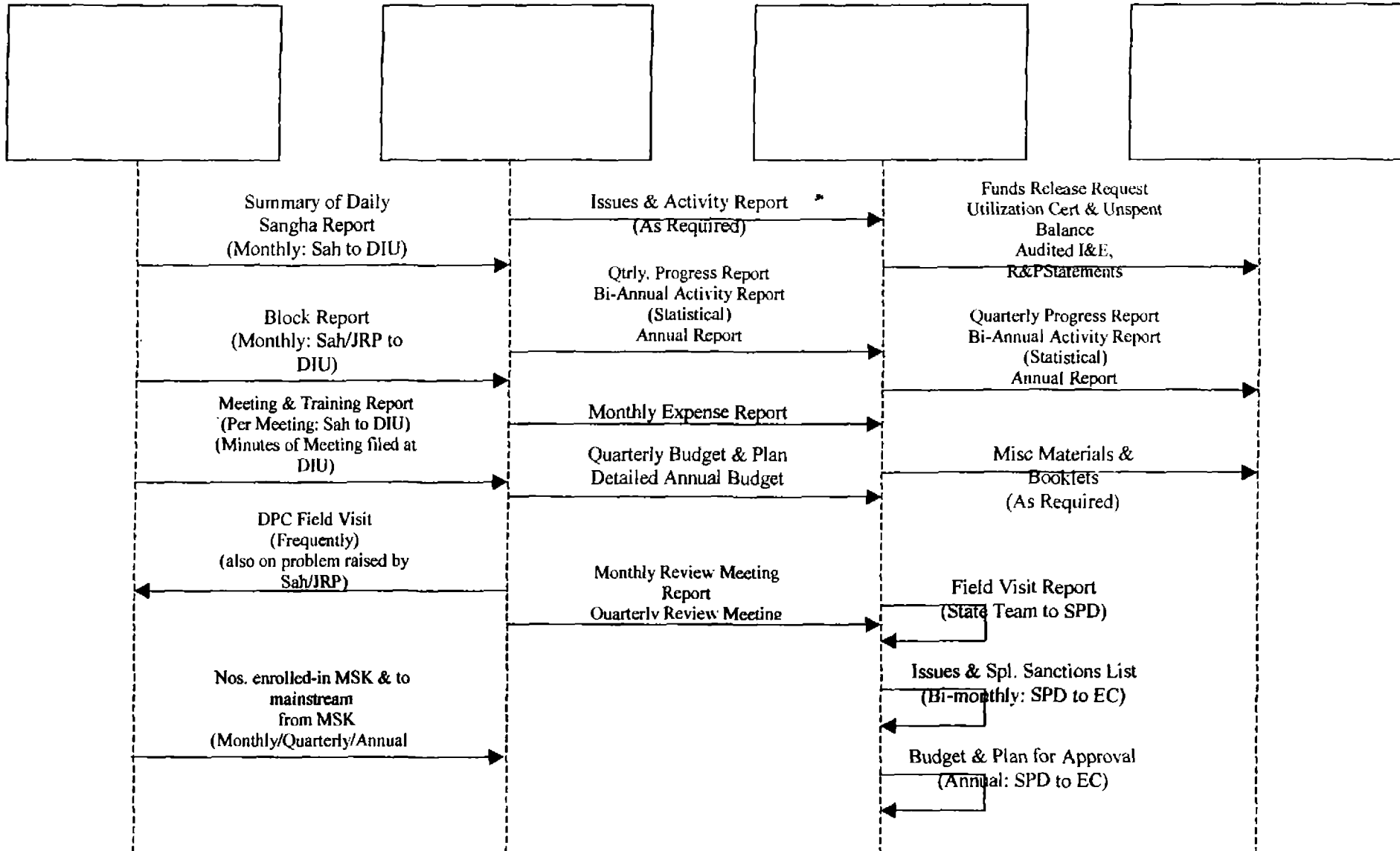
State Level structure is described in brief below:

- sahayoginis carry out discussions with their sanghas to assess members' expectations and priorities in the coming year.
- Based on these discussions sahayoginis prepare plans and this is discussed with DPC.
- After assessing expectations of sanghas through the sahayoginis, DPCs visit State to share these with SPD/ RPs/ Consultants and appreciate State level thrust areas.
- DPCs finalize and submit their plans to the SPD after contextualizing them in the light of State level thrust areas.
- After the submission of annual plans by the districts, activity wise costs are established and plan is consolidated for the whole State.
- Accountants at the district level as well as State level prepare Management Budget based on guidelines that are provided in the Green Book and number of villages in which the program is being implemented within each district.
- District wise budget is consolidated into a State budget and sent for an informal feedback to the Center.
- Center studies the budget and sends it back to SPD along with their comments.
- Annual plan or the budget is revised to incorporate Center's comments and placed before the EC for their approval.
- After the budget has been approved by the EC it is finally submitted to Center.

Center receives an annual budget statement, which has been approved by the EC.

⁷ MAHILA SAMAKHYA (Education For Women's Equality) (Ninth Plan Document 1997-2002) 1997, Ministry of HRD, (Deptt. Of Education) Govt of India, New Delhi.

Exhibit 2: Information Flow in MS Gujarat



themselves to analysis against objectives, as well as formatted appropriately for comparability. The Mission advises improved reporting procedures.

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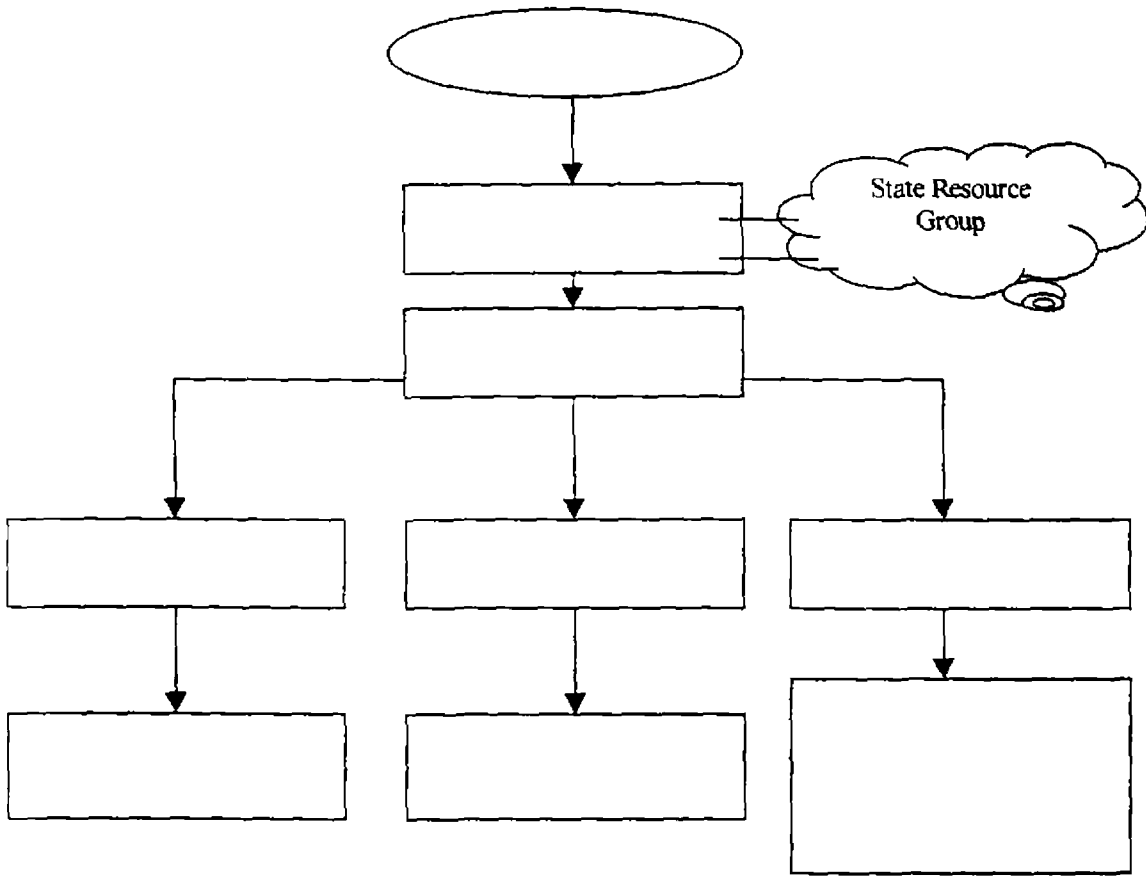
State Level structure is described in brief below:

- Sahayoginis carry out discussions with their Sanghas to assess members' expectations and priorities in the coming year.
- Based on these discussions Sahayoginis prepare plans and this is discussed with DPC.
- After assessing expectations of Sanghas through the Sahayoginis, DPCs visit State to share these with SPD/ RPs/ Consultants and appreciate State level thrust areas.
- DPCs finalize and submit their plans to the SPD after contextualizing them in the light of State level thrust areas.
- After the submission of annual plans by the districts, activity wise costs are established and plan is consolidated for the whole State.
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**EXHIBIT 3: ORGANIZATION CHART OF MAHILA SAMAKHYA GUJARAT
- STATE LEVEL**



RNE works on the principle of reimbursing the costs that have been incurred by the supported States for implementing MSG.

- The annual planning and budgeting exercise in MSG builds up on the expectations of the Sangha women in conformity with project principles. A detailed annual activity plan is drawn up which feeds into the annual budgeting process. There is a need to further strengthen this process and to strengthen the role of Sanghas in undertaking such planning and determining their activities especially in districts where these processes have been weak. Moreover, as in the case of other states, Gujarat also follows the national guidelines (objectives) for the preparation of their budgets. It is recommended that they should frame their own objectives, which should then become the basis for planning activities, budgeting, analyzing progress and variances. The progress as well as the monitoring can become more focussed and more state specific.

General Council is the top most body in the Society. It is the final authority at the State level which provides policy support, considers annual budget, audited accounts, forms bye laws and rules and delegates powers to EC so that it can discharge its duties effectively. The Governing Council cannot add and amend any rules. It cannot form any bye-laws without the approval of GOI.

The State Executive Committee is an empowered body that takes decisions relating to governance and program direction. It is responsible to the Governing Council. Executive committee puts its plans into action through the State Program Director (SPD). SPD is responsible for overall execution and smooth running of the program within the State. The majority of the representation in EC is either Government's ex-officio members or their nominees. It would be in the best interest of the program that its autonomous nature be fortified by making its representation even broader by including greater representation of local NGOs and public figures that have credentials in these areas. Greater involvement of the NRG representatives may also serve to strengthen the programme perspectives and capacities to deal with empowerment concerns.

Unlike the NRG, State Resource Group (SRG) at the State level is not a formal body. MS Societies have forged their own linkages with other NGOs and like-minded individuals whose resources and expertise are drawn from time to time.

A formal status for the SRG is recommended, as this would be useful in binding the current informal network of the MSG together. SRG because of its proximity to MSG and state specific expertise would be able to give much greater context specific advice. At certain points they might also be able to help MS negotiate on an operational level by making their networks and contacts available to them.

SPD has a team of following personnel to help her:

Table 9: Personnel at State Level in MSG

Position	Number of Posts
Assistant SPD	1 (Vacant)
Resource Persons	1
Consultants	1
Internal Auditor	1
Accounts Officer	1
Stenographer	2
Data Entry Operator	1
Lower Div. Clerk	1 (Vacant)
Assistant	1 (Vacant)
Peon	2
Driver	1

SPD is heavily loaded with routine administrative work. Whereas the position of Assistant SPD has been created but this is not the real requirement. SPD should be provided personal secretarial assistance so that her work can be better organized. It is suggested that the post of Assistant SPD should be changed to Executive Secretary to the SPD.

In case of some positions at the state level there is an overlap and lack of clarity in the respective roles. Overlapping Job descriptions of two positions may lend flexibility in the

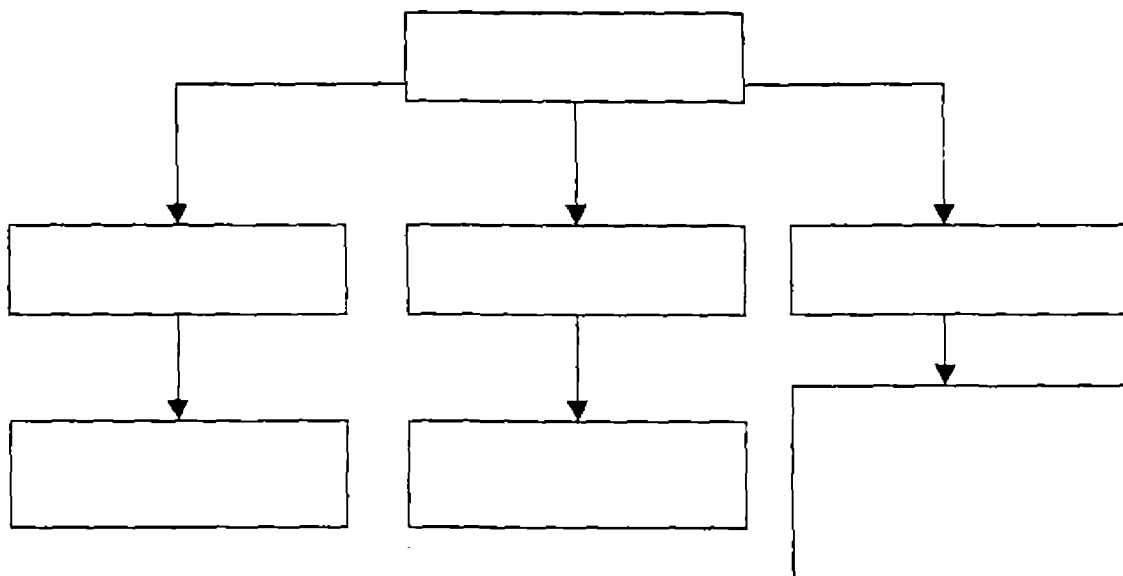
short term but could cause problems in the long term. There is a need to review and rationalize the job descriptions and roles.

State Resource Center: MS Program in Gujarat has been running for the last twelve years. While the program has performed well at some places and on some aspects (eg Nari Adalat) there is a need to provide fresh impetus especially in the direction of developing competencies and conceptual foundations of project functionaries. It would be useful for Gujarat to have its own State Resource Center in the long run, as this would accelerate and mainstream MS processes but this should be preceded by intensive action to develop competencies of functionaries on perspectives, key principles and strategies of the programme. This is all the more imperative in the context of the demands on MS to become a delivery mechanism for other programmes, without consideration to the processes that are the foundation of MS and essential for empowerment.

District

1. Exhibit 4 shows Organization Chart at the District level.

Exhibit 4: Organization Chart Of MSG – District Level



The DIU is headed by the District Project Coordinator who is supported by following staff:

Table 10: Staff at District level

Position	Number of Posts
Resource Person	Depends upon number of villages
Junior Resource Person	Depends upon number of villages
Accountant	1
Stenographer	1
Data Entry Operator	1
Lower Div. Clerk	1
Assistant	1
Peon	1
Driver	1
Sahayogini	Depends upon number of villages

Number of RP/ JRPs varies by the number of villages being covered in a district. It has been observed that DPC is overloaded with routine administrative tasks which leaves her with lesser time in her role as a coach and leader of the DIU. It is recommended that some provision for secretarial assistance should be made at this level also.

With the process gradual process of federation formation in the next phase there would be newer and higher expectations of Sahayoginis. It is proposed that in each district, positions for five 'Issue Based Coordinators' (IBCs) should be created. IBCs would be at the same level as RPs presently are in the organizational hierarchy and would be responsible for guiding and building capacity of sahayoginis and federations and providing support in the areas of their expertise. They would also be expected to work along with sahayoginis for federations.

7.HUMAN RESOURCES

Staff: MS has been able to carve a special position for itself and make its presence felt on the ground due to its dedicated personnel. However, there is a serious problem of staff turnover. Table 10 shows staff turnover in MSG at the State and district level. Problem of turnover is more acute at the State level as compared to District level. However, even small degree of staff turnover at senior supervisory levels in districts is extremely disturbing to the program as it is this level which provides critical leadership and direction to the program in the field.

Table 10: Staff turnover in MSG

Year	State Resignations as % of total Employees	Districts Resignations as % of total Employees
1997-98	7	1
1998-99	27	2
1999-00	20	5
2000-01	20	13
2001-02	13	8

Honoraria and travel allowance were fixed in 1997 (five years ago) and have since not been revised. This is leading to serious morale and retention issues. Program stands the risk of losing its momentum and jeopardizing its gains if this issue is not handled immediately. There is a need to benchmark MS compensation and employee benefit practices to other programs to be able to attract and retain proficient personnel. The recommended revisions should also incorporate provisions to account for general inflation as well as performance based incentives, which need not always be monetary.

The mission also found to its surprise that in Surendranagar, the DPC and four MS Sahayoginis are on Swa Shakti payroll and are housed in the MS DIU. There is no clear strategy how MS involvement would influence the strategy and functioning of the Swa Shakti programme, and nor has the process been adapted to changed to respond to women's needs. Swa Shakti as implemented by MS remains as target oriented and economic focussed as in other parts of the state. Besides this, the DPC being on the payroll of Swa

Shakti may compromise the MS programme objectives, given that there is likelihood of priority to targets of that programme at the cost of facilitation of the processes required for the MS programme. The mission is of the view that collaboration with other programmes and schemes must not be at the cost of Mahila Samakhya principles and objectives. Any collaboration should be analyzed for its programmatic implications and its potential to facilitate empowerment and the terms of such collaboration/ partnership should be negotiated and placed in writing, to reflect the adherence to the non violable principles of the programme.

Table11 shows Compensation of some of the positions in MS compared to similar projects.

Table11: MS Compensation compared to DPIP

	Mahila Samakhya Rs per month	DPIP Rs per month
State Program Director	10000	14000-20000
District Program Coordinator	6000	10000-15000

Vacancies: MSG has found it difficult to attract well-qualified people. This leads to positions lying vacant which has negative fallout on the program. There are numerous examples in Gujarat when key positions like DPCs have remained vacant or when positions have been filled on an adhoc basis without going through the laid down process of filling in vacancies.

Table 12 shows organization wide appointments as a percentage of total sanctioned posts on specific positions. Key positions like RP, Consultant and Auditor have remained vacant at the State Level for one or more years. Situation in districts has been worse. Appointments on the position of DPC has never increased beyond 67% in any of the years. Similarly there has been high level of vacancies for other positions in districts.

Table 12: Appointments as Percentage of Total Sanctioned Positions

	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
State Level Positions					
SPD	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
ASPD	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
AO	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Auditor	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
RP	0%	0%	100%	100%	100%
Consultant	100%	100%	0%	100%	100%
Accountant	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Stenographer	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
DEO	0%	100%	100%	100%	100%
LDC	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Assistant	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Peon	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Driver	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

District Level Positions					
DPC	17%	50%	67%	67%	29%
RP	63%	63%	50%	63%	56%
JRP	20%	40%	40%	36%	42%
Accountant	33%	33%	50%	83%	71%
Stenographer	40%	40%	33%	40%	33%
DEO	0%	20%	40%	40%	33%
LDC	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Assistant	0%	33%	17%	33%	14%
Peon	43%	67%	43%	57%	50%
Driver	20%	50%	67%	67%	43%
Sahayogini	33%	58%	52%	59%	58%

Status as on April 1st of every year. This table does not capture variations within a year.

Vacancies at the field level of DPCs, RPs and JRPs are bound to have a qualitative impact on the programme and need to be addressed urgently. It is expected that improvement in compensation will serve to correct the situation. It is important that the processes prescribed for appointments are followed in letter and spirit. Ad hoc appointments should be limited to emergency situations and suitable arrangements should be made as soon as positions fall vacant.

Social Security: MSG personnel especially Sahayoginis work under extremely difficult conditions, which also raises concerns of their safety and security. These issues should be closely looked into and necessary organizational arrangements made, which could be in the form of insurance-cover, etc. Mission noted that some of the states like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have instituted medical benefits for their employees.

Employment Contract: One-year-contract system of employment leads to insecurity in employees. There is a need for permanency of tenure, however to address the issue of an eventuality when funding to MS may stop, the contract of employment should be restricted to the period of the program and also subject to availability of funds from the GOI. In certain instances Sahayoginis have not been given a proper appointment letter. It is advisable that appointment letters should be given to Sahayoginis.

Appraisal: Whereas there is regular interaction between levels of functionaries which is quite facilitative in achieving organizational objectives collaboratively, a formal personnel appraisal system should be put in place, on the basis of which further renewal of contract, promotions and all other personnel decisions should be based. Annual employee appraisal should also feed into the Training Needs Assessment, which should further feed into Annual Plan in accordance with State's strategic objectives. Wherever induction into the organization is through an on-the-job process, it has been found to be insufficient. It is felt that there is a need for formal induction and orientation program when new personnel are recruited or when a person is promoted.

Workload: There is a need to specially account for and make room for additional administrative resources to support the DPC and the PD in the administration of the programme. Additional admin resources are also necessary whenever additional projects like Swa Shakti are taken up.

Skill Upgradation: Considering the expansion of the program and the need to strengthen the programme a strategy for capacity development needs to be evolved for the new and old staff to systematically provide learning on the core principles and goals of the programme as well as on key strategic areas. The programme needs to invest in the capacities of State level and field staff as well as Sangha and Mahasangha leaders to bring about a more cohesive and visible shift in the gains of empowerment processes in the lives of women and girls through this programme. It would also be helpful if skills of MSG personnel are upgraded in following areas:

- Perspectives of Mahila Samakhya and key strategies to address the achievement of empowerment goals
- Designing and management of Educational programmes for women and girls within the MS framework.
- Building peoples institutions and processes to strengthen Sanghas and inter-Sangha networking
- *Documentation* – to enable personnel make their documentation more analytical in nature so that it notes hurdles, uncovers root causes to problems and shares lessons learnt.
- *Strategic planning including MIS:* to enable personnel align their activities with their strategy for achieving overall goals. MIS would be helpful in assessing how far they have achieved and analyze if the gaps are due to implementation or limitations in strategy.
- *Basic budgeting process & financial management skills:* Greater financial skills would not only enable informed management of program through greater understanding of finance-physical linkages but would also contribute in substantive terms as then better finance appreciation would also be transferred to sangha women.

8. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

8.1 Accounting

Accounting practices in MSG are professional and up to date. A national level workshop was convened for accountants of all states and these practices can be attributed to that process. Details about Accounting system are provided in Appendix II.

Payments: All payments above Rs 1000 in MSG are made through cheques, however payments for honoraria are made by cash. In keeping with overall recommendations it is advisable that MSG should make all payments above Rs 500 by cheques and it is also recommended that all the honoraria and stipends should be paid by bank transfer or cheques.

Bank Accounts: MSG keeps separate bank accounts for District and State offices. It also opens separate accounts whenever a new project, which has a separate funding source, is taken up.

Authorization of Vouchers: Authority for all routine vouchers such as utility payments are passed by the Accounts Officer directly. Accounts Officer also has power to purchase routine office supplies upto a limit of Rs 2000. For all other matters SPD and DPC are the final authorities.

It is felt that load of approving all the expense vouchers on SPD/ DPC can be further reduced. The authorization of expense vouchers should be delegated to the level of Resource Person depending on the person who has incurred the expense. Only a limited number of vouchers should come to the SFD/DPC. A limit could be fixed above which all the vouchers would need to necessarily be approved by the SPD at the State Office and the DPC at the District Office.

Community Contribution: Current accounting system does not report the contributions received from community, which become available to the program. The budgeting also does not keep in mind resources that would be available from this source. This also contributes to budget surpluses currently observed. Community contribution accounting would make the budgeting process more realistic.

8.2 Internal Controls

A strong system of internal control is maintained through proper distribution of workload right from the Sangha Level to the Executive Committee level. At the Sangha Level the internal control is exercised through checks at various stages by DPC/ DRP/ JRP/ Members of the Sanghas. For expense approval, actual payment handling, recording & authorization are all handled by different functionaries in the organization. Monthly internal audit exercise is carried out by the State Accountants who visit different districts by rotation and check all the vouchers at the DIU level. Accountants keep a check on items being spent and budgetary provisions.

There is however, no budgeted activity/amount v/s actual verification and analysis, which could show some variations, which need to be carefully analyzed. The same as given in the Budgeting section of the report.

8.3 Purchase Procedures

Purchase process adopted by MSG is similar to that being followed by government. Authority to purchase up to a specified amount limits has been delegated. Whenever a purchase decision exceeds an employee's limit then she has to take approval from the competent authority. The process of purchase is briefly given in Appendix III.

The purchase process in MSG is time consuming and imposes unnecessary burden on the program and needs to be simplified. It is recommended that simplified purchases procedures up to a limit of Rs. 20,000 should be instituted in MS Societies. The basic underlying principle for an effective purchase procedure is to be able to carry out all purchases under practical conditions of transparent system rather than be burdened by procedures and system followed by the Government. A feasible alternative has been provided in Appendix IV.

8.4 Funds Flow

Funds Flow: Funds have to flow from Center to MSG to finally the districts so that program activities can be implemented on ground in a time bound manner. The flow of funds from Center to MSG usually takes two months from the date of receipt of 'request for funds' to final issue of draft. Factors like the amount requested, utilization certificates, audited statements and rate of utilization are used by the center to determine the amount to be released. MSG send requests every quarter based on the projected quarterly expenditure that is submitted to the Center. Generally the National Office releases funds in 2 to 3 installments. The process of flow of funds is shown in detail in Appendix V.

None of the persons at any link in the chain at MSG expressed disconcert due to funds not being available at the right time.

Idle Funds: It was observed that MSG regularly invests idle funds in Fixed Deposits, whenever funds available are more than the projected expenses for the following month. However there is no fixed rule on the basis of which this decision is taken across Districts and State Office. Thus, there is a need to standardize this practice and idle funds should be invested at the State and district levels in Fixed Deposits of 46 / 60 / 90 days according to requirement of funds.

Budget Reappropriation: SPD has complete authority to reappropriate budget. However activity costs cannot be taken into management costs but the opposite is possible and valid. DPCs have to send the request to SPD for a reappropriation. This practice should continue the way it is.

Legal requirements: MSG is filing an Income Tax Return. It is a good practice and it should continue to do so.

Computerization: Patchy efforts have been done by MSG in computerization. For example it has computerized its accounts at the Vadodara district office. Given the large volume of data likely to be involved in planning, budgeting, monitoring, and reporting and accounts processes it is recommended that these processes should be gradually computerized in a phased manner. The process of computerization should not create a parallel substructure within the organization but should be adopted by the existing management towards professionalization of their work. Some of these require substantial capacity building inputs and it is an area, which can be explored for Technical Assistance.

9.

9.1 Disclosures

8.6 Payroll System

VIRAT PLS SEND 2 MISSING SECTIONS

8.7 Utilization of Funds

Table 13 provides an overview of utilization of funds by MSG during the 1997-2002 phase of Program. It also provides a comparison of budget with the actual expenses.

Table 13: Budget versus Actual Expenditure of Funds (Total) by MSG during 1997-2002

Financial Year	Budget	Actual	Actual / Budget
1997-98	285.2	101.9	36%
1998-99	175.4	134.4	77%
1999-00	212.5	146.7	69%
2000-01	185	125.4	68%
2001-02	202		

Utilization of budget was closest to budget in 1998-99 but overall there is a tendency to either under spend or plan rather ambitiously. There is scope for bringing down this gap.

Table 14 gives actual versus budget analysis for management cost. It can be seen that these ratios are better than total cost actual-budget ratios. However, considering that management cost can be estimated to a greater precision there is opportunity for improving these ratios.

Table 14: Budget versus Actual Expenditure (Management Cost) by MSG during 1997-2002

Financial Year	Budget	Actual	Actual / Budget
1997-98	95.73	42.67	45%
1998-99	73.44	54.52	74%
1999-00	97.42	71.05	73%
2000-01	86.19	62.54	73%
2001-02	88.32		

Table 15 gives actual versus budget analysis for activity cost. Expectedly these ratios are lower than total and management cost ratios to budgets. There is a need to make planning much more realistic.

Table 15: Budget versus Actual Expenditure (Activity Cost) by MSG during 1997-2002

Financial Year	Budget	Actual	Actual / Budget
1997-98	189.5	59.27	31%
1998-99	101.96	79.92	78%
1999-00	115.08	75.71	66%
2000-01	98.81	62.93	64%
2001-02	113.68		

Table 16 gives ratio of management cost to total cost over the last phase. Share of management cost has increased from 42% in 1997-98 to 50% in 2000-01. It is important to ensure that management costs share should not increase disproportionately. As per the original financial estimates for 1997-2002, this ratio for a state with five districts should have remained less than 38%.

Table 16: Management Cost, Activity Cost and Management Cost as ratio of Total Cost (Actual Expenditure) in MSG during 1997-2002

Financial Year	Management Cost	Activity Cost	Management Cost / Total Cost
1997-98	42.67	59.27	42%

1998-99	54.52	79.92	41%
1999-00	71.05	75.71	48%
2000-01	62.54	62.93	50%

D. NEXT PHASE

1. Structure And Programme Initiatives

The MS Programme in Gujarat has raised awareness regarding women and social change in the districts where the programme is implemented, although work in the Dangs has been initiated only recently. However, the programme implementation and geographical outreach needs urgent attention. Figures provided by MS for the period 1997- 2000 indicate that initiatives like the Nari Adalats, Mahila Kutirs and Yuvati Shibirs all need renewed effort in order to expand or (more often than not) just to retain their momentum. The performance of Panchmahal, Surendranagar, Banaskantha and Dangs district is of special concern in this respect where the progress of MS over a five-year period has been less than satisfactory.

Institutional Strengthening

Much work needs to be done with regard to strengthening Federations, beginning with the strengthening of Sanghas. Federation meetings that the Mission attended revealed little understanding among women assembled about federations.

The Mission found that while other states have been successful in building strong Sanghas and developing strong networks between Sanghas Gujarat's performance in building up and facilitating the emergence of Sanghas as agencies for social change remains poor. Evidence of the empowerment of women at the Sangha level is uneven.. The Annual Report 2000-01 itself classifies only 30% of Sanghas in Gujarat MS as strong, 36% as medium and 33% are optimistically defined as 'normal'. It is futile to proceed with other processes without strengthening the present Sanghas as this is fundamental to the success of all other initiatives. The Mission notes the commendable initiatives to establish a strong programme of Nari Adalat and the interface with Panchayati Raj which has been facilitated by MS in various pockets. Specific strategies and efforts are also needed to strengthen the Sangha processes to bring them at par with the strong processes of the Nan Adalats and the interface with Panchayati Raj processes. This would infuse a new energy into the programme and enable it to influence mainstream processes more effectively since the Sangha women are finally the ones who participate and represent their needs on multiple platforms. Rajkot district stands out as a shining example of what could be possible by focussing on strengthening of Sanghas, although the education component needs greater attention.

While MS Gujarat has gone through a troublesome period with a succession of staff changes at the State level, it must reinstate the BSKs and MSKs to continue and take forward its literacy programme. The Balika Shikshan Kendra is a good concept and the 1997 Mission recommended that BSK be established in each block, providing alternative models of schooling for drop-out girls (9-14 years) at village level which is yet to be implemented. This Mission recommends that MSG explore means for collaboration with DPEP on the

BSK, while assuring adherence to the MS perspectives. The same also applies to the two MSKs that have not been functioning for the past two years.

The Mission is of the opinion that the concept and practical implementation of Sangha Federations needs to be worked out systematically. The limited scope of the Varanasi society initiated by the Sahyoginis, the Banda group starting a separate NGO or the disillusionment of the Baroda group are instances which need to be kept in mind while dealing with this issue. The Mission recommends that the conceptual, practical and financial aspects of the Federation be elaborated in a proper document.

Mahila Kutirs built some times with extra money provided by the Panchayat or the Corporate Sector has strengthened the Sangha. The Mission recommends therefore that reasonable budgetary allocations be provided for Sangha huts whenever possible, while women maybe encouraged to raise funds from other sources in order to gain confidence in the bargaining and achievement process.

The Mission is of the view that maximum autonomy of the programme should be secured. At SPD and DPC level staff needs to be appointed who have managerial capacities and are firmly rooted in the women's movement in Gujarat.

2. Staff Capacities

The Mission is of the view that inappropriate selection and inadequate training of staff has led to a situation where the Sanghas in Gujarat are often the weakest instead of being the strongest part of the Programme. The lack of conceptual clarity among the staff at the DIU and State level was reflected in the quality of training and processes followed for forming and implementation of programme with MS Sanghas.

There is insufficient conceptual clarity or understanding of the key principles of the Programme amongst staff and visible effort needs to be made to address these issues. Training of DIU staff and Sanghas are an essential component of strengthening Sanghas. MS Gujarat requires a concerted effort to develop conceptual clarity and mobilize Sahayoginis, an area that has received far from adequate attention in this phase. Adequate in-house capacity needs to be developed for staff training at all levels in order to be able to strengthen the field processes and equip the programme to respond to emerging needs. Sahayoginis, Resource Person (RP) and DIU training needs to be strengthened to overcome the dearth of such opportunities in the past couple of years and to enhance the momentum and efficacy of the programme.

The availability of training facilities, kitchen facility and space for sitting together and exchanging ideas is crucial for the Programme. For Gujarat, the Mission recommends the establishment of an appropriate office where all the necessities like the library, the Resource persons, Consultants and Sahayoginis can come together. Facilities should be available for overnight stay (as in UP and Karnataka). Change of the office to a decent location in Ahmedabad (not Gandhinagar) is recommended.

The interaction of MS Gujarat with NRG members and womens organizations is poor and it is recommended that this be vitalized in order to affirm its feminist perspective. The National Resource Group needs to exercise greater influence on the State programme as resource persons and advisors either as part of a State Resource Group or in the EC. The NRG can

also play a significant role to strengthen the conceptual understanding of the key principles of MS with the State team including the director.

The National office should ensure the linkage of the MS programme to the women's movement and development agencies and facilitate dissemination and sharing of experiences between States. The Mission recommends the enhancement of professional capacities of staff in order to take the programme forward instead of letting it peter out in small pockets.

There is also a need to consider and reflect upon possible drawbacks or deterrents in taking the programme forward. This is necessary not only in terms of assessing MS progress but also for evolving and developing strategies in order to successfully take the programme forward.

3.Spatial Expansion/ Consolidation

While the MS Programme has been largely successful in raising and facilitating awareness of women's issues, the progress of MS Gujarat has been less than satisfactory. Gujarat has 1399 Sanghas with a collective strength of over 34,000 women. Despite the numerical achievements, progress of MS programmes remains uneven and at times difficult to assess. While a number of activities have been initiated, the patterns of such activities have been spread thin and hence their contribution to women's empowerment is sporadic. The programme needs to undertake a comprehensive exercise of planning by objectives to address specific needs and issues in a comprehensive way towards achievement of the programme goals. The strengthening of the programme is a necessary prerequisite to expansion in the next phase.

The coverage of villages per block by MS Gujarat remains low. There is a need for MS Gujarat to connect with women's groups and the wider women's movement in Gujarat. There is little information regarding the programme in the tribal Dangs district. The Mission recommends caution in the appropriate appointment of staff within a tribal setting, and appropriate training and exposure opportunities to other tribal areas where MS is being implemented such as in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala for greater learning on strategies and processes.

The recommendations of the 1995-1996 Indo Dutch Evaluation Mission have not been complied with at all. Constant shuffling of the State and District Personnel of the programme can be detrimental to the programme. An E:C comprising of mainly bureaucrats and few links with activists or development workers further impedes conceptual clarity and progress towards goals of empowerment. The mission therefore recommends that the programme should consolidate its autonomous nature and that local non-government representation at state levels is increased.

The Mission expresses deep concern at the programme in the Dangs district. The recently employed staff (6 months) for the Dangs district need appropriate orientation and sensitivity to tribal population and culture. The mission is of the opinion that appropriate Sayoginis be selected who are sensitive to the culture and special needs of tribal groups and in taking the programme forward in Dangs district. Educational levels for qualification may be relaxed in order to recruit appropriate Sahayoginis as has been done in other states provided women and girls from the tribal community are recruited.

4. Steps Forward

With reference to MS Gujarat, the Mission recommends consolidation of the programme before planning the next phase. Intensive initiatives are required to formulate a Plan of Action in order to strengthen the programme towards achievement of its objectives.

The Mission understands from the National Office that a Resource Team is to be fielded to facilitate a state level vision workshop in the next month. This Resource Team can be assigned the additional task of formulating a Plan of Action with the team in Gujarat and the National Project Office to strengthen the programme to meet its objectives. This Resource Team should visit the State and facilitate the formulation of such a Plan of Action within a three month period before March 2002, and should further be required to track and report on the progress of the Plan of Action and its achievement by the end of the year 2002. Based on the achievement of this PoA, the next phase may be planned and considered.

The Resource team may chalk out a training programme by engaging a training institute preferably in Gujarat itself or through competent trainers from Mumbai which is not too far away. A training group needs to be based at State and district level. The Mission should also monitor and report on the progress of operationalization of the Plan of Action and its achievement by the end of the year 2002 at which point consideration may be given to withdrawal of support to dysfunctional districts. A winding up may be suggested in such districts, providing two years NGO grant in aid funding after which Dutch support for the district is either terminated or functions on its own without the MS support.

Appendix I: Reporting Process in MS

The reports that are produced in the organization at each level are described in brief in this Appendix. These reports have more or less similar format and frequency across districts within the State.

- Sahayoginis prepare a daily report, which contains an account of the activities that they complete during the day. These reports are submitted to RPs on a monthly basis. RPs read these report and provides comments to Sahayoginis so that they can improve upon their work.
- RPs also maintain a daily report which she submits to DPC at the end of month. These reports contain information about the happenings of each day. DPC goes through these reports and provide feedback to RPs about her work in the monthly staff meeting.
- DPCs submit a quarterly progress report about the district's performance to SPD. This report contains a snapshot of district's position on date as well as description of activities that were performed during the last three months.
- DPCs send a monthly expense statement, which contains information about all the expenses incurred during the month to the State Office.
- All MS Societies have a system of documenting each and every event that is organized or participated in. These events can be workshops, exposure visits, visits by outsiders, melas, camps etc. Reports that explain whatever transpired on these 4accounts are diligently maintained.
- MS Societies also produce documents relating to their substantive area. Whenever a ground level process, which is innovative or has been proved to be extremely successful and popular is identified and documented for wider use.
- Besides reports, minutes of meeting and plans of action for the District are also sent by DPC to SPD.

MS Societies diligently monitor the activities performed by its employees and the inputs that have gone into these activities. These are adequately reflected in the current reporting system.

Center receives audited quarterly and annual financial statements from the State. It also receives quarterly progress reports, six monthly statistical reports and annual progress reports.

RNE receives Annual Reports and audited annual accounts.

Appendix II: Accounting System followed in MSG highlight distinct features as different from others

In MS Gujarat following books of accounts are generally maintained:

- Cash Book;
- General Ledger;
- Journal Voucher Register;
- Asset Register & Inventory register of consumables
- Advance Register

Usually separate books of accounts are maintained whenever an external funded project is taken up.

Expenses & income are recorded on accrual basis and a double entry system is followed.

All vouchers are properly receipted and revenue stamp is affixed for any cash payment of Rs.500/- and above.

Depreciation is charged on the assets as per the Income Tax Act, 1961.

Appendix III: Purchase Process

This Appendix presents key points of the purchase process followed in MS Gujarat.

- All purchases below Rs. 500.00 per item may be made directly from the market after making simple verbal inquiries regarding prices and quality.
- All purchases involving amounts above Rs 500 but below Rs. 75,000 shall be made on rate contract of State or Central Government or after inviting quotations or without inviting quotations from Hastkala board, Khadi and Gramodyog board, Panchayat Udyog or any other undertakings of state or central governments. In unavoidable circumstances if minimum quotation is to be overlooked or the above prescribed procedure is not followed the reasons should be recorded on file.
- Purchase of items involving more than Rs. 75,000.00 can be made under rate contract of the State or Central Government or after inviting tenders or without inviting tenders from Hastkala board, Khadi and Gramodyog board, Panchayat Udyog or undertakings of State and Central Government. But in case when the lowest tender is not to be accepted or the above mentioned purchase procedure is not followed the reasons should be recorded on files before placing the purchase orders. The purchase of vehicles for the project should be made from dealers who are authorized by the government.
- Procedure for purchase:
 - There should be a need of article to be purchased.
 - Sufficient provision in budget should be available.
 - Purchase should be sanctioned by competent authority.
 - Purchase should be made according to the procedure laid down.
 - Article should be recorded in Stock Register and issued / utilized.
- Competent Authority

Limit of Expenditure	Authority	Other Limitations
Upto Rs 10,000	District Program Coordinator	As per the availability of funds
Upto Rs 35,000	State Program Director	As per the availability of funds
More than Rs 35,000		On recommendation of following sub-committee: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. SPD2. Representative of EC3. Representative of GOI4. Representative of NRG

- Splitting of items of purchase is not permitted for the exercise of these delegated powers.

Indo Dutch Joint Final Review of Mahila Samakhya

December 2001

MAIN REPORT

A. INTRODUCTION

The Mahila Samakhya Programme

The National Programme of Mahila Samakhya (Education for Women's Equality) was launched in 1988 in pursuance of the goals of the New Education Policy (1986) as a pilot project in 10 districts of Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh with assistance from the Government of The Netherlands. The unique programme is a novel programme, sponsored by Dutch Development Cooperation under a bilateral agreement whereby it has been conceptualized as a process rather than mere fulfillment of targets. The programme was extended to Andhra Pradesh at the end of 1992 and to Kerala in 1998. It was later decided that Dutch Development Cooperation would have a greater impact if concentrated in 3 States only instead of five. Therefore, RNE areas of concentration have been demarcated to Andhra Pradesh Gujarat and Kerala, whilst UP and Karnataka were dropped and programmes were not extended.

The National Policy on Education 1986 of the Government of India brought a conceptual **shift from equal educational opportunities for women to "education for women's equality"**; the introduction of 'education as an agent of change' in the status of women. Following this, the Mahila Samakhya Programme was conceived as a programme for the education and empowerment of socially and economically marginalized women in 1989. Mahila Samakhya was nurtured as a women's empowerment programme, conceptualized by committed feminists and progressive bureaucrats, and nested in the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India at the national level. It represents a unique experiment that charges the State with the responsibility of creating enabling spaces, institutions and structures to promote the empowerment of women, conceptually stepping leaps ahead of the Government's own rhetoric of development and advancement. The creation of autonomous Societies at the state level gives the necessary space to operate on the basis of emerging needs and trends.

Since its inception, the programme came to be viewed as a "Pilot" to a number of initiatives that followed in the pursuance of similar goals of empowerment, but with its own distinct character. It was grounded in the education sector and

continues to focus on the educational processes essential for the empowerment of women. Mahila Samakhya thus emphasizes the centrality of education in empowering women and now includes adolescent girls. Education is understood to include, but not limited to, literacy and numeracy as “**a process of learning to question, critically analyze and seek solutions;**” It includes creation of means to address the lack of self confidence, oppressive social customs. Paulo Friere had distinguished between the ability to read the ‘word’ and the ‘world’: MS too understands education to subsume both the word and the world.

The programme marks a departure from the earlier sectoral and instrumental approaches to education and views education as a process that is lifelong and enables women to organize and take charge of their lives, moving towards empowerment.

The Task Of The Indo Dutch Joint Review Mission

The task of the Review Mission as laid down in the Terms of Reference was to:

- Review the progress of the programme since January 1998, and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women.
- Recommend a strategy for the next phase (2003-2007) in the three concentration states, i.e. Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Kerala, consistent with the policy of Government of India (GOI) and the policy of Government of the Netherlands (GON)
- Provide an estimate of the total budget for the next phase.

In addition the Review Mission was also asked to assess the added value of MS in areas of health, water supply and sanitation, agriculture and Education in the concentration States of Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. This assessment was sought in the in the context of the sectoral priorities identified for programme initiatives by the RNE in its collaboration with the Government in the three states.

1

The Review Process

The Indo-Dutch Joint Review Mission Team consisted of ten members, including 3 GOI representatives. Most of the team members were gender experts, while three members brought expertise in educational issues and three were financial experts, looking into the financial and organizational aspects of the programme.

¹ Apart from the context of concentration for added value introduced within Dutch Development Cooperation, the areas of attention were Poverty, Women and Environment (acronyms AVM in Dutch and these were extended to include Institutional Development (I) and Good Governance (G); in short GAVIM. Good governance would also include the presence of the Wwomen's Mmovement and an active Women in Development (WID) policy in the State as well as women participating in the Governance, like Panchayati Raj , VECs, and as members of health services and local legal bodies.

The team prepared itself for the task ahead by formulating a list of key questions and issues pertaining to the areas of the Review TORs.

Following the briefing by the RNE and the GOI, the Mission members worked in two teams to cover the 5 states for review:

Soma Kishore Parthasarathy (Mission Leader), Hilde Janssen, Varun Anand visited Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Nishi Mehrotra and Vanita Mukherjee (GOI representatives) joined the team in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala respectively. Charu Sehgal also joined at Kerala for two days. The team spent almost a week in each state in discussions with the MS programme staff at various levels, State government and district authorities, representatives of NGOs and in interactions with the women at the level of the Sangha and the Mahasangha

Fatima Alikhan, Riet Turksma, and Virat Diviyakirti visited Gujarat, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. Sushmita Dutt (GOI representative) joined this team after three days. Intensive discussions and field visits were conducted to 6 districts of Gujarat apart from meetings with state level and other departmental officials. In Lucknow - MS UP, and Bangalore - MS Karnataka, only state level meetings were held, without field visits. (Itinerary of the mission teams is attached as Annexure 1)

The following report is based on

- the findings of the field visits in three states and discussions held at state level in two non-concentration states
- information available in the 5 year Annual Reports the numerous reports which have been produced in the states on different topics collected on site
- Meetings held with only three members of the National Resource Group (NRG), despite the Mission Leader's repeated request for a larger meeting with the NRG as a whole).
- A few documents made available to the Mission by the National Programme Director (NPD) on the Mission Leader's request, including :
 - Recommendations of the Working Group on Adult and Elementary Education relating to Girls Education for the 10th Five Year Plan, and
 - A concept note on girls' education for a scheme that is on the anvil.

The report focuses on the commonalities and specifics to assess the impact of the programme and to identify strategies for the way ahead in the next phase.

Following the visit to the field an Aide Memoire was presented containing the key findings and conclusions and pointers to the way forward in the next phase. Discussions were held with some of the State Programme Directors (SPDs) and there was a final debriefing with the Department of Education, Government of India on the 20th of December 2001. This was presided over by the Secretary Department of Education and attended by the Joint Secretary Deptt of Education

(Elementary Education), the NPD, NRG members, Head of Development Aid and senior RNE representatives.

Following the meeting at the DOE the members of the mission dispersed to their respective destinations, while a few worked to finalize the Aide Memoire and COCA document based on the discussions held at the DOE. These documents were submitted to the RNE on 29th of December 2001.

The mission members have since been working on the respective state level reports based on a common framework. The formulation of state level reports has required an unprecedented amount of energy and time to present the essence of the programme and to draw conclusions for the future direction of the programme.

The Report

The main findings and joint conclusions for the programme are contained in this Main report, along with details of a recommended strategy for the next phase, including the financial implications of the measures recommended.

This Main Report consists of

- A. An **introduction** to the programme and the review process
- B. **Current status and policy context** of the programme
- C. **Progress and impact of the programme** in areas identified by the TORs, specifically:
 - women's empowerment
 - education
 - linkages with government and NGO programmes and value added interface with RNE sectoral priorities
 - financial and organizational issues
- D. **The next phase** the possible steps and programmes for are highlighted, with an emphasis on the three concentration states of RNE collaboration and the emerging national scenario for women's education

The five state level reports: a) Andhra Pradesh b) Kerala c) Gujarat d) Karnataka e) Uttar Pradesh vary in length and depth based on the time available to the mission to examine the programme and the priority given to each within the RNE policy. All five are supplementary to the Main Report. and contain the specific details of the state level programme. While each state report may have its own style and represent a specific perspective, having been compiled from contributions of different team members, they document the status of the programme and highlight issues, dilemmas and successes which are specific to that state. These aspects may be found individually in each state but have been highlighted to provide learning for other states and to provide direction for that state in its future course of action.

The main report draws together the conclusions from these state reports to present the programme in its current state in the RNE assisted states. It seeks to the aspirations of the women, to point to the critical concerns and issues in the programme as well as to present a realistic assessment of the challenges ahead.

Circumstances and Constraints

It would be necessary to point out the circumstances and constraints that the team has dealt with in the process of field work and in the preparation of the reports.

We had not envisaged the scope of the task before us in undertaking a review across five states. Despite being a 10 member mission, we were constrained by the availability of two persons for only 2 and 5 days of the entire mission respectively, and the postponement of the travel itinerary by 2 days. We also had an exposure to the reality of the circumstances that workers have to contend with –bandhs (strikes) and Naxal bombings.

Further, the mission itinerary and design did not provide the space or time for a participatory process. This is contradiction of the very process and conditions for learning that the programme considers non-negotiable. This factor, that was earlier indicated in the evaluation report of the mission fielded in 1997, needs to be kept in mind for future assessments of the programme.

The team did not have enough time together to adequately discuss our approach or develop a common understanding of the task ahead. Nor did it help to have everyone disperse immediately after the presentation, to work on the state level reports in sections through the virtual world over the next three months. However, if the team had been retained for an additional week to complete the task at hand, hold internal consultations and chalk out the details of the future of the programme as a collective consultative process this process could have been more efficiently organized.. Scheduling the Mission just before the Christmas and the festive season did not allow for any flexibility in this respect either.

The unrealistic time frame of contractual arrangements has meant that most team members have devoted extra time in the preparation of state level reports after the mission travel period. Each one has had to reschedule their activities to meet the requirements of the process, in the interest of finally presenting a comprehensive set of documents.

The Mission is constrained in its assessment of the future policy linkages of Mahila Samakhya with other education sector programme initiatives. Neither the entire Working Group report, containing proposed programme priorities for the next five years, nor the relevant documents of the proposed National Resource Centre for Women, were made available. The report of the landmark

“Sanghamitra” Workshop was also not shared and therefore the value of the events can only be gauged from the views expressed by the women in the field.

Unfortunately, no general reports were commissioned by the NRG/NPD as in the previous evaluation, to supplement the reports available that could facilitate the work of the Mission, although state level presentation documents on the status and concerns were shared with the Mission team by some states.

Despite the constraints mentioned above, we hope that we have been able to adequately represent the reality of the programme, to capture its impact and to highlight its potential for the future. **The mission team members were stricken by the level of commitment of the staff especially at the field level. We wish to place on record the urgency of the need to enhance their compensation package in adequate measure in recognition of the enormous grit and dedication to their tasks and to the goals of the programme.**

We wish to express gratitude to the Government of India, Department of Education and to the Royal Netherlands Embassy for having given us the privilege of being on this Review Mission. For many of us who have followed the programme with eagerness and anticipation, this was indeed an opportunity to learn in greater depth about the programme, its energy, its travails and successes in all its diversity. We are indeed grateful to all those who have extended unstinting support to the mission in this task. The State Teams made our work easier and enjoyable by attending to every detail of support we needed, while sharing their experiences and concerns and providing us with opportunities for valuable insights and learning. To all those associated with the programme within its network and beyond who have shared their views, we express our thanks and appreciation.

B. PROGRESS AND IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

Scope and Outreach

In the years since its inception, the programme has evolved and grown in various dimensions, so that its physical outreach as well as its sectoral linkages has steadily expanded to encompass the articulated learning needs of poor rural women. In its initial phase the programme emphasizes the creation of the "space" for women's experiences to inform learning as well as to provide the basis for agenda setting and determination of priorities. The programme has found its moorings in the homes of women, in their life struggles for economic and social survival, in their quest for identity and status within the community, the village and public spaces/ forum of decision making and now in the establishment of their own networks and organizations.

The Sanghas have been generally successful in expanding horizontally but not as originally envisaged. They have taken on a greater number of activities thereby creating depth instead of a sheer critical mass as in numbers. The function, expansion and activities of the Sanghas moreover, vary between the states as well as between districts within them. The coverage within the States reviewed by the mission is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: coverage of the programme in the Dutch assisted states:

State	Districts	Blocks	Villages	Sanghas
Andhra Pradesh	7	32 Mandals*	1101	1101**
Gujarat	7	36	1422	1422
Kerala	2	13 Panchayats***	173 wards	775
Karnataka	7	33	1082	1082
Uttar Pradesh	16****		1470	

*The area of a Mandal is less than the block

**Including village level Sanghas which include multiple SHGs in 2 Districts

*** In the system of local Self-Governance, the Panchayat is the unit of admin in Kerala

****10 Dutch assisted of which 3 are now in the newly formed state of Uttaranchal)

The programme has also extended beyond the Dutch assisted programme in these States and presently covers a total of 9000 villages in 61 districts of 10 States. The outreach may seem small in numbers as compared to other government programmes that follow a linear target oriented agenda. Nevertheless, the scale of activity and outreach is larger than most NGOs and has increased substantially over the past five years.

Mahila Samakhya is a process-oriented programme, which does not pursue targets per se. Its achievements lie in the quality of outputs, generated through a systematic follow-through of processes. Processes are facilitated in a manner, which provide learning as well as the attainment of results conducive to the change in the lives of women at their pace. Activities are analyzed in the context of their potential to impact on the lives of women and their environment, thereby providing space for options to be explored, and likely outcomes to be assessed. These steps are essential to the process of learning and cannot be circumvented for the achievement of goals of social transformation.

Traditional models of development programmes may present large coverage through the enumeration of numbers of beneficiaries, and therefore their outreach would be to those directly benefited by the programmes. MS on the other hand seeks to promote processes of change through forums such as the Sanghas. For each Sangha woman it is estimated that at least 20 other women are impacted². The Sangha provides a forum and space to support not only those women directly active as members of the Sanghas, but other women in the village and beyond, to enable them to aspire and question the attitudes and practices that impact upon their lives. This fact can be gauged from the reported impact of the efforts of Sangha women in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to stop the practice of dedication of girls to local dieties in the practice of the tradition of Jogini and Devadasis. The impact of these efforts is felt not only by the Sangha women as they report cases and stop dedication rituals, take out "yatras" and motivate women in the community and the region. Other women and girls also benefit in the block and vicinity, as the discriminatory practice is curbed and even wiped out from the area. While Sangha women continue to maintain a vigil against such instances, the women and girls experience a change in practices and attitudes towards them. Instances are reported from all the states of cases of violence being referred to the Sanghas and the Nari Adalats, where these have been instituted, creating an environment of greater optimism. These ripples of the actions of Sanghas manifest themselves in changes in environment for women and practices in a wider area. These cannot be just enumerated but experienced and felt through perceptions and sustaining processes.

Mahila Samakhya has broadened its base by bringing existing groups under a common umbrella to address social issues related to women's status in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. As the programme outreach and intensification strategy is evolving, MS is increasingly recognized as a programme for the mobilization of women across class and caste groups, as a forum for women's social and political empowerment especially in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. With the shift in strategy necessitated by the proliferation of SHGs in the country, especially in Andhra Pradesh, under various governmental initiatives for poverty alleviation and economic empowerment, the MS programme is also exploring a shift in its strategy. In new districts the programme is reaching out to these SHGs through an umbrella approach, indicating an enhanced outreach potential to groups that are already in existence. While providing them with support on issues of social empowerment, the programme seeks to enhance their identity as women's organizations and to draw them into the network to address strategic changes in the lives of women. While this approach is still in its infancy, it presents a feasible alternative, which is of greater relevance in the context of large - scale programmes such as DPIP being promoted in these states.

The MS Programme has been able to **redefine education**, informed by the women's perspective emerging from the grassroots. Processes of empowerment have been strengthened from the Sangha level upwards. With the dissolution of the Sakhi's position Sangha women's leadership is more visible and widespread. **The programme agenda has included adolescent girls in significant measure in the period under review, with specific programme initiatives designed to cater to their emerging needs.** This enhanced scope is reflective of the understanding that educational processes for girls will enable them to gain confidence, and create opportunities for them to emerge

² Estimates shared by the Karnataka MS team, indicating the outreach of the Sanghas. This figure may vary across the states and districts, depending on the intensity of Sangha processes and the quality of facilitation.

empowered to question and determine their choices from an early age, giving them a head-start. These girls in turn represent the inter-generation (and spatial) continuity of the programme, as they progress into the formal educational process with higher levels of confidence or into the community as young adults. Their new role models are the leaders from the Sanghas and Federations emerging from the programme. This increased focus on girls' education gains greater significance in the context of the recent Lok Sabha decision to introduce education as a fundamental right for 6-14 year olds. *Mahila Samakhya* has the potential to exercise influence on the shape and content of initiatives for young and adolescent girls education based on its own experiences.

Expanding Horizons

As Sanghas have grown in number and strength, they have taken on new roles of mobilization and awareness raising in the old districts and providing learning to new districts. Sanghas have linked up to form clusters at local levels, motivating women to form new Sanghas in the neighbouring villages, and Mahasanghas or Federations as apex organizations that facilitate networking and work on collective agenda between groups in a taluk or district. Thus the outreach and coverage of the programme has also expanded in terms of its spheres of influence, so that in the older districts the Sanghas in many instances are able to negotiate with the State and other agencies on issues of concern for women. Mahasanghas now deliberate upon their priorities and facilitate access to government programmes, or raise women's concerns on the systems of governance. Women in larger numbers have engaged with the electoral process in this phase of PR elections either by standing as candidates, or by negotiating with candidates. They have forged links with the women Representatives and MS inputs have enhanced the sensitivity of WRPs to women's concerns for instance in Kerala and Karnataka. MS has also promoted the formation of All Women's Panchayats in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The expansion of horizons of women's spaces to negotiate and engage in action has given them increasing agency to influence mainstream processes.

While the programme's growth seems to have been modest in its apparent numerical strengths, but acquires significance in its depth. It is to be hoped that the level of empowerment so achieved by women in the older districts will propel the groups to expand in their vicinity and in the neighbouring areas to create a visible critical mass capable of asserting a strong presence for women. This calls for a strategy towards greater densification in the present districts, to impact on the macro structures.

Significant shifts may also be observed in the roles that the organization functionaries are expected to perform as a consequence. With enhanced capabilities and confidence, the Sangha and Mahasangha leaders undertake the more routine tasks of group formation and management, while their aspirations create demands for issue specific and perspective related inputs from the programme. With the changing nature of Sanghas and the demand for more issue-based inputs, **the role of the Sahayogini has also changed. They have become specialists and facilitators**, from being mobilizers providing issue based knowledge inputs, informed by a class and gender perspective. Training of Sahayoginis has been intensive and systematized in some states while others have followed an ad-hoc approach. Quality training of Sahayoginis is essential as it has a direct impact on the developments at the Sangha level on the processes of collective action and Federation formation.

The programme's successes are embedded in the relationships of friendship that have developed between the Sangha women at various levels and with the programme staff. These and the shared visions are really the energy that propel the programme forward. This cannot however be expected to sustain without recognition of such efforts especially of the grassroots field staff in financial terms. The present remuneration of the programme staff is dismal on a relative scale as well as in absolute terms and has compelled many to move (The state reports provide comparisons with other programmes in the States). The very survival of workers is at stake³, and they might well be compelled to move, taking with them the energy, the learning and the richness so essential to strengthen the programme at this stage of critical threshold. On the one hand is the picture of these abysmal salaries and compensations to workers who are the backbone of the programme, and on the other is the savings reported from the programme which have enabled it to be extended by more than a year without financial implication. These contradictions obviously call for revisions in the compensation of workers.

Outreach of MS as a Demonstration and Resource Agency

Mahila Samakhya has gained recognition as a resource agency at the district and state level. The taluk/district authorities seek its support in raising awareness on discriminatory practices and social issues. Health programme staff recognize MS as a programme with grassroots credibility and seek their assistance in implementing the immunization programme and would like to involve the MS in its family planning agenda. The state authorities accept and laud MS strategies to create a safe and conducive environment for girls in their MSKs, and view them as potential demonstrations for effective implementation of the Adult and Non-formal education programme. Participation of MS in the Village Education Committees at the village level to state programme committees for different educational initiatives, and in the preparation of learning materials and manuals for education and literacy bear testimony to the fact that MS is recognized as an agency with specialist skills and expertise that adds value to educational initiatives. This is also reflected in the responses of various departments in wanting to collaborate with the MS in the implementation of numerous programmes. While MS has hitherto been selective in the selection of its partnerships in most instances, and has negotiated terms to strengthen its focus on the non-negotiable, this has not always been the case. In Gujarat, the programme has become the implementing agency for the Swa Shakti Programme and the Chetna AIDs programme, without informing these initiatives with its own perspectives, and without clearly articulating the terms and limits of its engagement.

MS has been a resource and training agency to numerous programmes in all the states. It has undertaken policy initiatives such as the formulation of the Policy for Women in Uttar Pradesh and has been assigned the task of preparing the Gender Profile for the state in Andhra Pradesh. The state government in Kerala views MS as a state resource agency for Gender and MS has been involved in the training of Functionaries of Local Self Government as well as WPRs. It has undertaken a significant role in the gender budgeting process in Karnataka.

³ Workers in Andhra and Kerala for instance shared that they are living in poor conditions due to low affordability and are unable to visit their families due to inadequate incomes. The expenditure incurred by them on travel to the field is also not fully compensated in the present package, due to which they absorb these costs from their already meagre incomes.

MS collaborates with NGOs as a resource team for gender training', and participates in the formulation of training and learning materials in collaboration with state agencies as well as provides expertise to conduct campaigns against practices such as Devadasi, Jogini, child labour etc.

Although perceiving itself as a women's movement its links with the larger women's movement and with autonomous women's agencies have been fairly weak in the past 5 years. This may be attributed to the current focus on consolidating its own strengths based on the capacities already built in the previous phase with the help of such agencies. Another reason may be that those who were primarily involved in maintaining these links have moved out of the programme. In Kerala however, the links are fairly strong as the programme strives for a foothold and builds its alliances with like-minded agencies, which share similar goals. Affiliation with the women's movement therefore follows a growth pattern, being more intensive in the initial phases, for capacity and perspective building. These links need to be maintained on an ongoing basis, so that the MS is strengthened by emerging knowledge and debates and in turn informs the concerns of the movement with its own experiences as was attempted through its participation in the Women's Studies Conference in 1999. The focus now needs to be transferred from linking up for capacity development needs to forging alliances between women's organizations to enhance the horizontal flows of knowledge and solidarity networks. This could be facilitated through a systematic process of exposure through "Sammelans" and exchanges, which have been found to be the most enriching forms of learning for grassroots women. Events such as the Sanghamitra Workshop need to be organized more regularly not only for sharing within the MS but to forge broader alliances for learning and solidarity with other forums of women committed to similar goals

The role of the National Office in this context is critical. Three major initiatives that have been taken to facilitate learning of processes and issues were facilitated by the consultants at the national level- on management of accounts, on the issue of federation and the Sanghamitra Workshop. The absence of consultants at the National Level for more than a year to facilitate these processes and to provide support to state offices through trouble shooting, has caused a significant lag in the programme, most evident in the Gujarat programme. An active NRG and a more broad-based State Executive Committee with greater membership from NGOs and the Women's Movement will serve to strengthen the ties with the Women's Movement and facilitate lateral exchanges and learning.

The expanding scope of the programme has also led to the increased expectations from the MS programme. Its potential is considered significant as a state gender resource agency to promote the integration of gender interests in programmes of the development sector. The education sector specifically views MS as a potential demonstration base for good practice in Girls education and Continuing Education for women, as well as in the training of teachers and production of materials⁴. The level of skills to fulfill these roles however currently varies across the MS states apart from the paucity of staff. Future growth of the programme towards fulfilling these resource functions would need to be discreetly planned to

⁴ These future role for MS was emphasized by senior officials of the Dept of Education in AP, Kerala, UP, and Karnataka

- a. Facilitate the maximum flow of benefits and opportunities for Sangha Women.
- b. Spread of the MS approach to other programmes towards good governance in development and empowerment of women.

B. MAHILA SAMAKHYA AND THE CURRENT POLICY CONTEXT

India's commitment to the Universalization of Primary Education (UPE) was affirmed at the Jomtein Conference in 1990. The Delhi Declaration of 1993 recognized the importance of assuring education for the entire population. The Dakar Framework for Action 2000 emphasized all facets of education such as early childhood care and education, gender equality, quality improvement, elementary education, adolescent education and adult education. India is also committed to the goals of EFA, which were reiterated at the Beijing Ministerial Review 2001. The CEDAW declaration also identifies gender issues requiring action to eliminate discrimination in the education sector among others and recognizes the need for "lifelong learning" opportunities..

The 93rd amendment was introduced in Parliament earlier in 2000 and seeks to make education a fundamental right. The *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* is a new holistic and integrated approach for universalizing elementary education and is the Government of India's response to the commitments of Education for All (EFA) goals and commitments. It aims at bringing all children between 6-14 into school/ back to school/ Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) by 2003. It follows a time bound approach and aims to ensure that all children complete five years of schooling by 2007, eight years by 2010. Mainstreaming of gender in all proposed interventions through District Elementary Education Plan is postulated as a core to the proposed SSA. While other schemes and programmes have all been dovetailed under this umbrella programme, the Mahila Samakhya programme has been retained as an autonomous programme, but is also expected to play a role in mobilization of communities towards meeting SSA goals.

Women's Education

The principle of equal educational opportunity for women has given way to the more proactive principle of providing education leading to women's equality. Since 1986, the emphasis has been gradually shifting to holistic education leading to capacity building as an instrument to empower women. The NPE 1986 and the subsequent Plan of Action (POA) 1992 provided for higher priority to girls, which is also a trend highlighted in the recommendations for the 10th Plan. The District Primary Education Programme was started in 1994 in districts with female literacy levels lower than the national average. While these have been significant steps in recognizing the need to focus on formal education for girls, the approaches of these programmes continue to view education in a supply side framework, and do not adequately address the structural factors that impede girls and women's education, or call for change in approaches to education that are more relevant to their lives. Further all these commitments focus on the primacy of the young for education. Initiatives for education for adults especially for the large numbers of women have not gained significance despite the evidence from MS and literacy campaigns, of impact of adult learning on the overall environment and on capacities of marginalised communities to address their problems. Programmes like Mahila Samakhya thus remain an experiment in isolation without adequate effort to integrate their learning into mainstream educational initiatives.

While girls and women's education has gained more recognition as specific issues for concern and programmes are targeting the participation of girls in more concerted ways, these efforts need to take cognizance of the issues highlighted by MS such as the environment for girls education and the relevance of teaching/learning materials and subject matter in formulating new programmes.

The World Bank World Development Report 2000 refers to empowerment, security and opportunity as basic instruments for poverty alleviation. Attention to the connection between human rights and human development has also grown. Amartya Sen defines poverty as a lack of choice. Understanding education from the rights perspective stresses the need to focus on issues of diversity and on reaching the most marginalized and deprived. This argument links the provision of education for all to the concepts of social justice and equity. There is a strong co-relation between education and human well being, life expectancy and infant mortality. Within the rights framework therefore the design of education programmes needs to address the specific experiences of the *community or learner*. **MS has established that the demand for education is directly correlated to the creation of space where information can be sought, processed and used to make qualitative changes in the life of the learner.** Piecemeal efforts to address education in a sectoral way without addressing the socio-cultural and political context of peoples lives in the context of gender, class and caste is not empowering and does not address their reality.

While girls and women's education has gained more recognition as specific issues for concern and programmes are targeting the participation of girls in more concerted ways, these efforts need to take cognizance of the issues highlighted by MS: the environment for girls education and the relevance of teaching/learning materials and subject matter in formulating new programmes.

Proposed actions and recommendations for the 10th plan period reflect greater recognition of the roles that women can play in the management of education in village education committees and in the parents' forums, as well as in the mobilization efforts for girls education. There is also heightened requirement for "Each programme to spell out in concrete terms its concern for girls education and gender equality."⁵ Translated into programme realities, these need to address the living and learning environment to create learning opportunities for women and girls. This is also viewed as a basis for integration of gender concerns in other programmes of the Department as well as a programme monitoring and planning device.

The 10th Plan recommendations also include the creation of national and State capacities for planning and implementing programmes for the education of girls for which purpose a National Resource Center (NRC) for the education of women and girls is proposed. While these proposed measures would serve to increasingly integrate gender into the education sector, the provision for women's education and means to ensure their empowerment through greater focus on strategies such as those gained from the experience of MS is missing in the proposals for the 10th plan.

Thus MS continues to be showcased in the 10th plan period, with little understanding of its key learnings and principles influencing the mainstream efforts towards literacy and

⁵ Working group recommendations on Girls Education presented to the Planning Commission, 2001

education. The Continuing Education (CE) programme for instance could benefit from the learnings and strategies of the MS programme. Focussed efforts are required to advocate its strategies and processes that have been empowering and provided learning opportunities for women to effectively change their lives, and strive for a just and equal society. Mainstreaming of gender concerns and appreciation for strategies and issues highlighted by the MS programmes should be advocated with greater rigor by the National Office and by the NRG.

In The Tenth Five Year Plan some specific programmes with a focus on women and girls besides Mahila Samakhya are proposed. These include the new scheme or "National Strategy for ensuring greater participation of Women in Educational Field" to be implemented in specific areas with low female literacy and focus on intensive implementation and monitoring. The *Kasturba Gandhi Swatantra Vidyalaya* scheme will enable the opening of special schools for the girl child of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes Other Backward Classes and minorities, in low female literacy districts.

It is planned to further upscale The Mahila Samakhya geographically, specially interventions such as the Mahila Shikshan Kendras. It is hoped that the learnings and approaches of MS will be used to inform the new programmes in terms of content and strategy.

The Education Focus of Royal Netherlands Embassy

Education has been a major focus in the overall Dutch Development Co-Operation Policy, specially since this sector is now being seen as crucial for social well being and economic progress, both of which are key inputs for poverty alleviation. Whilst in the last decade, the international donor community has focused primarily on basic education, the Netherlands has done this without reducing its budget for other education sub-sectors. Dutch Development Policy on education concentrates on basic education in order 'to meet people's learning needs and to enable them to acquire the basic knowledge and the essential skills and values they need for their personal and social development, and to play an useful role in society.' While many education sector programmes prioritize formal primary education in order to meet EFA goals formal education paradigms are not always able to reach the most marginalized. This is because the learning content and pedagogy are often not contextual or relevant to specific groups and a cultural and social gap exists between the school and the learner.

The Dutch Development Policy has been arguing for the need to move beyond traditional 'formal' paradigms towards Universal Primary Education and that the formal and the non-formal should start to complement each other. The holistic view requires to encompass the non-formal education as well as other inputs like early childhood education. Non-formal education should leave behind its low cost, small scale, local image and move on to possessing the same value, status and quality as the formal since both these paradigms have a role in meeting the needs of poor people in society. However, ultimately the real challenge remains to ensure that the public institutions perform and are accountable as these serve the largest majority. Strengthening capacities and opportunities for MS to share its holistic learning through people owned structures for learning and on gender and education need to be reinforced through support to the proposed NRC.

RNE has also been supporting the second phase of the centrally sponsored scheme, DPEP II in three districts of Gujarat viz., Banaskantha, Dangs and Panchmahal through a co-financing agreement with the World Bank. These are also MS districts. Strategies need to be creatively formulated to explore the potential of the MS programme and DPEP to work synergistically in this context, while ensuring compliance with the non-negotiable principles of the MS which are essential for good governance.

C. PROGRESS AND IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME

Spiraling Outreach

In the years since its inception, the programme has grown in various dimensions, so that its physical outreach and sectoral linkages have steadily expanded to encompass the needs of women as they are articulated. In its initial phase the programme emphasized the creation of the "space" for women's experiences to inform the learning as well as to provide the basis for agenda setting and determination of priorities. Consequently the programme has found its moorings in the homes of women, in their life struggles for economic and social survival, in their quest for identity and status within the community, the village and public spaces/forums of decision making and now in the establishment of their own networks and organizations.

The Sanghas have been successful in expanding horizontally but not as originally envisaged. They have taken on a greater number of activities thereby creating depth instead of a critical mass. The function, expansion and activities of the Sanghas moreover, vary between the states as well as between districts within them. The coverage within the States reviewed by the mission is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: coverage of the programme in the Dutch assisted states:

State	Districts	Blocks	Villages	Sanghas
Andhra Pradesh	7	32 mandals.*	1101	1101**
Gujarat	7	36	1422	1422
Kerala	2	13 panchayats***	173 wards	775
Karnataka	7	33	1082	1082
Uttar Pradesh	16****		1470	

*the area of a mandal is less than the block

**including village level Sanghas which include multiple SHGs in 2 distts

*** In the system of local Self Governance, the panchayat is the unit of admin in Kerala

****10 Dutch assisted of which 3 are now in the newly formed state of Uttaranchal)

The programme has also extended beyond the Dutch assisted programme in these States and presently covers a total of 9000 villages in 61 districts of 10 States. The outreach is apparently small in numbers as compared to other government programmes that follow a linear target oriented growth curve. Nevertheless the scale of activity and outreach is larger than most NGOs and has increased substantially over the past five years. Mahila Samakhya is a process-oriented programme, which does not pursue targets per se. Its achievements lie in the quality of outputs, generated through a systematic follow-through of processes. Processes are facilitated in a manner, which learning and results conducive to the change in the lives of women. Activities are analyzed in the context of their potential to impact on the lives of women and their

environment, thereby providing space for options to be explored, and likely outcomes to be assessed. These steps are essential to the process of learning and cannot be circumvented for the achievement of goals of social transformation across villages and in blocks and districts.

Traditional models of development programmes may present coverage through the enumeration of numbers of beneficiaries, and therefore their outreach would be to those directly benefited by the programmes. MS on the other hand promotes processes of change through forums such as the Sanghas. It is estimated that 20 other women are impacted by 1 Sangha woman⁶. The Sangha provides a forum and space to support not only those women directly active as members of the Sanghas, but other women in the village and beyond, to enable them to aspire and question the attitudes and practices that impact their lives. This fact can be gauged from the reported impact of the efforts of Sangha women in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to stop the practice of dedication of girls to local deities in the practice of Jogini and Devadasi traditions. Sangha women report cases and stop dedication rituals, take out "yatras" and motivate women in the community and the region. Women and girls benefit in the block and vicinity benefit, as the discriminatory practice is curbed and even wiped out from the area. While Sangha women continue to maintain a vigil for such instances, the women and girls experience a change in practices and attitudes towards them. Instances are reported from all the states of cases of violence being referred to the Sanghas and the Nari Adalats, where these have been instituted, creating an environment of greater optimism. These ripples of the actions of Sanghas manifest themselves in changes in environment for women and practices in a wider area.

Mahila Samakhya has broadened its base by bringing existing groups under a common umbrella to address social issues related to women's status in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. As the programme outreach and intensification strategy is evolving, MS is increasingly recognized as a programme for the mobilization of women across class and caste groups as a forum for women's social and political empowerment especially in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. A proliferation of SHGs in the country, especially in Andhra Pradesh, under various governmental initiatives for poverty alleviation and economic empowerment, has necessitated a shift in the MS programme strategy. In new districts the programme is reaching out to the existing SHGs through an umbrella approach, indicating an enhanced outreach potential to groups that are already in existence. While providing them with support on issues of social empowerment, the programme seeks to enhance their identity as women's organizations and to draw them into the network to address strategic changes in the lives of women. While this approach is still in its infancy, it presents a feasible alternative which is of greater relevance in the context of large scale programmes, like DPEP, being promoted in these states.

The MS Programme in the States has been able to **redefine education**, informed by the women's perspective emerging from the grassroots. Processes of empowerment have been strengthened from the Sangha level upwards. With the dissolution of the Sakhi's position Sangha women's leadership is more visible and widespread. **The programme agenda has included adolescent girls in significant measure in the period under review, with specific programme initiatives designed to cater to their emerging**

⁶ Estimates shared by the Karnataka MS team, indicating the outreach of the Sanghas. This figure may vary across the states and districts, depending on the intensity of Sangha processes and the quality of facilitation

needs. This enhanced scope is reflective of the understanding that educational processes for girls will enable them to gain confidence, and create opportunities for them to emerge empowered to question and determine their choices from an early age, giving them a head-start. These girls in turn represent the inter-generation (and spatial) continuity of the programme, as they progress into the formal educational process with higher levels of confidence or into the community as young adults. Their new role models are the leaders from the Sanghas and Federations emerging from the programme. This increased focus on girls education gains greater significance in the context of the recent Lok Sabha decision to introduce education as a fundamental right for 6-14 year olds. On the strength of its experiences, Mahila Samakhya has the potential to exercise influence on the shape and content of initiatives for young and adolescent girls' education.

Expanding Horizons

As Sanghas have grown in number and strength, they have taken on new roles of mobilization and awareness raising in the old districts and providing learning to new districts. Sanghas have linked up to form clusters at local levels, motivating women to form new Sanghas in the neighboring villages, and Mahasanghas or Federations as apex organizations that facilitate networking and work on collective agenda between groups in a taluka or district. Thus **the outreach and coverage of the programme has also expanded in terms of its spheres of influence**, so that in the older districts the Sanghas in many instances are able to negotiate with the State and other agencies. Mahasanghas now deliberate upon their priorities and facilitate access to government programmes, or raise women's concerns on the systems of governance. Women in larger numbers have engaged with the electoral process in this phase of PR elections either by standing as candidates, or by negotiating with candidates. They have forged links with the women Representatives and MS inputs have enhanced the sensitivity of Women Elected Representatives (WERs) to women's concerns in Kerala and Karnataka. Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka MS have promoted the formation of all women's Panchayats. The expansion of horizons of women's spaces to negotiate and engage in **action has given them increasing agency to influence mainstream processes**. It is hoped that the level of empowerment so achieved by women in the older districts will propel the groups to expand in their vicinity and in the neighboring areas to create a visible critical mass, capable of asserting a strong presence for women. This calls for a strategy towards greater densification in the present districts, to impact on the macro structures.

Significant shifts may also be observed in the roles that the staff and field functionaries are expected to perform as a consequence. With enhanced capabilities and confidence, the Sangha and Mahasangha leaders undertake the more routine tasks of group formation and management, while their aspirations create demands for issue specific and perspective related inputs from the programme. With the changing nature of Sanghas and the demand for more education and learning on issues, **the role of the Sahayogini has also changed. They have become specialists and facilitators** from being mobilizers, providing issue based knowledge inputs, informed by a class/caste and gender perspective. Training of Sahayoginis has been intensive and systematized in some states while others have followed an ad-hoc approach. Quality training of Sahayoginis is essential as it has a direct impact on the developments at the Sangha level on the processes of collective action and Federation formation.

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⁸ Functionaries in Andhra and Kerala for instance shared that they are living in poor conditions due to low affordability and are unable to visit their families due to inadequate incomes. The expenditure incurred by them on travel to the field is also not fully compensated in the present package, due to which they absorb these costs from their already meagre incomes.

MS collaborates with NGOs as a resource team for gender training', and participates in the formulation of training and learning materials in collaboration with state agencies as well as provides expertise to conduct campaigns against discriminatory social practices such as devadasi, jogini, child labour.

Although perceiving itself as a part of the Women's Movement, its links with the larger women's movement and with autonomous women's agencies have been fairly weak in the past 5 years. This may be attributed to the current focus on consolidating its own strengths based on capacities already built in the previous phase with the help of such agencies. Moreover, those who were primarily involved in maintaining these links have moved out of the programme. In Kerala however, the links are fairly strong as the programme strives for a foothold and builds its alliances with like-minded agencies that share similar goals. Affiliation with the Women's Movement therefore follows a growth pattern, being more intensive in the initial phases, for capacity and perspective building. **These links need to be maintained on an ongoing basis, so that the MS is strengthened by emerging knowledge and debates and in turn informs the concerns of the movement with its own experiences** as was attempted through its participation in the Women's Studies Conference in 1999. The focus now needs to be transferred from linking up for capacity development needs to forging alliances between women's organizations to enhancing the horizontal flows of knowledge and solidarity networks. This could be facilitated through a systematic process of exposure through exchanges and "Sammelans" which have been found to be the most enriching forms of learning for grassroots women. Events such as the Sanghamitra need to be organized more regularly not only for sharing within the MS but to forge broader alliances for learning and solidarity with other forums of women committed to similar goals

The role of the National Office in this context is critical. Three major initiatives that have been undertaken to facilitate learning of processes and issues were facilitated by the consultants at the national level - on management of accounts, on the issue of federation and the Sanghamitra Conference. The absence of consultants, to facilitate these processes and to provide support to state offices through trouble shooting, at the National Level for more than a year, has caused a significant lag in the programme, most evident in the Gujarat programme. An active NRG and a more broad-based State Executive Committee with greater membership from NGOs and the women's movement will serve to strengthen these the ties with the Women's Movement and facilitate lateral exchanges and learning.

The expanding scope of the programme has also led to increased expectations from the MS programme. Its potential is considered significant as a state gender resource agency to promote the integration of gender interests in programmes of the development sector. The education sector specifically views MS as a potential demonstration base for innovations and good practice in Girls education and Continuing Education for women, as well as in the training of teachers and production of materials⁹. The level of skills to fulfill these roles however currently varies across the MS states apart from the paucity of staff. Future growth of the programme towards fulfilling these resource functions would need to be discreetly planned to:

a. Facilitate the maximum flow of benefits and opportunities for Sangha Women .

⁹ These future role for MS was emphasised by senior officials of the Dept of Education in AP, Kerala, UP, and Karnataka

b. Spread of the MS approach to other programmes towards good governance in development and empowerment of women.

1. IMPACT OF MAHILA SAMAKHYA ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

1.1 Impact on Women's Personal and Family Lives, Autonomy and Socio-Cultural Environment

Sharing experiences among themselves, women are analyzing their current situation, and establishing a foundation for solidarity and greater autonomy. A unified response from Sahayoginis/Sevinis/Karyakartas, Sangha women and elected women representatives across the programme is the space and legitimacy that MS has provided for them to come together, out of their homes and forge new bonds of friendship and work on unifying concerns. The dynamics of belonging to women's collective has brought knowledge, and has increased the sense of self worth among women and raised their status in their households and communities. This of course, has not translated automatically into 'autonomy' for women. However, there is 'negotiated autonomy' that women are exercising in varying measure in the states and across groups. Women are now **negotiating for more space in family and society**, beyond limited traditional roles. They express a greater say in family affairs, from addressing their own health needs and taking time off for meetings, to sending their daughters to school, challenging child marriages and violent relationships. Increasingly, their opinions are sought in decision-making within their households. **Both Sahayoginis and Sangha women spoke with pride about their increased courage, confidence and self-esteem, which has enabled them to strengthen their position, individually and collectively, within the family and in the community. Sanghas demonstrate their increased autonomy by being far less dependent on Sahayoginis. Their actions of promoting new Sanghas, taking local initiatives on issues that arise independently, and forming federations highlight this process. They are now local role models for young girls and other women in the community.**

Women use the agency of Sanghas to question their own social location and demand greater access to resources and structures of governance. **Women have become articulate with information and validation of their knowledge and skills, and are now able to express themselves in all types of forums and situations.** They are able to participate as a group and as individuals in meetings, discuss and negotiate with government and other functionaries and are able to look critically at development programmes and examine schemes for the Sangha members and for village development at village, Mandal and district levels. Sanghas have successfully raised awareness and initiated programmes on literacy, health, economic empowerment and environment. They are now beginning to understand their economic reality in the context of larger global trends. *In Kerala women analyse the impact of globalization on their lives as "depressed wage rates, lower income and consequently lower nutrition levels; higher indebtedness, incidence of suicides; on top of this the reduction in government services makes us even more vulnerable to these economic trends."* Sanghas seek to work together on common solutions through institutional means: through **collective farming**

*"by ploughing, weeding, planting in rotation so that each one can survive"*¹⁰; through the **Nari Adalats** in Gujarat and UP to secure their legal rights. More recently, in Karnataka, value added services of a helpline are planned. Through Pachayati Raj Institutions Sanghas articulate and gain agency to address their political interests and secure rights as citizens. **Sanghas have emerged as credible local organizations providing space for greater autonomy for women as valuable sources of information. Issues have been taken up and activities negotiated with reasonable success with state and other agencies based on emerging needs.** However MS Kerala is a fresh starter and is still learning to negotiate the narrow bridge of autonomy. MS Gujarat needs to be more focussed on the guiding principles and non-negotiables of MS.

Women have become more visible, due to their increased physical and social mobility. **Sangha women have taken up positions as Sahayogini, teacher and elected representatives at the village and block level.** Local leaders are now participating in cluster networks and setting up Federations. These new roles and expanded networking create a need for literacy and further education. It remains difficult however, to motivate older women to progress beyond very basic literacy skills.

Strong Sanghas show an accelerated pace of learning and transference to action especially in the older districts. They have enhanced their capacities to move to new organizational, managerial and decision-making roles, apart from developing greater linkages with Panchayati Raj and village development initiatives. Sanghas are affiliating at cluster level and providing support to weaker groups and to women outside their Sanghas. The weaker Sanghas on the other hand rely on the stronger Sanghas and Sahayoginis to provide guidance and leadership. The conceptual clarity and capacity of the Sahayogini, to facilitate the empowerment process in the Sanghas, directly impinges upon the quality of the Sangha and its capacity to emerge as an empowerment forum for women at the grassroots level.

In the older districts of AP, Gujarat, UP and Karnataka the Sanghas have created *alternative systems to address specific women's needs, i.e. Women's Courts, collective farming to ensure food security and girls residential Centres (Mahila Shikshan Kendras) for a safe learning environment. The struggles for wage increase in villages across Mandals in Andhra Pradesh have given more confidence to the women. They have negotiated with the landlords for minimum wages with the support of women who are members of their Sanghas and are also from the land owning class.* In Kerala exposure trips and workshops beyond their villages are new experiences for women. Contact with the world outside their homes and their collective economic activity has encouraged women to analyze their own position as women and start sharing experiences.

Forays into the economic spheres vary across the states. MS Karnataka initiated savings groups only after the Sanghas had matured and developed a deeper understanding of social issues from a gender perspective. Women themselves determined the guidelines for lending or borrowing and the kind of economic activities they felt were most feasible. In Kerala savings have been an entry point activity which is sustained by the group itself, allowing MS to work with the Sanghas on social awareness and action. The challenge has been to strike a balance between social and economic issues. In Gujarat SHGs have been promoted under the aegis of MS in collaboration

¹⁰ Surya Sangha, Idduki block, Adimali district, Kerala

with the Swa-Shakti programme, with little consideration to the target orientation and contradiction with MS principles. With various government schemes, NGOs and financial institutions vying with each other to set up self-help groups, MS reports increased problems in adhering to its own process oriented approach.

Women have negotiated land titles in joint names with their husbands to secure future ownership and control over land, and collective grain storage for lean periods to ensure food security. are measures that women have initiated to mitigate the adverse economic environment in UP and AP. Sanghas have instituted norms and rules that enable the Sangha women handle all financial transactions of the Sangha in AP, Kerala and Kamataka: expenditures, investments and financial assistance from banks. Enterprise training creates supplementary income opportunities for women and their families in UP and Kerala.

Knowledge of health and gender issues has brought about a new strength in women across Sanghas: they are aware of health services that exist and know how to access them. They are also questioning and resisting discriminatory social and traditional practices e.g female infanticide, child labour etc

In all the states under review, a WHO project has been instrumental in training Sahayoginis and community women on reproductive health issues. Functioning as voluntary health leaders, they spread health messages in the community and also seek men's participation to promote women's health. Sanghas intervene not only to facilitate health service access for women, but also to initiate discussions in women's groups on health issues and have thereby disseminated this information to wider audiences. Women in AP, Kamataka and UP grow and promote herbal medicines thus developing a resource base of traditional health culture.

The formation of Kishori Sanghas in UP and Kerala and organization of Yuvati Shibirs in Gujarat are significant initiatives. Apart from the training imparted on issues including family dynamics, health, cleanliness and sanitation, and information on social issues and government facilities and schemes and other social issues. This enables girls to find space to assert their rights, to meet with their peers and to develop negotiation skills and self-confidence. Talking about menstruation and learning to know their bodies, they no longer feel helpless and ignorant and are less diffident. They recognize the restrictions placed on them by society and discuss how to tackle social discrimination and harassment/discrimination with a new confidence germinating from feelings of self worth. More opportunities like this will enable girls to challenge discrimination in their lives and create a different social order. Earning opportunities leading to economic self-reliance too will increase as girls are given training to learn new ones and upgrade existing skills.

For tribal women in Adilabad district of AP, MS interventions and activities enabled women to seek solutions to the struggles for economic survival through alternative forms of economic organization. The creation of the All Women's Panchayat here is an act of faith, and tribal women seek the support of MS in coping with the challenges of these new roles. In Idukki district of Kerala, literacy training, initiated by MS, makes tribal women feel more confident and independent: they are able to read bus-signs, prices and access product information related to their livelihoods. The various vocational training

inputs have enabled Sangha women to develop new skills and earn extra income, which strengthens their position in a society where unemployment rates are very high.

Tribal women in both areas report a high level of trust in MS workers, as against their previous experiences of development functionaries. MS has also established links with tribal activists and sought involvement of community leaders in their efforts to work with the women - an approach appreciated both by women and the community. The state governments too recognize MS's initial successes in reaching out to tribal communities. However in Gujarat MS has yet to establish field presence in Dangs district and can learn from the experiences and strategies of MS Kerala and AP.

1.2 Creating a Foundation for a Grass-Root Level Women's Movement

Sanghas have emerged as collectives of women with a strong identity and a common goal to fight for social and gender injustice and make organized efforts to establish an equitable society with a place for themselves and their daughters. The abolition of the post of the Sakhi as a paid worker of the programme in UP, Karnataka and Gujarat has enabled women to take on leadership roles. Sanghas are classified as strong, intermediary and weak. The weaker Sanghas seek support from the stronger Sanghas. As strong Sanghas take initiatives on a range of issues - discriminatory practices and other needs of women - Sahayoginis are required to fulfill information needs and facilitate processes. This compels them to work in an intensive way, thereby limiting the horizontal expansion of the programme. It is paradoxical that while more villages are covered in Gujarat and UP, there are indications of the foundation of a movement in AP, Karnataka and in some districts of UP as evinced by the depth of analytical processes and well articulated actions.

Women are no longer silent. They now dare to speak out, among themselves, within the family, to village elders, landowners and government officials. All women cherish their own little and big 'victories'. Sanghas have increased their networking - women come together beyond Sanghas at village or block levels - on issues like alcoholism in Nainital and Tehri and on land rights in Allahabad in UP. . Sangha women in AP and hill districts of the erstwhile UP¹¹ have organized rallies against alcohol consumption and the local sale of arrack. Sanghas in AP, UP and Karnataka have successfully taken action against child marriages, gudiya patakka, *jogini* and *devadasi* systems, and maltreatment of widows and single women. On their own women have successfully tackled the issues of alcoholism, violence against women and debt relief through public action in Panchmahal district, Gujarat. In practical terms therefore there is a shift in focus of the programme from Sahyoginis to women's autonomous initiatives and action

They have progressed from Sanghas to coming together as federations that provide the collective platform to challenge discriminatory practices.. This was neither an easy nor a quick process. But step by step Sangha women have gained more space, more influence and have become more visible. It is very encouraging to see that once women discover their own strengths, the process of empowerment is irreversible and inclusive for other women around them. Sanghas operate as a strong pressure group at village

¹¹ The hill districts of UP are now part of the new state of Uttaranchal

and block levels, making use of and reviving traditional communication media. In older districts in UP, AP and Kamataka advocacy has been identified as the main objective for the formation of federations thus creating new forums for women.

Sanghas across AP, as in other states, have started addressing the issue of violence against women, in private and public domains. Two cases of rape in 1999 and 2000, one resulting in the death of an 18-year old, led to much publicised rallies participated by 800 women including other women's organizations in AP. Similar campaigns against jogini system, child labour and arrack have enabled Federations in older districts of Mahaboobnagar and Medak gain the identity of forums that challenge social injustice and fight for women's empowerment. A broad-based women's network has yet to materialise, although the recently established federations are a step in that direction, creating new forums for women. The Sanghas see themselves as part of the women's movement. *" We hold the keys for development' say women from the Federation in Mahboobnagar district. They can open doors to government services and resources like pensions, houses, bore wells and roads. The Sanghas have thus emerged as credible local organisations recognized as gold mines of information within the village.*

In Kamataka as collectives grow from an individual unit at the village level into Federations at the village cluster/taluk, and district level, they take on larger responsibilities and play more strategic roles in working for a just social order. Sangha women are taking over processes at the village level and MS interventions are more at the cluster, taluk and district level. Sanghas have networked with the various village institutions and with other Sanghas. Issue based federations are functioning at the taluk level in all the seven districts. The formation of Sangha Federations reflects the change of MS Kamataka 's role to that of supporting and strengthening of Federations. Women are very conscious that for a strong Federation the member Sanghas have to be strong and have a clear perspective on gender issues. In turn the federation processes help to strengthen the Sanghas and identify the ones where more work is required or different approaches need to be tried out.

In Gujarat, UP and Kamataka Women's Courts (Nari Adalats) address cases of domestic violence and public harassment. The Nari Adalats represent a forum owned and managed by the women and energized by the commitment of Sangha women. They are an alternative and informal justice delivery system, and simultaneously, an outcry from these women against the patriarchal biases and structures of justice delivery in the country. Yet these have gained credibility: even the state machinery considers them desirable forums to attend to the needs of the women and primarily of the poor. Informed by the perspectives of the women's movement, these are a manifestation of the emerging institutional responses of the women, owned and managed by them and sustained at their own costs, although the initial investments and ongoing support have come from the programme.

In terms of a horizontal spread, MS Kerala is limited by its geographic coverage and sporadic collective action. However, in contrast to other SHGs in the region, MS Sanghas clearly emphasize social empowerment along with economic empowerment. When Sangha women take initiatives to facilitate the formation of other Sanghas, they talk about benefits not only in monetary terms but also in terms of 'women's empowerment' and are responsible for a snowballing of MS Sanghas.

Sanghas and Federations have evolved strategies to negotiate and work with the state in various ways. As members of the SEC and VEC Committees they ensure regular attendance of teachers and discuss the teacher absenteeism with the Sarpanch even complain to the Mandal officials if need be. Women have reported some success in sending girls to school and postponing the age of marriage. For them too the Sangha is an arena to discuss issues of violence, faced by single women and sexuality. As strong advocates of girls' education, Sangha women participate in enrolment campaigns and fight against child labour. Low and discriminative wages have been addressed through rallies and lengthy negotiations.

The state in turn recognizes the significant role that Federations and Sanghas have played in bringing about social change. Women leaders are sought on district and block level committees as well as invited to participate in state campaigns. In most cases however, women have articulated their interests and determined their involvement based on the issue and perspectives formulated, and are also willing to voice their dissent on state policies that are discriminatory.

It may be too early to speak of a women's movement, since there is presently a lack of critical mass, given the scattered pattern of growth of the programme within districts and states, and addressing too broad a range of issues. It is required that women are visible in larger numbers within an administrative or spatial unit to have the visibility or exert the necessary pressure on various institutions and forums of governance and power. Without that women's energies may only dissipate with little effect. Moreover consolidation of linkages with the regional, national and international Women's Movement, would enable the MS Sangha and federation women to inform its agenda and content.

