

**REPORT OF THE EVALUATION OF MAHILA
SAMAKHYA PROGRAM IN KARNATAKA**

The Karnataka Evaluation Team

OCTOBER, 1993

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REPORT OF THE EVALUATION OF MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAM IN KARNATAKA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The evaluation team would like to place thier gratitude on record for this valuable experience of observing the MSP process at close quarters.

This was an experience that benefitted the evaluators as much as it is hoped to benefit the MSP. During the field work and the subsequent interactions, we learnt a lot about the process of empowerment of women, and were drawn in to the inspiring possibilities. For this, we are greatful to MSP and its staff at all levels, and the sangha women, for the warmth, openness, and hospitality showered on us.

We do hope that the report will be of use, in MSP's reflections on its functioning, and in the planning for the future. Needless to add that we will be happy to contribute to the movement in any way we can.

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BACKGROUND:

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

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

This report is the outcome of an evaluation work, undertaken in 1993, in one of the three states, Karnataka. The report presents the impressions of the four member team, based on their field experiences, interactions with the MS team at all levels, and study of relevant documents and reports.

Each of the evaluators have submitted detailed district reports covered by them. The consolidated state report was compiled by one of the evaluators, drawing extensively from the district reports. In this process of consolidation, many important and finer details may have got left out. We, therefore, recommend that the district reports be added as appendices to the state report, to be readily available for reference, on district details.

It is hoped that the report will be of use in the efforts at further strengthening the program that has tremendous potential, and in the planning of its extension to a wider area in the process of giving the due place to women in the society.

The report will be presented in several sections as follows :

- * Evaluation methodology
- * Constraints faced in the evaluation

- * Mahila Samakhya - its goals, strategies and mechanisms
- * Organizational structure and processes of MS
- * Achievements of MS
- * Areas that need further strengthening
- * Some issues of concern/importance to the future of the program.
- * Conclusions and recommendations
- * Appendices.

THE EVALUATION - COMPOSITION OF THE TEAM, APPROACH, METHODOLOGY:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Sanghas that have taken up action on collective issues, as well as those which are still groping with what to do;

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

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

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

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

In fact, we had the pleasure of acquainting ourselves with the reports of internal evaluations by the DIUs, which deserve compliments, both in terms of its scope and the process adapted. We feel that the staff which can introspect in such detail and candidness is well set for examining its own functioning.

CONSTRAINTS FACED IN THE EVALUATION:

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

The initial procedure of the evaluation team choice, formation and orientation pushed the schedule to the later part of June, which is the agricultural season in Karnataka. This meant that the village women would be available only in the late nights, for meetings with the evaluators.

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

The MSP covers hundreds of villages in the three districts in the state, and only a sampler of these could be covered, so the report may have been affected by the usual sampling biases.

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

MAHILA SAMAKHYA - ITS GOALS:

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

At the core of the program design is the value that women's empowerment is possible only when they are viewed as active agents and capable of self-determination and not as passive acceptors of what society metes out to them.

The program envisages providing services and facilities, as well as appropriate environment and support required for this process [see the project document, Ministry of HRD, Department of Education, Page 2].

These goals and their relevance is well understood and internalized by the MS staff, as was reflected in the projective drawings done by the sahayoginis of the Mysore district.

The drawings showed a close identification with the target group women without "us and them" dichotomy. The common and important imageries that emerged from these drawings was that of MS as a forum that can empower, enlighten and provide means and ways for women to overcome social, economic, cultural legal and other such traditional hurdles. The drawings also reflected an awareness of the inherent slowness of this process. The expected end results are women who are strong and aware, capable of self-determination, and the ability to create a new social order [see the group drawings enclosed].

Towards these goals, the program has several components:

- * Grassroots level women's organizations at the village level.
- * Educational activities.
- * Mahila Shikshana Kendras (MSK).