Although most staff and Sanghas see themselves as part of the women's movement there is very limited opportunity for interface and exchange with other streams of the movement. Sangha women recall the nationwide Mahila Samakhya Sanghamitra Workshop as a profound expression of women's solidarity across state borders. However, the strategic alliances with like-minded organizations need to be improved, to strengthen the programme as an integral part of the Women's Movement. Alliances need to be forged much more at the lateral levels between the Sanghas and federations and other grassroots formations of women for the programme to truly evolve into a movement for women's empowerment and social change.

1.3 Women's Political Participation

The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India relates to the Panchayati Raj Act and seeks to redress under-representation of women in the political arena in India at the grassroots level. With provision of 33 percent reservation for women up to the district level, the Panchayat stands out as a local institutional framework for self-governance that can adopt women's agenda in village development. The Panchayati Raj system is fairly effectively implemented in Kamataka. It is the basis of local governance in Kerala since the People's Campaign in 1995. Kerala is also the only state where the devolution of financial powers has been made to Panchayat organizations. The Panchayati Raj pattern of governance prevails in other states also with varying levels of effectiveness and people's participation.

Agency And Influence

In the period under review, MS has successfully incorporated the Panchayati Raj agenda with demands from Sanghas as a vehicle for women's autonomy in local self-governance. Channeling information on the Panchayati Raj provided understanding and awareness, and has **strengthened women's presence in the process of self-governance**. Sanghas have played a **significant role as activator of village Panchayats and Gram Sabhas**. They have participated in the general meetings (*Gram Sabhas*) and placed their concerns (alcoholism and violence) on the agenda. Demands have also been made to set up the mandated Committee on Social Justice to tackle social issues especially in Karnataka. In UP MS women have been actively involved as Panchayat members. Utilizing the medium of newsletters and Mahila Pradhans, women disseminated information on Gram Sabha meetings. Sanghas have become more articulate and are able to influence decisions and the allocation of resources for village development.

Sangha women have taken significant initiatives in AP, UP and Karnataka to demand that Gram Sabhas be held regularly and in accordance with rules and procedures. Women attend Gram Sabha Meetings in larger numbers and attempt to raise issues of concern to women and poor, disadvantaged families in the villages. In Karnataka women report Panchayat agenda is influenced by Sangha women through the Sanghas and the Elected Women Representatives (EWRs). Sanghas have also insisted on the constitution of the Standing Committees (especially on Social Justice). They have also fought for co-option of women from local Sanghas onto these Standing Committees, in accordance with the Panchayati Raj Act. *In Gujarat it is difficult to draw any conclusion on women's participation in structures of local governance or on how women have used this forum to raise awareness or secure their rights.*

In Kerala the programme has only started addressing this issue after the recent elections, given its recent inception and tentative beginnings. A conscious decision was taken by KMSS to distance itself from pre-election activities such as voter awareness training, to safeguard its political neutrality. However efforts now need to be made towards strengthening Sanghas for a greater consciousness of citizenship so that they can play a greater role in governance and influence political agenda to address women's needs in the future. An increasing participation of Sangha women in village meetings and greater interest in village affairs, with women keen to claim benefits are tangible outcomes of the MS processes. They realize that their voices are heard if they stand together as women. They also feel that they have a role in bridging the party divide, in a state sharply divided along political lines, and in promoting greater attention to women's concerns with both political groups. Building the power of women across party lines, and promoting alliances among women elected representatives across political barriers are challenges that the programme faces in that state. MS Kerala has also organized workshops on the Women Component Plan (WCP) at the block level in Kerala, and for separate Panchayats. The perspective of these exercises needs to be expanded to include gender analysis and budgeting.

The MS programme has built the capacity of Sanghas to act as community resource and pressure groups to monitor the functioning of the Gram Panchayat. The Sangha women have brought social justice issues to the fore, reinforcing the belief that poor women can change their status by influencing larger decision making processes.

Representation In Panchayats

Women were hitherto socially insignificant and marginalized, but today they belong to the Sangha and they have presence. Knowledge of PR processes, procedures and roles of representatives has clearly empowered Sangha women, encouraging them to stand for public posts, which were earlier seen as a male domain. A substantial number of Sangha women have stood for elections and a significant number have also been elected as ward members, Sarpanches, and representative at block and district levels. UP Sangha women have also actively participated in Panchayat administration as Pradhans and Panchayat members.

Armed with the knowledge provided through various awareness programmes, training and camps organized by the MS offices in the states, Sangha women are able to formulate their own needs, and challenge candidates and make demands during the election campaign. The primary initiative of all Sanghas in Karnataka was to activate the Gram Sabhas to involve women at village level as their allies to lobby and campaign for them.

The Sangha network now supports and informs the women who have won elections. Sangha women have come a long way from the diffidence and fear, ignorance and lack of information and resistance from men to emerge as representatives of the concerns of women. The situation however still poses challenges for women who have only just entered the portals of political power for these roles also imply a change in the relationships within groups and having to deal with the murky politics of the mainstream.

In Gujarat it has been difficult for women to get into Panchayats. While the number of women in Panchayats has increased, the stagnation of women's representation at Panchayat level in Rajkot and Vadodara is a disturbing trend.

Sanghas are aware of their growing influence, as they consciously choose to strengthen their advocacy capacity and establish a larger presence via federations. Elected members have been able to address and voice the issues that affect women – schools, education for girls, drinking water, housing, roads, bore wells for agriculture, health care, immunization and income generating programmes. While in Karnataka they set the agendas for meetings and demand accountability from other Panchayat members, government functionaries and Mandal Officers, in other states women are struggling for a voice. Their confidence is higher however, given the backing of the Sanghas. In AP also Sangha women are making efforts to solve women's problems and using Gram Sabha and Standing Committees to effectively address alcoholism, domestic violence and access to resources. The political arena and lobbying for good governance are viewed as *interwoven issues and despite achievements still remain for women*. Sanghas need to devise effective strategies to counter the trends of mainstream politics. MS has worked actively to facilitate and promote the establishment of all women Panchayats in Karnataka and in AP. While these are unique experiments, they need to be nurtured, as the women are first generation representatives with little exposure to the political mainstream and even less experience in community leadership. This poses a challenge and a great demand on the programme at the district and state level to provide the necessary support and know how for women to conduct their business effectively, given that the programme staff has hitherto had little experience of political processes.

Post elections, MS has been offering capacity building training for elected women representatives in all five states. This exercise has helped in bridging the lack of experience of women's public exposure, and at the same time creates a common platform for women's issues. In Kerala elected members perceived the training as a means to familiarize themselves with their new roles and responsibilities, daring to speak out and expose their ignorance among their peers. Sharing experiences and exchanging advice has developed a bond among the women representatives beyond party lines, which could be efficiently institutionalized by MS as a women's platform. Intensive training is also required in Adilabad District to support the All Women's Panchayat in its foray into local governance.

1.4 Women's Legal Rights

Overall, Sangha women have become far more aware of their legal rights and the concerned laws and regulations. Sangha members have addressed issues like domestic violence, harassment, rape, and murder and caste violence through negotiation and group pressure. Different strategies have been adopted by Sanghas across states to address instances of violence against women in the home and outside, and this remains the single common agenda that draws women into working as a support group for each other as a key area of action.

Women in Karnataka, UP, Kerala and AP report that conflicts, harassment and violence within the family have reduced, due to women's participation in meetings. By rotating the venue of meetings in member's houses, the Sanghas in AP have been able to ensure that family members are aware of the strength and agenda of the Sanghas, which reduces family resistance and harassment of women for fear of retribution. If a woman is harassed or beaten, the group will determine a course of action, which generally involves talking to her husband or family members, and pressurizing them to mend their ways. Efforts to identify ways to help husbands or other family members to deal with problems may be explored to resolve the issue as well. Women are aware of laws and if the need arises, threaten to take them to the Police or may call them to the Sangha meeting. In Karnataka, *Sangha Legal Committees* have been set up and have taken various concerted actions. Details of violence against women were collected and women visited the nearest Police Stations to get acquainted with Police officials. They have complained about violence against women and received assistance. **Women have made a significant transition as they now recognize and question violence against themselves.** The Sangha federations and clusters have made it possible for women to work in solidarity across talukas for resolution of problems, particularly those of harassment, bigamy and desertion faced by girls married into other villages. Sanghas are the first level where these problems can be raised by the women and possible solutions sought.

Strong Sanghas have demonstrated their ability to address discriminative social practices that are legally banned (child marriage, *jogini and devadasi* system, child labour and untouchability). **Backed by information on legal and basic rights women have ensured implementation of certain rights such as minimum wages and joint land titles through collective action, negotiating with landowners and officials.** The weak Sanghas ally with the strong ones for support to assert their rights. Some Sanghas continue to be hampered due to poor knowledge and information and gender bias in the legal system. Training has been a source of information and the clusters and

Federations offer opportunities for women to gain information on legal literacy and work together on issues of legal rights. Constant inputs and discussion on these issues are however required to change attitudes and to sustain actions for securing women's legal status to bring about the reduction in incidence of violence and discrimination. This is an area where Sanghas will require support and input from MS even while plans are envisaged for groups and federations to work autonomously.

Several rallies have been organized by Sanghas for mobilizing women from surrounding villages on social issues. Women work as pressure groups on the police and administration with a fair degree of success in Kamataka and parts of AP and UP as they are now aware of the prevailing procedures and steps that have to be taken. **Their rallies against cases of rape, murder and caste violence have ensured timely and effective investigations, although not all culprits have been caught.**

The formation of clusters and federations have galvanized these efforts as women are quickly able to rally around in large numbers around instances of violence and harassment and armed with their knowledge are able to pressurize communities and the police for solutions. These also serve as watchdog bodies against the spread or practice of socially discriminatory practices, and have gained recognition in the area with their strong and active roles. Through the Social Justice Committees and through the WERs, Sanghas have also been able to raise this as an issue in Panchayats in some instances.

Kerala MS views violence and harassment in public places as a key concern of its activities. Women report a heightened level of awareness on legal rights through the legal literacy inputs. They are gradually acknowledging the incidence of violence in their lives and seeking support from Sangha members to address their problems. MS Sevani¹² are seen as the information providers and have motivated Sanghas with information and support to take up issues as they arise. Groups have gradually started negotiating with families and seeking redressal from community forums in instances of harassment and violence. MS is also making efforts to sensitize the WERs to these issues and WERs are eager to work with MS and Sanghas to establish ways to address problems of violence. There is however a tremendous resistance from the local representatives to acknowledge the issue and concerted effort will be required to strengthen Sanghas and WERs and support them to take up issues of violence.

Nari Adalats are emerging as a vibrant alternative system of justice for women, with wide acceptability in the community. They have been established in Gujarat, followed by UP and Kamataka as Women's Courts and offer a credible alternative justice system. Nari Adalats are comprised of a wide cross-section of women. Apart from the Sangha women and one or two Sahayoginis they include women whose cases have been solved earlier, some single and elder women, women from lower castes and women members from Gram Panchayats. Nari Adalats cut across caste, class and religious divides and are filling the gap created by a legal system that is perceived as patriarchal and unreachable, slow and expensive. An infrastructure has been created where women can obtain social justice that is accessible, affordable and gender sensitive.

¹² The grassroots worker of the MS programme in Kerala is known as the Sevani

Cases brought before the Adalats pertain mainly to domestic violence, physical and mental harassment, fraudulent marriages and bigamy, divorce and maintenance, alcoholism, child marriage, child abuse and the harassment of women not able to have children, specially sons. Cases related to economic issues like property are taken up if women are affected. **By bringing the women's perspective to the solution of women's problems, Nari Adalats have challenged the patriarchal structures and increased the participation of women in the process of obtaining justice.** Nari Adalats provide space for women to articulate problems of violence and harassment and have imbued them with the confidence that justice can be sought and obtained.

Nari Adalats have had an impact not only on the women whose cases were addressed but also on their families and on adolescent girls, village leaders and Panchayats, and on lawyers, police and MS personnel. They are creating a new identity for women in the family, village and community. They have also impacted the way people perceive the problem of violence against women and have brought the women's perspective to the concept of justice and punishment. The Nari Adalats have in turn, highlighted the social and political importance of the Sangha and there is a reported trend of increasing number of women and even men, seeking help from the Sangha in Karnataka and UP.

Nari Adalats are viewed as economically and socially viable alternatives, having the confidence of local people. **There are no lawyer's fees, nor intimidating visits to police stations and courts.** Support from the government in the form of free accommodation for meetings, and from the police in the form of cases referred establishes the larger credibility of the NAs. Sangha women play a lead role in the initiation and functioning of Nari Adalats and those who participate in the Adalat incur transport costs for traveling to and from the Tehsil headquarters and on case work and also suffer loss of wages. In Karnataka a small fee has been levied as a cost recovery measure while Gujarat proposes to introduce the same. Apart from the costs incurred by the women, NAs are also supported by the Sahayoginis and the programme. Sahayoginis continue to play a critical role in facilitating and documenting the process, which adds to their workload and affects the time available for other work.

There is also no budget line in MS for expenses related to the Nari Adalats as these emerged during the course of evolution of the programme in this phase. While NAs are indeed low cost and simpler alternatives for justice delivery with a gender perspective, are recognized as credible and have even been given space at the Tehsil HQs by the local administration in Gujarat, plans for sustainability of NAs would need to take into account their requirement of continuing support requirement particularly for documentation, training and exposure, participation of Sahayoginis in the Adalats and networking with the various institutions the Adalats interact with. MS itself should be equipped to provide this support through increased budget and personnel in the talukas/blocks/districts that have them

While Nari Adalats remain independent in decision making and working, they also support the formal law agencies - police and judiciary - indirectly. The 12 Nari Adalats in 3 districts of UP dealt with 347 cases in 2000-2001 of which 250 were resolved. In spite of their obvious success Nari Adalats are functioning in just three districts, Tehri (8), Saharanpur (3) and Sitapur(1) in UP. Nari Adalats have been successfully run in some districts. There have been 800 cases dealt with by the Nari Adalats in Rajkot district alone. Besides Rajkot and Vadodara districts however, very few Nari Adalats have been

conducted in other districts especially in Banaskantha. MS Gujarat should attempt to extend the concept and practice of Nari Adalats to other districts.

Nari Adalats are a relatively new initiative in Karnataka. While the Sanghas and the federations have been dealing quite efficiently with women's problems, the concept of Nari Adalats are viewed as more formalized and effective and are in the process of being set up in all the districts. They may also provide a more sustainable forum for such issues and would also facilitate a broader outreach. By bringing the women's perspective to the solution of women's issues, Nari Adalats have challenged the patriarchal structures and increased the participation of women in the process of obtaining justice.

In Andhra Pradesh while Sanghas and Federations have been dealing with legal issues and seeking justice for women, they express the need for an alternative justice system. Women leaders learnt about the experience of the NAs at the Sanghamitra Workshop held in Delhi in 2000 and are in the process of exploring the same, and its relationship with the Federations. Common people, police and officials have positively acknowledged the involvement of APMSS on legal rights issues. APMSS has also developed a booklet on women's legal rights and organised several workshops and village meetings on the behest of the Collector Medak district. Sangha women and Federation Leaders however express the need for a formal legitimate and sustainable institutional model to address these issues with greater efficacy. **Exposure visits and exchange forums facilitate learning across regions between grassroots women. These need to be encouraged and facilitated more rigorously across districts and states as a learning strategy. Issue based learning on NAs and other initiatives such as federation formation and functioning, work with tribal communities collective farming etc. could be facilitated through such processes. Apart from sharing practices, this would also enable women to analyse issues and evolve new perspectives.**

1.5 Cutting Across Caste and Class

The focus on the poorest households resulted in a dominant representation of women from Scheduled Caste, backward and disadvantaged groups in the Sanghas. Attempts to include other women has not always been easy, as basic needs such as water, housing or health facilities tend to vary, given the fact that caste/class groups are living in geographically separated and marginalized areas. However, overall Sanghas are consciously addressing the issue in some states. **More outspoken Sangha members stress the common concerns, talking about having the same blood, belonging to the same "gender caste".** Sanghas cross the caste boundaries by eating together, holding meetings in various caste houses, etc. The alternative justice system of the Nari Adalats demonstrates this with its broad outreach, also catering to the needs of Muslim women and upper caste women.

The formation of multi-caste Sanghas is an example of the systematic strategy adopted by MS Karnataka in the formation and strengthening of women's grassroots forums. Since problems such as bigamy, alcoholism, exploitation, migration and lack of industrialization were common across castes, MS Karnataka found that there was a need to address these issues at a wider level and to establish multi-caste Sanghas. At the same time, women from upper castes who saw Sangha women of lower castes

interfacing successfully with the domain outside the household, came of their own accord to join the Sanghas. Thus Sangha membership broadened to allow women from upper castes to become members while remaining vigilant against caste discrimination and giving primacy to concerns of women from vulnerable sections. Sanghas try to overcome the divides of caste and class to bring women together by stressing common concerns. They have written several songs to address the issue, singing that all people have the same blood. **Experience shows that issues of violence are the most 'unifying' common concerns, which bring women from all backgrounds together.**

Greater participation of women in local governance and networking among elected women representatives offers another opening to bridge the caste and class divide and work together to focus on gender concerns. Issues like water management and installation of hand pumps facilitate inter-caste interaction. Upper caste women complaining about broken water pumps, in lower caste areas and the women supporting higher caste women in crisis highlight the solidarity among women of different social background in Andhra Pradesh.

Through consolidated efforts, Mahila Samakhya has been able to establish a presence in tribal settlements that were earlier shying away from outsiders' interference in AP and more recently in Gujarat and Kerala. The literacy and health programmes and childcare centres become a space for various caste and religious groups to come together. Involvement of women from different communities in Sangha discussions and activities has mobilized women to take action against the exclusion of poor women from electoral rolls. The MS groups in Kerala are very heterogeneous with women from every possible caste and religion, although most belong to the poorer sections. Caste structures remain extremely complex and pervasive in Uttar Pradesh. While MS has successfully upheld and secured lower-caste women's rights despite the problems encountered in overcoming these, as testified in some of their case histories. Mahila Samakhya UP and Kamataka have ensured representation of secular and equality as values in the materials produced and in related activities.

MS Sanghas include women across caste/class divides and bring women together across religious boundaries in Gujarat, as was visible in the Rajkot Nari Adalat, which was also attended by Muslim women. On occasions, women from other caste groups attend meetings without officially being part of the Sangha. However, the constraints or difficulties in overcoming caste/class/religious backgrounds are complex. This is an important issue, and needs greater attention in order to make Sanghas more representative. The pattern of staffing should be strengthened to be more broadly representatives of class/caste/ religious groups to demonstrate cooperation and sisterhood among women. **MS provides an opportunity to bring women together in a secular manner across religious groups, irrespective of these barriers, to work in solidarity for social transformation towards equality and justice.**

1.6 Growth, Pace And Emerging Trends

Meetings with older Sanghas have revealed a change in roles of Sahayoginis and Sanghas over time. Sahayoginis who used to be the implementers of the programme, have now become facilitators, and are more specialized in specific issues/areas. **Sangha women have become more autonomous and demonstrate enhanced management skills by organizing their own activities, calling on the Sahayogini for**

backstopping. **As Sanghas become stronger and self reliant, they adapt quicker to new roles and reach out to neighboring villages to help other women to establish their own Sanghas.** Women are entering into formal political spaces in greater numbers and with new vigour, influencing grassroots democratic processes as citizens and elected representatives at the village and Block level. Sanghas are gradually realizing their potential as political forums that represent the interests of women. Sangha leaders are recognized as members of the emerging District/Block Resource Centres. Women are creating alternative systems and institutional spaces to address their needs. In line with the process of acquiring greater autonomy Sanghas have started the formation of Federations. These networks of clusters of villages have evolved as forums with a larger voice and presence at the block level to articulate women's concerns on issues like violence, health, *Panchayat* interface, education, savings and credit. *Nari Adalats* have emerged as gender sensitive alternative justice systems that are supported by the community and considered credible by the state.

MS is gradually broadening its scope. Starting with older women it has created a space for participation of younger women and adolescent girls. *Cheli Sangha's*, *Kishori Sanghas* and *Yuvati Shibirs* focus on the needs of adolescent girls and address issues like health, sex education and harassment and vocational training opportunities. These girls are the potential expansion and sustainability potential and leaders as they carry these experiences and learning to new destinations.

The mobilizing potential of MS has been recognized by various government departments, which call on the Sangha women for implementation support. This offers the Sanghas an opportunity to tackle the shortcomings of government programmes from within. The district functionaries of MS supplement these efforts, given the increasing requests for gender inputs by various departments. However, **Mahila Samakhya should be consciously alert to the risk of becoming merely a service delivery machine for other programmes and should instead strive to influence their perspectives while maintaining its own autonomy and adherence to its principles.**

The programme has expanded in most states during the past five years, in a planned way as well as voluntarily through Sanghas' own initiative. Expansion of the programme is necessary to ensure a more visible presence as a process oriented, bottom up approach. Expansion must follow a course of densification in the existing districts for maximum impact. Expansion beyond is also necessary for greater visibility. The ground reality of multiplication of SHGs and schemes for economic empowerment calls for a new approach for expansion, where MS positions its value addition in the mobilization of SHGs and other groups around issues of social empowerment. In Andhra Pradesh the Sahayoginis are successfully uniting existing SHGs to address social issues, at the same time strengthening group dynamics through qualitative inputs on good practice. Kerala has more or less the same approach, although its entry-point is training for economic self-reliance.

Challenges ahead

The challenge to sustainability of the MS approach looms large from recent initiatives such as the DPIP poverty programme in AP, UP and Gujarat, and the Kudumbashree programme in Kerala. Given the economic nature of these programmes and the provision for matching resources for groups, these programmes are likely to subvert the

processes that MS has considered fundamental for long term sustainability of Sangha processes towards women's empowerment. These programmes have limited focus exclusively on SC/ST women, thereby threatening to split Sanghas and communities along caste lines instead of building solidarity among women of all denominations. These programmes are state-wide and would therefore impinge upon the space and processes that MS promotes.

This emphasises all the more the need to intensify processes of MS within the existing districts to demonstrate a viable model for the empowerment of women. MS would also need to negotiate with these programmes on their scope and approach, based on its own experiences, and seek to establish good practices that can provide learning for such programmes. Therefore, MS needs support towards intensifying its processes in current areas while providing perspective building and capacity development inputs as a resource agency to such programmes, to develop a holistic understanding among such programme personnel relating to women's empowerment.

New initiatives have been planned based on the experiences of the older districts and the needs that have arisen there. A constant vigil is required to ensure that the group processes are not being compromised with the provision of new inputs, and that the groups are at a level to absorb such inputs and manage them in the collective. The older districts may be able to absorb such inputs as the resources made available through the sustainable agriculture programme supported by UNDP and for Cluster Huts. Processes in the next phase districts need to be deepened and strengthened before groups will be ready to absorb such resources without thwarting their internal processes. Indicators need to be identified to assess group's preparedness for such inputs. The collective management of resources and funds is a complicated issue and Sanghas require strong internal processes to function as a collective. The policy to release the Sangha funds only once the group becomes strong is a sound one and should form the basic criteria for disbursement of other resources to them as well.

Sanghas and federations in the old districts prioritize the social empowerment agenda to address their social status; such articulation is however not explicit in the second phase districts. The processes in the second phase districts have not been as intensive and lack the rigour of the first phase districts, partly due to the fact that there is a perennial staff shortage especially in the new districts. Staff turnover implies a loss of people who have shared fundamental perspectives that are essential to the building, strengthening and expansion of the processes in the new districts. This lack of personnel is directly attributable to the low remuneration, at levels far below the market rate, and the demands of the programme. While the state office has sought to provide the support required for overcoming this problem, they themselves have been stretched due to a similar problem. The expansion of the programme on the scale and with the intensity envisaged has also not been possible for the same reasons. **Retention and appropriate compensation to the staff are a prerequisite for the quality of such a process-oriented programme.**

A programmatic linkage for economic development with a target-oriented Swa-Shakti project thwarts the MS objectives as it does not provide the space for issues or processes to evolve based on the needs of women and instead predetermines the agenda for groups. The use of trained Sahayoginis for this purpose is thus a deviation from the MS goals and use of MS funding for such an activity would be improper unless it operates on the basis of the norms and non-viable principles of the programme. **MS Gujarat can learn from other state MS programmes like MS Karnataka and U.P.**

where negotiation and operational strategies are planned to ensure that these fundamental concerns of the MS philosophy are not compromised through collaborations and partnerships for target oriented economic/rural development programmes.

2. EDUCATION

The National Policy of Education (NPE) 1986 brought a conceptual shift from equal educational opportunities for women to **education for women's equality**. The potential of education as an agent of change in the status of women came to be recognized.

MS has engaged with rural women from socio-economically-disadvantaged communities in the most backward areas of districts with low women's literacy.

Educational processes provide poor women the space, confidence and ability to question and demand accountability from mainstream institutions and are integral to the aim of facilitating empowerment and social change in MS. Education in MS includes literacy and involves the process of questioning, analyzing and seeking solutions. Women's new roles in political participation, paralegal initiatives, federation processes and holistic health have created a demand for literacy.

2.1 Women's Education

" Our lives have changed, our girls are going to schools. My power is my education. Now I am learning to read and write." Said a Sangha member in AP.

Educational activities were initiated in different ways based on the level of literacy and needs of the women. In AP the demand came for an understanding of government interventions. The Sanghas have demanded literacy and education for themselves and their daughters as they attempt to address social problems like child marriage, child labour, marital and social violence, Jogini system. In Kerala the programme addresses the educational needs of women and adolescent girls through "awareness classes", vocational training and capacity building. Irrespective of their educational levels, Sangha women, feel deprived of information due to the social-cultural restrictions. MS offers them a safe learning space and gives new opportunities through information and new confidence to venture out into public domains.

Education has emerged as a need as Sanghas have evolved and women's visions about themselves have developed. They recognize the capacity building strength of education. Educational opportunities have been created through structured and informal learning inputs that enable women to address issues of unequal access to education and health, problems of bigamy and divorce, maintenance, violence in the family and employment opportunities. Inputs have focused on building knowledge and capacities as well as perspectives on women's lives and the larger socio-economic scenario. The approach to issues is holistic rather than sectoral in most cases, providing women with the means to analyze their context and identify strategies to bring about change.

Progress in literacy initiatives is varied and uneven across districts and states. While Karnataka and UP are systematizing efforts and employing multiple strategies, efforts in

Gujarat have been uneven and the number and frequency of literacy classes across all districts remains low.

Strategies employed to provide literacy and continuing educational opportunities include training in residential camps for women and adolescent girls in AP, UP and Kamataka. Literacy classes in the villages enable women to help village children as well as learn from them. Sahayoginis and BMK teachers teach women during meetings to read and write. Some Sanghas have arranged for a teacher in their village. Literacy camps are reported to have greater impact but need sustained follow up at the Sangha level for acquired literacy skills to be retained. Curricula for literacy at the Adult Literacy centres in AP and Gujarat need to be developed systematically based on women's expressed interests and to provide capacity development as well as perspective inputs. Currently, available primers are used and supplemented with other materials from the program in AP and Kerala, based on the teachers' own perceptions. In Kamataka Sangha Shikshan Committees take up tasks related to education, literacy and documentation and report success in raising literacy levels and skills of members and those of their children, particularly daughters. They also facilitate enrollment and monitor attendance in schools and interact with the school management and community. Literacy has enabled Sangha women to handle and organize Sangha documentation. A few Sangha women are also running learning centers. Literacy needs have clearly emerged from the Sangha women's involvement in other activities like the Nari Adalats and Federation promotion. In Kerala where literacy levels are higher, group members are encouraged to organize literacy classes to help non-literate Sangha members. In the tribal settlements of Idukki literacy classes play a prominent role, given the lower literacy rates, and provide the basis for mobilization of groups. **An objective review of the situation leads to the conclusion that literacy inputs need to be systematized and relevant, and need to combine with additional input for enhancing analytical thought processes to facilitate the route to empowerment through education. Literacy initiatives need to be focused on a combination of the "word" and the "world" to enable women to acquire learning to reach MS objectives.** However, tracking and follow up of learners and their assessments also needs to be organised. Post literacy materials require to be developed and disseminated on a sustained basis across all states.

Specialized curricula have been developed for groups for issue based learning in Kamataka and AP given their involvement in local/regional social issues such as violence against women, *Jogini/Devadasi cult*, alcoholism, child marriage, wage labour, Panchayati Raj, health and environment. Each state has developed modules/materials within the local context for enhancing women's education and the MS perspective. These were shared during in the National Sanghamitra Workshop in 2000. MS also makes use of existing learning material, developed by the State Literacy Missions and other agencies in the states. The material needs to be screened and if necessary modified, as the content is not always gender sensitive. MS also needs to engage with agencies involved in the developing curriculum and materials to provide engendering inputs as well as to inform these from the perspectives of rural poor women. This will also serve their need of making such materials relevant to the needs of their Sanghas. The high level of education in Kerala makes information dissemination through the printed word much easier. KMSS has printed a booklet on the process and steps of Sangha/SHG formation, its philosophy, its benefits and objectives and other formalities of applications, technicalities, bank formalities, bye-laws etc.

There has been a tremendous upsurge in the demand for education - for information and knowledge by the Sangha women for themselves and school education for their children, particularly girls. Sanghas have actively participated in school enrolment drives. Sangha women have strategically sought membership to the Village Education Committees (VECs), School Education Committees (SECs) and School Development and Management Committees (SDMCs) in UP, AP and Karnataka. To ensure the enrolment and retention of children in schools and monitor student and teacher attendance and Sanghas play an active role in holding the system accountable. MS gender training modules and some teaching learning materials have been extensively used by DPEP in UP and Karnataka. In UP a Government Order (1996) was issued to enable older women and adolescent girls (from MSKs) to appear for the fifth class examinations. Some Panchayats have provided free space for a KMSS resource centre to provide training opportunities for the women. KMSS in turn participates as a gender specialist in training and workshops that are organized by the Panchayats, such as the masonry training in Nellanadu. They are involved in the enrollment drives of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

They are active in enrollment drives and follow up non-enrolled children to persuade parents to allow the children to come to school. MS has shared its training modules with the DPEP and has been the nodal agency in preparing the State Gender Policy (Mahila Niti) in UP. Women have been involved in the development of appropriate syllabi for girls and women and their writings are disseminated to a wider audience and serve as important reading material for neo-literate women. MS UP also runs libraries and has reached out to more than 10,000 men and women and helps sustain their literacy skills.

In AP the impact of MS is visible in the high increase in literacy figures in the programme districts as compared to other districts, in major part attributable to the MS programme. There is also evidence of the programme's effectiveness in the successes in enrolment in its Mandals and villages.

MS has actively participated in the Total Literacy Campaign in identification and training of teachers. Women in MS Sanghas in Panchmahal district Gujarat have received training in basic reading and writing. MSG has collaborated with DPEP in expansion of its literacy programmes to districts that were not covered by it previously. MS needs to strengthen its linkage with DPEP as with the formal mainstream education sector to influence curriculum and material development. MS could also network more closely with the NLM initiatives of Post and Continuing Education Programmes in order to influence the development of reading material by the NLM.

MS Sanghas have taken part in enrolment drives and Sahayoginis have been associated with DPEP community mobilization activities at block/taluka level. Unfortunately, this association of Sangha women with enrolment drives has not resulted in a uniform reaffirmation and commitment to girls' education among Sangha members in Gujarat. Whereas women of Sanghas in UP, Karnataka and AP report an almost total enrollment of members' children either in schools, MSKs or BMKs, not all Sangha women were sending their daughters to primary schools in Gujarat. They did not express concern over the fact, reflecting a lack of perspective and engagement within the programme on the issue. The Mission is of the view that MSG needs to focus its efforts to address issues through greater articulation and analysis of perspectives. A closer association of the MSG with teacher training and curriculum development in DPEP would help to engender initiatives and be beneficial to both programmes.

Women highlight the relevance of education in their lives in a number of ways. In practical terms, literacy and issue-based learning enable them to sign instead of using their thumb impression, to seek information of government schemes and programmes such as for housing and pensions without constrain of literacy. Women view literacy as necessary for sound leadership in political processes. The demand for literacy has increased with greater participation of women in the political processes in recent Panchayati Raj elections. The requirements of women to take up leadership roles and manage the affairs of the Federation have also created a greater desire among women, especially at leadership positions to acquire literacy skills. Education is viewed as a means of enabling them to learn and develop new skills, and as a means to acquire and transfer knowledge. Nari Adalats and Sangha processes have also provoked women to demand literacy as a capacity that empowers women to influence and negotiate with men and improve the village. The processes of education have built in the Sangha women in AP, UP and Karnataka the capacity to challenge and remove social evils and prevent bad habits among family members and in their communities. . Women have developed an understanding about the practices in a feminist perspective, analyze the consequences and examine strategies to address the problem on their own initiative. Women now feel more capable of negotiating for their needs and aspirations, especially in the older districts of MS where Sangha processes have become deep rooted and have led to higher levels of engagement and negotiation.

Given the increasing demand and heightened understanding of the relevance of education, the programme needs to tackle these through a systematic response. A focussed planning exercise is required for the education component in each state to cater to the emerging needs for women's education more effectively, to generate curriculum and materials and share strategies between states and with other programmes engaged in literacy and Continuing Education interventions. This acquires greater significance given high expectations from the mainstream departments at state and national levels from MS to evolve and demonstrate innovative strategies for women's education. Besides this MS has to effectively manage expanding outreach and ensure that education does not get subsumed in the larger social empowerment agenda of women.

2.2 Girl's Education

"We never got a decent chance for education. We want our daughters' lives to be different" say Sangha women.

The impact of MS educational initiatives is most visible in the impact on children's enrolment as Sangha women ensure that their own children attend school in 755 villages in UP. The educational awareness campaigns have led to 100% literacy in 165 villages in UP and to total enrollment in 68 villages in AP of the MS blocks and taluks. Community level PRA and village mapping exercises, rallies and campaigns, Kala Jathas, mobilization of Gram Sabhas and the election of Sangha women as chairpersons and members of SECs in villages have contributed to this success.

MS resolved to work with young adolescent girls to influence the choices they make in adult life, based on the demands from Sangha women, who wanted their daughters have the choices that they did not have. Therefore, the educational needs of never enrolled

and drop out girls has become a focus issue. Short-term bridge courses, camps and initiatives through *Bal Kendras*, *Bal Mitra Kendras*, *Cheli sanghas* and *Kishori Kendras*, *Yuvati Shibir*s provide educational opportunities and facilitate mainstreaming of children.

The programme needs to strengthen ongoing learning opportunities beyond the classroom. The programme should ensure that girls' education is not at the cost of women's education. Materials for neo-literate persons such as newsletters, information bulletins need to be generated, accessed and disseminated more widely at the grassroots level. A stronger interface with the Continuing Education Programme would strengthen gender perspectives, while providing greater material and content for the MS programme.

BMKs in AP, **Bal Shikshan Kendras** in Gujarat and **Non-Formal Education (NFE)** classes for boys and girls are run in villages with high drop out or illiteracy among girls and serve to mainstream children into school. Mixed classes for boys and girls are a constraint for girls attendance and male teachers and inadequate material further impede their learning. While a number of children have been mainstreamed from these Centres, a number of issues need to be addressed to make these more effective as interim educational opportunities specifically for girls. Some of the practical aspects that are required to be taken care of include

- (a) Duration and structure of classes to deal with a group of children at different levels of learning,
- (b) the development of diverse competencies/skills among teachers to teach adult women, adolescent girls and children with assurance of quality and gender perspectives and
- (c) Systems of assessment of children and of teachers.

The linkage of these Centres needs to be forged with the MSKs and the mainstream schools in a more effective manner. *Kishori Literacy Centers (Kishori Kendras)* in Uttar Pradesh enable adolescent girls to rejoin mainstream schools and provide a range of life skills. Many graduates of the *Kishori Kendras* opt to join the *MSKs*, the residential girls' educational institution and then move to formal schools.

Mahila Shikshan Kendras (MSKs) that are residential learning centres for 14+ girls have been one of the most successful educational components of the programme. *MSKs* serve to create opportunities for adolescent girls to go back to school, and thus prevent the initiation of girls into labour, cults, postpone the age of marriage and develop a second generation of leadership. *MSKs* run in AP (4), Karnataka (4), Gujarat (2), and UP (7) offer adolescent girls a residential course and a chance to complete class ten education in a secure environment. The adolescent girls' group in Kerala expressed the need for remedial classes to enable them to complete tenth standard,

There are also a number of need based variations in the courses run at the *MSKs* such as

- 2 month residential initiative that qualifies girls to be admitted to mainstream formal schools. Many of these girls continue to use the *MSK* hostel facilities as this offers a safe environment.
- Additional courses in life skills and knowledge and income earning skills such as typing and tailoring.
- 8 month residential bridge course to help girls re-enter the mainstream education system.

MSKs provide residential teaching courses for adolescent girls and young women for up to 8 months in Karnataka, AP and UP. Besides academic content, the MSK curriculum includes life skills, creates awareness of socio-economic realities, and prepares the participants to analyze, question and understand. According to reports available, the MSK curriculum stresses teaching through the feminist perspective in the local context in Uttar Pradesh. MS also introduces girls to practical and useful skills like cycling, judo and sewing. MSK in Uttar Pradesh also holds short residential literacy training courses for women participating in programmes on health, economic activities and PRI formulated with the involvement of the Sangha women. These strengthen ownership and decision making among women. These centres have played a significant role in delaying the age of marriage of girls, who themselves oppose the idea and take a stand with their parents once they realize the value of education for them selves. The majority of pass outs from MSKs continue their education in the mainstream system.

MSKs have reached out to drop out girls with innovative curriculum models within a safe learning environment catering to their needs (family life skills as well as regular academic curricula and extra curricula activities). Some States have recognized the need to provide teacher training support for the teachers/wardens of the MSKs. More professional support for these teachers is required for better transaction of the curriculum.

The curriculum and classroom transactions require review in the context of messages given through songs and activities undertaken in the classroom through participatory methodologies. Core Curriculum focus needs to shift from more gender specific content to integration of gender class and caste. The curricula of the Kendras should also address the varying needs of the different age groups in the Kendras, consisting of some girls young enough to be mainstreamed after a short preparatory period and others who may be older and need inputs for enhancing their life-skills.

Sanghas and parents are now convinced that MSKs are a safe opportunity for adolescent girls to fulfill their learning needs to enable them to enter the mainstream. Girls enjoy the daily routine of the MSK away from the drudgery of invisible/paid work. The majority of them have moved to mainstream schools as hostlers or day scholars. Along with academic proficiency, they have acquired additional skills like sewing, raising nurseries and knowledge about nutrition and health, child rights and legal literacy, that are not part of the formal school curriculum. There are demands for MSKs at Mandal level in AP so that girls are closer to their homes. This reflects the increase in demand as well as the aspiration to send older and younger siblings to the centre. Girls themselves bring more girls to the centre based on their positive experiences. The curriculum needs to be oriented to differential learning needs of different age categories of learners since younger siblings also attend. More MSKs are needed and teachers need to divide time adequately based on requirements, perhaps with shorter courses.

MS UP and Karnataka have also introduced a small token payment from the parents for the MSK, with the aim of helping the families to value education. MSKs have worked through the harvest season UP, reinforcing the principle of equal opportunity and gender equity by not providing a break in girls education to enable them to attend to domestic demands.

It is unfortunate that the MSKs in Gujarat have become dysfunctional, even as in other states like Karnataka and U.P. the number of MSKs and number of students is steadily increasing. The discontinuation of Mahila and Bal Shikshan Kendras in Gujarat, apparently due to lack of appropriate accommodation and the cost ineffectiveness of too few students need to be addressed through greater motivation and creation of a safe environment and relevant inputs.

MSKs fill a niche need and should be up-scaled in all the states, and revitalized in Gujarat. MSKs should remain located within MS with future links to District Resource Centres in the new phase, influencing mainstream education and catering to continuing education needs of Sangha women. Simultaneously, the increasing demand for MSKs makes it imperative to engage with the official/formal education system to improve the quality of education and make it more meaningful for girls. The MSKs have reached out to drop out girls with innovative curricular models within a safe learning environment catering to their needs (family life skills as well as regular academic curricula and extra curricula activities). Some States have recognized the need to provide teacher training support for the teachers/wardens of the MSKs. More professional support for these teachers is required for better transaction of the curriculum. MSKs have to develop strategies to plan for short-term intensive courses for many more women and girls to pass through its portals and experience learning differently. They have to evolve quickly as education resource centres at block level for fulfilling the education demands of federations and the move towards autonomy and self-reliance.

Kishori Sanghas provide a space for adolescent girls, for education and literacy as well as a forum for school going girls to discuss their problems. The Kishori Kendras, attempt to bring girls back to mainstream education and equip them with everyday knowledge and life skills. The Kishori Sanghas provide inputs on literacy, help girls reflect and gain a gender perspective in understanding social issues. The activities at the Kishori Sanghas revolve around regular meetings, refresher camps, study tours, documentation training, operating libraries, environmental conservation, theatre workshops and training. The attempt has been to break gender stereotypes

Kishori Sanghas and Kishori Melas give the girls an opportunity to interact with other girls their age and travel out of their village. Like the adult Sanghas, the Kishori Sanghas in Karnataka have also formed issue-based committees including education. Some Kishori Sanghas have started to demand education for themselves and have started savings groups and even lend to the Mahila Sanghas. Yuvati Shivirs in Gujarat have led to demands for literacy and a number of short duration literacy camps for girls and women. MSG initiatives in literacy need considerable improvement efforts to show tangible results in learners' perceptions and lives.

To cater to the evolving needs of women as they grow autonomous in their functioning, and as they demand greater information resource support from the MS, it is essential to strengthen the educational component of the programme. At the same time, streamlining and professionalizing the MSK and other educational interventions for girls, recognizing the unique role that MS can play as a bridge institution for girls towards mainstreaming as well as towards seeking new opportunities and roles in a changing socio-cultural environment. The differential learning needs of women and adolescent girls require different approaches and input, which the present system will need to gear itself for. The availability of women teachers to conduct the literacy classes and also facilitate continuing education providing learning inputs related to women's and girls information

needs— violence, health, etc. These would need to be addressed along with seeking ways to strengthen or modify the MSK approach to make it cost effective, replicable and sustainable to enhance its outreach to cater to a larger number of women, beyond Sangha members especially for the new districts. Strategies or combinations of strategies are required to enable the women to attain literacy skills and to sustain them. Preparation of literacy and post literacy material and provision of inputs to teachers needs to be based on a well-conceived strategy to strengthen the education programme components.

A related issue is that of monitoring the content and pedagogy of inputs. While the programme is significantly contributing to the creation of an environment for children's education and enrolment, recognizing and planning for the emerging need for women's education is equally important. *MS may like to discuss and analyze these issues among programme personnel and those from the Women's Movement with expertise and experience in developing education strategies, curriculum and pedagogy with a gender perspective.*

2.3 Contribution to Reduction of Child Labour

MS has no mandate to address issues of child labour. However Sangha women's concern about the education of their children has led to an intense involvement in enrolment campaigns, thus contributing to a reduction in child labour. MS supports Sangha women to access education for their daughters. As and when the need arises it facilitates Sanghas to take up the issue of child labour.

Sangha women promote children's' schooling, thus indirectly discouraging child labour. In places where working children are a dominant feature, like in the cotton fields of Mahbubnagar, Sanghas have gone one step further and actually rallied against child labour in order to put an end to it. ***Some Sanghas tried to counter this by offering cheaper labour of older women. Elsewhere they decided to tackle the use of pesticide, demanding that spraying is done only when the children are not working, thus trying to reduce the health risk.*** APMSS celebrates Child Rights Convention week involving schoolteachers, children and local organisations. Last year, APMSS formally became a member of APARC, a state level network working towards the protection of Child Rights. In this context MS organised a series of district level workshops in Karimnagar, Adilabad and Nizamabad to bring all organisations working on children's issues to one platform. A Child Rights Protection Forum was also established in Karimnagar.

In Karnataka and AP young girls are prevented from being dedicated to the Devadasi system, which is a form of child prostitution. The Bal Mitra Kendras in AP and Karnataka address the issue of education of working children, while in Gujarat linkages are forged with NGOs to continue education for children of pastoral migratory communities. While MS has not undertaken specific campaigns or advocacy targeted at working children in Karnataka and UP, this problem has been addressed through its work with the Sanghas and Kishori Sanghas. They have thus created greater appreciation of the value of girls and the need to invest in their future. While poverty has been a key constraint to the education of girls, the recognition of their worth has enabled Sanghas to address girl child labour by ensuring their enrolment and retention. Additionally, in order to free girls from sibling-care for education, MS Karnataka runs child care centers where no ICDS

Anganwadis exist. These are all efforts to ensure an equitable life opportunity with education for girls.

3.LINKAGES

3.1 MS linkages with Government and Women's Movement as Resource Agency and seeking support from others.

The mainstreaming of gender in the National Development Policy constitutes an integral part of the Beijing Platform for Action. MS UP drafted the State Policy for Women through extensive consultation with government agencies, NGOs and grassroots women. It has developed a set of indicators for women's empowerment, which needs to be refined and shared with others. The state of AP has a Women's Development Policy, and MS has been involved in providing Gender training inputs to other programmes and organizations, thereby establishing a niche for itself in the development scenario in the state. MS representatives at district and taluk level are members of various NLM and DPEP selection, coordination and management committees. MS in Karnataka, UP and Gujarat should use this linkage with DPEP to influence curriculum and material development. MS in AP and Karnataka has also sought to mainstream gender issues through its participation in various committees of the Dept of Education in the state, as well as with other programmes such as ANTWA and DPIP. MS in Karnataka has been involved in various State, regional and international initiatives to strengthen gender perspectives in policy and programming in the state, and share its learning and experiences in the process. Members of MS Karnataka interfaced in the development of the Gender Development Index (GDI) of the Human Development Report, 1999. Gujarat is in the process of establishing a State Commission for Women, but MS engagement with policy initiatives and linkages to strengthen perspectives towards developing a policy for women for the state have been negligible. The representation of women from the women's movement has also been low on the Executive Committee especially in Gujarat and Kerala and inputs and support from the NRG needs enhancement to strengthen perspectives. The Kerala programme is relatively nascent, but has linked with women's organizations for training of its team at state and district levels, and is engaged in building gender perspectives with the state institutional framework for decentralized governance but is yet to impact interventions at Panchayat level.

The State governments and NGOs draw upon MS gender training inputs and capacities, and MS in turn has sporadically drawn on individuals of the women's movement and networked with grassroots organizations to build pressure groups for advocacy and lobbying. The tendency to look inwards for resources and rely on intra-programme capacities and perspectives may cause stagnation of ideas and strategies and may deter Sanghas from building sustainable networks with the outside world. While the dependence on NGOs and women's groups has reduced for capacity development, the MS programme needs to forge links and network with organizations and forums of women to continually enrich and challenge its perspectives and efforts. **MS needs to strengthen and extend these links and facilitate more coherent and effective collaboration with the women's movement in the States as well as the (inter) national Level.** The skills of women's movement representatives in the form of NRG members are drawn upon in smaller measure. They can contribute significantly in

energizing the programme in the states. While strong Sanghas see themselves as a grassroots women's movement, they are yet to build up a critical mass since they are dispersed and limited in their spatial spread. They need to network beyond the programme through lateral exchanges with other forums on gender and rights issues to enhance their capacities and in turn to inform these forums with their own experiences. Aware of their rights and equipped with the ability to operate as a pressure group Sanghas need to work in solidarity and network with other forums. Sanghas would be reinforced through greater alliance with women's organizations and interaction with the Women's Movement and peoples organizations around gender and other issues that emerge from time to time.

As A Resource Agency MS is evolving, sought after by state and NGOs alike for the enhancement of capacities and perspectives on a range of issues from gender to group processes, on health and violence issues, as well as on issues of governance and formation of federations. MS is already working with the NLM in material development for neo-literates in Karnataka and has also worked with the State Resource Center for Adult Literacy in production of material for neo-literate learners. The Gender Training Manual and materials has been extensively used by DPEP in Karnataka, UP and Gujarat.

Gender training inputs have been provided for programme functionaries of govt. departments of health and education, the police and administrators, BDOs and CDOs, as well as for schools and colleges. Capacity development inputs have been provided for social development program functionaries such as ANMs, schoolteachers, Anganwadi workers and PRI functionaries. In Kerala Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) see MS as a support institute for themselves as well as for the Panchayat in dealing with violence, participation in development initiatives and ensuring greater access of women to resources. They express a need for networking and formation of a platform to tackle issues that effect women's lives, like alcoholism, violence against women and counselling, thus acknowledging the potential of collective strength. By facilitating such a common platform MS can create a basis for advocacy and networking, enabling women to address issues together. A non party women's political platform at block level would enable MS to address more sensitive issues, and open venues for more consolidated linkages with the women's movement.

MS serves as a resource group to engender the process of decentralization in Kerala, and as trainer for various state and district agencies including Kudumbashree, Swa Shakti, DPIIP here and elsewhere. In engaging with development initiatives MS should prioritize its primary task to empower women through education and should focus on generation of demand for these services rather than undertake implementation. Instead MS should seek to inform such programmes through its own experiences and build models for demonstration of demand driven and people owned development initiatives.

Through its linkages with national and international agencies such as WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, CIDA, MS enhances its own capacities as well as links to other experiences for empowerment, while influencing donor paradigms for development and partnership. Engagement with the ICRW to document and research the experiences of Nari Adalats in Gujarat and UP creates legitimacy and establishes best practice. It also adds to the body of knowledge on gender, women's empowerment and institution building, while enhancing MS skills for process documentation, research and analysis, which should then be shared across the programme and elsewhere. Engagement in research with the

NIAS in Kamataka and with Nirantar in UP and Kamataka opens new vistas for MS as a resource agency, towards generating strategic knowledge and methodology for action based research.

3.2 Added Value of the MS Programme in GOI-RNE's Sectoral Approach

RNE's sectoral approach to development assistance aims at integrating Dutch aid into sectoral policies of recipient countries. These efforts are guided by the Netherland's key policy aims of Good Governance, Poverty Reduction, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, institutional Development and Environment protection (GAVIM)¹³. Dutch policy seeks the adherence to GAVIM principles within the sectoral approach. Mahila Samakhya programme works with women from the most marginalized sections of the society often poorest of the poor, scheduled castes and tribes (SC/ST and OBC), illiterate and uneducated located in the interior villages of the most backward blocks of the districts. Recently greater priority is also apparent to tribal population, as tribal areas are added to the area of coverage in AP, Kerala and Gujarat. Experiences from these interventions may serve to demonstrate viable strategies to work with tribal groups with greater credibility.

MS seeks to enable women to participate in development and governance processes, and thereby to influence the mainstream processes to become responsive to gender and to the needs of the most vulnerable. It provides the opportunity for women to evolve institutional spaces that demonstrate good governance and adherence to principles of cohesion, transparency and democracy in its operations. Citizenship and participation in political processes have emerged as key areas of engagement of the Sangha women, brining greater accountability in governance in their areas of influence.

Sanghas and federations, which are growing through greater initiatives by women themselves, are evidence of a larger process of ownership. They are emerging as forums that challenge the basis of inequalities based on caste class and gender and working towards a just social order, as is evident in the case of AP and Kamataka.

Women understand poverty as rooted in the systems of management and distribution of resources including natural resources such as land and water. Their initiatives in the agriculture sector are focussed on concerns of sustainability and food security, as a rational approach to the utilization of these resources leading to the protection of the environment. These strategies are of specific significance and may have larger significance when shared with the ANTWA programme supported which is also under Dutch assistance. Through relief work for the victims of the Gujarat earthquake and active involvement in protecting and conserving the environment through "Van Panchayats" in Tehri women have expressed their concerns for a sustainable environment. Struggles for land rights in Allahabad collective land leases, and wages in Medak bear testimony to the efforts for greater access and control over resources. Conservation and regeneration of natural resources have direct implications on livelihood of women and emerge as a key agenda of the Sanghas. In AP, UP and Gujarat women's experiences on Watershed Committees can prove invaluable in the

¹³ For overall policy and effectiveness, the sectoral approach was adopted as the working method and the organizing principle of Dutch developmental programmes, with the key policy aims of good governance, poverty reduction, gender equality and women's empowerment, institutional development and environmental protection (GAVIM).

formulation of community-based initiatives with a gender perspective as currently under consideration for bilateral cooperation in AP.

At State level, in the three concentration states for Dutch Assistance, governments and other agencies increasingly recognize the training capabilities of the MS programme. The Governments of Kerala and AP envisage MS as a resource agency to provide gender inputs for future RNE assisted projects. Sangha women in UP, AP and Karnataka and more recently Kerala have sought to influence the modalities of development at grassroots level towards good governance and gender equality. The experience in Gujarat and demands on the programme in Kerala however point to the need to ensure that the programme does not become a mere delivery mechanism, but maintains its focus on empowerment and needs based initiatives. While Federations may choose to enter into implementers roles based on their emerging needs and may be facilitated in their negotiations for the same, MS programme should remain rooted in facilitating awareness, analysis and action.

Strategies for water and sanitation programmes planned in Kerala may be dovetailed in the areas where MS functions in Kerala, but would need to follow the course of need based prioritization, as essential in the MS process. The potential for convergence of MS with the Dutch assisted water and sanitation programme needs to be strategically built into the programmes to complement each other. It would strategically be desirable for MS to prioritize its work towards building women's organizations; with integration of educational agenda so that they can address these needs as and when they arise. MS could collaborate with the Water scheme based on a locational convergence i.e. that the scheme include areas of MS coverage, so that MS groups may then explore the potential of engaging in the implementation of such schemes or participating in their management etc.

While programmes such as Swa Shakti and Kudumbashree pursue economic empowerment goals, their processes are target oriented and centrally managed giving little space for women to influence or own them. MS experiences in the economic sector are grounded in a feminist analysis of economic trends, and based on the priorities determined for women for economic sustainability and empowerment MS creates holistic paradigms based on women's perceptions and ownership of such processes. MS should be strengthened to play a resource support role for the inclusion of a more holistic framework for empowerment in these economic programmes. It should function as demonstration and trainer to influence such initiatives towards ownership by women. Mainstreaming women's perceptions and strategies from the experiences owned by women in the MS programme has implications for sector reform and institutional change processes, and may well have the potential to inform economic growth models with women's experiences.

State governments in AP and Gujarat accord a high priority to education as reflected in the State Policy and Vision documents. While MS has engaged with the DPEP programme for mobilization of communities towards achievement of enrollment and attendance targets, links need to be strengthened with DPEP towards engendering programme content and materials, in training of teachers, linkages for enrolment. MS groups can also play a greater role monitoring and auditing of DPEP at the field level. MS could share its learning and experiences of holistic and relevant education especially for girls. Greater synergy can be generated through creative strategies for collaboration between the two programmes initiated in areas of common coverage under Dutch

assistance such as in Gujarat. Given the present status of the programme in that state, this process will need facilitation and external resource input.

The empowerment of women towards effective participation and agency within the decentralization and local self-governance process is a common priority for MS and the RNE. MS has worked with women to create awareness about development processes and procedures, and with women representatives to strengthen their linkages with the Sanghas. Efforts in Kerala to strengthen understanding and capacities for gender budgeting and women's component plan would serve to facilitate good governance and gender equality goals within the decentralized democratic planning framework. *MS should work intensively with the Sanghas and Panchayat members in one district to demonstrate the efficacy of an engendered budgeting process, while collaborating with state planning department and training institutions to integrate gender issues into all development sectors*

At the National level, the programme is located within the education sector. It has gained recognition for the innovations in girls' education and organization of women through education. This has also enabled it to retain autonomy. This recognition of the unique character of the programme and the potential it offers needs to however reflect in other programme and policy initiatives of the Department such as the CE programme and the initiatives for Girls and women's education planned for the 10th Plan period. While discussions have been on-going for MS to implement the CE programme of the GOI, there is little evidence of the MS processes and principles having been incorporated into the new CE programme and its operational strategies. Nor does MS material get used in the CE programme. While CE and literacy target groups are primarily women, by virtue of their low levels of literacy, the learning of the MS programme have not been brought to bear on these national programmes. This may be attributed to the lack of institutional spaces that permit such collaboration and exchanges, since programmes are implemented in a vertical bind, as well as the absence of adequate perspective to sustain a dialogue to promote the programmes experiences, in the absence of National Consultants. While MS has greater credibility as a women's empowerment programme, the educational processes that have enable this empowerment to happen need to be articulated and show cased with greater effect. Greater initiative is required from the national office to render the educational elements of the programme visible through advocacy within the department itself. The establishment of the National Resource Centre for Women and Girls could provide a space for such synergistic learning. RNE may consider support to the NRC as a mainstreaming opportunity for the learning and experience gained from the MS programme, and thereby ensure that the NRC is rooted in the experiences gained from the MS programmes in the Dutch assisted states. Strengthening the MS programme in its gender and education capacities through early appointment of Consultants, and strengthening the NRG to link up with the NRC are vital for the programme for the achievement of the shared goals of Gender Equality and Good Governance.

3.3 MS Convergence with Government and NGO Activities

MS is basically an autonomous NGO located within the Government structure. The added value is that it should influence government policies regarding gender and empowerment. Within the State, MS is seen as a vehicle to implement government policies, as it has been part of massive campaigns like the Pulse Polio programme in all States, and has acted swiftly in the delivery of emergency relief and food supplies in the

quake affected areas of Gujarat. While MS in Gujarat is a partner in implementation of programmes with Chetna ¹⁴ as the lead NGO in the MOH/Family Welfare/ World Bank (WB) programme, MS itself facilitates this process and has gone to scale in UP. Through this programme, the interface with the government health system has increased and women are more aware and demanding accountability. MS has also been able to work in a convergence of interests on access to health issues in collaboration with NGOs in AP and participate in the Peoples Health Assembly.

Through the efforts on co-operative farming in AP, UP and Kerala MS Sanghas are creating alternative paradigms for production that address the needs of the poor for livelihoods and food security. These need to be disseminated and shared more widely with the mainstream sector to bring about significant impact. MS is associated with the DPEP programme in Gujarat and part of the programme in 6 districts of UP. This presents an opportunity to transfer learning, develop materials pedagogy etc and to work synergistically while adhering to the principles of the MS of providing space and opportunity for women to question, challenge, prioritize and seek strategies and opportunities for their own development.

Linkages are evident at the Block/ Mandal / Taluka level through the participation of MS in the meetings and committees of various development programmes. In some states District officials participate in planning and review meetings of MS. In AP the Mandal Development Officer visits the Sanghas to get feedback on development issues and seeks support of the federation and programme for awareness campaigns on women's issues and child rights.

Mahila Samakhya Kerala works closely with the Government of Kerala. It is viewed as a potential state resource agency for social empowerment inputs and mobilization of women, to create an environment for greater participation, and involvement in delivery of other projects and missions. Mahila Samakhya Kerala is seen as a key agency to facilitate the shift from Women in Development (WID) approach to Gender and Development (GAD) focus in state planning processes. MS can play a role in building perspectives within the Kudumbashree programme towards gender sensitivity especially in the areas of social empowerment. Provided that this is recognized as a key issue within the programme framework by the leadership of the Kudumbashree and commitment to such a partnership includes the adoption of operational strategies required addressing social empowerment needs.

Women have set up their own courts or Nari Adalats but work in collaboration with the district and taluka authorities as well as cooperation from the police to create alternatives that are more responsive to the needs of women and the poor. Ms has acted as pressure groups to address women's issues, monitor literacy programmes and direct local Panchayats to consider equitable access to water. In Gujarat MS also implements the Swa shakti programme. Although partnerships may be mutually beneficial enhancing they do not necessarily coincide with MS perspectives essential for empowerment and sustainable development. **Spreading MS activities to implement programmes needs to be negotiated with caution and based specifically on women's own analysis of needs priorities and strategies and within the framework of the non-negotiable principles laid down. Otherwise MS stands the danger of being reduced to a mobilization role for numerous target-oriented interventions.**

¹⁴ Chetna is a Support Agency on Gender and Health issues and is located in Ahmedabad

4. MONITORING & REPORTING

Information flow in the MS Program has been captured in a flow chart in Exhibit 1. It shows the nature, time, frequency and direction of information flow between various functionaries/levels of the structure. The different levels at which information is generated and reports produced can be categorized as:

- Field: consists of Junior Resource Persons/Resource Persons and Sahayoginis;
- District: consists of supervisory and administrative employees like RP, accountants, DEOs and headed by DPC;
- State: consists of supervisory and administrative employees like RPs, Consultants, Accounts Officer, Assistant Accountant, Internal Auditor, SPD. Policy making and approval bodies like Executive Committee are also at the State level; and
- National Level: Office of the National Project Director and RNE.

The Exhibit presents a comprehensive listing of almost all the reports produced in any of the MS Societies. It also shows the direction in which reports are sent. Some of the states may not be producing all of these. Appendix I has more details on reporting.

MS has been producing a fairly high volume of monthly, quarterly, biannual and annual reports, which capture all the activities being performed within the program. Reflection, analysis and feedback on these reports is carried out in the day to day interactions among program functionaries, particularly during monthly meetings. However, there is a need to add greater analytical depth so that reporting captures not only the processes and itinerary of events but assesses problems, hurdles and learning. Follow up on previous reports is not integral to the reporting process, it is also advised to include action taken component as a standard feature. The process of feedback on reports also needs to be formalized.

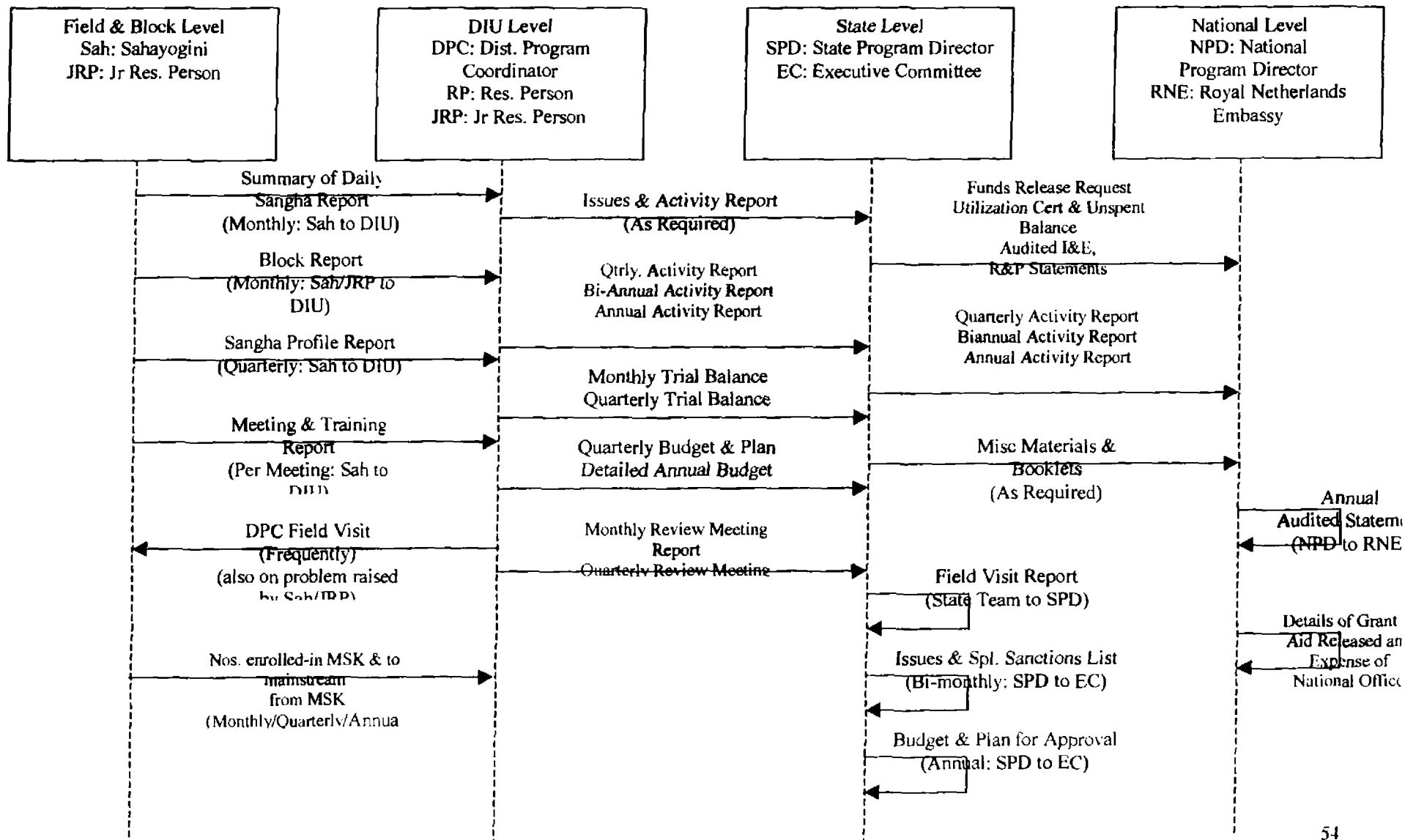
Besides regular reports, documentation in MS covers a wide spectrum, which includes process documentation, workshop/training reports, exchange visit reports, special events reports like camps/Melas etc. Some of these have immediate use and therefore have shorter shelf life whereas others have potential of long term use and would benefit a wider community. There is a need for greater systematization, analysis, indexing and utilization of these for future planning as well as for wider dissemination, through the Resource Centres at state and district levels.

MS accords high importance to observance and recording of the processes that are articulated in the Green Book (MS document 1997-2002). These processes have the potential of transforming status and bringing about empowerment. It should be assessed periodically if the processes are achieving the intended transformation or not. It is important to stress on processes insofar as they assure quality of output but it is also important to keep assessing these processes to avail of any opportunities of increasing their time and resource efficiency.

There is a need to introduce a formal and regular evaluation cycle which approaches evaluation in a systematic manner, based on a study-design suitable for social science research. It must assesses the 'empowerment-construct' in the

program group over a time series as well as differences with control groups which have not received MS inputs

EXHIBIT 1: INFORMATION FLOW IN MS



Information Flow to the RNE

Mechanisms and terms for information flows to the RNE are contained in the "Green Book" - Mahila Samakhya Ninth Plan Document of the Mahila Samakhya (1997-2002) which provides the Guidelines for Project Implementation. The document states "as this is a 100% externally assisted project (Dutch Assistance) the six monthly and annual reports are to be furnished to them". This needs to be adhered to for facilitating information flow to GON in the interest of the programme.

RNE has been receiving copies of documents produced by MS Societies, which relate to program in the past, in addition to annual audited statement of accounts and annual reports. However, over the last few years this flow of program related documents has reduced. It is recommended that this flow should be commenced again on a regular basis. Significant booklets and learning materials, published by the States programmes from time to time, should be forwarded to the RNE through the National Office. This additional documentation on the programme provides inputs for RNE and serves to highlight the emerging focus areas, learning and achievements of the programme.

5. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

MS is registered as an autonomous society and is a National Programme. Being located at the National level in the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, and operationalized through independent Societies at the State level provides an autonomous environment to ensure a process oriented approach at the State level. The Center provides minimal guidance regarding the program at state level, leaving sufficient room for state specific planning and management. The Green Book contains broad guidelines for the States to help them organize the programme with flexibility and autonomy, leaving room for decentralized planning suitable to State specific requirements.

National

Coordination of the MS programme through a National Office imparts a national identity, which is helpful in providing visibility to the programme and establishing space and autonomy for itself in negotiations with state departments. The program at the national level is headed by the National Project Director (NPD). The NPD (an IAS officer) is responsible for the coordination of the program at the Center and for providing overall direction with the support and guidance of the NRG. The NPD is supported by two consultants who provide substantive inputs and support staff for clerical assistance, although currently there is no Consultant at the National Office since June 2000. The criticality of the consultants' role in providing perspective attains greater significance in the absence of an NPD from the women's movement to provide the substantive inputs and direction to the programme. **Consultants in the past have facilitated exchanges and development of perspectives. They have also facilitated the flow of information between the states. The lack of consultants at the national level has significantly impacted these processes over the past one and a half years.**

The Coordination is facilitated through a National Resource Group consisting of women activists, development functionaries, social scientists and educationists, knowledgeable of the women's movement in one or more States. NRG members provide guidance to the programme as EC members, at NRG meetings and as and when States request for their inputs for studies, research and capacity building along with valuable guidance. However, not all the states are

able to seek their guidance. There is a need for the National Office to facilitate State-NRG interface more actively.

National Resource Group (NRG) acts as an advisory body and gives direction to the program at policy level. It has contributed significantly to the development of a strong gender perspective for processes of empowerment to be grounded soundly in the programme in the early phase. The meetings of the NRG held in different states have also facilitated greater learning, while individual NRG members provided significant inputs to state programmes. **The infrequency of NRG meetings and the shift in focus towards programmatic issues is noted with concern.** NRG meetings are desirable at least on a six monthly basis to focus more clearly on the strategic developments of the programme, especially in view of the proposed establishment of a National Resource Centre for Women (NRCW). The revitalization of the NRG is essential to ensure strong linkages with the women's movement as well as to provide direction to the programme and inputs to the proposed NRCW to ensure its strong linkage and to embed it in the MS programme in the 10th Plan period. States are able to draw upon expertise of this body, as representatives from NRG are also members of State Executive Committee. States can also benefit from their expertise by requesting NRG members directly to provide programmatic inputs.

Functional decentralization has been ensured through the delegation of powers to the State Office and support from the State Executive Committee to devote the energies of the programme towards creation of enabling opportunities and entitlements for women and girls. The obstruction of functional autonomy is largely attributable to the constitution of the EC, where the representation is largely that of State agencies. The interests they present also reflect such a pattern, which in turn creates extraneous compulsions on the programme, often negating or in conflict with the strategic interests of women.

It would be in the best interest of the programme in order to fortify its autonomous nature that the local non-government representation is increased. The National office should ensure the linkage of the MS programme to the women's movement and development agencies and facilitate dissemination and sharing of experiences between States. The Mission recommends the installation of a full team of professional staff in order to take the programme forward across States and districts culminating in what could potentially become a subaltern grass root women's movement with critical mass.

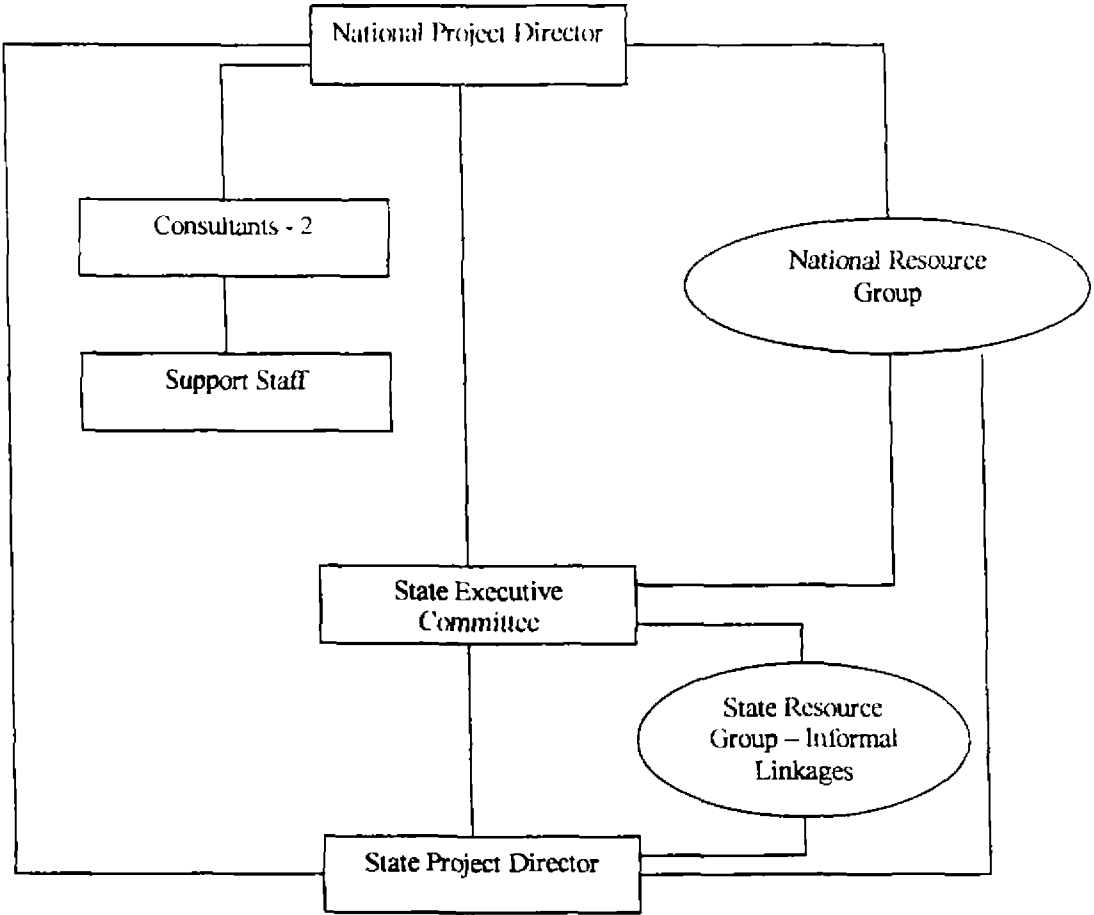
In case of positions of some functionaries at the state and district level there is an overlap and lack of clarity in their respective roles. Although this may lend flexibility in the short term, it could cause problems in the long term. There is a need to review and rationalize the job descriptions and new emerging roles to cater to the emerging perspectives of State and District Resource Centres as well.

The mission observed that states are duplicating efforts in developing management processes and systems. Centralized efforts are sometimes put in place whenever there is a need for uniformity in structures and management processes across States. The example of one such effort is the national workshop of MS Accountants/DPCs/SPDs. This has been able to standardize accounting practices across the States. It is desirable if the Center plays a more proactive role in either developing these systems or coordinating between States to avoid duplication of efforts and bring about standardization. Of course no system that is developed at the Center or by a particular State could be applied 'as it is' in each State. However, it can be

used after it has been suitably adapted accounting for changes in State specific needs. Some of these systems and processes could be:

- development of State specific strategy and objectives;
- annual planning and budgeting- already done by most states except Kerela;
- reporting and monitoring systems (including MIS , already initiated in UP);
- staff performance appraisal & training needs assessment – initiated by AP, UP
- design of evaluation framework
- Computerisation of accounts

Exhibit 3: National Level Organizational Chart



National Resource Center was proposed in the last plan period but is proposed to be established in the 10th plan period. The RNE should consider support to the NRC as a means of bringing the experience of MS to the centre of the debate and practice of education for women and as a means of mainstreaming its learning with other educational programmes. An NRC will facilitate linkages and learning of programme processes between states of RNE support and other states. It will enable the programme to develop resource inputs to feed into other mainstream educational programmes such as the CE programme, the proposed programme for Women and Girls Education etc in the Tenth Plan Period. It would provide a national institutional space for the vision and concerns of the programme to inform the formulation of educational policy from a gender perspective.

State

The state Executive Committee is an empowered body that takes decisions relating to governance and program direction. The Executive Committee facilitates the approval and implementation of the state Action Plan through the State Program Director (SPD). The SPD, preferably from the non-government sector, is responsible for overall execution and smooth running of the program within the State.

The majority of the representation in EC is either Government's ex-officio members or their nominees. It would be in the best interest of the program that its autonomous nature be fortified by making its representation even broader by including greater representation of local NGOs and committed persons that have credentials in these areas.

Unlike the NRG, State Resource Group (SRG) at the State level is an informal group. MS Societies have forged their own linkages with other NGOs and like-minded individuals whose resources and expertise are drawn from time to time.

A greater role is recommended for the SRG to facilitate linkages of the programme with other networks. SRG because of its proximity to respective MS Societies and state specific expertise would be able to give much greater context specific technical support and advice. Some SRG members may also be inducted in the State EC to strengthen its substantive capacities. SRG members might also facilitate MS negotiate its relationship and participation with other movements and networks on an operational level.

State Gender Resource Centres are an organic outcome of the programme's evolution and the consequent changes in the roles that the State MS office is now performing. The scope of the State office is moving beyond programme implementation to a wider role of facilitation of processes in the development, while providing a renewed impetus to its own programme towards expansion and consolidation through the adoption of revised strategies. The mission is of the view that support to the State Gender Resource Centres in the three states-UP, Karnataka and AP- as a measure of consolidation of the programme gains in the first 2 states where RNE is withdrawing support. In AP, and gradually in the states of Kerala and Gujarat as and when the process so evolves, it would provide continuity to the programme and direct its energy to respond to the emerging needs of federations, as well as facilitate strategic work on research and pedagogy. An SRC could engage with the women's movement and networks towards women's solidarity and empowerment, as well as serve to influence the discourse on gender and development in the state. This is all the more critical in the context of programme initiatives such as the DPIP and Kudumbashree that represent a limited and instrumentalist vision of women's empowerment.

In the case of some positions at the State and District level there is an overlap and lack of clarity in the respective roles. Overlapping JDs of two positions may lend flexibility in the short term but could cause problems in the long term. There is a need to review and rationalize the job descriptions and roles in all states and to incorporate the vision for formation of the state and district resource centres.

With the process of issue based federation formation starting in the next phase there would be newer and higher expectations of Sahayoginis/ Karyakartas. It is proposed that in each district, positions for five 'Issue Based Coordinators' (IBCs) should be created at par with RPs/JRPs in organizational hierarchy and would be responsible for guiding and building capacity of Federations and new Sahayoginis in their areas of expertise. This is visualised to operate much as the issue based committees of the Sanghas in the Karnataka model, with IBCs taking on facilitation and capacity building roles on specific issues, and transferring the same to the Sanghas and the federations and to Sahayoginis who are working in other areas. It is expected that such an approach would provide opportunity for deeper engagement and development of expertise in specific subjects among the workers, which could also create a resource pool for other programmes and agencies in and around the districts.

6. HUMAN RESOURCES

MS has been able to carve a special position for itself and make its presence felt on the ground due to its dedicated personnel. However, there is a serious problem of staff turnover. Honoraria and travel allowance fixed in 1997 have since not been revised. This is leading to serious morale and retention issues. The programme stands the risk of losing its momentum and jeopardizing its gains if this personnel remuneration issue is not handled effectively immediately. There is a need to benchmark MS compensation and employee benefit practices to the level of other programmes to be able to attract and retain proficient personnel. The recommended revisions should also incorporate provisions to account for provident fund, medical facilities/insurance, and general inflation. Measures should also be introduced to give recognition to significant contributions by team members.

MS personnel especially Sahayoginis/Karyakartas work under extremely difficult socio-geographical conditions, which raise safety and security concerns. These issues should be closely examined and organizational arrangements instituted in the form of insurance-cover, etc. The Mission noted that some of the states like Karnataka, UP and Andhra Pradesh have instituted medical benefits and Provident Fund for their employees.

A one-year-contract system of employment has led to insecurity in employees. There is a need for permanency or longer term of tenure. However to address the issue of an eventuality when funding to MS may stop, the contract of employment should be for the duration of the programme and subject to availability of funds from the GOI.

Whereas, there is regular interaction between levels of the MS functionaries which is quite facilitative in achieving organizational objectives collaboratively, a formal personnel appraisal system should be put in place, on the basis of which further renewal of contract, promotions and all other personnel decisions should be based. Annual employee appraisals should also feed into the Training Needs Assessment and Human Resource Development, which should further feed into Annual Plan in accordance with States' strategic objectives. Wherever induction into the organization is through an on-the-job process, it has been found to be insufficient. There is a

need for formal induction and orientation processes/training at all levels for new recruitment or when personnel are promoted and when new states are included in the Programme. Exchanges and exposure visits promote learning among grassroots groups that accelerates the learning and transfer of experiences most effectively. These need to be undertaken more regularly between districts and state programmes, as well as with other projects. Participation in Women's conferences and people's campaigns will serve to sharpen perspectives, and facilitate networking around key concerns.

There is a need to especially account for and make room for additional administrative resources whenever additional projects like the UNDP project Samata Dharani in Andhra Pradesh and Kisan Samakhya in UP and SwaShakti in Gujarat are taken up.

Considering the expansion of the programme and the complexities that come with it, it would be helpful if skills of MS personnel are upgraded in documentation, strategic planning including MIS, basic budgeting process and financial management and programme management (large scale). Better financial skills would not only enable informed management of programme through better understanding of financial-physical linkages, it would also enable better finance appreciation and self management skills to be transferred to Sangha women.

7. PLANNING & BUDGETING

The National Office guidelines in the Ninth Plan Document (Green Book), are the basis on which the States prepare their annual plans and budgets. All the States (except for new States like Kerala) follow more or less similar process through which they prepare their annual budgets. An outline of this process is represented in Exhibit 2.

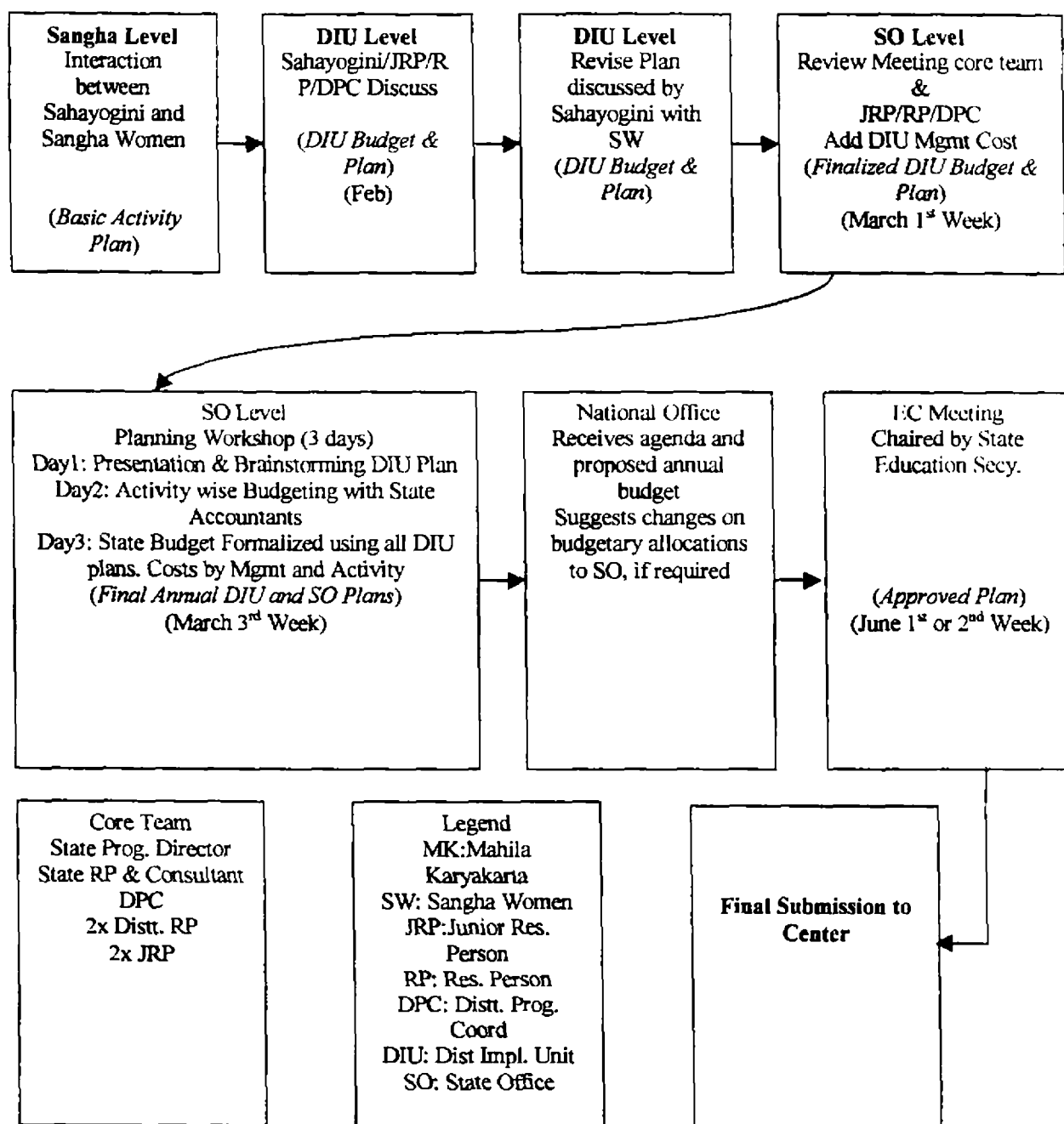
- Sahayoginis/ Karyakartas/JRPs carry out discussions with sanghas/clusters of sanghas to assess members' expectations and priorities in the coming year.
- Based on these discussions Sahayoginis/Karyakartas prepare plans and this is discussed with DPCs/RPs.
- To the above basic activity plan, activities planned at the DIU level are added. An estimated budget is prepared for the above plans and management costs at the DIU level are added to arrive at a consolidated DIU Budget. In UP they plan with SMART objectives at district level to have focussed plan of activities.
- The DIU team visits the State to share these plans and budgets with the Core team as well as appreciate State level thrust areas.
- DPCs finalize and submit their plans to the SPD after contextualizing them in the light of State level thrust areas two to three months before the end of the financial year.
- After the submission of Annual Plans by the districts, activity wise costs are established and the budget plan is consolidated for the whole State.
- Accountants at the District level as well as State level prepare management budgets based on guidelines that are provided in the Green Book and number of villages in which the program is being implemented within each district.
- District wise budget is consolidated into a State budget and sent for an informal feedback to the Center.(optional)
- The Center studies the budget and sends it back to SPDs along with their comments.
- Annual plan or the budget is revised to incorporate Center's comments and placed before the EC for their approval (which is expected to be done before the commencement of the financial year).

- The budget approved by the EC is finally submitted to the Center for release of funds.
- The Centre takes about two months to process the demand of funds by a state and releases sanctioned allocations in tranches, according to utilisation trends of the states.

RNE works on the principle of reimbursing the amounts disbursed to the States by the National Office for implementing MS program.

MS Planning has evolved over the years. Within the overall inviolable principle framework of the programme, a bottom up mechanism has been institutionalized. An extremely detailed annual activity plan is drawn up which feeds into the annual budgeting process. There is a need to further strengthen this process. The state at present follows the National guidelines (objectives) for the preparation of their budgets. It is recommended that they frame state level objectives, which would then become the basis for planning activities, budgeting, analyzing progress and variances. The progress as well as the monitoring can then become more focussed and state specific

EXHIBIT 2: ANNUAL PLANNING & BUDGETING PROCESS



The annual budget is used by the National Office in conjunction with other financial and accounting factors to release funds to States; it is also used by the state and district accountants to keep check over expense variances. It is recommended that an activity and amount wise variance analysis be carried out in all states. This will facilitate better management and information flow and contribute towards improvements in future planning and budgeting.

8. FINANCE & TAXATION

Accounts: Accounting practices across the MS States are professional and satisfactory. A national level workshop was convened for accountants/DPCs/SPDs of all states and these practices can be attributed to that process. However, there is still a need to standardize financial reporting across all States. Disclosures in the accounting statement should also be standardized.

Reporting to RNE from GOI: Annual statements received by RNE from GOI reflect expenditure on MS programme. The said expense is fully borne out of funds remitted by RNE towards the MS programme. It is advised that the State Societies, which receive RNE funds, should reflect advances, liabilities and bank balances on account of MS Programme separately in the audited balance sheets.

Legal requirements: Legally all the State Societies should file Income Tax Returns. There is a lack of clarity with respect to this across the States. Gujarat MS is filing returns regularly, while some States (UP, Karnataka) have applied for Tax Exemption from the competent authorities and others need to follow this up. It would be advisable to comply with all requirements. The process of obtaining Tax Exemption should be coordinated and facilitated by the National Office.

Funds Flow: The flow of funds from GOI to States usually takes two months from the date of receipt of 'request for funds' to final issue of demand draft. Factors like the amount requested, utilization certificates, audited statements and rate of utilization are used by the center to determine the amount to be released. States should be informed about the process followed at the Center in adequate detail in the interest of timely transfer of funds and to enable State offices to plan their expenditures in a better way

Payments: It is a good practice in MS that all payments above Rs 500.00 (Rs.1000 in Gujarat) are made by cheque, though some States are not following this rule. Gujarat and Kerala are currently paying honorarium and stipends in cash. It is recommended that all the honoraria and stipends should be paid by bank transfer or cheque, and cheques should be issued for all other payments above Rs 500.00.

Purchase: Purchase process adopted by MS is similar to that being followed by government in all the states and should be simplified, considering the fact that it is time consuming and imposes unnecessary burden on the programme. It is advised that the process be simplified at least for purchases below Rs.20,000 without compromising on transparency.

Bank Accounts: Usually District Offices and State Office have separate bank accounts. This is however not the case in Kerala. It is recommended that separate bank accounts should be maintained for the State Office and each District Office. A process of devolution is adopted in AP for the new districts brought under the programme, where the state accounts team facilitates the initiation of the procedures, and provides guidance to personnel in the procedure to be followed from the state office for about a year. Subsequently the process is transferred to the district.

In some states however, the practice of keeping separate bank accounts for each project and for each district is not followed -AP. It is recommended that separate bank accounts should be maintained for the State Office & District Offices. A separate bank account should also be opened whenever a new project is taken up.

Authorization of Vouchers: All payment vouchers are authorized by the SPD at the State Level and DPC/Accountant or in some cases RP/Incharge DIU also authorizes payments. In certain Societies at State level routine bills for utilities are being cleared by the Accounts Officer in Karnataka and Gujarat.

Too much load of approving all the expense vouchers falls on the SPD/DPCs. The authorization of expense vouchers should be delegated to the level of Resource Person depending on the person who has incurred the expense. Only a limited number of vouchers should come to the SPD/DPCs. A limit could be fixed above which all the vouchers would need to necessarily be approved by the SPD at the State Office and the DPC at the District Office.

Internal Controls: A strong system of internal control is maintained through proper distribution of workload right from the Sangha Level to the Executive Committee level. At the Sangha level the internal control is exercised through checks at various stages by DPC/ DRP/ JRP/ Members of the Sanghas. For expense approval, actual payment handling, recording and authorization are all handled by different functionaries in the organization. Monthly/Quarterly internal audit exercises are carried out by the State Accountants who visit different districts by rotation and check all the vouchers at the DIU level. Accountants keep a check on items being spent and budgetary provisions.

The only weakness on the internal control front is that there is no budgeted activity/amount v/s actual verification and analysis, which could show some variations, which need to be carefully analyzed. The same as given in the Budgeting section of the report.

Purchase: Purchase process adopted all the MS Societies is similar to that being followed by government. Authority to purchase up to a specified amount limits has been delegated. Whenever a purchase decision exceeds an employee's limit then she has to take approval from the competent authority. The process of purchase is briefly given in Appendix III.

The purchase process is time consuming and imposes unnecessary burdens on the program, therefore it should be simplified. It is recommended that simplified purchase procedures up to a limit of Rs. 20,000 should be suggested to all MS Societies. The basic underlying principle for an effective purchase procedure is to be able to carry out all purchases under practical conditions of transparent system rather than be burdened by procedures and system followed by the Government. A feasible alternative has been provided in Appendix IV.

Funds Flow: Funds have to flow from the Center to States to finally the Districts so that program activities can be implemented on ground in a time bound manner. The flow of funds from the Center to States usually takes two months from the date of receipt of 'request for funds' to final issue of draft. Factors like the amount requested, utilization certificates, audited statements and rate of utilization are used by the center to determine the amount to be released. States send requests every quarter based on the projected quarterly expenditure that is submitted to the Center. Generally the National Office releases funds in 2 to 3 installments. The process of flow of funds is shown in detail in Appendix V.

Some of the states (AP, UP, Karnataka) express that at certain points of time they are not able to carry out certain activities because funds were not available to them at the time these were required because of delays. It has been observed that delays may be exception rather than the norm. However, the balance limit at which States can send request for funds may need to be determined more judiciously and past expenditure may not always be a reflection of the expenses to be incurred in coming months. It is recommended that in the interest of transparency and to enable States to plan their funds in a better way it is advised that all States should be informed about the process followed at the center in adequate detail.

Idle Funds: MS societies (Karnataka, Gujarat, UP) invest their idle funds in Fixed Deposits, whenever funds available are more than the projected expenses for the next month. This is not being done in Gujarat and Kerala. There is a need to standardize this practice and idle funds should be invested in all States (and in all districts) in Fixed Deposits of 46 / 60 / 90 days according to requirement of funds.

Community Contribution: The current accounting system does not report the contributions received from community which become available to the programme in any of the states. The budgeting also does not keep in mind resources that would be available from this source. This also contributes to budget surpluses currently observed across the States. Community contribution accounting would make the budgeting process more realistic.

Budget Reappropriation: The SPD has complete authority to reappropriate budgets. However, funds allocated for activity costs cannot be appropriated to management costs but the opposite is possible and valid. DPCs have to send the request to SPDs for a reappropriation. This practice should continue the way it is.

Legal requirements: Only one States is filing Income Tax Returns – Gujarat regularly. UP has applied for exemption from the competent authorities whereas the remaining are not fulfilling their legal obligations. Statutory audit of accounts is carried out for all the MS Societies.

Legally all the Societies should file Income Tax Returns. There is a lack of clarity with respect to this across the States. It is advised to comply with all requirements or seek exemptions from doing so as the respective MS societies may choose. This process should be coordinated and facilitated by the Center.

Reporting to RNE from GOI: Annual statements received by RNE from GOI reflect expenditure on MS program. The said expense is fully borne out of funds remitted by RNE towards the MS program. The National Office sends to RNE only that portion of the Audited accounts, which pertains to RNE funding.

Computerization: Given the large volume of data likely to be involved in planning, budgeting, monitoring, reporting and accounts processes it is recommended that these processes should be gradually computerized in a phased manner. The process of computerization should not create a parallel substructure within the organization but should be adopted by the existing management towards professional outputs. Such capacity building inputs could be an area for Technical Assistance in the next phase.

9. UTILIZATION OF FUNDS¹⁵

Table 2 provides an overview of utilization of funds by MS during the 1997-2002 phase of Program. RNE had committed a total of XXX for the 1997-2002 period.

Table 2: Utilization of Funds by Dutch Assisted MS Societies during 1997-2002 (Rupees in Lakhs)

Financial Year	Opening Balance	Funds received during year	Expenditure during year	Closing balance (31st March)
1997-98	328	359	468	224
1998-99	224	488	581	198
1999-00	198	562	578	161
2000-01	161	859	689	349
2001-02*	349	440	—	—

* 2001-02 – Status as on Date

¹⁵ The figures presented in this section appear to be incorrect. Correct figures have been requested and would be updated as and when they arrive. Virat , where are the correct figures ???

MS has utilized a total of INR 100 of this committed amount till 31-12-2001. There is still INR 100 left of the original commitment by RNE after deducting this utilization.

Table 3 provides an analysis of year wise expenditures against the original estimates in 1997-2002 budget.

Table 3: Actual versus Budgets for the 1997-2002 period

Financial Year	Actual Expenditure	Budget	Actual Expenditure as a ratio of Budget
1997-98	468	570	82%
1998-99	581	639	91%
1999-00	578	691	84%
2000-01	689	796	87%
2001-02*		804	

It is observed that expenditures have been somewhat lower than the annual budgets during the 1997-2002 period. The Expenditure to Budget ratio has ranged between 91% to 82%. Some of this may be attributed to the fact that expansion to new districts was in fewer districts than what was originally planned. Another reason could be the delay in receiving funds for planned activities, which at times were stalled due to non availability of funds at that juncture.

D. THE NEXT PHASE

1. Rationale for A New Phase

Mahila Samakhya programme at this point is at a critical juncture, given the new policy initiatives planned for the Tenth Plan period, with the new programme for Women and Girls' Education and Education for All. The programme is faced with the challenge to consolidate its gains related to the empowerment of women and create and strengthen institutional frameworks for the same, at the same time enhancing its influence and role in the engendering of educational agenda at the national level.

The Mahila Samakhya programme has been successful in establishing the linkages between educational processes and women's empowerment in the areas under RNE project assistance. It has adequately demonstrated the means to empower women through processes of education and organization and stands on its own achievements as an alternative paradigm. This is manifested in various forms and degrees across the states, and points to the diversity that has been allowed to flourish through a flexible people based approach. Recognition has come in various ways, reflected in the expectations articulated by different groups that the mission interacted with, the demands from external sources that the programme has responded to as a resource group as well as, more significantly, in the confident faces and voices of the women we met. **The expansion of institutional spaces that women have created for themselves: Sanghas at the village levels, the Cluster forums and Federations, the Nari Adalats provide agency to grassroots women to pursue learning and gain empowerment while offering the potential to engender mainstream structures, informed by their own experiences.** Women's articulation of issues, analysis of concerns and

commitment to democratic processes was in evidence and offers the potential to bring about sustainable processes for social change leading to gender equality and good governance provided these are adequately supported and up-scaled. The next phase of the programme should focus on establishing and demonstrating mainstreaming strategies within the framework of the programme's core values and principles- the "non negotiables".

The programme has also made some headway in the scope of its activities for girls and in the creation of a demand and environment for education that is meaningful for the rural poor. It has contributed significantly to the *achievement of developmental goals* in the areas where it is located, compelling other programmes and agencies including the State to acknowledge and seek learning of its qualitative processes and perspectives. **Demands are being made on the programme to provide these inputs and to undertake a larger role in practically all the areas of its operation, and the programme has also gained the strength to negotiate these relationships in most areas.** It is therefore necessary that the programme receive support to intensify its efforts in its current area, to expand to new areas and to explore *innovative strategies* to expand its outreach in the next phase.

In the midst of a myriad of programmes that are working with a focus on women, MS serves to **demonstrate a women centred approach to planning and development.** It also presents a programme that nurtures organizational spaces for women, based on their *priorities* and the advocacy of women's interests in the larger paradigm of development. Through strengthened linkages with other grassroots formations of women, it could seek to strengthen and gain strength to emerge as a movement for women's empowerment and equality at grassroots level. **It has demonstrated its potential to facilitate transformatory processes for social change** in family, community and society in general-through its engagement in various campaigns and issues. As evinced by the quality of outcomes it is inferred that a critical mass needs to be generated through greater *intensification* and support to such processes, to provide the means for educational processes that are empowering. This would enable women to bring about changes in their own lives and in their communities and impact on the mainstream institutional framework in a more significant way.

MS programmes in the Dutch assisted states have provided a space for critical reflection and for women to arrive at an alternative framework for understanding and engaging with development and social change. **It has gradually sought to challenge gender and class/caste biased paradigms and, in seeking alternative frameworks poses challenges to the mainstream structures.** Through the creation of space for innovation and creativity to address gender and caste/class relations, it presents an opportunity that needs to be strengthened and shared in greater measure. The programme has also initiated work with success in this initial phase into the tribal areas of Kerala and Andhra Pradesh and has the potential of evolving a sound programme strategy.

A positive indicator of recognition at the National level is the proposal for provision of Rs 120 crores under a separate budget line in the 10th plan period for the MS programme. MS has been identified as a separate National programme with a unique approach, at a time when all programmes of the Department were being dovetailed under the umbrella of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme for Education for All.

2. Recommended Strategy for Mahila Samakhya in the Next Phase- 10th Plan Period

MS is currently at a crossroads, confronted by developments that pose challenges as well as opportunities for the programme:

Internally:

- The Sanghas have emerged strong and self reliant especially in the old districts, capable of forming new Sanghas and forging their own forums in the form of the Federations, and taking on issues and negotiating with institutions of authority independently. In the new districts however this process needs to be intensified, with renewed energy drawing upon the women's organizations and external resource persons in greater measure. Gujarat would specifically need to focus on strengthening Sanghas and facilitating the emergence of Sanghas as agencies for social change remains poor.
- The processes that women in Sanghas initiate also influence the processes in the newer districts and **there is much potential for peer learning through exchanges**, with minimal support from the DIU and the SPO.
- Sanghas and Sahayoginis/ Karyakarthis/Sevanis are currently engaged in evolving new approaches that encompass groups of varied origin and affiliation and focus into their purview, to build a common ground swell towards the achievement of women's equality in AP and Kerala. This strategy may well provide the multiplier in numbers but is faced with the inadequacies of earlier initiatives that have left the groups in a somewhat mixed state of autonomy, and with the onerous task of addressing larger issues of social change to address strategic gender interests.
- Much work needs to be done with regard to **strengthening Federations**, which are at a nascent stage and of varying quality in their levels of mobilization and intensity of commitment to action. This requires a different kind of input from those that were necessary in the mobilization stage, for which competencies of Sahayoginis?Karyakarthis / Sevanis and RPs and Sangha leadership will need to be enhanced.
- The Mission notes the commendable initiatives to establish a strong programme of Nari Adalat and to help in the establishment of federations as **alternative institutional frameworks** created within the programme. These will require substantive and resource support for some time to come to establish their viability. They will also require **facilitation towards enhancing their financial sustainability** while addressing the issue of autonomy.
- Programme **implementation and geographical outreach needs urgent attention**, as the pattern of growth has been spread without **adequate densification for tangible impact** on the socio-economic and cultural environment in most areas. Since MS is not a service delivery model, the impact of its processes can best be demonstrated through intensive coverage and mobilization of a critical number of women
- The experience of the Varanasi society (Gramras) initiated by the Sahyoginis, the Banda group starting a separate NGO (Vanangana) and the disillusionment of the Baroda group of Sahayoginis point to the need to ensure programme consolidation prior to initiation of withdrawal processes, to be sustainable. The mission recommends that Federations be provided adequate support to become viable in raising resources for their activities and negotiating for their needs. This can be done through **establishment of district resource teams** that provide guidance to the Federations.
- Similarly the processes that have been set in motion through the programme in the 2 states not included for RNE concentration- **UP and Karnataka**- are at a critical juncture. They would require **continued support to emerge as a resource agency** based on the

learning from the programme, while the programme implementation per se can be dealt with by GOI and State governments through provisions made for the 10th Plan Period.

The linkages of the MS programme to the Women's Movement and other development agencies has dwindled in this phase and needs to be pursued concertedly, to facilitate growth of the movement within the programme. **Networking and sharing of experiences** with other organizations and forums of women within the states and across provide learning that will enrich processes and consolidate strengths. It will also serve to build conceptual clarity or understanding of the key principles of the Programme amongst staff that is somewhat uneven across districts and states.

Externally:

- The programme has received recognition at district levels for its contribution in **mobilization and awareness building** to stop gender discriminatory practices and changes in social attitudes and by building alternative justice systems in the Nari Adalats. This recognition has however led to increasing demands being made on the MS staff and Sanghas to function in the capacity of mobilizers and motivators towards achievement of developmental goals of the government, without consideration of the perspective these present.
- MS as a process oriented need based programme that has provided the space for development to follow the pace of women's progress is **confronted with market driven models of development** such as Swa Shakti, DPIIP and Kudumbashree to address poverty. These programmes address income poverty, but do not incorporate the understanding of essential poverty of which women are the primary victims and which MS processes are seeking to address. Based on provisions of matching grant and subsidy, these programmes are likely to impact the development scenario in a significant manner due to their scale and the incentive of quick monetary returns, but with no processes to ensure the sustainable benefits to women in other spheres of their existence.
- **Educational initiatives are snowballing towards the achievement of EFA goals-access, retention and quality-** related to primary education in the country, within which women's roles are viewed primarily as mobilizers for girls' education. **Women's education would take a back seat in such a scenario, unless gains from the process are not adequately demonstrated.**

The programme would therefore need to move towards:

- **Consolidation** in existing blocks, covering new villages and including more women to develop a critical mass in these areas. This could be through the programme or through the initiatives of old Sanghas and federations as well as through outreach to existing Sanghas and groups of varied denomination, being conscious of the priority to address social empowerment agenda.
- **Expansion** of area beyond the present districts in the 3 concentration states, by forming its own Sanghas as a nucleus for its activities and towards the formation of Village Sanghas and cluster Sanghas where there is a saturation of groups already.
- **Diversification** of its roles from an implementation organization to a resource agency, informing the formulation and implementation of educational programmes and policy, and initiatives in various sectors.

3. Organization Structure And Programme Initiatives

The New Phase marks an enhanced role for the programme in the states and at the national level, and a shift to dual roles as **implementing and resource organization** for education for women's equality for the period 2002-2007. This process of resource support to other organizations should be determined by the priority needs of the programme in areas of direct implementation. In Gujarat however the pace should be determined by the programme's ability to strengthen its perspective and enhance qualitative aspects of its work within a limited time frame.

At the National level:

The proposals for the 10th Plan period provide **significant opportunities for the Mahila Samakhya to play a strategic role in building competencies and facilitating adoption of gender sensitive processes of development.** The MS Programme can provide vital inputs towards engendered planning and programming based on its experiences especially in the Dutch assisted states. This provides opportunities for value addition for MS and other initiatives seeking to address/integrate women's concerns in the states of RNE priority and concentration. The Mission Team is of the opinion that the Netherlands Government should consider support for the National Level Programme of Mahila Samakhya and to the National Resource Centre for Women and Girls Education proposed in the 10th Plan period. This would enable the formulation of National level strategies and initiatives based on the experiences of the Dutch assisted programme. It would also provide an opportunity for the MS programme to influence the integration of gender in other programmes of the Department of Education and for women's empowerment in the country.

The National Resource Centre for Women proposed in the 10th Plan period is envisaged as an autonomous organization located possibly in a National University/Institution. It should have a lean and autonomous institutional structure, and should draw upon the human resources and experiences of the MS at the state levels as well as the NRG to meet its goals. While its scope will include but be larger than the MS programme, it could be envisaged to play a role in developing and overseeing policy interventions towards gender equality, drawing upon and strengthening the State and District Resource Centres and the Federations of grassroots women. The National Resource Centre could facilitate the exchange of experiences and learning across the Dutch Assisted and other MS states, extending the current identity of the Dutch Assisted programme to a national one. It could facilitate the generation of new knowledge, to strengthen the programme at the grassroots level as well as to inform MS in other states and other efforts – especially education - to address gender equality within (and outside) the country.

The Mission further recommends that the **National Consultants/ Resource Persons are reinstated with immediate effect, the NRG group is revitalized** with regular meetings and focus on the substantive issues and direction of the programme towards achievement of programme goals. Activists and development workers experienced in working with disadvantaged groups in society through holistic approaches need to be brought within the NRG. The NRG can become advisory to the National Resource Centre in due course of time, to ensure the transference of learning and to root the NRC in the experiences and expertise generated by the MS.

The varying levels of development and strength of the programme indicate requirements for different kinds of support from the NRG and the National office.

- Kerala as a new MS state requires support for streamlining the activities while maintaining its focus on the primacy of strengthening of group processes and perspectives and establishing forums of solidarity with the WERs.
- In **Gujarat the programme requires urgent attention** to strengthen the Sanghas and build capacities and perspectives of functionaries of the programme and leaders of Sanghas. Consolidation of the programme based on a planned strategy is a prerequisite for any new initiatives to be undertaken.
- In Andhra Pradesh the programme has grown spatially and spirally, incorporating new strategies and institutional forms as it has evolved, but would **require support to strengthen its educational interventions as well as its linkages with the Womens Movement.**
- The developments in the old districts of AP, Kamataka and some districts of UP warrant greater **strategic support in formulation of strategies with Federations** and issue-based inputs for Sangha and Federation leadership. In other areas however the support requirement will continue to remain one of programme strengthening.
- The National Office should consider the areas where the programme has emerged as a strong voice for women as its demonstration areas. It should **encourage greater exchanges** with these areas, as well as involve these districts as partners and a **resource base for the NRC**, and in the formulation of **strategies for linkages with other educational programmes** of the GOI and the states such as the CE programme.

The most urgent requirement is that of **revisions in the remuneration to the programme functionaries based on the current situation in the development sector and taking into account the fact that no such revisions have been made in the last 5 years. In the view of the mission an increase of <= 100% is warranted, with provisions for future annual increases and taking into account inflationary trends. This should be done without further delay (from the commencement of the 10th Plan Period) to maintain the pace and ensure the gains from the programme. These changes would also need to be incorporated into a revised edition of the Green Book¹⁶, ensuring that the key principles and non-negotiables are adhered to.**

At the State level

The programme stands to benefit from the present positioning of being an autonomous agency with direct linkages to the National Government, with the Principal Secretary of the Department of Education as the Chairperson in the States. This provides functional autonomy, that is established with national office support, and has enabled the programme in the states to negotiate a functional relationship with various departments and agencies of the State governments without compromising on the basic principles of the MS. It does not limit the scope of the programme to a sectoral straitjacket and enables it to collaborate with multiple agencies to respond to the learning and empowerment needs of women. A strong team at the state office, supported by the requisite expertise from the Centre ensures an effective form of functioning based on the needs of women as they emerge. At this juncture these needs have necessitated a two pronged response from the State offices –

a) As the Implementers, the State programmes would need to address:

- Strategies focussing on issue based action with larger number of women through existing groups and with new groups at village and cluster level in new areas for expansion.

¹⁶ ibid

- Partnerships with larger programmes such as the DPIP, DPEP, Swa Shakti, as a training input for their teams on gender issues in the first instance, and then through negotiated partnerships towards the achievement of holistic goals of empowerment. These partnerships may in the long run be viewed as efforts to influence the processes of these programmes from within
- Greater involvement with women's and girls education through expansion of MSKs, enhanced outreach, and more intensive processes of teachers training, materials development therein. Enhancement of quality of teaching learning processes, creating opportunities for greater outreach to women and systematic structuring of the ALCs and the MSK as spaces for women's education are demands that need to be addressed. These efforts should aim to demonstrate viable models for the education of women and girls as well as facilitate the development of appropriate curriculum and materials. Linkages with the existing bridge programme and the innovative education scheme may be explored towards this end, with adaptations made where required, to retain the commitment to the key principles of the programme
- Linkages with women's groups in the states and at the regional level, to gain and exchange learning based on the priorities of the programme. Linkages with NGOs and organizations would also benefit to strengthen strategies.
- Facilitation of the federative processes and provision of backstopping support to the Federations.

b) As A Resource Agency

At State level MS experiences can be shared to enhance the learning of other organizations and people's efforts towards women's empowerment. For this State Gender Resource Centres have been visualized, for which Andhra Pradesh has taken the lead while Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka have also initiated preparations. These Centres will help programmes to mainstream gender issues in various sectors of development. They will also develop rollback and outreach strategies for the programme, and facilitate the emergence of women centred block level institutions for good governance and social justice, while exploring strategies for sustainability of such institutions. MS will also be able to assist Sanghas to realize their objectives through intensive capacity building inputs for socio-cultural, political, economic and physical autonomy and stronger links and alliances with the Women's Movement.

• State Gender Resource Centre

The establishment of the State Gender Resource Centre is envisaged to provide resource support, capacity building, action research, and advocacy towards women's education and equality. The State Gender Resource Center could:

- cater to the needs and demands of the other programmes for perspective and capacity development on gender and women's issues, with specific sectoral inputs, cadre building towards women's empowerment etc
- upscale the experiences as an out reach strategy for expansion of MS philosophy.
- initiate/undertake projects which are in line with MS programme
- Take up action research projects to validate MS experiences.
- Lobby and advocate for policy interventions for women and development issues.

The Resource Centre should have a formal identity with autonomy to function under the banner of MS. It could receive funds from ministries, departments and autonomous bodies of the government (State Government and GOI) and from donor agencies to implement

programmes and projects to further the aims and objectives of MS. The SGRCs should enter into contracts with clarity and specificity about the role of and expectations from it on condition that it does not adversely affect the work of MS.

By establishing a Resource Centre MS would provide technical support to government agencies, NGOs and others, to strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment processes in their ongoing initiatives, as well as to strengthen gender perspectives of educational interventions.

Networking and collaborative efforts of the programme with the Women's Movement and with other agencies and people's forums towards common goals of women's equality and social justice could also be facilitated by the SGRC. It could also provide support to the District Resource Centres, involving those resources necessary to emerge into resource agencies capable of support to the federations as well as to other programmes and departments as the need arises. It could also cater to the demands from the state and other agencies to undertake policy and capacity development activities with other organizations and undertake sectoral database development on gender issues in collaboration with key sectors.

In order to strengthen the programme support components and address specific needs for documentation, capacity development and management support, some options like having short term placements from universities, women's studies centres and institutes at the state level as well as collaborations with women's groups and NGOs may be explored. Existing team members with good skills and competencies should be given opportunities for working at the state level for specific assignments, in order to enable them to broaden perspectives and to move into new roles. Staff members could be extended as guest faculty to institutions for greater outreach of MS philosophy. **The entire orientation of the programme would need to shift from hands on implementation to facilitation and planning, management support and backstopping resource development, action research and capacity building.**

The relationship of the SGRC with the proposed NRCW is envisaged as a partnership and collaboration. In the meantime, the NRG (with renewed zeal and enhanced competencies) and national (to be immediately appointed) and state resource persons have critical roles to play in strengthening the programme and evolving a strategic plan for the next phase for each state and for the programme as a whole.

c) At the district level the programme would:

- Facilitate the formation of district resource teams/centres to provide the inputs for grassroots level organizations of women to emerge, to provide backup support in the form of organization development and management inputs etc till such time that these tasks are gradually managed by the women themselves
- Provide issue based and management inputs towards perspective and capacity development for Sanghas and federations, as well as linkages with opportunities towards viability and outreach of Federations at least in the short run

The financial and budgetary implications incorporated in the new budgetary framework as part of this main general report have been worked out at the State and National level to facilitate the new dimensions of the Programme.

With the envisaged new structure focussing on the State and District level Resource Centres, learning and capacity building needs of the functionaries and the Sanghas /federations, human resource development and additional staff requirement become a priority. The number of activities within MS would increase as well as demands from organizations and institutions would arise for gender focused inputs. More team members with the appropriate perspective and skills would be needed or else the present staff would be stretched. **The most immediate need however is to address the problem of low remuneration of staff, and to benchmark MS salaries at the level of other development programmes. This would solve the current problem of turnover, retention of old staff and recruitment. The staff is the core strength to the effective grounding of the programme, and its motivation levels directly impinge on the qualitative aspects of the programme.** Immediate efforts to address these issues would enable the programme to work towards consolidation, expansion and diversification of its programme as envisaged above so that the programme goals can be achieved.

4. State Specific Strategies Recommended

A) In States of RNE Priority and Concentration

Andhra Pradesh

The mission recommends that:

- The programme be extended for densification to new groups in existing districts, in old and new blocks/mandals
- Strategic inputs be provided in 3-4 new districts in collaboration with other initiatives for women's development such as the DPIP to strengthen social and gender inputs and organization for women's empowerment in a phased manner.
- The expansion of MSKs at district and block level with enhanced outreach and turnover of larger number of girls, along with an agenda to cater to women's literacy needs.
- Systematic inputs to strengthen the perspective of the educational component for teacher training and curriculum development, catering to the needs of girls and women. Building competencies among young girls and woman (possibly MSK passouts) to provide the learning inputs to women and other girls in the village, to overcome the constraints experienced presently by the (male) BMK teachers
- Facilitation of the Federations as they emerge in the seven districts and support to District Resource Centers, based on the emergence of women's Federations, to provide issue-based support to them and to a larger clientele.
- Strengthening of the State Gender Resource Centre, already been approved by the Executive Committee, through perspective building and technical competency development especially in policy research and documentation as well as advocacy.
- Strengthening of linkages with the women's movement at the programme level as well as with the Federations as grassroots women's organizations.
- Increased opportunities for learning exchanges and exposure for women and staff between new and old district districts to enhance transfer of experiences and networking between districts. Similarly more opportunities for exposure to other related programmes and grassroot organizations are required.
-

Gujarat

While commendable initiatives to establish a strong programme of Nari Adalat have been taken, and MS has facilitated the interface with Panchayati Raj in various places, progress remains uneven and there remain **areas of concern** relating to the programme:

- After twelve years of implementation, evidence of the empowerment of women at the Sangha level even in older districts is uneven.
- There is insufficient conceptual clarity & understanding of the key principles of the programme amongst the project staff, and there is little visible effort being made to address this issue.

The **consolidation of the programme needs to take place in Gujarat** before the next phase is planned. The mission was given to understand that a state level visioning workshop was planned. In its meeting with the MHRD, DOE and the RNE in December 2001, the Mission team had already recommended that a team, with adequate representation of the NRG, be assigned the additional task of formulating a Plan of Action with the team in Gujarat and the National Project Office to strengthen the programme to meet its objectives within a three-month period. The team should further track the progress in operationalizing the Plan of Action and report on its progress and achievement by December 2002, at which point consideration may be given to withdrawal of support to dysfunctional districts. A winding up may then be suggested providing two years NGO grant in aid funding after which Dutch support for the district is either terminated or functions on its own without the MS support.

Kerala

The programme in Kerala is recent and is implemented in two blocks of two districts;

- **Rapid expansion** is warranted in the two districts where the programme is already operating in the next year itself with greater focus on strengthening of Sanghas and Cluster/Vanitha Sabhas
- **Greater support is required from the National Office** for the State programme, to maintain its focus in the context of the guiding principles.
- Based on the strengthening of the above, expansion would be warranted to two additional districts in the subsequent years, including a tribal district, where women's literacy and development indicators are low.
- The programme needs to work in a more focused way to **strengthen alliances with women members of Panchyats** to create a stronger constituency of women, as well as to address the incorporation of gender in the decentralized planning process. Strategies to strengthen the alliances between Sangha women and the WERs would facilitate the emergence of a common forum for solidarity and collaboration.
- In a 2–3 years the programme can develop a Resource Center for Women. The process of providing gender inputs to other organizations/programmes such as Kudumbshree and the State Water and Sanitation Mission could begin even earlier, provided that priority is given to strengthen programme perspectives and processes in the area of operation.
- The programme needs to develop **stronger links with networks** for women's empowerment in the region.

The programme also needs to consider appointment of additional Sahayoginis in each Panchayat, based on the population/number of Sanghas that Sevani form and coordinate, as the intensity of inputs from the Sevani determine the strength and quality of processes that emerge in the Sanghas in the long run. As the Sanghas progress, these Sevani could progress to new panchayats or new roles in the programme.

B) States Outside Areas of RNE Priority And Concentration

Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka

A process of consolidation needs to be supported focusing on the gains of the programme. The proposed State level Gender Resource Centres are needed to consolidate the learning of the programme and to inform the initiatives at the state and national levels through its linkages with the NRCW towards the integration of gender. It would also provide sustaining management, information and issue based support to the District Resource Centres and to the emerging Federations. These would need to be supported by the RNE as part of its withdrawal strategy from these states, while the programme implementation needs may be met by the GOI from its own or alternate resources.

The District Resource Centres would require support in order to continue to provide issue-based inputs to the emerging Federations in the districts, and to render assistance to other CBOs/NGOs on women's issues. They would also support the networking and linking of Federations with other developmental initiatives in the region. With support from RNE to the national programme and to the NRCW these states would also be linked to these institutional initiatives and can benefit from the programmes planned therein.

A part of Uttar Pradesh recently became an independent state:Uttaranchal. The MS programme is running in 3 districts- Tehri Garhwal, Pauri and Nainital- of which Tehri is the oldest single district funded by the Government of Netherlands. Since the district units are implementing the programme, and Sahayoginis are functioning in the field, the involvement of the SPO in UP should urgently be taken over by an independent unit in the new state of Uttaranchal. This programme should also be linked to the National level initiatives and provided support thereof, as well as provided support for networking and learning exchanges, and capacity development of staff to strengthen the programme in the new state.

Future Budget

Financial allocation for Mahila Samakhya has been made to the amount of Rs 120 crore for the 5 year period by the GOI in the 10th Five Year Plan and GOI is committed to bridge gaps, if any that arise due to withdrawal of external funding. Alternative resources are yet to be determined, and the option of seeking alternate external resources may also be explored.

The task assigned to this Mission was to make financial estimates limited to three concentration states of Gujarat, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. However, it is felt that the envisaged NRCW offers avenues for up-scaling the learning from the RNE supported programme, these should be incorporated. **Hence, apart from supporting the programme in the three concentration states for the next phase over a period of 5 years, the RNE should consider support to this national initiative as well as to the consolidation efforts in Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh, as its gradual phase out from these states. This support proposed in the form of State Resource Centers and District Resource Centres is a critical step towards autonomous women's institutions committed to the goals of Mahila Samakhya and capable of facilitating a larger process within these states.**

The budget for the 10th Plan Period cannot be accurately estimated currently as program processes and structures for the future are under revision. These have not been defined exactly as yet. The budget that has been formulated here is basically a broad indicator of total finances

hat might be required. A more detailed activity wise budget would require much more inputs from the various States, and a clearer conceptualization of the organizational arrangements, which is beyond the purview of this Mission. However, for the future budget it is recommended that previous budget be adjusted for additional factors like:

- i) proposed salary increase ($\leq 100\%$) for all levels
- ii) inflation (5% per annum, 2002 onwards);
- iii) additional resources for the new structures that are proposed (National, State, District Resource Centers, and
- iv) Additional resources required for new processes like creation of Federations.

Proposed salary increases of 100% are in view of the fact that the present salaries have been continuing from 1997 and are much below other such programmes and projects in the country. The high turn-over of staff does affect the quality and processes of the programme, besides requiring capacity building investments too. This increase would also in a sense reward the existing staff who do not have other incentives and benefits apart from PF. Salary enhancement is imperative not only to maintain the morale of the functionaries, and as a right given the nature and quantum of work they perform. It is also necessary for the programme's image as giving fair recognition and acknowledgement of women's contributions. It would also enable the programme to attract professionally competent persons with adequate experience. This will also cut short requirements for on the job learning and long capacity building inputs, thereby accelerating the pace of the programme qualitatively. The agenda for Women's empowerment that the programme espouses have to give due consideration to the empowerment and well being of the women functionaries who are the backbone of the programme. Low honoraria have actually dis-empowered those women who work for other's empowerment. Their voices need to be heard and their issues addressed of fair and just remuneration.

The first three provisions for adjustments are concrete and can be incorporated in devising the budget for the next phase, however during the field visits it was felt that States do not have accurate information on the financial requirements and organizational viability of federations as yet. Thus, whereas this Mission does recognize that some form of support would be required for Federations it is important that this support is only extended after following criteria are met by states:

- Concrete plan of action that spells out Federations' agenda; and
- Plan for long term sustainability of these federations. Support should only be provided for a limited period after which they should be able to continue to function and raise their own resources. It is recommended that MS support to federations should be provided for an initial period of three years.

Estimates for NRC, SRC and DRCs are based on interactions and discussions with SPD, NPD and NRG members. No provision for inflation has been made in their budget as it is expected they would be able to meet the deficits due to inflation out of other self-generated revenues. These Centers would not only provide service to the program internally but would also provide professional technical assistance and consultancy services to other programs for a fee. From a long-term perspective all these resource centers can become more self-sufficient either through charging fees for assignments or accessing funds (donations and grants) from sources other than GOI.

Table 4 provides an overview of Financial Estimates in the period 2002-2007. Details of these workings can be found in Appendix VI.

Table 4: Overview of Financial Estimates 2002-2007

		Rs. in Lakhs
S.No.	Particulars	Total
I	National Level	
	i) Management Cost	111.81
	ii) Programme Activities	184.77
	(A) Total	296.58
II	National Resource Center	
	i) Management Cost	252.32
	ii) Programme Activities	145.05
	(B) Total	397.37
III	Federation Support Fund (for three states)	93.60
IV	State Level	
	i) Management Cost	143.23
	ii) Programme Activities	110.88
	Total for one state	254.11
	(C) Total (for three States)	762.32
V	State Resource Center	
	i) Management Cost	615.84
	ii) Programme Activities	301.85
	(D) Total (for five States)	917.70
VI	District Level	
	1 For on-going districts	
	i) Management Cost	1665.85
	ii) Programme Activities	1624.21
	(E) Total	3290.06
VII	New Districts	
	i) Management Cost	29.12
	ii) Programme Activities	47.66
	(F) Total	76.78
	Grand Total (A+B+C+D+E+F)	5834.40

* Allocations would also need to be made for vehicles that have degenerated and have to be replaced in the districts/state offices.

Appendix I: Reporting Process in MS

The reports that are produced in the organization at each level are described in brief in this Appendix. These reports have a more or less similar format and frequency across districts within a State.

- Sahayoginis/Karyakartas prepare daily reports, that contain an account of the activities that they complete during the day. These reports are submitted to JRPs/RPs on a monthly basis. JRPs/RPs read these report and provide comments to Sahayoginis so that they can improve upon their work.
- JRPs/RPs also maintain a daily report, which she submits to DPC at the end of month. These reports contain information about the happenings of each day. DPC goes through these reports and provide feedback to RPs about her work in the monthly review meeting.
- DPCs submit a quarterly progress report about the district's performance to SPO. This report contains a snapshot of district's position on date as well as description of activities that were performed during the last three months.
- DPCs send a monthly expense statement, which contains information about all the expenses incurred during the month to the State Office.
- All MS Societies have a system of documenting each and every event that is organized or participated in. These events can be workshops, exposure visits, visits by outsiders, melas, camps etc. Reports that explain whatever transpired on these accounts are diligently maintained.
- MS Societies also produce documents relating to their substantive area. Whenever a ground level process, which is innovative or has been proved to be extremely successful and popular is identified and documented for wider use.
- Besides reports, minutes of meeting and Action Plans of the District are also sent by DPC to SPD.

MS Societies diligently monitor the activities performed by their functionaries and the inputs that have gone into these activities. These are adequately reflected in the current reporting system. The Center receives audited/unaudited quarterly and audited annual financial statements from the States. It also receives quarterly progress reports, six monthly statistical reports and annual progress reports. There are a few parameters, that are commonly reported across all states and remaining details are qualitative / descriptive in nature. There have been isolated attempts of orienting reporting towards outputs.

RNE receives Annual Reports and audited annual accounts.

Appendix II: Accounting System followed in MS Societies

In MS Societies following books of accounts are generally maintained:

- Cash Book;
- General Ledger;
- Journal Voucher Register;
- Asset Register & Inventory register of consumables
- Usually separate books of accounts are maintained whenever an external funded project is taken up.
- Expenses & income are recorded on accrual basis and a double entry system is followed.
- All vouchers are properly receipted and revenue stamp is affixed for any cash payment of Rs.500/- and above.
- Depreciation is charged on the assets as per the Income Tax Act, 1961.

Appendix III: Purchase Process

This Appendix presents key points of the purchase process followed in almost all the MS Societies with minor variations.

- All purchases below Rs. 500.00 per item may be made directly from the market after making simple verbal inquiries regarding prices and quality.
- All purchases involving amounts above Rs 500 but below Rs. 50,000 (this limit varies from State to State depending upon what their EC has approved) may be made from the market after receiving sealed quotations from dealers/shops or may be purchased from any of the State or Central Government Corporations, handicraft boards, khadi and village industries etc. without any other quotations being taken as per procedures of DRDAs. In case the lowest quotation is not accepted, the reasons for deviation should be recorded in writing before placing the order. The purchases are made upon the approval of purchase committees.
- Purchase of items involving more than Rs. 50,000.00 may be made either in accordance with a rate contract of the State or Central Government or after inviting open tenders. In case of vehicles, it may be purchased from Government authorized dealer.
- Expenditure limits for various employees have been set up and these vary from State to State. Splitting of items of purchase is not permitted for the exercise of these delegated powers.
- There are sub-committees at state and district level for deciding the unit costs of activities and related expenditures, that review the rates and processes and provide recommendations for maintaining expenditure limits.

Appendix IV: Alternative Purchase Process

This Appendix presents an alternative purchase process which is simpler compared to the existing process being followed. MS Societies can either use this or design their own taking help from this.

Whenever a purchase has to be made following step process should be followed:

- SPD appoints any one functionary to survey the market and procure three quotations from reputed shops. She should then make a detailed report about her recommendations after discussion with the SPD.
- This note along with all the quotations and analysis of the same should then be handed over to the Accounts Officer who should through other sources confirm whether all the prices mentioned in the quotations are appropriate or not.
- After this the same note, along with the process followed for verification and findings of the Accountant should be put in front of the SPD for approval.
- After the approval of the SPD, there should be a formal purchase order placed with the selected dealer in writing, detailing all the terms and conditions agreed upon between the dealer and MS Society. On the basis of the above purchase order payments to the dealer should be released.

Appendix V: Funds Flow

This appendix explains in brief the process that is followed in transferring funds from Center to States and then onwards to Districts.

The flow of funds from Center to State follows following steps:

- After Center receives 'request for funds' it forwards it to the Ministry of Finance (MOF). In certain cases MOF may have queries which are answered either by Center or State depending upon whom it has been addressed to and who has an explanation.
- After the Financial Advisor clears the proposal, these papers go to the Internal Finance – 1(IF-1) division in the MOF.
- The IF- 1 certifies that the funds are available. After this the approval goes to Payments and Accounts Office (PAO) who formally sends instruction to the bank for preparation of a demand draft in favor of the respective MS Societies.
- This draft is then released either by Registered Letter or Speed Post to the respective States. The whole process takes about 2 months.

The flow of funds from State to District are along the following steps:

- As soon as funds are received at the State Office most of the said amount is transferred to Term Deposits of duration of 46,60 & 90 days in lots of Rs.50,000/- each, based on the requirement.
- Amounts are released in advance by the State Office to District Implementation Unit. Every quarter the District Offices send in a request of funds to the State Office along with their proposed expenditure in the coming quarter.
- State Office verifies request with that district's past expenditure statements and plan for future.
- State Office then releases funds based on balance available with district office and as and when funds become available from Center.

FINANCIAL ESTIMATES
An Overview

Rs. in Lakhs

S.No.	Particulars	Total
I	National Level	
	i) Management Cost	111.81
	ii) Programme Activities	184.77
	(A) Total	296.58
II	National Resource Center	
	i) Management Cost	229.29
	ii) Programme Activities	131.25
	(B) Total	360.54
III	Federation Support Fund	93.60
IV	State Level	
	i) Management Cost	143.23
	ii) Programme Activities	110.88
	Total for one state	254.11
	(C) Total (for three states)	762.32
V	State Resource Center	
	i) Management Cost	591.60
	ii) Programme Activities	287.25
	(D) Total	878.85
VI	District Level	
	1 For on-going districts	
	i) Management Cost	1665.85
	ii) Programme Activities	1624.21
	(E) Total	3290.06
VII	New Districts	
	i) Management Cost	29.12
	ii) Programme Activities	47.66
	(F) Total	76.78
Grand Total		5758.72

Phasing of District Resource Centers

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	Total
Andhra		2	5	7	9	
Gujarat		2	4	6	8	
Kerala				2	2	
All States		4	9	13	17	
Budget	-	25.20	69.54	90.29	123.98	299.01

Phasing of Federations

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	Total
No. of Districts		4	9	13	13	
Budget	0	9.6	21.6	31.2	31.2	93.6

Federation Formation process coincides with formation of DRCs

Support to Federations is Proposed for three years after which they should be self sustaining.

Support for 1 district has been taken @ Rs. 60,000 per federation per annum for four federations in a district

Phasing of New Districts**Management Cost**

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	Total
Andhra		2				
Gujarat			2			
Kerala	2	2				
All States	2	4	2	0	0	
Budget	6.93	14.55	7.64	-	-	29.12

Program Cost

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	Total
Andhra		2				
Gujarat			2			
Kerala	2	2				
All States	2	4	2	0	0	
Budget	11.34	23.81	12.50	-	-	47.66

Phasing of Old Districts**Management Cost**

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	Total
Andhra	8	10	10	10	10	
Gujarat	7	7	9	9	9	
Kerala	2	4	4	4	4	
All States	17	21	23	23	23	-
Budget	238.00	308.70	355.01	372.76	391.39	1,665.86

Program Cost

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	Total
Andhra	8	10	10	10	10	
Gujarat	7	7	9	9	9	
Kerala	2	4	4	4	4	
All States	17	21	23	23	23	-
Budget	232.05	300.98	346.13	363.44	381.61	1,624.21

Yearly Cost Estimates for SRCs

Total Cost

State	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	Total 2002- 2007
UP	68	54	54			176.77
Karnataka	68	54	54			176.77
Andhra	68	54	54			176.77
Gujarat			68	54	54.13	176.77
Kerala			67.67	53.97	54.13	176.77
All States	203.01	161.92	297.72	107.96	108.25	878.85

Management Cost

State	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	Total 2002- 2007
UP	49	35	35			118.32
Karnataka	49	35	35			118.32
Andhra	49	35	35			118.32
Gujarat			49	35	34.98	118.32
Kerala			48.52	34.82	34.98	118.32
All States	145.66	104.47	201.97	69.65	69.95	591.60

Program Cost

State	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	Total 2002- 2007
UP	19	19	19			67.45
Karnataka	19	19	19			67.45
Andhra	19	19	19			67.45
Gujarat			19	19	19.15	67.45
Kerala			19.15	19.15	19.15	67.45
All States	67.45	67.45	95.75	38.30	38.30	287.25

NATIONAL PROJECT OFFICE

Rs in Lakhs

Items of Expenditure	Posts	Annual Average Last Budget	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	Total 2002-2007	PM per person
MANAGEMENT COST									
Salaries									
) Programme Director	1	1.72	3.44	3.61	3.79	3.98	4.18	19.01	28667
) Consultants - 24 women months	2	1.92	3.84	4.03	4.23	4.45	4.67	21.22	16000
) Desk Officer	1	1	1.60	1.68	1.76	1.85	1.94	8.84	13333
) Assistant	1	0.7	1.12	1.18	1.23	1.30	1.36	6.19	9333
) Accounts Asstt	1	0.6	1.08	1.13	1.19	1.25	1.31	5.97	9000
) Typist	1	0.28	0.56	0.59	0.62	0.65	0.68	3.09	4667
) Stenographers	3	2.15	2.15	2.26	2.37	2.49	2.61	11.88	5972
i) LDC	1	0.48	0.77	0.81	0.85	0.89	0.93	4.24	6400
) Driver	1	0.48	0.48	0.50	0.53	0.56	0.58	2.65	4000
c) Peon	2	0.72	0.72	0.76	0.79	0.83	0.88	3.98	3000
		10.05	15.78	16.66	17.37	18.24	19.15	87.07	
Office Expenses									
i) Vehicle		2.25	2.87	-	-	-	-	2.87	
ii) Vehicle fuel & maintenance		1.35	1.72	1.81	1.90	1.99	2.09	9.52	
iii) Telephone, stationery		1	1.28	1.34	1.41	1.48	1.55	7.05	
v) Office Equipment (non-recurring)		0.5	0.64	0.67	0.70	0.74	0.78	3.53	
v) Contingencies		0.25	0.32	0.34	0.35	0.37	0.39	1.76	
		5.35	6.83	4.16	4.36	4.68	4.81	24.73	
Total Management Cost		15.4	22.58011	20.7002	21.73521	22.82197	23.96306	111.81	
PROGRAM COSTS									
Meetings & Workshops									
i) TA/DA		3.4	4.34	4.56	4.78	5.02	5.27	23.98	
ii) NRG meetings and workshops		1	1.28	1.34	1.41	1.48	1.55	7.05	
iii) Documentation and publication		0.6	0.77	0.80	0.84	0.89	0.93	4.23	
iv) Evaluation		0.4	0.51	0.54	0.56	0.59	0.62	2.82	
v) Fees & Honorarium		0.55	0.70	0.74	0.77	0.81	0.85	3.88	
vii) Journals & magazines		0.45	0.57	0.60	0.63	0.66	0.70	3.17	
		6.4	8.17	8.58	9.01	9.46	9.93	45.13	
Grants to NGOs & Institutions									
i) Studies & Research		4.8	6.13	6.43	6.75	7.09	7.45	33.85	
ii) Programme implementation in Non-MS states		15	19.14	20.10	21.11	22.16	23.27	105.78	
		19.8	25.27	26.53	27.86	29.25	30.72	139.63	
Total Program Cost		26.2	33.44	35.11	36.87	38.71	40.64	184.77	
Grand Total A+B		41.6	56.02	55.61	58.60	61.53	64.61	296.58	

Budget in case of following heads may be pre-utilized or carried forward but total expense under that head may not exceed Total for 2002-07

- 1 Office Equipment (non-recurring)
- 2 Documentation & Publication
- 3 Evaluation
- 4 Fees & Honorarium
- 5 Studies & Research

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

Rs in Lakhs

S.No.	Items of Expenditure	Frequ ency	Amount (p.m.)	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	Total 2002- 2007	PM per person
A	MANAGEMENT COSTS									
I	Salaries									
	i) Director	1	0.35	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.20	21.00	
	ii) Full Time Consultant	5	0.25	15.00	15.00	15.00	15.00	15.00	75.00	
	iii) Accounts and Admin Manager	1	0.15	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.80	9.00	
	iv) Program Assistant	1	0.10	1.20	1.20	1.20	1.20	1.20	6.00	
	v) Peon	1	0.04	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.48	2.40	
	vi) Driver	1	0.04	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.48	2.40	
				23.16	23.16	23.16	23.16	23.16	115.80	
II	TA/DA	6	0.05	3.60	3.60	3.60	3.60	3.60	18.00	0.60
III	Office Expenses									
	i) Communications	1	0.25	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	15.00	3.00
	ii) Printing & Publications	1	0.20	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	12.00	2.40
	iii) Rent, water, electricity, etc	1	0.30	3.60	3.60	3.60	3.60	3.60	18.00	3.60
	iv) Fuel and Maintenance	1	0.25	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	15.00	3.00
	v) General maintenance (equip, etc)	1	0.20	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	12.00	2.40
	vi) Stationery	1	0.20	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	12.00	2.40
	vii) Miscellaneous	1	0.02	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.25	0.25
	viii) Non Recurring Expense								-	-
	Car/Jeep	1	6.50	6.50					6.50	78.00
	Computers	6	0.60	3.60					3.60	7.20
	Fax Machine	1	0.10	0.10					0.10	1.20
	Telephone Connection	2	0.02	0.04	-	-	-	-	0.04	0.24
				27.29	17.05	17.05	17.05	17.05	95.49	
	Total Management Cost			54.05	43.81	43.81	43.81	43.81	228.29	
B.	PROGRAM COSTS									
IV	Meetings & Workshops									
	Meetings/Seminars/Workshops			3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	15.00	
	Training and Capacity Development			5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	25.00	
				8.00	8.00	8.00	8.00	8.00	40.00	
V	Research and Advocacy									
	Research and Advocacy			5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	25.00	-
	Consultants Honoraria (part time)	2	0.02	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	30.00	0.18
	Database & Information			3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	15.00	-
	Fellowships			4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	20.00	-
				18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	90.00	-
VI	Contingencies			0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	1.25	-
	Total Programme Cost			28.25	26.25	26.25	26.25	26.25	131.25	
	Grand Total A+B			80.30	70.06	70.06	70.06	70.06	360.54	

STATE PROGRAMME DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

Rs in Lakhs

S.No.	Items of Expenditure	Posts	Annual Average Last Budget	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	Total 2002-2007	PM per person
A	MANAGEMENT COST									
	I Salaries									
i)	State Programme Director	1	1.20	2.40	2.52	2.65	2.78	2.92	13.26	20000
ii)	Associated Prog. Director	1	0.96	1.92	2.02	2.12	2.22	2.33	10.61	16000
iii)	Resource Person	1	0.84	1.68	1.76	1.85	1.94	2.04	9.28	14000
iv)	Consultants - 24 women months	2	1.44	2.88	3.02	3.18	3.33	3.50	15.91	12000
v)	Accounts Officer	1	0.60	1.20	1.28	1.32	1.39	1.46	6.63	10000
vi)	Auditor	1	0.60	1.20	1.26	1.32	1.39	1.46	6.63	10000
vii)	Accounts Asstt	1	0.54	0.86	0.91	0.95	1.00	1.05	4.77	7200
viii)	Stenographers	2	1.08	1.08	1.13	1.19	1.25	1.31	5.97	4500
ix)	Data Entry Operator	1	0.42	0.59	0.62	0.65	0.68	0.71	3.25	4900
x)	LDC	1	0.42	0.59	0.62	0.65	0.68	0.71	3.25	4900
xi)	Driver	1	0.42	0.42	0.44	0.46	0.49	0.51	2.32	3500
xii)	Peon	2	0.72	0.72	0.76	0.79	0.83	0.88	3.98	3000
			9.24	15.54	16.32	17.13	17.99	18.69	85.87	
	II TA/DA		2.50	3.19	3.35	3.52	3.69	3.88	17.63	
	III Office Expenses									
i)	Non-recurring office equipment (Computer and photocopier including office furniture)		0.76	0.97	1.02	1.07	1.13	1.18	5.37	
ii)	Rent, electricity, water		1.26	1.61	1.69	1.77	1.86	1.95	8.89	
iii)	Vehicle		2.00	2.55	-	-	-	-	2.55	
iv)	Vehicle fuel & maintenance		2.00	2.55	2.68	2.81	2.95	3.10	14.10	
v)	Postage and tel Expenses		1.00	1.28	1.34	1.41	1.48	1.55	7.05	
vi)	Contingencies		0.25	0.32	0.34	0.35	0.37	0.39	1.76	
			7.27	9.28	7.06	7.42	7.78	8.18	39.73	
	Total Management Cost		19.01	28.01	26.73	28.07	29.47	30.95	143.23	
B	PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES									
IV	Documentation, Publication & Library									
i)	Annual Report		1.00	1.28	1.34	1.41	1.48	1.55	7.05	
ii)	Media and Publicity		0.56	0.71	0.75	0.79	0.83	0.87	3.95	
iii)	6-monthly report		0.25	0.32	0.34	0.35	0.37	0.39	1.76	
			1.81	2.31	2.43	2.55	2.67	2.81	12.76	
V	Workshops and Seminars		2.50	3.19	3.35	3.52	3.69	3.88	17.63	
VI	Evaluation									
i)	State Level Evaluation		1.41	1.80	1.89	1.99	2.09	2.19	9.96	
ii)	Thematic evaluation		0.50	0.64	0.67	0.70	0.74	0.78	3.53	
iii)	Action/ reflection meetings		0.50	0.64	0.67	0.70	0.74	0.78	3.53	
			2.41	3.08	3.23	3.39	3.56	3.74	17.01	
VII	Trainings									
	Fees and Honorarium		2.00	2.55	2.68	2.81	2.95	3.10	14.10	
	State Level Trainings for MS personnel		2.00	2.55	2.68	2.81	2.95	3.10	14.10	
			4.00	5.11	5.36	5.63	5.91	6.21	28.21	
VIII	Grants-in-Aid to NGOs for Programme Implementation		5.00	6.38	6.70	7.04	7.39	7.76	35.26	
IX	Resource Centre		2.50	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	Total Programme Activities Cost		18.22	20.07	21.07	22.12	23.23	24.39	110.88	
	Grand Total (A+B)		37.23	48.08	47.80	50.19	52.70	55.34	254.11	

Budget for Resource Center Prepared Separately

Budget in case of following heads may be pre-utilized or carried forward but total expense under that head may not exceed Total for 2002-07

- 1 Non-recurring office equipment (Computer and photocopier including office furniture)
- 2 State Level Evaluation
3. Thematic evaluation

STATE RESOURCE CENTER

Rs in Lakhs

S.No.	Items of Expenditure	Frequency	Amount (p.m.)	1st Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th Year	5th Year	Total 2002-2007
A)	Management Costs								
I	Salaries								
	i) Director	1	0.35	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.20	4.20	21.00
	ii) Full Time Consultant	3	0.25	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	9.00	45.00
	iii) Accounts and Admin Manager	1	0.15	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.80	1.80	9.00
	iv) Program Assistant	1	0.10	1.20	1.20	1.20	1.20	1.20	6.00
	v) Peon	1	0.04	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.48	2.40
	vi) Driver	1	0.04	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.48	0.48	2.40
				17.16	17.16	17.16	17.16	17.16	85.80
II	TA/DA	4	0.03	1.44	1.61	1.69	1.67	1.75	7.96
III	Office Expenses								
	i) Communications	1	0.10	1.20	1.20	1.20	1.20	1.20	6.00
	ii) Printing & Publications	1	0.20	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	12.00
	iii) Rent water, electricity, etc	1	0.30	3.60	3.60	3.60	3.60	3.60	18.00
	iv) Fuel and Maintenance	1	0.20	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	12.00
	v) General maintenance (equip. etc)	1	0.20	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	12.00
	vi) Stationery	1	0.20	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	12.00
	vii) Miscellaneous	1	0.02	0.24	0.24	0.24	0.24	0.24	1.20
	viii) Non Recurring Expense								
	Car/Jeep	1	6.50	6.50					6.50
	Computers	4	1.80	7.20					7.20
	Fax Machine	1	0.10	0.10					0.10
	Telephone Connection	2	0.02	0.04					0.04
				29.92	16.15	16.23	16.31	16.39	95.00
	Total Management Cost			48.62	34.82	34.98	35.13	35.30	188.75
B.	PROGRAM COSTS								
IV	Meetings & Workshops								
	Meetings/Seminars/Workshops			2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	10.00
	Training and Capacity Development			3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	15.00
				5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	25.00
V	Research and Advocacy								
	Research and Advocacy			3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	15.00
	Cosultants Honoraria (part time)	1	0.35	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	30.00
	Database & Information			2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	10.00
	Fellowships			3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	15.00
				14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00	70.00
VI	Contingencies			0.15	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.75
	Total Programme Cost			19.15	19.15	19.15	19.15	19.15	95.75
	Grand Total A+B			67.67	53.97	54.13	54.28	54.45	284.60

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

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

PART ONE: GENERAL REPORT

January 1992

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

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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

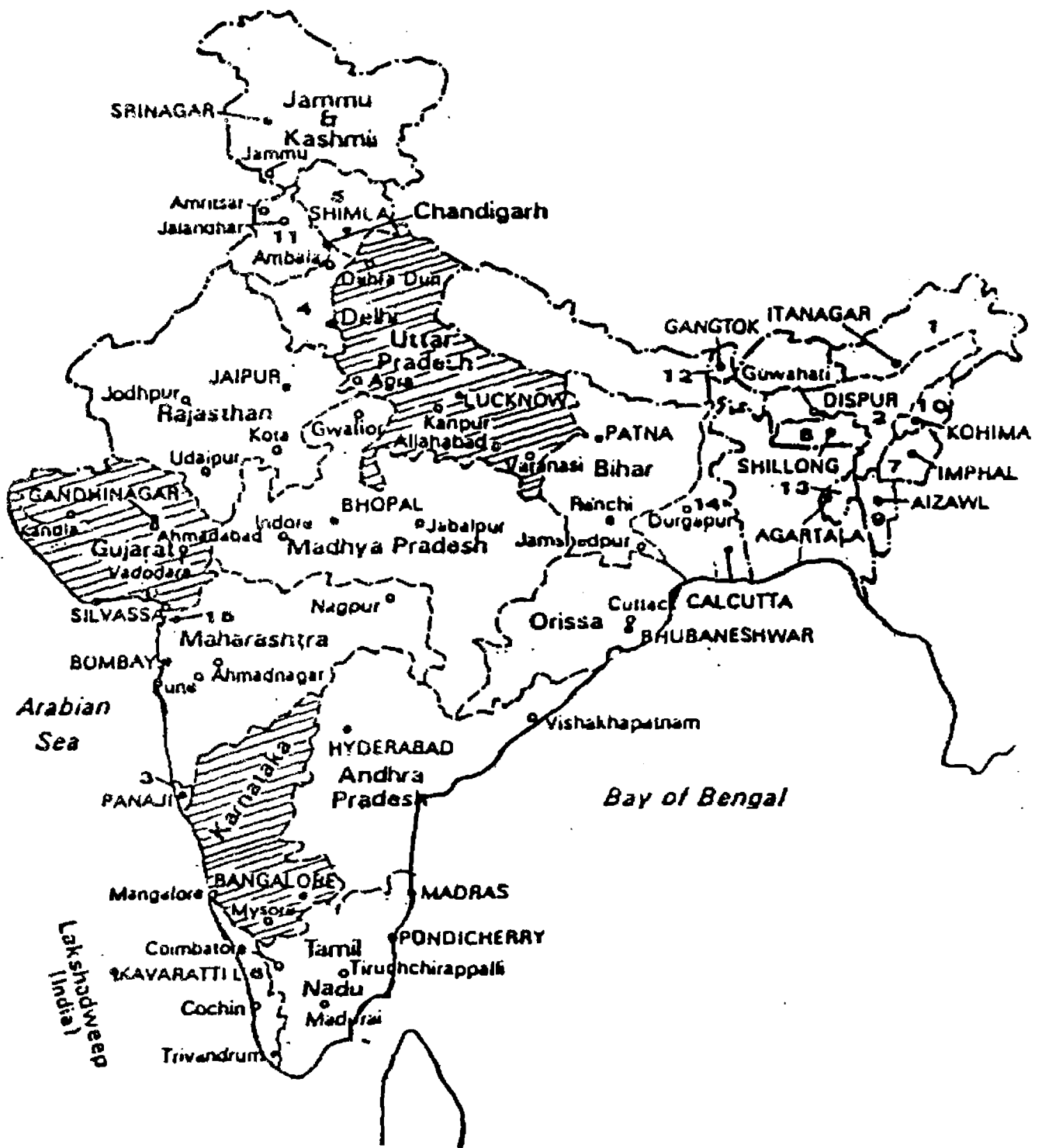
Last but not least our appreciation and gratitude goes to the sahayogini's, sakhi's and sangha women, who were willing to share with us some of their own experiences from their participation in the Mahila Samakhya Programme. We sincerely hope that our interruptive presence did not disrupt the process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

January, 1992

INDIA

EDUCATION FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY PROGRAMME:

UTTAR PRADESH, GUJARAT, KARNATAKA



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

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Members of the Review Mission:

Ms Claudine Helleman (mission leader)
Ms Indu Kapoor
Ms Caroline Diepeveen
Dr Kumud Sharma
Dr Prabha Mahale
Mr Hay Soree

New Delhi, January 1992

EDUCATION FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY

REVIEW OF THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME

29/09/1991 - 31/10/1991

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

GENERAL

The overall objective of this Mission was to:

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

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

The extension of the programme

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

Main conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

POINTS OF ATTENTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sensitization and mobilization of the support structure

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

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

Non-negotiable principles

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

Education

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

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

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

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

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

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

Training and Human Resources

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

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

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

Strengthening the DIU's and State Programme Offices

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

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

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

The expansion of the programme

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

Legal support

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

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

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

Evaluation

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

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

Voluntary Agencies

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

Mahila Samakhya Societies

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

National Resource Unit

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

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

National Resource Group

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

Finances

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ABBREVIATIONS

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

GLOSSARY OF LOCAL TERMS

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

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

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

PART ONE: GENERAL REPORT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

GLOSSARY OF LOCAL TERMS

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1. MAHILA SAMAKHYA: EDUCATION FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

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

1.1 Description of the programme in brief

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.3 Policy background

The Mahila Samakhya Programme (MSP) has emerged from the new National Policy on Education (NPE) which was formulated in 1986. As stated in the policy document the Government of India is committed to use education as an instrument of social change in service of women and to play an interventionist role in the empowerment of women (P.E-1986, Ch IV, 4, Government of India). India is one of the few countries in the world, perhaps the only country, with a national education policy which explicitly gives priority to education as a human right and a means for bringing about a transformation of the society towards a "genuinely egalitarian and secular social order". Education is seen as an instrument for securing a status of equality for women, and persons belonging to the backward classes and minorities". (Resolution of the Government of India No. F. 1-6/90-PN (D.I), dated 24th May 1986)

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

Some indications of the generalized disparities in the participation in the education system (based on the 1981 census data) are:

- . in 1981 the female rural literacy was 25% as compared to 47% for men;
- . illiteracy of women was highest in rural villages, but among women of the scheduled castes (93%) and tribal women (92%);
- . 70% of the rural girls in the age group of 6-14 years were outside the school system, whereas 43% of the boys in the same age group were out-of-school;
- . the lowest school enrollment rates are found among girls who belong to the scheduled castes, tribes and other minority groups;
- . girls drop-out of the school system at an earlier age than boys.

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

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

See also the table on page.

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

A. Literate Population and Crude Literacy Rates 1991

	Literate Population (in millions)			Crude Literacy Rate (per cent)		
	Females	Males	Persons	Females	Males	Persons
GUJARAT	0.2	18.0	21.3	61.10	61.44	51.65
Rajkot	0.6	0.0	1.4	49.23	66.97	37.00
Sabhar Kantha	0.3	0.6	0.9	36.92	63.09	50.22
Vadodara	0.7	1.0	1.7	45.12	63.66	54.01
KARNATAKA	0.2	12.0	21.0	37.37	56.29	47.02
Bidar	0.15	0.3	0.4	24.02	47.59	36.68
Bijapur	0.5	0.8	1.3	33.62	57.17	45.60
Mysore	0.5	0.8	1.25	32.07	47.30	39.07
Gulbarga (+)	0.25	0.5	0.7	20.14	41.47	31.01
Balohar (+)	0.2	0.7	0.7	17.03	39.67	28.77
UTTAR PRADESH	13.6	23.3	45.5	20.92	65.11	33.78
Fahri Garhwal	0.05	0.15	0.2	21.94	57.47	39.00
Saharanpur	0.2	0.5	0.8	22.38	43.23	33.99
Banda	0.1	0.8	0.5	13.45	41.61	24.75
Yamunasi	0.5	1.3	1.8	23.68	51.19	36.19

Notes:

(+) New districts of the Karnataka State Programme.

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

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

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

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

	Females		Males		Persons	
	1981	1991	1981	1991	1981	1991
INDIA	29.75	39.42	56.37	63.06	43.56	52.11
GUJARAT	90.96	48.50	65.14	62.54	52.21	60.91
KARNATAKA	33.16	44.34	56.72	67.25	46.20	55.90
UTTAR PRADESH	17.18	26.02	47.43	55.35	33.33	41.71
ANDHRA PRADESH (+)	24.16	33.71	46.93	56.24	35.46	45.11
BHAR (+)	16.51	23.10	46.58	52.63	32.03	38.54

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

	Females (per cent)	Males (per cent)	Persons (per cent)
Literates	66.0	42.0	50.5
Illiterates	9.0	4.8	7.3

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

	Overall Literacy Rate	Female Literacy Rate
GUJARAT	15	17
KARNATAKA	20	21
UTTAR PRADESH	27	29
ANDHRA PRADESH	25	25
BHAR	31	30

Source: Government of India

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

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

1.3 Women's empowerment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.4 The original Programme Document or "Green Book"

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

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

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The main components of the Mahila Samakhya Programme are:

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

=====

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

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

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

The implementation structure covers the organization at national level, state level and district level, and can be characterized by the relative autonomy, decentralization and delegation of decision-making and financial powers (see for details Chapter 6).

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

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

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

1.5 The Revised Project Document

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

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

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

- a. the initial phase, when women are consolidating their independence, time and space is not hurried or short circuited;
 - b. women participants in a village determine the form, nature, content and timing of all the activities in their village;
 - c. the role of project functionaries, officials, and other agencies is facilitative and not directive;
 - d. planning, decision-making and evaluation processes at all levels are accountable to the collective of village women;
 - e. education is understood as a process which enables women to question, conceptualize, seek answers, act, reflect on their actions, and raise new questions. Education is not to be confused with mere literacy;
 - f. acceptance that as an "environment of learning" is being created, what women decide to learn first may not be reading and writing. Women's priorities for learning must always be respected;
 - g. acceptance that given the time, support and catalysts for such reflection, women are of their own volition seeking knowledge with which to gain greater control over their lives;
 - h. the education process and methodology must be based on respect for women's existing knowledge, experience and skill;
 - i. every intervention and interaction occurring in the project must be a microcosm of the larger processes of change; the environment of learning, the respect for equality, the time and space, the room for individual uniqueness and variation must be experienced in every component of the project;
 - j. a participatory selection process is followed to ensure that project functionaries at all levels are committed to working among poor women and that they are free of caste/community prejudices.
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The mission sees the formulation of "non-negotiables" as extremely useful. They provide the programme with a set of unifying principles and guarantees against compromising its basic philosophy. At the same time, it remains necessary to periodically check these principles on their practical usefulness, to revise, reformulate or add to them in order to prevent rigidity and to prevent them from becoming 'empty statements' that no longer have a relationship to the reality.

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

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

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

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

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

1.6 Indo - Dutch Review

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

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

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

The overall objective of this mission was to

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. REACHING OUT, STRATEGIES TO EMPOWER RURAL WOMEN

2.1 Introduction

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

2.1.1 A process approach

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.1.2 The catalysts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.2.1 The impact

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.2.2 Limits

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.3 Strategies for dealing with violence

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

Overview outreach M.S.P. Uttar Pradesh

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

Overview outreach M.S.P. Karnataka

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

Overview outreach M.S.P. Gujarat

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

Outreach of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in India

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

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

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

2.4 The coverage

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

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

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

2.5 The process of sangha formation

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

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

Some of the constraints noted refer to e.g.

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

Facilitating factors appear to be related to

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.6 The response of the environment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.7 Child care centers and hut construction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.8 Reaching out

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

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

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

3. LINKAGES TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

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

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

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

3.1 Literacy

3.1.1 Innovative experiments in literacy training

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.1.2 The involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the literacy campaign

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

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

3.2 Children's education

3.2.1 Creative learning centers for children

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

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

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

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

3.2.2 Attention for teenage girls in Sabarkantha

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

3.3 Other linkages to the education system

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.4 Concluding remarks

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

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

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

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

4. TRAINING AND HUMAN RESOURCES

4.1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2 Some characteristics of the training per state

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

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

4.2.1. Gujarat

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

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

4.2.2 Karnataka

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

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

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

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

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

4.2.3 Uttar Pradesh

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.2.5 Training at village level

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

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

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

4.3 Internalization of the training component in the District Programmes

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

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

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

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

4.4 Training and Human Resources at DIU level

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

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

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

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

4.5 Training and human resources development

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

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

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

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

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

5. DOCUMENTATION, EVALUATION AND MONITORING

5.1 Documentation

5.1.1 Documentation and its use

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

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

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

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

5.1.2 Types of documentation within the Mahila Samakhya Programme

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

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

a. **Basic filing and information gathering**

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

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

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

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

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

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

b. Internal reports

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

c. Newsletters

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

d. Instruction material

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

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

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

e. **Material to inform outsiders**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.2. Monitoring and Evaluation

5.2.1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

These suggestions are:

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

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

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

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

Related to this we recommend:

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.2.2 Monitoring and evaluation experiences within the MSP

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

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

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

5.2.3 A structure for monitoring and evaluation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.3 The MAHILA SAMAKHYA RESOURCE UNIT at the National Level

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

6.1 Organization Development

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

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

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

6.2 The identity of the Mahila Samakhya Programme

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

by adding after:

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

the following sentence:

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

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

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

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

6.3 Cooperation with voluntary agencies

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

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

The chapter ends as follows:

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

The Mission wants to comment as follows:

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

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

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

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

6.4 Formalization of Mahila Sangha's

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

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

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

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

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

6.5 Management Structure

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

6.5.1 Denomination of staff functions

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

6.5.2 District Level

6.5.2.1 District Implementation Unit (DIU)

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

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

6.5.2.2 District Resource Group (DRG)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.5.3 State level

6.5.3.1 Mahila Samakhya Society (MSS)

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

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

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

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

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

6.5.3.2 Delegation of financial powers

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

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

6.5.3.3 The State Programme Office

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.5.4 National Level

6.5.4.1 National Resource Group (NRG)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

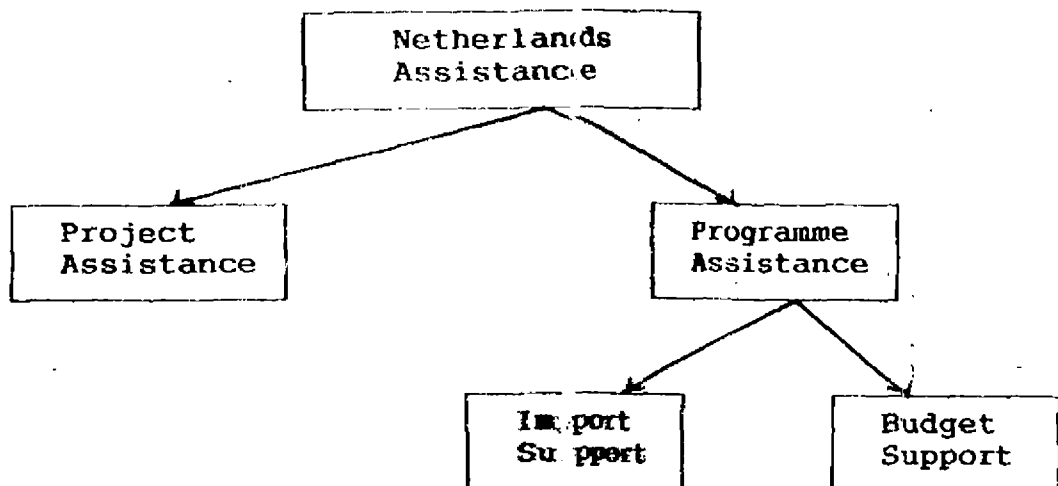
7. FINANCES

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

7.1 Mode of Financing

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

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



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

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

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

7.2 Disbursements and flow of funds

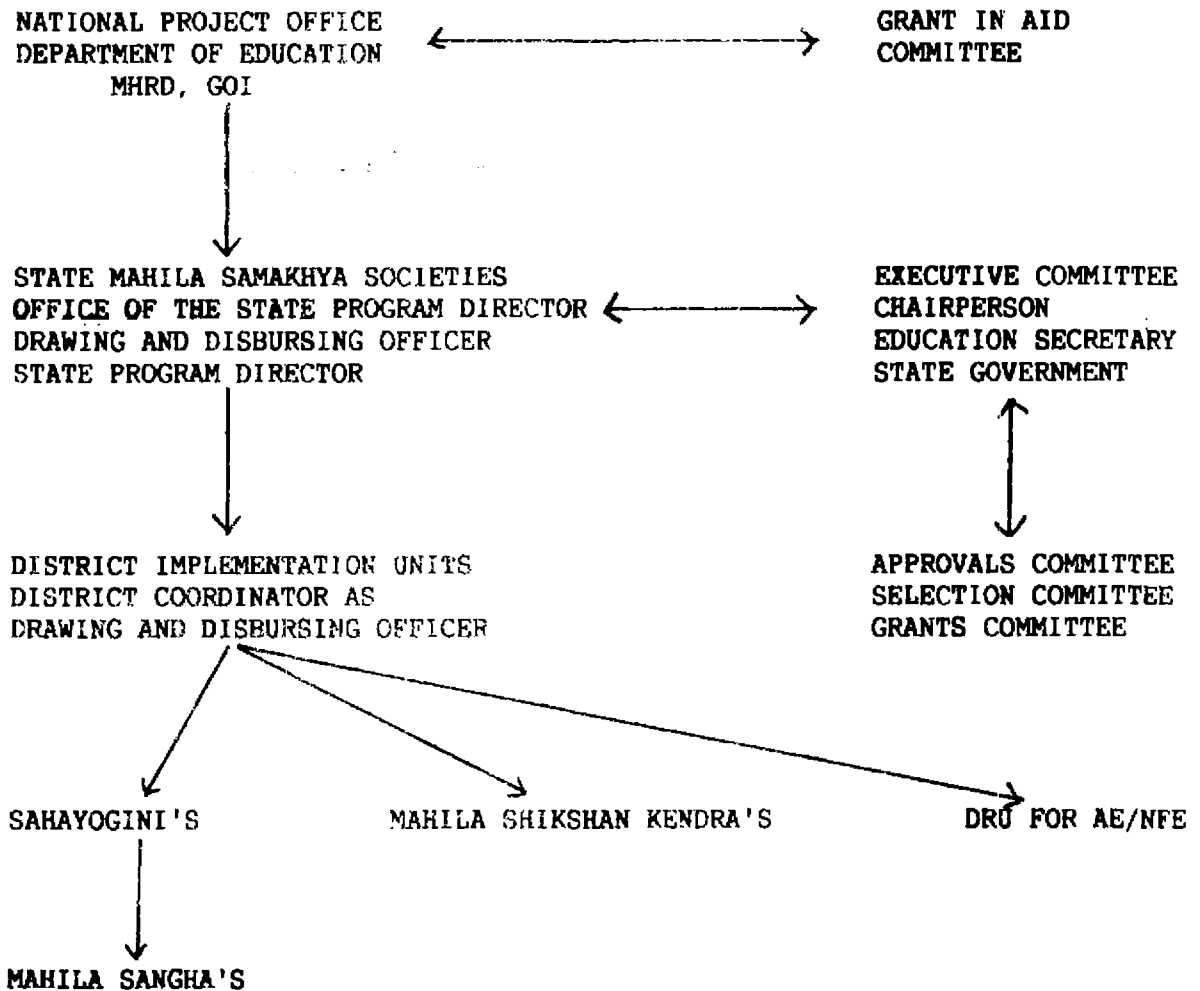
The flow of funds from the Department of Education Societies has been smooth. After utilization of 75% of installment is provided on the basis of independent from the Society to the District Implementation Society the Mahila Samakhya installment, another re. The flow of funds been discussed in the

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

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

The following diagram outlines the flow of funds:

FLOW OF FUNDS



7.3 Expenditure and claims

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7.4 Budgeting

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

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

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

Option 2. Bring budget-items which are virtually activity costs, but which are placed under management costs, under activity costs. At least the replacement of the following items at National, State and District level should be considered, as they refer to activities:

- Documentation, publication and library
- Fees and honorariums
- workshops and seminars
- programme launching in new districts
- training of district level functionaries
- T.A/D.A
- Contingencies
- Bicycles
- Audio equipment, VCR, etc.
- Books, magazines, journals, etc.

7.5 Interest accrued on deposits

The Mahila Samakhya Societies have a certain amount of interest accrued on deposits, due to the fact that installments are made to ensure a sound liquidity of funds. In order to make the Society financial viable, the Mission recommends that this amount remains within the society.

7.6 Revised Project Document, 1992-1997

The following table provides an overview of the financial estimates. It gives in the opinion of the Mission a realistic impression of the project-costs, divided over the years.

FINANCIAL ESTIMATES - OVERVIEW (Rupees in lakhs)

	<u>'92-93</u>	<u>'93-94</u>	<u>'94-99</u>	<u>'95-96</u>	<u>'96-97</u>	<u>Total</u>
NATIONAL LEVEL						
1. Nat. Proj. Office	20.29	20.79	23.29	24.54	25.79	114.70
2. Resource Unit for MS	33.33	27.60	28.28	29.83	30.95	149.99
3. Grants to NGO's outside Proj. Dist.	40.00	40.00	40.00	40.00	40.00	200.00
STATE LEVEL						
4. UP, Gujarat and Karnataka	545.86	702.86	804.77	905.37	1005.37	3964.23
TOTAL	639.48	791.25	896.34	999.74	1102.11	4428.92

GRAND TOTAL = Rs 4428.92 Lakhs

** December 1991: 1 Rs = Dfl. 0,075

GRAND TOTAL = Dfl. 33.216.900.=

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7.7 Liquidity

After the finalization of this report it might take up to one year before the project side-letter has been signed by both Governments. It is expected that the original allocated amount of Dfl.10 Million will nearly be exhausted. It is therefore proposed that after the side-letter has been signed, an advance will be provided. In view of the increased scale of the programme, an amount of Dfl. 3 Million as working capital seems reasonable if the plans for the expansion of the programme go ahead as proposed in the 'Revised Project Document'.

7.8 Additional funding

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

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

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

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

PART TWO

SOURCES OF STRENGTH

SOME OBSERVATIONS RELATED TO THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME IN UTTAR PRADESH

December 1991

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

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

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SOME OBSERVATIONS RELATED TO THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME IN UTTAR PRADESH

1. Introduction

In Uttar Pradesh the Mahila Samakhya Programme has firmly established its presence in the districts of Varanasi, Banda, Saharanpur and Tehri Garwhal, although there are distinct differences between the four districts as to how the programme is implemented. The greatest challenge for MSP-UP at present is to set up a full fledged and autonomous State Programme Office, which will provide direction and support to the district programmes and strengthen the identity of the MSP in Uttar Pradesh. In order to enable the state unit to play its coordinating, supportive and catalytic role the autonomy of the State Programme Office vis-à-vis the State Government should be ensured in the organizational set-up.

The mission has expressed its concern towards the UP State Secretary of Education that the unresolved issue of the State Programme Directorate will further stagnate and, ultimately, break-off the development of the district programmes. There is an urgent need to have a full-time State Programme Director with ideas and vision to give direction and support to the District Implementation Units. The current stale mate in the appointment of a State Programme Director needs to be resolved urgently. An adequate interim arrangement till a suitable candidate is found and appointed is recommended. If necessary the possibility of an open recruitment procedure by advertising the post should be considered.

During our discussion with the Education Secretary of UP it emerged that in the light of the experiences of the Mahila Samakhya Programmes in the three states, the role and the responsibilities of the State Director and the composition of the Executive Council may be reviewed in consultation with the districts and the National Programme Office. The mission suggests to consider the possibility of involving an organization cum legal expert to help design an appropriate organizational construction.

During the past one and a half year the MSP-UP has experienced a stage of transition which has left its mark on the programme implementation. After the establishment of the State Society, District Implementation Units have been created in all four districts. With exception of Saharanpur the Mahila Samakhya Programme is now being implemented independently from the voluntary agencies through which the programme has been initiated. The process of delinking from the Volags has not been easy on the sahayogini's, the district staff and others involved in the implementation. In addition to this the DIUs were faced with problems in getting funds for implementation of training and other activities.

In spite of the lack of support from the state level, the sometimes negative reactions and attitudes from the side of some of the Volags and the extremely violent local conditions the district programmes have been able to continue their activities, keep the process going and even get new inspiration and vitality from their gained independence. The support from the National Programme Office and the foundation of strength that JAGORI has been able to build into the programmes through its training and support input, as well as the morale and resilience of the involved staff, the sahayogini's and the sakhi's have been essential to keep the programme going under these adverse conditions. The internal evaluation workshop in the beginning of 1991 has been instrumental in supporting and inspiring the reorientation of the district programmes. However, there is a limit to how far

the energy, enthusiasm and vitality will stretch if the necessary state support remains absent.

In all districts the need for an autonomous state unit has been expressed to support (and not to control) the development of the district programmes, to provide vision, direction, planning and strategic support, to help identify resources for training and educational inputs, to coordinate intra and inter state activities and exchange, to liaison with the government and with development schemes at state level. One very important function to be attributed to the State as well as the National Programme Office is to provide a channel for otherwise marginalized rural women to influence policy making, policy decisions and implementation structures of government policies and to make government bodies and the legal system more sensitive towards issues and demands raised by women at grass-root level.

In addition to the urgent solution of the state issue attention need to be given in the direct future to the strengthening and consolidation of the DIUs, the continuation and reorientation of the training of *sahayogini's* and *sakhi's* in order to reconfirm and continue their process of growth and empowerment. The role and responsibilities of the District Coordinators, Resource Persons and other DIU staff needs to be looked into and clarified as well.

The observations made below should be considered against the foregoing framework. If the right conditions are provided the Mahila Samakhya district programmes in Uttar Pradesh are ready to resume, revitalize and intensify their efforts in support of the initiatives from village women who want to strengthen their capacities for changing their situations. Now MSP-UP must be ready to strengthen its support infra-structure in order to provide adequate responses to the demands from the *mahila sangha's*, to assist women in strategically planning their activities and in the collection of the necessary information and education inputs. Our observations relate to various aspects of the Mahila Samakhya Programme which, according to the mission need attention and consideration by those concerned.

2. The strategy of empowerment

The strategy for empowering rural women in MSP-UP is unlike the empowerment strategies of the other states where the emphasis is on building, strengthening and encouraging self reliance of *mahila sangha's* (women's collectives). The main focus of the empowerment strategies adopted in the districts of Uttar Pradesh is on creating strong networks of committed *sahayogini's* and *sakhi's*, who function as catalysts and activists, encouraging village women to meet around issues that are important to them and to collectively plan and decide upon taking action. It is not possible to say which is a more effective strategy. It is like a chicken and the egg question: *sakhi's* are important for building and strengthening the *sangha's*. At the same time the *sakhi's* need the support and backing from their own communities, as well as the strength, confidence and support from other *sakhi's* and their *sahayogini's* to reinforce their own process of empowerment. The MSP Karnataka has been quite successful in building strong *mahila sangha's* who are able to manage and plan their own affairs and take collective decisions. In Uttar Pradesh the self-confidence, enthusiasm and the vibrancy of the *sahayogini's* is particularly striking. They form strong peer groups who mutually support each other. Their strength is reflected in the more experienced *sakhi's* with whom they closely cooperate and who form an extension of their network. In areas where the training of *sakhi's* was interrupted or

incomplete, like in Tehri Garwal, they appeared to be quite overpowered by the enthusiasm of the sahayogini's.

During their visits the members of the mission did not get a clear picture of the extent to which the strong sense of collectivism that exists among the sahayogini's and the sakhi's has been filtered down to the level of village women. There appears to be no clarity about the concept of a sangha. The way it is used gives the impression that it may refer to any kind of meeting where people come together to discuss an issue, whether it is a meeting of sakhi's, village women, women and men who belong to the same community. A discussion with JAGORI confirmed the impression of the mission that there may be some doubt about the reality of a sangha as a sustainable collective of women, as women are divided and not necessarily share the same interests. Rather than focussing on sangha's or women's collectives as an entity the issues raised by women are turned into issues that are the concern of the whole community.

A strategic decision has been taken not to seek confrontation with the existing structures, but to devise tactics to resolve emerging issues to the advantage of the women concerned. By first taking up community issues like water, electricity, road building, ration cards and distribution, health, school fees etc. village women have started to organize themselves around issues which are due to face least opposition from the male community. Through mobilization of the community and active pressurizing government agencies are made accountable towards the village. Such actions have solicited recognition, respect and support from men, making the issues raised by women into community issues. Similarly women's individual, often family-related problems are made to be recognized as social issues shared by the community of women and made the responsibility of the whole community. Seeking public exposure and apology, rather than seeking police action in case of e.g. harassment raises the issue to a higher level, making it the responsibility of the community. The strategies involved are very much influenced by the organizations, who are responsible for the process training (JAGORI, ALLARIPU, ACTION INDIA) and rely on experience gained in programmes like, for instance, WDP Rajasthan.

In Uttar Pradesh a clear policy is successfully implemented to reach the women, who belong to the poorest and most neglected sections of the rural population: tribal women, women from the scheduled castes and other minorities. Special emphasis is given to women who are most marginalized and neglected by the society: single women i.e. widows, deserted or divorced women. Through their participation in activities organized by Mahila Samakhya they experience an renewed sense of worthiness.

It remains difficult to include women from higher the casts, who are usually more confined in their mobility because they are forced to comply with strict rules of purdah or seclusion. As a result, for instance in Banda, most sangha meetings consist of either harijan or tribal women. Yet, conscious efforts are taken to bridge caste divisions as well as divisions based on religion and with success. Communalism, which is a strong divisive force in the rural communities, is a recurring issues that comes up at village meetings. In Saharanpur sahayogini's from muslim and hindu communities work closely together in solving issues related to outbreaks of communalism.

In many areas women have successfully taken up issues like drinking water, ration cards, wages, the functioning of village schools, domestic and social violence. A strong need is felt to learn about law and women's legal rights. In Banda village women have requested training in maintenance of handpumps, which resulted in an exciting experiment: a special

training programme for illiterate women provided and funded by UNICEF. The women involved are very enthusiastic and full of confidence about their newly acquired technical skills. In various villages women are involved in experiments of micro planning: conducting surveys about children's education, the size, cast composition and the socio economic structure of their village, documenting the watersources and the functioning and maintenance of pumps. In Banda the government officials at the district have begun to recognize village women as reliable sources of information.

The activities taken up at village level by women and the way they are being dealt with are impressive. They are well documented in the progress report of the MSP-UP (September 1991). An overview, taken from the report is included as Annex I. While part of the strategies involved is on making the local authorities, programmes and services accountable to women and to the local communities, women by now have come to realize that there are limits to what they can achieve by pressurizing local power structures, if their efforts are being obstructed by higher level politics. They emphasize their need for strong legal back-up support and for a strong state office which can influence state level policy making and implementation and which can make the voices of rural women being listened and responded to.

Another issue which the MSP-UP will have to seriously consider is how to deal with economic issues that women come up with and other issues related to women's daily struggle for survival. In all districts visited village women prioritized their need for economic improvement, paid work, increased wages, better employment opportunities, new income generating opportunities etc. The MSP-UP can take an active role by providing linkages to the programmes of other agencies (GO and NCO), making women aware of the existence of relevant programmes, schemes and services and influencing the agencies by making them more responsive to the demands and needs of women. It is also important to keep informed of and anticipate on future development plans for the region, make an assessment of how these plans will affect the lives of women and their opportunities for employment.

3. Training and resource support

JAGORI has played a major role in the provision and coordination of the training and other support in three of the four UP districts. In Saharanpur ALLARIPU and ACTION INDIA have been responsible for the training. Both organizations belong to the JAGORI network. After the establishment of the State Society the coordinating role of JAGORI has changed and the training activities for Banda and Tehri Garhwal had to be discontinued due to external pressure. This has led to an interruption of the process of reinforcement and internalization of the training input and to insufficient training of the new batch of sahayogini's and sakhi's. Even in Varanasi the support from JAGORI has had to be reduced. Varanasi has received the maximum inputs through the long-term and intensive involvement of JAGORI long before the initiation of the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

The impact of JAGORI is visible in the professional growth, the conceptual clarity and awareness about the issues they are dealing with, as well as the confidence of the sakhi's and the sahayogini's. The effectiveness of the basic orientation training shows in their skills to facilitate sangha meetings, mobilize women, strategize and plan future actions. Another aspect of the strategies employed is the creation of strong peer group networks of sakhi's, sahayogini's and DIU staff and resource persons, so that women build their own

support structures. Furthermore, older sahayogini's work together with new sahayogini's for a while before starting their work in new areas. Apart from training the new sahayogini it has helped her older colleague in strengthening her own learning process.

In all districts internalization of the training is aimed by at by pooling the available training resources within the district, in order to make the districts self sustainable in this respect. In Saharanpur the training has become fully integrated in the programmes of the voluntary organizations who have both cooperated in and given support to training of the new sahayogini's and sakhi's of the newly established DIU. The mission fully appreciates and supports the policy of internalization of the training, involving experienced sahayogini's and sakhi's in the design and implementation of the training programmes and allowing for a stronger adaptation of the programme to the local conditions. But there is a danger that gradually the ideological principles of the Mahila Samakhya Programme become diluted and that the training becomes purely functional and mechanical. Even if the DIU manages to handle the training component together with the sahayogini's and sakhi's a form of external back-up e.g. through attachment of a training consultant or resource person remains necessary. Moreover, it implies the training of DIU staff and sahayogini's and sakhi's to become trainers themselves. They need to be equipped well for this role. While the situation in the field changes, it is necessary that the DIUs make periodic assessments of the training needs and plan the required support inputs. In addition there is a need for skill based training.

Training can never be a one time activity as it is an intrinsic part and reinforcement of the processes at the fieldlevel. The discontinuation of the training process in Tehri Garhwal needs to be immediately remedied and the process needs to be restored.

As will be clear from the above the mission is favorable impressed by the role JAGORI has played in the coordination and provision of training and other support to the district programmes. In addition to what has been mentioned above JAGORI has the capacity to mobilize other essential resources for strengthening the MSP through its network of sister organizations. We recognize that the separation has been painful for all parties concerned. Yet, we do see a distinct role for JAGORI in the further development of the MS programmes in Uttar Pradesh, particularly at district level. In all districts the need has been expressed for a professional and ideological input from a resource person of JAGORI for backing-up their programmes and to assist in the development of their own training programmes. In view of the changes that have occurred over the last year we strongly recommend a restoration of the relationship between JAGORI and the Mahila Samakhya programmes in Uttar Pradesh on new terms that are mutually agreed upon.

4. Literacy

Literacy has been taken up reluctantly in Uttar Pradesh. One of the constraints is the lack of (voluntary) literacy trainers and the lack of suitable literacy materials. In the different districts various initiatives for literacy training have begun in a rather experimental manner. The training may focus on interested sakhi's, on village women, on strengthening the skills of potential (voluntary) literacy trainers. Some methods focus on self-learning, others use a literacy-camp method (periodic condensed training courses for a selected group of learners), others may prefer nightclasses for groups of learners, or a combination of different methods. The mission recognizes the necessity to adopt an experimental approach which allows for flexibility, adaptation to local environmental conditions and the patterns

of time management of the female learners, and for development of methods and materials which recognize the local dialects and oral traditions in the form of poems, stories, songs etc. But we have the impression that the approaches developed so far seem like ad-hoc responses to an emerging need, rather than a systematic and well thought out strategy with a long term perspective including the development of neo-literate learning and information materials through participatory methods. Each team appears to be inventing the wheel again, using its own means without sufficient back-up and didactic input from experts or experiences elsewhere. To reinforce the sustainability of the literacy and numeracy skills the training should be related to the process of women's empowerment and personal development. It should enable women to get access to knowledge and information that is relevant to their lives, to read and question the contents of official documents and contracts, to themselves read stories and newspapers, and to write letters, applications, as well as express their own thoughts and ideas on paper for sharing it with others.

Within the Mahila Samakhya Programme in the different states various literacy approaches are progressively being developed, with or without external inputs. One of the materials which is popularly being used is the JAGORI diary on literacy. Much can be learned and shared from the approaches which are being developed in Sabarkantha district (Gujarat) or from Bidar District in Karnataka. The mission strongly recommends more systematic sharing of these experiences, as well as with similar experiences in other environments (e.g. with marginalized populations in other states, urban environments) with the aim to learn from one's own and others' positive and negative experiences, to pool and share resources and materials where possible and necessary. The further aims should be to develop common strategies and approaches for the generation of participatory methods and gender sensitive materials which can be adopted in different environments, and to strengthen and professionalize the available expertise. Through this the Mahila Samakhya Programme may be able to offer a viable alternative to the common target-oriented literacy campaign method, which goes beyond mere training in basic reading and writing skills, but extends into different forms adult education. Moreover, it will make the position of the MSP stronger vis-à-vis pressures to take on and implement education programmes (Literacy, AE, NFE) which have an approach which is incompatible with the ideology of the MSP.

5. Creative learning centers for children

Under the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Uttar Pradesh innovative projects for education of out-of school children (children who have never been to school, drop-outs, early school leavers) have been started: Udan Khatolas (Flying Magic Carpets) in Varanasi and creative learning centers in Saharanpur. They provide a flexible learning system through play, songs, games and fun, and the use of the local environment as learning aid. In addition use is made of locally available books and teaching aids, newspapers and children's magazines. No extra demands are made on the parents for slates, pencils etc. By providing childcare and preschool education girls are relieved from the care of their younger siblings and participate in the programme. The centers are located so that the distance does not impede the attendance of small children. In Varanasi 25 centers have been established with support from JAGORI, who mobilized experienced support from other groups like ALLARIPU and ANKUR and from experts in children's education (see ANNEX 2). In Saharanpur a few centers have just been started in the DISHA area with support from ALLARIPU.

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

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

6. Adult Education and other linkages to the education system

In different districts, e.g. Banda, Varanasi, the Ministry of Education plans to establish adult education centers. In Varansi 300 AE centers are envisaged which will also aim at providing adult education courses for women. In spite of the fact that the MSP is a programme of the national Government of India there appears to be little chance of coordination between the MSP in the concerned districts and the AE programmes. This is may partly due to the fundamental differences between the process oriented MSP approach and the target oriented approach which characterizes most government programmes. We do think however that there is room in Adult Education to adopt didactical innovations, as is stressed in the report of the Committee for Review of the National Policy on Education "Towards an Enlightened and Human Society " (New Delhi, 1990). Therefore the mission recommends that at district level as well as at state level initiatives will be taken to start a dialogue between MSP and AE, to exchange information and explore areas of common interests and, if feasible, to cooperate in the development of innovative learning programmes and curricula which are relevant for women as well as participatory and gender sensitive methods and materials for AE.

The DIU of Tehri Garhwal intends to put a strong emphasis on education inputs in its new programme. This, however, should be linked to the process of empowerment of rural women that is emerging in the villages. Considering the stagnation of the programme of Tehri Garhwal priority needs to be given to building a foundation of strength at village level through reinforcement of the training of sakhi's and strengthening the mahila sangha's. The required educational inputs for sustaining these processes need realistic and strategic planning, which allows for the participation of village women in the planning and design of the new activities

At present the concept of Mahila Shiksan Kendras (MSKs) is not yet being operationalized in Uttar Pradesh. These residential centers for women's education are envisaged as a facility which provides educational opportunities for women who are marginalized by society (particularly single women), and which will create a pool of educated and trained women for various rural development programmes.

7. Thikana

One of the components of the MSP relates to the construction of a sangha hut or thikana, which provides space for women to have their meetings and which can be turned into a women's activity center. In Uttar Pradesh only a few thikana's have been constructed so far in Banda and in Saharanpur. The huts that were visited by members of the mission team appeared rather poor in terms of design and construction: lack of ventilation and too small for really having women's collectives meet. The thikanas have been constructed under the guidance of the involved Volags. Conversations with local women revealed that they were hardly involved in the planning, decision making and design of the huts. In Saharanpur the leaders of the Morcha (grass root movement of rope makers) had decided that the thikana would be used as a school for children, since "the women have no time to use the thikana during day time". Other issues related to the ownership of the thikana, the allocation of the land, management and use etc. do not seem to be considered properly.

From the report of the internal evaluation it becomes clear that both the DIU staff and the sahyogini's are well aware of the problems concerning the sangha huts:

"The Sahyogini's, however, appear to have learnt their lesson well from the construction of the present Thikanas. The four Sahayogini's, in whose areas no Thikanas will be considered only when the entire village agrees to its necessity and is prepared to lend a hand in building it" (p. 26) Clearly, there is a need for reviewing the whole process around planning and building sangha huts.

The mission recommends to stop all activities related to the construction of the huts and to fully review the hut construction component. A proper strategy which ensures the full participation of the village women in all aspects related to the construction of thikana's and which includes the legal aspects involved as well. Also the costs should be looked into since the funds allocated under the MSP are limited, the use of low cost locally available materials and alternative building techniques should be considered.

The approach developed in Rajkot (Gujarat) may be shared or inspire a different hut construction strategy.

8. Internal evaluation and review

Periodic external evaluation/reviews are important for validation of the process and reaffirmation of the programme. They might also bring in some fresh perspectives. Internal evaluations and reflective exercises are crucial for self-growth and learning. The internal evaluation exercise of the MSP in UP has helped in the process of reflections. The contributions made by the district coordinator from Mysore, Karnataka, who was invited as a resource person, has made a significant impact. It has helped and strengthened the DIUs staff of UP who are struggling to establish an independent identity of their MS programmes and to wean the sahyogini's away from the control of the voluntary agencies.

The report of the internal evaluation is written in the English language. The results are therefore not accessible for the sannis and sahayogini's who have participated in the evaluation. The mission is of the opinion that it is important that the outcome of the internal evaluation will be discussed in the districts and that where needed follow-up will be given.

The way of conducting this internal evaluation by involving staff from Mahila Samakhya Programmes in other states as resource person can provide an example for the organization of similar internal evaluations in the other states.

9. Documentation

For documentation the district programmes rely mostly on materials made by JAGORI (diary, health book, posters etc) or ALLARIPU (in Saharanpur). JAGORI also provided training in office management, systematic filing of information and documentation in Varanasi and Banda. In Tehri Garwal, so far little attention has been given to systematic documentation, there is no documentation strategy and hardly any documentation material was available apart from some posters and the JAGORI diary. The DIU resource person is very interested in receiving adequate training in documentation techniques as well as production of documentary materials in cooperation with sakhi's and village women. The mission strongly recommends that such training and guidance will be provided.

10. Relationships with NGOs

Initially the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Uttar Pradesh was implemented through a number of voluntary agencies, who were already well established in the respective rural areas and who helped in selecting villages, sahayogini's and sakhi's. The NGOs have definitely put a stamp on the evolution of the programmes in the different districts. In the absence of a state unit the Volags received a grant-in-aid directly from the National Office. In each district one of the Volags acted as a nodal agency for the other involved agencies. However in most cases the ideologies and operational styles of the involved NGOs turned out to be different from the MSP ideological principles which gave cause to many misunderstandings and problems. After the registration of the State Society an independent MSP District Implementation Unit was established in each of the four districts, while the financial grant-in-aid arrangement was terminated. From being dependent on the NGOs for implementing its programmes the MSP has claimed its independence by gradually delinking the programmes from the NGOs and dissolving the District Resource Groups in which the Volags had a dominating role. This process of delinking is not yet fully completed, while it definitely caused resentments on the side of the NGOs who might have felt being used by the government.

One of the features of the Mahila Samakhya Programme is its capacity to cooperate with voluntary agencies who are involved in grass root work and have established credibility and experience in the rural areas in their specific fields of work. While the MSP may benefit from the experience and expertise available on the side of the NGOs, its own contribution concerns making the NGOs more sensitive and responsive to the needs, demands and interests of rural women. Moreover, it will be in the interest of the women concerned if the MSP can help them in building linkages to the programmes or schemes of the NGOs that can be made beneficial to them. Being an education programme by its

very nature the 'service delivery component' within the MSP is limited to the provision of information and education inputs and a number of support services like childcare centers, sangha huts and funds for experimental activities related to relief of women's workload and to strengthening their capacities for collective management and self reliance as a collective. Linkages with other support or service delivery mechanisms are essential for the reinforcement of women's process of empowerment. Without taking an interventionist role and compromising its ideological principles the MSP can be active in creating linkages with the programmes of other agencies, exploring fields for cooperation e.g. in the generation of informative documentary or educational materials, in designing and developing technical training programmes in response to the needs of women and/or in mobilizing public support for special issues raised by women. These are but few of the many reasons why the mission finds it important that the MSP at district and at state level builds new relationships with NGOs from an independent position based on mutual understanding and recognition. Active cooperation should be based on clarity through mutually established and preferably written terms of agreement.

Saharanpur is the only district where the MSP is still being implemented through two NGOs, DISHA and VIKALP. Both grass root organizations have incorporated the Mahila Samakhya component in their operational styles, making them better geared to actively involve women. And the organizations have cooperated in the establishment of the DIU and the selection and training of the first batch of *sahayogini's* and *sakhi's* for extension of the MSP under the DIU in a new block. In spite of the cooperative attitude from the side of the Volags the mission is of the opinion that much more clarity is needed, if this arrangement is to survive, about the relationships and the cooperation between the DIU and the agencies, as well as about the administrative arrangements. It is recommended to involve an organizational and legal advisor to assist in developing an appropriate management and coordination structure. Since Saharanpur provides a special case in the MSP context the NOTES ON SAHARANPUR DISTRICT prepared by the visiting members of the mission team are included separately as Annex 2.