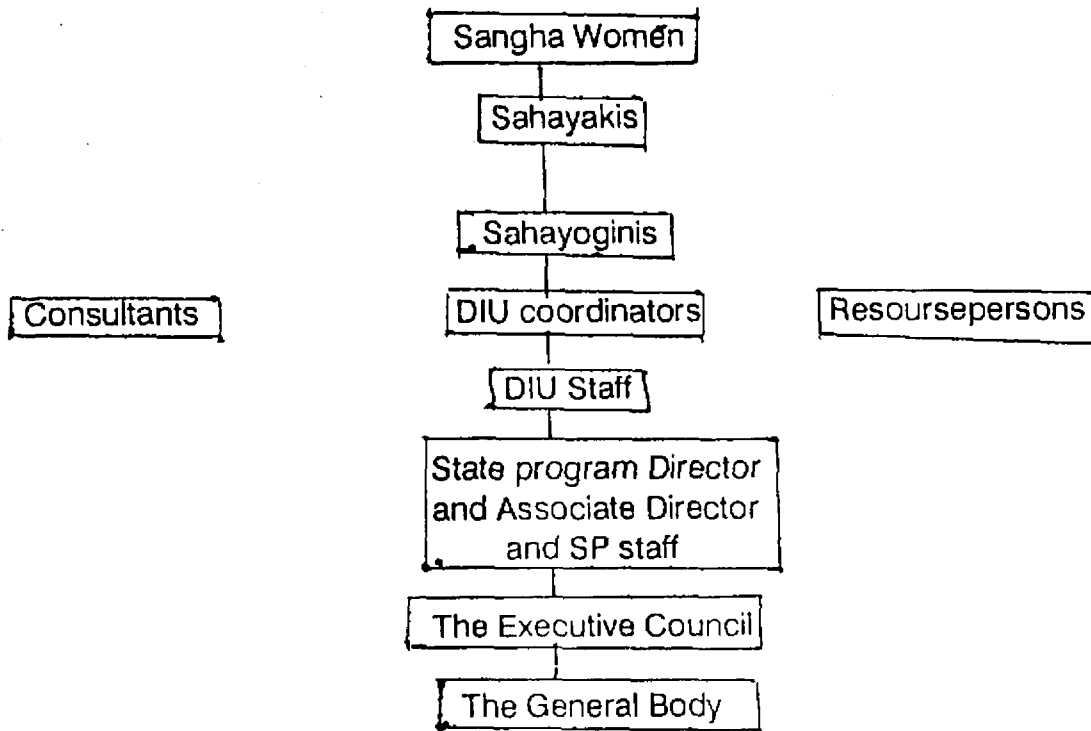
- * Other support service like Child Care Centres (CCC), savings and credit, health and legal services, links with economic programmes and civic amenities and so on.

The components are seen as tentative, in the sense, the program is designed to be responsive to the felt needs of the women's groups. For example, even though literacy was not seen as an important component in the initial design, the expressed desire by some sangha women to become functionally literate, had got MS to provide support in this direction. Similarly, when environmental issues were expressed as an important concern, the program has included this agenda in its sangha activities.

Even individual women who have sought help from MS, say for starting a business or trade, getting legal justice, accessing loan etc have found MS responsive, within its limited resources.

In fact, this attitude of openness in the program components and activities can be seen throughout the MS approach to women's empowerment. The relationship among the MS staff, and the sangha women is marked by warmth, absence of hierarchy, and genuine concern for mutual wellbeing.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF MS IN KARNATAKA:



At the state office, the program is headed by the state program director, supported by the associate director and administrative staff, providing state level coordination and support, for linkages with collateral agencies, as well as administrative support. This office also keeps in contact with the other three state functionaries through the national program office.

The program is implemented in the three districts through the three district implementation units (DIU).

Each DIU functions in an autonomous way in the utilization of resources, identification of villages to be covered, planning the work, meetings etc. The DIUs also have their own consultants and resource persons for program implementation.

The DIUs are headed by a district program coordinator (DPC), a group of sahayoginis, and requisite administrative staff.

At the village level, the program is shaped by the women's sanghas, animated by the sahayakis and other functional members. Organizationally, the sahayoginis and the sahayakis form the cutting edge of leadership in the program. According to the perceptions of the sahayoginis, the distinction between these two groups is -

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

The sahayoginis on the other hand, are seen as in charge of several sanghas in several villages. They function as a supportive resource, have more contact with the DIV get to tackle village level problems at a later stage. Their position is not rotational on the decision of the sanghas. They are paid

employees of the MS program, even though it is often reminded to them that there is an element of 'Voluntarism' in their work. Unlike the sahayakis, the sahayoginis are seen as having the potential to be promoted or upgraded to other positions like that of the resource person.