11. Flow of funds to the District Implementation Units

The inflexibility of the financial patterns have adversely affected the planning and implementation of activities at the district level. Considerable delays in releasing funds to the DIUs and the need for getting prior approval for each activity have led to considerable frustration and demoralization of the DIU staff, as they feel that they do not have control over their programme activities. The mission recommends that corrective measures will be taken to ensure a smooth flow of funds from the State Programme Office to the DIUs, which gives the DIUs a certain measure of leeway in the implementation of activities. It may be necessary to review the delegation of financial powers at different levels. The funds should be released on the basis of district plans prepared by the DIUs for training, documentation, workshops, collective experiments etc. The overall budget clearly states financial norms for sangha activities like child care centers, hut construction, various educational activities (AE and or NFE).

A discretionary fund or corpus should be created at the district level to allow for new initiatives by the DIU in response to the articulated needs of women. In the MSP budget financial provisions are allocated for local initiatives related to innovative and collective experiments which encourage group cohesion, collective decision making, planning and management etc. Local initiatives and alternative approaches have to be viewed as one of

the strong points of the MSP. The Secretary of Education UP gave his assurance to the members of the mission team that there should be no problem in releasing advance money to DIUs so that their activities will not suffer.

In Saharanpur District, where the MSP is implemented through two voluntary agencies as well as through the DIU there is an added complication of the Volags being dependent on the DIU for the release of funds. This creates a potential source of tensions and possibly conflicts. More clarity is needed about the relationships between the Volags and the DIU for cooperation, mutual support and financial arrangements. As the Volags have a vital role in the implementation of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Saharanpur they are to be involved as full partners in establishing suitable terms of agreement involving financial as well as other areas of cooperation.

12. Consolidation versus expansion

The revised project document indicates that in the second phase of the programme it is proposed to expand the MSP into four more districts in UP. The four districts which are to be added are not yet identified.

The mission recommends that a careful assessment of the available human resources for the present programme area will be done before any expansion is envisaged. Consolidation of the activities in the programme area through close monitoring of the programmes' needs, including the newly emerging needs, is to be done before new activities are to be undertaken in new areas. Also the capacities of the DIUs needs to be looked into and if necessary strengthened, before expansion of the programme.

GENERAL OVERVIEW VARANASI DISTRICT UP
 (from Progress Report Mahila Samakhyu UP, September 1991)

Number of Villages.....	64
Number of Sakhis.....	125
Number of Sahayoginis.....	6
Number of Training.....	13
Number of Creative Centers for Children...	25
Training Support:	Jagori (Delhi) & WDP (Rajasthan)
Blocks Covered:	Sevapuri and Cholakpur

A. BACKGROUND

MS was started informally in Varanasi district in September 1988. The programme was launched in 32 villages in Sevapuri block through SKVS, a Gandhian organization, that has been working in the area for many years. Some Sakhis were found unsuitable for the programme after the first training, and the number of villages dropped to 28. The selection of villages, Sakhis and Sahayoginis during the initial phase was done by SKVS. All the Sahayoginis had earlier worked with MMM, the women's wing of SKVS, and some had as much as 8 years of field experience. SKVS acted as the nodal agency for the programme up to September 1990.

The process of setting up an independent DIU began in March 1990 with the appointment of Bindu Singh as Resource Person. The DIU office was set up in April 1990, but was not fully operational till September 1990. In June 1990 work began in a new block, Cholakpur. The programme is currently being run in 44 villages in Sevapuri block and 20 village in Cholakpur block. Creative Centers for Children, called 'Udan Khatolas', are being run in 23 villages in Sevapuri block, and in 2 villages in Cholakpur block.

B. TRAINING PROGRAMMES

DATES	DURATION	NO. OF SAKHIS	NO. OF SAHA-YOGINIS	DIU	TRAINERS
5-19 September 1988	15 days	24	3	-	Jagori
20 April - 4 May 1989	15 days	24	3	-	Jagori
4 - 12 September 1989	8 days	23	4	-	Jagori
19 - 20 April 1990	2 days	33	3	1	Jagori/ Datta
12 - 19 July 1990	8 days	21	3	1	Jagori
14- 21 September 1990	8 days	24	3	1	Jagori
2 - 8 January 1991	7 days	23	1	1	Jagori
2- 8 January 1991	7 days	19	2	1	Jagori/ DIU
14 - 22 March 1991	9 days	23	2	-	Jagori/ WDP
14 - 22 March 1991	9 days	19	2	-	Jagori/ WDP

C. AREAS OF WORK

The main issues taken up by the Varanasi team in the last two years are the following:

- (i) Ration cards
- (ii) Wages
- (iii) Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY)
- (iv) Problems related to single and deserted women
- (v) Sexual harassment
- (vi) Working with women representatives of the village Panchayat
- (vii) Support Services
- (viii) Education

GENERAL OVERVIEW BANDA DISTRICT
 (from Progress Report Mahila Samakhya UP, September 1991)

Number of Villages	80
Number of Sakhis	100
Number of Sahayoginis	8
NFE Centers	100 (discontinued as of April 1991)
Training Support:	Datta Savale (Maharashtra) & Jagori (Delhi)
Blocks Covered:	Manikpur, Tindwari

A. BACKGROUND

When Banda was selected as an MS project district, most State officials were skeptical about its success. Banda is one of the most backward areas in U.P. marked by extreme poverty, very low literacy levels (in the rural areas the female literacy level is 5.8% and male literacy is 20.56 %), and a high proportion (23.63 %) of scheduled castes and tribes (notably the Kols). These problems are compounded by a high degree of violence, especially towards women. The 'dadus' (land owning upper castes), forest contractors and guards have spread terror among the poor. Private armies of thugs and dacoits roam the district with impunity. The hilly and forested landscape (a terrain locally referred to as "patha") provides natural cover for these numerous vigilantes infesting the area. It is inhospitable to government programmes most of which have been unable to reach the poor. In Manikpur block Kol children dare not enter the village schools for fear of the 'dadus'. The evolution of the programme in the district must be seen in the context of this harsh social environment.

In 1989-90 six NGOs participated in preliminary discussions to launch the programme in Banda district. Not one agency was working with women or had women staff members. They were all engaged in conventional development work. It was clear that

running a woman's empowerment project would not be easy in these circumstances.

After intensive debates and field visits, the programme was launched through Akhil Bharatiya Samaj Seva Sansthan (ABSSS) Manikpur, in March 1989. ABSSS had been working among the poor for many years and Gopal Bhai, its leader and dominant personality, is highly respected in the area. His support was essential to begin the programme in the area. At the time MS was launched in Manikpur block, ABSSS also received a grant from GOI to start NFE centers for children. The two projects were to be coordinated. Despite this understanding, ABSSS refused to relinquish control of the NFE project nor were they eager to draw on the resources of educational institutions with experience in training NFE instructors. In 1990, another NGO, Vigyan Shiksha Kendra (VSK) joined the programme in Tindwari block, and took up work in 20 villages.

Developing a working relationship between the various groups involved in the programme (in this case ABSSS, the NPO and Jagori) has not been easy. While the establishment of an independent DIU in September 1990 gave the Sahayoginis and other MS functionaries in Banda a sense of liberation, it has exacerbated tensions with ABSSS. Ironing out these differences is essential if the programme is to grow and be strengthened.

Working with ABSSS

In the initial phase MS was completely guided by ABSSS. The Sahayoginis reported to the ABSSS office every morning and had to give a detailed report to Gopal bhai (called 'pitaji'- father by all the workers) on their return from the field. They were assigned topics for discussion in the villages and any follow-up action was planned by the organization. Their role was limited to informing ABSSS about the problem. The Sahayoginis played no part in planning or decision making and had no direct link with the district and block level offices. In the words of one Sahayogini, "Though we had been to the BDO's office several times we never ever knew why we were going. If Pitaji had organized a protest it had to be for the right cause, so we always joined."

The process of understanding the prevailing socio-economic conditions began during Datta Savale's training in December 1989. Since then the issue of minimum wages and bonded labour has been discussed in a number of village meetings. No systematic attempts have been made to tackle this problem as it is beyond the scope of the programme. Nonetheless sporadic efforts have been undertaken. Sakhi Kaushalya for instance, inspired by the training, freed herself and her family from years of bondage. While this was an isolated incident it was the first time such a step had been taken and its impact cannot be overstated. It is seemingly isolated incidents such as this that help build an identity for the programme.

Where collective action has been taken it has met with success. The programme has successfully organized around the issue of wages for collecting Tendu leaves (leaves used to make indigenous cigarettes called 'bidis'). This issue was taken up by Gopal bhai in 1989. Collection of Tendu leaves is a major source of income for both men and women in the area. In Banda district, unlike other regions in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh and U.P., Tendu rates are very low, and the government has no fixed rate structure. The going rate in Manikpur was Rs 12 for a bundle of 100 leaves. Rates are one among many problems. The Forest Department leases out collection rights to contractors, known as 'Phar Munshis', who distribute the wages. Besides fudging accounts, every year these 'Phar Munshis' withhold payment for the last 5-6 days of work, knowing that the bargaining power of the workers is weak towards the end of the season. In 1989 they had withheld almost 30 lakhs worth of payment.

Gopal bhai decided to agitate both for higher wages and the payment of all the illegally withheld money. The Sakhis under his guidance mobilized the villagers to send post cards to the Chief Minister of U.P. stating their demands. Thousands of post cards were mailed. They also organized a large demonstration outside the offices of the District Administration and the Forest Corporation in Karvi and presented a petition of demands. Their efforts resulted in an increased rate of Rs. 18 for a bundle of 100 and they were able to recover Rs 28 lakhs of the outstanding

women can raise questions. The main issues that have been raised for discussion are:

- (i) Wages and problems of bonded labour
 - (ii) Water
 - (iii) Health
 - (iv) Oppression of Women: violence and sexual harassment
 - (v) Education
-

GENERAL OVERVIEW SAHARANPUR DISTRICT UP
 (from Progress Report Mahila Samakhya UP, September 1991)

Number of Villages	93
Number of Sakhis	9
Number of Sahayoginis	93
Number of Creative Centers for Children ...	10
Training Support:	Alarippu (Delhi), Action India (Delhi) & WDP (Rajasthan)
Blocks Covered:	Sarsawa, Sadoli & Muzafarabad

A. BACKGROUND

MS was launched in Saharanpur district in May 1989 through two NGOs, Disha and Vikalp, which have been working with the rural poor for many years. Disha is working in an agriculturally prosperous area and has been organizing agricultural workers, particularly women, around the issue of minimum wages. Since Disha's participation in MS their work among women labourers has intensified. Disha's earlier work among Muslim women, especially their non-formal education programme for young girls, had earned the group goodwill in the area. They did not however, have women workers at the village level and were keen to take up the MS programme.

Vikalp has been organizing the rural poor around issues of access to forest produce and wages in the "ghad" area (northern part of the district on the foothills of the Siwaliks). Vikalp has organized a strong union of workers, 'Ghad Kshetra Mazdoor Morcha' (GKMM), in which women have been in the forefront of the struggle.

The experience of working with NGOs has been different in Saharanpur compared with the other districts. Both organizations have been involved in struggles for change, and their ideology and style of functioning were conducive to promoting Samakhya's values. What Samakhya did provide was a space for them to develop an understanding of gender issues. They were able to build on

existing organizational networks and work on women's problems. Both organizations now have a strong cadre of women workers in the Sakhis and Sahayoginis and the leadership of their collectives no longer rests solely in male hands.

There is no dichotomy between the work of MS and the work of the NGOs. Sakhis and Sahayoginis participate in the meetings of the NGOs and take an active part in all their activities. This has been mutually beneficial. For instance, the mobilizing done by the Sakhis and Sahayoginis has meant that the participation of women in events like the annual sammelan has increased dramatically, and for Samakhya the organizational base of these agencies has been an effective launching pad. The initial selection of Sahayoginis was done by both NGOs, and Jhanvi Tewari from Disha agreed to co-ordinate the programme.

B. TRAINING PROGRAMMES

The initial training were organized by Alarippu (Delhi) for Disha and by Action India (Delhi) for Vikalp. The Sahayogini training organized by Alarippu proved to be a landmark because of the dramatic events surrounding Sahayogini Munawar's involvement in the training and programme. Munawar, who comes from an orthodox Muslim family, came to the training against her family's wishes. Two days into the training members of her family came and forcibly took her away. Munawar's case became the focal point of the training. A series of discussions and negotiations ensued between Disha, the trainers, the Sahayoginis and Munawar's family where everyone explained to them that Munawar was not about to embark on a "bad" career. The support Munawar received from those present at the training strengthened her resolve to resist her family. She was finally allowed to attend the training and continue working with the programme.

DISHA'S TRAINING SCHEDULE

DATES	DURATION	NO: OF Sakhis	NO: OF SAHA-YOGINIS	DIU	TRAINER S
5 -14 July 1989	10 days	17	6 + 4 Disha workers		Alarip- pu/ WDP
16 - 25 January 1990	10 days	24	6	1	DIU/ sahayo- ginis
6 - 15 November 1990	10 days	13	4	1	DIU/ sahayo- ginis
18 - 27 March 1991	10 days	5 + 6 Disha workers	2	1	DIU/ sahayo- ginis
5 - 10 December 1990	5 days	10 teachers	1	1	Ala- rippu
20- 22 April 1991	2 days	10 teachers	6 + 2 Disha workers	-	Sahayo- ginis

C. AREAS OF WORK

- (i) Minimum wages
 - (ii) Cases related to desertion, divorce and sexual harassment of women
 - (iii) Provision of Government schemes and services.
 - (iv) Communalism
 - (v) Education
-

GENERAL OVERVIEW DISTRICT TEHRI GARHWAL
(from Progress Report Mahila Samakhya UP, September 1991)

Number of Villages	103
Number of Sakhia	103
Number of Sakhi Training.....	4
Number of Sahayoginis.....	15
Number of Creative Centers for Children....	0
Training Support:	Jagori (Delhi) & WDP (Rajasthan)
Blocks Covered:	Bhilangana, Pratap Nagar, Jakholi, Jakhnidhar

A. BACKGROUND

MS was launched in Tehri district through a group of five NGOs. A preliminary meeting was held in Chamba in February 1989 where the selection criteria for NGOs and Sahayoginis were discussed. Fifteen agencies attended the meeting and it was decided that NGOs working with rural women, and those in agreement with the basic philosophy of the programme would be selected. The five agencies that agreed to work in partnership with MS were:

1. Lok Jeevan Vikas Bharati (LJVB), Buda Kedar
2. Jan Vikas Sansthan (JVS), Jakholi
3. Mahila Nav Jagran Samiti (MNJS), Chamba
4. Bhuvaneshwari Mahila Ashram (BMA), Anjani Sain
5. Bhawani Bhai: Thakkar Baba Chatravas (TBC), Tehri

LJVB acted as the nodal agency. EMA and MNJS dissociated themselves from the programme in June 1990. The first round of selection of Sakhis and Sahayoginis was done by the NGOs, but not before an exhaustive list of criteria had been evolved in consultation with the NPO, Jagori and women activists of the area.

Due to geographic reasons it was agreed that the Sahayoginis would initially work in 5 villages each, with the understanding that they would gradually take on 10 villages. Expansion has

been slow, and only by December 1990 were the Sahayoginis able to cover 10 villages.

This region has a history of struggle in which women have played a major role. The Chipko movement in the 1970's and the movement against alcoholism are now well known, as is the fact that while the sustenance and strength of the struggle was provided by women, they had no part in the leadership or decision making process.

Women did, on the other hand, have a voice through collectives known as Mahila Mandals which have existed in the Garhwal region for several years. In recent years, however, a number of Mahila Mandals have disintegrated into mere conduits for distributing goods procured through government block level programmes. Their work has centered around registration at the block level through the Pradhan to have access to these schemes/services. No longer genuine women's collectives involved in a movement, their ideology is at great variance with MS. As one Sahayogini says, "Even though the women have been together for so long they have not paused to think about themselves. They given no thought to the fires they are burning in." The Sakhis and Sahayoginis have faced the daunting task of rejuvenating these Mahila Mandals, and through MS have provided a alternative forum for addressing women's issues.

B. TRAINING PROGRAMMES

After the first round of selection, Jagori organized a number of orientation meetings with the new Sahayoginis. Radha Behn, a member of the national resource group, was unable to fulfill her initial commitment to organize the training in Tehri, and they were subsequently coordinated by Jagori. Apart from their own team, Jagori has drawn on the training resources of

other groups like Action India, Sabla Sangh, and WDP, Rajasthan. The following training have been held in the District:

DATES	DURATION	NO. OF SAKHIS	NO. OF SAHAYO-GINIS	DIU	TRAINERS
14 - 17 February 1989	4 days	-	22	-	Jagori
20 - 26 May 1989	7 days	35	7	-	Jagori
26 - 3 July 1989	8 days	22	7	-	Jagori
26- 3 July 1989	8 days	50	7	-	Jagori
22 - 29 June 1990	8 days	38	-	4	Jagori
13 - 21 December 1990	9 days	19	2	2	Jagori /WDP

C. AREAS OF WORK

- (i) Health
 - (ii) Bride Price and Dowry
 - (iii) Situation of widows
 - (iv) Superstitions and customs
 - (v) Land Rights
 - (vi) Suicide rates among women
 - (vii) Divorce and remarriage
 - (viii) Jawahar Rozgar Yojana (JRY)
 - (ix) Alcoholism
 - (x) Education
 - (xi) Child care facilities
-

FLYING MAGIC CARPETS OR UDAN KHATOLA

CREATIVE CENTERS FOR CHILDREN IN VARANASI DISTRICT

D. CREATIVE CENTERS FOR CHILDREN: 'UDAN KHATOLA'

An interesting experiment with children's education has been carried out in Varanasi district.

Children's Education reflecting the spirit of Samakhya

Government schools and balvadis conjure up a horrific image of everything negative about education in the minds of the village community. From the initial planning stages the group decided that the centers run by Samakhya would be radically different. They first needed a unique name that did not have echoes of 'balvadi' or 'anganwadi'. The name 'Udan Khatola' (flying carpet) reflects the conviction that these schools would be special - they would be places where children love to come, which is not restrictive, places where both children and Anudeshika's (female teachers) look happy and creativity is given importance, a centre which has the support of the community. And are these 'Udan Khatolas' different? Anudeshika's and Sakhi's proudly relate that it is not difficult to recognize a child going to an 'Udan Khatola'. She could be from any village but will greet you by saying "zindabad!" and not "namaste!".

How it all began

In January 1990, Varanasi district had an internal review of its programme. During the self-evaluation some of the upper caste, educated Sakhi's (from the first batch) expressed dissatisfaction with their own performance. They felt unable to reach out to the poor, low caste women in their villages, and were doing injustice to their roles as Sakhi's. They were, however, committed to the programme, and wanted to explore possibilities of finding other spaces for themselves.

At the same time Sahayogini's and Sakhi's reported that village women were asking for their children to be taught. Some of these literate Sakhi's, who were already teaching children informally, were keen to do this regularly and were willing to take on the responsibility of running a centre.

Groundwork

From January to March 1990 preparatory work began to discuss the larger vision behind the centers and to determine how they would be run. The DIU sought Jagori's help to launch the project and identify a resource person. Jagori, lacking experience in the field of children's education, held a series of meetings with experienced Delhi based groups like Alarippu and Ankur. It was necessary to clarify basic details about the kind of a centre MS wanted to begin, the likely age group, when and where the classes going to be held, the number of children the Anudeshika's could realistically manage, how they would inspire greater participation of girls etc. Both the MS group and Jagori felt that the finer details could only be worked out in the field and by March 1990, 12 centers were begun on an experimental basis.

The creative input

In April 1990, Ramfal, who had worked in the field of children's education with the Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC), Tilonia, in Rajasthan, was called in as a

resource person. His specific task was to help the Anudeshika's develop creative skills to teach children through theatre, songs and puppetry. Ramlal worked with the Sevapuri team for 6 months from April to September 1990. He was able to infuse the programme with so much energy that the 'Udan Khatolas' soon became the most vibrant aspect of the MS programme in Varanasi.

The Children's 'melas': Mobilizing local support

Ramlal visited the centers and had long discussions with the Anudeshika's. He also attended regular village meetings and built linkages with the Sakbhi's, Sahayonigi's and the larger community.

Towards the end of April, the group decided to hold a small children's 'mela' in Sahayogini Umraji's cluster of villages. Umraji, Ramlal and the Anudeshika's brought together children from 3-4 centers and organized games and plays, made posters and composed songs. After five days of preparations, on the sixth day they held a small 'mela' and exhibited their handiwork. It had a tremendous impact on the villagers. A number of women had been participating in the preparations and felt part of the whole process. They soon began to take an active interest in the running of the centre. The other Sahayogini's and Anudeshika's were inspired to hold similar 'melas' in their own areas. It was finally decided that children from all the 'Udan Khatolas' should come together for one large 'mela'.

Before deciding on the venue, a meeting of the entire Khargupur village community was held. The villagers were so enthusiastic that they offered to take care of all the arrangements - food, water, etc. The DIU just had to arrange for the microphone and stage.

Anudeshika training

Date/Duration/Venue	Focus	Trainer
August 1990, 15 days. DIU Office, Varanasi	Develop creative skills of Anudeshikas & Sahayoginis/ evolve innovative teaching methods	Ramlal
December 1990, 2 days. DIU Office, Varanasi	Follow-up workshop/ practical problems faced in the field	Runu, Jagori
January 1991, 7 days. DIU Office, Varanasi	Develop teaching aids, handwork, origami etc./ creative teaching methods for language and mathematics	Komal Srivastava, Jagori, Rashmi Tiwari, DIU
March 1991, 15 days State Office, Lucknow. Attended by Anudeshikas of Varanasi & Saharanpur	Conceptual issues regarding children's education. Developing language teaching skills	Tripta Batra, Jagori

About 200 children from 12 centers gathered in Khargapur village on May 30th. It was the height of summer but the place was charged with energy. There was no pre-determined programme, and the children were given free run of the stage. They played games, ran around, and generally had "a good time". The uniqueness of the 'mela' lay in the level of involvement of the entire village community, particularly of the young boys and girls. Assisted by the MS team, they had planned and organized the entire event. Everyone, including the village Pradhan, made some contribution. As Bindu Singh, the Varanasi DRP, described it, food kept pouring out of everyone's home. The 'mela' was a tremendous success and reinforced the belief that for any programme to be successful it is imperative for the community to accept it as their own.

'Udan Khatolas' today: Problems and future plans

The flexible and unstructured character of the 'Udan Khatolas' is not without problems. Classes are held for four hours usually in the mornings, where ever the Anudeshika can find a suitable space - under a tree, in a courtyard or orchard. Consequently classes often get suspended during the monsoon and summer, when the heat becomes unbearable for young children.

The number of children attending the centers varies from 20 to 55. Ages range from 3 years to 16 years, but a greater proportion are between the ages of 4 to 7. The large numbers and varied age group is making it increasingly difficult for one Anudeshika to manage. During a workshop in March, the Anudeshika's suggested that where a sufficient number of older children attend, it might be more realistic to have two Anudeshika's.

Most centers are being run in low coast 'bastis' where resources are most needed. But the Khargapur 'mela' broke these caste barriers and reinforced the belief that if we are build a children's world where discrimination and biases are absent then our centers should reach out to all groups and communities. One creditable feature is there are at least 50% girls in every 'Udan Khatola'. Some centers are attended only by girls. Anudeshika's, Sakhi's and Sahayogini's have also encouraged parents to enroll their daughters in the formal schools, and to ensure that they attend regularly.

The DIU has provided each Anudeshika with a roll up black board, a notebook, pen and a register along with other basic teaching material. The Varanasi team assisted by Jagori has begun compiling a list of the locally available books, primers and other teaching aids, to lessen their dependence on material from outside. Most MS villages have access to a newspaper which is used at the centers. A children's magazine called 'Chakmak' is also reaching each centre.

'Udan Khatolas' are a concrete reflection of the spirit of MS. The centers have forged strong ties between MS and village community, so much so that during the U.P. review in April, the team talked about initiating work in new villages through these centers.

'Udan Khatolas' have stimulated a desire for education and literacy which is not restricted to children. Women in their free time come and sit in the classes. Access to newspapers and books has fueled this desire.

Source: Progress Report Mahila Samakhya UP, September 1991.

NOTES ON SAHARANPUR DISTRICT

Within Saharanpur District the Mahila Samakhya Programme (MSP) is implemented in a way which is clearly distinct from the other districts of U.P. It is the only U.P. district where the MSP is implemented through the Voluntary Agencies who were initially involved in the launching of Mahila Samakhya in the Saharanpur District. At present the MSP is implemented via three channels:

- a. via DISHA, an NGO involved in organizing and mobilizing poor agricultural labourers around issues like wages and other forms of injustice.
- b. via VIKALP, a grass-root activist NGO involved in supporting the movement of labourers in their struggle to maintain access to and control of the forest resources.
- c. via the newly established DIU

Each organization operates in a different geographical area and maintains its own operational style. A clear decision has been made by the DIU to initiate the Mahila Samakhya Programme in a new block, outside the operational areas of DISHA and VIKALP, with the intention to give special attention to the situation of single women (widows, deserted and divorced women).

1. MSP under DISHA and VIKALP

The operational styles, emphasis on the poor and activist orientation of both NGOs as well as the prominent role of female labourers in the movement for wages and the Ghad Movement (referred to as the Morcha) have provided conditions which are, to a certain extent, compatible with the Mahila Samakhya ideology. The same conditions and the inherent flexibility provided by the Mahila Samakhya Programme have provided a suitable climate or context for launching the Mahila Samakhya Programme in the Saharanpur District and for integration of the Mahila Samakhya approach into the operational styles of the organizations. A strong force of motivated Sahayogini's and Sakhi's has been trained for mobilizing and organizing village women around issues related to women's work, access to resources and services, communalism as well as specific women's issues related to work and wages, domestic violence, dowry, rape etc. The MS component has become firmly lodged and integrated in the operational structures of these NGOs, enabling them to widen their scope of activities, to expand their geographical outreach and to become more sensitive and responsive to women's issues in a systematic manner.

However there are signs that by becoming integrated into the Volags structures the MS component has lost some of its MS identity or ideological direction. This is partly the result of the incomplete training, and partly a consequence of the strategy of integrating the MS component within an existing structure with already vested - male dominated - interests (in spite of openness and willingness to appreciate and recognize the important role women have played and are playing in the struggle over jungle resources and wage issues). Questions that need to be raised are e.g. to what extent does the DISHA or VIKALP/Morcha umbrella allow for participation of village women in planning and decision making processes? To what extent is there room for in-house transformation of the genderized power structures, debate on changing internalized male attitudes and values which reinforce the patriarchal nature of gender relationships? or for gender confrontations and conflicts?

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The mission has observed that the training has been incomplete and un-reinforced as far as gender awareness and internalization of the ideology of Mahila Samakhya is concerned. The first Sakhi/Sahayogini training programmes were designed and conducted by Allaripu for DISHA and Action India for VIKALP. Both training organizations are represented in the Jagori network and draw upon resource persons, experiences, training methodologies from Jagori and from the WDP Rajasthan teams. In the subsequent training sessions Allaripu gradually withdrew its input for strategic reasons: by gradual withdrawal and handing over the training responsibilities to DISHA and the experienced Sahayogini's and Sakhi's, the training would become institutionalized within the DISHA structure. Question is whether the Sahayogini's and Sakhi's were ready to make that step, whether their own process of learning had been reinforced sufficiently to be able to share and transmit their experiences without diluting the basic ideologies of the MS programme. While the previously trained Sahayogini's and Sakhi's became more strongly involved in the design and implementation of new training programmes, the training gradually developed into an in-house affair which carries a clear DISHA stamp. The training has become more functionally and issue oriented rather than process oriented and aimed, ultimately at transforming asymmetrical gender and other power relationships into relationships based on equality. As a result the Sahayogini's and Sakhi's are now trained as village 'animators' for mobilizing village women on issues rather than as facilitators encouraging village women to realize and assert their own strength. It is not quite clear whether the same can be said for VIKALP. But also within VIKALP the effects of the training have not filtered down to the level of village women (e.g. the mission has observed that village women have not been involved in the planning, design and construction of the Tikana or hut).

2. The relationship between the NGOs and the DIU

The status of the DIU as an institution of the State Government, which became operational from March 1991, vis-à-vis the NGOs is as yet unclear. From the perspective of the NGOs it is not to be expected that they will be prepared to hand over their 'Mahila Samakhya team' to the newly established DIU unconditionally. Particularly to a DIU who, as yet, has to establish its identity and credibility within the Saharanpur context, whereas both DISHA and the MORCHA are recognized identities. Moreover there is anxiety about losing their autonomy as NGOs if they are to become associated with a programme from the Government.

It is unclear if coordination of the MSP input from the side of the DIU will result in a re-orientation of the MS component within the NGO structures and if the NGOs are willing to permit such change.

At present the three organizations operate more or less as a federation, coordinated by a team consisting of the DIU resource person and the (unofficial) women's programme coordinators of VIKALP and DISHA. Jointly they have been involved in the selection and training design for the Sahayogini's and Sakhi's who will be working the new DIU area. The DIU resource person appears to strategically plan her own way by seeking advice from, coordination and cooperating with the NGOs, gaining their trust and confidence. She is determined to succeed through cooperation rather than through confrontation. According to a spokesman of one of the NGOs she may be in a vulnerable position as a person who is new in the district and who lacks the 'protection' from a fatherly NGO.

The different aspects and implications of this implementation modality needs a deeper analysis. For the time being some preliminary observations are given below.

3. The impact of Mahila Samakhya on the NOGs

Taking up the MSP has helped the both Volags in increasing the area and the scope of their activities. It has enabled them to extend their outreach towards women who are playing an important role in the activist movements. It has accelerated the process of empowering women at least at the level of sakhi's and sahayoginis in taking up an activist role with regard to issues raised by women. It has also effected in a greater societal recognition of women's role in community struggles and respect for women (according to VIKALP).

The main focus has been on issues like the access to the natural forest resources, ration cards, electricity, road and bridge construction which are mainly community issues. Hard struggle for specific women's issues like unequal wages have been successful in raising women's wages for agricultural labour. But as a result the wages of male workers have increased as well so that female labour still is valued less. More systematic attention is being given to specific women's issues related to problems resulting from the dowry system, cases of rape and domestic violence. These issues are usually resolved as individual cases through dialogue and counseling. Recently a rape case in one of the DISHA blocs aroused sakhi's and sahayogini's into action by mobilizing village women who by collective action forced the police to arrest the culprits. And collectively women have expressed their anger by public exposure of the culprits, not as an act of vengeance, but to show their anger and demand changes in male attitudes. The release of two of the culprits from jail on the day of the mission's visit has raised a new wave of anger from sakhi's and sahayoginis, who were heavily involved in discussing this issue and planning a response. These incidents do show that within an integrationist approach gender confrontations are due to arise and that women have started demanding changes. The initiators and activists as yet are the sakhi's and the sahayoginis.

The visit by the mission has not led to a clear understanding of the extent to which the experience of empowerment and the strong sense of collectivism that exists among sakhi's and sahayoginis has been shared with and filtered down to village women. The concept of a sangha is as yet unclear and may refer to any village meeting whether for women only or for mixed audiences who come together to discuss an issue.

In both organization the role of the Sakhi's and Sahayogini's is to mobilize women, to identify women's issues and to initiate actions. Sahayogini's describe their task as

- . being a friend
- . generating a feeling of sisterhood among women
- . bringing information to women which help women to make their own decisions rather than to depend on decision made for them by men
- . solving women's problems through sisterhood and friendship.

To sum up: both organizations have incorporated the input from the Mahila Samakhya Programme within their existing organizational structures. They now have an women's programme alongside their health, education and other community programmes. The Sakhi's and Sahayogini's do identify themselves with their parent organization and are part of the village mobilization teams. (E.g. ten villages in the DISHA area are being visited by a whole team of a sahayogini, a sathin (health worker) and a community worker. The other 50 villages the support is limited to one Sahayogini (trained under the Mahila Samakhya Programme).

4. Training

The training of Sakhi's and Sahayogini's has been organized by Allaripu for Disha and by Action India for Vikalp. Both these organization were already cooperating with the Volags. Allaripu started as a theater group and has experience in running several training programmes aimed at awareness raising, self-esteem and for mobilization. Women's issues do play an important role in the training but the training programmes do not have an explicit perspective on changing relations of gender. In the process of incorporating and institutionalizing the training within the organizations Sakhi's and Sahayogini's have become trained as social animators in mobilizing women around certain issues rather than as facilitators for village women to strengthen their own self esteem, recreate awareness of their collective strength, exposure to new learning experiences which helps them to analyse and question their situation and empowers them to plan and design their own strategies for change.

No systematic follow-up and reinforcement of the learning process has been provided after the initial training and a clear long term perspective and strategic planning of training, education or other learning inputs either internal or external seems to be lacking. This can partly be attributed to lack of funds for activities and unclarity on the part of the NGOs about which provision as are allowed for under the Mahila Samakhya set up.

The training has resulted in articulate, self-confident, active and committed Sahayogini's and Sakhi's.

On the whole the MS component seems to have become incorporated in and adapted to the organizational and operational styles of the parent organizations. It has resulted in an integration of attention to women's issues in their grass root activists programmes. But it is doubt full whether this integrative approach will lead to a greater awareness about gender issues and result in actual changing relations of gender and patriarchal values and attitudes into relationships based on equality between genders. Although village women are being seen as powerful actors in the activist movement they have not been involved in the planning and decision making related to these actions taken up by the movement.

This is, for example, visible in the Thikana (hut construction) programme and the literacy approach developed through VIKALP. The strategy for the planning and decision making processes related to the hut construction programme needs to be reconsidered and reconstructed into a fully participative approach where village women decide about whether, how and for what purposes they want to build a space for themselves, where they can meet discuss. Village women should be involved in the hut design, the planning and the construction of their own hut.

5. Literacy

Within the VIKALP region the sakhi's have undergone a three month long training programme in literacy skills on a daily basis. The methodology for the literacy has been decided upon by the Vikalp resource person and the sahayoginis, without involving the Sakhi's. Why this the choice has been made to focus on literacy training on sakhi's and burden the sahayogini's with the instruction is not clear. Have other modalities for literacy training sufficiently been explored? Since classes were held on a daily basis at fixed hours, many of the sakhi's have been unable to attend the classes regularly due to their time schedules, working load and the distance to the village where the classes were held. Only a small number of the sakhi's (appr. 4 out of 10) managed to attend the classes regularly. Others attended irregularly, which distorted the learning continuity and

effectiveness of learning and tempo of learning. No differentiation was made between fast and slower learners. There was no clarity about the direction of learning (recognition writing names, reading, writing. As a sakhi told us 'I can write a dictation, but I am unable to write what I think'. The approach seemed to lack flexibility which is needed to adapt to different patterns and tempos of learning. It is also not clear to what extent this literacy training is reinforcing the learning process of the sakhi's themselves.

The learning methodology through recognition of familiar words shows similarities with the approach adopted in the Varanasi District. But the implementation and learning approach seem rather impressionistic and ad-hoc: it lacks professional guidance based on innovative learning experiences adopted in elsewhere and it lacks a long term perspective (e.g. provision of follow-up, post-literacy, sustainability etc.). The sustainability, applicability and reinforcement of the learning process is not sufficiently looked into. It appears as an impulsive response to a perceived need rather than a well planned and thought out strategy.

5. Other linkages with education

Under DISHA a start has been made for the establishment of creative learning centres for out-of-school children. The idea behind it is very exiting and innovative. It provides opportunities for out-of school children to have fun, to play, to learn, and for older girls to get away from domestic and other labour chores. It can provide a bridge towards formal education. The programme started with a children's meal which met an enthusiast response. At present 10 centres are or will be established. The programme is co-financed by other organizations. Allaripu provides for a part time resource person on a fellowship basis. The programme is still in a nascent stage. The mission is of the opinion that also for this innovative and challenging enterprise experienced inputs for the operationalization of the ideas, experimenting with innovative creative learning methods, planning and strategizing with a long term perspective in mind is required. Intra (Varanasi) as well as inter (e.g. Sabarkhanta) state coordination and sharing of experiences as well as professional guidance are required to strengthen this component of the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

At present this education component seems to be autonomous and independent from the DIU. The organizational implications are as yet unclear. For the time being it seems advisable to keep the programme separate from the DIU, both are still in an experimental stage.

6. DIU

Around April/March 1991 the DIU has become operational after a three month period of orientation and building up relationships with the existing infra-structures. At present the DIU staff consists of one resource person, one accountant, one messenger and a driver. The DIU has been provided with a spacious office, office equipment and a vehicle. The intention of establishment of the DIU is to coordinate and support the Mahila Samakhya Programme activities in the Saharanpur district. As yet no District Coordinator has been appointed and the DIU resource person with the women programme coordinators from VIKALP and DISHA do coordinate and cooperate for instance in the selection and training of Sahayogini's and Sakhi's for the new area. To make her efforts sustainable it is needed that the DIU Resource person can rely on a strong support network from within Mahila Samakhya, from external resource persons and consultants as well as from within the district: networking and coordination with the NGOs and with the local administration and district resource persons.

7. Relationship DIU and NGOs

The relationship between the DIU and the NGOs as well as with the Sahayogini's and Sakhi's needs to be clarified. It seems important to the mission that the Sahayogini's and Sakhi's under the NGOs and the under the DIU link-up and form a strong network which is linked to the Mahila Samakhya network across districts and states. This will help to restore, maintain and strengthen the Mahila Samakhya identity and ideological principles without loosing on the flexibility of the implementation modalities allowed for in the programme. The DIU in cooperation with the DISHA and VIKALP resource persons will have to play a strong role in building this intra district MS network and link it to the overall MS network. The tripartite relationship is certainly worthwhile to continue although it is a very complicated relationship, which needs further consideration.

8. Documentation, evaluation and monitoring:

Whatever documentation is available comes from Jagori (Diary) and from Allaripu.

9. Management and organization

The management and organization structure needs urgently looking into: the tripartite modality and 'federal set-up' demands a complete different management and organizational model based on partnership, clarity with regard to financial and cooperative arrangements, coordination of joined activities, mutual responsibilities and accountability etc. It is essential that all partners are involved in the discussion and decision making. There should be clarity about the role of the State Government and the Mahila Samakhya Society towards the district and vice versa. At present the flow of funds towards the NGOs goes through the DIU. The NGOs are not happy with this arrangements which makes them financially dependent on the DIU. The NGOs have been requested to sign a letter of Bond. The contents of this letter and its implications are as yet unclear. But it appears to be a one sided proposition without a preceding discussion with the partners involved. On their side there is no clarity. It is recommended to involve a management and organization consultant as well as a legal advisor to assist in developing an appropriate management and coordination structure at district level.

10. Financial management

Regarding the financial management Saharanpur experiences the same problems as in the other UP districts, with the added complication of the NGOs' dependency on the DIU for funds. On the whole it is a complete set of unclarities on all sides, which is bound to lead to distrust and distorted relationships, which may have, unnecessary, negative consequences. The non-involvement of the NGOs in the design of the arrangements can lead to serious conflicts which may be damaging for the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Saharanpur.

11. The role of the State

There is certainly a need for an autonomous Mahila Samakhya State Unit to support (and not control) the development of the district programme, to provide vision, direction and planning support, to identify resources for training and educational inputs, to coordinate intra and inter state activities and exchange, to liaison with the government. One very important function of the state and national offices is to provide a channel for women to influence policy making, policy decisions and implementation structures of government policies and to make government bodies and the legal system more sensitive to issues raised by women at grassroots level.

According to one resource person: 'sometimes we feel that we have reached a dead end, there are limits as to what women can achieve through pressurizing local power structures. What we need is legal support and the influence of Mahila Samakhya as a Government programme to influence policy making, to point at the loopholes in the legal structures, which make that rapists are released from jail and walk around freely before the case is heard and sentenced.'

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

PART THREE

SOME OBSERVATIONS RELATED TO THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME IN KARNATAKA

January 1992

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

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

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ANNEXES

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Period of the mission:	September 29 - October 31, 1991

2. Strategy of empowerment:

The Mahila Samakhye Programme Karnataka has adopted a conscious strategy of starting with issues like saving schemes, sangha huts, land issues, literacy, health when the programme first establishes itself. Consequently, the sangha women have started organising themselves on relatively non-controversial, community issues in which they face least opposition from the men folk. The Mission feels that the men on the whole have been very supportive, for they realise that through the Mahila Sangha, women can mobilize resources like water, loan, land registration, funds for a sangha hut, etc. In the opinion of the Mission, this is a good approach.

How far the community will be supportive in allowing women to grow and build their lives on the new experiences and learning inputs is a question still to be answered. Will they accept women questioning the values and customs oppressive in their homes? While sensitizing women about gender issues it is necessary that the Mahila Samakhya Programme prepares and anticipates the consequences and mobilizes support structures by sensitizing them to women's demands, using their power and linkages to influence and mobilize the legal system, policy makers and implementors at levels where the voices of rural women are, until now, ignored or unheard.

3. Training and resource support

In MSP Karnataka the initial training of sahayoginis and other kinds of training were organised by different organisation, some of the more important ones are: AIKYA, SEARCH, ALLARIPU. A great diversity in kinds of training and organisations providing them is still characteristic of MSP Karnataka. There are two sides to this great diversity. On the one hand good use is made on what is on offer, one can pick the best experts for certain kinds of training. On the other hand, one can see in Karnataka that there is a danger that it might turn into a kind 'cafeteria-system' of training. The Mission, therefore, feels that there is a need to formulate a long-term training strategy. By involving individuals and organisations that have the necessary expertise and field-experience in the planning stages of the training policy, their commitment is ensured and the Mahila Samakhya concept can be communicated to them.

Apart from that, one can observe that MSP Karnataka has progressed so far that it has quite a few resource-persons within its own organisation, who can provide training in specific areas, e.g. herbal medicine. These resource-persons are mainly found at the state office, but increasingly DIU-staff and sahayoginis specialise in certain areas and become valuable resource-persons. Sahayoginis are encouraged to widen their perspectives, by continuing their studies (part-time), by learning specific skills and by being stimulated to formulate their own career perspectives.

SOME OBSERVATIONS RELATED TO THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME IN
KARNATAKA

1. Introduction

In Karnataka, the Mahila Samakhya Programme is implemented in the districts of Bidar and Bijapur, the utterly backward areas with low status of women by all indicators, and in the extremely backward tribal areas of Mysore district. The Mahila Samakhya Programme has been successful in reaching out to the poorest of the poor and the socially oppressed groups of women, regardless of caste and community. The Mission considers this to be an outstanding achievement. So far no educational or developmental programme has so directly linked itself with these poor rural women on such a large scale. The Mahila Samakhya Programme has provided them with the rare opportunity for a self development process, ensuring their participation in decision making processes at all levels. The very backbone of the programme in Karnataka are a cadre of highly motivated staff at all levels from the State Office to the DIU and the Sahayogini's.

The way in which the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka is operating, provides a positive illustration of how, as an autonomous registered society, autonomy and flexibility is maintained while ensuring the participation and support of the State Government.

If in the following paragraphs some concerns are expressed, or recommendations made, they should be read in the context mentioned above and taken as positive points for consideration in order to strengthen the programme or aspects of the programme.

The commitment, dedication and hard-work of the sahayogini's and all other staff is unparalleled compared to other government and sometimes non-governmental functionaries. The sahayoginis regularly have to cover a distance of 15 to 20 km. on foot to reach inaccessible areas. The Mission considers it most essential that they be provided with a loan for the purchase of a bicycle in order to save their energy and time. Many Sahayogini's expressed the wish to learn to ride a bicycle and in Mysore district a training in riding a bicycle has already been organised for the Sahayogini's. We appreciate that in a constant effort to develop the human resources, the core Mahila Samakhya staff, the Sahayogini's are encouraged to promote their personal growth and are encouraged to continue their education as external students, through provision of study leave, tutorships etc.

4. Literacy

In Bijapur-district there has been a strong involvement of MSP in the Literacy Mission, this has had a very positive impact on the success of the campaign. However, the Mission observed that, at the same time, it has had a negative effect on the Mahila Samakhya programme. Even before Mahila Samakhya had mobilized women and had firmly established its identity, all its staff was drawn to take up the literacy campaign. The participation of Mahila Samakhya which was initially restricted, was extended to cover many more villages. More importantly the short term target oriented, campaign approach that did not provide time and space to women, was conflicting with the Mahila Samakhya's long term non-target and process oriented approach. This gave a set-back to Mahila Samakhya's own programme in setting the process of empowerment of women in the right direction. So, the MSP in Bijapur was negatively effected by the literacy campaign in three ways:

1. The literacy campaign drew heavily on the human resources of MSP;
2. The MSP and the literacy campaign differ in its approach and objectives, and were sometimes contradictory;
3. The process-approach that characterises the MSP was interrupted or even broken.

In both Mysore and Bidar district MSP has had the opportunity to develop its own literacy approach. Night classes are organised for sangha women, literacy instructors (village women) are identified and trained to work with the literacy material that has been developed by MSP (Bidar) or others (Mysore). Women learn at their own pace, whenever it fits in their schedule.

Within a few months the literacy mission will be launched in Bidar, with a six months campaign. MSP is clearly perceived, by the District Controller, as an avenue for launching this campaign. Arrangements have been made that MSP Bidar will take up the campaign in 50% of the villages in the blocs where MSP is operating. The Mission is concerned that the literacy campaign, because of the intensity of its approach, might interrupt the process of empowerment of sangha women. The time-frame is likely to put a lot of pressure on the human resources of MSP, among others because many more villages need to be trained and monitored, and within villages classes must be organised for men's groups as well. However, the process of empowerment in Bidar is already well set and there certainly is a need for literacy expressed by the sangha women themselves. Therefore, the Mission feels that the risks of involvement in the literacy campaign are not as big as in Bijapur. Nevertheless it is very important that the MSP keeps in control of its co-operation in the campaign and does not compromise on its own learning approach, i.e. flexibility in timing, flexibility in adjusting to differential learning patterns, no set targets in terms of numbers and time etc.

The involvement of MSP should be clearly specified in terms of educational inputs that will be expected of MSP and in concrete terms with contractual arrangements.

5. Child care centers

Child care centers have been established in Bidar (6) and Mysore (19), in Bijapur child care centers have not yet been established. In Bidar an excellent method for the training for child care workers has been developed, and Mysore has organized training for child care workers along similar lines.

In Mysore the child care centers include a medical component, because these villages are totally isolated from any medical care: there are budgetary provisions for a private doctor visiting the center three times a month. This medical component is one of the reasons, why women in Mysore like to send their children to the child care centers, because otherwise these children would have no access to medical services. The medical care facilities in Bidar are as poor as in Mysore, but unfortunately there is no health component in the child care centers there.

There are several issues connected to the child care centers, about which the Mission feels there could be more clarity. For example the relationship of the child care centers to the ICDS pre-school programme and food distribution is not very clear. This has led to problems in the co-operation in Bidar, where the child care centers are jointly run by the ICDS and the MSP.

The Mission also feels there should be more insight^{3v} into the motivations of parents to send their children to the child care centers: is it because women need more control of their own time, or to relieve older children of the younger siblings to enable them to attend school, or because parents want a pre-school education for their children, or merely because they want custodial care, or because parents want their children to profit from the additional food and health services the centers provide?

More insights into the main motivations of parents can enable the MSP to tailor the centers better to the needs of the women and children. For example, if it is considered by the women mainly as a play and learning facility, then why should it be limited to younger children only? It could then be transferred into some kind of open school, also allowing non-school-going children of different ages, particularly girls, to attend. The creative learning centers, Udan Katholas, in Varanasi district (UP) are excellent examples of such open schools (see also annex 2 of UP-report). Through inter-state sharing of ideas and experiences in this area, the Mission feels that systematic strategising on the innovative learning approaches can be encouraged.

6. Sangha huts

Sangha huts have been constructed in Bidar (4) and Mysore (9), in Bijapur no Sangha huts have constructed so far although land has been acquired in 10 villages in the district. In Mysore one hut is still under construction and in Bidar five huts are under construction. The Sangha huts in Mysore were quite attractive, although the budget does not allow for sanitary facilities. In Bidar, however, the huts not only lacked sanitary facilities, some also lacked ventilation and were too small to accommodate a group of 20 women.

The Mission feels that the women could be more actively involved in the design of the huts, as is for example done in Rajkot district in the state of Gujarat.

Apart from the design, there are also many legal issues around the sangha huts, that the Mission feels have not yet been sufficiently resolved: whom will the hut belong to? Where does the title to the land on which the hut is built rest? Labour is contributed by both women and men in the community can men therefore make use of the sangha hut as well? What happens to the hut when the MSP, a government programme, ceases to operate?

And there are even more issues to be addressed in relation to the sangha huts. The Mission is wondering whether the Hut is used as an incentive to form sanghas or is it a result of the awareness process? What are the required training inputs related to Sangha hut construction? And finally, there is the financial question that needs to be addressed. Clearly, the budgetary provision of RS 15000/- is not sufficient to build an adequate hut, with a spacious veranda. Sanghas in Karnataka can solve part of the problem by donating their Sangha honorarium (RS 400/- per month) to the hut construction. In other states this honorarium is paid to the Sakhi's. However, even if they contribute the entire Sangha honorarium of one year and contribute their labour at no cost as was done in Mysore, it still is not enough to build a sangha hut with sanitary facilities. The Mission feels that the budgetary provision for Sangha hut construction should be reviewed.

Because of all these unresolved issues the Mission recommends to thoroughly review the whole MSP-policy with regard to the Sangha hut construction, to study all the legal and financial implications and to temporarily cease all Sangha hut construction activities in the meantime.

7. Sangha registration

Of the three states where the MSP is operating at the moment, MSP Karnataka is by far the most progressed in the area of Sangha registration. This is quite logical, because MSP Karnataka is slightly different from MSP in the other two states. In Karnataka Sakhi's do not receive a honorarium, but the Sangha itself receives the honorarium (RS 400/month). This means that the Sangha, as a group, has to come to an agreement about what to do with the money. As the Sangha acquires assets, a need to formalise the Sangha in one way or another arises sooner than in the other two states.

In order to be eligible for a Sangha honorarium a Sangha has to register with the DIU. A step further is registration under the Societies Act. So far (August 1991), 39 Sangha's in Bidar and 95 Sangha's in Mysore have registered under Societies Act.

Mahila Samakhya views registration of sanghas as a way of enabling women to establish themselves as a visible, collective and independent forum. Only on reaching a point of strong collective functioning, the sanghas need to be assisted to register themselves. In the case of Bidar and Mysore one can argue that there is such a collective, but the Mission did not feel that the sanghas had reached this stage in Bijapur. This is reflected in the statistics, because no Sangha's in Bijapur have registered under the Societies Act, yet. The Mission recommends that in Bijapur, there should be no pressure on Sangha's to register officially, until such a collective has evolved.

Furthermore, the issue of registration of sangha as a legal entity needs to be carefully examined. The legal and administrative implications need to be clarified and discussed, in all three districts.

In Karnataka, also an idea was expressed to the Mission, to form a federation of Sangha's. The Mission is of the opinion that much strengthening and consolidation at field level is necessary before such an idea could be considered. We are concerned that by putting too much emphasis on building a federation as a dream for the future, will create a situation where the formation of a federation becomes an end in itself. This might endanger the process of strengthening the empowerment of women on their own terms.

8. Mela's

The Mahila Mahiti mela's are a unique feature of the Mahila Samakhya programme in Karnataka (see also annex 1, report of the Bidar Mela). The Mela is a kind of fair, a festive meeting of many MSP women (in Bidar 1500 women attended), that might last several days. Information is provided on aspects like the law, health, savings, economic development, alternative technologies and panchayat system. Mela's have proved successful in gaining access to new areas of knowledge for both the staff and the sangha women. The mela's have contributed positively in breaking the male monopoly of information. It is important that the information disseminated in melas, is followed up in the sangha meetings.

Moreover, attending such a mela might be an empowering experience in itself for Sangha women. The Mission observed that especially in Mysore district, women had experienced the Bidar Mela as an empowering experience, because travelling to Bidar district, far away in the extreme north of Karnataka state is not something Mysore rural women are used to do.

The Mission also thinks that Mela's provide an excellent opportunity to establish linkages and exchange experiences between sangha's of different districts. Furthermore, Mela's are a good opportunity for the MSP to make itself known to the environment by the publicity it generates and by inviting outsiders to contribute.

In view of the massive organisational work involved in organising a mela on the scale of the Bidar mela, the Mission does not recommend to repeat such a mela on a yearly basis. This would put too much strain on the MSP-staff and Sangha women involved. However, smaller mela's could also be very valuable, they could be organised block-wise, district-wise or they could involve two districts. These smaller mela's could be organised around a specific theme, e.g. 8th March or literacy. It could also be envisaged that Sangha's of one district go to visit Sangha's in other districts without necessarily organising a mela.

9. Documentation and internal review

Newsletters are being produced at district level, they form an example of how, with simple means, good results can be booked. The newsletters are written by the Sahayoginis in the language of the village women and deal with concrete local issues, but they also contain general information and sometimes world news. The newsletters are read to the Sangha women and are received enthusiastically. The Mission thinks these newsletters provide an excellent means of sharing information and experiences between Sangha's. The newsletters are also good reading material for neo-literate Sangha women.

In Karnataka a quarterly state-level newsletter is produced. This newsletter is not only for internal use, it is also distributed to a limited group of outsiders. The Mission feels that this state-level newsletter could be exploited more extensively as a means to promote MSP public relations.

The State office has produced several booklets, containing information on different subject and meant to inform Sangha women. An example of such a brochure is the booklet, in the form of a comic, that is now being produced on the 'devadasi'-system (a form of temple prostitution). The devadasi-system is characteristic for Bijapur district. The Mission finds it very useful that such booklets are being produced, and the comic form makes it very attractive reading material. However, the devadasi-system is a many-sided and very complicated phenomenon. The Mission feels that in the process of producing this material, more use could have been made of the available expertise, and the results of research that has been conducted, on this phenomenon.

Reporting is done systematically. Sahayoginis have been trained in creative writing, and some follow-up on this has been given, especially in Mysore, in the form of feed-back on the monthly reports they write. The writing is very narrative, and the Mission thinks that in view of the increasing scale of MSP it would be advisable to start using reporting formats. DIU's (At least Mysore, I don't know about the other two districts, CD) have recently changed their filing system into a village-wise filing system. This certainly is an improvement, but it involves a lot of work. The Mission thinks that some training in this area for DIU-staff involved in this kind of work might be useful. This training could also include the management of a small documentation centre, including the use of a simple classification system. An example of this kind of training is the training in office-management that was provided by Jagori in MSP Uttar Pradesh.

An internal review has taken place in Karnataka. Unfortunately, at the time of the Mission the report of that review was not yet available.

10. Relationship with NGO's

Initially, in the absence of a State structure and District units in two districts, Bidar and Mysore the co-operation of NGO's was sought to implement the Mahila Samakhya programme. After some initial problems in Mysore the DIU has managed to come to terms with NGO's, but it is more a truce than a form of co-operation. In Bijapur, the NGO's perceive Mahila Samakhya as an additional programme with focus on Women without realising that the objectives and approach of Mahila Samakhya are different from their's. In Bidar, Mahila Samakhya could build successfully its process on the ground work laid by Aikya.

This varied experience of Mahila Samakhya working with NGO's in Karnataka clearly shows that if strategic choices are made by Mahila Samakhya about the involvement of NGO's, the kind of co-operation it expects and if there is clarity about the terms of partnership and areas of co-operation, there can be room for more intense co-operation with NGO's. The Mission is of the opinion that the MSP should have control over the involvement of NGO's in its programme, without having to compromise on its approach. This requires a clear view of its own identity and the kind of involvement that is wanted.

11. District Resource Group

The DRG is established in different ways in the districts. In Mysore, it is clearly an advisory body, consisting of individual experts from areas of health, education and legal issues. The DRG in Mysore will no longer consist of representatives of NGO's, but members will be nominated in the DRG on the basis of their expertise. There is no need to have NGO's representatives on the DRG there because co-ordination with NGO's can take place in the Tribal Joint Action Committee of which MSP is also a member.

In Bidar the DRG acts as an advisory and support group, whose membership changes regularly and if needed. In Bijapur the DRG gives the impression of an empowered body. It consists of representatives of the most important agencies related to the programme.

The Mission is of the opinion that an advisory/supporting group should consist of experts in the fields where Mahila Samakhya is working. They should not be representatives of various organisations, as this might imply that the interests of the organisations to which they belong, have to be taken into consideration.

12. Role of State Office

The Mission was impressed by the State office building. It provides ample space and all facilities, including lodging facilities for the State level, DIU staff and sahayoginis. The autonomy of the State office towards the State Government in general, and the Department of Education in particular, seems ensured.

The Mission recognizes and supports the wish of the State office to decentralise its powers to the respective DIU's. The DIU's do need flexibility and autonomy in chalking out their own action plan. However, the role of the state office in providing them vision, guidance and direction in the light of the broad objectives cannot be underestimated.

ANNEXES: REPORTS ON INTERESTING EVENTS IN MSP KARNATAKA
(from: 'TWO YEARS ON', OVERVIEW OF MSP KARNATAKA,
July 1990 - June 1991)

ANNEX 1: BIDAR MELA

ANNEX 2: ASTRA OLE SURVEY, MYSORE

ANNEX 3: WORKSHOP WITH MEN AND YOUTH, BIDAR

ANNEX 1: BIDAR MELA

BIDAR DISTRICT PROGRESS REPORT, DECEMBER - MARCH, 1991

THE MAHILA MAHITI MELA, FEBRUARY 1 - 3

Planning and Preparation:

This mela was the largest exercise undertaken so far by Samakhya, and we felt proud that Bidar was chosen as the venue. However, this also meant a lot of responsibility had to be taken by our team to ensure that the event would be a success. Consequently much care was given to planning, for which two major meetings were held in December and January.

We selected Markunda village of Bidar Taluk as the venue for the mela, because there was a large, flat stretch of ground adjacent to the village, and the village mandal pradhan, being a member of the Bidar DRG, would give us all help and cooperation.

At the planning meetings, each aspect of organising the mela was discussed in detail and committees were formed to take up the specific responsibilities. At the January meeting, representatives from other districts also came and took up some tasks on behalf of their team. District units were asked to bring not more than 4-5 women from each Sangha. It was decided that women from each district would be given bags in a distinct colour, so that sahayoginis would be easily able to identify the women from their district.

We also made a plan for the layout of the Mahiti-nagar, and did rough estimates of the materials that would have to be purchased and their approximate cost. It was decided that the district office teams should reach Bidar by the 26th January to help the Bidar team with last-minute work, while the sahayoginis would accompany the women in the buses and reach Markunda village by the 31st evening.

The Mela:

Despite the fact that some of the Bijapur, Mysore and Maharashtra groups had arrived only in the early hours of the morning, some after journeys of nearly 30 hours, the inaugural ceremony began only one hour later than planned. The sight of nearly 1500 women, assembled in the central tent, bright-eyed and ready to begin three days of learning and discussion, was powerful and moving.

Immediately after the inauguration, the women moved in orderly groups to their assigned tents for the sessions on law, health and economic programmes. A great deal of time had gone into the planning of how the participants could be disbursed to different sessions so that each one got an exposure to a range of information over the three days. Thus sahayoginis were given the task of taking their groups to the right tents for the right sessions.

Session Plan:

TOPIC	RESOURCE PERSONS
Legal Rights and Laws relating to Devadasis, Child Marriage, Forests, and personal laws	Ms. Ratna Kapur, Sita Anagol & senior students of National Law School of India
Health, Herbal Medicine and Reproductive health of women	Dr. S. Sunderajan Ms. Gangamma, Uma Kulkarni & Philomena Vincent
Economic Development and Women	Dr. B. T. Acharya, Prema Gopalan, Maharashtra Groups
Agriculture & Animal Husbandry	Extension Centre, Bidar, UAS Dharwad
Alternative Rural Technologies	ASTRA & KSCST
Problem of Child Labour	CWC, Bangalore
Land Issues	Humnabad Tehsilidar
Structure of Panchayat Raj	Shri Shafiulla, LLB Markunda Pradhan
Role of Police	Representative, Bidar Police
Cooperatives	Shri Kallappanavar
Legal Aid Services	Rep., Karn. Legal Aid Board
Banamati & other possession syndromes	Shri. U. Periodi

Appropriate documentaries and feature films ("Bara", "Ghatashradha", "Mithileya Seeteyaru", etc., which unfortunately could not be shown due to the frequent power cuts).

Help and Support:

We cannot imagine how this major event could have been organised and successfully carried out without the unstinting help and assistance of scores of people in Bidar. Each and every one of the following treated the mela as their own, and took pride in ensuring that the event should earn a good name for Bidar and its people:

1) The Bidar chapter of the Bharat Scouts and Guides, under the able leadership of Shri Madhavrao Janwadkar, rendered yeoman service at the mela. These 100 boys and girls, with their scout masters and mistress, worked night and day for the comfort and care of both participants and organisers. They seemed tireless, and were always ready to render any small or large service to us, in good cheer. The sight of them brought a smile to every face as they served meals, tea, cleaned the campus, made announcements in six languages (Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Hindi and English !) and generally held the overwhelming logistics of the mela in their small but capable hands.

2) The Deputy Commissioner, Bidar, and his officers gave us their help in myriad ways, including deputing local resource persons. We are particularly grateful to them for expediting various permissions for ensuring us adequate diesel supply in the face of a nation-wide shortage. We were happy that the DC cut short his visit to Delhi so that he could visit the mela on the last day and join us for the concluding ceremony.

3) Shri Shafiulla, the Mandal Pradhan of Markunda, gave us his unquestioning help with all local arrangements, permissions, electricity lines, and security for the Mahiti-nagar. Shafi is a loyal friend of Samakhya who never demands acknowledgement, but renders behind-the-scenes support in silence.

4) Dr. Snehalata Sunderajan will be remembered by all who attended the mela for her motherly presence and patient care of the hundreds of women and children who lined up outside the medical tent every day to have long-neglected illnesses treated. But though she came to the mela as a doctor, she became a dear friend to every woman there, listening to their problems with concern and caring. Her sessions on the reproductive system and its common problems will be vividly remembered.

5) Many visitors to the mela were amazed at the sight of the bright red fire engine parked outside the Mahiti-nagar. The Bidar Fire Department, on stand-by duty at the mela, efficiently solved the water supply problem, which was a major relief for us. Arrangements had been made for them to be instantly informed if they were needed in Bidar.

6) The Food and Civil Supplies Dept. and Mannakali Petrol Pump played a major role in the success of the mela by ensuring us adequate diesel supply in the face of a nation-wide shortage.

7) The Jyoti Tent House not only supplied the tents for the Mahiti Nagar (which necessitated hiring tents from several other firms), but also made arrangements for many other key inputs such as cooks, lighting, technicians, stage-building, hire of vessels and implements, and countless other things, at minimal cost.

Impact of the Mela:

Throughout the district, women have been discussing the mela in their sangha meetings and sharing the information they received with others. Some specific incidents which have occurred after the mela are given below to illustrate its many interesting effects on women:

- Imambi from Hosahalli village said: "I am at the end of my life, but I have never seen such a meeting anywhere!"
- Khajabi added: "Our Muslim women never go beyond their thresholds or get an opportunity to learn anything new. I will send my daughter-in-law to any future meetings."
- Women of Ittiga village have been discussing the law session with their sangha, especially the fact that child marriage is against the law.
- Herbal remedies are also being extensively discussed. "At least now when we fall ill, we can take these medicines instead of neglecting ourselves." Many women have begun using the herbal medicines.
- Sangha women of Sheetalgere have started a small-savings programme and have opened accounts in the bank.

ANNEX 2: ASTRA OLE SURVEY, MYSORE

FUNCTIONING OF ASTRA OLES : A SURVEY

(Conducted by Mahila Samakhya Karnataka, Mysore District Unit, in six predominantly tribal taluks of Mysore District)

Introduction:

Mahila Samakhya Karnataka is an innovative pilot project launched by the Dept. of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India, under the New Education Policy of 1986. The project aims to empower the poorest rural women through the formation of collectives (or Sanghas) which then engage in a process of critically analysing their situation and problems and actively seeking information and resources for their solution. This process results in a more meaningful and dynamic type of self-education, including literacy. The project presently covers 10 districts in the states of Gujarat, Karnataka and UP. Bidar, Bijapur and Mysore districts were selected for the first phase of the programme in Karnataka.

At present, about 100 active Sanghas have been formed in an equal number of villages in each district, and women have identified, explored and tackled a wide range of issues affecting their lives such as water, housing, illiteracy, child care, health, legal problems, atrocities against women, loans and credit, etc. etc. Not surprisingly, Sanghas in all the districts have identified cooking fuel as one of the important daily problems faced by them; however, the Jeraluruba and Soliga tribal women who form the bulk of Sangha members in Mysore district are most acutely affected by this problem in view of the loss of their traditional access to the forest which was their home.

In attempting to help these women become aware of alternative cooking fuels and more fuel efficient stoves, the Mysore Mahila Samakhya team visited the ASTRA Rural Extension Centre in Ungra, and also the Puna village. Much excited by the ASTRA OLE and the community biogas plant, they eagerly spoke of these innovations on their return to their village areas. However, they found that in fact, a large number of astra oles had been constructed in these areas, but women were very dissatisfied with them, and in fact found them worse than their traditional oles.

In order to understand the reasons for this situation, and to provide useful feedback to both ASTRA and the Sangha women, we decided to conduct a quick survey to discover exactly what problems the users were facing with the oles, and what were the general beliefs/opinions about the ole among the beneficiaries.

The Survey:

Mahila Samakhya is not a research organisation nor are our staff professional researchers. However, we have the advantage of having extremely good rapport and an ongoing relationship of trust and confidence with the women, which puts us in an advantageous position to elicit accurate and meaningful information on such issues, which an outside investigator may not be able to do.

A simple questionnaire was designed with the participation of the Sahayoginis (the field activists of Mahila Samakhya), eliciting the following information: name of village and mandal, number of households in the village and number having astra oles, when the oles were constructed and which agency constructed them, knowledge about the ole and its actual performance, and some observations of the Sahayogini conducting the interviews.

A total of 573 respondents in 36 villages spread over the taluks of Hunsur, H.D.Kote, Chamrajnagar, Kollegal, Periyapatna and Nanjangud, were canvassed in the months of September and October, 1990, by a team of 16 Sahayoginis from the Mysore District Unit. The raw data was sent to the State Programme Office of Mahila Samakhya in Bangalore, where it was coded, manually tabulated and analysed with the help of both Mysore and Bangalore office staff.

The Results:

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF OLES BY CONSTRUCTING AGENCY

CONSTRUCTED BY	NUMBER	%
Land Army Corporation	424	79.10
Block Development Office	40	7.46
Mandal Panchayat	35	6.53
MYRADA (A voluntary agency)	12	2.25
Don't Know	25	4.66
TOTAL	536	100.0

TABLE 2 : DISTRIBUTION OF OLES BY WHEN CONSTRUCTED

WHEN CONSTRUCTED	NUMBER	%
Less than 1 year ago	131	24.45
1 to 2 years	150	27.98
2 to 3 years	88	16.42
More than 3 years	167	31.15
TOTAL	536	100.0

It is clear that the vast majority of oles are of relatively recent construction, and that the Land Army has been the main agency involved in building the oles in this area. The survey also found that out of the 1220 households in the surveyed villages, 536 - or over 40% of homes - have installed the oles, whether they use them or not.

TABLE 3 : DISTRIBUTION OF OLES IN THE SURVEYED VILLAGES

PARTICULARS	NUMBER	%
Houses with oles	536	43.95
Houses without oles	684	56.07
TOTAL	1220	100.00

TABLE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF OLES BY USAGE

ARTICULARS	NUMBER	%
Having ole and not using it	70	13.05
Having ole and using it	136	25.38
Had ole but broke it and rebuilt traditional ole	167	34.90
Not clear	134	25.00
Rebuilt the ASTRA ole with some modifications	9	1.67
TOTAL	536	100.00

CONSTRUCTING AGENCY

USAGE CODE (as in Table 4)	LAND ARMY		E.D.D.		MAN. PAN.		MYRADA		DON'T KNOW	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	62	14.6	-	-	4	11.4	-	-	3	12.0
2	78	18.4	-	-	21	60.0	11	91.7	19	76.0
3	134	31.6	40	100	6	22.5	-	-	3	12.0
4	141	33.3	-	-	2	5.7	1	8.3	-	-
5	9	2.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	424	100.0	40	100	35	100.0	12	100.0	25	100.0

TABLE 6 : DISTRIBUTION OF OPINIONS ABOUT ASTRA OLE

NATURE OF OPINION	NUMBER	%
Only positive	19	3.32
Only negative	357	62.30
Both positive and negative	120	20.94
No response	77	13.44
TOTAL	573	100.00

TABLE 7: POSITIVE OPINIONS ABOUT OLE

CODE	POSITIVE OPINIONS	NUMBER	%
01	Cooks faster/More heat/ Cooks 2 items	88	47.06
02	Smokeless/Less smoke	42	22.46
03	Vessels stay clean	17	9.09
04	Uses less firewood	11	5.88
05	Don't have to tend the ole/ Can do other work	2	1.07
06	Ashes go through the pipe	8	4.28
07	Safe	19	10.16
TOTAL		187	100.0

TABLE 8: NEGATIVE OPINIONS ABOUT OLE

CODE	NEGATIVE OPINIONS	NUMBER	%
01	Cooks slowly/Less heat	195	16.86
02	Smoky/eye irritation/ Chest pain	112	9.68
03	Smoke does not go through the pipe/fills up the house	207	17.90
04	Requires more firewood	264	22.83
05	Leakage of rain water from the chimney	169	14.61
06	Ole opening too big	17	1.47
07	Ole is too high	31	2.69
08	Needs good wood/can't use twigs	31	2.69
09	Flame goes towards the pipe	24	2.07
10	Does not work properly/ Badly constructed	25	2.16
11	Ashes don't settle down	15	1.29
12	Vessels get black	60	5.44
13	Can't sit in front of the fire to warm ourselves	3	0.25
TOTAL		1156	100.00

ANNEX 3: WORKSHOP WITH MEN AND YOUTH, BIDAR

Workshop with men and youth :

From the time Mahila Samakhya was launched in Bidar, men's role in providing backup support has been a specific one. There have also been many instances when men have resisted the Sangha's work. Against this context, with the objective of enlisting the support of men in the district, and providing them an opportunity to understand about the work of Mahila Samakhya, their role in relation to women and society, a 3-day men's workshop was conducted from 24th to 26th August, 1990, at Bidar. About 75 members participated in this workshop from Aurad and Bidar taluks, including youth and men. To begin with, the participants were invited to share about their expectations on coming to this programme.

These were expressed as follows..

1. To know about Samakhya's objectives.
2. Resources available in Mahila Samakhya.
3. To share with others about our village problems.
4. To know more about what their women are doing in the Mahila Samakhya meetings ?

In the sessions which followed, various opportunities were provided in the workshop for men to look at their role in society, in relation to women, to widen their perspectives and examine the assumptions behind their behaviour. Towards this various experiential exercises were designed for the participants during these 3 days.

Through these exercises the objective of sensitising the men to become supportive to women's issues was realised during this programme.

The first session began with each member being invited to explore on... the dreams we have for others.

- As men who relate to women in their specific roles of sister, mother, sister-in-law, or wife,
- What dreams do you have for them ?
- What do you wish for them ?

This self exploration, was taken up for one and half hours, in small groups, following which the team met together as a large group to share their experiences of dreams.

It was quite obvious, from those of the responses shared, that the popular image of women that was held by them was "Women's role is to be a good house wife stay home, bring up children". What else is there to wish for them ? Their next question, was..

"This is a workshop for us men... why should we talk of women's issues here" ?

These were the dreams they shared :

1. Mother should love us, help us in all our work.
2. Our sisters must find good husbands.
3. Sisters must become women of good character - chaste, well behaved "Sheelavathi", and of good character - "Gunavathi".
4. Sisters should always listen to their father, mother and brothers.
5. After marriage, sisters must bring joy to the parental home and to the husband's family.
6. My sister must become a writer.
7. My sister must complete B.A. degree.
8. My sister-in-law must look after my parents and obey her husband in all matters.
9. Our sisters and mothers, can join Mahila Samakhya and become literate that is sufficient for them.

Focussing on the above responses, the general discussion began in the large group. In the process of analysing deeper at their own dreams for women, the men could see what a world of difference there was, in the dreams they had for themselves as men and the

dreams they had for their women. These were summarized in terms of the differences in the aspirations for each gender as follows...

1. a) for men's education the limits were Ph.D.
b) for women's education literacy was seen as adequate.
2. a) for men - they looked forward to a secure a government job.
b) for women - they wished for a good husband.
3. a) men needed to be independent.
b) women must obey parents, brothers and always be well behaved and submissive.

The participants could look at their own double standards one for each gender, and felt quite uncomfortable to find themselves in this position. Gradually it became clear to them, that though they considered themselves educated and knowledgeable, they had been blind to these aspects of themselves and ^{the} andro centric ~~their~~ world view. They began reflecting and sharing about, what has been the impact of their male chauvinistic behaviour in their families with their women. As the day came to a close, they reviewed that day's experience and shared their learnings, and their views as follows...

1. Now I feel, that my sister can become a lawyer and be of service. I'd like to extend my support for the same.
2. I'll help my sister to become a doctor.
3. I think my sister can live independently and select her job, I'll respect her choice.

Thus... as more and more participants shared their new aspirations for their women, they began to make new decisions about themselves in the process. Summing up, their feelings for the day the response was..

"This is the first time we are looking at women in this way. Till now we went our way, denying opportunities to women, we have been responsible for women to have been left behind in a backward condition. In future we'll enable this situation to change, we must encourage our sisters to have access to higher education. Let us accept that women can be independent, work with their own authority. Some of the resolutions, shared by them were as follows:

- From now onwards we, men should think anew on women's issues.
- Women's social status in Society can improve, if we provide support and cooperation as men.
- We have understood that as men we must acknowledge the strength and the work of women as equals.

During the final day of the workshop, the participants could concretise their learning from the workshop in terms of drawing up a realistic - 3-month action plan, in their respective villages, as a follow up to this workshop.

The main features of their action plan were as follows:

1. I will try and share my understanding of women and Mahila Samakhya with other members of the community in my village.
2. In my village, I would enroll atleast one woman from each family in the Mahila Sangha.
3. Most of the men in our village are reluctant to send girls to school, I'll contact their families, and convince them to send their girls to school.
4. I will make efforts to stop injustice against women in my village.
5. I plan to work towards putting an end to exploitation of women in our village.
6. In our area, I would ensure that the mid-day meal scheme in Anganwadis is properly implemented to benefit our children.
7. There are Mandal members in our village, I plan to find out, what they have been doing for rural development.
8. In my village, I plan to do my share to enable women become economically independent.
9. The Mahila Sangha group in our village is ready to build their centre, the delay has been from the Mandal Pradhan. I plan to convince him, to finalise this matter as soon as possible.
10. There are many poor families in my area struggling with dry and barren lands to earn a living. I wish to assist them find ways of improving their land with government's support.
11. In my village, I would like to share with many other women, the awareness that women have equal rights as men.

In conclusion, we quote participant Lallappa's remarks, who summed up as follows, " In our village I often used to stop women from attending Sangha meetings. But the understanding of myself and women that I have gained now... I did not have at that time. Now I realise, how mistaken I had been. In future I wish to come forward to support the women's Sangha, in its work. I would like to make this promise before all of you, with this betel leaf, as a token of my resolution"!

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

PART FOUR

SOME OBSERVATIONS RELATED TO THE MAHILA SAMAKYA PROGRAMME IN
GUJARAT

January 1992

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Government of India

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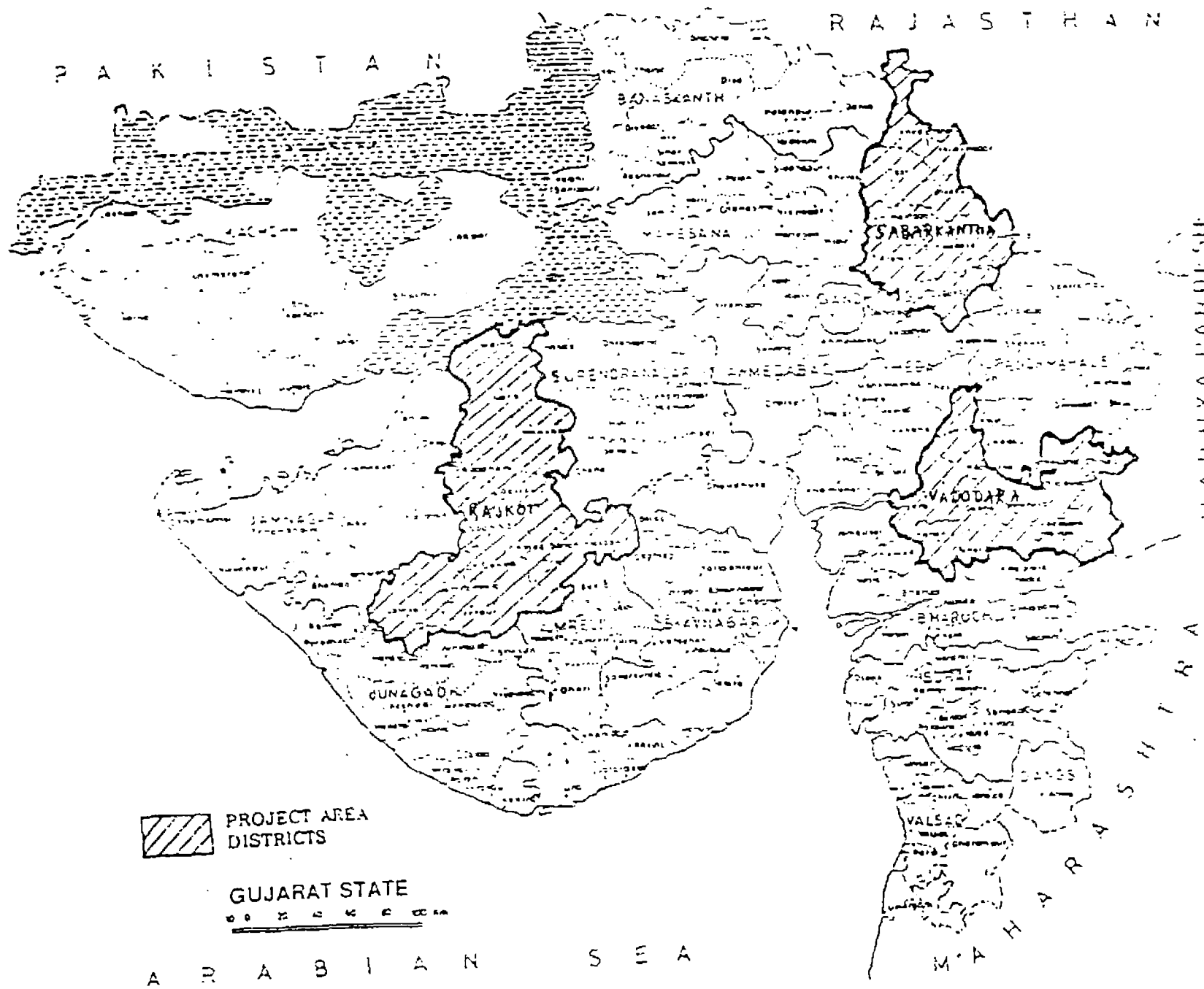
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Period of the mission:	September 29 - October 31, 1991

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MAP DISTRICTS COVERED BY MAHILA SAMAKHYA, GUJARAT.



1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

2. Strategy of empowerment

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

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

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

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

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

3. Training and resource support

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Literacy

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

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

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

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

5. Human resources

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

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

6. Sangha huts

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

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

7. Role of the state office

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

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

The autonomy of the state office is a necessity, among others, to provide assistance and guidance, and to give vision and direction to the programme. To avail of separate office facilities is a first condition to be met, to ensure a certain degree of autonomy. As the State Programme Office of Gujarat is, at present, understaffed, the Mission recommends that immediate steps will be taken to appoint an Assistant Programme Director, who will assist the State Programme Director in supporting the implementation of the District Programmes.

8. Internal Review

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

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

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

9. Documentation

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

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

10 Relationship with NGO's

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

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

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

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

11. Finances

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

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

12. Expansion strategy

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

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

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

One form of consolidation that the mission would strongly recommend for the MSP-Gujarat would be: to develop a policy of strategic planning. Based upon the experience of two years, the MSP can now, to a certain extent, anticipate on the main issues that women will come up with. In this way, the MSP can provide a prompt response to the articulated needs. As has already been stated above, some temporary external support might be needed in this area.

Furthermore, the MSP by the very nature of its programme, does not allow for mere consolidation of its activities, because new demands and challenges are constantly being voiced. So, even a strategy of consolidation will take up a lot of energy of the already strained human resources of the MSP-Gujarat.

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

Annexes:

- Annex 1:** Mahila Kutir (Sangha huts), Rajkot
From: 'The Unfolding', pages 64 - 75
- Annex 2:** Development of literacy primer, Saberkantha
From: 'The Unfolding', pages 101 -107

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

MAHILA KUTIR :

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

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

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

THE ROLE OF A FACILITATOR ARCHITECT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IDENTIFICATION AND APPLICATION FOR LAND :

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WOMEN MASONS :

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

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

construction and on elementary knowledge of some of the techniques.

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

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

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

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

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

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

MAHILA KUTIR AND 'TIME AND SPACE' :

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

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

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

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

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

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

Annex 2: Development of literacy primer, Saberkantha district

PROCESS OF LITERACY-PRIMER DEVELOPMENT :

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

LEARNINGS :

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

the not result of the active involvement of many individuals and organisations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

learning of this workshop are as follows :

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

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

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

LITERATURE FOR TRIBAL WOMEN OF KHEDBRAHMA TALUKA :

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

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

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

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

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

LITERATURE FOR TRIBAL WOMEN OF BHILODA AND MEGHRAJ TALUKA :

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

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

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

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

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

Identification of numbers takes place in the same phase.

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

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

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

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

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

**"TOGETHER WE ARE POWERFUL"
voices from the mahila sanghas**

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

MAIN REPORT

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

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

MAIN REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The task of the evaluation mission

The task of the Indo-Dutch evaluation mission was —

- to review the progress of the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and
 - to assess and analyse processes of empowerment at the sangha level.
- In addition to this the mission was asked to look into financial management issues.

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

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

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

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

Main findings and conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Continuation of the Programme

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

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

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

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

and include

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

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

Implementation & Human Resources

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

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

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

Empowerment at sangha level

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

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

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

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

Collaboration for economic empowerment of women

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

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

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

Expansion strategies

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

capacity building for self reliance of the existing/older sanghas and de-linking from the strong sanghas

promoting sanghas to become a community forum of women across caste, class or religious divides,

strengthening networking among sanghas and the formation of cluster groups,

strengthening and building of support structures at the block level,

forming new sanghas in areas surrounding the clusters wherein Mahila Samakhya already exists,

involving the old sanghas and clusters in the formation and strengthening of new sanghas, and for new districts

selection to be based on transparent criteria e.g. poverty indicators, indicators for gender equality, female literacy rates, potential for linking up with DPEP and/or other schemes for poverty alleviation and socio-economic development,

ensuring that staff and necessary infra-structure are in place and well prepared/trained before starting the activities in the new districts.

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

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

Mahila Shiksha Kendras

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

Interface with DPEP

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

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

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

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

Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres

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

Technical Assistance

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

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

MAIN REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Programme

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

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

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

The evaluation team

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

The task of the evaluation mission

The task of the Indo-Dutch evaluation mission was

- to review the progress of the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and
 - to assess and analyse processes of empowerment at the sangha level.
- In addition to this the mission was asked to look into financial management issues.

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

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

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

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

Women's empowerment

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

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

The execution of the mission

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

financial management.

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

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

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

Reports

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

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

States visited.

The circumstances

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The formation of a sangha is a process of building solidarity and strength among women. In this process of building a solidarity collective action and collective struggle appear to be the major binding factors. Concrete achievements and successes are important in creating and reinforcing women's self-confidence. The process of sangha formation takes its own time and experience has learned that it cannot be shortcut or hurried by external factors without the risk of interrupting the fragile bonding process.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.3 Cutting across caste and class divides

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

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

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

1.4 Emerging trends, pace and growth

Accessing resources

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

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

Economic empowerment

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

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

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

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

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

Support structures

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

Sangha networking and federations

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

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

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

Mixed economies

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

New relationships between the 'independent' sanghas and Mahila Samakhya

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

1.5 The reporting system

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

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

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

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

1.6 Expansion strategies

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

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

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

1.7 Capacity building and training

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 2. THE EDUCATION COMPONENT IN MAHILA SAMAKHYA

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

2.1 Education for literacy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.3 The impact of the Mahila Shiksha Kendras

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

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

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

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

3 The interface with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)

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

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

Education for women's empowerment

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

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

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

Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurthy 1996, pp. 27 ff

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER 4. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

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

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

4.1 The Facts

4.1.1 Funds

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.1.2 Financial roles and responsibilities

Federal Level

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

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

State Level

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

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

The *Executive Committee* is given the powers:

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

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

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

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

4.2 Findings on financial management

4.2.1 General impressions

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

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

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

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

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

4.2.2 Findings related to the funds

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

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

4.2.3 Utilisation of the provision for Technical Assistance

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

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

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

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

OVERVIEW OF THE FUNDING

Total funds provided:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Table for Technical Assistance

Total TA funds provided:

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

4.2.4 Findings regarding financial roles and responsibilities

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

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

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

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

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

4.2.5 Findings related to financial planning

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

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

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

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

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

4.6 Budget monitoring and control

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

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

4.7 Recommendations for financial management

4.7.1 Recommendation related to the funds

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.3 Methodology of budgeting

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

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

4.4 Budget implementation - utilisation of funds

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

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

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

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

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

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

4.5 Budget administration

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

4.7.3 Recommendations regarding the financial planning

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

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

4.7.4 Recommendations regarding budget methodology

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

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

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

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

4.7.5 Recommendations regarding budget implementation - utilisation of funds

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

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

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

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

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

A proposal for some items to realise this suggestion comprises:

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

4.7.6 Recommendations on budget administration

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

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

4.7.7 Recommendations regarding budget monitoring and control

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

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

4.8 Summary of the main conclusions regarding financial management linked to the terms of reference

a) Expenditure and the utilisation of funds in relation to approved budgets

All expenditures are part of the Government of India Guidelines and include:

- * field (sanghal) activities
- * staff salaries
- * staff training

as sub-heads in the Guidelines.

Main reasons for under-spending during past programme years:

- * too ambitious activity planning and budgeting
- * understaffing - staff turnover and vacancies - due to lengthy recruitment procedures and problems in finding suitable candidates, esp. for management or specialist positions
- * *cost cutting caused by female sense for the sound management of household money, in the villages combined with influence of women's own contributions, their improved negotiating skills and abilities to tap other available resources*
- * absence of a professional staff development scheme in the activity and budget planning at all levels due to workload and lack of time.

Problems experienced by the implementing staff regarding financial planning:

- * lack of clarity in interpretation of budget heads and absence of headings for certain expenditures (e.g. health checks and security provisions for staff)
- * unit prices, calculated in 1988, are too low considering inflation, the changing market and rising cost, and have not been adjusted to current rates and changes in salary structures within the government and outside. This refers especially to the following:
 - remuneration (salaries and allowances) of sahayoginis, teachers of childcare centres, literacy teachers and MSK teachers, honoraria for resource persons, external trainers etc.
 - rates for renting buildings for office space and MSK
 - Sangha hut
 - maintenance, replacement and acquisition of equipment (vehicles, office equipment, VHR, PCs, fax etc.

b) **Parties involved in the financial planning and their understanding of the budgetary procedures**

All levels of the Mahila Samakhya Programme, from the sangha to the State Office are involved in activity planning. However, activity planning and financial planning remain separate entities. The finalisation of financial planning is still, to a large extent, in hands of the State Office even though it is prepared by district co-ordinators together with their accountants and based on the activity planning designed "bottom-up". The final responsibility for approval of annual plans and budgets is with the Executive Committee.

The procedures regarding the preparation of the annual budget may have become clearer and more realistic in recent years, but the question remains to what extent is there really decentralisation of financial authority. There is still lack of clarity and transparency as to the delegation of powers for expenditures and release of money within the approved budgets. The financial powers at all levels of the Mahila Samakhya Programme structure appear to be clearly formulated in the articles of the Mahila Samakhya Association. In practice however, possibly due to (a) the power of further delegation given to the State Programme Directors, and (b) the lack of sufficiently competent and motivated personnel, especially at the district level, it may happen that the SPD tend to keep more power in their own hands (e.g. signing the invoices, signing the approvals for purchases etc.). This is perfectly understandable and effective as to elimination of the financial errors, but not always progressive in the scope of learning and motivating processes. The same can happen between the district and the village levels. On the other hand the Executive Committees which delegate many powers to the SPDs tend to keep the final decision-making powers to the EC regarding issues they feel are important (such as allocation of money for involvement of external expertise). Such situations could become a cause for frustration and delay in the implementation of activities and a reason for under-spending (because the release of the budget has not been approved and consequently activities are postponed or not taking place). The recommendation would be an enhancement of transparency by means of clarification of the ambiguities in the formulation of the 'delegation of financial powers'.

The positive attempts to streamline budgetary procedures by training the Mahila Samakhya Programme staff need to be encouraged and continued for the relevant parties at all levels. Increased acceptance of responsibility by the sanghas for their support structures should lead, in the future, to added financial decision-making by the sanghas.

c) Extended budget neutral financial and management planning

An extension of the Dutch financial assistance is justified, if the basic philosophy of the programme is maintained, ensured and where necessary strengthened, requiring a revision of the five-year budget (1998 - 2002 '3). The revision is to be based on the following:

- review, updating and recalculation of unit costs for programme activities and provisions, taking into account inflation correction and costs changes
- review and recalculation of the salary structure and introduction of an differentiated salary structure for sahayoginis and programme staff allowing
 - promotion on merit and performance
 - compensation for inflation
 - adjustments to remain compatible with (changes in) salary levels in the Government and in the NGOs-world,
 - incentives (house rent allowance and/or hardship allowance for work under extreme conditions)
 - medical care and insurance for staff and sahayoginis
- adequate provisions for professional development of programme staff (including sahayoginis)
- provisions for maintenance, replacement and purchase of new equipment

The recalculated budget should also take into account the expansion of the programme at different levels (block, district, new districts) within the state, and for the expansion into new States.

d) Directions for future planning:

The following measures are recommended:

- to organise an in-depth review of planned budgets and realised expenditures at district and State levels with all parties involved (see above) offering a better insight in procedures, relevant division of tasks and responsibilities and identification of problems and training needs with regard to the (financial) planning
- to visualise the effect of sangha financial input, savings, funds from other sources within the scope of sanghas becoming financially self-reliant
- to strengthen the acceptance of responsibility of sanghas for their support structures (e.g. all types of educational and literacy centres) which might increase the feasibility of linking this with greater financial responsibility. This would imply handing over to the sanghas the Mahila Samakhya provisions for e.g. teachers of childcare/pre-school education centres, non-formal education and adult education centres and related costs.

e) Technical Assistance

The use of the provision for Technical Assistance has been limited to the organisation of a successful international workshop with participants from African countries and neighbouring countries in Asia and for technical assistance by resource persons.

At national level it is felt that the provision of Technical Assistance can play an important role in facilitating further capacity development of functionaries in the programme at different levels such as exposure visits to and interaction with programmes in other countries, training at relevant institutes abroad, participation in international conferences and seminars, hosting seminars and workshops on issues relating to women's education empowerment and development.

The optimal utilisation of the TA provision requires that the information on the provision will be shared with the states at all levels, and that criteria and guidelines be prepared and agreed upon, so that is clear at all levels how to access and benefit from the available provision.

f) The role of the Royal Netherlands Embassy

Within the time frame of the evaluation mission there was no opportunity to assess the role of the RNE.

The overall impression gained from the field discussions is that there is a regular contact of embassy staff with the National Programme Directorate. There is no direct involvement of embassy staff with the implementation of the State Programme. This is as it should remain.

TERMS OF REFERENCE INDO-DUTCH EVALUATION MAHILA SAMAKHYA

MAHILA SAMAKHYAINDO-DUTCH EVALUATION, 1996BACKGROUND

Manila Samakhya emerged in response to the National Policy on Education, 1986, which envisaged education as an agent of change in the basic status of women. The programme aims at empowerment of women through creating a conducive environment and generating a demand for learning. The programme is sponsored by the Netherlands Government in four States, i.e., Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Gujarat. Mahila Samakhya fits in with the four inter-related principles of physical, economic, political and socio-cultural aspects of the autonomy principle of the Indo-Dutch Development Cooperation programme.

The programme is flexible and facilitative in nature and is process, rather than, target oriented. The programme is guided by the 'non-negotiable' principles, i.e., allowing sufficient space and time to women to come together and to influence the shape and pace of the programme, to create an environment of learning that will enable them to question, conceptualise, seek answers, act and reflect on their actions and also acquire the necessary skills and capacities to determine their own development. In this process, the role of the project functionaries and agencies is facilitative and not directive. All programme interventions are developed in response to articulated local needs and demands.

The Mahila Sangha women's collective at the village level is the nodal point of the programme and all activities are planned around the Sangha.

The MS programme started in 1988-89 in Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh and was extended to Andhra Pradesh at the end of 1992. In addition to these four Dutch funded MS programmes, the programme is also functioning in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Assam. In Bihar, it is part of the Bihar Education Project and in Madhya Pradesh and Assam, autonomous MS societies have been set up by the District Primary Education Project.

Given the existing scope for self-definition and organic expansion, MS is at different stages of development in the four States and even within each State.

MS has a provision for both external and concurrent internal evaluations. Each State has a continuous process of self-evaluation. There have been two external evaluations: the

Indo-Dutch evaluation of 1991 and the National Evaluation in 1993.

In a review of the total Indo-Dutch Cooperation programme during 1982-92, the Inspection advised that indicators for measuring progress and impact be developed. In a series of simultaneous efforts, parameters have been developed (by Mahila Samakhya, Jamsheda Khan and Bounuis) for internal and external evaluation. The mission is urged to use the matrix in Annexure A.

1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

To review the progress of the programme over the last 5 years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women.

To assess and analyse processes of empowerment at the Sangha level (village collective).

2. PARAMETERS FOR EVALUATION

The evaluation team will utilise the set of parameters (Annexure A) to assess the progress and process of empowerment of rural women through the Mahila Samakhya Programme. In addition, the mission will address the following as well:

Is there an impact of the programme on women's personal and family life using the autonomy principle?

To what extent has MS been able to lay the ground for a grassroots level women's movement; facilitate women's political participation and evolve a focus on women's rights?

How successful has MS been in addressing women's issues cutting across caste and class divides?

What is the emerging trend across the four States in terms of pace of growth and impact?

During the programme Mahila Shiksha Kendras have emerged as a strong part of the programme. What impact do the MSKs have?

Is the reporting sufficient to give a clear insight into the programme?

Assess the interface of MS with other educational programmes like CPSE.

Is the evaluation matrix an effective and workable tool? Can it be applied to the different States?

Assess the expansion strategies in MS.

Recommend measures to disseminate MS strategies in non-MS areas/programmes both within and outside the country.

Financial Management

Assess and analyse expenditure and utilisation of funds in relation to approved budgets. In view of underspending in the current project period, how realistic is budget planning in MS? Provide directions for future planning.

Who is involved in planning? How far are planning and budgetary procedures understood by project personnel? To what extent are these processes transparent?

Is an extended budget-neutral financial and management planning feasible?