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

In presenting the organogram, MS makes a departure from the traditional structure, in that it puts the sangha women at the top, moving down the line to the State Program Director (SPD), thereby implying a downward accountability. This is indeed laudable and very elegant conceptually, but to realize the essence of such a structure, or its processual demands is not so simple.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES

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

It is also left to the sanghas to determine their own rules and regulations on matters of discipline, meeting schedules, agenda or punitive action for violating the basic values of the collective. The sanghas are encouraged to keep records of the meeting, process, decisions taken and follow up actions, etc. The sahayoginis role in these meetings is seen as a facilitating person, providing the necessary support to the sanghas, and a linkage with the DIU.

At the MS staff level too, there are monthly meetings in the DIU for information and experience sharing, and for planning block level events. The others like the teachers, 'Avvas' and sangha women are brought together periodically for sharing experiences and learning from each other.

Training is an important aspect in the program. This can be towards specific skill development, or performance of a specific role, or even in general personal growth and development. Training is seen not in the conventional program sense, but as a broad opportunity for learning.

For example -

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

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

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

There have been other kinds of training in the MS - Vocational courses geared at self - employment, of Short duration for 5 - 7 days for setting up nurseries etc, and of long duration for 30 - 50 days , intensive in nature, like for sericulture, or cooperatives etc.

The program places a lot of emphasis on the general environment to be created in all aspects of the program. For example, the seating plan in all meetings is informal, making the women feel comfortable, there are no fixed chairpersons conducting the meetings, the women are encouraged to bring their children etc. Spontaneity and warmth are fostered. Similarly, the sahayoginis are very approachable for the sangha women, the women come to their houses, whenever they need help or advice.

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

So the MS process has not only impacted on the 'target group' women, but touched the MS staff too, developing in them self- confidence, competence, and motivation to contribute to the goals of MSP. This is reflected in the statements made by the women, such as :-

"MS has given me wings to fly with. Until now, I lay on the ground helplessly."

"MS is like a perennial river, all women can benefit from it"

An interesting case is that of a sahayogini, who ran an arrack shop. The MS experience touched her in a way, that she gave up that and now works for MS, even at the cost of reduced earnings.

These are but a few examples given, to indicate the process adapted by the program, in empowering women, both within and outside MSP.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE MS PROGRAM

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

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

We were happy to note that the program has weaned the women from only material expectations to an appreciation of the empowerment process, the need for unity, organization, awareness building, and collective action. Some of the sanghas have overcome traditional divides along caste and religious lines, which is a significant achievement in the rural context.

A significant area in which the sanghas have influenced social practices, is when sanghas in one taluk managed to stop the 'Devadasi' practice, and stopped the 'Okali' ritual, which consider the women as a purchasable commodity.

The intangibles like the creation of a strong collective, a feeling of oneness, even women abandoned by their own family finding warmth in the sangha, are all important gains of the MS process.

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

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

The sangha house is symbolic of the women's own SPACE. Even in sanghas where this has not become a reality, the concept of having one in the near future is a driving force. Comments like

"We have learnt now to walk with our heads held high, no question of going around with a bent head anymore" reflect the sense of pride and confidence gained by the women.

The sangha women see the value of collective action in solving their problems. They say "The authorities take serious note when we approach them as a united group". There are women now, who feel that they would like to contest the coming elections, for positions in the local bodies!

In most of the villages we visited, the sanghas have started child care services, which relieve the women from worries about their children when they go for agricultural work. The centres serve a meal at noon time, keep the children from getting into mischief, and teach them some songs and alphabets, etc. The center also serves as a point to refer the children for medical help, in cases of illnesses. This service is to be appreciated for its value in freeing the women, at least to some extent, from pressures of child care.

Many of the sanghas have taken up small savings, to meet expenses of collective action - to travel to taluks offices, get petition applications typed etc. Others who have saved a larger sum are examining using the amount for income generation activities. In one area, they have leased some land and collectively cultivating it, sharing the proceeds of the yield for individual and sangha needs. A similar activity in dairying is being explored in another area.

The MS program had set aside some funds to be given as honorarium to the sangha sahayakis. Most sanghas have decided to use this as savings for meeting sangha needs, whether it is to build the 'MANE', or to organize block level events, or purchase assets and materials for the use of the sanghas. The sahayakis, while being given an important role in the sanghas, may still need some forms of 'positive stroking', as they have given up their honorarium, for the sake of sanghas.

The women show a strong sense of pride in belonging to the sanghas, feel confident of their ability to work towards common good through the sangha. Their confidence in being able to influence social change is reflected in some women expressing interest in contesting the coming elections for the local governing bodies.

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

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

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

They feel that MS has a lot more potential role to play in helping rural women benefit from Government programs and schemes. There were one or two officials who felt that the MSP has lost the initial momentum of the early days.

At the organizational level, the greatest achievement of the program is a cadre of sahayoginis. These women are very articulate, aware, committed and work with a clarity of the program goals and approaches. Their level of

motivation is such that they work in harsh field conditions, with minimum transport, boarding or lodging facilities, without any complaints. Some of them have to walk for 4-7 kms, after traveling by local buses, to reach the villages. They often have to stay at some make shift arrangements in the village after a late night sangha meeting. All this they do with cheerfulness and dedication. They seem to be driven by the satisfaction that they are contributing to a significant cause, which touches their own lives at one level. Some of them see their work continuing even if the MS program ceases. In some sanghas, when asked what would happen if the MS program came to an end, the women said "We will support the sahayoginis with our own resources, she is one of us". This shows the bondage that has developed between the staff and the women.

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

The achievements in the area of awareness building and use of herbal medicines and home remedies, is significant, not only from the utilitarian point of view, but also a means of confirming the value of women's knowledge and self-worth. Similarly, the response to a women's decision to earn her living as an auto- driver, is a reflection of the extent to which MS will reach, to empower women.

The Mahila Mahiti Melas are an excellent example where relevant information is disseminated, without the rigors of classroom learning. The

program has organized the melas in such a way that not only awareness building, but also experience sharing on a wider platform and a large number of issues has been possible.

Another component of the MS program that reflects the need based nature of the strategies, is the Mahila Shikshana Kendra, which has provided an opportunity to the young girls to continue their education. The approach of the Kendra is appropriate and motivating, for the school dropouts, with all the necessary support and facilities being provided at the DIU. Here again, the process adapted which allows the education to be individually paced, and holistic is to be appreciated. The 'Pravasa Patrike' which documented the experiences of the kendra girls on their first ever travel to Bangalore shows what the facility has meant to them, in terms of opportunities.

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

(As stated earlier this report does not present the none quantitative achievements of MS, like the number of villages covered, number of sanghas registered, money saved by the sanghas etc, as those statistics are already in the MSP documentation).

AREAS THAT MAY NEED FURTHER STRENGTHENING

The evaluation team, while fully appreciating the achievement of the program, would like to draw the attention of MS, to some aspects of the program which may need further strengthening. These areas may have been considered by the staff, but we would still like to place these, on record in case it has escaped attention due to the demands of project implementation.

a) **The first is the role of the sahayoginis.**

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

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

Among the demands on the role are being available to the sangha women and the sahayakis at all times , travel over long distances and difficult terrains, being the link between the DIU and the sanghas, supervision of the sangha meetings, documentation of the village visits, organizing block level events, to name a few.

Over the years, as the number of villages brought under the fold of MS has increased, the number of sanghas to be covered by the sahayogini has also increased, as the staffing situation at this level has not changed correspondingly. It was pointed out by the SPD that there are some indications that the pressure is beginning to show, many sahayoginis look weak and tired, and complain of acidity, a sure sign of irregular hours of eating and overwork. Surely, MSP would not let 'The ends justify the means'!

The compensation received by the sahayoginis too is ridiculously low. The most crucial personnel in the MS staff seem to be the least paid ! This needs to be urgently attended to.

- b) The second related point is that of the status of the sanghas themselves.