Is the Technical Assistance amount well used? Can it be better used?

Assess the role of RNE.

3. EVALUATION PROCESS

Team Composition

1. The evaluation team will comprise of two senior Dutch experts and two senior Indian experts who are familiar with the MS process and philosophy as well as with gender issues.

1. Claudine Hellman
2. A financial/management expert
3. Vasant Kannan
4. Leela Gulati

Duration

1. The evaluation will be done during the period 11th to the 28th of November, 1996.
2. The evaluation will begin with a briefing in Delhi on the 11th November, 1996 by the National Office and RNE.
3. The evaluation team will visit all the four States, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka and interact at various levels, i.e., the village, the district and the State.
4. The evaluation mission will interact with representatives of the National Resource Group of MS and the GOI at the national level.

4. DOCUMENTATION

The following documentation will be made available to the team:

1. Mahila Samakhya, Ministry of Human Resource Development (Project Document)
2. Mahila Samakhya, National Overview, 1992-93; 1993-96
3. Mahila Samakhya, National Evaluation Report
4. Knowledge is like flowing water, 1995
5. We can change our world, 1995
6. Women's Collectives in Mahila Samakhya -- A Study, 1996
7. Mahila Shiksha Kendras, 1996
8. Training in Mahila Samakhya, 1996
9. Annual Reports of Mahila Samakhya programme in Karnataka, UP, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh.
10. Indo-Dutch Evaluation Report, 1991.

5. REPORTING

The Mission will draft a summary of findings including conclusions and recommendations in an Aide Memoire. This will be presented and discussed at a joint meeting of representatives of the Government of India and the Netherlands Embassy on 28th of November, 1996, before the Mission leaves.

The report will be presented in a draft form before 31st of December, 1996.

ANNEXURE A

Dutch Review Mission Internal Evaluation

Parameters/Levels	Village Level (Sangha)	District (DPU)	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 NS Operational process in a phased manner) creative of a facilitative and open working environment/ensuring solidarity and a team spirit.	-Planning activities: inputs with teams -Field/ direction to the programme. -creation of a facilitative and open working environment. -ensuring solidarity and a team spirit. -expansion of programme qualitatively & quantitatively (spatially & programmeatically).
1. Growth	Concept of Sangha, stages of strengthening.	-Programme expansion with integration of new sanghas, new activities, processes & initiatives - decentralised planning and decision making. -Initiating changes in roles individual growth	-Assessing staff requirements, programme needs -equipment & perspective of NS personnel at all levels- individual growth. -Delegation, operational support, crisis management, strengthening programme components, ensuring policy changes when required.
Qualitative/ Quantitative parameters for	-Sangha formation- levels of participation/no. variants. -Initiatives taken and negotiations at various levels- family, community, village administration and political structures. -acquisition of new skills & their application, ability and strength to influence the social environment. -conflict resolution. -sharing of information at all levels.	-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 training, capacity building, role clarity. -Trust building and team cohesion
2. Issues Range of issues addressed	New Sanghas enable to act -collective/individual -family based -community/sector -village -area/regional Different levels of participation of the various actors and their perspective for taking action (NS & non NS).		
3. Activities	-Problem solving, widening circles/triples of activities & action. -Moving from practical needs to strategic gender interests.		
4. Demanding Accountability	-Making government systems and NS/non NS personnel accountable.	-Accountability to village level processes and NS programme.	-Accountability to village/district level & larger NS programme as a whole.
5. Resources & Created/access to resources.	-Range of schemes/resources and assets/acquired at individual & sangha level. -Nature of assets/schemes skills. -Range of visibility - self image and identity individual/sangha/community/state perceptions. -Recognition in the eyes of govt. departments and functionaries. -Participation at village/block level meetings.	-Human resources develop within the organisation and accessed from outside. -Material resources accessed from outside and developed within the organisation. -Documentation - skills developed, documents created - usage within the programme. -Image and visibility of the programme at district level. -Recognition of DPU & core team.	-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. -Viability of the programme by virtue of its performance in field and its credibility at village/district/state level
6. Viability / Ability			

scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Horizontal and vertical at village level with institutions government, intra-sangha. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Liaison and networking of programs at various levels within the district and inter district networking with NGOs, agencies, Govt departments and training institutes/organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ensuring that MB responsibilities are maintained. -Involvement of specialists, resource persons as per program needs from time to time. -Liaison at state level with other MB programmes
capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ability of sanghas to act and work independently and collectively to develop and build capacities -Emergence of new and varied leadership patterns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Strengthening skills and capacities of programme team. -Facilitating capacity building at village level setup terms of their interaction with others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Democratization/decentralization of decision-making in the context of evolving programs. -Strengthening skills and capacities at village/district level.
monitoring/ follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Degree/kind of accountability sought from MB personnel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Mechanisms/Methods for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) monitoring inputs and activities. b) performance of team in the context of task & responsibilities. c) impact of inputs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Monitoring financial expenditures/ programme components and activities in relation to MB processes/principles. -Evolution of innovative strategies for follow up inputs & sustenance.
vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sangha vision for themselves for the future, independent of MB. -Strategies to realize vision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Functionaries vision for themselves and for the programs. -Operational changes to achieve the vision. -Efforts for further evolving and sharpening this vision. -Processes for sharpening vision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Vision for the future (self back and sustainability). -Developing concrete strategies to realize the vision. -Facilitating change in inputs for changing dynamics. -Moving towards sustainability.
budgets/ plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Learning financial operations, maintenance of accounts, credit and thrift, sharing financial responsibilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Decentralization & delegation of financial operation. -Planning inputs - financial & human resources timely. -Facilitating fund flow. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Planning budgets in accordance with and in response to field demands. -Delegation of financial powers. -Meeting expansion & planning withdrawal. -Planning various programs inputs in accordance with needs

Key Challenges / trends
 Sustainability eco-prod, health, energy consumption, (activities) & (programs).
 Key structures, strategies, processes.

Keyly different parameters for old and new states with certain common denominators.
 4 members from the previous session to be included in this session.
 Working meeting at Delhi with Review Mission to discuss these parameters
 are members go to the States.

Members of the Committee:
 Sujitba - M.S., Bihar.
 T. Kanchawari - M.S., A.P.
 S. Mehrotra - M.S., D.P.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE FIELDVISITS IN ANDHRA PRADESH AND UTTAR PRADESH

1. Major conclusions and some reflections

The overview of the issues and trends in the Mahila Samakhya Programme as outlined in the Mahila Samakhya National Evaluation Report (1993) is generally confirmed by the findings of the team in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

The Mahila Samakhya Programme has brought about major changes in the lives and situations of the women involved. Like the National Evaluation Report we emphasise the following as important achievements.

- A foundation for women's empowerment at the grassroots level has been built. Although sanghas differ in form and size, the majority are committed to collective action to solve their own problems.
- Women have moved ahead from expecting the programme to deliver material benefits, to understanding empowerment in a broader perspective, and to seeing the sangha as a forum where they can share and analyse their own issues and problems.
- In many cases, women have come together in sanghas in spite of traditional communal and caste divides.
- Many sanghas have been able to initiate action on issues of importance to the larger community, and have been able to mobilise the support of others in the village, including men, to make government delivery systems more accountable to the community.
- Issues such as domestic violence, oppressive social customs and discrimination against women have in many cases been firmly established as social and community issues rather than as merely problems of individuals for families.
- Sanghas have been able to identify and articulate their needs. They have mobilised their own resources and have received support from the programme to plan and implement strategies for change in areas such as literacy, health, water supply, savings and credit, child care, education and economic development.
- The Sakhis and Sahayoginis are self-confident, competent and motivated women with a deep understanding of, and commitment to, the ideology of Mahila Samakhya. They form a strong and mutually supportive network. Mahila Samakhya has given them a distinct voice and identity, and has supported and facilitated their evolution into a resource for change at the village level.
- The Programme has continued to be shaped and directed by the needs and priorities of women themselves, rather than by any pre-set targets or blueprints. There has been no dilution of the emphasis on process.

Regarding the issues and concerns that emerge the report of the National Evaluation (1993) refers to the following:

1. empowerment at the sangha level
2. structures and systems

3. strengthening need based interventions
4. training
5. prospects of sahayoginis
6. long term perspective for sanghas.

The National Evaluation Report points out that the empowerment processes have progressed unevenly for the sakhis, sahayoginis and sangha members. It points the fact that programme interventions such as training opportunities and skill building are more frequent and intensive at this level. This is confirmed by our findings. The report also points out that the perspective and understanding of the philosophy of the programme is limited at the sangha level. The sanghas seem issue-based with a focus on short strategies rather than on organisation building in the long term. This is completely confirmed by our findings as well.

The only long term vision seems to be that the children will be educated and go to school. This does reflect a major concern of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. The role of the sanghas in ensuring children's education is one of the indicators of empowerment in the Programme.

While sangha women have begun to compromise, confront and create a space for themselves within the family and community there is no visible evidence yet of consistently building on, or consolidating this space. In Andhra Pradesh, especially, the main emphasis is on access to resources, while the reference to violence or collective struggle around social practices is limited to child marriage and jogini initiation. Issues of violence against women up incidentally but not yet addressed in terms of power and legal justice¹. The programme in Andhra Pradesh is younger and the process of consolidation is yet to begin.

The priority of social issues seems to be coming from the Karyakarthis (sahayoginis) who did express as one of their frustrations the fact that they were forced to set aside their own agendas and respond to the women's survival needs. The discrepancy between sangha women prioritising their basic survival needs and the Mahila Samakhya's empowerment agenda is a very problematic area.

Given the levels of poverty and deprivation that exist in these districts survival needs will keep emerging all the time. It is also a fact that women simply do not articulate their oppression or suffering but silently accept it as a fact of life. To be able to see the violence they suffer as an abridgement of their right or dignity women need to be aware of the options available to them. And that emphasis on options is lacking. And this is directly linked to capacity building of sahayoginis and sangha leaders who are the catalysts.

The report of the National Evaluation (1993) points out that "Since Mahila Samakhya is a time-bound programme with the long-term goal of building an independent identity for the sanghas, processes at the village level require an intensive focus, with strategies being designed to understand, take forward and strengthen empowering interventions for the sangha women. An essential prerequisite for this is building a deeper and better understanding of the nature of these processes and to evolve parameters to study empowerment through education, empowerment in the context of personal relationships and in relation to economic independence, and women's strategies to negotiate space for themselves within the family and community. It is essential to help the sangha women to develop a holistic gender perspective which encompasses all the aspects of the reality of their lives."

¹ And this is in spite of having mobilised a rally on violence in Medak. Although a large rally on violence had been held in the district following incidents of rape, neither the Karyakarthis nor the sangha women mentioned it as an achievement. One Karyakartha mentioned violence but more in the nature of disaster than as an aspect of power.

While we agree in principle with this we feel that to achieve this two things are required

1. *The staff of the Mahila Samakhya at every level need much more training and a sharpening of their conceptual philosophical perspective.* In the Andhra Pradesh team we felt that there was a distinct need for training and strengthening right up to the level of the district co-ordinators, and district resource persons.

In Uttar Pradesh this was much more uneven. There was a great degree of conceptual clarity among the experienced Sahayoginis and the resource persons who were also confronting the problem of burnout and lack of avenues of career advancement and challenge. Among the newer ones there was an evident need for more training.

2. The Mahila Samakhya philosophy of allowing women at the sangha level to decide the pace and direction of their development may affect seriously the likelihood of women being sufficiently empowered to form that "cadre of empowered rural women who will take forward the process of collective action for change." Women, however, can define their development and priorities only within the parameters of their lived experience and reality. Without the presence of options, without a conscious and designed catalysing effect they will continue to define their empowerment purely in terms of accessing resources - whether it is housing, JRY or DWCRA.

This is not to dismiss the significance of these measures, but to urge the *need for a forward looking strategy that will prevent any sense of statis or stagnation in the programme.* In Tehri for instance women connect their survival need to the 'jal', 'jungle' and 'jameen' (water, forest and land) and their struggle becomes a struggle to protect and preserve the environment. This link is important and qualitatively different from accessing resources.

In Banda and Saharanpur the critical concern is violence and it is difficult to deal with an issue like violence without the support of other movements and groups. We reiterate the warning in the National Evaluation Report: "It is envisaged that all the women who are presently part of the programme will ultimately form a cadre of aware and empowered rural women, who will take forward the process of collective action for change. *The programme and its processes cannot be viewed in isolation, and should be seen as sharing a commitment to women's empowerment along with other movements and groups in the country.*" (Emphasis VK)

Talking of the need to strengthen and consolidate need based interventions the report points out that several innovative strategies and approaches have been evolved in response to local needs. "It is emphasized that these interventions have now progressed beyond the preliminary stage and more focused planning, as well as a greater degree of skill is now called for. A long term perspective and a better understanding of literacy in the larger framework of women's empowerment, a qualitative enhancement of pedagogy as well as involvement of literacy experts in designing curricula and post-literacy materials, and linkage of literacy activities with opportunities for further learning and skill training, are all essential to ensure that these interventions are ultimately empowering." (Emphasis VK).

Similar challenges are emerging in programmes for children's learning, education for drop-out girls, vocational and skill training, group economic activities and participation in Panchayats."

Regarding training the evaluation report points to the fact that training programmes with women who share the values and ideology of Mahila Samakhya have initiated processes that were instrumental in providing the opportunity for women to build strengths and solidarity and develop a collective framework for understanding gender. These trainings also provide networks and links with the larger women's movement. What is in evidence now is a kind of drawing together and a certain degree of 'closing in' as experiences and competencies within the programme have grown.

Yet, training seems to have become to be considered as an informal and internal process of reflection and exploration. This 'closing in' can be seen as a result of reluctance to interference from other NGOs and external organisations which might perhaps have another philosophy. It could also result from reluctance of interference of NGOs in a Government programme. Or it results from the need to build a coherence and unity within the team, which can then link the issues to the concrete problems on the ground.

The problem here is that while a training that explores the self and makes women aware of their inner resources and energies can build capacity and leadership quality, it cannot substitute for specific skills or information. The ideal would be to balance the two. What has happened in most instances is that when sahayoginis ask for more information on specific demands from the sanghas the provision of such information in training or reflection meetings becomes a substitute for perspective building. This is not necessarily deliberate, but could be a result of the pace of the programme and lack of time. Gradually in the process of responding to the growing demands from the field, perspective building and conceptual clarity take a back seat.

It is also good to remember that not everybody is a good trainer and that not every resource person and Karyakartha can replace experienced trainers however much we value participatory processes.

The balance between building capacity internally and tapping to the fullest, resources available externally is also a difficult issue and needs to be considered. The Report of the National Evaluation (1993) points out that "however, the evaluation shows that there is a change in the nature of the activities of the sangha level, with many groups moving ahead from the stage of reflecting on and exploring the need and implications of coming together, to tackling collective action on specific issues." The evaluators also emphasise the need to ensure that empowering learning processes which were part of their initial phase of training for the sakhis and sahayoginis, are experienced by the other women in the sangha as well. "There is a clear need for more focused and strategic training programmes which will be tailored to meet specific learning needs and which will strengthen and reinforce concepts and skills built earlier."

This is something we would also urge strongly from our findings.

2.2 Recommendations

- * More training and perspective building for the staff.
- * More emphasis on management skills, planning and professional capacity. This does not mean that the process orientation is sacrificed. It means that while the process is prioritised for the sangha women, the karyakarthas and staff must be strengthened to deal with the increasing demand from the field. Commitment by itself does not replace competence and the organisation needs to concentrate on building competence.
- * The whole programme seems to revolve around voluntarism, dedication and the indefinite availability of a single woman (without family responsibility). This needs to be streamlined to allow women to work for a given period intensively and then be able to have predictable timings so that there is not burn out or rapid turnover of staff.
- * Staff salary, allowances, health & accident insurance, housing, childcare need to be attended to and improved if women are to work to their best capacity without sacrificing their own interests.
- * Periodic reorientation and fresh interactions outside the MS family at all levels to fulfil the promise of the programme.

OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS BASED ON THE FIELDVISIT IN GUJARAT

SUMMARY

1. The Programme

In Gujarat Mahila Samakhya has been in existence since 1989 and started to be implemented in three districts. The Programme has gradually extended its coverage within the districts and has extended its outreach in a fourth District. The thrust of Mahila Samakhya is on the building of village-level mahila sanghas or women's collectives. The sangha collective is the epicentre which gives direction to the process of empowerment generating self-directed development and learning processes. Mahila Samakhya has taken a formidable task upon its shoulders and has succeeded in reaching out to women who, under the prevailing conditions in Gujarat, have otherwise remained unreached, invisible and voiceless. From the first attempts to establish rapport with the poorest women in the villages, to gain their trust and confidence in an often hostile environment, to start a process off through collective reflection, decision making, planning and concerted action, women's collectives have emerged (or are emerging) in more than 600 rural villages in Gujarat.

The key actors in the building of a sangha are, apart from the village women, the *sahayoginis* and the *sakhis*. Most of the *sahayoginis* we met seemed remarkably capable and strong women, highly motivated and with a great commitment to their work, their 'mission' and to the sangha women. As the result of the sakhi rotating system more than 2000 women have been trained, each sangha having a cadre of five to six trained and committed *sakhis*. They have become strong, assertive and articulate.

In the initial stages of sangha formation mainly infra-structural and community issues like access to water, road repair, electricity have been taken up. Such issues are relatively non-controversial and do not threaten the existing power structures and gender relationships. But they involve some amount of collective struggle and have helped in building solidarity and confidence in collective action.

Prevailing issues which over time have emerged and given attention to in the districts show a varied profile of activities related to e.g. health care and women's health awareness, female literacy and education of girls, legal issues and women's rights, economic empowerment, women's participation in politics. Special features of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat are the organisation of learning/awareness raising camps for adolescent girls and the mobilisation of thousands of women during celebrations and melas around relevant issues.

2. The impact of Mahila Samakhya on women's lives

2.1 Empowered women

The Programme as it has evolved has made an empowering impact on the lives of women participating in the Programme at different levels. The strongest noticeable effect is demonstrated in the existence of women's collectives in the villages. The impact of the Mahila Samakhya on the lives of rural women is that the sangha has become a source of strength upon which they can draw for solving personal and community problems individually as well as collectively. The sangha has provided women with the social and emotional space which enables them to shed their fears

and break out of physical and cultural barriers that have confined their lifespace. The sangha confirms their identity as women and gives space and right to a dignified life for single women. Slowly and gradually women are beginning to assert their rights in order to get greater control of their lives and make changes.

The areas where Mahila Samakhya, through the mahila sanghas, has achieved most apart from gaining dignity and self-respect is in accessing government schemes and services, in health awareness and care, in literacy education. The approach used is based on women's assertion of their (equal) rights and entitlements to social welfare services, community provisions, economic schemes, educational provisions and health services. They do not challenge power structures and particularly gender relationships directly. But they affect the balance of powers in an indirect way, not in the least by the public respect and recognition gained. And this reflects back on the status and bargaining power of women in their families, their increased control of financial resources and family decisions, and their ability to fight and resist violence. The direct improvements are mainly noticeable in the area of basic survival needs and improving the circumstances in the personal and family sphere.

Women have started conquering new public spaces during the last two years through their involvement in the Panchayati Raj elections as voters and as candidates, and through the initiatives of women in e.g. Baroda to establish women's courts (nari adalat) at the Block level in front of the police and magistrate's office. And women are occupying new economic spaces by entering into new occupations like hand-pump mechanics and masons.

Political rights

Sangha women used their right to vote in supporting female candidates, women contested unfair election politics and resisted pressurising and being bribed. 284 MS women got elected and a number of them became a Sarpanch. The experience has helped to demystify the notion that political functions are beyond reach for rural women with their backgrounds. And now women begin to realise the enormous challenge they are coping with from their new positions in the current socio-political environment and its inherent gender biases against women. The involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the elections have strengthened its visibility and has created high expectations about women's power and ability to influence political decision making from a perspective of social justice and equality. By now almost a year after the elections it is a good time for a review and assessment of the impact on the elected women, and look into the need for effective support in the form of further training and the development of a common women's agenda.

Women and law

In all districts attention is given to legal issues and violence against women in the sangha meetings. Recognition that such cases are legal issues led to the initiative of sangha women to set up a voluntary support structure in the form of a women's courts or 'nari adalat' at the Block level. The nari adalats have a great impact on the public recognition of women's legal rights, on the visibility of Mahila Samakhya, and on the credibility of the court as a trustworthy support structure, because of its transparent rules and procedures. It has created a change in the attitude of officials and in their application of the rules: they now take women's issues seriously. The initiative has commanded respect and co-operation from the local authorities. And the court has created a sense of sisterhood among women across caste and village divides as women from other caste groups and from other villages also bring their cases and they are treated equally.

Economic empowerment

Sangha women in all districts have started savings and loans schemes. These saving schemes give women a feeling of having more control over financial resources and access to cash when in need. Loans are mostly used for individual and personal purposes, seldom for investing in economic

and/or collective enterprises. There is a great concern about sanghas breaking apart because of conflicts arising from dealing with savings schemes and from the emergence of economic interest groups within the sanghas.

2.2 Areas needing attention

Meeting women's basic survival needs and the Mahila Samakhya empowerment agenda

The empowerment agenda of Mahila Samakhya is bound to be at odds with the non-interventionist approach of the Programme and the emphasis on sangha women identifying their needs and priorities. Finding the balance between this is problem facing the sahayoginis and the District staff. The agendas of the sangha women are based on their experienced realities within the framework of their geo-political and socio-cultural environments and the accepted values and biases that shape their positions in their gendered societies. Given their situation of poverty and deprivation they naturally articulate their needs in terms of basic survival and improvement of the quality of life. Without a conscious and deliberate input on building new perspectives based on equality, social justice and women's human rights there is a risk of stagnation of the growth of the empowerment processes. The day to day practice of constant preoccupation with running after meeting women's immediate needs may overtake (non-intended) the long term empowerment perspective. And this may create a risk that Mahila Samakhya becomes more of a demand driven organisation facilitating access to information and development resources, thereby losing its identity as an empowerment Programme.

This is a very complex issue that the Programme needs to continuously come back to in its training strategy and that should remain on the agenda for critical reflection.

Strengthening of the sanghas

The women we met in the meetings with the sanghas were impressively articulate and powerful. We noted, however, that spokes women were mainly the women who have attended the sakhi training. Questions can be raised as to what extent they have been able to share what they have learned with the sangha women and to which extent their empowerment has percolated down to the women in the sangha. Moreover, a long term perspective on sustaining the empowerment processes of and within the sanghas is absent. The internal training system needs to be reviewed and made more strategically oriented towards capacity and perspective building of women in the sanghas.

About 45% of the sanghas in Gujarat have been identified as being strong in terms of identity, internal dynamics and sharing of responsibilities, sensitivity to women's equality and social justice, use of collective strength. Yet, they need to become more self-reliant in managing their own affairs and able to connect their activities to a clearer and holistic perspective on gender.

Besides, more than half of the sanghas need further strengthening and support in terms of sangha consolidation and perspective building. More attention need to be given to training at sangha level and it will be a great challenge for the programme staff with the sakhis and sahayoginis to engage in evolving special training/learning programmes to be conducted with women in their sanghas around issues raised by them focused on enhancement of a gender perspective, strengthening of the sangha from within and capacity building for the self-reliance of the sangha.

For the further development of empowerment strategies at the sangha level more insight is needed in the internal dynamics of the sangha development and the dimensions of the empowerment processes of and among women at the sangha level. The initiative of the Programme to start a project of participatory documentation of the sangha development process with the sangha members can be considered as a start for getting into the heart of the sangha. This can be

supplemented by an in-depth study focused on the internal and external dynamics guiding the processes within the sangha.

Women's economic empowerment

Economic issues in areas of e.g. wages, improved labour conditions, employment creation and income generation seem to be difficult to deal with. The need for economic development, regular work, higher and stable incomes is high on the priority list of sangha women. But dealing with the recurring economic demands of women is an area for which Mahila Samakhya - as a process oriented, non-input delivery organisation - has not yet found a suitable answer, nor has it been able to define its role. The economic empowerment of women is an area which needs further thinking and strategizing, perhaps by exploring possibilities for capacity building and vocational skills training, and for strengthening economic support structures initiated by women in combination with developing partnerships with economic/rural development programmes.

Collaboration with other organisations

Mahila Samakhya has expanded its collaboration with other, like minded, organisations, particularly in the areas awareness training and capacity building. The lessons learned from such collaborative efforts could help in evolving more active approaches to collaboration with other agencies especially in the area of economic/rural/ agricultural and environmental development based on a participatory approach. Instead of focusing on organisations which are already present in a certain geographical area Mahila Samakhya could encourage rural development organisations to come to areas which have been unreached and are now uncovered by Mahila Samakhya.

Women's rights under tribal law

One of the obstacles in dealing with family violence and abuse of women from a legal perspective is that a number of the sanghas are in tribal areas which have their own tribal laws. A study about women's rights under tribal law in different tribal systems is required in order for women to know their rights and how to make use of them in order to seek justice. A better understanding of the tribal legal system is also relevant in relation to other legal issues such as property and inheritance rights and rights to the use of tribal land e.g. for the building of the sangha hut.

Mahila Kutir

The building of a Mahila Kutir - providing 'space' for women to come together - has become a lengthy learning process requiring stamina from the sangha women and sahayoginis. The process has met with many disappointments and a certain fatigue seems to have set in because of sometimes insurmountable obstacles. The main constraints are

- problems of getting land allocated, particularly in the tribal areas where land issues fall under the Tribal Area Development Programme,
- the allocation for the sangha hut under the Mahila Samakhya is insufficient to meet the costs involved,

and perhaps some inflexibility in the adherence to the Mahila Samakhya rules regarding the transfer of land to the sanghas. One problem might be the lack of understanding about the tribal legislation regarding the use and allocation of land and the implications in respect to the status of the sanghas as autonomous entities within a government programme.

Sanghas have been very resourceful in finding solutions for the lack of funds. In many cases they have been able to raise funds from other sources, to find low cost solutions and to provide their own labour. Yet it is necessary to review the budgetary allocations for the sangha huts under the Mahila Samakhya budget and to bring it in line with the current price levels.

3. Cutting across caste and class divides

Most of the sanghas in Mahila Samakhya are limited in caste composition to Scheduled Castes or belong to specific tribal groups. Women from other caste groups sometimes attend sangha meetings and have started to bring cases of violence and injustice to the sanghas. The nari adalats in Baroda District deal with legal cases from women regardless of their caste background. The melas and celebrations organised by the sanghas are a start for breaking class/caste barriers. Child care centres, literacy classes, securing access of girls to good education, women's health and legal rights, and community issues like water are areas of common women's interests where traditional caste divides can be broken.

In the sanghas there is a predominance of women from older age groups. The sanghas could give more attention to involving young women and look into their needs, and to reviewing relationships of power and authority among women within the family from a perspective of equality.

4. Toward a grassroots women's movement

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat has an impressive record in mobilising more than ten thousand women around issues like women's health, political participation, women and law, women's literacy etc. during melas and international celebrations. And sanghas have started networking and building linkages outside their villages. Their lobby and mobilisation activities are increasingly centred around women's legal and political rights, their right to health and education. The seeds for the emergence of a grassroots women's movement are there. Its growth is linked to the ability of Mahila Samakhya to broaden its coverage within the villages, within the blocks and within the districts, and develop a certain 'critical mass' of sangha women.

The Programme could perhaps make more intensive efforts of linking the sanghas with the developments within the women's movement and establishing closer contacts with women's organisations and groups within the districts and in the State.

5. Emerging trends

The emerging trends in Mahila Samakhya relate to the process of re-orientation and include

- the new emphasis on conscious integration of a gender perspective to the issues raised in the sanghas,
- the identification of a limited number of focal points per district around which activities will be centred,
- renewed attention to the role of Mahila Samakhya in relation to the economic empowerment of women and collaboration with other agencies,
- mobilisation of women around women's issues and the gradual emergence of a grassroots women's movement,
- the increasing emphasis on training at sangha level aimed at perspective building and capacity building for self-reliance of the sangha.

One of the emerging trends in the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat is the transition from the sakhi rotation model to the so called sangha model. This is an important step towards decentralised financial management and decision-making, and towards self-reliance of the sanghas, if it is accompanied by training of the sangha members in financial management and skills required to be self-reliant.

An on-going debate in MS concerns the development of support structures at the block level. Sanghas are already actively engaged in networking and mobilisation around common issues above the village level. Sakhis are seeking support from sakhis in other villages to strengthen their voices and powers when dealing with authorities at block or district levels. And sanghas have initiated their own legal support structures. These dynamics emerging from the sanghas are very positive in terms of growing strength. The role of Mahila Samakhyas is then to strengthen the human resources component and capacity building for new and diverse areas as well as the continuous expansion and intensive training at all levels of responsibility.

Mahila Samakhyas concerns cluster forming and the building of a federation. The role of Mahila Samakhyas is then to provide support for these sangha networks and support structures. This will involve providing new roles for sakhis, such as the para-legal counsellors in Baroda. For sakhis it may offer opportunities for horizontal and vertical mobility, for role differentiation and specialisation, and for career paths.

6. Expansion strategy

The current situation with MS is in different stages of strength (formation stage, consolidation stage, weakened, strong or a diversified strategy. This strategy is to be based on the lessons learned in the past, increased presence and visibility in the State and within the districts and the current momentum of spontaneous expansion via the sanghas.

The process of expansion should be seen in connection with the process of de-linking the strong sanghas and strengthening their capacities to become self-reliant. The following points should guide the formation and implementation of the expansion strategy:

- reinforcing the sanghas in terms of strength and capacity building for self-reliance of the older sanghas;
- de-linking the strong sanghas from direct sahayogini support;
- promoting sangha networks across caste, class or religious divides,
- strengthening networks among sanghas and the formation of cluster groups,
- strengthening and building up support structures at the block level.
- forming new sanghas in areas surrounding the clusters wherein Mahila Samakhyas already exists,
- involving the old sanghas and clusters in the formation and strengthening of new sanghas,
- selection to be based on transparent criteria e.g. poverty indicators, indicators for gender equality, female literacy rates, potential for linking up with DPEP and/or other schemes for poverty alleviation and socio-economic development,
- ensuring that state necessary infra-structure are in place and well prepared/trained before starting the expansion in the new districts.

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7. The education component and linkages to the other education programmes

Education is central in the meaning as an empowering process which enables learners to question, to analyse and seek answers, to act and thereby to discover their inner strength and realise their potential. It involves a process of interactive learning, based on sharing of knowledge and life experiences, critical reflection, creating new kinds of knowledge and understanding.

Education is understood in its broadest meaning as an empowering process which enables learners to question, to analyse and thereby to discover their inner strength and realise their potential. It involves a process of interactive learning, based on sharing of knowledge and life experiences, critical reflection, creating new kinds of knowledge and understanding.

7.1 Education as Literacy

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat started taking up education as literacy in the early nineties on an experimental basis. However these early initiatives were short-lived as they have been overtaken by the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) which started in Gujarat in 1993. Mahila Samakhya has become actively involved in the TLC in two districts. The Mahila Samakhya contribution made the campaign into a success in the districts. The credit is not just for the efforts of Mahila Samakhya during the campaign. Recognition is to be given to the fact that the involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the success of the TLC is also an outcome of the preceding empowerment processes among village women and of the holistic Mahila Samakhya approach to education as empowerment. A culture of learning has been created among sangha women, which made them assert their rights to literacy and to benefit from the Total Literacy Campaign.

After the completion of the TLC literacy activities were continued in the form of motivational camps, followed by literacy classes, training of volunteer literacy teachers, preparing materials for neo-literates. The experience in education as literacy with adult women in the form of regular classes or camps is somewhat mixed, because of difficulties in maintaining women's interest after reaching the stage of being able to write their names, reading words and sentences, writing simple letters. Efforts to integrate literacy skills with function related training such as the training for balsakhis, hand-pump mechanics, para-legal workers etc. appear to be more effective, because of the direct linkage to the area of work.

Women have come to realise that they can learn, become empowered, effect changes without necessarily becoming literate themselves. What the experience in literacy has achieved is that women have come to better understand the importance of relevant literacy and school education for their daughters. They have learned that there are alternative ways of making learning and teaching meaningful and interesting in the lives of women. Mahila Samakhya has created a positive environment for learning and schooling of children, especially for girls' education.

7.2 Education of children

The education of girls is an emerging issue in the programme, it is on the agenda of sangha women, who have taken initiatives to obtain scholarship funds for their children's education, and to form committees checking on school attendance and teaching by teachers in village schools. In some villages informal initiatives have emerged such as coaching classes for out-of school girls (and sometimes also boys) in order get them into the mainstream education system.

Child Care and Education

The establishment of child care centres was first seen as a local support structure which would provide women with 'time' to spend for her own and for collective purposes. In various villages or neighbourhoods not reached by the Government run ICDS centres sangha women have set up childcare centres on a voluntary basis with support from Mahila Samakhya and in some form of collaboration with ICDS. One of the differences with the ICDS Child Care Centres are that the MS Centres are 'owned' by the sanghas.

There are good linkages with the local schools, children from the Child Care Centres enrol in the schools, are well adjusted to the school rhythm, they speak out and seem to be performing well. In some centres balsakhis are teaching school age girls and prepare them for admission in the village school. What is clearly coming out is that the child care centres are more than just taking care of young children, they have become important in environment building for school education, especially for girls, and they provide the children with a child-friendly learning environment and

prepare them for school. Areas to look into are the training of the balsakhis who could be given more training in e.g. pedagogic skills for pre-school learning and child psychology.

Balika Shiksan Kendra

In Sabarkantha the District team has established a residential school (Balika Shiksan Kendra) for out-of-school-girls in the age group of 9-14 years, who dropped out of school after four years. The BSK is meeting a demand for the provision of meaningful education for girls in a safe environment. According to the teachers and parents there are visible changes in the behaviour attitudes of the girls. They have lost their fears and initial shyness, they talk openly and are motivated to learn more, they have become confident and no longer consider themselves drop-outs. Parents (fathers), who had little faith that their daughters had learnt anything in school, expressed that after four months they have come to realise that in this school their daughters can learn.

The short experience of the BSK begins to have effect on further thinking not only about the establishment of BSKs in each block, but also about finding other alternative modes of schooling for drop-out girls at village level. This is an area wherein Mahila Samakhya could cooperate with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

There are some areas that need further attention and improvement, such as training in child psychology, pedagogy and class room methods. Serious attention needs to be given to the development of a clear vision and clarity about the objectives of the BSK. There is no longterm vision which guides the curriculum and no clarity about the duration of the BSK programme.

There are plans for establishing a Mahila Shiksan Kendra e.g. in Baroda District, but with different objectives in mind and for a different target group (adolescent girls and sangha women). The MSK will provide three to four months residential training programmes aimed at creation of local cadre linked to the emergence of sangha initiated support structures.

7.3 Co-operation with other education programmes

Mahila Samakhya has actively collaborated in the Total Literacy Campaign and further cooperation in the next post-literacy phase of the TLC is envisaged.

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in Gujarat is almost ready to start in Gujarat. DPEP will be focusing on improvement of the quality of instruction, teacher training, curriculum development and development of gender sensitive learning/instruction materials, community participation, and development of alternative learning modes for out-of-school children. The Mahila Samakhya experience shows that the empowerment of women is a precondition for the creation of demand for education of girls and for an environment for community participation in improving access to and quality of school education. In all DPEP components Mahila Samakhya can build on its experience and contribute e.g. in community mobilisation, participation and environment building, involving women in Village Education Committees (VECs) and training of VEC members, provision of training inputs on dealing with gender issues for the training of DPEP staff and teachers, development of gender sensitive learning materials and methods, alternative models for drop-outs and out-of-school girls. Mahila Samakhya will be able to benefit from DPEP in strengthening the pedagogic quality of the education components as well as the use of learning materials and aids.

As DPEP will be implemented by the State and District Departments of Education and the Gujarat Council for Education Research and Teacher Training (GCERT) the feasibility of forming a three partite (MS-DPEP-GCERT) task group could be considered with the task to work out the plans and

terms for co-operation at general State level as well as for the districts covered by both programmes.

8. Reporting and documentation

Over time Mahila Samakhya has produced a wealth of documentation for internal as well as for external purposes. However there is need for more systematisation and consolidation of the resource materials which allow for following the processes overall longer period. Since 1995 various training workshops have been conducted on process documentation at different levels of the programme structure. This is a very positive initiative as it is expected to provide a better understanding of how the learning and empowerment processes evolve.

9. The structure

The Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat has gone through a troublesome period with a succession of staff changes at the State and District levels. The re-orientation process which has been started within the Programme needs to be continued in all districts and reinforced by strategic training inputs on perspective building at all levels of the implementation structure. In this process more interaction with NRG members as resource persons is welcomed as it will help in sharpening of the feminist perspective, provide professional support as well as access to a broad range of experiences and linkages to the wider women's movement.

Furthermore, Mahila Samakhya needs to reconsider its staffing and staff training policies from a structural point of view in order to enhance professional development, and put in place an adequate staff training mechanism at all levels in order to be able to provide the necessary support to the field processes in line with the changing needs of the Programme. Conditions need to be created, which will ensure the autonomy of the Programme and adherence to the Mahila Samakhya Programme principles, as well as flexibility in its mode of operations by making it a principle to appoint functionaries at SPD and DPC levels, who have experience in the NGO sector and affinity with the women's movement in Gujarat.

The District teams of sahayoginis and the sakhis are the strongest link in the implementation structure. The State Programme Office and the DIUs are found to be the weaker links.

In line with the future developments of the programme, its new directions and the increasingly differentiating needs of sanghas who are in different stages of developing their strengths, as well as the greater focus on the identity of Mahila Samakhya as an education Programme supporting non-formal self-directed learning processes, a total review of the support structures needed at District and State levels is called for.

Mahila Samakhya could consider the establishment of a network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres at State, district and block levels. Instead of a DIU which is responsible for the implementation and Programme in the Districts the DIUs could be converted into a District Mahila Samakhya Resource Centre which has branches at the block level. These Resource Centres could provide or facilitate access to training resources (process, perspective building, issues based and/or training of trainers), assist in development of training curricula and manuals, assist in further development of effective training/learning methods as well as gender sensitive learning materials for self-directed learning. The Resource Centres could have a role in collecting, converting and disseminating relevant information, in documentation and research, in dissemination of newsletters etc. And the centres could provide social, legal, job/career counselling as well as training and library facilities. These Resource Centres will provide a multi-

purpose support network which can be flexible and responsive to the needs of the Programme and varied processes in the field.

At the State level a similar conversion could be considered, although a State Resource Centre might be taking a slightly different role with a stronger emphasis on providing for professional development of the Programme Staff, on networking with other resource organisations and on advocacy and influencing policy decisions and implementation.

The network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres which is flexible and adaptable to the needs of the empowerment/development processes, can provide a more permanent support structure in the State and in the Districts that can branch out to the blocks and clusters, and cooperate with other (education) resource centres to avoid duplication by exchanging services.

The development of a support structure as proposed will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy. This is to be accompanied by a total of the financial pattern and the financial management procedures.

ANNEX 4

OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS BASED ON THE FIELDVISIT IN KARNATAKA

SUMMARY

Background

The task of the evaluation mission was to review the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and to assess and analyse the processes of empowerment at the level of the sanghas or women's collectives. In addition to this the mission was to look into financial management issues.

The visit in Karnataka lasted five days and took place between January 4 and 9. During this period we had meetings in Bangalore and travelled through three of the five districts wherein the Mahila Samakhya Programme is being implemented: Raichur, Bijapur and Bidar. The programme for the visit has been prepared by the State and District teams who provided us with excellent support and arrangements.

The mission is impressed by the resilience and the inner strength of the programme on the ground enabling it to continue and progress on its own steam during a period without much leadership or guidance from the top of the programme structure. The problems the Mahila Samakhya Programme Karnataka faced at State level were many, including lack of clarity of vision, strategic thinking, planning and communication between the state and districts. Under-staffing at the state as well as the district levels created further problems. The new staff learnt by trial and error without any systematic introductory training. As a result some dilution of the concepts, principles and philosophy have crept in and has led to overall stagnation in recent years.

It is to be noted that at present the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka is in the midst of a process of re-orientation of the entire programme, which is to lead towards a redefinition of the vision of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka and affirmation of its nature as a education programme for the empowerment of women. It will also lead to redefinition of the programme goals and objectives, to development of forward looking strategies and plans, and to identification of strategic partnerships with like-minded organisations in e.g. participatory rural development, innovation of educational methods and approaches, and to identification of resource organisations for training inputs aimed at reinforcing and furthering perspective and capacity building. From our observations and findings in the field we fully endorse this initiative.

The coverage

In 1997 the Mahila Samakhya Programme is working in 900 villages in five districts in the State of Karnataka. The choice of the districts has been made most judiciously with four of these districts considered the most backward in terms of their economic and social indicators. In all these districts Mahila Samakhya has deliberately focused on and reached the most poor and backward population groups.

At present Mahila Samakhya is present in 12,5% of all blocks and 3,4% of the villages in the State. In 1996 there were 773 active sanghas or women's collectives and taken together the sanghas have a membership of more than thirty thousand women. Through them their families and communities are also reached. The Mahila Samakhya Programme has taken strong roots in the districts and talukas, in which it is located. Yet, there is still a great scope for expansion in the

future in terms of membership of the sanghas within the villages, as well in as terms of expansion into new villages in the talukas covered, in new talukas and in new districts in the State of Karnataka.

The impact of the Programme on women's lives

The impact on women who are members is really impressive. They have not only established a collective identity, but have also gained recognition in the community. These women are a visible force and exude a great sense of self-confidence. Their visibility, mobility and maneuverability both in the community and within the family have increased enormously. Their empowerment in terms of self-confidence and sense of solidarity speaks volumes for the solid ground work that Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka has established, particularly among the most impoverished sections of Karnataka rural society. The programme has definitely given support, strength and feeling of hope.

Membership of the sangha has changed their self-image and given them an identity of women who belong to a visible and increasingly influential group in the village community. Their sangha membership has raised their image in the perception of their families. As a result, men no longer resist but encourage the women to go for meetings and support them in various ways. Thus women have earned the time, space and mobility to come together. Now women feel that they can raise their voices in public meetings confidently and without fear, and they feel that their voices are being listened to. The sangha gives them strength and supports them through difficult times, they feel the strength of acting together.

The activities of the sanghas and the exposure to training, information and knowledge has an impact on women's changing attitudes to and understanding of social traditions which reflect and endorse women's oppression. They increasingly challenge social practices which perpetuate women's inequality. Their attitudes towards the education of their children and particularly girls has changed and now they start demanding accountability from the local schools and teachers in providing good education.

Although the actions of women do not directly challenge the existing gender relationships or the local power structures subtle changes are becoming visible in the attitudes of male family members, in women's decisions making powers in their families, in recognition they get from women and men from other caste communities, and the recognition and respect gained from village authorities and government officials.

On the whole the impact is most visible in improvement of the survival base and living conditions. Further impact in changing the balance and practices of power will require continuation of the process of careful and creative strategizing with a long term vision on women's equality which determines the direction.

Approximately 34% of the sanghas in Bidar and Bijapur can be considered as strong sanghas in terms of taking initiatives, responsiveness to issues of exploitation and violence on women, having an image as 'a power to reckon with' at community level, taking decisions and action without guidance from the sahayogini. The capability of the sangha to function in this manner tells much about the formidable impact of the Mahila Samakhya Programme on the women who before the presence of the Programme were living in the dark corners of their homes, afraid to go outside. to take initiative and raise their voices.

Yet more than two thirds of the Mahila sanghas are still in the process of reaching this stage of strength. The process of empowerment and building of inner strength of and within the sanghas is an area that needs the full and continuing attention of Mahila Samakhya in the future and cannot

be overlooked or side-tracked in the midst of emerging issues like the building of sangha federations. Quite a number of sanghas have fallen apart or are no longer active. A better understanding is needed about this phenomenon and the factors involved in sanghas breaking up or losing interest in order to draw lessons for future strategies related to strengthening the empowerment of and within the sanghas.

Women's health

Women's health and particularly the use of herbal medicines and traditional wisdom for treatment of a wide variety of ailments is one of the focal issues in the Programme. The impact on women is their better understanding of the function of their bodies and their reproductive systems, demystification of superstitious beliefs, eradication of harmful practices, awareness of traditional and modern health systems, and how and when to approach them, and increased ability to recognise problems and take appropriate actions. Some attention has been given women's reproductive health and, sporadically, aids. More systematic approaches could perhaps be evolved as women are increasingly showing their interest.

Women reported better health of themselves and their children. Due to the lack of village health statistics it is difficult to assess the impact of Mahila Samakhya on the health status. Sanghas could become actively involved in monitoring the health situation in their villages or at least in the community of which they are apart by keeping records of relevant health data. This could help in evolving more effective strategies for informing the health authorities, changing the systems and ultimately influence health policies and their implementation.

Economic empowerment

Accessing economic development schemes is on the agendas of all district programmes. However, it meets with different degrees of success and also with many problems and difficulties. More attention may need to be given to understand the factors involved, as well as to the identification of resource organisations (state as well as NGOs) involved in participatory rural development, environmental resources management and employment creation. Co-operation with such organisation in areas where Mahila Samakhya has already established a basis for women's involvement in participatory development need to be addressed in the future.

The main focus of activities in the area of economic empowerment evolves around savings and loans. More than 85% of the active sanghas are engaged in group saving schemes. Most of the loans taken are used for individual purposes. In terms of impact the savings schemes are reported to have given women greater control of their incomes and savings, it has increased women's awareness about their economic assets and how they can use them, increased their confidence in dealing with the bank system and taking financial decisions, and increased their decision making powers in their families on financial matters. And now sanghas have started forming federations with the aim of establishing their own Mahila Bank at cluster level.

The concept of the Women's Bank is related the idea of economic independence of sangha women and self-reliance and sustainability of the sanghas, which are valid arguments. But questions could be raised regarding the implications of an active involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the establishment of special Mahila Banks, and if available options with regard to alternative banking systems been sufficiently explored. We recommend Mahila Samakhya Karnataka to carefully review and reconsider its strategy, also in view of the sometimes negative experiences of the impact of the saving schemes on the sanghas, creating rifts and breaking them up. Banking and saving matters may become the predominant activity of the sangha overshadowing other

future in terms of membership of the sanghas within the villages, as well in as terms of expansion into new villages in the talukas covered, in new talukas and in new districts in the State of Karnataka.

The impact of the Programme on women's lives

The impact on women who are members is really impressive. They have not only established a collective identity, but have also gained recognition in the community. These women are a visible force and exude a great sense of self-confidence. Their visibility, mobility and maneuverability both in the community and within the family have increased enormously. Their empowerment in terms of self-confidence and sense of solidarity speaks volumes for the solid ground work that Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka has established, particularly among the most impoverished sections of Karnataka rural society. The programme has definitely given support, strength and feeling of hope.

Membership of the sangha has changed their self-image and given them an identity of women who belong to a visible and increasingly influential group in the village community. Their sangha membership has raised their image in the perception of their families. As a result, men no longer resist but encourage the women to go for meetings and support them in various ways. Thus women have earned the time, space and mobility to come together. Now women feel that they can raise their voices in public meetings confidently and without fear, and they feel that their voices are being listened to. The sangha gives them strength and supports them through difficult times, they feel the strength of acting together.

The activities of the sanghas and the exposure to training, information and knowledge has an impact on women's changing attitudes to and understanding of social traditions which reflect and endorse women's oppression. They increasingly challenge social practices which perpetuate women's inequality. Their attitudes towards the education of their children and particularly girls has changed and now they start demanding accountability from the local schools and teachers in providing good education.

Although the actions of women do not directly challenge the existing gender relationships or the local power structures subtle changes are becoming visible in the attitudes of male family members, in women's decisions making powers in their families, in recognition they get from women and men from other caste communities, and the recognition and respect gained from village authorities and government officials.

On the whole the impact is most visible in improvement of the survival base and living conditions. Further impact in changing the balance and practices of power will require continuation of the process of careful and creative strategizing with a long term vision on women's equality which determines the direction.

Approximately 34% of the sanghas in Bidar and Bijapur can be considered as strong sanghas in terms of taking initiatives, responsiveness to issues of exploitation and violence on women, having an image as 'a power to reckon with' at community level, taking decisions and action without guidance from the sahayogini. The capability of the sangha to function in this manner tells much about the formidable impact of the Mahila Samakhya Programme on the women who before the presence of the Programme were living in the dark corners of their homes, afraid to go outside, to take initiative and raise their voices.

Yet more than two thirds of the Mahila sanghas are still in the process of reaching this stage of strength. The process of empowerment and building of inner strength of and within the sanghas is an area that needs the full and continuing attention of Mahila Samakhya in the future and cannot

be overlooked or side-tracked in the midst of emerging issues like the building of sangha federations. Quite a number of sanghas have fallen apart or are no longer active. A better understanding is needed about this phenomenon and the factors involved in sanghas breaking up or losing interest in order to draw lessons for future strategies related to strengthening the empowerment of and within the sanghas.

Women's health

Women's health and particularly the use of herbal medicines and traditional wisdom for treatment of a wide variety of ailments is one of the focal issues in the Programme. The impact on women is their better understanding of the function of their bodies and their reproductive systems, demystification of superstitious beliefs, eradication of harmful practices, awareness of traditional and modern health systems, and how and when to approach them, and increased ability to recognise problems and take appropriate actions. Some attention has been given women's reproductive health and, sporadically, aids. More systematic approaches could perhaps be evolved as women are increasingly showing their interest.

Women reported better health of themselves and their children. Due to the lack of village health statistics it is difficult to assess the impact of Mahila Samakhya on the health status. Sanghas could become actively involved in monitoring the health situation in their villages or at least in the community of which they are apart by keeping records of relevant health data. This could help in evolving more effective strategies for informing the health authorities, changing the systems and ultimately influence health policies and their implementation.

Economic empowerment

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issues. Instead of establishing its own Mahila Banks Mahila Samakhya could direct its strategy towards influencing the banking system, assisting the sanghas in negotiating their terms of co-operation with local banks or with elsewhere existing women's banks. Perhaps banks could be convinced to open special women's branches which fulfil the criteria and terms set by sangha women.

Women's political participation

One of the most impressive achievements of the Mahila Samakhya is in enabling women to participate in the political process. The Programme has helped women understand issues around political participation and empowered them in the real sense of the term. What is truly remarkable is that more than half the women who contested the elections got elected. The elected members, who have become strong, still need Mahila Samakhya to help them function in their new roles and to train them in public speaking, literacy and awareness of issues. A further step ahead might be to assist the elected women (sangha and non sangha) to formulate a common women's agenda and to form a network of elected women who can support each other and join their forces for their common women's interests.

Women's legal rights

In all district programmes legal issues are continuously on the agendas in the sangha meetings. It relates to dealing with cases of domestic violence, family disputes, land and property issues etc. and activism of the sanghas often evolves around issues related to social injustices. No initiatives have been taken as yet for addressing the area of women's legal and human rights, and women's rights under tribal law in a systematic manner with the aim of enhancing women's awareness about how to use their legal rights. This could be an area to give more systematic attention to in the future in the entire Programme.

The impact on breaking caste and class divides

Most of the sanghas in Karnataka are affiliated with specific caste or tribal groups. Efforts of enlarging sanghas by including women from other caste groups have met disappointments and have not been encouraging further efforts. Caste divides are strongly ingrained in the texture of the society and are probably the most difficult boundaries to break through. This is especially the case when caste interests are inter-twined with class and political interests.

There are areas where caste barriers are overcome e.g. health, education and solving problems related to domestic violence. A potential scope for reaching more women, including women from upper castes is very much there. Mahila Samakhya could play a role in the promotion of a village-community based open women's forum, which is open for women regardless of their caste, class or communal background and which brings them together around common women's issues and interests. Although difficult the effort to broaden the sangha membership and build towards a community of women remains a long term challenge within the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

The emergence of a grass-roots women's movement and building federations

Sangha activism about women's issues and forms of social injustice are clear indications of the emergence of a grass roots women's movement. Sanghas are actively seeking lateral relationships with other sanghas to enlarge their collective strength. Mahila Sanghas have become visible

entities with voices that need to be listened to and sangha women are ready to use that capacity more effectively.

The building of sangha federations is on the agendas for discussions at different level of the Programme. The idea of a federation seems to have become an end in itself which is linked to the goal of achieving self-reliance and sustainability of the sanghas after withdrawal from Mahila Samakhya as a support structure. However, how the formation of federations is linked to women's empowerment processes in the sanghas is no longer very clear. There is a danger that the investment in the forming of federation will be a drain on the attention that need to be given to the strengthening of the sanghas. Priority is to be given to reinforcing the empowerment processes of and within the sanghas, two thirds of which have been found to be needing further strengthening. In addition to this the sangha initiatives in networking among sanghas at cluster and taluka level are to be supported and strengthened without necessarily making it into a formalised structure.

Sahayakis and sahayoginis

The impact of empowerment is not just on the sangha members but on all women working with the Mahila Samakhya Programme. It is most visible and pronounced on the sahayoginis and sahayakis.

In total more than 2000 sahayakis have been trained and have become empowered beyond expectation. They are strong in terms of self-confidence, verbal skills, mobilising women, organisation of the sangha meetings and representing their sanghas in cluster, taluka and district level meetings. However it is reported that sometimes sahayakis individually or as group have become overactive and dominating the sangha preventing its growth. The internal dynamics of sharing information, power and responsibilities within the sangha is an area that needs to be better understood in order to evolve strategies for strengthening of the sanghas through training programme directed at the sangha level.

The sahayoginis are the key actors for the empowerment of women at the grassroots level. They mobilise the collective strength of women, bringing about an attitudinal shift from age old beliefs and practices. With their commitment and hard work they have made a great and valuable contribution over the last seven years. And strong and lasting relationships have been built between the sahayoginis and 'their' sanghas, which may have given some sahayoginis a certain degree of power and control over their sangha which they might be unwilling to relinquish.

Sahayoginis are in a contradictory position as they are expected to be responsive to the development agendas of the sangha women which focus on their basic survival needs and improvement of their living conditions. At the same time they are to bring this in line with the empowerment agenda of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Besides, day to day problems may override the attention for broader perspectives and long term strategies. This inevitably leads to stagnation in the Programme, in loosing its conceptual clarity, vision and sense of direction as an empowerment Programme. The signs can clearly be observed in the attitudes and expressions of sahayoginis. To come out of this situation it is suggested, a.o. to jointly evolve a forward looking human resources development plan which provides for role differentiation and for lateral and upward mobility, and for career paths, and to implement a training plan for sahayoginis and programme staff with a fresh approach which includes exposures to new perspectives and inspiration coming from the women's movement as well as building of professional capacities.

Education for empowerment and adult education

Education for women's empowerment is definitely taking place in all districts and has made significant impacts on the lives of rural women. However, if the concept of education is used in its limited understanding of education as literacy, the level of success is limited. This is particularly the case for forms of education taking place in regular classroom-like sessions with materials brought from elsewhere, which perhaps have no bearing to women's lives, or which are not directly linked to women's area of work.

In general the attention to adult literacy and to the creation of a consistent, holistic gender aware approach to education for empowerment, which includes and integrates the different aspects of education (e.g. life skills, information and knowledge, literacy and numeracy) is waning in the Karnataka Programme. The centrality of education in Mahila Samakhya appears to have given way to other priorities, like e.g. the running of savings group, the building of the sangha hut, accessing schemes and services, and other activities aimed at keeping the collectives going. In Karnataka Mahila Samakhya is operational in the districts which are most backward in terms of women's development and literacy. *Mahila Samakhya could and should refocus its attention and make education for empowerment its foremost and central issue.* With their literacy skills and with the gains achieved in terms of women's empowerment women are ready to move ahead use their newly acquired skills to access and further their knowledge, to strengthen their information base and to counter disinformation and abuse, and to participate in family, community and further political decision making from a position of strength.

For the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka the area to venture in is *to evolve together with the sangha women innovative and participatory learning strategies for learning in pre- and neo-literate stages maintaining the focus on supporting women's empowerment.* Strategies which combine awareness, information and skills, which are directed at learning groups with women who are barely literate and women who want to use and further their literacy skills. Banking on the lessons learned from seven years of experience Mahila Samakhya will be on its way to the creation of a truly alternative approach to adult education.

Refocusing the Programme on education for empowerment requires *changes in the human resources staffing and development policy.* Each District Implementation Unit as well as the State Programme Office is to have an experienced education expert on its staff who together will form a team for backing-up and supporting the education component in the Programme. Mahila Samakhya has a great resource of in-house practical experience in training methodologies, use of drama and cultural expressions, teaching by improvisation in non-formal settings. These experiences can be brought up to a higher professional level with a well directed staff development plan.

Education of children

The focus on education for empowerment naturally includes the next generation by giving attention to the education of children and particularly girls. Mahila Samakhya is enhancing a growing awareness about the values of children's and particularly girls education. The activism of the mahila sangha directed at the local schools indicates that a foundation for community interest and participation in improving the quality of education in the schools on the part of women exists and that other education programmes like the District Primary Education Programme could build upon this.

Child Care Centres

The primary function of the Child Care Centres seems to be child care with perhaps some attention to preschool education. Generally the centres have become regarded as a service from the government and a sense of ownership and shared responsibility by the sangha seems to be missing in many cases. One could question if there still exists a qualitative difference between the ICDS centres and centres run through Mahila Samakhya and if it is not duplicating the services from the Department of Child Development. Instead Mahila Samakhya could focus on collaboration with the concerned Departments and on influencing the policies and the policy implementation in order to make them more responsive to the needs and situations of rural women who are currently not being reached through the existing services.

Non-formal education centres for children

The non-formal education initiatives run by the sanghas are meeting a need for alternative modes of education, which provide a learner-friendly and safe environment for girls, who otherwise would remain excluded from participation in formal education. The numbers of NFE centres are growing and there is a lot of scope for further growth, the non-availability of teachers being the most severe constraint. We noted that the preparation and training of the teachers for non-formal education is limited. Training in pedagogic methods, alternative learning approaches are needed. In addition to engaging its own professional resource persons in the District and State teams Mahila Samakhya needs to work at further networking and co-operation with educational resource organisations in the further development of its education component.

Mahila Shikshana Kendras

The Mahila Shikshana Kendras are the most outstanding contribution of Mahila Samakhya in the area of girls' education. They provide a residential school for teen-age girls between 14 and 18 years of age who for various reasons have stopped going to school after Standard four. This is a most relevant age group as they are the adult women and mothers of tomorrow. Being given this opportunity allows them to delay the age of marriage and get a certain level of education first, to escape from being drawn into bonded labour, to escape from an existence as prostitute, and to prepare for a new future and life in dignity.

Without doing injustice to the relevance and importance of the MSK as an extremely valuable alternative educational provision for girls, which will definitely change their prospects in life, there are areas which need to be addressed like the curriculum and curriculum development, the training of teachers in pedagogy, child development, classroom methods, dealing with gender in education etc. Moreover, there does not seem to be a clear vision with a forward looking perspective on the future development of the MSK. The original objective was to provide for an educational facility which would help to create an educated cadre of women for development of education in backward rural areas and for rural development. That vision has gradually faded away as the MSK has become like an alternative boarding school for girls. Mahila Samakhya needs to reconsider its vision and strategy for the future of the MSK.

Co-operation with DPEP

The presence of Mahila Samakhya in the districts wherein the DPEP is planning to operate provides scope for co-operation between the two programmes in areas of e.g. village mobilisation, community participation, gender training for teachers and DPEP staff, development of gender relevant learning materials, and creation of alternate modes of education for out-of-school children. In this respect the formation of joint MS-DPEP task group is recommended who will work out the further plans for co-operation at general State level, as well as for the districts to be covered by both programmes* with the aim of increasing access to and retention in primary & continuing education of girls, and ensuring quality of learning that is meaningful and gender relevant.

Expansion of the Programme

During the next five year plan Mahila Samakhya intends to further extend its outreach into three more districts, which means that by the year 2000 the Programme will be present in almost half of the total number of districts in Karnataka. The current situation with sanghas in different stages of strength calls for a diversified strategy based on the lessons learned in the past, the increased presence and visibility in the State and within the districts, and the current momentum of spontaneous expansion via the sanghas. The process of expansion is to be seen in connection with the process of de-linking the strong sanghas and strengthening of their capacities to become self-reliant.

Documentation and reporting

Over the years Mahila Samakhya has produced a wealth of documentation which provides a rich resource of information for internal as well as for external purposes. For a better insight in the progression and evolution of the programme in a long time perspective and in relation to the basic principles and objectives of Mahila Samakhya a greater degree of systematisation and analysis is necessary. The creation of a data base of gender relevant development statistics, could help to place the contributions from Mahila Samakhya in a wider development perspective.

Mahila Samakhya as a resource organisation for the empowerment of women

Mahila Samakhya is perceived as a time-bound programme that is to phase itself out after a certain period of time. This perception is in contradiction with the understanding of empowerment as an on-going process of growth. What can be time-bound is the process of sangha formation and consolidation, and the period a sangha needs in order to de-link itself from the regular support of its sahayogini.

Instead of phasing itself out the Mahila Samakhya Programme structure is able to build on the strength of its presence and its credibility gained in the Districts and the State. Its future is to expand and differentiate its role in order to be responsive to the needs related to the different stages of development of the existing and the new sanghas. In recognition of the sanghas as mature, self-sustaining organisations in their own right, capable of making their own decisions and *determining the direction of their development process*, the Mahila Samakhya Structure has to diversify and change its role. From this point of view Mahila Samakhya can be regarded as one of the resource organisations to be accessed by the sanghas for provision of (gender-sensitive) training inputs and materials, for providing information, knowledge and new perspectives on issues coming up in the sangha, for facilitation of access to other resource organisations or assistance in setting up and sustaining support structures. As a support structure of the sanghas Mahila Samakhya could play a stronger role in advocacy and policy development in support of women's equality and empowerment.

By converting the existing structure of DIUs and SPO into a network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres with accessible branches at taluka and cluster levels it can provide a flexible, accessible and multi-functional support structure. This will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy. It requires a human resources development plan which provides for staff development, staff training and capacity building for sahayoginis and district staff. To accompany the recommended changes a review of the financial pattern and financial management procedures will also be necessary.

January 24

Presentation of the Aide Memoir to the National Programme Director

Meeting at the Royal Netherlands Embassy with

- Programme Officer *Women and Development*
- First Secretary OS
- Financial Controller

Departure Claudine Helleman to The Netherlands

ITINERARY Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh visits

The programme began with a briefing meeting on 3 January 97 at Shastri Bhavan, New Delhi.

The Joint Secretary, Mr R.S.Pandey made the opening remarks regarding expectations from the Evaluation Mission. This was followed by some remarks from Mr Kuperus, Counsellor, Development Section, Royal Netherlands Embassy. Then the Mahila Samakhya Programme was presented by Ms Vrinda Sarup, Director, Mahila Samakhya. Ms J.Kameshwari, Consultant, Mahila Samakhya then introduced the Evaluation parameters and material was distributed to the mission. This was followed by discussion and clarifications.

The team then met the National Resource Group members at lunch which was followed by a meeting where NRG members presented three studies, and the methodology and concept of Mahila Samakhya.

On the 4 January Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran left for Andhra Pradesh.

4 January 1997: Team Meeting with the Secretary, Department of Education, A.P. and EC members at the conference hall. Ms Padma, State Programme Director then briefed the team on the AP Mahila Samatha Society. The afternoon was a team meeting to discuss strategies and parameters followed by a dinner where the team met the resource groups and other NGO's and academies connected with Mahila Samatha.

5 January 1997: Dana Broft remains in Hyderabad meeting with the State office. Vasanth Kannabiran leaves for Mahaboobnagar and visits the Mahila Sikshana Kendra at Mahaboobnagar. She then left for Makthal to attend a sangham leaders planning and review meeting there. After that she visited Lingampalli village, saw the sangham hut, interacted with sangha members, went to Tipparasapalli to attend a sangha meeting, met the watershed committee visited the Balamitra Kendra (children's night school) at Bondalkunta and returned to Makthal at 10 pm for a night halt.

6 January 1997: Vasanth Kannabiran met with Karyakarthas (Sahayoginis) individually and then had a group meeting with the while DIU. She then proceeded to attend a cluster meeting at Kungsi(a new village) and then left for Hyderabad.

7 January 1997: Both the team members proceeded to Sangareddy. There they visited the Mahila Sikshana Kendra, and met the DIU and MSK teams.

8 January 1997: They visited the sangha Hut and met the members of Esogipet Sangham. They then proceeded to the sangham leaders planning and review meeting at Alladurg. From Alladurg they visited a cluster health training at Paladugu and then left for Sangareddy and then returned to Hyderabad.

9 January 1997: They visited the Mahila Sikshana Kendra run by MVF an NGO, and then met with the sangha members from the 20 villages mobilised by MVF.

On the 9th evening the team returned to Delhi.

On the 10 January Vasanth Kannabiran left for Haridwar to visit Tehri while Dana Broft left for Varanasi to see the programme in that area.

After reaching Lambgaon on the 10th night Vasanth Kannabiran had a meeting with the Sahayoginis of the district.

On the 11th morning she had a meeting with the more experience Sahayoginis. She then proceeded to Bounsari to visit a Phulkandi, a children's literacy centre. This was followed by a sangha meeting at the village.

After this she visited a women's literacy camp in Ramole and had a discussion with the women learning to read and write.

In the evening she had a meeting with four sakhis who came on their own to meet the mission on coming to know about it. This was followed by a meeting with the newer sahayoginis.

11 January 1997: Vasanth Kannabiran attended a sangha meeting at Kurangaon. After this she visited a Thikana at Jawalgaon colony.

12 January 1997: She left for New Tehri and met members of the District Resource Group over dinner.

13 January 1997: She had a meeting with the DIU Core Team and left for Haridwar and Lucknow.

14 January 1997,

Lucknow: Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran visited two villages with new literacy centres in Sitapur district.

15 January 1997: Lunch meeting with state resource group, consultants, officials and state team. In the afternoon Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran attended an extended meeting with the state level team of the Uttar Pradesh programme.

15 January 1997: Return to New Delhi

LIST OF PERSONS SPOKEN TO in relation to financial management

New Delhi

Secretary Department of Education (MHRD)
Joint Secretary Department of Education (MHRD)
National Programme Director Mahila Samakhya, Department of Education (MHRD),
Resource Person National Programme Office Mahila Samakhya
Royal Netherlands Embassy Staff
Members of the national Resource Group

Andhra Pradesh

State Programme Director APMSS (current)
Former State Programme Director-APMSS
Members of the Executive Committee APMSS
Accounts Officer SPO (previous period)
Accounts Officer SPO (current period)
Resource Persons and staff State Programme Office
District Programme Co-ordinators APMSS
Friends of Mahila Samakhya

District Implementation Unit Medak
Accounts Officer DIU and staff

Sahayoginis
Sangha women in the villages visited
NFE teachers BMK
Management and teaching staff MSK Medak
Management and teaching staff MSK MV Foundation
Sakhis, sangha members, sahayoginis at Block planning meeting

Uttar Pradesh

State Programme Director

District Implementation Unit Varanasi:
Accounts Officer
Resource persons
Sahayoginis
Sakhis and sangha women in the villages visited
Friends of Mahila Samakhya
Representatives of donor organisations
NFE teachers and learners in sangha classes

State Programme Office Lucknow:
Resource Persons
Accounts Officer
Junior accounts officer
Sahayoginis at sahayogini meeting
Sakhis and sangha women in the visited villages

Teachers and sangha women in sangha classes

ITINERARY KARNATAKA (Leela Gulati - Claudine Helleman)

- January 4 Arrival in Bangalore
- Meeting at the State Programme Office with
- . State Programme Director, Dr Revathi Narayanan,
 - . District Programme Co-ordinator Mysore, Dr C.P.Parimala,
 - . Resource Person on traditional Healthcare C.M. Gangamma
 - . Junior Resource Person, Ms B.S.Vani
- Meeting with the Secretary Department of Education, Chairperson of the Mahila Samakhya Society, Mr S.V.Ranganath
- Meeting at the SPO with
- . Financial Advisor, Sri A.R.Achyuta Rao and
 - . Accountant, Ms H.R.Sreelatha
- Dinner with friends of Mahila Samakhya
- . Ms Shoba Nambisan (member Executive Committee)
 - . Ms Shoba Raghuram (member General Council and Deputy Representative HIVOS)
- and State Office staff
- Departure for Raichur
- January 5 Arrival in Raichur
- Meeting at the District Resource Unit with the District Programme Co-ordinator Raichur, Ms Sowbhagya, ex District Programme Co-ordinator Raichur, Dr C.P. Parimala (junior) resource persons and office staff
- Visit to Mahila Shiksan Kendra, meeting with students and teachers
- January 6 Sahayaki meeting at Kadarahalli, Raichur District meeting with sahayakis, sahayoginis and sangha women
- Inauguration of a Sangha Mane meeting with women from the Mahila Sangha
- Travel to Bijapur District
- January 7 Children's Chinnara Mela at Bagalkot (Agricultural Training Institute), meetings with - resource persons
- children from NFE centres and MSK
 - NFE teachers
 - sahayoginis
- Inter-taluk meeting of Sahayakis from entire District Bijapur at Bagewadi

January 8 Meeting at District Implementation Unit Bijapur with District Programme Officer, Ms Nirmala Shiraguppy, Resource Persons and Office staff

Meeting with Sahayoginis at DIU

Meeting with resource persons from Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi (NGO Resource Organisation on innovative pedagogy for literacy and non- formal education in support of the Literacy Movement)

Visit to Mahila Shiksan Kendra, meetings with

- children
- teaching staff

Travel to Bidar

January 9 Meeting at District Implementation Unit Bidar District with District Programme Co-ordinator Bidar District, Ms Usha Rani, and District Programme Co-ordinator Gulbarga District, Ms Nirmala

Sangha Meeting at Bagdal in Bidar Taluk (Iambani)
meeting with sangha women, sahayakis, sahayogini and some village officials (Panchayat President)

Departure for Hyderabad and on to Gujarat.

ITINERARY, VISITS AND MEETINGS IN GUJARAT (Leela Gulati & Claudine Helleman)

- January 10 Arrival in Ahmedabad
Meeting with
 . in charge State Programme Director, Ms Meena Batt
 . District Programme Coordinator Sabarkantha, Ms Shakuntala Mehta
 . SPO consultant, Ms Rashmika Modi
- January 11/12 **Baroda District**
Meeting at DIU Office with the District Programme Coordinator, Ms Indira Pathak and DIU team
visits to
 Nari Adalat at Massa Road, Padra Block,
 meeting with members of the court, attending women, sahayogini
 . Patod village (Padra Block),
 meeting with sangha members of three sanghas
 . Child Care Centre & NFE class at Haripura village, Naswadi Block,
 meeting with balsakhis, children, mothers/sangha members
 . Sakhi cluster meeting at Ghatasa village, Naswadi Block,
 meeting with sakhis and sahayoginis
 . Tree Plantation (Mahila Sangha) at Lunadra village, Naswadi Block
 Creativity Centre & Library at Tanakhia (DIU sub-office)
- Meeting with the Secretary, Education Department, Chairperson of the Executive Council Mahila Samakhya Society, Shri S.D.Sharma
- January 13/14 (J.G) **Rajkot District**
Meetings with District Programme Coordinator, Ms Manisha Brahbhatt and DIU team and Sahayoginis
Fieldvisits for meetings with sahayoginis, sakhis and sangha women
- January 13/14 (CH) **Sabarkantha District**
Meetings at DIU Office with District Programme Coordinator, resource persons and consultant
- Meetings with member District Resource Group, Dr Prakash Joshi and representative of NGO partner (ARPAN)
- visits to
 Balika Shiksan Kendra at Khebrahma,
 meeting with teaching staff, children
 . Sahyogini meeting at Khebrahma
 Sangha Hut at Danmahudi village,
 meeting with sakhis and sangha members from various sanghas
 . Literacy Class at Jinjodi village (Bhiloda Block),
 meeting with sangha members
 . Child Care Centre at Jinjodi village
- DIU Office
 . meeting with accountant and office staff
 . meeting with BSK parents (fathers)
 . meeting with representatives of the Sahayoginis

(representing the Mahila Kutir Committee, Health Committee, Literacy Committee, Savings Committee, Child Care Committee, District Training Team) and DIU staff

January 15 (CH)

State Programme Office
meeting with in charge State Programme Director and Accounts Officer,
Mr B.R.Shah

Meeting with Education Officers

- . Financial Advisor Education Department
- . Director Adult Education
- . Deputy Director Adult Education
- . Secretary GCERT
- . Director DPEP/Planning Primary Education
- . Officer dealing with MS in the Education Department
- . District Education Officer Sabarkantha
- . Controller Sabarkantha

January 15

Lunch meeting hosted by the State Programme Director

- . education officers,
- . members General Council
- . friends of Mahila Samakhya,
- . DIU staff

Wrap-up meeting with

- . Secretary Education Department
- . State Programme Director and consultant SPO
- . District Programme Officers and Resource persons/consultants
 - District Banaskantha
 - District Baroda
 - District Rajkot
 - District Sabarkantha

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TOGETHER WE MAKE A PATH

Chendanda Gangamma

MEDICINE IN YOUR BACKYARD

Mahila Samakhya Karnataka

Claudine Helleman, Indu Capoor, Caroline Diepenveen, Prabha Mahale, Kumud Sharma, Haye
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GLOSSARY

<i>anganwadi</i>	child care centre of Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS)
<i>bal mela</i>	children's fair or large gathering of children
<i>bala mitra kendra</i>	non-formal education centres for children (Andhra Pradesh)
<i>Balika Shiksan Kendra</i>	residential school for girls (school-leavers)
<i>balsakhi</i>	teacher of a child care centre
<i>devadasi/jogini</i>	women who are dedicated to the Goddess Yellamma who have the position of a prostitute (jogini in Karnataka)
<i>devadasi system</i>	system of sexual exploitation of women, usually from the subordinate castes, under the guise of ritual prostitution (jogini in Karnataka)
<i>jatha</i>	street theatre
<i>karyakartha</i>	literally: 'worker', term used for fieldworkers/cluster level coordinators in Andhra Pradesh
<i>kutir</i>	hut (in Gujarat)
<i>lakh</i>	hundred thousand (rupees)
<i>Mahila Samakhya/Samatha</i>	literally: 'women speaking as equals' (Mahila Samatha in Andhra Pradesh)
<i>Mahila Shiksan(a) Kendra</i>	residential training/education institute providing condensed residential courses for girls and women
<i>mane</i>	hut (in Karnataka)
<i>mandal/block</i>	administrative unit, consisting of a block of several villages
<i>mela</i>	fair
<i>nari adalat</i>	women's court
<i>(Gram)-Panchayat</i>	village council, an elected body which constitutes the first tier of the system of local self-government
<i>Panchayati Raj</i>	three tier system of local self-government by elected bodies where a third of the seats are reserved for women
<i>Pradhan</i>	village leader
<i>samelan</i>	meeting (of all persons)

<i>Sarpanch</i>	(elected) member of the village council
<i>taluka/block</i>	administrative unit, consisting of a block of several villages
<i>thikana</i>	hut (Uttar Pradesh)
<i>sangha/sangham</i>	village level women's collective
<i>sakhi/sahayaki</i>	literally: 'woman friend', village activist of the mahila sangha
<i>sahayogini</i>	literally: 'a woman helper', field worker, coordinator of a cluster of (ten) mahila sanghas

ABBREVIATIONS

AE	Adult Education
AMN	Auxiliary Nurse/Midwife, government health worker at the village level
AP	Andhra Pradesh
APMSSS	Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samatha State Society
BSK	Balika Shiksan(a) Kendra
DIU	District Implementation Unit
DO	Development Officer (at block/taluka level)
DPC	District Programme Co-ordinator
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
DRG	District Resource Group
DTT	District Training Team
DWCRA	Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas
EC	Executive Council (of the State Society)
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Scheme
GCERT	Gujarat Council for Education Research and Teacher Training
GOI	Government of India
GON	Government of The Netherlands
JRY	Jawahar Rogjar Yojana: employment scheme for the economic uplift of people living below the poverty line
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resources Development
MP	Madya Pradesh
MS	Mahila Samakhya
MSK	Mahila Shiksan(a) Kendra
NCERT	National Council for Education Research and Teacher Training
NFE	Non-Formal Education

NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NRG	National Resource Group
PHC	Public Health Centre/Primary Health Care Centre
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PTA	Parents Teachers Association
RNE	Royal Netherlands Embassy
RP	Resource Persons (at the District or State level)
SC	Scheduled Caste
SPD	State Programme Director
SPO	State Programme Office
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TLC	Total Literacy Campaign
TRYSEM	Training for Youth in Self-Employment
TWA	Training Women in Agriculture
VEC	Village Education Committee
UP	Uttar Pradesh
UPEFA	Uttar Pradesh Education for All

SUPPLEMENT A

**THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMMES IN
ANDHRA PRADESH AND UTTAR PRADESH**

**findings from the visit by
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997**

**Vasanth Kannabiran
Dana Broft**

**The Hague , July 1997
NUFFIC-Department of Educational Studies and Consultancy**

**THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMMES IN ANDHRA PRADESH AND UTTAR PRADESH
findings from the visit by the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997**

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THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMMES IN ANDHRA PRADESH AND UTTAR PRADESH findings from the visit by the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997

General introduction

The Mahila Samakhya Programme was launched by the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resources Development in the three States Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka in 1989 and in Andhra Pradesh in 1992 as an empowerment Programme. The Programme is implemented with financial assistance from the Government of The Netherlands.

In a significant shift from the assumption that literacy equals education the Mahila Samakhya Programme is focused on enabling women to

- . gain access to information
- . build a critical understanding of their situation
- . undertake collective action in the process of changing the situation.

Departing from earlier family based strategies it is based on the understanding that change for individual women and communities can come through collective action and through pooling human and material resources. As a flexible and facilitative programme it prioritises process over targets.

The 'non negotiable' principles of the programme are to

- allow sufficient space and time to women to come together and influence the shape and pace of the programme;
- create an environment of learning that will enable them to question and critically reflect on their actions and reality;
- help women acquire the skills to determine their own development.

The programme revolves around the Mahila Sangha at the village level and all activities are planned around the sangha.

The Indo-Dutch Mid-Term Evaluation, was carried out by a team consisting of four team members, Claudine Helleman, Leela Gulati, Dana Broft and Vasantha Kannabiran between the 2-18 January 1997. Claudine Helleman and Leela Gulati were to look at Karnataka and Gujarat, while Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran visited Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

According to the terms of reference the task of the evaluation mission was to

- * to review the progress of the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and
- * to assess and analyse processes of empowerment at the sangha level (village collective).

The evaluation was to address the following questions:

- . Is there an impact of the programme on women's personal and family life?
- . To what extent has Mahila Samakhya been able to lay the ground for a grassroots level women's movement; facilitate women's political participation and evolve a focus on women's rights ?
- . How successful has MS been in addressing women's issues cutting across caste and class divides?
- . What is the emerging trend across the four states in terms of pace of growth and impact?
- . What is the impact of the Mahila Sikshana Kendras?
- . Is the reporting sufficient to give a clear insight into the Programme?

And the mission was to assess

- . the effectiveness of the evaluation matrix as a workable tool;
- . the interface of the Mahila Samakhya with other educational programmes like DPEP
- . the expansion strategies in Mahila Samakhya.

In addition to this one member of the evaluation team was to specifically look into the financial management issues. The Terms of Reference of the evaluation mission are attached to the Main Report.

The current report is based on the visits to Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh by Vasantha Kannabiran and Dana Broft. The Andhra Pradesh visit took place from January 4 to January 10 after a briefing meeting in New Delhi with the Department of Education (MHRD), the Royal Netherlands Embassy, the National Programme Office Mahila Samakhya and members of the National Resource Group. The visit to Uttar Pradesh was between January 11 and 15.

Part of the visits were done jointly and for another part the team had separate programmes due to the specific assignment of Dana Broft related to the financial management. This report is based on the joint findings of both members of the mission. The first part relates to the Programme and compiled by Vasanth Kannabiran. The findings and conclusions related to financial management are reported by Dana Broft in Part II.

PART I

FINDINGS FROM THE FIELD VISITS TO ANDHRA PRADESH AND UTTAR PRADESH

1. Conclusions and Recommendations

1.1 Major conclusions and some reflections

The overview of the issues and trends in the Mahila Samakhya Programme as outlined in the Mahila Samakhya National Evaluation Report (1993) is generally confirmed by the findings of the team in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

The Mahila Samakhya Programme has brought about major changes in the lives and situations of the women involved. Like the National Evaluation Report we emphasize the following as important achievements.

- A foundation for women's empowerment at the grassroots level has been built. Although sanghas differ in form and size, the majority are committed to collective action to solve their own problems.
- Women have moved ahead from expecting the programme to deliver material benefits, to understanding empowerment in a broader perspective, and to seeing the sangha as a forum where they can share and analyze their own issues and problems.
- In many cases, women have come together in sanghas in spite of traditional communal and caste divides.
- Many sanghas have been able to initiate action on issues of importance to the larger community, and have been able to mobilize the support of others in the village, including men, to make government delivery systems more accountable to the community.
- Issues such as domestic violence, oppressive social customs and discrimination against women have in many cases been firmly established as social and community issues rather than as merely problems of individuals for families.
- Sanghas have been able to identify and articulate their needs. They have mobilised their own resources and have received support from the programme to plan and implement strategies for change in areas such as literacy, health, water supply, savings and credit, child care, education and economic development.
- The Sakhis and Sahayoginis are self-confident, competent and motivated women with a deep understanding of, and commitment to, the ideology of Mahila Samakhya. They form a strong and mutually supportive network. Mahila Samakhya has given them a distinct voice and identity, and has supported and facilitated their evolution into a resource for change at the village level.
- The Programme has continued to be shaped and directed by the needs and priorities of women themselves, rather than by any pre-set targets or blueprints. There has been no dilution of the emphasis on process.

Regarding the issues and concerns that emerge the report of the National Evaluation (1993) refers to the following:

1. empowerment at the sangha level
2. structures and systems
3. strengthening need based interventions
4. training
5. prospects of sahayoginis
6. long term perspective for sanghas.

The National Evaluation Report points out that the empowerment processes have progressed unevenly for the *sakhis*, *sahayoginis* and *sangha* members. It points the fact that programme interventions such as training opportunities and skill building are more frequent and intensive at this level. This is confirmed by our findings. The report also points out that the perspective and understanding of the philosophy of the programme is limited at the *sangha* level. The *sanghas* seem issue-based with a focus on short strategies rather than on organisation building in the long term. This is completely confirmed by our findings as well.

The only long term vision seems to be that the children will be educated and go to school. This does reflect a major concern of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. The role of the *sanghas* in ensuring children's education is one of the indicators of empowerment in the Programme.

While *sangha* women have begun to compromise, confront and create a space for themselves within the family and community there is no visible evidence yet of consistently building on, or consolidating this space. In Andhra Pradesh, especially, the main emphasis is on access to resources, while the reference to violence or collective struggle around social practices is limited to child marriage and *jogini* initiation. Issues of violence against women come up incidentally but are not yet addressed in terms of power and legal justice¹. The programme in Andhra Pradesh is younger and the process of consolidation is yet to begin.

The priority of social issues seems to be coming from the *Karyakarthis* (*sahayoginis*) who did express as one of their frustrations the fact that they were forced to set aside their own agendas and respond to the women's survival needs. The discrepancy between *sangha* women prioritizing their basic survival needs and the Mahila Samakhya's empowerment agenda is a very problematic area.

Given the levels of poverty and deprivation that exist in these districts survival needs will keep emerging all the time. It is also a fact that women simply do not articulate their oppression or suffering but silently accept it as a fact of life. To be able to see the violence they suffer as an abridgement of their right or dignity women need to be aware of the options available to them. And that emphasis on options is lacking. And this is directly linked to capacity building of *sahayoginis* and *sangha* leaders who are the catalysts.

The report of the National Evaluation (1993) points out that "Since Mahila Samakhya is a time-bound programme with the long-term goal of building an independent identity for the *sanghas*, processes at the village level require an intensive focus, with strategies being designed to understand, take forward and strengthen empowering interventions for the *sangha* women. An essential prerequisite for this is building a deeper and better understanding of the nature of these processes and to evolve parameters to study empowerment through education, empowerment in the context of personal relationships and in relation to economic independence, and women's strategies to negotiate space for themselves within the family and community. It is essential to help the *sangha* women to develop a holistic gender perspective which encompasses all the aspects of the reality of their lives."

While we agree in principle with this we feel that to achieve this two things are required

1. The staff of the Mahila Samakhya at every level need much more training and a sharpening of their conceptual philosophical perspective. In the Andhra Pradesh team we felt that there was a distinct need for training and strengthening right up to the level of the district co-ordinators, and district resource persons.

In Uttar Pradesh this was much more uneven. There was a great degree of conceptual clarity among the experienced *Sahayoginis* and the resource persons who were also confronting the problem of burnout and lack of avenues of career advancement and challenge. Among the newer ones there was an evident need for more training.

¹ And this is in spite of having mobilised a rally on violence in Medak. Although a large rally on violence had been held in the district following incidents of rape, neither the *Karyakarthis* nor the *sangha* women mentioned it as an achievement. One *Karyakartha* mentioned violence but more in the nature of disaster than as an aspect of power.

and direction of their development may affect seriously the likelihood of women being sufficiently empowered to form that "cadre of empowered rural women who will take forward the process of collective action for change." Women, however, can define their development and priorities only within the parameters of their lived experience and reality. Without the presence of options, without a conscious and designed catalysing effect they will continue to define their empowerment purely in terms of accessing resources - whether it is housing, JRY or DWCRA.

This is not to dismiss the significance of these measures, but to urge the *need for a forward looking strategy that will prevent any sense of statis or stagnation in the programme.* In Tehri for instance women connect their survival need to the 'jal', 'jungle' and 'jameen' (water, forest and land) and their struggle becomes a struggle to protect and preserve the environment. This link is important and qualitatively different from accessing resources.

In Banda and Saharanpur the critical concern is violence and it is difficult to deal with an issue like violence without the support of other movements and groups. We reiterate the warning in the National Evaluation Report: "It is envisaged that all the women who are presently part of the programme will ultimately form a cadre of aware and empowered rural women, who will take forward the process of collective action for change. The programme and its processes cannot be viewed in isolation, and should be seen as sharing a commitment to women's empowerment along with other movements and groups in the country." (Emphasis VK)

Talking of the need to strengthen and consolidate need based interventions the report points out that several innovative strategies and approaches have been evolved in response to local needs. "It is emphasized that these interventions have now progressed beyond the preliminary stage and more focused planning, as well as a greater degree of skill is now called for. A long term perspective and a better understanding of literacy in the larger framework of women's empowerment, a qualitative enhancement of pedagogy as well as involvement of literacy experts in designing curricula and post-literacy materials, and linkage of literacy activities with opportunities for further learning and skill training, are all essential to ensure that these interventions are ultimately empowering.(Emphasis VK).

Similar challenges are emerging in programmes for children's learning, education for drop-out girls, vocational and skill training, group economic activities and participation in Panchayats."

Regarding training the evaluation report points to the fact that training programmes with women who share the values and ideology of Mahila Samakhya have initiated processes that were instrumental in providing the opportunity for women to build strengths and solidarity and develop a collective framework for understanding gender. These trainings also provide networks and links with the larger women's movement. What is in evidence now is a kind of drawing together and a certain degree of 'closing in' as experiences and competencies within the programme have grown. Yet, training seems to have become to be considered as an informal and internal process of reflection and exploration. This 'closing in' can be seen as a result of reluctance to interference from other NGOs and external organisations which might perhaps have another philosophy. It could also result from reluctance of interference of NGOs in a Government programme. Or it results from the need to build a coherence and unity within the team, which can then link the issues to the concrete problems on the ground.

The problem here is that while a training that explores the self and makes women aware of their inner resources and energies can build capacity and leadership quality, it cannot substitute for specific skills or information. The ideal would be to balance the two. What has happened in most instances is that when sahayoginis ask for more information on specific demands from the sanghas the provision of such information in training or reflection meetings becomes a substitute for perspective building. This is not necessarily deliberate, but could be a result of the pace of the programme and lack of time. Gradually in the process of responding to the growing demands from the field, perspective building and conceptual clarity take a back seat.

It is also good to remember that not everybody is a good trainer and that not every resource person and Karyakartha can replace experienced trainers however much we value participatory processes.

The balance between building capacity internally and tapping to the fullest, resources available externally is also a difficult issue and needs to be considered. The Report of the National Evaluation (1993) points out that "however, the evaluation shows that there is a change in the nature of the activities of the sangha level, with many groups moving ahead from the stage of reflecting on and exploring the need and implications of coming together, to tackling collective action on specific issues." The evaluators also emphasize the need to ensure that empowering learning processes which were part of their initial phase of training for the sakhis and sahayoginis, are experienced by the other women in the sangha as well. "There is a clear need for more focused and strategic training programmes which will be tailored to meet specific learning needs and which will strengthen and reinforce concepts and skills built earlier."

This is something we would also urge strongly from our findings. .

1.2 Recommendations

- More training and perspective building for the staff.
- More emphasis on management skills, planning and professional capacity. This does not mean that the process orientation is sacrificed. It means that while the process is prioritised for the sangha women, the karyakarthas and staff must be strengthened to deal with the increasing demand from the field. Commitment by itself does not replace competence and the organisation needs to concentrate on building competence.
- The whole programme seems to revolve around voluntarism, dedication and the indefinite availability of a single woman (without family responsibility). This needs to be streamlined to allow women to work for a given period intensively and then be able to have predictable timings so that there is not burn out or rapid turnover of staff.
- Staff salary, allowances, health & accident insurance, housing, childcare need to be attended to and improved if women are to work to their best capacity without sacrificing their own interests.
- Periodic re-orientation and fresh interactions outside the MS family at all levels to fulfil the promise of the programme.

2. Findings regarding Mahila Samatha in Andhra Pradesh

2.1 Introduction

The Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samatha Society (APMSS) was launched in January 1993.

The Programme was introduced in Mahaboobnagar and Medak districts in blocks or mandals chosen for backwardness, poverty and absence of NGOs. By the end of March '94 the Programme covered four mandals and 91 villages in Medak and two mandals and 67 villages in Mahaboobnagar. The APMSS deliberately adopted the Karnataka model of strengthening a collective of four or five women in each sangha rather than adapt a sakhi model. The sangha formation is seen as going through four stages; rapport building, group formation, consolidation and an independent sangha.

The programme has been rapidly expanding into new areas more easily as the APMSS has become known and accepted in all the areas. The sanghas have established linkages with each other and with government departments and programmes. They are key actors in all the developmental activities. Through the district melas, which are a combination of information inputs and interactions women are becoming visible in the public arena.

The APMSS is now concerned with strengthening sangham leaders with training. It is emphasising the need to address sensitive social issues such as jogini, child marriage and violence against women. For 1997 the focus will be on education, health resource building, legal awareness and political participation.

2.2 Findings related to empowerment

Looking at the progress of the programme over the last four years in Andhra Pradesh it is clear that a foundation for empowerment has been laid. Women as a presence and a constituency to reckon with have been established in the public domain.

It is also evident that the sanghas have begun to take collective action and are now a factor to reckon with on community issues. However, there does not seem to be a grasp of the Mahila Samakhya philosophy or vision.

The Karyakarthis (or sahayoginis) are a motivated network and are key agents in providing the resources for change. The emphasis on process as against goals and targets has been maintained. To this extent the findings of the Mahila Samakhya Evaluation Report (1993) are confirmed.

With regard to the empowering outcomes mentioned in the Programme our findings confirm that

- . there is a changed self image
- . enhanced access to new information and skills
- . a larger knowledge base
- . a capacity for organisation and collective action
- . and a capacity for mobilisation, negotiation and networking.

Impact on women's personal lives

In terms of the impact of MS on women's personal lives this can be seen in terms of direct and indirect impact.

As a result of women meeting together and becoming a visible and physical presence in the village, and as a result of their capacity to access resources and credit their value within the family has undoubtedly gone up. What we also need to consider is the priorities of rural women. After dealing with survival issues, women want to plan for a better life. And their indicators are education for their children, health care, food security, ration cards, housing, water, electricity, credit and then infrastructure like roads, bore-wells, primary health centres etc.

Rural Women do not think in terms of autonomy but of connectedness. And there is the long

practice of a sacrifice one's needs and interests rather than an assertion of ones rights. To change this it means that Mahila Samakhya has to critically reflect on its policy of allowing women to decide their agendas and the pace of their development.

At what point will Mahila Samakhya think it viable in introducing a consideration of rights? If women do not begin to assert themselves in relation to their rights as individuals then how far is it possible to sustain and consolidate the process of empowerment? The whole issue that APMSS had to confront in the beginning of taking a more directive role has to be re-addressed. The balance between an empowerment agenda and the women's own agendas (defined by their needs) has to be critically examined.

Sanghas

There is a lot of visible energy and hope in the sanghas. There is a lot of initiative taken at the levels of the community in terms of sending children to school or the Bala Mitra Kendras. The sanghas find space for the Bala Mitra Kendra, send children, identify teachers and take pride in running it well. The Bala Mitra Kendras are bright and active in each village with the sangha prioritising education for their children. The kit that is used, the methodology, and the teachers's commitment seems very good and holds promise for the future.

The sangha's have all begun to intervene in the village administration and have begun to negotiate resources, programmes, wages and community needs. The sanghas have also facilitated the women entering into political structures and demonstrating their legitimacy, through collective support.

Women have learnt masonry, brick-making and bore-well repairs and are beginning to apply their skills to their advantage. They have become a visible force and so influence the social environment by their presence. Conflicts at the village level are resolved by them and information is absorbed and shared with great eagerness.

The sanghas deal with both individual and collective issues. They do not seem to interfere much on family based issues except when a case is brought to the sangha for justice. They deal with community issues and try to address issues of caste, like drinking water and separate tea cups. On the issues of wages they would like to spread across the region for greater efficiency.

They demand a degree of accountability from the government system and the Mahila Samakhya personnel. They have been able to access all the JRY and DWCRA schemes, pensions, housing, electricity etc. They also negotiate for land for the sangham hut and for the landless.

Sangha women find an increased sense of self worth and identity.

From a life of constant invisible struggle to survive they are now making plans for the future, counting their assets and have a presence and a voice not only in the village but in neighbouring villages as well. Caste barriers are broken by their newly acquired respectability and they feel confident to speak of their interests. The community sees them as assets and the men are generally sympathetic and supportive because the demands of the sangha do not yet affect the male perception or power.

They are now invited to participate in Block level meetings, general bodies and play an active part in the government at the doorstep programme. There is, however, a tendency to remain within the framework of practical needs and survival strategies and the empowerment is likely to remain within these parameters.

Women's movement, political participation and women's rights

The Mahila Samaknya Programme has definitely created a grassroots level movement where women actively came together for information, access and for political participation. The Panchayati Raj trainings also help women to grasp their roles and responsibilities.

It is true that as attention and mobilisation for practical needs builds up in quantitative terms there is also a qualitative shift to strategic interests. But given the way gender rigidly structures lives of women in rural communities unless a gender perspective is brought in consciously and deliberately there is a risk of the gains being dissipated.

Women in the sanghas, when they spoke of collective action or conflict resolution always gave instances from the public arena. In the only case of marital dispute that I came across it was to advise the woman to go back to her husband and put the family together again. The issue here is of priorities. Given the fact that women generally support and uphold traditional values and biases because of their gendered positioning in society, how can they be sustained to assert and exercise political power in a larger context especially in the face of the very biases that ensure their subservience and dependence.

As women meet they are found to deal with issues of caste. Within Mahila Samakhya there is a *slow breaking down of caste barriers* with people eating together and addressing caste discrimination as a social issue in tea shops and hotels. Caste however remains a reality of rural Andhra and there is a polarisation around caste.

2.3 Emerging trends

The emerging trend that one sees in Andhra Pradesh is a horizontal spread of the programme, with a growing demand coming in from neighbouring villages to be part of the programme. The growth and impact in quantitative terms is admirable. What we need to be aware is the fact that women are hungry for space and opportunity. Mahila Samakhya provides that and there is a great hope and energy generated. The needs and demands that come from the group are also immense. There is a serious risk of the Mahila Samakhya programme being trapped into a facilitating and delivery service for development measures. While the staff and district teams are extremely committed and hard working there appears to be at present an acute lack of a broader perspective and long term vision of the MS goals and philosophy. If this is not purposefully addressed through training and capacity building there is a danger of a stagnation setting in. The requirements for jumping a level need to be seriously addressed here. And unless the karyakarthis are strengthened this gap will remain.

2.4 Mahila Sikshana Kendras and co-operation with other education programmes

The Mahila Sikshana Kendras (MSK) are one of the key components of the programme. As an innovative alternative for girl children, who are drop-outs or at risk of violence they are excellent.

The fact of providing a space, attention, love and care makes a world of difference to the children who join the MSK. They are full of hope and energy. The MSK run by MV Foundation has a clear objective of mainstreaming the children and a clearly designed curriculum and principles. It is easily one of the most professionally run and competent institutions in the programme. The MSKs in Mahaboobnagar and Medak seem to be much more adhoc with an add on curriculum. There is an emphasis on health and child marriage, but no clear planning on the children's future. Also the rationale of the time frame of one year is not very clear.

If the MSK is to be a key institution of the MS programme producing the change agents of the future then a lot more of planning and perspective is needed. It is also necessary to adopt a more professional approach to the institution. This is not to criticise what exists so much as to suggest that for the MSK to fulfil its creative potential it requires a lot more of planned effort and vision. At present there is plenty of time, commitment and good will but not enough clarity of perspective. The general idea is that you delay the age of marriage a little, get the child some education, teach her a few skills and add a lot of hope and affection and stir !!

The impact of the MSKs is considerable. The sight and performance of these children, their interaction with community opens up a whole area of possibility for girls and their education.

The Mahila Samakhya seems to work effectively with other education programmes. The value of MS ethos seems to impact the other's approach.

2.5 Reporting

The reporting is more than adequate. As a matter of fact the Mahila Samakhya Programme seems to be over documented and more systematisation may be required. There is a lot of material that is produced, a lot of documentation. The journals, newsheets and health material is excellently produced in the local dialects.

2.6 The District Implementation Units

The district units in Andhra Pradesh are busy with operationalising inputs and in creating a facilitative environment. They also work for expansion into new areas. They are planning the next phase of activity for the district and are often caught up in responding to the demands from the field on multiple issues. While they keep up the information flow and sustain the momentum of the programme they need a lot of strengthening on perspective. They are very hardworking and committed to the programme but require a lot of training and intensive input to help them fulfil their potential tasks. While they address the training needs of the sangha the core team and field *functionaries need a lot of strengthening of conceptual clarity and support if they are to be able to help the sanghas more from developmental activity, towards empowerment.*

There is also a visible drawing together of the Mahila Samakhya family to solve its own problems within its context and a withdrawal from outside movements and influences. The major interaction seems to be with government and government programmes. This has its obvious advantages but it also creates an atmosphere that does not nurture creativity.

The interaction between the MSKs and the villages are also vehicles of change. The DIU team has a great degree of visibility and good image at the district unit level.

2.7 The State Programme Office

The State level team works closely with the DIUs, provides direction, builds team spirit and provides operational support.

It works diligently on policy and provides resource support for action, conflict management and is involved in all team trainings. It ensures the visibility of the programme through ensuring its credibility at village, district and state levels.

However, there is a perceptible gap between the perspective and capacity of the State level team and the district level team. This is something that needs to be addressed seriously with the Programme.

3. Findings on the Mahila Samakhya Programme in UTTAR PRADESH

3.1 Introduction

The genesis of Mahila Samakhya Uttar Pradesh is traced to a training by Jagori in 1988 when the Mahila Samakhya was not even a project on paper. In Uttar Pradesh, Mahila Samakhya was not initiated as a state programme but through NGOs in the four districts of Varanasi, Saharanpur, Tehri, and Banda. Slowly as the State programme and the DIUs were set up in 1989-90. The shift from the NGO culture of beneficiaries and target groups to that of partners and activists opened up spaces for greater participation of women though not without struggles.

The central issue in Varanasi was wages (fair and equal wages) and most other issues revolved around it. The issues of the single women has also been articulated helping them to build a sense of solidarity and identity.

In Banda the issues has been water and violence. Banda is a turbulent district where law and order problems often arise. Education has been a powerful tool and the MS broadsheet has been a useful weapon to expose perpetrators of violence. Saharanpur is a prosperous district where violence against women has been the critical issues. In Tehri the women's lives are linked organically to a fast disappearing forest. So their struggle is linked to 'jal', 'jungle' and 'jameen' in search of which their whole labour and time is spent. Alcoholism which is another drain on their scarce resources is another point of struggle.

The geo-political landscape of Uttar Pradesh thus shapes the character of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in each district as it responds to the demands and issues that come up.

In Uttar Pradesh the initial emphasis was on building up strong sakhis, but around 1995 the emphasis shifted to a direct focus on sangha. So while a weak sangha is defined as one that does not understand the philosophy, is dominated by a sakhi or is merely issue based, the strong sanghas are defined as possessing a social space, where women draw strength from the collective, take initiative and have an active social identity.

3.2 Findings

The literacy which is an integral part of sangha building is seen as a vehicle of empowerment. The literacy camps have specific curricula. In Saharanpur it revolves around violence, in Varanasi around Panchayat Raj and fair wages, in Banda around water and wages and in Tehri around the forest and its regeneration. The women in the sanghas speak with pride of a sense of identity that the collective gives them. They tell of how earlier they were not allowed to leave their homes but now no one dares to stop them. With the struggle against alcohol they have found community support and added legitimacy. They find respect in the community and the family.

In the Tehri district the Mahila Samakhya Programme has been able to connect with the struggle to preserve the environment. As part of this struggle women articulate their needs and their right to forest produce in political terms. When survival needs are linked to a struggle the degree of politicisation is qualitatively different from accessing resources from the state for survival. This is where the key difference between the Programmes in Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh lies. This has not only to do with the age of the programme but also the geopolitical conditions and the early perspective building.

The Programme has been able to cut across class and caste divides in small ways and depending on issues. However caste, class are not easy to overcome or cut across in the space of a decade.

The promise of the programme becomes evident when one witnesses the joy and celebratory nature of the women's groups that are just starting off. Women value the space and possibility implicit in that space. The growth and impact are difficult to measure in absolute terms especially in a state like UP which is a stronghold of patriarchy and violence. With direction and dedication the programme can continue to bring a change in women's lives.

The extension strategies in Uttar Pradesh are adequate. Experienced sahayoginis and resource

persons are being used to set up the programme and train new sahayoginis and this seems to be working well.

The broadsheets and children's journals and literacy material produced are excellent. The documentation on violence and other issues is also excellent. The use of local dialects for the learning material is effective.

In terms of impact on their personal lives women speak of the support and strength of the sangha. The fact that they are now able to travel to other places and leave home legitimately for meetings. As a result of their struggles against alcohol and their bargaining skills women claim they have gain a legitimate voice within the family and the community.

The Mahila Samakhya has created a grassroots level movement where women actively come together to demand their rights and access resources. They have also linked with the struggle to preserve the environment. Women are able to confront government local authorities to demand their rights and for information on "budgets". They actively mobilise and lobby around issues relating to reserve forests, illegal encroachment of forests and set limits on the forest produce that they can collect free of cost. They send representatives to local bodies and rotate the pradhan's post between two or three sanghas. Caste and class issues are slowly impacted. The women bore-well mechanics for instance break a barrier by repairing bore-wells in the upper caste villages. In marital and man-woman disputes the sangha is called upon for justice regardless of caste.

Women find that learning to read and write opens a window on the world and helps them to break their isolation.

Many traditions though valued are transformed to include widows and single women.

The MSKs in Tehri are planned as institution that will produce the foresters of tomorrow.

The sanghas are a space filled with energy and dynamism. They work to ensure space and teachers for the children's centres. They also intervene in the village administration and negotiate programmes wages and other resources of the community.

The struggle against alcohol has made them a marked force to be reckoned with in the villages.

They are able to demand accountability and want the Mahila Samakhya to spread to all the nearby villages.

PART II

FINDINGS ON FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

4. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT - ANDHRA PRADESH

4.1 Introduction

The Programme in Andhra Pradesh has changed significantly since its launch in January 1993. This report attempts to assess the current status of financial affairs within the Mahila Samakhya Programme, reflecting, where needed, the past developments and indicating possible future trends. It is based on a thorough study of available documentation, in-depth discussions with the Programme planners and implementers, on interviews and observations in the field and discussions within the mission team.

The Mahila Samakhya Programme in Andhra Pradesh is now in its fifth year (since 1993). The highest priority is given to:

- educational component, focusing especially on the girl-child. The regular education channels are not adequate
- income generating aspect
- wages
- health sector
- other - ad hoc - issues arising when initiative needs to be taken - legal illiteracy

The institution of paid village workers (sakhis) does not exist in Andhra Pradesh, attention is fully paid to collectives (sanghas).

4.2 Funds

An overview of the funds is presented on the following page.

4.3 Financial roles and responsibilities

The overall policy of the Mahila Samakhya Programme is to decentralise all management responsibilities and power decision making as far as possible. This involves the complete package of tasks/responsibilities and rights, namely the strategy preparation, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and follow-up.

Financial management at State and district levels fully corresponds with the guidelines given by the MS Society's Articles. The financial management at village level can be described as follows:

Sangha fund, being 400 Rs. per month, is valid for three years and paid in instalments or as a lumpsum. It is a starting fund, so-called "seed money", not a fund leading to any financial dependency. The villages use this fund freely with some directives. There is a requirement of an own symbolical contribution for full commitment, own savings, to cover various sangha expenditures, such as payment for village teachers, building of a sangha hut, purchase of equipment, sangha members' travelling expenses, cost of collective leasing and purchasing. There are also ideas for collective insurance.

Women have to gain more experience in financial management, to ensure that a sangha of poor marginalised women can utilise much larger amounts in the future to resource their activities. And Sangha women should be part of the Executive Committee. Now villages are given solely administrative and personnel costs. Ideas to empower women in financial management do already exist, notably in some UNDP programmes, but also show some limitations in terms of defining of salary and travelling provisions.

1 LAKH = 100.000 Rs

Expenditure versus projected budget:

year	estimated budget	expenditure	utilisation of funds
	Rupees in lakhs	Rupees in lakhs	in %
1992-93	50.00	1.13	2,3%
1993-94	63.55	11.63	18,3%
1994-95	68.45	21.44	31,3%
1995-96	89.73	40.74	45,4%
1996-97	86.12	est. 70 - 75	

Management cost involved:

year	total budget	Management cost cost estim.	Mgt cost spent
	Rupees in lakhs	Rupees in lakhs	in %
1992-93	50.00	1.01	2,02%
1993-94	63.55	29.07	45,74%
1994-95	68.45	27.51	40,19%
1995-96	89.73	33.86	37,74%
1996-97	86.12	32.44	37,67%
upto Sept.96			

Activity cost involved:

year	total budget	Activity cost estimated	Act.cost spent
	Rupees in lakhs	Rupees in lakhs	in %
1992-93	50.00	0.12	0,24%
1993-94	63.55	34.48	54,26%
1994-95	68.45	40.94	59,81%
1995-96	89.73	55.87	62,26%
1996-97	86.12	53.68	62,33%
upto Sept.96			

4.4. Financial planning

THE FIRST YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1992 - 1993

The programme in Andhra Pradesh commenced in December 1992 - January 1993. The State Programme Office started with a limited number of staff (3) and an initial cheque with an amount of 56 lakhs to be utilised according to the GOI guidelines for this Programme as stated on an allocation sheet of unit costs and number of activities. From the funds, a project car (jeep), some basic office equipment and initial running costs for the State Office and two selected districts were paid.

As the end of the fiscal year approached the plan for the next financial year had to be prepared within the time span of three months, before March 1993. There was neither the time nor the capacity for any strategic and budgetary planning.

THE SECOND YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1993 - 1994

The annual plan for 1993/94 which was prepared by the Mahila Samakhya staff (three persons) at State level in March 1993, indicated the envisaged numbers of personnel, villages and activities. This plan was approved and launched in July 1993.

The programme focused on setting-up the organisational structure at the State level and launching the programme at village level, with special regard to the aspects of team building, training, reflecting and planning strategy. There were practically no activity costs, only running costs.

THE THIRD YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1994 - 1995

When the planning of 1994/95 was compiled there was already a better understanding gained from experience in the previous year. The number of personnel also increased as the districts were staffed. During meetings of the entire team (including districts) discussions were held as to how the budget should reflect reality instead of centrally proposed estimates. Nevertheless, the initiative for planning was remained with the State Programme Office.

The Programme focused on consolidation and further institutional building at district and village levels, team building and gradual decentralisation. The issue of activity planning was familiar but planning money was still relatively strange. The budget based on the plans was prepared at state level.

THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1995 - 1996

The 1995/96 plan was based on some basic procedures, it is more a district plan as the districts gained, in turn, the required knowledge and experience in the learning process during the planning exercise last year.

Despite the lessons learned, it still appeared to be rather an ambitious plan. The on-going processes achieved were, however, of great importance.

The year of further gradual consolidation concentrated mainly on the capacity building of the organisational structure. The budget started to be based on the activity plans at, respectively, district and village levels.

It was effectively the third year of the programme when financial thinking started. Funds were essentially needed for organising training, workshops, basically oriented on village level, (fairly strong sanghas). There was no usage of documentation.

THE FIFTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1996 - 1997

The plan already reflected reality, as it was based on certain costs and projections, e.g. on three-monthly district activity plans derived from the annual plan. There was a more general understanding of and experience with funds. People were already aware of the importance, contents, meaning and price of some headings/items (like documentation, newsletter) and certain norms had already evolved. Nevertheless the original design of the GOI budget was still used. It was, however, better understood and reviewed as this was the final year of the 8th Five-year planning.

It was a year of further re-enforcement of the organisational structure. There was already more consolidation in place. Less attention was required for the building of team capacity and was therefore paid to the sanghas and their teachers.

The growing consciousness of past achievements made people want to keep the momentum (videos). The volume of activities and interventions (training, Mahila Shiksan Kendras) and number of participants increased.

Collective strength was still slightly overestimated, e.g. in plans to set a hut, to expand (requires so many people) and to recruit people (needs much time and organisation). There was also a lack of knowledge of village dynamics, such as planning during peak seasons (of crops) and the inadequate frequency of activities. Insufficient capacity and capability and inefficient communication at various levels also hampered many activities.

The financial year of the Mahila Samakhya Programme started with 54 lakhs (14 lakhs transferred from the previous year 1995/96, 20 lakhs disbursed as the first instalment for the current year and 20 lakhs of the second instalment available in May 1996). In December 1996 almost 52 lakhs were spent effectively.

In the meantime another 25 lakhs have been requested for the expenditures already committed and another 20 - 25 lakhs are likely to be spent in the period of January - February 1997. The total expected expenditures per March 1997 are 70 - 75 lakhs.

PROJECTIONS FOR THE SIXTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1997 - 1998

Based on the lessons learned from the previous years of the Programme, the preparers of the financial plan for the next financial year will ensure that this plan reflects the reality as described in the activity plans for the sanghas, districts and state office. It will indicate norms based on real costs and proved financial estimates for the various budgetary headings, such as sangha huts, sahayoginis, etc.

4.5 Utilisation of the funds

In order to obtain a sound view on the pattern, kind and size of expenditures, as well as the reasons for the under-spending, a practical case of the thorough budgetary analysis was implemented. (See next page) This was done jointly with the representatives of the management team (SPD and accountant).

4.6 Reasons for under-spending

There is an entire spectrum of possible specific motives for under spending, which can be summarised as follows:

- * rather ambitious planning based on insufficient experience with financial planning/budgeting,
- * lack of time caused by initial underestimation of the complexity of setting up the organisational structure,

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CASE 1- ANALYSIS OF THE 1995/96 EXPENDITURES:

State level:

Management costs: under-spending

- allocation for 1 resource person not spent, as there was no relevant need

Activity costs: under-spending

- cluster meetings for sahayoginis completed only for 60-65%,
- turnover and lack of capacity of sahayoginis,
- masonry training not organised as DIUs failed to do it,
- accounts training for DIUs and Sanghas was not executed as neither the state nor district offices had the capacity to organise the training,
- Panchayati Raj training was not implemented, though prepared, due to the changed political situation

District level:

Management costs: - under-spending, partial utilisation - approx. 6.5 lakhs

- unused allocation for 1 extra resource person, various reasons, personnel not available,
- not fully used allocation for consultants as the external expertise was not relevant for the current Programme scale,
- unused allocation for 1 technical staff person as his/her support was not relevant for the current Programme scale,
- not fully used allocation for the new district, except for the jeep, as extension slow, office not operational, activities not yet started.

Activity costs: - DIU office: - under-spending:

- concurrent & external evaluation - partly utilised as not enough activities required,
- fee and honoraria - not fully spent as not enough activities required,
- fuel and maintenance - not fully used, see above.

Activity costs: - Sahayogini level: - under-spending:

- allocation for number of personnel good personnel not easy to find,
- marginal under-spending on Sangha Fund, slightly overestimated,
- Sangha Huts - not achieved due to the legal problems, time costly registration process,
- training, documentation - used for 75% as materials prepared by hand only, printing technically impossible,
- publication, newsletter - never used, even in past, as not enough motivation and experience,
- MSK - marginal under-spending, slightly overestimated,
- New MSK - only about 30% will be used as Medak situation not yet ready for setting-up the MSKs,
- Bal Mitra Kendra - partly used although in district Mb. expenditures may even exceed the planned budget, but in M. only 30% will be utilised, due to turnover of sahayoginis,
- not enough motivation by sanghas,
- Grant-in-aid - only 15% spent due to a strong overestimation of the Executive Council, which added this amount to the grant allocation

There were adequate expenditures on:

- stationary, books - fully spent;
- musical instruments - fully spent;
- workshops/seminars - completely utilised

The fiscal year 1995/96 ended with approximately 50% under-spending.

1996/97

Based on similar analysis of the available documentation of the 1996/97 expenditures, it seems most likely that the fiscal year 1996/97 will end with marginal under-spending

- * understaffing - lack of key persons to implement the Programme and to perform the expected tasks, including adequate financial planning.
- * unseen intentional savings - contributions by individuals, sanghas, free-of-charge facilities and resource persons offered by the Government, subsidies/funding from other projects, programmes, better negotiated prices.
- * intensification of other programmes organised by the Government and/or foreign donors, de facto affecting the Mahila Samakhya Programme because addressing the same target group,
- * strong intentional "saving" efforts by better negotiating and the "cost-cutting on expenditures and saving" attempts of the Programme staff and clients.

4.7 Problems occurred

Nevertheless some problems arose

- * Due to only partial achievements of the activities planned and the overestimation of collective strength and underestimation of the economic and legal constraints with regard to the fulfilment of some activities (e.g. purchase of a sangha hut troubled and considerably delayed by the problems of purchasing land, legal obstacles) the budgeted utilisation of funds was not fully achieved in the time planned.
- * The planned expansion of staff created problems, too. To recruit people required much more time and effort than was possible with the heavy workload of the existing staff was under.
- * On top of that, as the amount of funds unspent grew and so did every following year's budget.

4.8 Conclusions regarding financial management Andhra Pradesh

Based on the study of materials and interviews in the field the conclusion can be drawn that one of the major reasons for the phenomenon under-spending is most probably the anxiety to make the sanghas dependent on support funds and thereby creating the new dependency structure.

Despite a rather high level of under-spending in the years 1993/94 - 1995/96, it can be stated that the funds utilised were, in the opinion of the mission, spent on items of fundamental importance for the project. One of the major accomplishments which the mission observed on - the-spot in the villages and throughout the whole organisational structure is the enormous commitment to the philosophy of the Programme of all parties involved.

There are also many achievements which are not to be found in the activity plans or in the budget, as they were not predictable and planned. They cannot be quantified as they are of the rather qualitative and process-oriented kind. And yet they consumed a lot of time and effort:

- * the sanghas which were not all registered were recognised and respected by the majority of the banks approached for the depositing the Sangha Fund,
- * some of this "seed money" was already used in a way which serves the objective of "sanghas becoming independent",
- * large "saving" efforts in the villages meant for the enhancement of self-confidence, independence and group commitment,
- * the requirement of an own (symbolical) contribution to this fund, intended to achieve higher commitment of the sangha members was largely accepted,
- * the achievements of some planned activities caused reverse effect in the budget, e.g. they "cut the costs and saved the funds rather than spent them",
- * successful negotiations with the banks about better interest rates for their deposits, with the merchants about lower prices for collective purchases, conscious personnel planning and remuneration, and saving, certain gains were made which contributed to the growth of "capital",
- * there were also some money flows of no importance for the Programme. They were recorded correctly but their appearance on the Expenditure statement might need an explanatory note².

² In the scope of a UNICEF project complying with the Mahila Samakhya philosophy, computer equipment was purchased.

The recommendation of the mission for the Programme in Andhra Pradesh is to continue the Programme with safeguarding its identity and the structural professionalisation of the Programme structure in terms of staff training (on management and communication issues, notably the financial management), development of systematised, relevant and transparent job requirements and an adequate scheme of career planning.

It would also help to start thinking about the systematic definition of various stages of the programme, including the envisaged gradual withdrawal of the Programme structure in the foreseeable future.

As UNICEF did not have the funds available when this equipment was needed, the Programme (SPD) prepaid this amount, recorded it as advance payment and later, when the Society was finally paid, recorded advances recovered.

5. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT - UTTAR PRADESH

5.1. Introduction

Uttar Pradesh was one of the three states in which the Mahila Samakhya Programme started (from the very beginning) in 1989/90. Therefore its progress has been slightly different from that of Andhra Pradesh. The Programme was launched at "bottom" line, e.g. at village level. The first implementers of the Programme were not the functionaries of the Programme staff, as there was no structure in place. The implementation was given to the association of existing NGOs and their structure and these took care of the initial activities. Only later, in the third year of the Programme implementation, was the current structure built.

Certain results of Mahila Samakhya Programme have already become visible.

- The sangha is a platform for sharing problems, learning (even to read and write), group-feeling, dissemination of information, it is a "pressure, support and suggestion" group.
- Many villages are co-ordinated by sakhis, the selected sangha women. They organise the village meetings and distribute the relevant information. They enjoy the full trust of the village women in all matters and are asked for advice, even in private matters.
- Sahayoginis come and share and teach and help very often, they do the counselling, help to establish the literacy centre, organise education camps and training on various issues.
- The strong sanghas send their representatives to Panchayati, the lowest administration unit of the state, which is responsible for the realisation of women's rights, communication with the village headmen, care for village infrastructure and passing on the necessary information to block level.
- The implementers focused till 1994 primarily on strengthening the institution of sakhis as the focal point for the creation of strong villages but since 1995 attention has been transferred more to sahayoginis as the trainers for the capacity building of the sanghas.

5.2 Funds

The budget estimation for the first three years of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Uttar Pradesh cannot be seen as representative for the financial analysis as these were not kept separate from the other funds of the respective NGOs.

Therefore only after the nomination of the present State Programme Director can the situation be considered representative. The following overview shows the situation from the third year of implementation. (See for an overview of the funds the next page)

5.3 Financial roles and responsibilities

The overall policy of the Mahila Samakhya Programme is to decentralise all management responsibilities and decision-making powers as far as possible. This involves the complete package of tasks/responsibilities and rights, namely the strategy preparation, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and follow-up.

In Uttar Pradesh the Mahila Samakhya Programme was implemented as early as 1988 and, from the very beginning, before there was any structure at all, there were activities in villages.

Financial management at State and district level fully corresponds with the guidelines given by the Mahila Samakhya Society's Articles. The financial management at village level can be described as follows:

Expenditure versus projected budget:

1 LAKH = 100,000 Rs

year	estimated budget	expenditure	utilisation of funds
	Rupees in lakhs	Rupees in lakhs	in %
1992-93	222.75	41.72	18,79%
1993-94	180.19	56.28	31,27%
1994-95	286.34	88.69	31,01%
1995-96	289.43	107.43	37,17%
1996-97	276.83	84.65 (Dec.96)	30,56%

Management cost involved:

year	total budget	Management cost estim.	Mgt cost spent
	Rupees in lakhs	Rupees in lakhs	in % of tot.budg.
1992-93	222.75	52.75	23,65%
1993-94	180.19	44.10	24,5%
1994-95	268.34	42.77	15,95%
1995-96	289.43	44.79	15,49%
1996-97 upto Dec.96	276.83	46.99	16,96%

Activity cost involved:

year	total budget	Activity cost estimated	Act.cost spent
	Rupees in lakhs	Rupees in lakhs	in % of tot.budg.
1992-93	222.75	170.00	76,23%
1993-94	180.19	133.59	74,22%
1994-95	268.34	223.57	83,42%
1995-96	289.43	237.51	82,18%
1996-97 upto Dec.96	276.83	212.71	76,80%

priorities. Therefore these sanghas are often strongly involved in saving and other income generating activities. In addition to this, once the sanghas are ready to build their sangha hut they become eligible for the Mahila Samakhya funds allocated for this purpose. The internal mechanism for managing the sangha money is strongly developed, very effective and built on complete trust.

5.4 Financial planning

The budgetary planning corresponds to a large extent with the activity planning. This was not so in the initial years of the project.

THE FIRST YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1989 - 1990

The launching of the Mahila Samakhya Programme was realised by a group of associated NGOs. The internal division of tasks was such that some NGOs were responsible for planning the *implementation of field activities while others focused specifically on the conduct of a major component of the Mahila Samakhya Programme, such as the training component.* Both the implementation of field activities and training were time-consuming although the actual cost remained rather moderate. No other expenditure was necessary. The costs involved were kept *reasonably low as the programme utilised the existing NGO infrastructure.*

THE SECOND YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1990 - 1991

The second year can be described as a year of further initiating the Programme, with the initial organisational set-up of offices at district level. Only small financial inputs were needed to cover the initial cost of setting up the DIU offices.

THE THIRD YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1991 - 1992

As the establishment of DIUs started, the links with NGO structure became loose. The organisational set-up continued to focus on establishing the state office. Some management cost were allocated for the recruitment of the office staff and initial expenditure for furniture, cars and other equipment was incurred. This resulted in a number of initial problems related to the recruitment of personnel which, in some cases had to be appointed only temporarily, e.g. the position of SPD.

The field activities for the villages operated by the DIUs and aimed at the crucial issues of solidarity, unity and mobilisation of women were low-cost. The other "more costly" activities, like the literacy centres and camps, Child Care Centres etc. were introduced gradually. *There was no structural planning in time and money at this stage.*

THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1992 - 1993

The personnel problems continued and some other shortcomings appeared, such as DIU staff's insufficient knowledge of their roles and responsibilities. The core team had limited financial and other responsibilities and operated under *restrictive measures.*

There was still no full time SPD with the knowledge and skills to plan the activities and expenditures. The budget was planned top-down and, when utilised, done so rigidly according to the GOI guidelines.

THE FIFTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1993 - 1994

The newly established SPD was delegated the necessary financial powers and started its work by gradually decentralising all relevant responsibilities to the DIUs and villages, explaining the rules and contents and introducing a more structural approach. More staff was recruited and the

number of activities finally increased. The planning, however, was still based on the assumption that expenditure matters more than the financial planning. Some allocations for sanghas were made without considering their urgent needs or the specifics of the area.

THE SIXTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1994 - 1995

It was only in this year that planning activities in terms of the unit cost was fully adopted. The first results of investment in activities started to show, the first rise in salaries could take place. The overall confidence in one's operations was achieved, the Mahila Samakhya structure consciously started to furnish its offices.

Also the aim, advantages and constraints of structured financial planning has been digested; the first specialist training for the core-team and accountants, all functionaries with some share in financial responsibility, was conducted and, in such way a better understanding of the budget headings was achieved.

The planning exercises for the annual budget started with DIU core teams at state level. The expenditure of the previous year was reviewed and the coming financial year was estimated with an attempt to understand why the planning had not been achieved and why certain items were un-foreseen.

However, some expenditures, such as the larger investments for sanghas (Sangha fund, child centre, etc.) were still allocated from the point of view of overall strategy as seen from the national Programme level without any realistic planning.

THE SEVENTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1995 - 1996

In this year the real expansion of Mahila Samakhya started. More districts and more blocks were added to the initial number. These new districts and blocks already profited from the experience gained in previous years and therefore it was possible to accelerate activities significantly. Also the expertise acquired in financial planning aspects provided a better basis for financial planning.

The financial planning had already been prepared with a proper analysis per item of spending. But, as not all the sanghas were strong in all districts or did not have the same pattern of needs, the need for spending again varied.

THE EIGHTH YEAR OF THE PROGRAMME - 1996 - 1997

The high turnover of staff in management positions is a problem. Of the total of ten districts implementing the Mahila Samakhya Programme, only two have District Programme Co-ordinator.

It was the first year of intensive reflective thinking about the future strategy of the Programme in general and its consequences for the individual districts.

5.5 Utilisation of funds

Under-spending based on the total budget requested can be shown as follows:

1992-93 - 81,21%
1993-94 - 68,73%
1994-95 - 68,99%
1995-96 - 62,83%
1996-97 - 69,44% until Dec. 96, foreseen about 50%.

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CASE 2 - ANALYSIS OF THE EXPENDITURE FOR 1996-97:

State level:

Management costs: under-spending

- allocation for resource persons not spent, as there was no knowledge of the possibility to book the short-term consultants under this category, wrongly booked,
- office expenses were not so relevant for this year of the programme, some cost was shared by other programmes.
 - rent under-spending not so relevant,
 - furniture bought although not allocated, adjustment made from other items
 - audio-visual material needed and paid although not allocated,
 - petrol almost spent, consequence of maintenance cost,
 - stationary spent.

Activity costs: almost realistic, where under-spending then only marginal

- training just started, budget will be spent,
- workshop realistic planning,
- concurrent & external evaluation - partly utilised as not enough activities required,
- most of the activities will take place in the last quarter of the year.

District level:

Management costs: - marginal under-spending, maybe adequate:

- unused allocation for one District Programme Co-ordinator and two District resource persons, for various reasons personnel was not available.

Activity costs: - DIU office: - some under-spending, especially during the first four years of the Programme implementation:

- innovative educational programmes will not be utilised fully,
- publication material, products and newsletter - unused until 1993-94,
- workshop for sangha women little utilised during the first 4 years.

Activity costs: - Child care centres: under-spending:

- contingencies - unused,
- medical care - weekly visits of doctor - unused,
- medicine grant provided only twice.

Activity costs: - Sahayogini level: under-spending:

- honoraria and fees will not be spent fully,
- stationery, books and magazines: 60% will be spent,
- contingencies also not utilised.

Activity costs: - Sangha level: under-spending:

- equipment not utilised at all,
- training cost for vocational training practically unused ,
- sangha huts utilised for 30%,
- publication, newsletter - never used, even in past, too little motivation and experience,
- MSK - spent for 30%,
- stationery and contingencies partly used,
- books, journals and other educational material - start of utilisation after more literacy training.

The fiscal year 1996:97 will end with approximately 50% under-spending.

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In order to obtain a sound view on the pattern, kind and size of spending, as well as the reasons for the under-spending, a practical case of the thorough budgetary analysis was implemented (see page 26). This was done jointly with the representatives of the management team (SPD and accountant).

5.6 Reasons for under-spending

The reasons can be summarised in the following overview:

- The initial lack of understanding the idea of financial planning being the translation of the strategic planning into financial terms. The budgeting was seen as the overview of planned expenditures, initiated by the proposed GOI guidelines and allocations from the national programme office.
- The insufficient knowledge of the purpose of budget planning, implementation and control and the confusion of the contents of individual budget headings by the DIU financial managers played major role in under-spending the budget. As they were not capable of understanding their role and responsibilities in financial planning, for whatever reason, they could not guide their teams in sound financial planning.
- The budgets formulated at the beginning of the financial year were not always, for whatever reasons reviewed during the year and therefore the reasons for under-spending were not analysed and visible nor were possible corrective management actions.
- The planning was often done mechanically (quantitatively) without proper attention for the specifics of the beneficiary or expenditure, e.g. expenditure was multiplied by number of villages without considering their strength, needs or priorities.
- High turnover of staff - lack of key persons to implement the Programme and to perform the expected tasks, including adequate financial planning.
- The activity planning was largely overestimated as it was obvious that it is the main issue of the programme. Moreover, the funds were in place, there was enough money and the intention of the programme management and all implementers involved was very enthusiastic.
- The limitation of time was crucial in situations where all other necessary conditions, such as the sound division of financial management responsibilities and their overall understanding and influence of external circumstances were not adequately fulfilled.
- Lack of time caused by initial underestimation of the complexity of organisational setting-up. The same expenditure was also booked wrongly as the headings of the GOI budget were not understood properly.
- Unseen intentional savings - contributions by individuals, sanghas, free-of-charge facilities and resource persons offered by the Government, subsidies/funding from other projects, programmes, better negotiated prices.
- Intensification of other programmes organised by the Government and/or foreign donors, de facto affecting the Mahila Samakhya Programme because the same target group was addressed.

In order to clarify the problem of under-spending even further another case is included which contains a thorough analysis of all budget headings, the budget utilisation and the reasons for possible deficiencies.

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CASE 3 - ANALYSIS OF THE VARANASI DISTRICT SPENDING THROUGHOUT THE PROGRAMME YEARS:

Management costs under-spending

major under-spending only in the first year, improvement in the second year and with the present SPD almost corresponds with the planning

STAFF:

co-ordinator - job requirements too high, personnel not available

1993-94 - part of the year

1994-95 - full time

1995-96 - not available

1996-97 - still required

consultant - not understood that this money can be used also for the short-term interventions, wrongly booked

1995-96 - understood and booked correctly

1996-97 - ditto

resource persons - allocation 1 per 100 villages, initially more used, recently a pool of resource persons trained for future coverage

1994-95 - fully used

1995-96 - less, as 1 of 2 asked for a transfer because of poor working atmosphere

1996-97 - even less

accountant

1990-91 - only 5 months

1992-93 - left

1993-97 - fully utilised

office assistant

1990-91 - nobody

1995-96 - nobody

in the remaining years fully utilised

stenotypist - provision for 2 (1 per district)

until 1994 only one position utilised

from 1994-95 onwards fully utilised

When a computer became available the post of operator replaced the need for a shorthand typist. Up to this moment this cost had been booked under this heading.

driver - 1 position allocated

1994-96 - utilised only part-time for the co-ordinator, paid from contingencies

messenger

first three years not fully utilised, recently full utilisation

OFFICE EXPENSES:

rent

1990-91 - allocation only for 5 months

1991-92 - for 12 months

1992-93 - for six months

1993-97 - full utilisation and even some overspending due to the unforeseeable escalation in rent

furniture - almost exhausted

first 4 years hardly any expenditure

1994-95 - maximum spent
1995-97 - not so relevant

AV equipment

first 4 years nothing spent
1994-96 - funds fully used

petrol, fuel and maintenance

first year no jeep, no expenditure
1991-94 - fuel cost only, as there was no maintenance of new vehicles
1994-95 - jeep repaired after accident, also stolen
1995-96 - utilisation of unspent maintenance money for purchase of new jeep
1996-97 - fuel only
first 3 years over-budgeted, once the work expands more maintenance will be needed, then the expenditure will become normal

stationery

up to 1992-94 - utilisation remains under 0.5 lakhs
1994-95 - gradual growth, as phone and post are also included

books

first 3 years little spent, only after 1994-95 almost 1 lakh

TA/DA

first year no spending, then stabilised
1996-97 - minimum spent as only DIU staff is booked, initially all TA/DA recorded as management cost now recorded by activities

contingencies

first year not relevant
1991-93 - normal booking
1993-94 - part-time messenger included
1994-96 - part-time driver booked here
1996-97 - normal booking

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5.7 Problems occurred

The implementers of the programme were also confronted with some problems.

- The rather rigid planning of management cost including the office rent led to some major problems of unrealistic financial planning
- The high turnover of personnel at the state and district offices caused major problems with the establishment and continuation of professional management as well as building up an effectively operating team.
- The GOI guidelines served their purpose in the initial phases of the programme but did not fit in the scope of purpose of later programme years. They appeared to be incomplete, did not include some items as buffer for rent and salary increase but, on the other hand, did include allocations for items not equally relevant for all districts and all stages - programme years.
- Due to the only partial achievement of the activities planned the utilisation of funds was not fully completed in the time planned.
- On top of that, as the amount of funds unspent grew so did the budget for each subsequent year.

5.8 Conclusions

The major cause for under-spending was the overestimation of activity budget. Although under-spending on management cost played a role until 1994-95, since that year the planned proportion of management costs has almost corresponded with the reality. The activity cost, however, has not yet reached the level of the planned budget. The spectrum of activities has started to increase only gradually and under-spending has remained significant (less than the quarter of planned budget) until present.

There is a need to readjust the proportion of management cost and activity cost, whereas the activities should be planned according to the needs of the respective programme period and current priorities of clients - sanghas within the context of their development stage.

There is also a need to adjust the management cost, being the salaries and office rent, at least every third year in line with external developments.

Mahila Samakhya is a Programme of processes, of an attitudinal change and as such it cannot possibly be planned in the same way as other more "product"-oriented programmes. Although it may have some of the features of a project, it is still a large scale programme without any visible deadline, oriented to quality aspects more than quantitative objectives within the scope of a long-term perspective, of a continuous process.

As a process-oriented Programme, many of the lessons learned were learnt through trial and error, and also many errors were made. And yet the Programme has achieved extensive goodwill among the targeted group of clients, being the sangha women.

The recommendation of the mission for the Programme in Uttar Pradesh is to continue the programme and safeguard its identity and the structural professionalisation of the Programme structure in terms of staff training (on management and communication issues, notably the financial management), development of systematised, relevant and transparent job requirements and an adequate scheme for career planning.

It would also help to plan in line with the experience acquired from the various stages of the Programme, including the envisaged gradual withdrawal of the programme structure in the foreseeable future.

ANDHRA PRADESH DIARY

At the briefing meeting on 4 January 97 with the Secretary, Education, other government officials and the Mahila Samakhya team the thrust of the briefing was as follows.

- It was difficult to capture the quality of the programme through statistics.
- The thrust of Mahila Samatha was to prioritise education with emphasis on the girl child
- To promote mother's association to achieve universal enrolment and retention of girl children.
- To improve the quality of life and reduce drudgery
- To work in the area of health
- To implement other education programmes like District Primary Education programme
- To support NGO's with a good track record in areas where AP Mahila Samatha Society cant reach.

Issues that confront APMSS are what is the optimal presence in a district? Perhaps a 1/4 of the district would provide the critical mass for change. Another problem was how to develop a Mahila Samakhya ethos at the field? How to strengthen a conceptual understanding of the Programme? How to maintain the pace of the programmes, responding to demands especially with the rapid turnover of staff. How to define a strong sangha? How to build a federation of sanghas that can mobilise around issues like minimum wages.

5 January

Mahila Sikhsana Kendra, Mahaboobnagar

Mahila Sikshana Kendra Mahaboobnagar has about 28 girls in the age group of 9-14 years. The girls were happy, bright, outgoing and confident. They had learnt about health, some science and mathematics, handicrafts. They were eager to learn more and to stay on longer if possible.

The positive observations about the Mahila Sikhsana Kendra are the affection and goodwill of all the staff, the confidence of the children and the sheer hope that is generated by reaching out and providing this supportive and nurturing space for girls who have never experience this care before. Most of them want to go back and start "tailoring centres" or teach at the Balkendras in the village. Two or three will be joining a hostel and continuing their education. The problems were rapid turnover of staff, total lack of training or vision on the part of the teacher and need for design and planning in the curriculum, pedagogic skills and a clear vision for the future.

To maximise the impact and use of the MSK one needs to pay attention to this.

Sangha Leaders Meeting, Makthal

Nearly 70 women from around 31 villages had come for the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to review their past activity and plan for the next two years. The women spoke of the issues they had taken up in the past.

They felt they had gained information, visibility and bargaining power. They were able to wrest the resources due to the community from the Sarpanch. They had gained in increase in wages, they had applied for and secured government housing. They could buy rice for consumption during a famine, gain some education for themselves and create the possibility of education for their children. They had also prepared for and contested elections. Their health and children's health had improved due to education as well as the confidence to access health care. They planned to set up a mandal level federation to help them network on common issues and to increase their strength and bargaining. On the question of a collective struggle that had changed their lives or vision of the future there were no clear answers.

Sangham Hut, Lingampalli

The next visit was to the Sangham hut being built at Lingampalli.

The women had contributed their labour, picked up stones on the wayside and brought them in for the basement. There was a lot of pride and anticipation at the prospect of having their own space, but they had not yet learnt to calculate the value of their labour or other contribution.

Tipparasapalli Sangham meeting

The next visit was to the Tipparasapalli sangham meeting and the watershed committee meeting. The women spoke with pride of their literacy, of the knowledge they had gained and the confidence it had brought them.

Men who were present said that they were happy at the progress their wives had made; it was good for the community. Significantly enough they said it will be good for them to go up one step at a time and not try to walk on a wire straight away. This sangha is at the II (group formation) stage moving towards the III (consolidation) stage.

Meeting with Karyakarthis

I met all the Karyakarthis in two and threes and had an intensive discussion on their perspective of Mahila Samakhya, their problems, future etc. They are hardworking and seemed caught up with the problem of accessing resources for the villagers. No clear articulation of Mahila Samakhya philosophy.

Bondalkunta Bal Mitra Kendra

The Bondalkunta Bala Mitra Kendra was running well with children wanting to escape the drudgery of housework through schooling. The sangham is in the second (sangha building) stage, the women want to get electricity etc. This sangham still needs to be strengthened and sees Mahila Samakhya as a means of tapping resources.

Kunsi Sangha Meeting

At Kunsi there was a meeting of village women. This is an early sangham. Despite a funeral and a wedding in the village the women had cooked a meal and came to the meeting. They are eager for some change, some bettering of their condition but, as yet inarticulate. The key here is the hope and possibility that Mahila Samakhya arouses.

Mahila Sikshana Kendra, Medak

In Medak we started with a visit of the Mahila Sikshana Kendra. The children are bright and happy and full of eagerness. They seem better skilled and more competent than the children in the Mahaboobnagar MSK girls. This can be explained by the fact that mandal is not as backward as Mahaboobnagar. But it is also clear that a lot more of thought and planning has gone into the MSK here.

The warden is a karyakartha with experience, who can no longer travel for reasons of health so her approach and perspective on MSK is much clearer. The content of the curriculum is better and the girls hope to become NFE teachers or karyakartha after they leave. Those are the role models they have before them and who they perceive as change agents in their society.

The question is whether just one year of residential learning is enough to equip them to stand up in their local context. The rationale offered for the decision for one year is that many more girls were waiting to come in. Also the cluster MSKs that are being demanded and which might be implemented have not been thought through thoroughly.

The question of whether the investment of one year will simply be lost or how it can be sustained or strengthened in the village has not been considered. No follow up (except in the cases of the girls who will join government hostels) has been planned or considered.

Karyakartha Meeting

Next the team had a meeting with Karyakarthis. The capacity of the Karyakarthis is quite impressive. They travel long distances, sit with the women, face great difficulties (like attacks saying they are child lifters or naxalites) and build a sangha.

They demand more skills and training. But none of them were able to articulate their vision of what development for women should be. They are caught into responses to the immediate practical needs of the women and running the Bala Mitra Kendras etc., but are unable to move beyond that. They have great clarity on the survival issues of women, how to mobilise women for meetings, desire to build federations of sanghas, the need for horizontal spread of mandal level networks etc. There is a sense of stagnation with the more experienced ones and a great deal of the problem is on building the capacity to jump levels both professionally and conceptually.

Sangham Meeting Qamsanpalli

We then attended a sangham meeting at Qamsanpalli. The women were vocal, energetic and very clearly listed all their achievements, which included accessing resources and collective bargaining. However, on discussing the sangham fund they were nervous and diffident and lacked information.

The Bala Mitra Kendra was very impressive with the children reeling off historical dates, geographical information etc. This again proof of the teachers commitment and pedagogic skills.

Esogipet Sangha Meeting

The next day we visited Esogipet. This is a three year old sangha. The women sound strong and articulate. They listed their achievements in terms of education, health training, new borewells, housing, reduction of toddy prices and had resolved a marital dispute. They were thorough on their accounts and the sangham fund.

Visit to the Sangham Hut

They estimate it will cost another 10,000 and two women are being trained as masons.

Alladurg - Sangham Leaders Meeting

Women from the Mandal had come to review their past activities and plan their activities for the future. There had been an attempt to use Participatory Rural Appraisal methods to get the women to map their requirements. But the perception of the charts was very uneven. The teachers who were monitoring the charts need more training in this area. The market stuff is brought by the Mahila Samakhya Office.

The activities that women suggested at the review meeting were:

Sangham Hut, education, land lease, toilets, kitchen gardens, tamarind contracts, vegetable vending, training in brick making, masonry, borewell mechanics, negotiating with mid-wives, government officers around land for landless, dealership of rations, help for disabled etc.

Cluster meeting

The APMSS tries to reduce expenditure of cluster meetings by sharing local resources, asking local households to supply the glasses and plates and the women to bring local available vegetables.

The next visit was a cluster meeting and health training by a local resource person from the village. The meeting was attended by 16 members. It is meant to build up training skills for the more capable village women and re-orient the slightly weaker ones. The local remedies are effective and saleable. There is a clear understanding that this is a small measure, a stop gap for minor ailments while major ones need to be taken to the doctor or ANM.

Visit to Mahila Sikshana Kendra, Hayatnagar

The next visit was the MSK run by the MV Foundation. The MSK at Hayatnagar was the most effectively planned and managed. The MVF is an NGO and works around NFE for children and children's rights, and has continuous training and research on curriculum and pedagogic methods.

The training evolves around natural resource management, overall physical and social development of the girls and environmental activism. In addition to regular science and social science lessons children are also taught about laws, children's rights, they talk to the managers of factories and to mandal officials.

A lot of attention is paid to the training of teachers who are teaching the change agents of the future. The girls learn karate, crafts etc. The children would compare favourable with children of the most privileged schools. What marks the MSK here is the professional management of the place and the planning and design.

What needs strengthening is the gender perspective. Right now it is that these are under privileged children at the risk of violence and child marriage. But a little more clarity on the political dimensions of gender would fulfil its potential of being a matchless institution.

Meeting with sangha women

This was followed by a meeting with approximately 40 women from 20 sanghas. The women are working a joint forest management and accessing resources. The level of awareness among the

women either regarding collective action or empowerment or the need for a sangha was the lowest among all the sanghas visited so far. They simply see the Coordinator as the provider of knowledge, resources and pointing the way. This orientation is totally at cross purpose with the Mahila Samakhya philosophy, but is effective for joint forest management and conserving natural resources which is the main thrust of the programme. Only two young women out of the thirty to forty women, who were assembled, could understand the question of collectives or empowerment despite repeated probing. As long as this is viewed as a JFM programme or any other development programme there is no problem at all. As a women's empowerment programme it is far from the mark.

UTTAR PRADESH DIARY

10-1-1997: Lambgaon Gahrwal, Meeting with Sahayoginis

We discussed the main issues in the sanghas. For the Gahravali women the main issues are the forest and alcohol.

As more and more forests are being declared Panchayat areas or Resource Forests by the Government women are fast losing their right to minor forest produce and their fuel and fodder sources. Add deforestation and the fact that women have to trek 20-25 km to find the family need of fuel and fodder. The issue of the forest thus is both a survival issue for women and a gender issue.

Most of the men are away serving in the armed forces or are back burnt out and drinking heavily. The women are the backbone of the community and the Mahila Samakhya programme revolves around jal, jungle and jameen around which women's lives revolves. The fight against alcohol was taken up by most sanghas in the areas and all the illicit breweries have been smashed. Women have not been able to deal with government liquor which is freely supplied.

The Sahayoginis had quite a good degree of clarity on the Mahila Samakhya philosophy and vision. They said that it was difficult initially, when they took up individual issues. As soon as they moved to issues of forest and alcoholism which were community issues they began to find more acceptance and confidence in the community. The major issues they take up are health, forest and alcoholism.

Training

The sahayoginis felt that the earlier training gave them self-confidence, a sense of identity and clarity of vision. Gradually they felt the need for more training to handle the issues they confront on a daily basis. But while sectoral and need based training is important they feel that interaction with other groups and exchange will keep them more strong and vibrant. These Sahayoginis were the strongest and clearest on the MS philosophy that I met.

Visit to Bhounsari Village Children's Centre

There were 36 children here. The literacy material is being developed in the local language and around issues of the environment.

Bhounsari Sangha Meeting

This was a 1 1/2 year old sangha. Almost 70 women were there. They were very articulate, happy to be together and said the sangha gave them power made them a force to reckon with. Although they were confident, they said that the sahayogini had a critical role. She provided the information, support and direction. This sangha has begun to combine older and younger women in a single forum, something that was unheard of earlier.

Women's Literacy Camp, Ramole

The women were all able to read and some of them write. They just left their homes in the morning and sat together each day to learn. They claim that learning to write increases their self worth, helps access resources and provides a window to the outside world. They see education as a means of joining the mainstream. They have actively preventing illegal encroachment of the forest land and are planting trees to conserve the environment.

They express the need for Mahila Samakhya work to spread beyond the sangha to the entire village and neighbouring villages so that their protection of the forest can be complete.

Meeting with Sakhis

These sakhis came to Lambgaon to meet the mission on their own. They spoke of their initial fear, timidity and ignorance which lifted with the first Jagori training. They understood that the fear came from within, stifling their movements and gradually learnt to set it aside and assert their identity.

They claimed that working for Mahila Samakhya was more difficult than rearing a child. They faced physical attack, rejection and humiliation. But they feel it is worth it now. The sakhi has now three office bearers (a President, Secretary and Treasurer) to support her work. Today the government programmes like Jawahar Rozgar Yojana come straight to the sanghas. They contribute a day's wage to appoint a watchman for a the common forest.

Meeting with new Sahayoginis

These women, young and inexperienced, always felt the desire to do something - it was Mahila Samakhya that provided the opportunity. They said they need training, information, knowledge to deal with the issues in the sanghas. For a lot of them balancing family responsibility with Mahila Samakhya duty, and confronting the opposition from their families to women travelling and working was difficult indeed.

Sangha Meeting Khurangaon

This seems a good strong sangha and they see Mahila Samakhya as a source of knowledge and information. They see Mahila Samakhya as having ushered in change both within the home and in the community. They say that sitting together helps them to think creatively and critically. It was Mahila Samakhya that helped them to think about issues.

Examples:

- The village bull used to roam loose wasting things. The sangha took responsibility for feeding the bull and keeping it in control.
- The sangha appointed a watchman to prevent monkeys from destroying fruits and crops.
- The sangha allotted mohallas (hamlets) to take turns to protect the jungle.
- The sangha decided that each family would contribute a bundle of firewood and a handful of rice to each wedding thus easing the strain on the forest as well as the family.
- The sangha saw the it that children went to school.

They said that earlier to men tried to keep them home but now no one could hold them back.

Jamalgaon Colony: Tikhana and Children's School and Meeting with Sangha Women

The Tikhana (Sangham Hut) is being built by the sangha members and is very important to them. Material is scarce, many insufficient and yet they are trying. The children are taught on the roof of one of the houses. When it rains - one house finishes cooking quickly so the children can learn in that house. They are trying to raise other resources. The village is just 12 families all Harijan. There are not men in the village, they say they are all dead. But the women are determined to ahead.

- They went to the Block office and asked what budgets had been allocated to them.
- They cleared a path to their village and went to the Block office to demand wages for their labour.

After dealing with one Pradhan who was corrupt they have now elected an Mahila Samakhya member as Pradhan and the post will rotate between the three villages that the Pradhan covers. They said that they wanted training on their rights.

Meeting with the District Resource Group

The next meeting was with an informal district resource group at the New Tehri office.

Meeting with DIU staff

The next day was a lengthy meeting with the District Unit Staff. Problems that came up were

- the tension between the senior and junior staff
- the need for training new recruits to that they understand the Mahila Samakhya philosophy and vision.

The staff mentioned low wages and the low travel allowance so that they have to constantly use good will and personal contacts to survive. There seems to be lack of clarity on finances. Given the terrain there has to be health and accident insurance for the staff as well as some savings and increments and other incentives for long service. The rent of housing and living is exorbitant in the Tehri areas and that has to be considered.

However, the team seems to have jelled together quite well and have come through a difficult period of crisis. They are articulate, dedicated and very hardworking. As the Mahila Samakhya Programme here has taken on the nature of a movement around jal, jungle and jameen there is a coherent long term vision and philosophy visible in the staff.

Sitapur District, Pipri and Hussainpur

These are two new villages just meeting around learning to read and write. What is important is the hope, that the women see the value of the support that a collective provides and see this as equipping them to change their lives. Although new these new groups are alive and vibrant, eager to dance and sing and learn.

Meeting with the Uttar Pradesh State Unit Staff

At this meeting all the District Programme Co-ordinators, resource persons and consultants were present. There was an extended discussion on the need for training, the need for external inputs and skills, the need for group building and solidarity, the prioritising of issues etc. The impression of this group was that they are very politically aware, critical, reflective, thorough, able to see where their strengths and shortcomings lie. They spoke of Banda where the gun rules and all disputes including crimes like rape are settled either with the gun or money. The sangha began to publish names and incidents in its own paper and that created some discomfort.

They all spoke of the need for more exposure, training skills and reinforcement of their capacity. There was also some discussion of the "life" of a Sahayogini. How long can women survive and lead a life of commitment and voluntarism that is not matched by benefits ?

ITINERARY Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh visits

The programme began with a briefing meeting on 3 January 97 at Shastri Bhavan, New Delhi.

The Joint Secretary, Mr R.S.Pandey made the opening remarks regarding expectations from the Evaluation Mission. This was followed by some remarks from Mr Kuperus, Counsellor, Development Section, Royal Netherlands Embassy. Then the Mahila Samakhya Programme was presented by Ms Vrinda Sarup, Director, Mahila Samakhya. Ms J.Kameshwari, Consultant, Mahila Samakhya then introduced the Evaluation parameters and material was distributed to the mission. This was followed by discussion and clarifications.

The team then met the National Resource Group members at lunch which was followed by a meeting where NRG members presented three studies, and the methodology and concept of Mahila Samakhya.

On the 4 January Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran left for Andhra Pradesh.

4 January 1997: Team Meeting with the Secretary, Department of Education, A.P. and EC members at the conference hall. Ms Padma, State Programme Director then briefed the team on the AP Mahila Samatha Society. The afternoon was a team meeting to discuss strategies and parameters followed by a dinner where the team met the resource groups and other NGO's and academies connected with Mahila Samatha.

5 January 1997: Dana Broft remains in Hyderabad meeting with the State office. Vasanth Kannabiran leaves for Mahaboobnagar and visits the Mahila Sikshana Kendra at Mahaboobnagar. She then left for Makthal to attend a sangham leaders planning and review meeting there. After that she visited Lingampalli village, saw the sangham hut, interacted with sangha members, went to Tipparasapalli to attend a sangha meeting, met the watershed committee visited the Balamitra Kendra (children's night school) at Bondaikunta and returned to Makthal at 10 pm for a night halt.

6 January 1997: Vasanth Kannabiran met with Karyakarthis (Sahayoginis) individually and then had a group meeting with the while DIU. She then proceeded to attend a cluster meeting at Kunsia (a new village) and then left for Hyderabad.

7 January 1997: Both the team members proceeded to Sangareddy. There they visited the Mahila Sikshana Kendra, and met the DIU and MSK teams.

8 January 1997: They visited the sangha Hut and met the members of Esogipet Sangham. They then proceeded to the sangham leaders planning and review meeting at Alladurg. From Alladurg they visited a cluster health training at Paladugu and then left for Sangareddy and then returned to Hyderabad.

9 January 1997: They visited the Mahila Sikshana Kendra run by MVF an NGO, and then met with the sangha members from the 20 villages mobilised by MVF.

On the 9th evening the team returned to Delhi.

On the 10 January Vasanth Kannabiran left for Haridwar to visit Tehri while Dana Broft left for Varanasi to see the programme in that area.

After reaching Lambgaon on the 10th night Vasanth Kannabiran had a meeting with the Sahayoginis of the district.

On the 11th morning she had a meeting with the more experience Sahayoginis. She then proceeded to Bounsari to visit a Phulkandi, a children's literacy centre. This was followed by a sangha meeting at the village.

After this she visited a women's literacy camp in Ramole and had a discussion with the women learning to read and write.

In the evening she had a meeting with four sakhis who came on their own to meet the mission on coming to know about it. This was followed by a meeting with the newer sahayoginis.

- 11 January 1997: Vasanth Kannabiran attended a sangha meeting at Kurangaon. After this she visited a Thikana at Jawalgaon colony.
- 12 January 1997: She left for New Tehri and met members of the District Resource Group over dinner.
- 13 January 1997: She had a meeting with the DIU Core Team and left for Haridwar and Lucknow.
- 14 January 1997,
Lucknow: Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran visited two villages with new literacy centres in Sitapur district.
- 15 January 1997: Lunch meeting with state resource group, consultants, officials and state team. In the afternoon Dana Broft and Vasanth Kannabiran attended an extended meeting with the state level team of the Uttar Pradesh programme.
- 15 January 1997: Return to New Delhi

LIST OF PERSONS SPOKEN TO in relation to financial management

New Delhi

Secretary Department of Education (MHRD)
Joint Secretary Department of Education (MHRD)
National Programme Director Mahila Samakhya, Department of Education (MHRD),
Resource Person National Programme Office Mahila Samakhya
Royal Netherlands Embassy Staff
Members of the national Resource Group

Andhra Pradesh

State Programme Director APMSS (current)
Former State Programme Director APMSS
Members of the Executive Committee APMSS
Accounts Officer SPO (previous period)
Accounts Officer SPO (current period)
Resource Persons and staff State Programme Office
District Programme Co-ordinators APMSS
Friends of Mahila Samakhya

District Implementation Unit Medak
Accounts Officer DIU and staff

Sahayoginis
Sangha women in the villages visited
NFE teachers BMK
Management and teaching staff MSK Medak
Management and teaching staff MSK MV Foundation
Sakhis, sangha members, sahayoginis at Block planning meeting

Uttar Pradesh

State Programme Director

District Implementation Unit Varanasi:
Accounts Officer
Resource persons
Sahayoginis
Sakhis and sangha women in the villages visited
Friends of Mahila Samakhya
Representatives of donor organisations
NFE teachers and learners in sangha classes

State Programme Office Lucknow:
Resource Persons
Accounts Officer
Junior accounts officer
Sahayoginis at sahayogini meeting
Sakhis and sangha women in the visited villages
Teachers and sangha women in sangha classes

SUPPLEMENT B

MAHILA SAMAKHYA GUJARAT

**observations and findings based on the visit of
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997**

**Leela Gulati
Claudine Helleman**

**The Hague, July 1997
Nuffic/Department of Educational Studies and Consultancy (DESC)**

MAHILA SAMAKHYA GUJARAT

**observations and findings based on the visit of
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997**

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MAHILA SAMAKHYA GUJARAT

observations and findings based on the visit of the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997

SUMMARY

1. The Programme

In Gujarat Mahila Samakhya has been in existence since 1989 and started to be implemented in three districts. The Programme has gradually extended its coverage within the districts and has extended its outreach in a fourth District. The thrust of Mahila Samakhya is on the building of village-level mahila sanghas or women's collectives. The sangha collective is the epicentre which gives direction to the process of empowerment generating self-directed development and learning processes. Mahila Samakhya has taken a formidable task upon its shoulders and has succeeded in reaching out to women who, under the prevailing conditions in Gujarat, have otherwise remained unreached, invisible and voiceless. From the first attempts to establish rapport with the poorest women in the villages, to gain their trust and confidence in an often hostile environment, to start a process off through collective reflection, decision making, planning and concerted action, women's collectives have emerged (or are emerging) in more than 600 rural villages in Gujarat.

The key actors in the building of a sangha are, apart from the village women, the sahayoginis and the sakhis. Most of the sahayoginis we met seemed remarkably capable and strong women, highly motivated and with a great commitment to their work, their 'mission' and to the sangha women. As the result of the sakhi rotating system more than 2000 women have been trained, each sangha having a cadre of five to six trained and committed sakhis. They have become strong, assertive and articulate.

In the initial stages of sangha formation mainly infra-structural and community issues like access to water, road repair, electricity have been taken up. Such issues are relatively non-controversial and do not threaten the existing power structures and gender relationships. But they involve some amount of collective struggle and have helped in building solidarity and confidence in collective action.

Prevailing issues which over time have emerged and given attention to in the districts show a varied profile of activities related to e.g: health care and women's health awareness, female literacy and education of girls, legal issues and women's rights, economic empowerment, women's participation in politics. Special features of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat are the organisation of learning/awareness raising camps for adolescent girls and the mobilisation of thousands of women during celebrations and melas around relevant issues.

2. The impact of Mahila Samakhya on women's lives

2.1 Empowered women

The Programme as it has evolved has made an empowering impact on the lives of women participating in the Programme at different levels. The strongest noticeable effect is demonstrated in the existence of women's collectives in the villages. The impact of the Mahila Samakhya on the lives of rural women is that the sangha has become a source of strength upon which they can draw for solving personal and community problems individually as well as collectively. The sangha has provided women with the social and emotional space which enables them to shed their fears and break out of physical and cultural barriers that have confined their lifespaces. The sangha confirms their identity as women and gives space and right to a dignified life for single women. Slowly and gradually women are beginning to assert their rights in order to get greater control of their lives and make changes.

The areas where Mahila Samakhya, through the mahila sanghas, has achieved most apart from gaining dignity and self-respect is in accessing government schemes and services, in health awareness and care, in literacy education. The approach used is based on women's assertion of their (equal) rights and entitlements to social welfare services, community provisions, economic schemes, educational provisions and health services. They do not challenge power structures and particularly gender relationships directly. But they affect the balance of powers in an indirect way, not in the least by the public respect and recognition gained. And this reflects back on the status and bargaining power of women in their families, their increased control of financial resources and family decisions, and their ability to fight and resist violence. The direct improvements are mainly noticeable in the area of basic survival needs and improving the circumstances in the personal and family sphere.

Women have started conquering new public spaces during the last two years through their involvement in the Panchayati Raj elections as voters and as candidates, and through the initiatives of women in e.g. Baroda to establish women's courts (nari adalet) at the Block level in front of the police and magistrate's office. And women are occupying new economic spaces by entering into new occupations like hand-pump mechanics and masons.

Political rights

Sangha women used their right to vote in supporting female candidates, women contested unfair election politics and resisted pressurising and being bribed. 284 MS women got elected and a number of them became a Sarpanch. The experience has helped to demystify the notion that political functions are beyond reach for rural women with their backgrounds. And now women begin to realise the enormous challenge they are coping with from their new positions in the current socio-political environment and its inherent gender biases against women. The involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the elections have strengthened its visibility and has created high expectations about women's power and ability to influence political decision making from a perspective of social justice and equality. By now almost a year after the elections it is a good time for a review and assessment of the impact on the elected women, and look into the need for effective support in the form of further training and the development of a common women's agenda.

Women and law

In all districts attention is given to legal issues and violence against women in the sangha meetings. Recognition that such cases are legal issues led to the initiative of sangha women to set up a voluntary support structure in the form of a women's courts or 'nari adalet' at the Block level. The nari adalats have a great impact on the public recognition of women's legal rights, on the visibility of Mahila Samakhya, and on the credibility of the court as a trustworthy support structure, because of its transparent rules and procedures. It has created a change in the attitude of officials and in their application of the rules: they now take women's issues seriously. The initiative has commanded respect and co-operation from the local authorities. And the court has created a sense of sisterhood among women across caste and village divides as women from other caste groups and from other villages also bring their cases and they are treated equally.

Economic empowerment

Sangha women in all districts have started savings and loans schemes. These saving schemes give women a feeling of having more control over financial resources and access to cash when in need. Loans are mostly used for individual and personal purposes, seldom for investing in economic and/or collective enterprises. There is a great concern about sanghas breaking apart because of conflicts arising from dealing with savings schemes and from the emergence of economic interest groups within the sanghas.

2.2 Areas needing attention

Meeting women's basic survival needs and the Mahila Samakhya empowerment agenda

The empowerment agenda of Mahila Samakhya is bound to be at odds with the non-interventionist approach of the Programme and the emphasis on sangha women identifying their needs and priorities. Finding the balance between this is a problem facing the sahayoginis and the District staff. The agendas of the sangha women are based on their experienced realities within the framework of their geo-political and socio-cultural environments and the accepted values and biases that shape their positions in their gendered societies. Given their situation of poverty and deprivation they naturally articulate their needs in terms of basic survival and improvement of the quality of life. Without a conscious and deliberate input on building new perspectives based on equality, social justice and women's human rights there is a risk of stagnation of the growth of the empowerment processes. The day to day practice of constant preoccupation with running after meeting women's immediate needs may overtake (non-intended) the long term empowerment perspective. And this may create a risk that Mahila Samakhya becomes more of a demand driven organisation facilitating access to information and development resources, thereby losing its identity as an empowerment Programme.

This is a very complex issue that the Programme needs to continuously come back to in its training strategy and that should remain on the agenda for critical reflection.

Strengthening of the sanghas

The women we met in the meetings with the sanghas were impressively articulate and powerful. We noted, however, that spokes women were mainly the women who have attended the sakhi training. Questions can be raised as to what extent they have been able to share what they have learned with the sangha women and to which extent their empowerment has percolated down to the women in the sangha. Moreover, a long term perspective on sustaining the empowerment processes of and within the sanghas is absent. The internal training system needs to be reviewed and made more strategically oriented towards capacity and perspective building of women in the sanghas.

About 45% of the sanghas in Gujarat have been identified as being strong in terms of identity, internal dynamics and sharing of responsibilities, sensitivity to women's equality and social justice, use of collective strength. Yet, they need to become more self-reliant in managing their own affairs and able to connect their activities to a clearer and holistic perspective on gender.

Besides, more than half of the sanghas need further strengthening and support in terms of sangha consolidation and perspective building. More attention need to be given to training at sangha level and it will be a great challenge for the programme staff with the sakhis and sahayoginis to engage in evolving special training/learning programmes to be conducted with women in their sanghas around issues raised by them focused on enhancement of a gender perspective, strengthening of the sangha from within and capacity building for the self-reliance of the sangha.

For the further development of empowerment strategies at the sangha level more insight is needed in the internal dynamics of the sangha development and the dimensions of the empowerment processes of and among women at the sangha level. The initiative of the Programme to start a project of participatory documentation of the sangha development process with the sangha members can be considered as a start for getting into the heart of the sangha. This can be supplemented by an in-depth study focused on the internal and external dynamics guiding the processes within the sangha.

Women's economic empowerment

Economic issues in areas of e.g. wages, improved labour conditions, employment creation and income generation seem to be difficult to deal with. The need for economic development, regular work, higher and stable incomes is high on the priority list of sangha women. But dealing with the

recurring economic demands of women is an area for which Mahila Samakhya - as a process oriented, non-input delivery organisation - has not yet found a suitable answer, nor has it been able to define its role. The economic empowerment of women is an area which needs further thinking and strategizing, perhaps by exploring possibilities for capacity building and vocational skills training, and for strengthening economic support structures initiated by women in combination with developing partnerships with economic/rural development programmes.

Collaboration with other organisations

Mahila Samakhya has expanded its collaboration with other, like minded, organisations, particularly in the areas awareness training and capacity building. The lessons learned from such collaborative efforts could help in evolving more active approaches to collaboration with other agencies especially in the area of economic/rural/ agricultural and environmental development based on a participatory approach. Instead of focusing on organisations which are already present in a certain geographical area Mahila Samakhya could encourage rural development organisations to come to areas which have been unreached and are now uncovered by Mahila Samakhya.

Women's rights under tribal law

One of the obstacles in dealing with family violence and abuse of women from a legal perspective is that a number of the sanghas are in tribal areas which have their own tribal laws. A study about women's rights under tribal law in different tribal systems is required in order for women to know their rights and how to make use of them in order to seek justice. A better understanding of the tribal legal system is also relevant in relation to other legal issues such as property and inheritance rights and rights to the use of tribal land e.g. for the building of the sangha hut.

Mahila Kutir

The building of a Mahila Kutir - providing 'space' for women to come together - has become a lengthy learning process requiring stamina from the sangha women and sahayoginis. The process has met with many disappointments and a certain fatigue seems to have set in because of sometimes insurmountable obstacles. The main constraints are

- problems of getting land allocated, particularly in the tribal areas where land issues fall under the Tribal Area Development Programme,
- the allocation for the sangha hut under the Mahila Samakhya is insufficient to meet the costs involved,

and perhaps some inflexibility in the adherence to the Mahila Samakhya rules regarding the transfer of land to the sanghas. One problem might be the lack of understanding about the tribal legislation regarding the use and allocation of land and the implications in respect to the status of the sanghas as autonomous entities within a government programme.

Sanghas have been very resourceful in finding solutions for the lack of funds. In many cases they have been able to raise funds from other sources, to find low cost solutions and to provide their own labour. Yet it is necessary to review the budgetary allocations for the sangha huts under the Mahila Samakhya budget and to bring it in line with the current price levels.

3. Cutting across caste and class divides

Most of the sanghas in Mahila Samakhya are limited in caste composition to Scheduled Castes or belong to specific tribal groups. Women from other caste groups sometimes attend sangha meetings and have started to bring cases of violence and injustice to the sanghas. The nari adalats in Baroda District deal with legal cases from women regardless of their caste background. The melas and celebrations organised by the sanghas are a start for breaking class/caste barriers. Child care centres, literacy classes, securing access of girls to good education, women's health and legal rights, and community issues like water are areas of common women's interests where traditional caste divides can be broken.

In the sanghas there is a predominance of women from older age groups. The sanghas could give *more attention* to involving young women and look into their needs, and to reviewing relationships of power and authority among women within the family from a perspective of equality.

4. *Toward a grassroots women's movement*

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat has an impressive record in mobilising more than ten thousand women around issues like women's health, political participation, women and law, women's literacy etc. during *melas* and international celebrations. And sanghas have started networking and building linkages outside their villages. Their lobby and mobilisation activities are increasingly centred around women's legal and political rights, their right to health and education. The seeds for the emergence of a grassroots women's movement are there. Its growth is linked to the ability of Mahila Samakhya to broaden its coverage within the villages, within the blocks and within the districts, and develop a certain 'critical mass' of sangha women.

The Programme could perhaps make more intensive efforts of linking the sanghas with the developments within the women's movement and establishing closer contacts with women's organisations and groups within the districts and in the State.

5. *Emerging trends*

The emerging trends in Mahila Samakhya relate to the process of re-orientation and include

- the new emphasis on conscious integration of a gender perspective to the issues raised in the sanghas,
- the identification of a limited number of focal points per district around which activities will be centred,
- renewed attention to the role of Mahila Samakhya in relation to the economic empowerment of women and collaboration with other agencies,
- mobilisation of women around women's issues and the gradual emergence of a grassroots woman's movement,
- the increasing emphasis on training at sangha level aimed at perspective building and capacity building for self-reliance of the sangha.

One of the emerging trends in the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat is the transition from the *sakhi* rotation model to the so called sangha model. This is an important step towards decentralised financial management and decision-making, and towards self-reliance of the sanghas, if it is accompanied by training of the sangha members in financial management and skills required to be self-reliant.

An on-going debate in Mahila Samakhya concerns cluster forming and the building of a federation of sanghas in combination with the development of support structures at the block level. Sanghas are already actively engaged in networking and mobilisation around common issues above sangha level. *Sakhis* are seeking support from *sakhis* in other villages to strengthen their voices and powers when dealing with authorities at block or district levels. And sanghas have initiated their own legal support structure by establishing their women's courts. These dynamics emerging from the sanghas are very positive in terms of growing strength. The role of Mahila Samakhya is then to strengthen the human resources for these sangha networks and support structures. This will provide new roles for sangha women and *sakhis*, such as the para-legal counsellors in Baroda. For *sahayoginis* it may offer opportunities for horizontal and vertical mobility, for role differentiation and specialisation, and for new career paths.

6. Expansion strategies

The current situation with sanghas in different stages of strength (formation stage, consolidation stage, weakened, strong) calls for a diversified strategy. This strategy is to be based on the lessons learned in the past, the increased presence and visibility in the State and within the districts and the current momentum of spontaneous expansion via the sanghas.

The process of expansion is to be seen in connection with the process of de-linking the strong sanghas and strengthening of their capacities to become self-reliant. The following points of attention can guide the formulation and implementation of the expansion strategy:

- reinforcing the sangha strength and capacity building for self-reliance of the older sanghas;
- de-linking the strong and self-reliant sanghas from direct sahayogini support;
- promoting sanghas to become a community forum of women across caste, class or religious divides,
- strengthening networking among sanghas and the formation of cluster groups,
- strengthening and building of support structures at the block level,
- forming new sanghas in areas surrounding the clusters wherein Mahila Samakhya already exists,
- involving the old sanghas and clusters in the formation and strengthening of new sanghas, and for new districts
- selection to be based on transparent criteria e.g. poverty indicators, indicators for gender equality, female literacy rates, potential for linking up with DPEP and/or other schemes for poverty alleviation and socio-economic development,
- ensuring that staff and necessary infra-structure are in place and well prepared/trained before starting the activities in the new districts.

The expansion strategy is to include attention to the human resources component and capacity building for new and diversified roles at all levels of the MS structure (including the sangha level), as well as the continuous (re-) orientation and intensive training at all levels of responsibility.

7. The education component and linkages to the other education programmes

Education is central in the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Education is understood in its broadest meaning as an empowering learning process which enables learners to question, to analyse to seek answers, to act and reflect, and thereby to discover their inner strength and realise their potential. It involves a life long process of interactive learning, based on sharing of knowledge and life experiences, critical analysis and reflection, creating new kinds of knowledge and understanding.

7.1 Education as Literacy

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat started taking up education as literacy in the early nineties on an experimental basis. However these early initiatives were short-lived as they have been overtaken by the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) which started in Gujarat in 1993. Mahila Samakhya has become actively involved in the TLC in two districts. The Mahila Samakhya contribution made the campaign into a success in the districts. The credit is not just for the efforts of Mahila Samakhya during the campaign. Recognition is to be given to the fact that the involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the success of the TLC is also an outcome of the preceding empowerment processes among village women and of the holistic Mahila Samakhya approach to education as empowerment. A culture of learning has been created among sangha women, which made them assert their rights to literacy and to benefit from the Total Literacy Campaign.

After the completion of the TLC literacy activities were continued in the form of motivational camps, followed by literacy classes, training of volunteer literacy teachers, preparing materials for

neo-literates. The experience in education as literacy with adult women in the form of regular classes or camps is somewhat mixed, because of difficulties in maintaining women's interest after reaching the stage of being able to write their names, reading words and sentences, writing simple letters. Efforts to integrate literacy skills with function related training such as the training for balsakhis, hand-pump mechanics, para-legal workers etc. appear to be more effective, because of the direct linkage to the area of work.

Women have come to realise that they can learn, become empowered, effect changes without necessarily becoming literate themselves. What the experience in literacy has achieved is that women have come to better understand the importance of relevant literacy and school education for their daughters. They have learned that there are alternative ways of making learning and teaching meaningful and interesting in the lives of women. Mahila Samakhya has created a positive environment for learning and schooling of children, especially for girls' education.

7.2 Education of children

The education of girls is an emerging issue in the programme, it is on the agenda of sangha women, who have taken initiatives to obtain scholarship funds for their children's education, and to form committees checking on school attendance and teaching by teachers in village schools. In some villages informal initiatives have emerged such as coaching classes for out-of school girls (and sometimes also boys) in order get them into the mainstream education system.

Child Care and Education

The establishment of child care centres was first seen as a local support structure which would provide women with 'time' to spend for her own and for collective purposes. In various villages or neighbourhoods not reached by the Government run ICDS centres sangha women have set up childcare centres on a voluntary basis with support from Mahila Samakhya and in some form of collaboration with ICDS. One of the differences with the ICDS Child Care Centres are that the MS Centres are 'owned' by the sanghas.

There are good linkages with the local schools, children from the Child Care Centres enrol in the schools, are well adjusted to the school rhythm, they speak out and seem to be performing well. In some centres balsakhis are teaching school age girls and prepare them for admission in the village school. What is clearly coming out is that the child care centres are more than just taking care of young children, they have become important in environment building for school education, especially for girls, and they provide the children with a child-friendly learning environment and prepare them for school. Areas to look into are the training of the balsakhis who could be given more training in e.g. pedagogic skills for pre-school learning and child psychology.

Balika Shiksan Kendra

In Sabarkantha the District team has established a residential school (Balika Shiksan Kendra) for out-of-school-girls in the age group of 9-14 years, who dropped out of school after four years. The BSK is meeting a demand for the provision of meaningful education for girls in a safe environment. According to the teachers and parents there are visible changes in the behaviour attitudes of the girls. They have lost their fears and initial shyness, they talk openly and are motivated to learn more, they have become confident and no longer consider themselves drop-outs. Parents (fathers), who had little faith that their daughters had learnt anything in school, expressed that after four months they have come to realise that in this school their daughters can learn.

The short experience of the BSK begins to have effect on further thinking not only about the establishment of BSKs in each block, but also about finding other alternative modes of schooling for drop-out girls at village level. This is an area wherein Mahila Samakhya could cooperate with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

There are some areas that need further attention and improvement, such as training in child psychology, pedagogy and class room methods. Serious attention needs to be given to the development of a clear vision and clarity about the objectives of the BSK. There is no longterm vision which guides the curriculum and no clarity about the duration of the BSK programme.

There are plans for establishing a Mahila Shiksan Kendra e.g. in Baroda District, but with different objectives in mind and for a different target group (adolescent girls and sangha women). The MSK will provide three to four months residential training programmes aimed at creation of local cadre linked to the emergence of sangha initiated support structures.

7.3 Co-operation with other education programmes

Mahila Samakhya has actively collaborated in the Total Literacy Campaign and further cooperation in the next post-literacy phase of the TLC is envisaged.

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in Gujarat is almost ready to start in Gujarat. DPEP will be focusing on improvement of the quality of instruction, teacher training, curriculum development and development of gender sensitive learning/instruction materials, community participation, and development of alternative learning modes for out-of-school children. The Mahila Samakhya experience shows that the empowerment of women is a precondition for the creation of demand for education of girls and for an environment for community participation in improving access to and quality of school education. In all DPEP components Mahila Samakhya can build on its experience and contribute e.g. in community mobilisation, participation and environment building, involving women in Village Education Committees (VECs) and training of VEC members, provision of training inputs on dealing with gender issues for the training of DPEP staff and teachers, development of gender sensitive learning materials and methods, alternative models for drop-outs and out-of-school girls. Mahila Samakhya will be able to benefit from DPEP in strengthening the pedagogic quality of the education components as well as the use of learning materials and aids.

As DPEP will be implemented by the State and District Departments of Education and the Gujarat Council for Education Research and Teacher Training (GCERT) the feasibility of forming a three partite (MS-DPEP-GCERT) task group could be considered with the task to work out the plans and terms for co-operation at general State level as well as for the districts covered by both programmes.

8. Reporting and documentation

Over time Mahila Samakhya has produced a wealth of documentation for internal as well as for external purposes. However there is need for more systematisation and consolidation of the resource materials which allow for following the processes overall longer period. Since 1995 various training workshops have been conducted on process documentation at different levels of the programme structure. This is a very positive initiative as it is expected to provide a better understanding of how the learning and empowerment processes evolve.

9. The structure

The Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat has gone through a troublesome period with a succession of staff changes at the State and District levels. The re-orientation process which has been started within the Programme needs to be continued in all districts and reinforced by strategic training inputs on perspective building at all levels of the implementation structure. In this process more interaction with NRG members as resource persons is welcomed as it will help in

sharpening of the feminist perspective, provide professional support as well as access to a broad range of experiences and linkages to the wider women's movement.

Furthermore, Mahila Samakhya needs to reconsider its staffing and staff training policies from a structural point of view in order to enhance professional development, and put in place an adequate staff training mechanism at all levels in order to be able to provide the necessary support to the field processes in line with the changing needs of the Programme. Conditions need to be created, which will ensure the autonomy of the Programme and adherence to the Mahila Samakhya Programme principles, as well as flexibility in its mode of operations by making it a principle to appoint functionaries at SPD and DPC levels, who have experience in the NGO sector and affinity with the women's movement in Gujarat.

The District teams of *sahayoginis* and the *sakhis* are the strongest link in the implementation structure. The State Programme Office and the DIUs are found to be the weaker links.

In line with the future developments of the programme, its new directions and the increasingly differentiating needs of *sanghas* who are in different stages of developing their strengths, as well as the greater focus on the identity of Mahila Samakhya as an education Programme supporting non-formal self-directed learning processes, a total review of the support structures needed at District and State levels is called for.

Mahila Samakhya could consider the establishment of a network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres at State, district and block levels. Instead of a DIU which is responsible for the implementation and Programme in the Districts the DIUs could be converted into a District Mahila Samakhya Resource Centre which has branches at the block level. These Resource Centres could provide or facilitate access to training resources (process, perspective building, issues based and/or training of trainers), assist in development of training curricula and manuals, assist in further development of effective training/learning methods as well as gender sensitive learning materials for self-directed learning. The Resource Centres could have a role in collecting, converting and disseminating relevant information, in documentation and research, in dissemination of newsletters etc. And the centres could provide social, legal, job/career counselling as well as training and library facilities. These Resource Centres will provide a multi-purpose support network which can be flexible and responsive to the needs of the Programme and varied processes in the field.

At the State level a similar conversion could be considered, although a State Resource Centre might be taking a slightly different role with a stronger emphasis on providing for professional development of the Programme Staff, on networking with other resource organisations and on advocacy and influencing policy decisions and implementation.

The network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres which is flexible and adaptable to the needs of the empowerment/development processes, can provide a more permanent support structure in the State and in the Districts that can branch out to the blocks and clusters, and cooperate with other (education) resource centres to avoid duplication by exchanging services.

The development of a support structure as proposed will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy. This is to be accompanied by a total of the financial pattern and the financial management procedures.

1. Introduction

This report is based on a brief visit by two members of the team for the Indo-Dutch evaluation of the Mahila Samakhya Programme which took place in the beginning of January 1997. The task of the evaluation mission was to review the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and to assess and analyse the processes of empowerment at the level of the sanghas or women's collectives. In addition to this the mission was to look into financial management issues. For this evaluation a set of leading questions have been formulated by the National Programme Office related to among others

- the impact of the programme on women's personal and family life in terms of women's *autonomy*,
- the ability of the programme
 - . to create a foundation for a grass-roots level women's movement,
 - . to facilitate women's political participation,
 - . to evolve a focus on women's legal rights,
 - . to address women's issues cutting across caste and class divides;
- the emerging trends in terms of pace, growth and impact;
- the interface of Mahila Samakhya with other educational programmes like DPEP;
- the adequacy of the reporting system in providing insight into the programme;
- the expansion strategies in Mahila Samakhya.

The Terms of Reference, including the evaluation parameters in the form of a matrix are attached to the Main Report.

The evaluation covers the four states where the programme is being implemented under the agreement between the Governments of India and The Netherlands for financial assistance during the 1992-1997 period. Two members of the evaluation team visited Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, and two members visited Karnataka and Gujarat.

The visit to Gujarat lasted five days and took place between January 11 and 15. The programme for the visit has been prepared by the State and District teams and included the three 'older' districts, Rajkot, Baroda and Sabarkantha, and meetings at the State level. The district teams have taken a lot of effort to include a varied scope of field encounters in order to expose the evaluators to different aspects of the programme at different levels. This necessarily created timing problems given the short time period for the visit, long distances to cover between various meetings, and the need not to short cut discussions once interesting points were coming up. Therefore, we suggested to split the team once again, one member spending two days with the Rajkot team, whereas the other member stayed two days with the Sabarkantha team, instead of a one day visit in each district and losing time for travelling in between. We are grateful that the district teams were able to accommodate our wishes for changing the programme. Looking back we felt this was the right decision: even by extending the district visits with a day we were not able to fully complete the visit programme prepared for us. Due to an emerging management crisis in Rajkot District the visit there took a different shape.

The shortage of time did not allow us to engage in an in-depth assessment of the programme, doing justice to all of its facets. We feel that a brief external evaluation is not suitable for getting an insight in the internal dynamics of the sangha development and the dimensions of the empowerment processes of and among women at the sangha level. The entire programme evolves around the processes within and the development of the sangha and that is the node we were unable to uncover. The initiative of the Programme to start a project of participatory documentation of the sangha development process could be considered as a start for getting into the heart of the internal dynamics guiding the processes within the sangha.

We further would have liked to include in our assessment the views of persons not connected to Mahila Samakhya, especially at village level, such as women who are not members of the sangha,

of women who belong to other caste or age groups, husbands, village leaders, teachers from the formal school. But unless it happened incidentally, time did not allow for such encounters.

Throughout the visit we remained looking at the Programme with an outsiders view. Moreover, we did not cover all aspects and were unable to cover the entirety of the Programme in Gujarat. The documentation made available to us in the form of reports and case-studies provided supplementary information and helped to place our observations and findings in a broader perspective.

We regret not having been able to meet the State Programme Director, who had been on leave for a few months due to illness. She has been temporarily replaced by the acting State Programme Director who has the Mahila Samakhya Programme on added charge and whose day to day involvement in terms of time is limited. However, she seemed to be managing very well and provided us with meaningful information and her views on the programme to which she has been connected off and on during the past years.

In spite of these limitations it has to be stated that in most cases we were met with friendly and open attitudes, we felt that the opportunity given to share experiences and ideas has been welcomed and appreciated at different levels (women, sakhis, sahayoginis, DIU staff, NGO partners, State level officers). Evaluations like this sometimes become loaded with high expectations, which cannot always be met fully, especially not in situations where time is short, the programme is as complex as Mahila Samakhya, and the focus of the evaluation is perhaps directed more at the perspective of the parties commissioning the evaluation instead of it being directed at the immediate needs and questions facing the implementers in the field and, mostly, the sangha women. Yet, we hope that our findings and recommendations will make a meaningful contribution to the already on-going process of re-orientation that is taking place in the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat.

2. The coverage

In Gujarat Mahila Samakhya has been in existence since 1989 when the programme was registered as an autonomous State Society under the Societies' Registration Act. The programme started to be implemented in three districts, Rajkot, Baroda and Sabarkantha in 19 blocks. The districts had been identified during the programme design and formulation phase based on criteria related to caste/class factors, existence of (pockets of) rural poverty, the existing knowledge about the situation of women and the availability of locally based Voluntary Agencies or NGOs. Initially the programme was launched through Voluntary Agencies working in rural development, who helped the programme to get an entrée into the rural villages. However, like in the other States, soon there were problems arising from divergences between the NGOs and Mahila Samakhya in terms of basic orientation and vision, objectives, operating style and agenda's, and from NGOs not being able to come to grips with the implications of a non-target oriented process approach aimed at empowering women to themselves determine, shape, plan and execute their actions, and to determine the direction of their processes. This required a different attitude and operating style from the NGO leadership than they were accustomed to and ready to adopt. From 1990 onwards the programme was implemented through the District Implementation Units established by Mahila Samakhya at the District Headquarters.

During 1992 and 1996 the programme has gradually extended its coverage within the districts by expanding into five new blocks in Rajkot and Sabarkantha (1992) and by expanding into a new District, Banaskantha since 1994. In Banaskantha Mahila Samakhya is in the stage of sangha formation in 80 villages in two blocks (according to the most recent information). The main criteria for the selection of the new district are the low rate for female literacy, which belongs to the lowest in the State, the prevalence of tribal population, and its adjacency to Sabarkantha district.

OVERVIEW OF THE COVERAGE OF MAHILA SAMAKHYA IN GUJARAT

1. Expansion of the coverage of Mahila Samakhya in Gujarat 1992 - 1996

DISTRICT	nr sahayoginis		nr trained sakhis, including trainees		nr villages covered	
	1992	1996	1992	1996	1992	1996
Banaskantha	--	5	--	--	--	33
Baroda	22	28	255	697	147	264
Rajkot	19	16	138	522	107	154
Sabarkantha	13	32	213	798	109	211
State	54	81	606	2017	363	662

Sources: Mahila Samakhya Gujarat, Annual Report 1995-96
Mahila Samakhya, National Overview for 1992-93

2. Blok wise coverage per district (1996):

Banaskantha 2 out of 11 blocks
Baroda 6 out of 12 blocks
Rajkot 12 out of 13 blocks
Sabarkantha 6 out of 10 blocks

Source: Mahila Samakhya Gujarat, Annual Report 1995-96

3. Village wise coverage per district 1996):

Banaskantha 33 villages (rapport building phase)
Baroda 264 (151) out of 1689 villages: 15.6% (8.9%) of all villages
Rajkot 154 (109) out of 865 villages: 13.3% (12.6%) of all villages
Sabarkantha 211 (85) out of 1407 villages: 14.9% (6.04%) of all villages

() refers to villages with sakhis

Source: Mahila Samakhya Gujarat, Annual Report 1995-96

4. Average number of sakhis per sangha

DISTRICT	nr of villages covered	nr of villages with sakhis	nr of trained/ trainee sakhis	average nr of sakhis per sangha
Baroda	264	151	697	4.6
Rajkot	154	109	522	4.8
Sabarkantha	211	85	798	9.3
	629	345	2017	5.8

Source: Mahila Samakhya Gujarat, Annual Report 1995-96

5. Sangha strength Gujarat

nr of sanghas	strong sanghas	intermediate strength	weaker/fallen apart sanghas
554	259 (46.7%)	192 (34.6%)	103 (18.5%)

Source: Empowering women through Mahila Sanghas, The Mahila Samakhya Experience by Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurty, December 1996

Another criterium is that there are not many other development organizations operating in the area. The expansion of the coverage during the 1992-1996 period is illustrated on page 13.

During 1992-1996 the number of villages covered has almost doubled from 363 to 662. The number of villages with sakhis in the three 'older' districts is reported to be 345. It is not clear what the status is of the remaining 284 villages. The number can include new villages where the sanghas are in formation stage. It may include 'old' villages which never reached the stage of a sangha being formed and consolidated, it may include villages where sanghas have been fallen apart, and it could refer to villages with sanghas where the training of sakhis has been completed after five or six rounds of sakhi training. The study of the Mahila Sanghas by Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurty (1996) refers to a total of 554 sanghas in Gujarat. Almost 48% of these are considered strong sanghas. Approximately one third (34,6%) are sanghas of intermediate strength, whereas 18,5% or 103 sanghas are weak or have fallen apart. This would mean that in the three 'older' districts more than 80% of the villages covered have active sanghas.

Mahila Samakhya is present in almost 15% of the villages in three out of nineteen districts in Gujarat (the 33 villages in Banaskantha are not included in the calculation because no comparable figures are available). Villages with sakhis comprise slightly more than 9% of the villages in the three districts Baroda, Rajkot and Sabarkantha. Geographically and in quantitative terms the coverage is modest, but the overall coverage has increased significantly since the National Evaluation in 1993.

3. The context and the population reached

The four districts differ in terms of demographic, female employment and work participation and educational statistics (see annex 1). Both Rajkot and Baroda have a mix of urban and rural population and developing industrial, commercial and urban sectors. With its university Baroda is also an educational centre. In both districts there are vast discrepancies among the 'newly rich' commercial, industrial and educated classes, and the rural poor. The latter are among the landless rural population who depend for their living mainly on seasonal agricultural labour. They belong to the scheduled caste or impoverished caste groups, who are marginalised from the mainstream developments and mostly illiterate. These groups live in a social environment dominated by caste and patriarchal values which are reflected in the low status of women in the family and in society, and in for women oppressive social customs and traditions. Women are subjected to triple exploitation based on caste, class and gender factors, they have little or no control over their lives, over resources, they have little powers to influence decision making processes. Their lives are focused primarily on daily survival and they cannot rely on resources which help them to withstand incidences of violence and abuse in the family and in society. Whereas in Rajkot the dominance of industrialism and commercialism may be widespread over the entire district, Baroda seems to have remained more rural in the predominantly rural areas. In the east of the district there are backward tribal villages with a tribal system of governance based on patriarchal values.

In both districts roughly 10% of the female population has had any kind of formal education, which is slightly higher than the 9% average for the entire State. The female literacy rates are also higher than the State average of 32,3%, approximately 37% for Baroda and almost 40% for Rajkot. The rates for female literacy among the rural SC population in Baroda is 30% whereas in Rajkot it does not reach the 12%. For the tribal population groups the female literacy rates are lower, 6,3% in Baroda and 4,4% in Rajkot.

Both Sabarkantha and Banaskantha belong to the poorest districts in the State. They have a large proportion of tribal population groups, who live according to their own tribal laws and customs and who speak their own language. Female literacy rates are below the average for the entire State, 25,5% for Sabarkantha and 11,36% for Banaskantha. Female literacy rates among the SC and ST populations in Sabarkantha seem more favourable than for Banaskantha and reach almost 20% for

the SC population and 12% for the tribal population. This is partly due to missionary activities in some parts of the district under which schools have been established providing education for both boys and girls. In contrast to this the female literacy rates among the rural SC population in Banaskantha is much lower 8.2%, whereas among the female tribal population only 1.5% is literate. In Sabarkantha almost 8% of the female population has had any kind of school education, in Banaskantha this is only 2%.

The low educational level of the female population in a district like Banaskantha will have implications for the ability of Mahila Samakhya to identify and train local women who have at least a minimal educational background required to function as *sahayoginis*, particularly in the tribal areas. It may have implications for the coverage of the programme and its expansion, as well as for the training component and the support and guidance structure for the *sahayoginis*. This will put a heavy burden on the DIU and will require careful selection of a District Co-ordinator and Resource Persons ensuring that capable and qualified persons will be appointed with solid professional and field experience. At present the DIU staff consists of one Resource Person and support staff who operate under supervision and guidance from the District Programme Coordinator in Sabarkantha.

In all districts the Mahila Samakhya Programme has deliberately concentrated on the rural poor in multi caste areas as well as in tribal areas and by doing so has succeeded in reaching these groups. The *sangha* women we met, were for their living engaged in irregular and seasonal agricultural labour on the fields of landowners who belong to the higher caste groups. They earn wages up to 20 rupees per day depending on the season and the kind of labour. In addition to this they receive payment in kind and are given vegetables and fodder, which are extremely valuable in their survival economies. Most are landless, some keep goats or buffaloes. Livestock is important for survival because they provide dung (for fuel) and dairy products, they can be sold if cash is needed and therefore serve as a year round safety net. Cash availability is very low for labour is not available throughout the year. Until they became involved in the *sangha*, women had little say over their own and the family incomes and how it was spent.