At present, the MS sanghas can be classified under three categories -

Those that are still in the formative stage,

Those that have started meeting regularly with village level functionaries in position, but still needing MS staff guidance, and

Those that have taken roots and are functioning in an independent way.

(We noted that the sense of security in the community has an important role to play in this process of maturation. For example - sanghas in areas that may come under submerging due to the Upper Krishna Project, have still to take root.)

The role of the sahayogini in each of these types would of course vary. At present, each sahayogini works with about 10 sanghas, the maturity level of these sanghas may be varied, their locations may also have implications on the work load of the sahayogini. Thus, the load on each sahayogini may be widely differing, some being overburdened, others having an easier load.

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

- c) The next area that needs strengthening is the CCCs. They are, at present rendering very valuable service to the women. One of the evaluation team members, Prof. Geetha, has some detailed comments to make on the functioning of these centres and suggestions for improving their effectiveness.

For example - she feels that the training inputs for the avvas is inadequate, to deal with the demands of the CCCs. More training in the

area of child development is needed, and the CCCs too need to be better equipped with toys, games, and other teaching aids.

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

Some more attention needs to be paid to issues of assessing the students' progress, the teachers own abilities in their role, and in the process of 'mainstreaming' with the formal educational systems.

- e) As mentioned earlier, the process of women's empowerment with which MS is working will demand constant innovation and forward looking strategies. The program will have to be ready with options, plans, linkages, information and so on, to meet the expectations raised in the women's groups. For example, the sangha women in Badagalapura in the H.D.Kote taluk, are a well knit, empowered group, who are already looking for income generation opportunities. They want to start a pappad making unit, willing to invest their savings, explore the market etc. We understand that a similar interest is shown by a sangha in the Bijapur district. MS will have to find means of supporting such initiatives, strengthening linkages with DICs, financial institutions, entrepreneurial development organizations etc.
- f) Another area that needs to be closely examined and strengthened is that of training of the sahayakis and sahayoginis. The earlier Indo-Dutch evaluation mission noted that the approach to training was "a-la-carte", and our impressions too seem to confirm this. In our interactions with the MS women, the ratings of training programs and experiences in these, varied from the superlative to the most dismal. For example, some sahayoginis felt that the training changed their whole being, helped them realize their potential, invested them with

many skills. On the other hand, a particular training program of the sahayakis at Bangalore was reported to have been a worthless, even humiliating experience, for them. Here again, we would like to point out that the exploratory, a-la-carte approach to training which might have been appropriate in the early years of MS, may need to be replaced with more purposive, need based, intensive and systematic training approach. For this, no single training organization or institution may be adequate. MS will have to keep in touch with several such organizations, work with them to develop programs that are tailor-made to meet MS's specific needs.

In all these, the district resource groups, and the state resource groups have an important role to play. We understand that the SITARA in Bidar is playing this role to some extent, but, the state resource group is yet to contribute in any significant way. What the SRG needs is a group of people who can think along MS lines, keep their 'antennae' open, and keep feeding into the MS mechanisms ,on opportunities, trends and resources. (For example - like on the Maternity allowance available for women in agricultural labor, or some credit facilities for women's groups engaged in economic activities etc) This needs to be urgently activated.

In the MSP design, the district resource person, and the consultant were to play this role, to some extent. However, their role seems not clearly defined. for example - In one district, the RP is seen as an acting DIU coordinator, in the absence of the co-ordinator. In another, the sahayoginis said ' We go to her when some trouble arises.' The role of RPs and consultants have to be examine and defined better, and ways and means to get them to relate to the field requirements needs to be identified.

- g) The empowerment process in the MS has begun, no doubt, but, one wonders whether it has reached the village women level, as effectively as it has the sahayogini and the sahayaki level. It was expressed by the Mysore DIU staff that in many sanghas, things seem to be left in the

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

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

- h) In some villages, the women's stance on gender equality issues, raised some doubts in our mind. For example, on the issue of equal wages, many women did say that our work does not deserve the same wages as the men's. Is this stance based on the realities of their existence or is it based on the unquestioning acceptance of social values? We were not sure that the issue had been taken up for discussion in the sanghas. On the other hand, on the issue of preference for male children, every sangha expressed concern and said that this attitude needs to be changed. So, the question is how deep and wide is the acceptance of gender equality concept, is it still a concept being debated or a strong value that is being internalized, in all its dimensions?
- i) On the question of literacy, right from the beginning, it has been included in the agenda only on the explicit interest of the sangha women. In many sanghas, this interest seems to have stopped at being able to sign the names. The non-formal, adult education activity has not taken off in most places. MS has made excellent contacts with the State Resource Center, which has produced meaningful and effective materials for the use in this. MS has also developed very good workbooks and reading materials to be used in teaching literacy. But,

we did not see these being put to use. MS has provided each sangha with books on a variety of subjects, including good literature, but we did not see evidence of it being read by or read to sangha women. We feel more efforts are needed in this direction, in terms of rejuvenating the literacy component. Of course, the pressure to conform to the target oriented approach of the literacy mission and losing the goals of MS in the program imperatives may have to be carefully examined.

On the whole, the achievements of MS far outshine the areas which need further strengthening. Some of these areas of weaknesses are those that are coming to light now, and could not really have been anticipated. In fact, some of them are proof of the fact that the program has unleashed a process of social change in favor of women. It is important, therefore that they need to be addressed to and dealt with in the program.

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

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

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

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

2. The MSP is time bound, and what happens after 1997, when the program comes to an end, should be considered right from now. Is it possible that all the sanghas get registered, assume identities as independent bodies that can function even after MSP is withdrawn? what are pros and cons of registering them? can we think of state level taxation of the sanghas or district level registration?

next 2 - 3 years ? These are to be examined seriously in the coming period.

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

Perhaps this could be due to the women feeling uncomfortable in handling the roles of authority, feeling empowered for the first time in their jobs..... It is as if they have to exercise this new found sense of powerfulness on the nearest and most accessible MALE! May be the men in MS have taken this in their stride, despite feeling hurt and frustrated. The same may not be the response of other men, who come in contact with the MS staff, like other government functionaries, relatives of sangha women etc. Perhaps, it the question of the men's own inability to deal with women in positions of authority I

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

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

For example :

The process of internal evaluation of the DIUs was to involve all the staff of MS, both the field workers and the administrative Staff. The Mysore team felt that this time, some of the staff were kept out of the process, a unilateral decision made by the state director. The question asked by

the DIU team is why are we making this divide? They have been involved in the implementation in their own way. If internal evaluation is a mechanism for self reflection, even if there is the risk of role ambiguity, everyone should have been involved. This did not happen and the Mysore team expressed concern.

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

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

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

The sanghas seem to fall into four categories :

Those that still in the formation stage,

Those which have come together, but still needing the MS staff's intervention in the conducting of meetings,

Those that have coalesced into an effective group, capable of handling their own issues, and defining their own agenda,

And those that have come to be effective pressure groups, and looking into future activities like income generation etc.

The sahayoginis role in each of these is different On one hand, her presence in a mature sangha may block the sangha from becoming self

reliant, she may on the other hand not be able devote more time to the still forming sangha.

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, there is a feeling that they are not working in coordination with each other. For example, the APD was not included in the initial briefing, or the planning of the evaluation, or even the discussion of the draft reports. Her role needs to be better defined, and legitimized, and ensuring that her contributions to the program is facilitated, as it is an important aspect of the program, in the NFE, AE and MSK components.

The growing tension and conflict between these two may hamper the program in the long run and something must be done, either by way of arbitration or role definition, so that the smooth functioning of both is ensured. At the moment, we are not in a position to comment on the rights or wrongs of each, but can say that there is some conflict. We would request the MS policy makers to look into the matter at the earliest.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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

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

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

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

The program has achieved an excellent documentation system, both of the process of empowerment and that of the implementation of the program. The dairies to be maintained by each sahayogini will be a rich treasure of information, to document the sangha building process. This has to be strengthened, and made use of in the documentation of the MS process. These would be of great interest and value to people working in the area of women's programs. Similarly, the presentation of information to the sangha women and sharing of experiences and wisdom among them has been enabled through appropriate means. These are to be highly appreciated.

While appreciating the achievements of the program, and its 'process orientation', which can be best be experienced though a close interaction, we