According to a study done in Baroda *sangha* women make working days of 16 to 18 hours. About 34% is spent on agricultural labour, 23% on domestic activities, including outdoor activities like fetching water, collecting dung and making fuel, 8% is spent on care for cattle and 9% on child and self care. About 24% remains for sleeping. Illness is a constant threat as health care centres are a long walking distance away. Long working days and preoccupation with survival and feeding the family, as well as the constant concern about and care for small children give women little or no space to think that they could change their lives. "We women are destined to live a life of drudgery and oppression -seemed to be their attitude" (Rajalakshmi Sriram, 1996).

The pattern maybe slightly different for tribal groups and in other districts, for instance in Rajkot where wages are higher and attitudes seem to be more influenced by commercialism.

4. The growth of the Programme

The Programme

As an education programme of the National Government of India Mahila Samakhya is unique in its ideologically based approach aimed at initiating and sustaining a process of empowerment. The main target group are rural women living under conditions of poverty and marginalisation from societal, political and economic developments, and living in a social environment dominated by casteism and a patriarchal structure. The Programme aims at creating conditions - in terms of providing 'time', 'space' and an emotionally safe environment - for women to realise a collective process of empowerment based upon a common understanding of social justice and equality, enabling them to manage their own lives, plan their futures and take action to change their social

and material environments. In this context empowerment refers to the process whereby women gradually take more control over their lives, are able to negotiate with society from a position of strength, gain access to and control of resources, participate in political processes and challenge existing power structures. It implies a process of personal and group development, which includes, gaining self-respect and a sense of worth, gaining confidence and courage to challenge authority structures, developing a shared identity as women, building of inner and collective strength in order to be able to influence social and political processes and the direction of social change.

The main characteristics of the Programme are its philosophy based on women's equality and social justice, its process orientation, its flexibility in structure and mode of operation, its contextuality and responsiveness to local conditions, a participatory ethos or culture and decentralised decision making. The inherent flexibility and autonomy at State level encourages the emergence of multiple options and modes of operation for each State and District Programme in response to the prevailing conditions and issues raised by women.

Sangha formation

The thrust of the Programme is on the building of village-level mahila sanghas or women's collectives as a forum for sharing experiences and ideas, for learning and building knowledge, for raising and discussing common issues, for joint decision making, planning and taking action, and for shouldering joint responsibilities for management of collective initiatives such as a childcare centre, a savings scheme or a sangha hut. Ultimately the sangha collective is the epicentre which gives direction to the process of empowerment generating self-directed development and learning processes.

The formation of a sangha is a laborious process of building solidarity and strength among women who at the onset are very shy, sometimes hostile and full of distrust, have a low image of themselves and little confidence in their ability to change things. The process takes its own course and is built upon shared experiences of achievements, hopes, disappointments, struggles and successes. In this process of building solidarity collective action and collective struggle appear to be the major binding factors. Concrete achievements and successes are important in creating and reinforcing women's self-confidence. The process of sangha formation takes a long time and experience has learned that it cannot be short circuited nor hurried by external factors without the risk of interrupting the fragile bonding and breaking the process. Given this Mahila Samakhya has taken a formidable task upon its shoulders and has succeeded in reaching out to women who, under the prevailing conditions in Gujarat, have otherwise remained unreached, invisible and voiceless. From the first attempts to establish rapport with the poorest woman in the villages, to gain their trust and confidence in an often hostile environment, to start a process off through collective reflection, decision making, planning and concerted action, women's collectives have emerged (or are emerging) in more than 600 rural villages in Gujarat.

Sahayoginis and sakhis

The key actors in the building of a sangha are, apart from the village women, the sahayoginis and the sakhis. The sahayoginis are the field workers and motivators who initiate and guide the process of sangha formation at village level and look after a cluster of ten villages each. Between 1992 and 1996 the number of sahayoginis has increased from 54 to 81, in line with the expansion of the programme into new villages, blocks and the new District. Although there has been some turn-over because of sahayoginis moving away or leaving the programme, more than half of the sahayoginis have been with the programme from its initial stages (before 1992). Contrary to the sangha women most of the sahayoginis have been educated up to SSC level (a few are higher educated), and a considerable number come from an Upper Caste background. Half of the sahayoginis in Baroda belong to the tribal or SC population. Most of the sahayoginis we met

seemed remarkably capable and strong women, highly motivated and with a great commitment to their work, their 'mission' and to the sangha women.

The sakhis are sangha women who have been delegated by the sangha to act as activist once the sangha has been formed. In this respect the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat has a different approach from other States, e.g. Uttar Pradesh where sakhis are being trained first and then become the major activists in the sangha formation stage. It is not possible to determine which approach is more effective as they have evolved in response to the specific situation and because of all other intervening factors and specific conditions in the respective areas. The sakhis participate in the sakhi training, which consists of three to four condensed training periods during the year and monthly reflection/planning meetings at cluster and/or block levels. Another characteristic of Mahila Samakhya Gujarat is the adoption of a sakhi rotation system aimed at developing a small cadre of women at sangha level who have benefited from the exposure to the sakhi training. As the result of the sakhi rotating system more than 2000 women have been trained, each sangha having a cadre of five to six trained and committed sakhis. (For sanghas which started later the number is less.)

Capacity building and the training of sahayoginis and sakhis

The continuing process of training and capacity building of sakhis and sahayoginis has been and is crucial in the process of sangha building. A lot of effort has been invested, particularly in the initial stages of the Programme implementation, in the creation of a cadre of empowered, articulate, motivated and capable sahayoginis who in their turn would participate in the training of sakhis. The initial process training during the first years of the programme was conducted with assistance from an external training organisation based in Ahmedabad. The Sahayoginis who initially have been recruited in the districts and the first batches of sakhis have gone through an intensive learning/training process focused on their self-development and empowerment, perspective building, development of methods and skills for fieldwork with villagers, development of a participatory working ethos in line with the philosophy of Mahila Samakhya. The training has been reinforced by the system of monthly reviews and training related to up-coming issues. Overtime the training/learning processes have been given content and shape along with the involvement of the programme in the respective districts. This is an outcome of the inherent flexibility which has been built into the programme.

During the last five years the system of sakhi and sahayogini training has become internalized. Since 1992 Districts Training Teams (DTT) have been formed in all districts consisting of a group of sahayoginis, sakhis and district staff, who take care of the training of sakhis and sahayoginis. The reliance on outside training organisations has been reduced to inputs on certain issue based training. Last year the team district team in Baroda has taken the decision dissolve the DTT. Each sahayogini will now conduct the sakhi training in her own cluster, with the assistance from other sahayoginis. A similar decision is being debated in Sabarkantha. Through the sakhi training and the regular reflection meetings strong bonds are have been created between the sakhis and the sahayoginis as well as among sakhis from different villages which are reaching above and beyond the village level.

One of the advantages of internalising the sahayogini and sakhi training is the strengthening of internal capacities for training and increased self-reliance of the Programme in meeting the internal staff training needs. It also allows to evolve a training programme in response to the specific working conditions and the issues which emerge as the process evolves. However, the advantages can also turn into weaknesses. For example if the training system relies too much on the examples of successful experiences and approaches, if the training becomes like a recurring routine lacking innovative inputs and external perspectives, and if the training becomes more skill-oriented gradually losing its feminist or gender perspective, and leads to a stagnation in the process of building collective strength within the sangha.

District Implementation Unit and the State Programme Office

The State Programme Office (SPO) and the District Implementation Units (DIU) are responsible for the co-ordination of the Programme and the liaison with other organisations at the State and District levels. The State Programme Office has a State Programme Director (SPD) who is the main executive of the Programme in Gujarat, and two resource persons, a consultant, an accounts officer and support staff. The District Implementation Units are responsible for the facilitation of the implementation of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in the District. The District Programme Co-ordinator (DPC) is in charge of the DIU. The staffing depends on the number of villages covered and consists of two resource persons, a consultant (who often act as a third resource person), an accounts officer and the necessary support staff.

At the State level there has been a succession of State Programme Directors, all of them Government Officers and some of them having the responsibility for Mahila Samakhya as added charge. At District level there has been absence of, or there were temporary District Co-ordinators. There were changing resource persons and consultants, or these posts being vacant for longer periods. Three resource persons have remained with the programme from the very beginning one of them having become the District Co-ordinator in one of the districts. Since about one year non-government District Co-ordinators have been appointed in the three 'older' districts. The DPC Sabarkantha, who as a resource person has a long standing field experience dating from the beginning of the Programme is also in charge of Banaskantha. A few of the newly appointed resource persons have been working as *sahayoginis*. Those who have been recruited from outside the Programme at State and District levels are young and motivated, college educated women who have had little working experience prior to joining the Programme. They may have to give extra attention to building communication skills and to gaining the respect from older and experienced *sahayoginis*, from *sakhis* and *sangha* women, from local authorities and representatives from NGO partners. In this respect Mahila Samakhya Gujarat might think of developing an institutional mechanism for induction and in-service training of new resource persons and consultants, which at present is lacking. They learn on the spot by doing and by exposure to the field experience of others and by attending training workshops organised by other organisations, or in other States.

Stagnation and re-orientation

When the new District Co-ordinators took charge at the end of 1994/beginning 1995 a certain degree of stagnation in growth had set in, the emergence of which had already been observed by the National Evaluation conducted in 1993. The stagnation was manifest in e.g.

- shading of the Mahila Samakhya concept and of the ideological principles of the Programme,
- focus on group-solidarity building as an end in itself and losing sight of building strength and sharing power within the *sanghas*;
- focus on too many different issues simultaneously and a tendency of Mahila Samakhya becoming a mobilisation and issue based programme with an emphasis on achievements and targets rather than on how the achievements relate and contribute to women's learning and empowerment processes;
- emphasis in the training on capacity and skills building at *sakhi* and *sahayogini* levels and less attention to perspective building and to building of capacities and empowerment within the *sanghas*,
- and an overall lack of direction.

From 1995 onwards interventions have taken place in response to the outcomes of the National Evaluation (1993), which have set off a process of reorientation and re-direction of the entire Programme. Apart from the measures related to the staffing the interventions included a series of re-orientation training sessions focused on feminist perspective building, on gender awareness and

sensitivity, and on sangha-process documentation at different levels for all districts, as well as district-wise. The National Training Consultant, the resource person from the National Office and members of the National Resource Group have played a vital role conducting the various training sessions. A number of *sahayoginis* and staff members attended gender sensitivity training workshops organised by other organisations.

The process of re-directing the Programme is taking a different pace and shape in each of the 'older' districts and still needs to continue. In Baroda it has led to a stronger focus on the integration of a feminist perspective in all programme activities and training, and the identification of three major focal issues which will give direction to the District Programme: women's legal rights, (reproductive) health as a right of women, and the rights of women and girls to basic education. The Programme in Rajkot may perhaps need further external inputs in the process of re-orientation and regaining clarity about the direction of the Programme. At the time of the evaluation visit the Rajkot team was facing a number of difficult questions and decisions. The problems do not seem to be limited to mere management issues, but relate to the orientation and direction of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in the District.

5. Major features of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat

In spite of the structural and ideological problems mentioned above the Programme has gained momentum in all districts particularly on the activity side, thanks to the strengths and resilience at the field level e.g. the *sahayoginis*, the *sakhis* and the resource persons who all along have remained with the programme, and thanks to the support from various quarters within and outside the Programme structure e.g. members of the Executive Committee, the General Council, the National Resource Group, the District Resource Groups, partner organisations and others who believe in the Mahila Samakhya approach.

In the initial stages the emphasis of the Programme has been on

- . establishing a cadre of trained *sahayoginis* or fieldworkers who were to cover a circle of approximately the villages in order to establish rapport with the women and start the formation of village level women's collectives,
- . facilitating the formation and consolidation of a sangha or women's collectives, part of this process is,
- . the organisation of sangha meetings where issues are being raised and discussed, where learning takes place and actions are planned,
- . building solidarity by mobilising women around common interests and sharing the experience of realising that they can effect changes by using their collective strength,
- . the selection by the sangha's of village activists or *sakhi*'s,
- . the orientation and skills training of *sakhi*'s in yearly recurring training cycles according to the *sakhi* rotation system.

The process of sangha formation has been and is being supported and reinforced by

- . regular review and planning meetings at cluster, block and district levels for development of strategies in response to the issues raised in the sangha meetings,
- . supporting sangha initiatives by organizing relevant inputs in terms of information, training, facilitating linkages with other programme's and agencies,
- . organising and mobilisation of women for events like the International Women's Day and International Literacy,
- . capacity building at DIU, *sahayogini*, *sakhi* and gradually also at sangha levels on common issues related to e.g. child care, women's (reproductive) health and sexuality, legal issues and women's rights, literacy, post-literacy and numeracy skills, the participation of women in the Panchayati Raj system, repair and maintenance of hand-pumps, masonry and building skills.

In the initial stages of sangha formation mainly infra-structural and community issues like access to water, road repair, electricity have been taken up. Such issues are relatively non-controversial and do not threaten the existing power structures and gender relationships. But they involve some amount of collective struggle and have helped in building solidarity and confidence in collective action.

Prevailing issues which over time have emerged and given attention to in the districts show a varied profile of activities related to e.g.:

- access to and availability of water (Rajkot, Sabarkantha). Particularly in Rajkot water seems to have become a dominant caste related issue influenced by ideas about pollution;
- solving immediate problems by accessing government schemes and resources for road repair, electricity, widow's pensions, supply of rationed goods, as well as for credit and employment schemes such as DW CRA and TRYSEM (all districts);
- legal issues and women's rights (Baroda, Rajkot), including issues related to violence against women and abolishment of alcoholism (Sabarkantha); in Baroda the emergence of a voluntary legal support system through the women's courts (nari adalat), and legal awareness + literacy training for sangha women;
- health care and women's health awareness (Sabarkantha, Baroda); in Baroda it has been given a new dimension by focusing on health as a right and on women's reproductive health and sexuality: implementation of a health survey, training of local healers and birth attendants (dais), attention to witch-hunting;
- adult literacy and education (all districts), with special attention to female literacy in local languages in the tribal areas (Sabarkantha, Baroda); involvement in the Total Literacy Campaign (all districts);
- childcare (Sabarkantha, Rajkot, Baroda), in Baroda with special attention to voluntary childcare centres run by the sanghas;
- girls education in formal schools, non-formal education classes for girls, accessibility and use of scholarship funds for girls (all districts) and in Sabarkantha the establishment of a Balika Shiksha Kendra as a residential school for out-of-school girls from tribal communities;
- women's participation in politics, particularly related to the Panchayati Raj elections (all districts);
- economic empowerment by accessing government schemes and programmes for income generating activities (Rajkot) and setting up saving schemes managed by sangha women for personal and group purposes (all districts);
- building a space for women, Mahila Kutir: continuation of the processes involved in obtaining land, designing, planning, resourcing and building of a Mahila Kutir (Rajkot, Baroda, Sabarkantha);
- (financial) self-reliance of the sanghas by the adoption of the sangha model and the transfer of the sangha honorarium to the sangha as seed money for future collective or sangha related activities, for which rules are to be formulated and decided upon by the sangha membership.

One of the special features of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat is e.g. the attention being given to adolescent girls by the organisation of 'Yuvati Shibir' in Sabarkantha, Baroda and later Rajkot, and 'Mahiti Mela' in Banaskantha. Health awareness and sexuality are among the issues dealt with in these camps. The participating girls are supposed to share what they have learned with their age-mates in the villages. Sometimes these girls have formed their own groups.

Another feature of the Gujarat Programme are the 8th of March (International Women's day) and International Literacy Day celebrations, which are turned out into festivals of melas lasting a whole week. They are organised around specific themes of common interest or linked to current events, like women's health, Panchayati Raj, legal literacy, the inauguration of a Mahila Kutir. Such celebrations are organised cluster, block, or even district-wise and attracted more than ten thousand women. 1995 was a peak year with 28 programmes attended by 25,000 women.

These issues are seen by the staff as playing a role in the sangha building process as they involve collective analysis, planning, decision making and actions.

The achievements of the Programme in terms of numbers of childcare centres and literacy classes, mahila kutir construction, results of Panchayati Raj elections, Youth Camps, Melas etc. have been well documented in recent Programme brochures and the Annual Reports and need not be repeated here.

6. The impact of the Mahila Samakhya Programme on women's lives

6.1 Women's personal and family lives

The Programme as it has evolved has made an empowering impact on the lives of women participating in the programme at different levels. The strongest noticeable effect is demonstrated in the existence of women's collectives in the villages. Sangha women give testimony that the collectives or sanghas have emerged out of a growing sense of sisterhood, an increased sense of worth, dignity and self-confidence, and increased understanding of the power of collective action in order effect changes such as availability of water or fighting alcoholism.

What women reported

For sangha women the most important changes mentioned are that

- . they have come out of isolation in their former lives hidden in the shadows of the kitchen and behind their veils,
- . their world has broadened and they dare to face the world with dignity, with an upright face and opened eyes,
- . the sangha gives them a space where they feel safe to share their life problems, and they have shed their fears of talking openly,
- . they have gained the courage to address and challenge people in positions of authority demanding their rights and making them accountable (government officers, village leaders, school teachers, the police etc.),
- . the sangha as a source of solidarity and support has given them the courage to fight social and family issues, to resist their dominating husbands and in-laws,
- . they can move around and go to meetings without asking permission or being questioned,
- . they have developed aptitudes for family counselling and providing services to others,
- . they are able to successfully undertake joint actions and access government schemes and resources which improve their situation,
- . they have awareness about the banking system and are capable to deal with savings in order to improve the survival base of their families, they know how to run their own saving system, which provides them with cash in times of need,
- . they have learned to put their signature instead of a thumbprint, this gives them pride and a feeling of dignity,
- . they are aware of the importance of schooling for girls and are determined to let their daughters go to school up to the tenth grade,
- . they can take care of their and their children's health better,
- . they get more respect from their husbands, their families, the community and feel that their voices are being listened to,
- . they can influence family decisions and are able to prevent their men from using the scarce family resources on alcohol,
- . they are aware of their voting rights, they have cast their votes for the panchayati raj elections and supported a female candidate,
- . they are able to run their sangha meetings without the assistance from the sahayogini,
- . and they have come to understand that together they are powerful and have become

force to be reckoned with.

They further reported better health and use of family planning methods, they have shed their fear for raising intimate and personal issues related to their bodies and health. Their traditional notions about their bodies, their reproductive system, and their sexuality have been demystified. They are no longer afraid of being treated by male physicians. They use local medicines, they have managed to get the health workers to come to their villages and they visit PHC centres, which they have become to trust.

The impact and women's empowerment

The impact of the Mahila Samakhya on the lives of rural women is that the sangha has become a source of strength upon which they can draw for solving personal and community problems individually as well as collectively. The sangha has provided women with the social and emotional space which enables them to shed their fears and break out of physical and cultural barriers that have confined their life-space. The sangha confirms their identity as women and gives space and right to a dignified life for single women. Through their ability to access knowledge and analyze their situation critically, and their ability to use their collective powers and negotiate changes from a position of strength, they can further expand their life-space. Slowly and gradually they beginning to assert their rights in order to get greater control of their lives and make changes.

The area of women's empowerment has many dimensions which interact and are related to women's identity, dignity and self respect, to women's reproductive rights and control over their own lives, to economic justice and right to have access to and control of economic resources, and to political empowerment and women's right to vote, to participate in decision making and to influence the direction of societal development. It relates to equality, social justice and women's legal and human rights and it relates to the demystification of ideologies based on patriarchal values.

The areas where Mahila Samakhya, through the mahila sanghas, has achieved most apart from gaining dignity and self-respect is in accessing government schemes and services, in health awareness and care, in education and particularly education for girls. The approach used is based on women's assertion of their (equal) rights and entitlements to social welfare services, community provisions, economic schemes, educational provisions and health services. They do not challenge power structures and particularly gender relationships directly. But often the access to such provisions is limited to or monopolised by the dominant power groups. The successes of the sangha not only give women a sense of achievement, reinforcing their inner strength, it also affects the balance of powers in an indirect way, not in the least by the public respect and recognition gained. And this reflects back on the status and bargaining power of women in their families, their increased control of financial resources and family decisions, and their ability to fight and resist violence.

The direct improvements are mainly noticeable in the area of basic survival needs and improving the circumstances in the personal and family sphere.

The empowerment agenda of Mahila Samakhya is bound to be at odds with the non-interventionist approach of the Programme and the emphasis on women identifying their needs and priorities. Finding the balance between this is problem facing the sahayoginis and the District staff. The agendas of the sangha women are based on their experienced realities within the framework of their geo-political and socio-cultural environments and the accepted values and biases that shape their positions in their gendered societies. Given their situation of poverty and deprivation they naturally articulate their needs in terms of basic survival and improvement of the quality of life. Without a conscious and deliberate input on building new perspectives based on equality, social justice and women's human rights there is a risk of stagnation of the growth of the

empowerment processes. A day to day practice of constant preoccupation with running after meeting women's immediate needs may overtake (unintended) the long term empowerment perspective. And this may create a danger that Mahila Samakhya becomes more of a demand driven organisation facilitating access to information and development resources, thereby losing its identity as an empowerment Programme.

This is a very complex issue that the Programme needs to continuously come back to in its training strategy and that should remain on the agenda for critical reflection.

Sakhis and sangha women

The women we met in the meetings with the sanghas were impressively articulate and powerful. We noted, however, that spokes women were mainly the women who have attended the sakhi training. Questions can be raised as to what extent they have been able to share what they have learned with the sangha women and to which extent their empowerment has percolated down to the women in the sangha. The sakhi rotation system has as result that the sanghas are led by a small group of well trained sakhis. There is a risk that the sakhis will take a dominating position and the effect on building strength within the sanghas among sangha women could be less.

As mentioned in the introduction the current evaluation visit did not allow us to get an insight in the internal dynamics of the sangha development and the dimensions of the empowerment processes of and among women at the sangha level. Such insight is necessary for the further development of empowerment strategies with women at the sangha level. The initiative of the Programme to start a project of participatory documentation of the sangha development process with the sangha members can be considered as a start for getting into the heart of the sangha. This can be supplemented by an in-depth study focused on the internal and external dynamics guiding the processes within the sangha. The study could further provide insight in e.g.

- . the understanding of sangha women of concepts like empowerment, social justice and equality, and their perception of what a mahila sangha is and could be;
- . their views on how the sangha has impacted their lives personally, within their families and in the community;
- . their experiences and perceptions of the changes in the relationships and power structures within their families and in the community;
- . their views on their potential, individually and collectively through the sangha, to affect and change the prevailing power-relations within their families, in the community and beyond,
- . their ideas about sharing power and responsibilities within the sangha and in their families;
- . their views on breaking caste, class and age barriers among women in the village;
- . as well as
- . their views on the future development and growth of the sangha at village level and within a larger network of similar sanghas.

The study would have to be based on an action oriented and participatory approach with sufficient time and space for joint reflection and analysis, and for establishing rapport and mutual understanding.

We further observed that the training system has also led to the creation of strong bonds between sakhis at cluster level and between sakhis, and sahayoginis. These bonds go beyond and above the level of the individual sanghas. Whereas sahayoginis and sakhis are discussing sangha federations and setting up mutual support mechanisms at cluster and block level, the sanghas and sangha women themselves might not have achieved sufficient strength and be involved in these discussions and ensuing initiatives.

In terms of identity, internal dynamics and sharing of responsibilities, sensitivity to women's equality and social justice, use of collective strength and self-reliance in managing its own affairs,

about 45% of the sanghas in Gujarat can be called strong. Yet, more than half of the sanghas need further strengthening and support.

Most of the training within the Mahila Samakhya Programme is directed a capacity building and awareness/perspective building of sahayoginis, sakhis and DiU staff. Apart from the health awareness training camps, literacy camps, activities around the Panchayati Raj elections and special training for selected groups of women (e.g. childcare centre teachers, local healers and health workers, para-legal counsellors, hand-pump mechanics, elected panchayati raj members) there have been no training programmes designed for and directed at empowerment of the sangha women. It will be a great challenge for the programme staff with the sakhis and sahayoginis to engage in evolving special training/learning programmes to be conducted with women in their sanghas around issues raised by them focused on perspective building, strengthening of the sangha from within and capacity building for the self-reliance of the sangha.

6.2 Political participation and women's rights

Women have started conquering new public spaces during the last two years through their involvement in the Panchayati Raj elections as voters and as candidates, and through the initiatives of women in e.g. Baroda to establish women's courts (nari adalat) at the Block level in front of the police and magistrate's office.

Panchayati Raj

Mahila Samakhya has facilitated women's participation in the elections by providing information, organising workshops and public events, providing guidance and support to women who were standing for the elections, providing training and support to elected women. Sangha women used their right to vote in supporting female candidates, women contested unfair election politics and resisted pressurising and being bribed. 295 women including sahayoginis, sakhis and village women stood for elections, 284 women got elected of which few resigned for personal reasons or because they had to make a choice between Mahila Samakhya and their political function. A number of sangha women have become a Sarpanch. The experience has helped to demystify the notion that political functions are beyond reach for rural women with their backgrounds.

The activities of Mahila Samakhya in relation to the elections have strengthened its visibility. It has been taken as a learning experience which has been analysed at different levels. It also created high expectations about women's power and ability to influence political decision making from a perspective of social justice and equality. And now women begin to realise the enormous challenge they are coping with from their new positions in the current socio-political environment with its inherent gender biases against women. By now, almost a year after the elections, it is a good time for a review and assessment of the impact on the elected women, and look into the need for effective support in the form of further training and the development of a common women's agenda.

Women's courts

In all districts attention is given to legal issues and violence against women. Legal awareness training has been on the agenda in the three older districts directed at sahayogini and sakhi levels. Legal committees have been established to solve and strategize about legal issues. And in Baroda women's legal rights has become identified as a central focus of attention in three blocks. In the same district an exciting initiative to establish a voluntary legal support structure for women at the block level under responsibility of women from mahila sanghas has emerged.

Women's issues related to family violence, divorce and custody cases are being raised during sangha meetings as individual cases and are solved through persuasion, counselling, and if necessary social pressure or public exposure. After such cases became recognised as legal issues sangha women of different villages in Baroda decided to establish a women's court or 'nari adalat' at the block level. This court holds weekly public meetings under a 'neem' tree in front of the police and village magistrate's office, or in a public space like a theatre. The court provides time and a public and accessible place where women can bring their cases. Everyone can join the meetings. Eleven sangha women and a sahayogini constitute the court and one of them, an elderly lady, is the judge. The reasons for establishing the court are that legal procedures are lengthy and women are unable to afford the costs. The women's court is in a better position than the official court to understand the situation from a women's point of view and the case is taken seriously. At present there are three nari adalats in two blocks in Baroda.

The cases taken to the court relate to family violence, alcoholism, wife beating, custody of children, separation, widows pensions, property issues, child abuse and rape. Women from the ten cluster villages bring their cases to the court and nowadays also cases from other villages in the block are brought in. The court procedures include the hearing of all parties and getting information, counselling aimed at reconciliation, getting a public statement in writing from the perpetrator, support to the woman, and if necessary involvement of the police, the judge, or the revenue officer. The initiative has been supported by the three months training course organised by the DIU on women and law, which was attended by 25 women from three blocks. The training focused on

- . legal awareness, women's rights and the use of their rights,
- . legal literacy and literacy for documentation,
- . information and problem solving strategies.

In its preparation of the course the team produced a book on the language of the court to be used in training for legal literacy. The local judge participated in the course as resource person and he co-operates with the women's court. The women who attended the training act as para legal counsellor in their villages and some are members of the nari adalats. After the training the courts were able to deal more effectively with women's legal cases, they have been able to solve a number of cases of rape and child abuse.

A second training is planned for another batch of women who are selected by the sanghas and who are willing to take the responsibility of running the court and/or provide legal counselling at village level. As the majority of trainees who attended the legal training course were elderly women it is suggested to pay attention to including younger women in the training course. And more attention is to be given to strengthening the self reliance of the women's courts and equip the trainees with skills that reduce the reliance of the courts on the support from the sahayoginis (who now takes records and writes the reports).

The nari adalats have a great impact on the public recognition of women's legal rights, on the visibility of Mahila Samakhya, and on the credibility of the court as a trustworthy support structure because of its transparent rules and procedures. It has created a change in the attitude of officials and in their application of the rules: they now take women's issues seriously. The initiative has commanded respect and co-operation from the local authorities. And the court has created a sense of sisterhood among women across caste and village divides as women from other caste groups and from other villages also bring their cases and they are treated equally.

In Saharkantha cases of family violence and abuse against women are raised in the sangha meetings. One of the obstacles in dealing with these cases from a legal perspective is that most of the sanghas are in tribal areas which have their own tribal laws and do not fall under the jurisdiction of the national legal system. A study about women's rights under tribal law in different tribal systems is required in order for women to know their rights and how to make use of them in order to seek justice. A better understanding of the tribal legal system is also relevant in relation to

other legal issues such as property and inheritance rights and rights to the use of tribal e.g. for the building of the sangha hut.

6.3 Economic empowerment

Economic and income generating activities are a priority area in Rajkot where sangha women are engaged in saving and loans and in various income generating activities by successfully accessing schemes (DWCRA, TRYSEM). Women have moved into new occupations like hand-pump mechanics and masons and thereby they are occupying new economic spaces. The situation in Rajkot did not allow for an assessment of these activities on women's economic empowerment. In the other districts there is less attention to economic development in the Programme apart from engagement of sanghas in saving and loan schemes and efforts to access DWCRA loans.

Savings and loans

These saving schemes give women a feeling of having more control over financial resources and access to cash when in need. Loans are mostly used for individual and personal purposes, seldom for investing in economic and/or collective enterprises. Earlier investments in economic activities have not always been successful and seem to have been abandoned. There is also a great concern about sanghas breaking apart because of conflicts arising from dealing with saving schemes and from the emergence of economic interest groups within the sangha.

Economic development and interest groups

Economic issues in areas of e.g. wages, improved labour conditions, employment creation and income generation seem to be difficult to deal with. The need for economic development, regular work, higher and stable incomes is high on the priority list of sangha women. A one-sided focus on economic development and income generation activities can lead to uneven development within the sangha, conflicting economic interests between sangha members, closing the sangha off for new members, breaking the solidarity within the sangha and eventually breaking up of the sangha and interruption of the empowerment processes. One option to deal with such conflicting interest is that the economic interest group moves out of the sangha and forms a society which is independent from the sangha as happened with the hand-pump mechanics in Banda District in Uttar Pradesh who have established their own society. This does not imply that the women have to give up their membership and participation in the sangha as a forum of women as women.

Need for rethinking and strategizing

Dealing with the recurring economic demands of women is an area for which Mahila Samakhya has not yet found a suitable answer, nor has it been able to define its role. Mahila Samakhya is not an employment creation or economic development programme and is unable to deliver the necessary inputs and know how for economic development. As an education programme for women's empowerment Mahila Samakhya's role is not to engage in running income generating activities or saving schemes. Instead it can focus on environment and capacity building. The economic empowerment of women is an area which needs further thinking and strategizing perhaps by exploring possibilities for capacity building and vocational skills training in combination with developing partnerships with economic/rural development programmes.

The Gujarat Women Economic Development Corporation has recently issued a directory on Government Programmes for women which include a wide variety of schemes for training and capacity building, loans and financial assistance related to rural and agricultural development

aimed at agricultural labourers, population below the poverty line and the tribal population. Many of the schemes are known in Mahila Samakhya and are being accessed (such as DWCRA and TRYSEM), but active searching may lead to new options and possibilities for vocational training, training in various areas of rural extension or environmental resource management, scholarship funds, loans etc.. A similar active exploration can be made in the world of voluntary agencies and private organisations.

Collaboration with other agencies

There has been some reluctance in the past within Mahila Samakhya to seek co-operation with other development organisations due to the negative experiences in the early stages of the Programme and the concern about conflicting views on women's empowerment and development, and conflicting styles of operation. Over the last years there has been a marked increase in the collaboration with other agencies especially in the areas of health (CHETNA, ARPAN, SEWA), legal issues and violence against women (SHAKSHI), gender sensitivity and feminist perspective building (JAGORI, ICECD and others) and water (UNICEF). The lessons learned from such collaborative efforts could help in evolving more active approaches to collaboration with other agencies especially in the area of economic/rural/ agricultural and environmental development. Instead of focusing on organisations which are already present in a certain geographical area Mahila Samakhya could encourage rural development organisations to come to areas which have been unreached and are now uncovered by Mahila Samakhya. One of the disadvantages of the Mahila Samakhya policy to expand to areas where no other agencies are working is that there are also few opportunities for linkages. For instance the Training Women in Agriculture (TWA) programme is implemented in six districts in Gujarat. Only one district is also covered by Mahila Samakhya i.e. Banaskantha and initiatives to start collaboration have already been taken. Possibilities could be explored to have women from the other district attend some of the training programmes and/or the TWA could be invited to expand its activities into districts covered by Mahila Samakhya.

Earlier evaluations (1992, 1993) already emphasised the importance of developing a clear set of terms of agreement with the collaborating organisations in order to ensure that the ideological principles of Mahila Samakhya are not violated. The terms of agreement can be based on the non-negotiable principles of the Programme.

6.4 Mahila Samakhya support structures

Under the Mahila Samakhya scheme are provisions to facilitate the mahila sanghas in creating local support system in the form of

- childcare centres which would provide women with 'time' for themselves to participate in sangha meetings, for learning, and to be able to leave their young children safely while going for work;
- the construction of a sangha hut which gives women a 'space' for themselves, to come together, have meetings and joint activities, find relief and support from other women, for learning together and storage of the sangha goods.

The creation of these support structures requiring joint decision making and planning, visits to authorities, writing applications, mobilisation of resources etc. was also looked upon as a process building activity which would reinforce group solidarity and strength.

Mahila kutir

From the very beginning after the sanghas have been formed the women have been engaged in the process of hut or 'kutir' construction. Since then it has been an on-going struggle to go

through the procedures of sangha registration, obtaining land, designing the hut, planning its construction, finding alternative resources meet the costs and supplement the Mahila Samakhya provision, organising labour and building supplies, doing and supervising the construction etc. Each district has a Mahila Kutir committee to look into the progress made and develop strategies when new problems arise. At present ten Mahila Kutirs have been constructed whereas more than 70 sanghas are in the different stages of the process of obtaining land, finding resources, planning for and implementing construction work. The building of a Mahila Kutir has become a lengthy learning process requiring a great deal of stamina from the sangha women and sahayoginis. The process has met with many disappointments and a certain fatigue seems to have set in because of sometimes insurmountable obstacles. The main constraints are

- problems of getting land allocated, particularly in the tribal areas where land issues fall under the Tribal Area Development Programme,
- the allocation for the sangha hut under the Mahila Samakhya is insufficient to meet the costs involved.

and perhaps some inflexibility in the adherence to the Mahila Samakhya rules regarding the transfer of land to the sanghas. The issues have been raised frequently in the Executive Council but it has not resulted in creative solutions and perhaps more flexibility in application of the rules. One problem might be the lack of understanding about the tribal legislation regarding the use and allocation of land and the implications in respect to the status of the sanghas autonomous entities within a government programme.

Sanghas have been very resourceful in finding solutions for the lack of funds. In many cases they have been able to raise funds from other sources, to find low cost solutions and to provide their own labour. Yet it is necessary to review the budgetary allocations for the sangha huts under the Mahila Samakhya budget and to bring it in line with the current price levels.

Child Care Centres

The establishment of child care centres has been on the Mahila Samakhya agenda in Gujarat from the beginning. Activities started in sanghas which had gained sufficient strength to take up the responsibility of running a centre, where the demand was raised, where local balsakhis (teachers for childcare centres) could be found and where there was no accessible ICDS centre in the neighbourhood. In the tribal areas the first centres were set up as branches of the ICDS centres and with support from ICDS in the form of health visits and some snacks. Also in other areas there is co-ordination and co-operation with ICDS. In many villages child centres have been set up, part of them are still running, but quite a number have been closed down due to various problems related to the management of the centre, the balsakhis moving away or conflicts. Moreover, the child care centres seemed sometimes to have become regarded more as a government provision like the ICDS centres than as a centre of and running under the responsibility of the sanghas. In Baroda and Sabarkantha the situation with regard to the child care centres has been reviewed and amendments have been made to (re)link the centres to the sanghas and bring them under their full responsibility. In Baroda the child care centres are now run on voluntary basis by and with contributions from the sanghas. Parents pay a token fee of Rs 2.- per child per month. Systems have been set-up for monitoring and supervision by the sangha members. In the case of Baroda supervision is done by members from other sanghas.¹

The childcare centres visited were well run, lively and energising with care for the children's needs. The centres have three to four balsakhis sharing tasks in dealing with children of different ages. At least one balsakhi is literate and trained in pre-school activities. Anganwadi workers come to the centre and check the children's health. Parents are involved in the running of the centre,

¹ We were unable during this visit to talk to officers from ICDS and get their views on the interface between the MS centres and the ICDS centres, on the co-operation at policy and at field level and on how MS has influenced the ICDS approach.

especially mothers/sangha members who take turns in preparing food and ensure that foodstocks are supplied.

The differences with the ICDS Child Care Centres are that the MS Centres are nearby and accessible, that the environment is child friendly, that the balsakhis are from the local community and speak the familiar dialect, that teaching methods are innovative using local songs and games, that the sangha women are deciding about the timings, the place, responsible for paying the balsakhis' honorarium and the provision of food, and above all the centres are 'owned' by the sanghas.

There are good linkages with the local schools, children from the Child Care Centres enrol in the schools, are well adjusted to the school rhythm, they speak out and seem to be performing well. In one of the centres the balsakhi was engaged in teaching school age girls and prepare them for admission in the village school. And sometimes schools will send some children to the centre for remedial coaching as the school is unable to provide the individual attention needed. After some time the children are ready to go back to school.

Areas to look into are the training of the balsakhis who could be given more training in e.g. pre-school methods, child psychology and development, dealing with children of different ages, toy making and use of local materials. What is clearly coming out is that the child care centres are more than just taking care of young children, they have become important in environment building for school education, especially for girls, and they provide the children with a child-friendly learning environment and prepare them for school. There is of course a risk of becoming over ambitious, expecting a higher professional pedagogical level than is feasible within the given framework, the local conditions and available means. A realistic balance need to be found between what is feasible and the need for strengthening the pedagogic skills for pre-school learning.

A total review of the financial pattern and provisions for the Child Care Centres is required (see also the recommendations from the study of the Child Care Centres in Gujarat by Rajalakshmi Sriram, 1996).

6.5 Cutting across caste and class divides

Most of the sanghas in Mahila Samakhya are limited in class composition to Scheduled castes or belong to specific tribal groups. There are mixed sanghas of harijan and tribal women if they happen to live in the same village. In principle there are no formal restrictions for women from other caste groups to join the sanghas. But so far there have been no active efforts to reach out to women from other groups to become a member of the sanghas. Women from other caste groups are welcomed and sometimes attend sangha meetings. Women from upper caste groups have started to bring cases of violence and injustice to the sanghas. And the nari adalats in Baroda District deal with legal cases from women regardless of their caste background. If the sanghas are to move towards becoming a community wide women's forum and collective the sanghas could perhaps more actively try to involve women from other castes in their activities. The melas and celebrations organised by the sanghas are a start for breaking class/caste barriers. Child care centres, literacy classes, securing access of girls to good education, women's health and legal rights, and community issues like water are areas of common women's interests where traditional caste divides can be broken. Half of the sahayoginis themselves are from upper caste background, they find no difficulty because of their background and they have developed strong bonds with sangha women from the SC or ST communities. They can support the sanghas' efforts to reach out to other women and be a kind of 'role model'.

In the sanghas we observed a predominance of women from older age groups. This seems logical as they are the women in the household who have perhaps more freedom of movement, time and decision making power. Younger women with small children who have the position of a daughter-

in-law are perhaps more difficult to reach and involve. The sanghas could give more attention to involving young women and look into their needs, and to reviewing relationships of power and authority among women within the family from a perspective of equality.

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat pays attention to adolescent women through the organisation of camps for this group. And young women have formed their own groups or sanghas which could become associated with the mahila sanghas.

6.6 Toward a grassroots women's movement

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat has an impressive record in mobilising more than ten thousand women around issues like women's health, political participation, women and law, women's literacy etc. during melas and international celebrations. These celebrations have become major events giving women from different backgrounds the opportunity to move out of their houses and get together, to celebrate and have fun, to listen to and participate in discussions. Nowadays the melas are planned and organised by the sanghas and reach out also to women outside the sanghas. The melas and celebrations have reinforced the visibility of Mahila Samakhya and the sanghas in the communities, in the block and the districts. And the sanghas give public evidence of their capacity to organise these events and for mobilising other women.

Sanghas have started networking and building linkages outside their villages. Their lobby and mobilisation activities are no longer limited to survival issues and their rights to access public services and schemes. By their involvement in the Panchayati Raj system women have started entering the political arena. And by establishing women's courts women are asserting their right to justice. The seeds for the emergence of a grassroots women's movement are there. Like other processes within Mahila Samakhya the building of such movement takes its own course and pace should not be hastened. Its growth is linked to the ability of Mahila Samakhya to broaden its coverage within the villages, within the blocks and within the districts, and develop a certain 'critical mass' of sangha women.

The Mahila Samakhya Programme is focusing on women in rural areas and seems to function, apart from individual and personal contacts, in relative isolation from the (perhaps urban oriented) women's movement in Gujarat. The Programme could perhaps make more intensive efforts of linking the sanghas with the developments within the women's movement and establishing closer contacts with women's organisations and groups within the districts and in the State.

7. Emerging trends

Most of the emerging trends have already been mentioned in the previous sections. They are related to the process of re-orientation and include

- the new emphasis on conscious integration of a gender perspective to the issues raised in the sanghas,
- the identification of a limited number of focal points per district around which activities will be centred,
- renewed attention to the role of Mahila Samakhya in relation to the economic empowerment of women and collaboration with other agencies,
- mobilisation of women around women's issues and the gradual emergence of a grassroots women's movement,
- the increasing emphasis on training at sangha level aimed at perspective building and capacity building for self reliance of the sangha.

One of the emerging trends in the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Gujarat is the transition from the sakhhi rotation model to the so called sangha model. It means that sakhis are no longer treated

as learners who are receiving a stipend during the year that they are 'in training'. Instead the sakhi honorarium is converted into a sangha honorarium that is to be transferred directly to the sangha. This sangha fund is at the disposal of the sangha and serves as seed money for future collective or sangha related activities. The sangha is to develop a set of rules and procedures for the use of the money.

We have no information about the experience with the sangha model which has been adopted at the beginning of last year. It is seen by the Mahila Samakhya staff as an important step towards decentralised financial management and decision making by the sangha. As such it is to be seen as a very positive step towards self-reliance of the sanghas, if it is used well. And if it is accompanied by training of the sangha members in financial management and skills required to be self-reliant and not dependent on the recording and calculating skills of sahayoginis or literate outsiders.

The decision also calls for some caution, because it may create a wrong impression of Mahila Samakhya being an input delivery organisation which provides subsidies to mahila sanghas. In other States like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh decisions have been taken or debates are going on about putting a three year time limit to the period a sangha is eligible to a Mahila Samakhya input in the sangha fund. After that period the sangha is to be able to mobilise its own financial resources for its sustenance and self-reliance.

Having a sangha fund may also put limits to the willingness of the sangha members to enlarge its membership and grow into a village movement, because the fund is to be shared by a larger number of beneficiaries. These remarks are calling for caution and careful documentation of the processes involved in order to draw lessons for future strategizing.

Another emerging trend is the on-going debate in Mahila Samakhya about cluster forming and the building of a federation of sanghas in combination with the development of support structures at the block level. Sanghas are already actively engaged in networking and mobilisation around common issues above sangha level. Sakhis are seeking support from sakhis in other villages to strengthen their voices and powers when dealing with authorities at block or district levels. And sanghas have initiated their own legal support structure by establishing their women's courts. These dynamics emerging from the sanghas are very positive in terms of growing strength. The role of Mahila Samakhya is then to strengthen the human resources for these sangha networks and support structures. This will provide new roles for sangha women and sakhis, such as the para legal counsellors in Baroda. For sahayoginis it may offer opportunities for horizontal and vertical mobility, for role differentiation and specialisation, and for new career paths.

Internal mobility is another positive upcoming trend: a resource person becoming District Coordinator, sahayoginis becoming resource persons or Headmistress of the Mahila Shiksan Kendra and sakhis becoming sahayoginis. We have been told that many of the sakhis, balsakhis (preschool teachers) and sangha women are taking interest in becoming a sahayogini.

The pace of growing strength is uneven between districts, blocks and villages. As mentioned earlier in half of the sanghas attention needs to be given to consolidation and further development of their inner strength. And most of the sanghas need to become self-reliant and develop internal capacities for self-directed management before they are ready to function fully independent from sahayogini support. Focusing attention on federation building without paying sufficient attention to furthering the sangha building process is making a jump that could interrupt the empowerment processes of and within the sangha.

B. Expansion strategies

In Gujarat Mahila Samakhya has slowly expanded its coverage by moving into five new blocks

within the three original districts and by starting activities in two blocks of the new District Banaskantha. There are plans to expand further into two other districts which are selected on the basis of low rates for female literacy. According to our assessment of the current status of the Programme in Gujarat we feel that a diversified expansion strategy is called for². However, the current situation with sanghas in different stages of strength (formation stage, consolidation stage, weakened, strong) calls for a diversified strategy. This strategy is to be based on the lessons learned in the past, the increased presence and visibility in the State and within the districts and the current momentum of spontaneous expansion via the sanghas.

Sanghas are asking for expansion of the programme into neighbouring villages for widening of their network for mutual co-operation, mobilisation and activism and for building a critical mass of empowered sanghas at block and district levels. Women in surrounding villages are seeking assistance in forming their sanghas and the older sanghas can play a role in this process which altogether will save time and effort in the formation stage. The process of expansion is to be seen in connection with the process of de-linking the strong sanghas and strengthening of their capacities to become self-reliant.

The following points of attention can guide the formulation and implementation of the expansion strategy:

- reinforcing the sangha strength and capacity building for self-reliance of the older sanghas;
 - de-linking the strong and self-reliant sanghas from direct sahayogini support;
 - promoting sanghas to become a community forum of women across caste, class or religious divides,
 - strengthening networking among sanghas and the formation of cluster groups,
 - strengthening and building of support structures at the block level,
 - forming new sanghas in areas surrounding the clusters wherein Mahila Samakhya already exists,
 - involving the old sanghas and clusters in the formation and strengthening of new sanghas, and for new districts
- selection to be based on transparent criteria e.g. poverty indicators, indicators for gender equality, female literacy rates, potential for linking up with DPEP and/or other schemes for poverty alleviation and socio-economic development,
 - ensuring that staff and necessary infra-structure are in place and well prepared/trained before starting the activities in the new districts.

The expansion strategy is to include attention to the human resources component and capacity building for new and diversified roles at all levels of the MS structure (including the sangha level), as well as the continuous (re-) orientation and intensive training at all levels of responsibility.

9. The education component and linkages to the other education programmes

Education is central in the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Education is understood in its broadest meaning as an empowering learning process which enables learners to question, to analyse, to seek answers, to act and reflect, and thereby to discover their inner strength and realise their potential. It involves a life long process of interactive learning, based on sharing of knowledge and life experiences, critical analysis and reflection, creating new kinds of knowledge and understanding.

in their study of the Mahila Sanghas Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurty make a distinction between three interrelated aspects of education: education as life skills, education as knowledge and information, and education as literacy (1966 pp. 27 ff.). Education of life skills relates to the ability to manage life and is based on gaining confidence and self-esteem. It is underlying all of the

². We (the evaluation team) have not been able to discuss the strategies for expansion have not been discussed with the State and district teams.

activities in Mahila Samakhya and in the on-going processes of collective action/reflection/learning/deciding/planning/action. Education as information and knowledge refers to accessing knowledge and information and using it effectively. It is part of awareness workshops and training related to health, law, the environment, etc. In both aspects of education being literate in the sense of reading and writing is not directly essential for learning taking place, for feeling empowered and having confidence in one's strength to make changes.

In Mahila Samakhya education as literacy comes in when women discover the importance of literacy in dealing with the outside literate world with its written rules and procedures. It comes when the need arises for writing application letters, for keeping records of savings, for registration of law cases, for recording and checking minutes of meetings, for getting clarification on procedures etc., and when the women experience its importance for furthering their knowledge and accessing new information.

This means that demands for literacy (reading, writing, numeracy skills and a wider body of knowledge) emerge from the developments within the sanghas and that in principle literacy is not imposed as part of the programme.

Education as literacy

Mahila Samakhya Gujarat started taking up education as literacy in the early nineties on an experimental basis when sahayoginis started with in-formal literacy classes or camps with sakhis and sangha women using materials from the State Resource Centre for non-formal and adult education. This was done on requests from the sanghas and according to their demands regarding timings, pace, and an informal, friendly way of learning. In Sabarkantha and Baroda interesting experiments in adult literacy have been initiated with women in the tribal communities, where there was a need for literacy teaching via the local dialects. The approach followed included participatory methods for development of gender-sensitive learning materials, use of local forms of expressions through songs and lyrics, combining didactic methods of reading and writing skills with knowledge building through discussion and critical thinking. With the assistance of experts in tribal culture, linguistics and pedagogy some primers and textbooks have been developed based on life issues of tribal women. Literacy was imparted through the camp method and with especially trained volunteers. In Sabarkantha educated girls became involved as voluntary teachers.

The materials and methods developed were appreciated by the learners, the camps gave proof that it could be done and a lot of experience has been gained. However, the experiments were short-lived because of various reasons. The camp method proved to be too costly, it was difficult to retain the volunteers, no follow-up could be given due to lack of resources for developing materials for self-learning, and the problem of retaining and reinforcing the basic literacy skills after returning home from the camps: women could not find time due to their domestic and agricultural work and retention was low due to the lack of follow-up.

The early initiatives have in fact been overtaken by the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) which started in Gujarat in 1993. Mahila Samakhya has become actively involved in the TLC, especially in Baroda and Sabarkantha. The district teams contributed to the campaign in various ways:

- conducting surveys to identify illiterate women and add them to the lists of participants (as often only the names of men were written on the lists produced by the district education offices),
- identification and training of volunteers, many women from Mahila Samakhya acted as voluntary teachers,
- environment building by participating in motivational rallies and International Literacy Day Celebrations, streetplays, discussing the TLC and women's right to education in the sangha meetings,
- participation in the training of voluntary teachers: creating awareness about the situation

of women and their problems;

- securing slates + pens for the participants, as well as lights for night classes,
- liaising with government officers and assisting in problem solving.

Mahila Samakhya succeeded in getting women above the age limit of 35 years into the classes and altogether the Mahila Samakhya contribution made the campaign into a success in the districts. The credit is not just for the efforts of Mahila Samakhya during the campaign. Recognition is to be given to the fact that the involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the success of the TLC is also an outcome of the preceding empowerment processes among village women and of the holistic Mahila Samakhya approach to education as empowerment. A culture of learning has been created among sangha women, which made them assert their rights to literacy and to benefit from the Total Literacy Campaign.

The impact on Mahila Samakhya is increased visibility, respect and co-operation from authorities in the villages and at block, District and State levels. Government officials have begun to listen to women, taking them seriously. The response of the women is visible in the numerous letters received from sangha women by the State office, their pride in being able to write and read their names, their ability to read and check their savings records and manage their own savings scheme.

After the completion of the TLC literacy activities were continued in the form of motivational camps, followed by literacy classes, training of volunteer literacy teachers, preparing materials for post literacy (in Sabarkantha). The DIU in Rajkot collaborates with the District Literacy Committee in the post-literacy phase of the TLC, Mahila Samakhya is contributing to the News letter for neo-literates, to development of neo-literate materials and training of volunteer teachers e.g. on dealing with gender issues.

At present there are 170 locally initiated literacy classes. In Sabarkantha almost half of the literacy classes are irregular because women find it difficult to make time and because of seasonal labour migration.

On the whole the experience in education as literacy with adult women in the form of regular classes or camps is somewhat mixed, because of difficulties in maintaining women's interest after reaching the stage of being able to write their names, reading words and sentences, writing simple letters. Efforts to integrate literacy skills with function related training such as the training for balsakhis, hand-pump mechanics, para-legal workers etc. appear to be more effective, because of the direct linkage to the area of work. Training in literacy and numeracy skills related to financial matters such as savings and banking, profits and investments seems to be an area of women's interest.

Women's loosing interest in further literacy training (unless related to concrete activities and responsibilities) is not too surprising as the learning goes slowly and maintaining writing skills requires exercising manual dexterity for which they have little time. Women have come to realise that they can learn, become empowered, effect changes without necessarily becoming literate themselves. What the experience in literacy has achieved is that women have come to better understand the importance of relevant literacy and school education for their daughters. They have also learned that there are alternative ways of making learning and teaching meaningful and interesting in the lives of women. The Mahila Samakhya Programme has created a positive environment for learning and schooling of children, especially for girls' education.

Education of girls

We have not been able to assess the impact of camps for adolescent girls and leave this issue aside. But the education of girls is an emerging issue in the programme, it is on the agenda of

sangha women, who have taken initiatives to obtain scholarship funds for their children's education, and to form committees checking on school attendance and teaching by teachers in village schools. In some villages informal initiatives have emerged such as coaching classes for out-of-school girls (and sometimes also boys) in order get them into the mainstream education system.

In one of the blocks in Sabarkantha preparations for establishing a Mahila Shiksan Kendra in the tribal areas have started two years ago. The preparatory activities included a survey on education of girls, meetings with parents, girls and schoolteachers, environment building activities and starting non-formal education classes with girls who dropped out of school.

The general situation is that in the tribal area boys tend to go to school up to Standard X or higher. Whereas girls have not been to school at all or leave school after Standard IV. Reasons for girls dropping out are that

- the residence style is very scattered and school facilities are far from the home,
- village schools go up to Standard IV, after that children have to go to another village,
- parents are concerned for their daughters safety,
- girls have domestic duties and look after the family's cattle (as boys are in school nowadays),
- parents feel that they do not get benefit out of education of their girls,
- girls get married at an early age.

Besides, girls have started to dislike schooling, have developed a hostile attitude to the school and they are not motivated to continue their education. In interviews with parents (fathers in this case) they gave the same reasons, but they also intimated to have little confidence in the ability of the school to provide meaningful education to their daughters, they are not satisfied with the quality of education provided by the school and have little trust in the teachers ability to teach. Based on the results of the survey the District team decided to focus on girls in the age group of 9 to 14 years who were drop-out from the formal school and start a residential school at the Block centre.

The non-formal education classes for girls were intended to gain the interest of the girls in other ways of learning than what they had been accustomed to in the school, for environment building and motivation.

Balika Shiksan Kendra

Because of its focus on children in the 9-14 age group the school is called Balika Shiksan Kendra and is different in this respect from the Mahila Shiksan Kendras in other States. The school started in October 1996 with 36 six girls from seven villages in the block. The children are graded in four groups after testing of their capacity levels. They are being taught according to the formal curriculum but in an informal and interactive way in small learning circles. The length of the programme was intended to be four months, but seems to have been extended to one year with the aim of getting the children admitted in the State Boarding School for further education up to Standard X. At this stage, after four months, it is too early to assess the impact.

What could be observed is that the BSK is meeting a demand for the provision of meaningful education for girls in a safe environment. According to the teachers and parents there are visible changes in the behaviour attitudes of the girls. They have lost their fears and initial shyness, they talk openly and show affection, they accept discipline and are motivated to learn more, they have become confident and no longer consider themselves drop-outs.

There is close interaction with the parents who take turns to visit on Sundays. There are monthly meetings between parents, teachers and DIU staff for review and discussing the children's progress. Parents (fathers) expressed that after four months they have come to realise that their

daughters can learn in this school. They have trust in the approach of Mahila Samakhya (individual attention, care and safety). Now they want their daughters to complete Standard X and become a teacher or a sahayogini. They also expressed concern about the equivalence to the government system and the recognition from the formal schools. They have consented in letting their daughters stay in the boarding school because of their confidence in their sahayogini, the sangha of which their wives are a member and in Mahila Samakhya. Now they feel that all of their daughters should have the opportunity to get this kind of education. They are open for initiatives to start similar (non-residential) schools for girls in their villages, if teachers can be found. And they feel that as parents they could approach and convince the Sarpanch of their villages to cooperate and provide for facilities (space).

The short experience of the BSK (not forgetting the initial preparations and environment building efforts) already begins to have effect on further thinking not only about the establishment of BSKs in each block, but also about finding other alternative modes of schooling for drop-out girls at village level. This is an area wherein Mahila Samakhya could co-operate with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

There are some areas that need further attention and improvement, this relates especially to the pedagogical side. The teaching staff (4) has hardly any prior teaching experience with children, and only one of the teachers, who had been trained as a sahayogini, is familiar with the Mahila Samakhya philosophy. There has been no preparatory course providing pedagogical/ educational training, and teaching methods apart from learning through songs. The teachers have had to overcome many difficulties in winning the trust of the children. They mainly rely on their own creativity and resourcefulness and on visits to school teachers to learn teaching skills. For some lessons they invite teachers from the formal school. There is frequent interaction with the formal school and the children are welcome to enrol in the school after completion of the BSK programme. But the teaching staff needs training in child psychology, pedagogical and class room methods, and in 'how to teach without books'. They want to upgrade their own subject matter knowledge and learn how to make learning aids. There is also a need for good learning materials for higher levels of education (upper primary/secondary) in subjects like numeracy and science, and for drawing and art.

Another area needing serious attention relates to the lack of a clear vision and clarity about the objectives of the BSK. There is no long-term vision which guides the curriculum and no clarity about the duration of the BSK programme. What is the 'mission' of the BSK? What are its objectives? Will the curriculum include practical and vocational skills preparing the girls for a role in community and rural development? What will be the policy of Mahila Samakhya in Sabarkantha, moving towards establishing more BSKs in the tribal blocks? Such questions, and more, need to be answered.

In the other Districts discussions are going on about the establishment of a Mahila Shiksha Kendra. The District team in Baroda has decided not to follow the BSK model of Sabarkantha, but to start an MSK for training of adolescent girls and adult women in condensed residential courses (e.g. legal awareness and literacy) following the Banda model.

Co-operation with other education programmes

As referred to earlier Mahila Samakhya has actively collaborated with the District Literacy Committees and the concerned education departments in the implementation of the Total Literacy Campaign. They have made significant contributions to its success. Further co-operation in the next post-literacy phase of the TLC is envisaged and is already taking place in Rajkot. The second phase will be launched in 13 districts which include the Districts covered by Mahila Samakhya, and is to be completed in two years. New gender-sensitive materials are being developed by the State Adult Education Department according to the Minimum Levels of Learning prepared by

NCERT. One of the books is based on the Mahila Samakhya experience with tribal groups in Sabarkantha.

The District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in Gujarat is almost ready to start in Gujarat. During the first phase DPEP will be concentrated on the educationally most backward areas which includes Banaskantha and two Districts where Mahila Samakhya is planning its extension. In these Districts the rates for female literacy are the lowest in the State. DPEP will be focusing on improvement of the quality of instruction, teacher training, curriculum development and development of gender-sensitive learning/instruction materials, community participation, and development of alternative learning modes for out-of-school children. The Mahila Samakhya experience shows that empowerment of women is a precondition for the creation of demand for education of girls and for an environment for community participation in improving access to and quality of school education. In all of the components of DPEP Mahila Samakhya can build on its presence in the State/Districts and contribute in e.g. community mobilisation, participation and environment building, involving women in Village Education Committees (VECs) and training of VEC members, provision of training inputs on dealing with gender issues for the training of DPEP staff and teachers, development of gender-sensitive learning materials and methods, alternative models for drop-outs and out-of-school girls. And Mahila Samakhya will be able to benefit from DPEP in strengthening the pedagogic quality of the education components as well as the use of learning materials and aids.

As DPEP will be implemented by the State and District Departments of Education and the Gujarat Council for Education Research and Teacher Training (GCERT) the feasibility of forming a three partite (MS-DPEP-GCERT) task group could be considered with the task to work out the plans and terms for co-operation at general State level as well as for the districts covered by both programmes with the aim of e.g.

- increasing access to and retention in primary & continuing education of children and especially girls: sanghas could play a catalyst role in this and extend their activities across the entire community (of women);
- ensuring quality learning that is meaningful and gender relevant in the local environment: e.g. sanghas being represented in the Village Education Committees (VECs) and Parent (Mothers)- Teachers Associations (PTAs) for monitoring children's and teachers attendance as well as ensuring quality and meaningful learning; involving sahayoginis and MS/NFE teachers in training of VECs;
- making teaching/instruction gender relevant by involving Mahila Samakhya (education resource persons, sahayoginis and NFE/BSK teachers) in the training of teachers;
- providing gender-sensitivity training for DPEP implementing staff and in the training of teachers;
- conducting participatory appraisal studies and micro-planning at village level by involving the Mahila Sanghas;
- joint development and sharing of learning materials, books and learning aids for formal as well as non-formal education and making use of the experience of Mahila Samakhya in using songs, oral traditions and knowledge, drama, games and play;
- joint development of alternate forms of schooling for special groups, who are otherwise neglected by the mainstream school system based on experience of Mahila Samakhya in non-formal education and the BSK model.

The monitoring of the co-operation between DPEP and Mahila Samakhya is important for it being effective and could be taken up in the regular monitoring visits of DPEP by an external expert who has sufficient expertise in gender and education and who is sensitive to process oriented Programmes like Mahila Samakhya.

Co-operation between Mahila Samakhya and other education programmes is also important for creating an environment for and acceptance of a more holistic, flexible and participatory approach to education in adult as well as in primary education.

10. Reporting and documentation

Over time Mahila Samakhya has produced a wealth of documentation for internal as well as for external purposes. The documentation consists of sangha and village profiles, case studies, reflection papers, brochures and video's. Sahayoginis keep diaries and records of meetings, women write letters from the field and newsletters are issued by the State and by the District. The various sources provide the basis for quarterly and annual progress reports. However there is need for more systematisation and consolidation of the resource materials which allow for following the processes over a longer period. Quantitative formats are apparently being used for reporting purposes, but they seem to be focusing more on 'products' than on progress. There is also no recording of gender relevant development statistics, which could help to place the contributions from Mahila Samakhya in a wider development perspective.

Further research could be encouraged for development of indicators through which the achievements of the Mahila Samakhya could be related to changes in the Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) for Gujarat.

Since 1995 various training workshops have been conducted on process documentation at different levels of the programme structure. This is a very positive initiative as it is expected to provide a better understanding of how the learning and empowerment processes evolve. At the time of the evaluation no information was available on the results of the projects on documentation of processes within the sanghas.

11. The structure, reflections on the role of the DIU/SPO

The role of the District Implementation Units and the State Programme Office in supporting the processes at village level could not always be optimal due to, among other reasons, recurrent understaffing because of frequent staff-turnover and difficulties in finding qualified and experienced staff. Other reasons are more of a bureaucratic nature and relate to position of the Programme in the structure of the Government. Mahila Samakhya Gujarat is the only State Programme with an Office inside the Government and with a government officer as State Programme Director. This situation could become open for conflicting interests between the autonomy and flexibility required for the implementation of the Programme and the typical bureaucratic culture within a government office.

Over the years the Gujarat Programme has been faced with the difficult problem of balancing a dual reality. As a government Programme Mahila Samakhya is part of a national administrative system with upward accountability, pre-occupation with rules and regulations, orientation towards concrete achievements and targets. At the same time Mahila Samakhya is a process oriented empowerment programme with a flexible structure, a focus on participatory development and accountability towards the grassroots, based on a feminist ideology, as well as a mission for challenging existing power structures including the government. From the beginning the equilibrium on the higher levels of the Programme structure seemed to be leaning towards the government. This is visible in e.g. the appointment of officers from the Government structure as State Programme Directors, and at times also as District Co-ordinators, and in the adoption of an operational style, which gives more weightage to administrative and bureaucratic matters, to meeting visible targets, and to observation of rules and regulations. Interaction with the field is reported at some times to have been minimal, which might be due to understaffing and the heavy workload. Such circumstances have sometimes led to a situation wherein DIU staff and fieldworkers have lost their belief that substantial support is to be expected from the side of the State Office (and incidentally from the DPC and DIU), compelling the fieldteams to rely on their own strengths, capacities and resourcefulness. In a situation with minimum interaction the strong and experienced sahayoginis with the resource persons are bound to strengthen their mutual bonds and at times close their ranks and follow their own course of action.

The DIUs are in an extremely difficult position being accountable to the sanghas in the field as well as being accountable to the higher authorities in the Government. This requires strong leadership from qualified, competent and experienced District Co-ordinators, who have credibility with the fieldteams. Although many staff changes have been effected during the last two years with the appointment of new non-government DPCs and new resource persons/consultants the problems are not easy to solve and the legacy of past developments has not disappeared completely. The effects of the staff changes are uneven between the districts, Rajkot being in a difficult situation.³ Apart from the necessity to pay attention to the immediate situation, Mahila Samakhya Gujarat needs to further reconsider its staffing and staff training policies from a structural point of view. The balance is to be restored in favour of the Programme principles and flexibility by making it a principle to appoint functionaries at SPD and DPC levels, who have experience in the NGO sector and affinity with the women's movement in Gujarat, and to provide for an adequate staff training mechanism at all levels in order to provide the necessary support to the field processes in line with the changing needs of the Programme.

The State Programme Office and the DIUs are found to be the weaker links in the programme structure. The DIUs have a role in facilitating the Programme implementation by

- . providing administrative support,
- . co-ordination and supervision of sahayoginis,
- . facilitating and providing training inputs,
- . documentation and compiling reports.

In practice the main focus of the work of resource persons and consultants in the Districts is on the co-ordination of sahayoginis, evaluation of their performance participation in their training and in working committees. Sometimes they focus on specific aspects of the programme like legal issues, health or the education component. But they have not been recruited on the basis of their professional experience as e.g. trainer and feminist, educationist, health or legal expert. The appointment of resource persons and consultants is based on the number of villages covered in the district, the rule seems to be that one resource person will be appointed per 100 villages. They are working more as programme officers than as resource persons or consultants who bring a professional input or experience in the Programme. Calling them resource persons or consultant seems to be inappropriate in the current structure. Due to the absence of in-house professional and experienced resource persons - neither at DIU level nor at State level - the DIU is therefore not always able to function adequately as a support structure for the implementation in the field .

District Resource Groups are functioning and members of the DRG co-operate with the district teams in e.g. health awareness camps or as legal advisor and resource person in the para-legal training programme. From the side of the District teams there is a need for more direct interaction resource persons from the State and National level. The General Council does not meet regularly , though it should meet annually. There is no State Resource Group in a formalised sense, although there is co-operation with various support groups at State and at District level. The support given by individual members of the National Resource Groups is highly appreciated by the teams and more direct interactions with NRG members would be welcome as it will help in perspective building, provide professional support, as well as access to a broader range of experience and linkages with the wider women's movement.

In line with the future developments of the programme, its new directions and the increasingly differentiating needs of sanghas who are in different stages of developing their strengths, as well

³ An assessment of the situation is beyond the assignment of the evaluation. Immediate attention from the competent authorities, the SPD and the Executive Council, is required perhaps by creating a small team of (govt + non-govt) EC members who is to look in the situation and to formulate a plan for decisions and actions that need to be taken.

which is responsible for the implementation and Programme in the Districts the DIUs could be converted into a District Mahila Samakhya Resource Centre which has branches at the block level.

These Resource Centres could provide or facilitate access to training resources (process, perspective building, issues based and/or training of trainers), assist in development of training curricula and manuals, assist in further development of effective training/learning methods as well as gender-sensitive learning materials for self-directed learning. The Resource Centres could have a role in collecting, converting and disseminating relevant information, in documentation and research, in dissemination of newsletters etc. And the centres could provide social, legal, job/career counselling as well as training and library facilities. These Resource Centres will provide a multi-purpose support network which can be flexible and responsive to the needs of the Programme and varied processes in the field.

The District Resource Centres and their branches at block level could be staffed by sahayoginis who will be the resource persons and by professional resource persons and (temporary) consultants with specific assignments or tasks. The District Programme Co-ordinator will be Resource Centre Co-ordinator and remain in charge of the Programme in the District be it from the perspective of a Programme support structure.

At State level a similar conversion could be considered, although at a State Resource Centre might be taking a slightly different role with a stronger emphasis on providing for professional development of the Programme Staff, on networking with other resource organizations and on advocacy and influencing policy decisions and their implementation. Its tasks could include e.g. the following:

- . the identification of training resources within and outside the State,
- . providing assistance in developing and implementing internal monitoring mechanisms, documentation, evaluation and studies,
- . the conversion and dissemination to the districts of information and learning materials from elsewhere,
- . organisation of state and national level reflection workshops for Programme staff and external resource persons, and
- . the facilitation exchange and exposure visits (in two directions),
- . advocacy and influencing policy decisions and policy implementation.

The network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres which is flexible and adaptable to the needs of the empowerment/development processes, can provide a more permanent support structure in the State and in the Districts that can branch out to the blocks and clusters, and co-operate with other (education) resource centres to avoid duplication by exchanging services.

The development of a support structure as proposed will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy.

To accompany the recommended changes a review of the financial pattern and financial management procedures is necessary. The financial and administrative procedures are to be made more transparent and ensure the Programme's inherent flexibility as well as smooth and affective implementation. The financial pattern needs to be brought in line with current cost level and based on realistic estimates. The budget needs to accommodate for inflation correction, changes in the comparable salary structures of the Government and of NGOs allowing for more differentiation, for staff development and other changes in the programme. Staff training in financial management and planning as part of programme planning needs to be continued and reinforced at all levels.

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**Videos: - Along with Literacy, Mahila Samakhya Baroda
- Mahila Samakhya Gujarat**

ITINERARY, VISITS AND MEETINGS IN GUJARAT

- January 10** **Arrival in Ahmedabad**
Meeting with
. in charge State Programme Director, Ms Meena Batt
. District Programme Coordinator Sabarkantha, Ms Shakuntala Mehta
. SPO consultant, Ms Rashmika Modi
- January 11/12** **Baroda District**
Meeting at DIU Office with the District Programme Coordinator, Ms Indira Pathak and DIU team
visits to
. Nari Adalat at Massa Road, Padra Block,
 meeting with members of the court, attending women, sahayogini
. Patod village (Padra Block),
 meeting with sangha members of three sanghas
. Child Care Centre & NFE class at Haripura village, Naswadi Block,
 meeting with balsakhis, children, mothers/sangha members
. Sakhi cluster meeting at Ghatasa village, Naswadi Block,
 meeting with sakhis and sahayoginis
. Tree Plantation (Mahila Sangha) at Lunadra village, Naswadi Block
. Creativity Centre & Library at Tanakhla (DIU sub-office)
- Meeting with the Secretary, Education Department, Chairperson of the Executive Council Mahila Samakhya Society, Shri S.D.Sharma**
- January 13/14 (LG)** **Rajkot District**
Meetings with District Programme Coordinator, Ms Manisha Brahbbatt and DIU team and Sahayoginis
Fieldvisits for meetings with sahayoginis, sakhis and sangha women
- January 13/14 (CH)** **Sabarkantha District**
Meetings at DIU Office with District Programme Coordinator, resource persons and consultant
- Meetings with member District Resource Group, Dr Prakash Josh) and representative of NGO partner (ARPAN)**
- visits to**
. Balika Shiksan Kendra at Khebrahma,
 meeting with teaching staff, children
. Sahyogini meeting at Khebrahma
. Sangha Hut at Danmahudi village,
 meeting with sakhis and sangha members from various sanghas
. Literacy Class at Jinjodi village (Bhiloda Block),
 meeting with sangha members
. Child Care Centre at Jinjodi village
- DIU Office**
. meeting with accountant and office staff
. meeting with BSK parents (fathers)
. meeting with representatives of the Sahayoginis
 (representing the Mahila Kutir Committee, Health Committee, Literacy Committee, Savings Committee, Child Care Committee, District Training Team) and DIU staff

January 15 (CH)

State Programme Office
meeting with in charge State Programme Director and Accounts Officer,
Mr. B.R.Shah

Meeting with Education Officers

- . Financial Advisor Education Department
- . Director Adult Education
- . Deputy Director Adult Education
- . Secretary GCERT
- . Director DPEP/Planning Primary Education
- . Officer dealing with MS in the Education Department
- . District Education Officer Sabarkantha
- . Controller Sabarkantha

January 15

Lunch meeting hosted by the State Programme Director
. education officers,
. members General Council
. friends of Mahila Samakhya,
. DIU staff

Wrap-up meeting with

- . Secretary Education Department
- . State Programme Director and consultant SPO
- . District Programme Officers and Resource persons/consultants
 - District Banaskantha
 - District Baroda
 - District Rajkot
 - District Sabarkantha

Departure for New Delhi

SUPPLEMENT C

MAHILA SAMAKHYA KARNATAKA

**observations and findings based on the visit of
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997**

**Leela Gulati
Claudine Helleman**

**The Hague, July 1997
NUFFIC/Department of Educational Studies and Consultancy (DESC)**

MAHILA SAMAKHYA KARNATAKA
observations and findings based on the visit of
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997

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MAHILA SAMAKHYA KARNATAKA

**observations and findings based on the visit of
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997**

SUMMARY

Background

The task of the evaluation mission was to review the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and to assess and analyse the processes of empowerment at the level of the sanghas or women's collectives. In addition to this the mission was to look into financial management issues.

The visit in Karnataka lasted five days and took place between January 4 and 9. During this period we had meetings in Bangalore and travelled through three of the five districts wherein the Mahila Samakhya Programme is being implemented: Raichur, Bijapur and Bidar. The programme for the visit has been prepared by the State and District teams who provided us with excellent support and arrangements.

The mission is impressed by the resilience and the inner strength of the programme on the ground enabling it to continue and progress on its own steam during a period without much leadership or guidance from the top of the programme structure. The problems the Mahila Samakhya Programme Karnataka faced at State level were many, including lack of clarity of vision, strategic thinking, planning and communication between the state and districts. Under-staffing at the state as well as the district levels created further problems. The new staff learnt by trial and error without any systematic introductory training. As a result some dilution of the concepts, principles and philosophy have crept in and has led to overall stagnation in recent years.

It is to be noted that at present the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka is in the midst of a process of re-orientation of the entire programme, which is to lead towards a redefinition of the vision of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka and affirmation of its nature as a education programme for the empowerment of women. It will also lead to redefinition of the programme goals and objectives, to development of forward looking strategies and plans, and to identification of strategic partnerships with like-minded organisations in e.g. participatory rural development, innovation of educational methods and approaches, and to identification of resource organisations for training inputs aimed at reinforcing and furthering perspective and capacity building. From our observations and findings in the field we fully endorse this initiative.

The coverage

In 1997 the Mahila Samakhya Programme is working in 900 villages in five districts in the State of Karnataka. The choice of the districts has been made most judiciously with four of these districts considered the most backward in terms of their economic and social indicators. In all these districts Mahila Samakhya has deliberately focused on and reached the most poor and backward population groups.

At present Mahila Samakhya is present in 12,5% of all blocks and 3,4% of the villages in the State. In 1996 there were 773 active sanghas or women's collectives and taken together the sanghas have a membership of more than thirty thousand women. Through them their families and communities are also reached. The Mahila Samakhya Programme has taken strong roots in the districts and talukas, in which it is located. Yet, there is still a great scope for expansion in the future in terms of membership of the sanghas within the villages, as well in as terms of expansion

nto new villages in the talukas covered, in new talukas and in new districts in the State of Karnataka.

The impact of the Programme on women's lives

The impact on women who are members is really impressive. They have not only established a collective identity, but have also gained recognition in the community. These women are a visible force and exude a great sense of self-confidence. Their visibility, mobility and maneuverability both in the community and within the family have increased enormously. Their empowerment in terms of self-confidence and sense of solidarity speaks volumes for the solid ground work that Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka has established, particularly among the most impoverished sections of Karnataka rural society. The programme has definitely given support, strength and feeling of hope.

Membership of the sangha has changed their self-image and given them an identity of women who belong to a visible and increasingly influential group in the village community. Their sangha membership has raised their image in the perception of their families. As a result, men no longer resist but encourage the women to go for meetings and support them in various ways. Thus women have earned the time, space and mobility to come together. Now women feel that they can raise their voices in public meetings confidently and without fear, and they feel that their voices are being listened to. The sangha gives them strength and supports them through difficult times, they feel the strength of acting together.

The activities of the sanghas and the exposure to training, information and knowledge has an impact on women's changing attitudes to and understanding of social traditions which reflect and endorse women's oppression. They increasingly challenge social practices which perpetuate women's inequality. Their attitudes towards the education of their children and particularly girls has changed and now they start demanding accountability from the local schools and teachers in providing good education.

Although the actions of women do not directly challenge the existing gender relationships or the local power structures subtle changes are becoming visible in the attitudes of male family members, in women's decisions making powers in their families, in recognition they get from women and men from other caste communities, and the recognition and respect gained from village authorities and government officials.

On the whole the impact is most visible in improvement of the survival base and living conditions. Further impact in changing the balance and practices of power will require continuation of the process of careful and creative strategizing with a long term vision on women's equality which determines the direction.

Approximately 34% of the sanghas in Bidar and Bijapur can be considered as strong sanghas in terms of taking initiatives, responsiveness to issues of exploitation and violence on women, having an image as 'a power to reckon with' at community level, taking decisions and action without guidance from the sahayogini. The capability of the sangha to function in this manner tells much about the formidable impact of the Mahila Samakhya Programme on the women who before the presence of the Programme were living in the dark corners of their homes, afraid to go outside, to take initiative and raise their voices.

Yet more than two thirds of the Mahila sanghas are still in the process of reaching this stage of strength. The process of empowerment and building of inner strength of and within the sanghas is an area that needs the full and continuing attention of Mahila Samakhya in the future and cannot be overlooked or side-tracked in the midst of emerging issues like the building of sangha federations. Quite a number of sanghas have fallen apart or are no longer active. A better understanding is needed about this phenomenon and the factors involved in sanghas breaking up

or losing interest in order to draw lessons for future strategies related to strengthening the empowerment of and within the sanghas.

Women's health

Women's health and particularly the use of herbal medicines and traditional wisdom for treatment of a wide variety of ailments is one of the focal issues in the Programme. The impact on women is their better understanding of the function of their bodies and their reproductive systems, demystification of superstitious beliefs, eradication of harmful practices, awareness of traditional and modern health systems, and how and when to approach them, and increased ability to recognise problems and take appropriate actions. Some attention has been given women's reproductive health and, sporadically, AIDS. More systematic approaches could perhaps be evolved as women are increasingly showing their interest.

Women reported better health of themselves and their children. Due to the lack of village health statistics it is difficult to assess the impact of Mahila Samakhya on the health status. Sanghas could become actively involved in monitoring the health situation in their villages or at least in the community of which they are apart by keeping records of relevant health data. This could help in evolving more effective strategies for informing the health authorities, changing the systems and ultimately influence health policies and their implementation.

Economic empowerment

Accessing economic development schemes is on the agendas of all district programmes. However, it meets with different degrees of success and also with many problems and difficulties. More attention may need to be given to understand the factors involved, as well as to the identification of resource organisations (state as well as NGOs) involved in participatory rural development, environmental resources management and employment creation. Co-operation with such organisation in areas where Mahila Samakhya has already established a basis for women's involvement in participatory development need to be addressed in the future.

The main focus of activities in the area of economic empowerment evolves around savings and loans. More than 85% of the active sanghas are engaged in group saving schemes. Most of the loans taken are used for individual purposes. In terms of impact the savings schemes are reported to have given women greater control of their incomes and savings, it has increased women's awareness about their economic assets and how they can use them, increased their confidence in dealing with the bank system and taking financial decisions, and increased their decision making powers in their families on financial matters. And now sanghas have started forming federations with the aim of establishing their own Mahila Bank at cluster level.

The concept of the Women's Bank is related the idea of economic independence of sangha women and self-reliance and sustainability of the sanghas, which are valid arguments. But questions could be raised regarding the implications of an active involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the establishment of special Mahila Banks, and if available options with regard to alternative banking systems been sufficiently explored. We recommend Mahila Samakhya Karnataka to carefully review and reconsider its strategy, also in view of the sometimes negative experiences of the impact of the saving schemes on the sanghas, creating rifts and breaking them up. Banking and saving matters may become the predominant activity of the sangha overshadowing other issues. Instead of establishing its own Mahila Banks Mahila Samakhya could direct its strategy towards influencing the banking system, assisting the sanghas in negotiating their terms of co-operation with local banks or with elsewhere existing women's banks. Perhaps banks could be convinced to open special women's branches which fulfil the criteria and terms set by sangha women.

Women's political participation

One of the most impressive achievements of the Mahila Samakhya is in enabling women to participate in the political process. The Programme has helped women understand issues around political participation and empowered them in the real sense of the term. What is truly remarkable is that more than half the women who contested the elections got elected. The elected members, who have become strong, still need Mahila Samakhya to help them function in their new roles and to train them in public speaking, literacy and awareness of issues. A further step ahead might be to assist the elected women (sangha and non sangha) to formulate a common women's agenda and to form a network of elected women who can support each other and join their forces for their common women's interests.

Women's legal rights

In all district programmes legal issues are continuously on the agendas in the sangha meetings. It relates to dealing with cases of domestic violence, family disputes, land and property issues etc. and activism of the sanghas often evolves around issues related to social injustices. No initiatives have been taken as yet for addressing the area of women's legal and human rights, and women's rights under tribal law in a systematic manner with the aim of enhancing women's awareness about how to use their legal rights. This could be an area to give more systematic attention to in the future in the entire Programme.

The impact on breaking caste and class divides

Most of the sanghas in Karnataka are affiliated with specific caste or tribal groups. Efforts of enlarging sanghas by including women from other caste groups have met disappointments and have not been encouraging further efforts. Caste divides are strongly ingrained in the texture of the society and are probably the most difficult boundaries to break through. This is especially the case when caste interests are inter-twined with class and political interests.

There are areas where caste barriers are overcome e.g. health, education and solving problems related to domestic violence. A potential scope for reaching more women, including women from upper castes is very much there. Mahila Samakhya could play a role in the promotion of a village-community based open women's forum, which is open for women regardless of their caste, class or communal background and which brings them together around common women's issues and interests. Although difficult the effort to broaden the sangha membership and build towards a community of women remains a long term challenge within the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

The emergence of a grass-roots women's movement and building federations

Sangha activism about women's issues and forms of social injustice are clear indications of the emergence of a grass roots women's movement. Sanghas are actively seeking lateral relationships with other sanghas to enlarge their collective strength. Mahila Sanghas have become visible entities with voices that need to be listened to and sangha women are ready to use that capacity more effectively.

The building of sangha federations is on the agendas for discussions at different level of the Programme. The idea of a federation seems to have become an end in itself which is linked to the goal of achieving self-reliance and sustainability of the sanghas after withdrawal from Mahila Samakhya as a support structure. However, how the formation of federations is linked to women's empowerment processes in the sanghas is no longer very clear. There is a danger that the investment in the forming of federation will be a drain on the attention that need to be given

to the strengthening of the sanghas. Priority is to be given to reinforcing the empowerment processes of and within the sanghas, two thirds of which have been found to be needing further strengthening. In addition to this the sangha initiatives in networking among sanghas at cluster and taluka level are to be supported and strengthened without necessarily making it into a formalised structure.

Sahayakis and sahayoginis

The impact of empowerment is not just on the sangha members but on all women working with the Mahila Samakhya Programme. It is most visible and pronounced on the sahayoginis and sahayakis.

In total more than 2000 *sahayakis* have been trained and have become empowered beyond expectation. They are strong in terms of self-confidence, verbal skills, mobilising women, organisation of the sangha meetings and representing their sanghas in cluster, taluka and district level meetings. However it is reported that sometimes sahayakis individually or as group have become overactive and dominating the sangha preventing its growth. The internal dynamics of sharing information, power and responsibilities within the sangha is an area that needs to be better understood in order to evolve strategies for strengthening of the sanghas through training programme directed at the sangha level.

The *sahayoginis* are the key actors for the empowerment of women at the grassroots level. They mobilise the collective strength of women, bringing about an attitudinal shift from age old beliefs and practices. With their commitment and hard work they have made a great and valuable contribution over the last seven years. And strong and lasting relationships have been built between the sahayoginis and 'their' sanghas, which may have given some sahayoginis a certain degree of power and control over their sangha which they might be unwilling to relinquish.

Sahayoginis are in a contradictory position as they are expected to be responsive to the development agendas of the sangha women which focus on their basic survival needs and improvement of their living conditions. At the same time they are to bring this in line with the empowerment agenda of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Besides, day to day problems may override the attention for broader perspectives and long term strategies. This inevitably leads to stagnation in the Programme, in losing its conceptual clarity, vision and sense of direction as an empowerment Programme. The signs can clearly be observed in the attitudes and expressions of sahayoginis. To come out of this situation it is suggested, a.o. to jointly evolve a forward looking human resources development plan which provides for role differentiation and for lateral and upward mobility, and for career paths, and to implement a training plan for sahayoginis and programme staff with a fresh approach which includes exposures to new perspectives and inspiration coming from the women's movement as well as building of professional capacities.

Education for empowerment and adult education

Education for women's empowerment is definitely taking place in all districts and has made significant impacts on the lives of rural women. However, if the concept of education is used in its limited understanding of education as literacy, the level of success is limited. This is particularly the case for forms of education taking place in regular classroom-like sessions with materials brought from elsewhere, which perhaps have no bearing to women's lives, or which are not directly linked to women's area of work.

In general the attention to adult literacy and to the creation of a consistent, holistic gender aware approach to education for empowerment, which includes and integrates the different aspects of education (e.g. life skills, information and knowledge, literacy and numeracy) is waning in the

Karnataka Programme. The centrality of education in Mahila Samakhya appears to have given way to other priorities, like e.g. the running of savings group, the building of the sangha hut, accessing schemes and services, and other activities aimed at keeping the collectives going. In Karnataka Mahila Samakhya is operational in the districts which are most backward in terms of women's development and literacy. *Mahila Samakhya could and should refocus its attention and make education for empowerment its foremost and central issue.* With their literacy skills and with the gains achieved in terms of women's empowerment women are ready to move ahead use their newly acquired skills to access and further their knowledge, to strengthen their information base and to counter disinformation and abuse, and to participate in family, community and further political decision making from a position of strength.

For the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka the area to venture in is *to evolve together with the sangha women innovative and participatory learning strategies for learning in pre- and neo-literate stages maintaining the focus on supporting women's empowerment.* Strategies which combine awareness, information and skills, which are directed at learning groups with women who are barely literate and women who want to use and further their literacy skills. Banking on the lessons learned from seven years of experience Mahila Samakhya will be on its way to the creation of a truly alternative approach to adult education.

Refocusing the Programme on education for empowerment requires *changes in the human resources staffing and development policy.* Each District Implementation Unit as well as the State Programme Office is to have an experienced education expert on its staff who together will form a team for backing-up and supporting the education component in the Programme. Mahila Samakhya has a great resource of in-house practical experience in training methodologies, use of drama and cultural expressions, teaching by improvisation in non-formal settings. These experiences can be brought up to a higher professional level with a well directed staff development plan.

Education of children

The focus on education for empowerment naturally includes the next generation by giving attention to the education of children and particularly girls. Mahila Samakhya is enhancing a growing awareness about the values of children's and particularly girls education. The activism of the mahila sangha directed at the local schools indicates that a foundation for community interest and participation in improving the quality of education in the schools on the part of women exists and that other education programmes like the District Primary Education Programme could build upon this.

Child Care Centres

The primary function of the Child Care Centres seems to be child care with perhaps some attention to preschool education. Generally the centres have become regarded as a service from the government and a sense of ownership and shared responsibility by the sangha seems to be missing in many cases. One could question if there still exists a qualitative difference between the ICDS centres and centres run through Mahila Samakhya and if it is not duplicating the services from the Department of Child Development. Instead Mahila Samakhya could focus on collaboration with the concerned Departments and on influencing the policies and the policy implementation related to the child care centres in order to make them more responsive to the needs and situations of rural women who are currently not being reached through the existing services.

Non-formal education centres for children

The non-formal education initiatives run by the sanghas are meeting a need for alternative modes of education, which provide a learner-friendly and safe environment for girls, who otherwise would remain excluded from participation in formal education. The numbers of NFE centres are growing

and there is a lot of scope for further growth, the non-availability of teachers being the most severe constraint. We noted that the preparation and training of the teachers for non-formal education is limited. Training in pedagogic methods, alternative learning approaches are needed. In addition to engaging its own professional resource persons in the District and State teams Mahila Samakhya needs to work at further networking and co-operation with educational resource organisations in the further development of its education component.

Mahila Shiksha Kendras

The Mahila Shiksha Kendras are the most outstanding contribution of Mahila Samakhya in the area of girls' education. They provide a residential school for teen-age girls between 14 and 18 years of age who for various reasons have stopped going to school after Standard four. This is a most relevant age group as they are the adult women and mothers of tomorrow. Being given this opportunity allows them to delay the age of marriage and get a certain level of education first, to escape from being drawn into bonded labour, to escape from an existence as prostitute, and to prepare for a new future and life in dignity.

Without doing injustice to the relevance and importance of the MSK as an extremely valuable alternative educational provision for girls, which will definitely change their prospects in life, there are areas which need to be addressed like the curriculum and curriculum development, the training of teachers in pedagogy, child development, classroom methods, dealing with gender in education etc. Moreover, there does not seem to be a clear vision with a forward looking perspective on the future development of the MSK. The original objective was to provide for an educational facility which would help to create an educated cadre of women for development of education in backward rural areas and for rural development. That vision has gradually faded away as the MSK has become like an alternative boarding school for girls. Mahila Samakhya needs to reconsider its vision and strategy for the future of the MSK.

Co-operation with DPEP

The presence of Mahila Samakhya in the districts wherein the DPEP is planning to operate provides scope for co-operation between the two programmes in areas of e.g. village mobilisation, community participation, gender training for teachers and DPEP staff, development of gender relevant learning materials, and creation of alternate modes of education for out-of-school children. In this respect the formation of joint MS-DPEP task group is recommended who will work out the further plans for co-operation at general State level, as well as for the districts to be covered by both programmes with the aim of

- . increasing access to and retention in primary & continuing education of girls, and
- . ensuring quality of learning that is meaningful and gender relevant.

The report of the National Workshop on the interface between the DPEP and the Mahila Samakhya Programme, organised by the Department of Education (MHRD) in July 1996 provides guidelines that need to be further elaborated and put into practice.

Expansion of the Programme

During the next five year plan Mahila Samakhya intends to further extend its outreach into three more districts, which means that by the year 2000 the Programme will be present in almost half of the total number of districts in Karnataka. The current situation with sanghas in different stages of strength calls for a diversified strategy based on the lessons learned in the past, the increased presence and visibility in the State and within the districts, and the current momentum of spontaneous expansion via the sanghas. The process of expansion is to be seen in connection with the process of de-linking the strong sanghas and strengthening of their capacities to become self-reliant.

Documentation and reporting

Over the years Mahila Samakhya has produced a wealth of documentation which provides a rich resource of information for internal as well as for external purposes. For a better insight in the progression and evolution of the programme in a long time perspective and in relation to the basic principles and objectives of Mahila Samakhya a greater degree of systematisation and analysis is necessary. The creation of a data base of gender relevant development statistics, could help to place the contributions from Mahila Samakhya in a wider development perspective.

Mahila Samakhya as a resource organisation for the empowerment of women

Mahila Samakhya is perceived as a time-bound programme that is to phase itself out after a certain period of time. This perception is in contradiction with the understanding of empowerment as an on-going process of growth. What can be time-bound is the process of sangha formation and consolidation, and the period a sangha needs in order to de-link itself from the regular support of its sehayogini.

Instead of phasing itself out the Mahila Samakhya Programme structure is able to build on the strength of its presence and its credibility gained in the Districts and the State. Its future is to expand and differentiate its role in order to be responsive to the needs related to the different stages of development of the existing and the new sanghas. In recognition of the sanghas as mature, self-sustaining organisations in their own right, capable of making their own decisions and determining the direction of their development process, the Mahila Samakhya Structure has to diversify and change its role. From this point of view Mahila Samakhya can be regarded as one of the resource organisations to be accessed by the sanghas for provision of (gender-sensitive) training inputs and materials, for providing information, knowledge and new perspectives on issues coming up in the sangha, for facilitation of access to other resource organisations or assistance in setting up and sustaining support structures. As a support structure of the sanghas Mahila Samakhya could play a stronger role in advocacy and policy development in support of women's equality and empowerment.

By converting the existing structure of DIUs and SPO into a network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres with accessible branches at taluka and cluster levels it can provide a flexible, accessible and multi-functional support structure. This will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy. It requires a human resources development plan which provides for staff development, staff training and capacity building for sahayoginis and district staff. To accompany the recommended changes a review of the financial pattern and financial management procedures will also be necessary.

MAHILA SAMAKHYA KARNATAKA

**observations and findings based on the visit of
the Indo-Dutch evaluation team in January 1997**

1. Introduction

Karnataka is one of the four States visited for the Indo-Dutch evaluation of the Mahila Samakhya Programme, which took place during the first weeks of January 1997. The task of the evaluation mission was to review the programme over the last five years and assess its impact in terms of empowerment of women, and to assess and analyse the processes of empowerment at the level of the sanghas or women's collectives. In addition to this the mission was to look into financial management issues. For this evaluation a set of leading questions have been formulated by the National Programme Office related to among others

- the impact of the programme on women's personal and family life in terms of women's autonomy,
- the ability of the programme
 - . to create a foundation for a grass-roots level women's movement,
 - . to facilitate women's political participation,
 - . to evolve a focus on women's legal rights,
 - . to address women's issues cutting across caste and class divides;
- the emerging trends in terms of pace, growth and impact;
- the interface of Mahila Samakhya with other educational programmes like DPEP;
- the adequacy of the reporting system in providing insight into the programme;
- the expansion strategies in Mahila Samakhya.

To guide the evaluation a set of parameters in the form of a matrix has been developed by a committee of State Programme Directors. The Terms of Reference including the matrix are attached to the General Overview (Part A).

The evaluation covers the four states where the programme is being implemented under the agreement between the Governments of India and The Netherlands for financial assistance during the 1982-1997 period. Two members of the evaluation team visited Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, and two members visited Karnataka and Gujarat.

The visit in Karnataka lasted five days and took place between January 4 and 9. During this period we had meetings in Bangalore and travelled through three of the five districts wherein the Mahila Samakhya Programme is being implemented: Raichur, Bijapur and Bidar. The District Programme Coordinator of Mysore District accompanied us to Raichur where she had been in charge of the Programme until last year. The District Programme Co-ordinator of Gulbarga District met us in Bidar which gave us an opportunity to get some first hand information on the District Programmes not covered by our visit. During our travels we were accompanied by the State Programme Director and the Junior Resource Person of the State Programme Office. This allowed us to extend our discussions and exchange views while travelling on the road. Both have assisted us as interpreters during meetings with sangha women, sahayakis (sakhis), sahayoginis, children and teachers.

The programme for the visit has been prepared by the State and District teams who provided us with excellent support and arrangements. The visit programme included attendance of sahayaki meetings, the opening of a sangha hut, a children's mela, Mahila Shiksha Kendras (MSKs) and meetings with sahayoginis and staff at the District Implementation Units. The district teams have taken a lot of effort to expose us to different aspects of the Programme and as much as time allowed us we tried to use the opportunities given to interact with small groups of sangha women, teachers and children. However, the visit was short, we had long distances to cover between visits and we were constantly confronted with problems of timing. The shortage of time did not

allow for an in-depth understanding of the programme and its impact on the lives of the sangha women doing justice to all of its facets in the proper perspective of their daily socio-political, cultural and economic environments. We relied on what we could observe and what women could tell us during the meetings, and the cases reported in the documentation made available to us.

Due to a high level of staff turnover and changes at the State and District Offices there is hardly any institutional history left within the programme structure. With the exception of two District Programme Co-ordinators (one of them recently got transferred from Raichur to Mysore) and a few resource persons most of the staff in the State and District Offices have not more than one year experience in the Mahila Samakhya Programme. This limited our possibility to look into the historical dimension of the Programme and assess its progress over the last five years. It also means that unless the experiential knowledge laying with the older group of sahayoginis is being documented systematically, valuable knowledge from which lessons could be learned is disappearing. This applies for instance to the experiences regarding sangha development and factors related to breaking up of sanghas, or to the involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the National Literacy Campaign.

On the positive side, the mission is impressed by the resilience and the inner strength of the programme on the ground enabling it to continue and progress on its own steam without much leadership or guidance from the top of the programme structure. The problems the Mahila Samakhya Programme Karnataka faced at the State level during a transitional period were many, including lack of clarity of vision, strategic thinking, planning and communication between the state and districts. Under-staffing at the state as well as the district levels created further problems. The new staff learnt by trial and error without any systematic introductory training. As a result some dilution of the concepts, principles and philosophy have crept in and has led to overall stagnation in recent years.

It is to be noted that at present the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka is in the midst of a process of internal reflection on the conceptual understanding of the Mahila Samakhya principles and its visions for the future. This is done by looking at the impact made in the seven years of its existence and by reviewing the effectiveness of its approaches to the empowerment of women who live under conditions of poverty, marginalisation and caste/gender oppression. The re-orientation process has come after a series of changes at the top of the organisational structure. This was followed by an administrative re-organisation which included the solution of staffing problems, the streamlining and smoothing of administrative and financial procedures and putting in place an administrative system with greater transparency and consistency as well as inherent flexibility and responsiveness to local contexts and issues.

The process of re-orientation of the entire programme has begun with the organisation of an all State sammelan in October 1996 in which sangha women, sahayoginis, programme and administrative staff from all five districts and the State Office participated. It was the first sammelan after three years. Another input which set off the re-orientation process was the study done by two members of the National Resource Group (NRG), Lakshmi Krishnamurthy and Sharda Jain, to assess the development of the Mahila Sanghas in terms of empowerment, which involved interaction with sanghas in Bidar and Bijapur. The results of a study on the changing status of women in Karnataka¹, which included women from mahila sanghas in Raichur and Bijapur Districts, are expected to have an input in the process as well. As a follow-up to these studies Mahila Samakhya Karnataka is planning a three level evaluation study which is to provide a better understanding of the empowerment processes of and in the sanghas and help to develop a systematised mechanism for following the sangha development processes with a set of concrete,

¹ The study was implemented in 1996 by the Women's Advocacy and Policy Research Unit of the National Institute of Advanced Studies. The results of the study are expected to be available in the beginning of 1997.

and possibly quantifiable indicators, which can be computer-processed.

The re-orientation process is to lead towards a redefinition of the vision of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka and affirmation of its nature as a education programme for the empowerment of women. It will also lead to redefinition of the programme goals and objectives, to development of forward looking strategies and plans, and to identification of strategic partnerships with like-minded organisations in e.g. participatory rural development, innovation of educational methods and approaches, and to identification of resource organisations for training inputs aimed at reinforcing and furthering perspective and capacity building. From our observations and findings in the field we fully endorse this initiative and we hope that our findings will somehow feed into the process.

In spite of the problems faced by Mahila Samakhya Karnataka during the five year period under review the Programme has not only survived but has shown resilience. Staff members at the district and taluka level are showing great commitment and dedication to the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Given this broad overall picture what follows is a more detailed report of our findings on the Mahila Samakhya Programme in the light of the terms of reference given to the mission.

2. The Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka

2.1 The context

The Mahila Samakhya Programme was launched in Karnataka in April 1989 and started to be implemented in three districts: Bidar, Bijapur, Mysore. From 1992 onwards the Programme extended its coverage by moving onto two new districts, Gulbarga and Raichur which together with Bidar and Bijapur form a solid block with similar socio economic and geo-climatic conditions in the northern part of Karnataka. These districts are characterized by the low rates for female literacy, poverty and backwardness of the rural population, by their drought prone areas with depletion of natural resources and meagre possibilities to make a decent living and by the existence of for women oppressive social traditions like the devadasi system and the custom of child marriages. Mysore District in the south of Karnataka is economically slightly better off, it was selected because a relatively large part of its population belongs to the scheduled tribes.

In all these districts Mahila Samakhya has deliberately focused on and reached the most poor and backward population groups. They mainly depend for their livelihood on seasonal, irregular and low paid agricultural labour, some livestock and on the scarce resources available in the environment. Seasonal migration to neighbouring States and Mumbai is prevalent among parts of the population and in some areas situations of bonded labour exist.

In 1997 the Mahila Samakhya Programme is working in five districts in the State of Karnataka. The choice of the districts has been made most judiciously with four of these districts considered the most backward in terms of their economic and social indicators. Table I in ANNEX I sets out some of these indicators as compared to the State as a whole.

2.2 The coverage

The coverage in terms of numbers of villages varies depending on the duration of the presence of Mahila Samakhya in the respective districts and the prevailing conditions which enhance or constrain its expansion e.g. distances to cover, responsiveness of the population etc. At present Mahila Samakhya is present in 22 of the 175 talukas (12,5%) and 914 of the 27,066 odd villages (3,4%) in the State reaching 30,618 women. On the assumption that each member comes from a separate household we can say that more than thirty thousand households are reached, including the men who belong to these households. Given that the average household size is around six

Overview I
Mahila Samakhya Karnataka 1995-96

Districts	Bidar	Bijapur	Gulbarga	Mysore	Raichur	Total
Nr. of villages	208	225	164	203	114	914
Nr. of active sanghas	200	200	70	175	70	715
Av. size of sangha	34 women	32 women	40 women	30 women	33 women	33/34 ww
Nr AE centres	92	33	20	--	--	145
Nr NFE centres	94	74	45	21	44	278
Nr MSKs (*)	1	1 (2)	(1)	1	(1)	3 (8)
Nr Child Care Centres	41	12	18	15	5	89
Nr Savings Groups	195	190	100	71	58	614
Nr Sahayoginis	20	18	15	19	11	83
Nr Sahayakis	1200	450	328	n.i.	174	2152 (+ Mysore)
Nr AE teachers	94	33	20	--	--	147
Nr NFE teachers	92	74	45	21	44	276
Nr CCC teachers	82	24	32	15	10	141
MSK teachers	2	3	.	2	.	7
Nr women trained as dai	--	8	.	--	89	77
Women elected in PR	n.i.	59	22	54	n.i.	
Total sangha women reached	7,000	7,258	6,560	6,000	3,800	30,618
Nr children reached through CCC, NFE, MSK	3,561	1,300	1,700	1,000	1,492	9,053

(*) : new MSKs in Gulbarga, Raichur and Bijapur ()

AE : Adult Education

NFE : Non-Formal Education

CCC : Child Care Centre

MSK : Mahila Sahiksana Kendra

PR : Panchayati Raj system

Source : Mahila Samakhya Karnataka, Annual Report 1995/96

More than 30 thousand women are reached and through them their families, their communities and village authorities.

More than nine thousand children are reached through non-formal education (CCC, NFE and MSK).

Almost four thousand persons are involved as Sahayogini, Sahayaki, teacher (AE, NFE, CCC, MSK) or local birth attendant (dai).

persons in the State the outreach among the population is quite substantial. In Bidar this expansion has been most impressive both in terms of talukas covered, as well as number of villages reached. Yet, there is still a great scope for expansion in the future in terms of membership of the sanghas within the villages, as well in terms of expansion into new villages in the talukas covered, in the new talukas and in new districts in the State of Karnataka, (see ANNEX II).

2.3 Features of the Programme

Since 1992 the Programme has widened its scope in terms of content. During the initial stages the Programme focused in sangha formation and registration, accessing government services and schemes, land and environmental issues, challenging social traditions like the devadasi system and women's health. In 1991 Bijapur District got involved in the Literacy Mission, in other districts the momentum of the Literacy Campaign came during and after 1992. During the 1992-1996 period women's literacy and the education of children have emerged as central issues. Adult education (literacy and post literacy) classes are running more or less successfully in three of the five districts and in all districts sanghas take the responsibility for 278 non-formal education centres for out-of-school children and 90 centres for child care and pre-school education. A total of six Mahila Shiksha Kendras have been established, two in Bijapur and one in each of the other districts, which provide educational opportunities for teenage girls between the age of 14 and 18 years. The MSKs in Gulbarga, Raichur and the second MSK in Bijapur have been opened in mid-1996. Over nine thousand children are reached through these centres and prepared for (re) entrée into the formal education system or for an equivalent level of learning. Getting girls into the education system is seen as a strategy for delaying the age of marriage and combating child marriage as well as for preventing children from being drawn into bonded labour.

More than two thirds (67%) of the sanghas in all of the districts are engaged in saving and loans schemes which have taken off with tremendous speed especially in Bijapur and Bidar. Women's health and particularly the use of easily available, affordable and effective herbal medicine have become another central issues in the Mahila Samakhya Programme of Karnataka. And during and after the Panchayati Raj elections women's participation in politics was on the agendas of the sanghas in all five Districts and the Mahila Samakhya Programme provided political awareness training, and training in support of candidates and elected Panchayat members. In all districts Mahila Samakhya candidates got elected and quite a number have become president or vice-president.

Issues which are given attention to a greater or lesser extent in all districts are e.g.

- . women's literacy (Bidar, Bijapur, Gulbarga) and education of children (all Districts),
- . environmental protection and awareness (Mysore, Raichur),
- . social issues like the Devadasi system (Bijapur, Gulbarga), child marriage (all Districts), alcoholism and liquor trafficking (all Districts),
- . health awareness and use of herbal medicines (all Districts),
- . legal issues and awareness of legal processes (all Districts),
- . economic development programmes and accessing programmes like DWCR or TRYSEM (all Districts, particularly Bijapur, Gulbarga and Raichur),
- . savings and loans (all Districts),
- . political participation and leadership training (all Districts).

Activities related to the construction of sangha huts are on-going in all of the Districts.

3. The impact of the Programme

3.1 Strength of the women's collectives

In 1996 there were 773 active Sanghas or women's collectives and of these 256 were registered. The average size of the sanghas varies between 30 (Mysore) and 40 (Gulbarga) women, and taken together the sanghas have a membership of more than 30,000 women. Thus Mahila Samakhya can be said to have taken strong roots in the districts and talukas, in which it is located.

The impact on women who are members is really impressive. They have not only established a collective identity, but have also gained recognition in the community. These women are a visible force and exude a great sense of self-confidence. In all the three districts where the evaluation mission visited and met the sangha members, the women were able to articulate clearly the gains they had achieved from the sangha. Their visibility, mobility and manoeuvrability both in the community and within the family have increased enormously. Their empowerment in terms of self-confidence and sense of solidarity speaks volumes for the solid ground work that Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka has established, particularly among the most impoverished sections of the rural society in Karnataka.

The Programme has definitely given support, strength and feeling of hope. Very poor peasant women, eking out an existence at wage rates of Rs 5 to 8 find time and space to come together with other women, share their life experiences and plan together for change for the first time in their lives. This was the most touching part of the Programme both in Raichur and Bijapur. Most marginalised groups of woman, especially elderly agricultural workers and a sizable number of devadasis, were present at the sangha meetings. In Bidar the collective that the team met was of the Lambanis, a tribal group. Having been rehabilitated with government land and having a more egalitarian social structure the impact they experienced was more in the nature of an exposure to the outside world, a chance to interact with woman from other sections of society, and access to schemes and resources which help them to improve their lives.

According to the NRG study on the strength of the Mahila Sanghas² approximately 34% of the sanghas in Bidar and Bijapur can be considered as strong sanghas, 30% are of medium strength, whereas 37.5% are weak or have fallen apart. Related to the way they function strong sanghas are characterised by the following indicators:

the sangha

- . takes initiative in identifying a common cause
- . responds with sensitivity to issues of exploitation/violence on women
- . integrates community concerns in its agenda
- . takes decisions without guidance from the sahayogini
- . builds an image of 'a power to reckon with' at the community level
- . pressurises the existing system for greater accountability to people
- . attracts and sustains participation from different sets of women and men over varied issues
- . holds regular meetings in which women take active interest and indulge in creative, open minded problem solving
- . encourages alternative forms of learning
- . provides leadership opportunities to greater numbers of women³.

The capability of the sangha to function in this manner tells much about the formidable impact of the Mahila Samakhya Programme on the women who before the presence of the Programme were

² by Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurthy, 1996.

³ in Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurthy 1996, p. 24.

living in the dark corners of their homes, afraid to go outside, take initiative and raise their voices. The researchers involved in the study on the status of women in Karnataka were struck by the openness, the assertiveness, the strength of their voices and opinions and the freedom of movement of the sangha women as compared to other women living under comparable rural conditions in the State⁴.

Yet more than two thirds of the Mahila Sanghas are still in the process of reaching this stage of strength. The process of empowerment and building of inner strength of and within the sanghas is an area that needs the full and continuing attention of Mahila Samakhya in the future and cannot be overlooked or side-tracked in the midst of emerging issues like the building of sangha federations. Quite a number of sanghas have fallen apart or are no longer active. A better understanding is needed about this phenomenon and the factors involved in sanghas breaking up or losing interest in order to draw lessons for future strategies related to strengthening the empowerment of and within the sanghas. Frequently mentioned reasons are related to e.g.

- . internal power mechanisms in the sanghas and a dominating position of sahayakis or sahayoginis,
- . economic or money related factors such as predominance of economic interests, abuse of money, restrictions about the numbers of persons who can access loans,
- . out-migration of sangha members,
- . inter-family conflicts,
- . outside pressures.

However, to date no systematic in-depth study has been conducted.

3.2 Impact on women's personal and family life

Since the members of the Mahila Sanghas largely belong to the category of agricultural workers, they probably exercised some mobility and visibility as working women. Given their age and also the fact that they were earning members in the family their voices probably were heard to some extent even though muted. What the Sangha membership has done is to give them a feeling of belonging and togetherness, to instil a renewed sense of self-respect and dignity, to enlarge their sphere of movement, to increase their prestige in the families as useful members for accessing government facilities or services, to make them feel confident in their ability to approach and address village authorities and make them accountable.

Membership of the sangha has changed their self-image and given them an identity of women who belong to a visible and increasingly influential group in the village community. Their sangha membership has raised their image in the perception of their families. As a result, men no longer resist but encourage the women to go for meetings and support them in various ways. It was striking to note that the Mahila Sangha has come to be considered as one large Samakhya family and the husbands, sons and brothers consider themselves to be part of that family.

In the melas organised at Raichur, Bijapur and Bidar, the mission noticed that men were as active as women in organising the events and helping with household chores so that women can attend. It shows how women now have earned the time, space and mobility to come together and to meet formally in meetings. What is a meeting, how to conduct it, and its organisation and function has all become part of the Mahila Samakhya Sangha members' ethos. The English word meeting has become part of their Kannda vocabulary. And a Mahila Samakhya meeting has become a visible public event.

Now women now feel that they can raise their voices in public meetings confidently and without fear, and they feel that their voices are being listened to. The sangha gives them strength and

⁴ oral information.

supports them through difficult times, they feel the strength of acting together and as one group firmly asserted:

'we may have our differences and conflicts, but we can deal with those. Nothing can make our sangha fall apart, because we are there to make sure that the bond of the sangha will not be broken.'

The activities of the sanghas and the exposure to training, information and knowledge has an impact on women's changing attitudes to and understanding of social traditions which reflect and endorse women's oppression such as the devadasi-system, child marriage, certain taboos or prohibitions. They increasingly challenge social practices which perpetuate women's inequality. Their attitudes towards the education of their children and particularly girls has changed and now they start demanding accountability from the local schools and teachers in providing good education.

Although the actions of women do not directly challenge the existing gender relationships or the local power structures subtle changes are becoming visible in the attitudes of male family members, in women's decisions making powers in their families, in recognition they get from women and men from other caste communities, and the recognition and respect gained from village authorities and government officials. On the whole the impact is most visible in improvement of the survival base and living conditions. Further impact in changing the balance and practices of power will require continuation of the process of careful and creative strategizing with a long term vision on women's equality which determines the direction.

3.3 Women's health

Women reported better health of themselves and their children, as small children are being regularly checked in the child care centres, Primary Health Care centres are visited more frequently and health workers are called to the villages. In the area of women's health Mahila Samakhya has adopted a holistic approach which includes attention to the indigenous health system and revival of the knowledge and practice of herbal medicine.

We did not meet women who have become herbalists and local healers. But women's health and particularly the use of herbal medicines and traditional wisdom for treatment of a wide variety of ailments and illnesses including some common gynaecological problems, is one of the focal issues in the Programme. The spread of the use of herbal medicine is increasing as gradually more women become involved in the training on identification of medicinal plants, the preparation and use of herbal medicines, as well as growing of medicinal plants. In a number of villages herbal gardens are emerging and with co-operation of the Forest Department sanghas will become involved in starting nurseries for growing medicinal plants. It means a revival of traditional knowledge and experience as well as protection and multiplication of species which have medicinal value.

In some of the District local birth attendants (dais) have been trained and women have been involved in health awareness training programmes, which include nutrition, hygiene and sanitation, women's health and identification of diseases, understanding of the health system and services. Attention has been given women's reproductive health and, sporadically, aids. More systematic approaches could perhaps be evolved as women are increasingly showing their interest.

The impact on women is their better understanding of the function of their bodies and their reproductive systems, demystification of superstitious beliefs and misconceptions, eradication of harmful practices, awareness of traditional and modern health systems, and how and when to approach them, and increased ability to recognise problems and take appropriate actions.

Due to the lack of village health statistics it is difficult to assess the impact of Mahila Samakhya on

the health and nutrition status. In some areas Mahila Samakhya with the sanghas have conducted health surveys. Discussing the results of the survey in the sanghas can lead to sanghas becoming actively involved in monitoring the health situation in their villages or at least in the community of which they are a part, by keeping records of infant mortality, maternal mortality, occurrence of illnesses, use of herbal medicines, visits to the PHC or visits by AMN workers etc. This could help in evolving more effective strategies for informing the health authorities, changing the systems and ultimately influence health policies and their implementation.

3.4 Economic empowerment

The economic empowerment of women is an area we were not able to pursue during the visit of the mission. But the area of economic development and particularly women's activities regarding savings and loans, are reported upon in the annual reports as it is another of the major areas of attention in the Karnataka Programme.

The activities in the area of economic development are mainly related to the use of the sangha fund for accessing loans for income generating activities, either individually or as a group. However, little is reported about the effects of such schemes in terms of

- . skill improvement, new job opportunities, employment creation
- . increased incomes
- . improvement of living conditions, availability of food, improved nutritional status etc.

The impression is that accessing economic development schemes is definitely on the agendas of all district programmes perhaps more so in Bijapur, Gulbarga and Raichur. However, it meets with different degrees of success and also with many problems and difficulties. This could be partially related to the complexity of the procedures involved in accessing the schemes, restrictions with regard to groups size and other conditionalities, lack of possibilities for skill training, and the absence of accessible rural development and employment creation programmes in the area. More attention may need to be given to understand the factors involved, as well as to the identification of resource organisations (state as well as NGOs) involved in participatory rural development, environmental resources management and employment creation. Co-operation with such organisation in areas where Mahila Samakhya has already established a basis for women's involvement in participatory development may be a need for the future.

So far no activism is reported in the area of increased and equal wages or in changing the labour conditions of women. In Mysore and perhaps in other districts as well economic development is closely linked to the availability and protection of scarce natural resources. Watershed management schemes and environmental resource management programmes touch on areas wherein women's interests are involved. Women's active participation in the design, decision making and implementation of such programmes is an area whereby Mahila Samakhya can play a role in awareness raising, information and knowledge building, practical skills training and further capacity building of the sangha in terms of e.g. negotiating and management skills.

The main focus of activities in the area of economic development evolves around savings and loans. More than 85% of the active sanghas are engaged in group saving schemes and a total of savings up to 6 or 7 lakhs has been reported for Bidar and Bijapur. Most of the loans taken from the collective savings fund⁵ are used for individual purposes such as investment in livestock, in agricultural inputs, in equipment for income generating activities such as tailoring, for a shop or hotel or the for immediate emergencies, or for getting a loan from the bank. The rules for repayment are determined by the sangha and generally repayment seems to be good. No information is available about the results in terms of e.g. the money accessed and received by

⁵ this is not to be confused with and deliberately kept separate from the sangha fund or honorarium

using the sangha loan as collateral, what it has been used for and how this has effected improvements or changes in the incomes, lives and living conditions of women.

In terms of impact the savings schemes are reported to have given women greater control of their incomes and savings, it has

- . increased women's awareness about their economic assets and how they can use them,
- . decreased their dependence on loan sharks
- . made women aware of how to handle money, banking procedures and how to access loans,
- . increased their confidence in dealing with the bank system and taking financial decisions,
- . increased their decision making powers in their families on financial matters,
- . created a buffer and security network for difficult times,
- . increased their confidence in their capabilities for handling money and savings and loan schemes.

And now sanghas have started forming federations with the aim of establishing their own Mahila Bank at cluster level. Bijapur District has already gone ahead in the preparations for the establishment of a Mahila Bank and formulated a set of rules and procedures.

The concept of the Women's Bank is related the idea of economic independence of sangha women and self-reliance of the sanghas. It is conceived as a credit system that will loan money to its members (sangha women) on easy repayment terms and for activities which regular banking system do not usually provide credit for. By creating this Women's Bank it is expected that high interest rates charged by official banks can be avoided. And the Women's Bank is seen as a factor for sustaining the self-reliance of the sangha after eventual withdrawal of the Mahila Samakhya support. The latter is linked to the sangha honorarium that is paid annually to those mahila sanghas that are of sufficient strength to deal with the sangha fund. It is to be expected that in the process of Mahila Samakhya phasing out its regular support to the sangha, the payment of the sangha honorarium will stop after some time. It means that by then the sangha is expected to be economically self-reliant and sustainable.

We fully endorse the validity of the arguments for self-reliance and sustainability of the sanghas as well as the economic independence of women. Questions could be raised regarding the active involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the establishment of special Mahila Banks.

- Have the available options with regard to alternative banking systems been sufficiently explored?
- Have the experiences of other women's organisations involved in women's banking like SEWA and/or Women's World Banking been sufficiently looked into?
- What will be the implications for the identity of Mahila Samakhya if it becomes banking system?
- What will be the costs in terms of investment in precious time, capacity building, skills training as well as attention and time spending of the sahayoginis, resource staff and the entire Mahila Samakhya apparatus?
- Is it going to divert the attention that needs to be given to strengthening of the empowerment processes of the mahila sanghas and other issues?
- What will be the implications of sangha women who are unable to pay the required membership fee for the bank?
- And what will be the implications for the relationships within the sangha if economic/commercial interests start interfering in the sangha?

We recommend Mahila Samakhya Karnataka to carefully review and reconsider its strategy and implications of its involvement in an economic and commercial activity like a banking system. Already we have seen that the running of the sanghas savings and loans system is taking a major chunk of the sahayoginis working time. And the question can be raised that if sangha women are not yet ready to run their small savings systems without the involvement of the sahayoginis how

will they be capable of running a Mahila Bank on their own (leaving aside the complications of organising the federation of a number of sanghas who are the 'owners' of the bank). Instead of establishing its own Mahila Banks Mahila Samakhya could direct its policy towards influencing the banking system, assisting the sanghas in negotiating their terms of cooperation with local banks or with elsewhere existing women's banks. Perhaps banks could be convinced to open special women's branches which fulfil the criteria and terms set by sangha women.

The recommendation for reconsideration of Mahila Samakhya's involvement in banking is also related to the sometimes negative experiences of the impact of the saving schemes on the sanghas: such as money related issues creating rifts within sanghas which eventually may lead to the sanghas falling apart. And savings may become the predominant activity of the sangha which comes to overshadow other issues. Some sangha women openly say that the savings scheme is to bond that keeps the sangha together. Savings schemes together with the sangha honorarium may cause sanghas to become reluctant to open up to new members who are unable to save and become closed for expansion. There is no information available on the scale of these phenomena, but the area of savings and women's economic empowerment is clearly an area that needs attention and looking into.

Without devaluating the argument that the experience in saving and banking shows women that they can handle money and deal with a banking system, we are of the opinion that Mahila Samakhya as an education programme for women's empowerment should not become engaged in running a bank or running e.g. income generating projects. With regard to banking and other issues related to women's economic empowerment we would like to refer to the Working Women's Forum in Karnataka who has an office in Bijapur. The possibilities for establishing a linkage to this programme and join forces in the areas of employment, wages, savings and banking need to be further explored.

3.5 Strength of women's political participation

Besides the formation of mahila sanghas, the second most impressive and useful function the Mahila Samakhya has been able to play is enabling women to participate in the political process. Among the seven hundred odd villages in which Mahila Samakhya is in operation with 30,000 Sangha members, more than two hundred women contested the elections. What is truly remarkable is that more than half the women who contested the elections got elected, among them are 10 devadasis. Some elected women have become presidents and vice presidents (see Table II). Mahila Samakhya has helped women understand the whole range of issues around political participation and empowered them in the real sense of the term.

One has to realise that - without the positive help and encouragement from Mahila Samakhya - political participation was way beyond the reach of most women in the villages. Many had no idea what politics was about. The women candidates did not have to spend any of their own money, and used the Sangha funds for clearing all legal formalities and took collective decisions about who should contest and what strategies to use. Most contestants had support from their families.

A few of the elected women (8) left the sangha afterwards, largely due to the pressure from their men. The elected members, who have become strong, still need Mahila Samakhya to help them function in their new roles. The Mahila Samakhya goes to great lengths to train them in public speaking, dress codes, literacy and awareness of issues. A further step ahead might be to assist the elected women (sangha and non sangha) to formulate a common women's agenda and to form a network of elected women who can support each other and join their forces for their common women's interests.

The focus and impact of these women in the Panchayats is most in asking for basic infrastructure facilities for their villages. The participation of sangha women in the public political arena is an

illustration of how Mahila Samakhya has changed women's self-image, enhanced their access to information, and has made them realise the strength of collective action.

Table: II
Mahila Samakhya in Politics - Gram Panchayat 1997.

District	No. Of women contestants	No. of women elected	No: elected as president	No. elected as Vice-president
Bidar	30	27		
Bijapur	90	59	6	7
Gulbarga	35	22	1	1
Mysore	30	13		
Raichur	14	14		
District	199	135	7	8

Source: M.S. K 1994-95 Annual Report

3.6 Women's legal rights

In one of the district programmes, in Bijapur, women's law is a major area of attention and training has been conducted to create awareness of the legal system and legal procedures. We have no information on the impact of the training. In all district programmes legal issues are continuously on the agendas in the sangha meetings. It relates to dealing with cases of domestic violence, family disputes, land and property issues etc. Sangha women support their members if they have to appear in court and activism of the sanghas often evolves around issues related to social injustices. The sanghas prefer to solve family related problems of e.g. domestic violence and property rights by using their own non-confrontational approach rather than taking it as a case into the legal courts which are costly and in which women do not have much confidence. Yet, if needed they will report cases to the police or go to court. The approach of women is through reconciliation, public exposure and publication. In Gulbarga District plans exist for establishing legal support and relief centres for women at cluster or taluka level.

In Mysore activism around legal land issues is an interest of the entire tribal community and Mahila Samakhya is actively co-operating with local NGOs and tribal collectives in fighting against programmes which do not recognise land ownership as a basic right of the tribal community.

As far as we are informed no initiatives have been taken as yet for addressing the area of women's legal and human rights and women's rights under tribal law in a systematic manner with the aim of enhancing women's awareness about how to use their legal rights. This could be an area to give more systematic attention to in the future in the entire Programme.

3.7 The potential for breaking caste and class divides

Generally, most of the sanghas in Karnataka are affiliated with specific caste or tribal groups. After the early stages of sangha formation conscious efforts have been made to include women from other caste or religious groups in the sanghas upon the condition that they would be willing to sit together with the sangha members and eat the food prepared by the sangha members regardless

of their caste background. In Bidar District some Muslim women have joined the sanghas. Almost 22% of the sanghas in Bidar are mixed and more than half of the sanghas have a Harijan membership. In Bijapur 31% of the sanghas are mixed. No data are available on Mysore, Gulbarga and Raichur. The sanghas in Mysore are reported to be linked either to the tribal community or to the scheduled castes. The likelihood of the tribal population to inter-mix with Harijan women seems to be very small, because of differences in social status. According to the outcomes of the study on the empowerment of the mahila sanghas⁶ women who belong to different castes will come together in one sangha as long as the joiners are of a lower caste. Purely upper caste sanghas or an intermixing of upper with lower caste women does not occur.

On the whole it can be said that the efforts of enlarging sanghas by including women from other caste groups have met disappointments and have not been encouraging further efforts. There is genuine fear among the sangha women who are predominantly from scheduled caste backgrounds that upper caste women might try to dominate the sangha. And apprehension exists that women from another caste community might have diverging interests which will destabilise the sangha. And women from upper castes belong to the landed classes, who are the employers of the sangha women from the SC or ST communities and exploit their labour. Caste divides are strongly ingrained in the texture of the society and are probably the most difficult boundaries to break through. This is especially the case when caste interests are inter-twined with class and political interests.

There are areas where caste barriers are overcome e.g. when women from upper caste communities come to sangha meetings or events organised by the sanghas. And sanghas deal with cases brought by women from other caste groups. Child Care Centres and non-formal education classes for children provide a space where women from different caste groups meet and interact. Sangha women who have become trained as practitioners in herbal medicines provide their services to women and men from upper caste community when they come for treatment. And in the training of elected Panchayat members women from other caste community have joined. The potential scope for reaching more women, including women from upper castes is very much there.

Increasingly Mahila Samakhya is confronted with requests from upper caste women who want to form their own collective and the Programme has to be prepared to consider and answer such requests, without compromising the basic Programme philosophy. Can Mahila Samakhya play a role in the promotion of a village-community based open women's forum, which is open for women regardless of their caste, class or communal background and which brings them together around common women's issues and interests as women? Such issues could be women's health, the education of girls and joint celebrations of festivals such as the International Women's Day. Although difficult the effort to broaden the sangha membership and build towards a community of women remains a long term challenge within the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

3.8 The emergence of a grass-roots women's movement

Sangha activism about women's issues such as widows' pensions, the abolition of the devadasi system and rehabilitation of devadasis, child marriage, anti-alcoholism and liquor trafficking and other forms of social injustice are clear indications of the emergence of a grass roots women's movement. Sanghas are actively seeking lateral relationships with other sanghas to enlarge their collective strength, to join forces and to mobilise women on common issues across village levels. And women from other villages are requesting the formation of sanghas in their villages in order to be able to join the 'movement'. Mahila Sanghas have become visible entities with voices that need to be listened to and sangha women are ready to use that capacity more effectively.

⁶ by Sherda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurty, 1996

3.9 Building a federation of Mahila Sanghas, an emerging issue

As mentioned above the seeds for the building sangha federations have been sown and the issue is on the agendas for discussions at different level of the Programme. The idea of a federation was voiced as a common vision of the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Karnataka as early as in 1991 by the then Programme Director. To what extent this vision has been shared all the way down to the sanghas is an open question.

What seems to have happened is that the idea of federation has become an end in itself which is linked to the goal of achieving self-reliance and sustainability of the sanghas after withdrawal from Mahila Samakhya as a support structure. However, how the formation of federations is linked to women's empowerment processes in the sanghas is no longer very clear. Federations are seen as instrumental in strengthening women's voices at the Block Offices, to provide a network for mutual support of sahayakis when accessing resources and government officials at the Block Headquarters, for development of more effective strategies for addressing common women's issues like anti-liquor activities. And lateral linkages among sanghas may help individual sanghas to clarify their positions, to understand their problems in a broader perspective and feel stronger with the support from other sanghas. Cluster and block level meetings of sahayakis from different sanghas have proven to be a source of strength as well as a source of learning from successful experiences in other sanghas.

Most of these arguments are valid, but they do not necessarily lead to a structure in the shape of a formalised federation, at least not yet. Active networking among sanghas at cluster and block levels may have the same effects, but do not require investment in infra-structural arrangements. Earlier efforts in forming federations in Bidar and Gulbarga have not been successful because the process involved has not been given sufficient time and perhaps thought.

There is also a danger that the investment in the forming of federation will be a drain on the attention that need to be given to the strengthening of the sanghas. We feel that priority is to be given to reinforcing the empowerment processes of and within the sanghas, two thirds of which have been found to be needing further strengthening. In addition to this the sangha initiatives in networking among sanghas at cluster and taluka level are to be supported and strengthened with the related capacity building among sahayakis and sangha women who could become a team of network promoters. All of this could be seen as steps in the process of growing towards the formation of federations of sanghas which are grounded from within the sanghas rather than promoted from above.

A parallel trend is the emergence of initiatives for support structures at cluster and block levels such as a women's resource and information centre, a legal support and relief centre for women, a women's bank etc. Room for supporting such initiatives and provision for related skills training and further capacity building could also be integrated in the future strategic plans of the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

3.10 Contradictory position of sahayoginis and sahayakis

It must be mentioned that the impact of empowerment is not just on the sangha members but on all women working with the Mahila Samakhya Programme. It is most visible and pronounced on the sahayoginis and sahayakis.

Sahayakis

The sahayakis are the village level activists who have been selected by the sangha members for training as sahayaki. They are expected to share their experiences and information received during

the training with the women in the sangha meetings. Most of the active sanghas have more than one trained sahayaki as most sanghas have adopted a rotation system and often two or more women are sent for the training. In Bidar 1200 sahayakis attended sahayaki training programmes with the result that the sanghas have an average of six sahayakis. In total more than 2000 sahayakis have been trained and have become empowered beyond expectation. They are strong in terms of self-confidence, verbal skills, mobilising women, organisation of the sangha meetings and representing their sanghas in cluster, taluka and district level meetings.

With regard to their position in the sangha there is a risk that some sahayakis individually or as group may become overactive and dominate the sangha preventing its growth. We were unable to see to what extent sahayakis have been able to share their learning experiences sufficiently within the sangha, but incidences have been reported of sanghas falling apart because sahayakis are taking a too dominating position. This calls for a greater understanding of the empowerment process of and within the sangha's, the evolving mechanisms for sharing power and control. The series of studies on the sangha development and the internal power mechanisms planned by the State Programme Office are to look into this issue.

Sahayoginis

The sahayoginis are the fieldworkers who co-ordinate the processes and activities of a cluster of usually ten sanghas. They play a crucial role in the formation mahila sanghas, in sustaining and reinforcing the sanghas' empowerment processes, in providing training and information aimed at perspective and capacity building of the sangha, in the training of the sahayakis. They assist the sanghas in preparing their activity plans, in consolidating these into plans for the cluster, block and the district, in budget preparations, in documentation and reporting on the sangha processes, in conducting surveys. They are the key actors for the empowerment of women at the grassroots level enabling them to improve their socio-economic status. They have been chosen for their communication skills and acceptability among villagers. The sahayoginis mobilise the collective strength of women to bring about an attitudinal shift from age old beliefs and practices.

With their commitment and hard work they have made a great and valuable contribution over the last seven years, particularly during the early years. And strong and lasting relationships have been built between the sahayoginis and 'their' sanghas. Although they have become fully professional as fieldworkers they are to a certain extent considered as paid volunteers in a job with an insecure future and without career perspectives. They feel fully capable and competent in doing their work, they have become vocal, assertive and exude a great sense of confidence. Over the years and particularly during a period of weak leadership from the top and increased reliance on their own experience and resourcefulness, fatigue has crept in with a sense of dissatisfaction. Training and work has become repetitive and more like a routine as new inspiration and perspectives are lacking.

Their day to day work is co-ordinating the sangha activities, being responsive to their demands and issues. Most have received a solid training, are clear about the Mahila Samakhya philosophy and its basic concepts, and have internalised a gender perspective in their approach to their work. But they lack new inspiration, growth and opportunities for further perspective building which help them to link the demands arising from the sanghas to gender and empowerment of women. They are in a contradictory position as they are expected to be responsive to the development agendas of the sangha women which focus on their basic survival needs and improvement of their living conditions. At the same time they are to bring this in line with the empowerment agenda of the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Besides, day to day problems may override the attention for broader perspectives and development of long term strategies. This inevitably leads to stagnation in the Programme, in losing its conceptual clarity, vision and sense of direction as an empowerment Programme.

The signs can clearly be observed in the attitudes and expressions of sahayoginis. Some have left and joined other organisations. Others are seriously contemplating entering into politics or starting their own NGOs. And there are sahayoginis who have built strong rapport with and control over the sanghas, reinforcing the sanghas dependency on their presence. This gives them a certain legitimacy to their (insecure) position, which they sometimes find unable to give up in absence of alternative prospects. It also makes other and less experienced district staff rather helpless in giving them directions. And there is a danger that their position over the years has become so strong that they can break sangha or prevent its growth.

To come out of this situation the following approaches are suggested:

- to involve the sahayoginis actively in the process of creative thinking for the re-orientation, rethinking and re-directing the Programme,
- to jointly evolve a forward looking human resources development plan which involves the sahayoginis in different capacities, provides for role differentiation and for lateral and upward mobility, and career paths,
- to invest in human resources capacity building and implement a training plan for sahayoginis and programme staff with a fresh approach which includes exposures to new perspectives and inspiration coming from the women's movement as well as building of professional capacities related to the progression in the process of sangha empowerment,
- to approach and consider sahayoginis as professional workers in the programme structure rather than as paid volunteers;
- and to review and update the remuneration system and make it compatible with equivalent positions and functions in the government and the NGO sector.

4. The education component and linkages to other education programmes like DPEP

Education for women's empowerment is central in the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Education is understood in a holistic and broad meaning as an empowering learning process which enables learners to question, to analyze, to seek answers, to act and reflect, and thereby to discover their inner strength and realise their potential. It involves a life long process of interactive learning, based on sharing of knowledge and life experiences, critical analysis and reflection, creating new kinds of knowledge and understanding.

In the study of the Mahila Sanghas a distinction is made between three interrelated aspects of education: education as life skills, education as knowledge and information, and education as literacy⁷. Education of life skills relates to the ability to manage life and is based on gaining confidence and self-esteem. It is underlying all of the activities in Mahila Samakhya and in the on-going processes of collective action/reflection/learning/ deciding/planning/action. Education as information and knowledge refers to accessing and analysing knowledge and information, and using it effectively. It is part of awareness workshops and training related to e.g. health, law, the environment, etc. In both aspects of education being literate in the sense of reading and writing is not directly essential for learning taking place, for feeling empowered and having confidence in one's strength to make changes.

In Mahila Samakhya education as literacy comes in when women discover the importance of literacy in dealing with the outside literate world with its written rules and procedures. It comes when the need arises for writing application letters, keeping records of savings, recording and checking minutes of meetings, getting clarification on procedures etc., and when the women experience its importance for furthering their knowledge and accessing new information. Thus in principle demands for literacy (reading, writing, numeracy skills and a wider body of knowledge) emerge from the developments within the sanghas.

⁷ Sharda Jain and Lakshmi Krishnamurty 1996, pp. 27 ff.

4.1 Literacy and education for empowerment

In Karnataka the Mahila Samakhya Programme has become actively engaged in the Literacy Mission since the beginning of the nineties, particularly in Bijapur and later also in Bidar and Mysore. The involvement of Mahila Samakhya varied per district and relates to motivational activities, the selection and training of local volunteers, development of materials and methods and the responsibility of running literacy centres in certain talukas. In Bijapur the involvement of Mahila Samakhya has made the literacy campaign a great success.

Between 1992 and 1995 Mahila Samakhya provided a Grant-in-Aid to an NGO, AIKYA, who has established a District Resource Centre with the task to assist the Mahila Samakhya Programme in Bidar with the development of an innovative learning system and with training support in educational methods and pedagogical skills related to adult literacy/education, and non-formal education of children. This co-operation is related to the involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the Literacy Mission. The results and the impact of this temporary collaboration and what happened after the withdrawal from AIKYA in terms of continuation of the literacy efforts has not been documented nor researched: what has been the significance of the innovations in methods, materials, approaches for (post) literacy? how has it contributed to women's motivation to further their literacy skills and how has it supported their empowerment?

There is also no systematic documentation and analysis of the experiences of the collaboration between Mahila Samakhya and the Literacy Mission keeping in view the non-target process oriented approach of Mahila Samakhya and the time/target bound campaign-like approach of the Literacy Mission. Such analysis would be necessary in view of further involvement of Mahila Samakhya in the second phase of the Literacy Campaign and future collaboration with the Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education. The experiences of Mahila Samakhya in the adoption of innovative non-conventional approaches to adult education, - which include needs based education related to life skills and education as information and knowledge, with or without a literacy component - may pave the way for widening the scope of adult education and the adoption of holistic non-structured approaches with a long term perspective of creating opportunities for self-directed learning.

It seems that during and after the literacy campaign Mahila Samakhya has followed its own way in the area of adult literacy allowing women learners including the 35+ age group to determine their time and pace of learning. In Bidar currently 92 adult literacy classes are running. Bijapur has 33 and Gulbarga has 20 adult literacy centres, whereas for Raichur and Mysore no adult literacy centres are reported. Successes and results in the area of adult literacy through a regular class-like method are modest and mixed. Reasons mentioned are e.g.

- . difficulties in keeping women motivated for literacy after they have reached the stage of being able to write their names, or read the destination of the bus,
- . women find it difficult to make time to attend classes regularly because of the seasonal nature of their agricultural labour and because part of the year they migrate for work elsewhere,
- . difficulties in finding local women who can teach,
- . non-suitability of the available (neo)-literacy materials, because they are not gender sensitive and/or do not make much sense in the living environments of (tribal) rural women.

Furthermore, a likely reason could be that women feel that they have become stronger and empowered, that they can access information and resources and that they feel capable to make changes in their lives without necessarily being able to read and write. And another explanation could be that providing education in any kind of class setting beyond a certain time-span is not the most suitable approach. On the whole the reasons for the supposed decline of interest on the part of the women have not been fully investigated and analysed.

Education for women's empowerment is definitely taking place in all districts and has made

significant impacts on the lives of rural women as is clear from the foregoing sections. However, if the concept of education is used in its limited understanding of education as literacy, or just reading, writing and numeracy skills, the level of success is limited. This is particularly the case for forms of education taking place in regular classroom-like sessions with materials brought from elsewhere, which perhaps have no bearing to women's lives, or which are not directly linked to women's area of work.

In general the attention to adult literacy and to the creation of a consistent, holistic gender aware approach to education for empowerment, which includes and integrates the different aspects of education (e.g. life skills, information and knowledge, literacy and numeracy) is waning in the Karnataka Programme. What we see is that the centrality of education in Mahila Samakhya appears to have given way to other priorities, like e.g. the running of savings group, the building of the sangha hut, accessing schemes and services, and other activities aimed at keeping the collectives going. Through the Literacy Mission more and more women have become exposed to reading, writing and numeracy skills. Instead of standing back and letting women loose interest in further learning (with the help of their literacy skills) and allowing the learning process to stagger, *Mahila Samakhya could and should refocus its attention and make education for empowerment its foremost and central issue.* With their literacy skills and with the gains achieved in terms of women's empowerment women are ready to move ahead and use their newly acquired skills, to access and further their knowledge, to strengthen their information base, to counter disinformation and abuse, and to participate in family, community and further political decision making from a position of strength.

In Karnataka Mahila Samakhya is operational in the districts which are most backward in terms of women's development and literacy. In these districts the seeds have been sown and now time has come for Mahila Samakhya to move ahead and come to terms with its nature as an education programme. And the area to venture in by using its flexibility and creative powers is *to evolve together with the sangha women innovative and participatory learning strategies for learning in pre- and neo-literate stages maintaining the focus on supporting women's empowerment.* Strategies which combine awareness, information and skills, which are directed at learning groups with women who are barely literate and women who want to use and further their literacy skills. Strategies which include gender-relevant methods and pedagogy, development of learning materials and aids on relevant issues and skills for use in self-directed learning groups. And strategies providing for short and intermediate term training programmes, residential as well as non-residential, for selected women as functionaries in e.g. water or village education committees, and as specialists like local health workers, rural extensionists, village level workers for veterinary services, plant protection, environment-aware technologies, water management, horticulture etc. It further is to include modes and forms of learning which do not conform to conventional classroom like settings and are flexible enough to respond to the time patterns, mobility and environments of the learners. Banking on the lessons learned from seven years of experience Mahila Samakhya will be on its way to the creation of a truly alternative approach to adult education.

Refocusing the Programme on education for empowerment requires *changes in the human resources staffing and development policy.* At present there are no resource persons in the organisational structure of Mahila Samakhya with a professional background in educational methodology or pedagogy, for curriculum development, development of learning materials and use of media. Such experts are needed if Mahila Samakhya is to move into the direction of developing innovative learning strategies. Each District Implementation Unit as well as the State Programme Office is to have an experienced education expert on its staff who together will form a team for backing-up and supporting the education component in the Programme. Mahila Samakhya has a great resource of in-house practical experience in training methodologies, use of drama and cultural expressions, teaching by improvisation in non-formal settings. These experiences can be brought up to a higher professional level with a well directed staff development plan.

The focus on education for empowerment naturally includes the next generation by giving

attention to the education of children and particularly girls.

4.2 Education of children

Mahila Samakhya is actively involved in education of children. Children's education is on the agendas of the mahila sanghas. In sanghas we visited the women reported that their primary school-age daughters are in school nowadays. Sanghas are taking actions to demand accountability from the school teachers that they come to school and teach. However, most villages have no school facilities beyond standard four. This means in practice that most girls leave school and drop-out before they have achieved a sustainable level of reading and writing skills. For boys the distance of the school from the homestead does not provide a restriction to their schooling. A brief interview with a group (male) literacy teachers who all belong to the 'sangha family' revealed that most young men continue their school education up to standard ten and many go beyond that level. Whereas their sisters, wives or daughters who are above primary school-age have never been to school at all.

Mahila Samakhya is definitely enhancing a growing awareness about the values of children's and particularly girls education. The activism of the mahila sangha directed at the local schools indicates that a foundation for community interest and participation in improving the quality of education in the schools on the part of women exists and that other education programmes like the District Primary Education Programme could build upon this.

The involvement of Mahila Samakhya in education of children, apart from the above mentioned activism on the part of the sanghas in making schools accountable, are the child care centres, non formal education centres for children and the Mahila Shikshane Kendras.

Child Care Centres

In Mahila Samakhya child care centres are primarily conceived of as a means to create time for women to be relieved from the responsibility of having to constantly look after their small children and to have more control over how to use her time. It also relieves older children from child care duties so that they can go to school. Child Care Centres have been established in all districts in places where the ICDS run anganwadis do not exist or where the services are inadequate e.g. in terms of timing. In some instances there is some form of co-operation between ICDS and Mahila Samakhya in the running of centres or in the provision of food and health services. There are indications that children who have been in the child care centres are going on to the primary school, but concrete information is not available. We did not come across concrete evidence that the training and guidance of the teachers for the child care centres is purposely directed at the creation of an environment that helps children to adjust easily into a classroom situation and pre-school education which prepares them for primary school. The primary function of the centres seems to be child care with perhaps some attention to pre-school education. Whether or not these centres have an impact on women's awareness and motivation for schooling of their children is a question we have not been able to give attention to.

The Child Care Centres have been running more or less successfully, some being closed down after some time, new centres coming up. Reasons mentioned are lack of interest, neglect, unsatisfactory teachers and conflicts in the sangha, or the fact that no food is provided.

Although we did not have sufficient opportunity to discuss the involvement of Mahila Samakhya in establishing Child Care Centres we have the impression that generally such centres are seen as service from the government and that a sense of ownership and shared responsibility by the sangha may be absent in many cases. One could question if there still exists a qualitative difference between the ICDS centres and centres run through Mahila Samakhya, or is it that the

MS centres are reaching places that cannot be reached through the ICDS programme? Related to this is the question that needs to be answered by Mahila Samakhya if it is not duplicating the services from the Department of Child Development and instead could pay more attention to co-operation with the concerned Departments. Through that Mahila Samakhya is in a better position to influence the policies and the policy implementation related to the child care centres in order to make them more responsive to the needs and situations of rural women who are currently not being reached through the existing services.

Non formal education centres for children

In forty percent of the villages the sanghas are running non-formal education centres which prepare children for entrée in the formal education system or for taking examinations at standard six or seven. They are using existing materials from the State Resource Centre and often men who are related to the sangha women and who have been involved in the literacy campaign are the literacy teachers. Systematic data on these classes and the results in getting the children admitted in the formal schools are not available. And there are no concrete data on the numbers of girls who have passed their Standard seven examinations and are now admitted in secondary or State Boarding Schools.

But in spite of the absence of data (which are not very difficult to obtain, systematise and compile) it is clear that these non-formal education initiatives are meeting a need for alternative modes of education, which provide a learner-friendly and safe environment for girls, who otherwise would remain excluded from participation in formal education. The numbers of NFE centres are growing and there is a lot of scope for further growth, the non-availability of teachers being the most severe constraint.

We noted that the preparation and training of the teachers for non-formal education is limited. Most of the teachers rely on their training and experience in the literacy campaign. The training inputs by Mahila Samakhya have been limited to a few days introductory training and regular review meetings. Training in pedagogic methods, alternative learning approaches are lacking and felt needed by the teachers.

At the time of our visit we were able to witness a children's mela for children from the nfe centres, from MSKs and their teachers. The mela was to introduce games, play and art in the process of learning. It was very lively and the experience was appreciated by all participants who were to transfer what they had learned to other children in their with the help of their teachers. The mela was organised by Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi. This NGO is a resource organisation on innovative pedagogy for literacy and non-formal education. Apart from engaging its own professional resource persons in the District and State teams Mahila Samakhya needs to work at further networking and co-operation with resource organisations like BGVS in the further development of its education component.

The non-formal education centres provide girls access to an alternate form of schooling. Eventually this is expected to have a positive impact on increasing the literacy rates of girls and decreasing the gender gap in literacy. However, there is no clear philosophy or vision regarding the future empowerment of these girls in their socio-economic and cultural environments which is backing these nfe initiatives. We also noted a lack of forward looking thinking and strategizing for the future of the girls: what will be their prospects in life? Does non formal education equip them with new perspectives and possibilities? Will they enter into marriage and live the lives of their mothers? Will they be able to learn cognitive and practical skills that help to use their talents and make a meaningful contribution to rural development? What forms of continuing education exist or could be developed? Can they create self-learning groups and access the Open School system? Will they become eligible for skills/vocational training programmes offered by the State or by other organisations? These are questions which Mahila Samakhya will need to address as well as to its

own role in development of innovative alternatives.

Mahila Shiksha Kendras

The Mahila Shiksha Kendras are the most outstanding and seminal contribution of Mahila Samakhya in the area of girls' education. They provide a residential school for teen-age girls between 14 and 18 years of age who for various reasons have stopped going to school after grade Standard four, mostly because no school facility for upper primary education is available in their village. The girls in the MSK include girls who have been dedicated as devadasi and became prostitutes, married and already separated girls and married girls who have become widows and have been rejected by their in-laws. The majority of the girls would be married off soon, if they had not been in the school and some have been married but are allowed to complete their school education till they are eighteen. For them being given this opportunity allows them to delay the age of marriage and get a certain level of education first, to escape from being drawn into bonded labour, to escape from an existence as prostitute, and to prepare for a new future and life in dignity. Efforts to prevent early marriage have not always been successful as pressures from the families in the villages remain. In consultation with and upon suggestion from the parents Mahila Samakhya now requires parents to sign a letter of bond stating that they cannot take their child from the school without being taken to court until they have reached the age of eighteen years. This serves as an illustration of the involvement of parents, their confidence in the school and their grown recognition of the importance of education for their daughters.

The MSK provides an educational curriculum which follows the formal system and prepares for examination at Standard seven and Standard ten in a formal institution. In addition the children get lessons in music and art, they get opportunities for learning vocational skills like tailoring and typing. By participating in the household management the girls are encouraged to practice management and planning skills, cooking and housekeeping, hygiene and self-care. Discussions on gender and other relevant issues are encouraged on the basis of video, tv programmes, reading the newspaper, newsletters or articles etc. Although initially planned for one year, the learners who come in at the age of 14 may stay until they have become eighteen. So far only very few have completed their Secondary School Level Certificate and left for further learning (e.g. becoming a nurse) or life as a married women in a village. The method of learning is informal, interactive and learner friendly through small groups divided by levels of competency. Much care is taken to create a positive learning environment, which stimulates questioning and further learning.

What we were able to observe when visiting two of the MSKs was a group of happy, bright, open and vocal young women, eager to learn and explore their ever expanding world. This was the more striking after being told the difficulties to overcome by the teachers in winning the learners' confidence and getting them to open up. The first MSKs were established in Bijapur, Bidar and Mysore, last year three new MSKs have been added in Raichur, Gulbarga and a second one in Bijapur. The two MSKs visited by the mission are running extremely well.

The girls have been selected by the sahayoginis in consultation with the sanghas. There is a great demand from the side of the parents in getting their daughters admitted in the MSK. This makes one wonder if parents would be reluctant about the schooling of their daughters if good quality and facilities for education are provided.

There are restrictions with regard to the numbers admitted, because of the limited capacity of the MSKs which does not reach beyond 50 learners. E.g. not more than one girl per family can be admitted. This means that the reality is that the MSK as a residential school is selective and open for a very small portion of eligible girls so that it can never be a true solution in providing educational opportunities for all teenage school leavers in the districts, who will remain many if schools do not improve and expand in numbers.

Without doing injustice to the relevance and importance of the MSK as an extremely valuable alternative educational provision for girls, which will definitely change their prospects in life, we also need to state that the same what has been mentioned above for non-formal education regarding the curriculum, pedagogy and the absence of a vision applies to the MSKs.

At present there does not seem to be a clear vision with a forward looking perspective on the future development of the MSK. The original objective was to provide for an educational facility which would help to create an educated cadre of women for development of education in backward rural areas and for rural development. The programme was planned for one year after which a new cohort of learners would get an opportunity to be admitted. By imperceptibly extending the duration of girls staying in the MSK to four years the quantitative in-take capacity has been reduced significantly. And there are no indications of a curriculum that is in itself gender-sensitive with a focus on a future life in rural development.

As with the entire education component Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka will need to address many questions and decisions regarding its future role in relation to further development of the Mahila Shiksha Kendra. Will it become an educational support structure consisting an MSK at each taluka or for each cluster? Is it a viable innovative model for alternate school education of out-of-school girls to be taken over, incorporated and multiplied under DPEP or non-formal education? Will Mahila Samakhya play a role in the (further) development of alternative learning approaches for girls and women and in development of gender-relevant methods and materials through the MSKs? Are MSKs to become seen as part of and complementing the non-formal education initiatives at village level and perhaps gradually to be replaced by extending nfa to become a village level open learning system that provides education beyond primary level? And/or will the MSK gradually be transformed in a training institute which provides condensed courses for a multiple set of purposes related to the formation of female cadre - equipped with a gender perspective - for rural development? These are a few of the questions that need to be considered in order to decide on the direction of a future strategy for the MSKs in Karnataka.

4.3 Co-operation with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP)

So far there has been no experience in co-operation with the District Primary Education Programme. In the first phase of the implementation of DPEP Raichur will be the only District wherein both programmes are present. Plans are being discussed for involving Mahila Samakhya in micro-planning and training for the formation and training of village education committees. In the second phase DPEP will expand to Bijapur, Bidar, Gulbarga and Mysore where it can benefit from the rich experience and the presence of Mahila Samakhya. It means that there is scope for co-operation to be started now with a perspective on the future. Some areas for future co-operation have already been mentioned such as the involvement of sangha women in monitoring schools, and their role as catalyst for community participation and creating awareness about the importance of girls education. The MS centres for non-formal education and the Mahila Shiksha Kendras could become models for alternate forms of education to be incorporated in DPEP and Mahila Samakhya could become involved in gender training for DPEP staff, teachers and village education committees. From its experience in working with rural women Mahila Samakhya can contribute to and co-operate in curriculum development and production of gender-relevant learning materials. And Mahila Samakhya could benefit from learning materials made available through DPEP, as well as from professional pedagogic inputs in training of nfe teachers.

In this respect the formation of joint MS-DPEP task group is recommended who will work out the further plans for co-operation at general State level, as well as for the districts to be covered by both programmes, with the aim of e.g.:

- increasing access to and retention in primary & continuing education of children and especially girls: sanghas could play a catalyst role in this and extend their activities across the entire community (of women);

- ensuring quality of learning that is meaningful and gender relevant in the local environment: e.g. sanghas being represented in the Village Education Committees (VECs) for monitoring children's and teachers attendance as well as ensuring quality and meaningful learning; involving sahayoginis and MS/NFE teachers in training of VECs;
- making teaching/instruction gender relevant by involving Mahila Samakhya (education resource persons, sahayoginis and NFE/MSK teachers) in the training of teachers;
- providing gender sensitivity training for DPEP implementing staff and in the training of teachers;
- conducting participatory appraisal studies and micro-planning village level by involving the Mahila Sanghas;
- joint development and sharing of learning materials, books and learning aids for formal as well as non-formal education and making use of the experience of Mahila Samakhya in using songs, oral traditions and knowledge, drama, games and play;
- joint development of alternate forms of schooling for special groups, who are otherwise neglected by the mainstream school system based on experience of Mahila Samakhya in non-formal education and the MSK model.

5. Expansion strategies

In Karnataka the Mahila Samakhya has expanded in two phases. The Programme was launched in three districts, in Mysore and Bijapur with the assistance of local NGOs and in Bidar by Mahila Samakhya. After two years when the Programme had set its roots in these three districts, expansion was planned in two new districts which created a block of four Mahila Samakhya districts in the north of Karnataka. In the implementation the new districts could benefit from the earlier experiences and the human resources trained in the initial stage. In both districts different strategies have been adopted for the mobilisation of villages and women. In Gulbarga sahayoginis started campaigning through streetplays and in Raichur Gramsabhas were conducted in the villages to inform the community and attract their co-operation. We have not been able to discuss the merits of these different approaches. They have evolved from the earlier experiences in the Programme and in response to the prevailing conditions in the Districts. The expansion of the Programme within the 'older' districts has been relatively slow and not very actively pursued. During the next five year plan Mahila Samakhya intends to further extend its outreach into three more districts, which means that by the year 2000 the Programme will be present in almost half of the total number of districts in Karnataka.

The strategies for expansion have not been discussed with the State and district teams. However, the same situation exists as in other States with the sanghas in different stages of strength (formation stage, consolidation stage, weakened, strong). This calls for a diversified strategy based on the lessons learned in the past, the increased presence and visibility in the State and within the districts and the current momentum of spontaneous expansion via the sanghas.

Sanghas are interested in forming mahila sanghas in neighbouring villages in order to widen their network for mutual co-operation, mobilization and activism and to create a critical mass of empowered sanghas at block and district levels. Women in surrounding villages are seeking assistance in forming their sanghas and the older sanghas can play a role in this process which altogether will save time and effort in the formation stage. The process of expansion is to be seen in connection with the process of de-linking the strong sanghas and strengthening of their capacities to become self-reliant.

From the General Report we reiterate the following points of attention which can guide the formulation and implementation of a differentiated the expansion strategy:

for districts and talukas where Mahila Samakhya already has a presence

- reinforcing the sangha strength and capacity building for self-reliance of the older sanghas;
- de-linking the strong and self-reliant sanghas from direct sahayogini support;

- promoting sanghas to become a community forum of women across caste, class or communal divides,
- strengthening networking among sanghas and the formation of cluster groups,
- strengthening and building of support structures at the block level,
- forming new sanghas in areas surrounding the clusters wherein Mahila Samakhya is present;
- involving the old sanghas and clusters in the formation and strengthening of new sanghas, and for new districts
- selection to be based on transparent criteria e.g. poverty indicators, indicators for gender equality, female literacy rates, potential for linking up with DPEP and/or other schemes for poverty alleviation and socio-economic development,
- ensuring that staff and necessary infra-structure are in place and well prepared/trained before starting the activities in the new districts.

The expansion strategy is to include attention to the human resources component and capacity building for new and diversified roles at all levels of the Mahila Samakhya structure.

In relation to expansion to new areas and consolidation in the talukas wherein Mahila Samakhya is already present attention needs to be given development of more special strategies for working in areas, which cause difficulties because of their mixed economies, a high influx from migration, from urban life styles, commercial attitudes and political activism. The strategies for working with a predominantly rural population may not be adequate to meet the social conditions of women under these circumstances. This situation applies for instance to one of the talukas in Raichur District.

6. Documentation and reporting

Over the years Mahila Samakhya has produced a wealth of documentation which provides a rich resource of information for internal as well as for external purposes. The documentation consists of sangha and village profiles, case studies, reflection papers, video's, brochures, diaries and records of meetings, newsletters etc. The various sources provide the basis for quarterly and annual progress reports, which record activities related to certain issues, illustrative cases, training programmes, events taking place and some reflections etc. These reports provide little insight in the progression and evolution of the Programme in a long time perspective and in relation to the basic principles and objectives of Mahila Samakhya. And there is a tendency in such reports to give attention to the successes and positive examples. A critical analysis of less positive experiences is also needed in order to identify and understand the working of constraining factors and to draw the lessons for future strategizing.

Due to the internal problems not much attention could be given during the last year to review the documentation and reporting system and to the development of an effective documentation strategy. There is need for more systematisation and consolidation of the resource materials which allow for following the different processes over a longer period. The creation of a data base of gender relevant development statistics, could help to place the contributions from Mahila Samakhya in a wider development perspective.

As mentioned in the introductory paragraph the State Programme Office is planning a three tier approach to getting better insight in the development processes of the sanghas which includes a mechanism for following the sangha development processes with a set of concrete, and possibly quantifiable indicators, which can be computer-processed. We fully endorse this initiative and recommend the State Programme Office also to look into the documentation systems which have evolved in the other state programmes. Furthermore, the process of reflection and re-orientation which is taking place already forces to Programme staff to look back critically for indicators that provide clear insight on what has been and is going on in the Programme in terms of its aims and objectives.

Studies are part of a documentation system, they allow for a deeper analysis of selected and relevant phenomena. In this report various areas for studies have been mentioned which could be integrated as part of a new documentation strategy.

7. Mahila Samakhya as a resource organisation for the empowerment of women

Mahila Samakhya is perceived as a time-bound programme that is to phase itself out after a certain period of time. This perception is in contradiction with the understanding of empowerment as an on-going process of growth, reinforcement of inner strength and expansion towards broader horizons, as well expansion in terms of dealing with new issues and struggles. What can be time-bound is the process of sangha formation and consolidation, and the period a sangha needs in order to de-link itself from the regular support of its sahayogini.

Sanghas as they are becoming stronger, develop confidence and capabilities to be self-reliant in managing their own meetings and financial affairs. More and more sanghas are seen taking their own decisions, solving their problems, accessing resources independently from sahayoginis' involvement. They are planning, strategizing and executing their activities, they share their joint responsibilities and by this they play a greater role in determining their futures and influencing social change. Such processes of change do not evolve without resistance from the environment, without disappointments and compromises, without recurring struggles, which might require fresh inputs to reinforce the process of empowerment. In these processes of growing self-reliance and strength of the sanghas the relationship of the mahila sanghas with Mahila Samakhya is bound to be changing and needs to be redefined in new terms.

In recognition of the sanghas as mature, self-sustaining organisations in their own right, capable of making their own decisions and determining the direction of their development process, the Mahila Samakhya Structure has to diversify and change its role. From this point of view Mahila Samakhya can be regarded as one of the resource organisations to be accessed by the sanghas for provision of (gender-sensitive) training inputs and materials, for providing information, knowledge and new perspectives on issues coming up in the sangha, for facilitation of access to other resource organisations or assistance in setting up and sustaining support structures. Mahila Samakhya will still have a role in facilitating inter sangha networking at block and district levels and in capacity building for support structures at cluster or block levels initiated by sangha networks. The role of Mahila Samakhya with regard to providing gender-sensitive pedagogic and other training support to teachers for nfe, child care centres, formal schools and for village education committees is bound to be getting greater emphasis and importance in the future. And at the same time Mahila Samakhya will have to maintain its presence for formation of new sanghas in new villages and for strengthening the sanghas which are not yet ready to be self-reliant.

Instead of phasing itself out the Mahila Samakhya Programme structure is able to build on the strength of its presence and its credibility gained in the Districts and the State. Its future is to expand and differentiate its role in order to be responsive to the needs related to the different stages of development of the existing and the new sanghas: independent self-reliant sanghas; weaker sanghas that want to become self-reliant; young and emerging sanghas; sangha networks and federations etc. Furthermore, Mahila Samakhya has created a strong role for itself in initiating and supporting gender-sensitive educational innovations for children as well as adults. The oncoming new developments related to the expansion of DPEP in MS districts, as well as the future developments in adult (post) literacy calls for the establishment of tripartite partnerships between the concerned education programmes (MS, DPEP, AE) and requires the experience and continuing presence of Mahila Samakhya in order to ensure the focus on education for girls' and women's empowerment to which the Government of India has committed itself in its education policy (1986). And Mahila Samakhya as a support structure of the Mahila sanghas could play a stronger role in advocacy and policy development in support of women's equality and empowerment.

By converting the existing structure of DIUs and SPO into a network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres with accessible branches at taluka and cluster levels it can provide a flexible, accessible and multi-functional support structure. These Resource Centres could provide or facilitate access to training resources (process, perspective building, issues based and/or training of trainers), assist in development of training curricula and manuals, assist in further development of effective training/learning methods, as well as gender-sensitive learning materials for self-directed learning. The Resource Centres can have a role in collecting, converting and disseminating relevant information, in documentation and research, in dissemination of newsletters etc. And the centres can provide for social, legal, job/career counselling, as well as training and library facilities. These Resource Centres will provide a multi-purpose support network which can be flexible and responsive to the needs of the Programme and varied processes in the field.

The District Resource Centres and their branches at block level could be staffed by sahayoginis who will be the resource persons and by professional resource persons and (temporary) consultants with specific assignments or tasks. The District Programme Coordinator will be Resource Centre Co-ordinator and remain in charge of the Programme in the District be it from the perspective of a Programme support structure.

At State level a similar conversion could be considered, although a State Resource Centre might be taking a slightly different role with a stronger emphasis on advocacy and influencing policies, on studies and compilation & analysis of data, on providing for professional development of the Programme Staff and on networking with other resource organisations. Its tasks could include e.g. the following:

- . the identification of training resources within and outside the State,
- . providing assistance in developing and implementing internal monitoring mechanisms,
- . documentation, evaluation and studies,
- . the conversion and dissemination to the districts of information and learning materials from elsewhere,
- . organisation of state and national level reflection workshops for Programme staff and external resource persons,
- . the facilitation exchange and exposure visits (in two directions),
- . development and implementation of strategies for advocacy and influencing the policy structures (policy and decision makers, policy changes, the implementation of policies and the public), e.g. via the National Alliance of Women (NAWO).

The network of Mahila Samakhya Resource Centres which is flexible and adaptable to the needs of the empowerment/development processes, can provide a more permanent support structure in the State and in the Districts that can branch out to the blocks and clusters, and co-operate with other (education) resource centres by exchanging services in order to avoid duplication.

The creation of a support structure as proposed will require a review of the staff requirements and the staffing policy. It requires a human resources development plan which provides for staff development, staff training and capacity building including new possibilities for horizontal and vertical mobility, for new and differentiated career paths for sahayoginis and district staff. To accompany the recommended changes a review of the financial pattern and financial management procedures will also be necessary.

STATISTICAL DATA KARNATAKA

Table : III Social and Demographic Indicators						
Index	Bider	Bijapur	Gulberga	Mysore	Raichur	Karnataka
C.B.R (1991)	30.4	30.1	31.1	26.9	30.3	27.0
C.D.R (1991)	9.2	10.0	9.9	8.3	8.2	8.6
Sex Ratio (1991)	952	963	962	979	978	959
I.M.R	105	121	107	98	116	73
Mean Age at Marriage (1981)	16.9	16.7	15.80	16.20	17.0	19.2
Proportion of girls married 15-19 yrs (1981)	53.29	62.06	58.44	41.56	59.31	36.24
C.P.R (1993)	47.62	45.87	35.84	63.52	37.13	50.26
Per capita Income (In lakhs, 1993-94)	1626	2030	2065	2399	1763	2423
Scheduled Population (%)	20.9	16.8	26.6	24.1	25.0	19.4
Women Agricultural Labourers (1991)	42.0	38.0	39.0	22.0	43.0	49.06
Total Female Literacy reate (1991)	24.8	33.6	20.1	32.1	17.8	37.4
Sources:	Census of India 1991; Sheel C.Nuna, Women and Development; National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration; CMIE 1996					

Table: IV
Literacy Rates in Karnataka 1981 & 1991

States	1981			1991*		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
KARNATAKA	48.6	27.8	38.4	56.3	37.4	47.0
Bijapur	45.1	18.4	31.9	57.2	33.6	45.6
Bidar	38.7	14.4	26.8	47.6	24.8	36.5
Gulberga	36.2	25.1	30.7	41.5	20.1	31.0
Raichur	36.1	13.6	24.9	39.5	17.8	28.8
Mysore	39.7	23.0	31.6	47.3	32.1	39.9

Notes: (i) * Crude Literacy Rate = Number of Literates

Total Population (inclusive of 0-6 age group)

(ii) Literacy rates exclude children in the age group 0-6 who are treated as illiterates in the 1991 Census.

Source: Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of Karnataka, (1993), Population Centre Bangalore.

COVERAGE AND EXPANSION OF THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME IN KARNATAKA

Table V Mahila Samakhya out reach in Karnataka (1996)								
Districts	Total No. Of Taluka	No. M.S.P in	Total No. Of villages	No. of Villages M.S. in 1997	Rural Female population 1991 in million	M.S Members	% SC to total population of the district (1981)	% ST to total population of the district (1981)
Bidar	6	5	598	240	.49	7000	16.05	4.33
Bijapur	11	6	1244	226	1.0	7258	15.11	4.80
Gulbarga	10	6	1305	171	0.9	6840	21.89	4.69
Mysore	11	6	1641	203	1.0	6000	17.70	6.42
Raichur	9	4	1401	134	0.9	4466	15.12	9.94
Karnataka State	175	77	27,078	873	15.2	30,564	15.07	4.91

Note: M.S.P - Mahila Samakhya Programme
Source: Mahila Samakhya Karnataka, Annual Report 1995-1996, Census of India, Series - 11 1991

Table VI Sahayoginis			
Districts	1989	1992-93	1995-96
Bidar	16	20	20
Bijapur	14	19	18
Gulbarga	-	15	15
Mysore	19	19	19
Raichur	-	9	11
Total	63	82	83

Source: Mahila Samakhya Karnataka, Annual Report 1985-96
Mahila Samakhya, National Overview for 1992-93

Table VII Sahayakis	
Districts	1995-96
Bidar	1200
Bijapur	450
Gulbarga	328
Mysore	n.i.
Raichur	174
Total	2152

Source: M.S.K Annual Report 1995-96.

Expansion

Table: VIII
Mahila Samakhya Expansion 1992-1996

Districts	No. Of villages M.S in 1992-93	No. of villages in 1995-96	Increase in nr of villages reached
Bidar	144	208	+ 64
Bijapur	215	225	+ 10
Gulbarga	120	164	+ 44
Mysore	200	203	+ 3
Raichur	82	114	+ 32
Total	761	914	+153

Source: Mahila Samakhya Karnataka. Annual Report 1995-96
Mahila Samakhya National Overview for 1992-93.

Table: IX
The Growth of Sanghas

Districts	1992-93	1994-95	1995-96	Change 1992/3-1995/6	Registered Sanghas
Bidar	110	186	200	+ 90	n.i.
Bijapur	148	200	200	+ 52	99
Gulbarga	100	130	130	+ 30	105
Mysore	150	173	173	+ 23	2
Raichur	47	68	70	+ 23	30
Total	555	655	773	+218	256 (+ Bidar)

Source: MSK Annual Reports
Mahila Samakhya, National overview for 1992-93.

NOTES ON BIDAR DISTRICT

The Mahila Samakhya programme in Bidar began in 1989 in four of the five talukas of the district and in 1992 went on to cover all the five talukas. Bidar is the only district in the state where Mahila Samakhya is operating in all the talukas. The five lakh population of Bidar is distributed over 587 villages. Mahila Samakhya is well established in 144 or 24 per cent of the villages. In 1996-97 there were 7000 Sangha members. Assuming that each member came from one household the coverage could be said to be of a population of 40,000. This is on the assumption that the average household size in the state is around 5.6 members per household. The sanghas vary in the length of their duration.

Most of the work of the Mahila Samakhya in this district is among the scheduled caste and the tribal population. It must also be added in the context of this district that the proportion of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe population is much higher than the state average. The population of the scheduled caste stood around 20.71 per cent and of the scheduled tribes 8.30 per cent. Together they form nearly 30 per cent of the district population. [Census of India 1991].

Table: X Distribution of Mahila Samakhya in Bidar 1996-97				
Taluk	Total No. Of Villages	No. of Villages M.S in	Rural Female Population	MS Sangha members
Aurad	149	50	1,03,114	
Bhalki	120	40	96,566	
Bidar	123	21	96,883	
Basavakalyan	113	36	10,0832	
Homnabad	82	39	98,861	
District	587	240	4,96,256	7,000
Sources: Census of India 1991, Series 11 Part 12-B, Karnataka. Mahila Samakhya Karnataka, Annual Report 1995-96.				

District Profile

Bidar is one of the most charming district of Karnataka full of history and legends, and replete with monuments. It is also the base for major social reform movements that shook the very structure of medieval hinduism. The heavy burden of its historical past is still weighing down upon it and shows very slow signs of recovery from centuries of exploitation. Today it presents a picture of neglect and ruin. The dice are loaded very heavily against the women of this district, be it in terms of education, health, work or social practices.

Bidar lies at the farthest north-eastern corner of Karnataka, located some 700 kilometres from Bangalore. Bidar forms the tri-junction of the three principal religions and cultures of the Deccan, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Manjara, a tributary of Godavari is the main river. Bidar is one of the smaller districts in terms of both area and population.

Major Characteristics of the District in Relation to Economic Resources.

It has a predominantly rural character. Agriculture is the mainstay of economic activities and more than 85 per cent of the lands are cultivable. There are no major irrigation projects and at present wells constitute the major source of irrigation. Dry farming, dependent on the vagaries of monsoon is the problem. Even within the district the northern and north-western parts are more backward even in agriculture. There are no large scale industries except for a sugar factory.

The soils are fertile, but it is the variation in rainfall that causes anxiety and distress. The ground water resources are considerable and with its systematic exploitation Bidar would be an agriculturally prosperous district. In the low lands all kinds of grains, sugar cane and especially grapes grow in abundance. Jowar, wheat, gram are the most important food crops. Among non-food crops are sugar cane and oil seeds. Three-fourth of the area is under food crops and one fourth under non-food crops.

Land Holdings

Land holdings are small and 35 per cent of the holdings are smaller than 2 hectares each. These account for only 8.6 per cent of the total cultivated area. Relatively large holding with areas of 5 to 10 hectares account for about 19 per cent of the total. The extent of landlessness in the district would be an useful information to have about the sangha members.

Agricultural Labour

The proportion of women working in agricultural labour is very high in this district. Thirty per cent of the women in the district are in the workforce and of those working seventy six per cent work as agricultural wage workers. Their wages are paid partly in cash and partly in kind. Moreover, variations of bonded labour still exist. Agricultural practices, are labour intensive and agricultural relations continue to be extremely exploitative and feudal. It is work in agriculture that provides a living and sustenance to the vast majority of the population and women's involvement in this activity in all castes is exceptionally high. The wage rates are extremely low, between 5 and 8 Rs. per days work. Though the minimum wages prescribed by the government is much higher, due to the abundance of cheap female labour and lack of alternative employment opportunities, it has not been possible to enforce higher wages. Mahila Samakhya is aware of the situation but is helpless to do anything about it. No strategies or systematic efforts to rectify the situation seem to have been taken so far. This could be an area to work in the future.

In spite of good infrastructure in terms of roads and electricity Bidar is amongst the most industrially backward districts in the state. There are no large scale or medium scale industries of any kind. Animal husbandry is an important economic activity besides agriculture.

As a result of these economic conditions the population growth rate in Bidar has been considerably lower than in the State at 20.83 per cent. This low growth rate may be largely because of heavy out migrations from the district for long periods to other neighbouring states due to the exceptionally low wage rates. All this seems to be changing as more economic activity seems to be slowly coming into Bidar, being at close proximity to Sholapur and Hyderabad.

Social Indicators

The choice of Bidar district by Mahila Samakhya was made on the basis that it had very low literacy rates, especially for women, and also for its general social backwardness. The literacy rate in Bidar is much lower than the state average. This has been so over four decades although compared to the base-line figures for 1951 some progress can be said to have taken place. Table XI shows the progress of rural female literacy in the district.

Table: XI Rural Female Literacy Rates, Bidar 1951-91	
1951	1.48
1961	4.67
1971	8.69
1981	14.28
1991	24.51
Source: Census of India 1991.	

The literacy rates among the talukas vary still further. The socio-cultural attitudes and the grinding economic conditions make the parents keep the girl child at home. Birth rates continue to be high and family size large. As can be seen from Table XII, birth rates continue to be high, and infant mortality are way above the state average. More than half the girls (53%) get married in their teens.

Table: XII Demographic Characteristics, Bidar (1991)					
Districts	Birth Rate Per 1000 Population (1990-91)	Couple protection Rate (1993)	Infant Mortality Rate per 1000 live births	Mean Age at Marriage of Female (1981)	% of Married Females Age 15-19
Bidar	30.1	47.62	105	15.70	53.29
Karnataka (Average)	27.0	50.25	73 (1992)	19.2	36.24
Sources: (i) Estimates of Vital Rates for The Districts of Karnataka 1951-91, Government of Karnataka; Population Centre Bangalore, by P.J.Bhattacharjee (ii) Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of Karnataka, (1993), Population Centre Bangalore.					

Availability of facilities for Education.

According to the 1991 Census figures for the district out of the 598 villages, 96.66 per cent have at least one primary school each within their limits. Within Bidar District there are 20 villages which do not have even a primary school. And as many as 12 primary schools are located in Bidar itself, as the concentration of schools is in the urban areas. Not only do some of the villages have no schools at all, but in those villages which have the school provides primary education only up to Standard four.

Among the nineteen districts of Karnataka, Bidar reports the lowest rate for literacy, particularly among rural women (see also Table II in ANNEX I).

Migration

Given the drought and famine prone conditions in agriculture and the extreme poverty of the peasant population there is large scale migration periodically from the districts. The women's

collectives faces this problem as families migrate in search of work for large part of the year. The work of Mahila Samakhya gets disrupted from time to time as a result of this.

Health Facilities

Medical facilities are inadequate in the talukas. Except for Bidar the other talukas have very few facilities. In 1981 only 10.37 per cent of the inhabited villages had medical facilities. Hopefully in 1991 the situation might have improved. According to the Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of Karnataka 1993¹ Bidar district had in 1993 a total of 262 health care facilities including 10 Community Health Centres, 35 Primary Health Centres and 217 Sub Centres for a total of 587 villages. It would appear that access to good facilities seems to be a problem. A great deal needs to be done in the area of health of women and children. Attention to women's reproductive health is called for.

Going by the low sex ratio itself women's chance of survival as compared to men's seems problematic.

Table: XIII Sex Ratio	
Taluk	No. Of Females per 1000 Males
Basavakalyan	981
Bhalki	971
Bidar	948
Homanbdl	984
Aurod	984
District	966
Source: Census of India, Series-11 Karnataka 1991	

There is a need for reliable village level data on the frequency of death of infants, and women in childbirth. Mahila Samakhya sanghas could play a role the collection and provision of information on such vital issues for the district, as well as information on the Primary Health Care Centres and their functioning in the talukas.

Conclusion

The most important needs of Bidar are related to women's education and better wages for women's work in agriculture, and women's (reproductive) health. And the Mahila Sanghas could play a role in conducting village level surveys in their villages, which provide relevant base-line data in the areas of education, women's health, women's involvement in wage labour and labour migration, bonded labour etc. This would be useful for development of effective strategies and for informing of and building linkages with relevant Departments of the Government with the aim of influencing the implementation of their policies.

¹ Socio-Economic and Demographic Profile of Karnataka (1993), Population Centre Bangalore

NOTES ON MAHILA SAMAKHYA IN BIJAPUR

The district of Bijapur is one of the largest district of Karnataka. It accounts for 6.47 per cent of the State's population and covers 9 per cent of its geographical area. Bijapur district is located in the central sector of the northern most portion of Karnataka State. Though historically a city of great importance, it is today considered one of the most backward districts of Karnataka. Historically it is a very interesting district with its monuments exuding medieval charm and grandeur. The district is sparsely populated. The population growth rates are lower than those for the entire State.

Administrative Divisions

Bijapur was one of the first district in which the Mahila Samakhya programme was introduced in 1989. The programme was initiated through the zilla parishads located in the district. The Mahila Samakhya Programme is now operating in six of the talukas. Three of the talukas were taken up when the programme was started in 1989. Subsequently two more talukas were added in 1992 and since then the programme has not tried to expand further into other talukas.

The district contains 1,253 inhabited villages. Being a very large district, the area is very unevenly distributed among its villages and talukas. The three talukas of Indi, Singdi and Bijapur account for almost 40.82 per cent of the total area of the district. Three talukas Bilgi, Bagalkhot and Mudhol which are small and cover less than 1000 sq. Kilometres in area. The distances that need to be covered in a taluka varies a great deal for the Mahila Samakhya Programme workers, making access problematic in many of the large districts with the widely dispersed population.

The three large talukas were chosen for the Mahila Samakhya Programme. Taluk Mudhol is the smallest. Table XIV sets out the broad distribution of the programme in the district. The number of villages in a taluka varies between 65 to 160.

Table: XIV Mahila Samakhya in Bijapur					
Taluka	Total No. of villages in the district	No. of villages M.S. is in	Total Female Population of the taluk	Area in Sq.kms	Mahila Sangha members
Bijapur	107	55	1,35,300	2,659 Sq.km	
Bagewadi	119	33	1,16,210		
Indi	122	32	1,34,319	2,225 Sq km	
Muddebihal	149	42	88,435		
Mudhol	77	30	80,681	950 Sq.km	
Singdi	142	33	1,29,020	2,176 Sq.km	
District (11)	1,253	226	1,101,684	17,069 Sq.Km.	7,258
Average Taluk Population 266,181.. No. of Households 4.8 lakhs. Source: Census of India 1991, District Census Handbook, Bijapur					

Scheduled Castes

The district has a high concentration of the scheduled population. Scheduled castes constitute 17.39 per cent of the districts population and their proportion in the rural areas is 18.81 per cent. In many of the predominantly agriculture villages their proportion is more than 20 per cent. The presence of the scheduled tribes is negligible around 1.35 per cent. Their proportion is lower than the State average of 4.26 per cent. In seventy per cent of the villages they form less than five per cent of the population. In four villages they constitute more than fifty per cent of the population. The Mahila Samakhya programme concentrates on the scheduled caste population to a large measure.

Some Basic Social Indicators

The choice of the Bijapur district was made on the basis that its social indicators particularly those concerning women were very low. Table XV presents some of these indicators in comparison with the figures for the state.

Index	Bijapur	Karnataka
C.B.R (1991)	30.1	27.0
C.D.R (1991)	10.0	8.6
Sex Ratio (1991)	963	960
I.M.R	121	73
Mean Age at Marriage (1981)	18.7	19.2
Proportion of girls married 15-19 yrs. (1981)	62.06	38.24
C.P.R (1993)	45.87	50.26
Per capita Income (in lakhs, 1993-94)	2030	2423
Scheduled Population (%)	16.8	19.4
Women Agricultural Laborers % among main workers (1991)	69.47	49.69
Total Female Literacy (1991)	33.6	37.4
Source:	Census of India 1991; Sheel C.Nuna, Women and Development; National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration; CMIE 1996	

An important indicator that help us understand the status of women is the sex ratio. This gives us an idea of the broad survival chances women have in an area. The sex ratio in the state is low but rates in Bijapur district and the taluks are still lower and have been deteriorating between census periods, giving a cause for great concern.

As can be seen from the Table XVI the sex ratio for the rural population of the district expressed as the number of females per 1000 males, is lower than the State average of 973. Three talukas covered by Mahila Samakhya show a lower ratio than the district average of 968 females per

1000 males. Moreover, between 1981 and 1991, the sex ratio seems to have worsened for women in the district from 982 to 968. This gives us an indication of the deteriorating health condition of women in the district, at situation that will need the attention of the Mahila Samakhya Programme.

Table :XVI Sex ratio for Rural Population 1991		
Taluka covered by Mahila Samakhya	Sex Ratio	Proportion of Rural population served by medical amenities.
Bagewadi	969	66.44
Bijapur	936	47.75
Indi	935	43.50
Muddebihal	996	30.92
Mudhol	975	50.47
Sindgi	951	19.53
District Rural	968	40.81
Karnataka State (R)	973	

Source: District Census Handbook, Bijapur 1991.

Economic Characteristics

Bijapur is essentially an agricultural district with its population dependent on agricultural wage labour. Women in this district are active in the labour force. The work participation rates for women of all castes are high.

Table: XVII Work Participation (1981)						
District	% Female Main Workers in Female Population	% Female Marginal Workers in Female Population	% Females Workers (Main + Marginal) in Female Population (Rural)	% Female Cultivators in Female Main Workers (Rural)	% Female Agricultural Labourers in Female Main Workers (Rural)	% Non-Scheduled Female Agricultural Labourers in Non-Scheduled Female Main Workers (Rural)
Bijapur	19.96	8.57	33.00	18.17	73.66	70.98

Source: Sheel C.Nuna, Women and Development; National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration. (1990)

Virtually half of the women workers are dependent on agricultural wage labour (45.87) according

to the 1991 Census figures, land is by far the most important economic resource of Bijapur. The rainfall and climatic conditions are quite unfavourable. Lands utilised for agricultural and horticultural purposes constitute about 69 per cent. These lands until recently have been rainfed and totally dependent on the monsoon and the District has been known for the frequent occurrence of famines and scarcity conditions. Wells constitute the main source of irrigation and feed about 65.49 per cent of the total irrigated area. There are large number of pumpsets in the districts. Production of food crops such as jowar, bajra, wheat and dals are of great importance. Among cash crops cotton, groundnuts and safflower are important. In spite of many agricultural programmes launched to increase productivity, there has been a decline in the net area sown over the years.

Land Holdings

Since the productivity of the land has been low and cultivation carried out under dry, that is -un-irrigated conditions, the land holdings have all along displayed a tendency to be larger than elsewhere in the state. Besides dry farming, handloom weaving and rearing of livestock forms a subsidiary occupation.

Literacy

The district lags behind in the field of literacy in general and rural female literacy in particular. The rural areas lag behind in educational facilities. Children are required to work. This combined with lack of awareness of the benefits of education and non-availability of educational facilities have kept literacy rates low. Over the decades, since Indian independence the rates have improved, but large disparity between male and female literacy rates continues. Though primary education has been made compulsory by the state, female literacy stands around half of the male rates. According to the government reports 96 per cent of the villages have schools. There are 1730 primary schools in the district.

Year	Female literacy rate	Male literacy rate
1951	5.88	28.63
1981	18.48	45.22
1991	35.29	66.09

Source: Census of India, District Census Handbook, Bijapur 1991.

Mahila Samakhya Literacy Intervention

The literacy rate among the scheduled caste women in extremely low (see ANNEX I, Table IV). These are the women with whom the Mahila Samakhya works in Bijapur. The Mahila Samakhya Programme's initial effort to take literacy to these women was through active participation in the Literacy Campaign in 1991. Mahila Samakhya has made a very substantial contribution when the campaign was on.

Table XIX on the following page gives an overview of the various efforts of Mahila Samakhya Bijapur in the field of education as literacy.

Table: XIX
MS Literacy Efforts - Bijapur (1996)

Index	No. of Centres	No. of Children
Non-Formal Education Centres	74	1,993
No. of Adult Education Centres	33	342
No. of Creches	12	330
Mahila Shikshana Kendras	2	50

Source: Bijapur MS Annual Report 1995-96.

NOTES ON RAICHUR DISTRICT

Raichur District is situated in the north-eastern sector of the state of Karnataka is a vast stretch of a plain. The epic Ramayana, narrates the events and episodes that took place in this tract of land during those legendary days. It was here that Lord Rama met Hanuman. These legendary references apart, the district has been the abode of man since early time. The mythological and historical importance of this district gives it an ambience of its own.

Until recent years Raichur ranked amongst the most backward districts of the state. Raichur in the past suffered frequently from droughts and famines. In the last few years it has been transformed into a flourishing tract. This has been possible mainly on account of the Tungbhabhadra Reservoir project which provided hydro electric power as well as water for the irrigation for the vast tracts of land. The two important rivers the Krishna and the Tungbhabhadra have been associated with the religious and cultural life of the people. With the harnessing of these two rivers, the landscape has undergone change due to the construction of the left bank canal. The South Eastern Belt of the district now has been turned into a wet farming zone. An idea regarding the tremendous increase in the area under irrigation may be had from the fact that in a matter of a decade between 1957-58 and 1966-67, the irrigated area rose from 14.5 thousands to 198,068 hectares.

The basic economy rests on agricultural land. Assured irrigation facility has given a boost to the agricultural sector. Nearly 85 per cent of the land is brought under cultivation. The district, known for the production of cotton, groundnuts, sunflower seeds and jowar. It ranks foremost among the cotton growing districts of the state. There are many cotton ginning and pressing factories.

The district has witnessed a substantially high population growth rate and within the districts different tracts have experienced growth at different rates. The areas which have been transformed on account of assured irrigation, have gained considerably in population while those in dry farming show low growth rates. The average population of an inhabited village of the district works out to 1028. The average population varies between 747 in Devadurga to 1369 in Sindhnur Taluka. The total number of households in the district in 1991 400,000. [Census, 1991].

The Mahila Samakhya programme in Raichur began in 1992 and has been in existence the last four years. In this period has spread into four of the nine talukas and in 114 of 1401 Inhabited villages. These are the talukas of Yelburga, Devadurga, Kustagi and Raichur.

The coverage can be said to be in 50 per cent of the taluk and 10 per cent of the villages. Choice of Raichur was made on the relative backwardness of the district and the proximity to the three districts where the programme existed already.

Table: I
Basic Statistics Mahila Samakhya, Raichur (1996)

Talukas	Total No of Villages	No. of M.S. villages	Sangha members	Rural Female Population	% irrigated to cultivable land	No. of beds in medical institutions
Devadurga	173	23	350	65,120	1.63	2.01
Kushtagi	163	23	480	62,883	1.00	1.53
Raichur	152	20	400	73,654	6.82	1.49
Yalburga	138	50	1,230	73,771	1.63	5.30
District Total (9)	1,401	113	2,460	7,18,928	10.07	1.21

Source: Census of India 1981 Series 9, Karnataka

Education

The rural female literacy rates in the district and in the talukas are very low. The rates among the scheduled population are even lower (see ANNEX I, Table III). The literacy initiatives under the Mahila Samakhya Programme are presented below.

Table: XX
Literacy Initiatives, Mahila Samakhya Raichur 1996

Taluka	NFE- Centres	No. of Children	Creches	No. of Children	A.E	M.S.K
Yalburga	38		5	105		
Kushtagi	7		2	65		
Raichur	1					1
Devadurga	2		4	50		
Total	46	1,232	11	222		1

Source: MS Annual Report 1995-96

Health

Health and Education are two areas of great urgency in Raichur District. As can be seen from the table presented the district shows very high birth rates and infant mortality rates. The couple protection rate is also considerably lower than the state average. The District has almost 60 per cent of girls married in their teens. The DIU's focus could be directed more on woman's health issues. A District social and economic profile would help the DIU to focus its attention on the relevant needs.

Table: XXI
Reproductive Health

	C.B.R. 1991	I.M.R. 1981	C.P.R. (31-3-1993)	Mean age at marriage (1981)F	DPT3 Coverage 1988
Karnataka	27.0	77 - 81	50.2	19.2	NA
Ranchur	30.3	116 -67	37.1	17.0	70

Note: C.B.R. - Crude Birth Rate ;
I.M.R - Infant Mortality Rate;
C.P.R - Couple Protection Rate;
NA - Not Available

Sources:

Estimates of Vital Rates for The Districts of Karnataka 1951-91, Government of Karnataka; Population Centre Bangalore, by P.J Bhattacharjee: CMIE -1996
Annual Report Health and Family Welfare 1993-94 Government of Karnataka (CPRI)
Sheel Nuna, Women and Development (1990) (IMR 1981)

Itinerary

- January 4** **Arrival in Bangalore**
- Meeting at the State Programme Office with**
- . State Programme Director, Dr Revathi Narayanan,
 - . District Programme Co-ordinator Mysore, Dr C.P.Parimala,
 - . Resource Person on traditional Healthcare C.M. Gangamma
 - . Junior Resource Person, Ms B.S.Vani
- Meeting with the Secretary Department of Education, Chairperson of the Mahila Samakhya Society, Mr S.V.Ranganath**
- Meeting at the SPO with**
- . Financial Advisor, Sri A.R.Achyuta Rao and
 - . Accountant, Ms H.R.Sreelatha
- Dinner with friends of Mahila Samakhya**
- . Ms Shoba Nambisan (member Executive Committee)
 - . Ms Shoba Raghuram (member General Council and Deputy Representative HIVOS)
- and State Office staff**
- Departure for Raichur**
- January 5** **Arrival in Raichur**
- Meeting at the District Resource Unit with the District Programme Co-ordinator Raichur, Ma Sowbhagya, ex District Programme Co-ordinator Raichur, Dr C.P. Parimala (junior) resource persons and office staff**
- Visit to Mahila Shiksha Kendra, meeting with students and teachers**
- January 6** **Sahayaki meeting at Kadarahalli, Raichur District meeting with sahayakis, sahayoginis and sangha women**
- Inauguration of a Sangha Mane meeting with women from the Mahila Sangha**
- Travel to Bijapur District**
- January 7** **Children's Chinnara Mela at Bagalkot (Agricultural Training Institute), meetings with - resource persons**
- children from NFE centres and MSK
 - NFE teachers
 - sahayoginis
- Inter-taiuk meeting of Sahayakis from entire District Bijapur at Bagewadi**

January 8 Meeting at District Implementation Unit Bijapur with District Programme Officer, Ms Nirmala Shiraguppy, Resource Persons and Office staff

Meeting with Sahayoginis at DIU

Meeting with resource persons from Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samithi (NGO Resource Organisation on innovative pedagogy for literacy and non- formal education in support of the Literacy Movement)

Visit to Mahila Shiksha Kendra, meetings with
- children
- teaching staff

Travel to Bidar

January 9 Meeting at District Implementation Unit Bidar District with District Programme Co-ordinator Bidar District, Ms Usha Rani, and District Programme Co-ordinator Gulbarga District, Ms Nirmala

Sangha Meeting at Bagdal in Bidar Taluk (Iambani) meeting with sangha women, sahayakis, sahayogini and some village officials (Panchayat President)

Departure for Hyderabad and on to Gujarat.