

Mahila Samakhya

Andhra Pradesh

National Evaluation

December 2004

Executive Summary

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NATIONAL EVALUATION OF THE MAHILA SAMAKHYA PROGRAMME: ANDHRA PRADESH MAHILA SAMATHA SOCIETY (APMSS)

1. INTRODUCTION

At very outset, it needs to be stated that the APMSS intervention in Andhra Pradesh is impressive. APMSS has succeeded in establishing a strong field presence. The MS ideology is clearly articulated by the sangham women in both speech and the range of activities they are engaging in. The women came across as dynamic and confident. Across districts, the women view the sanghams as an institution that belongs to them and value its role in their personal and social life. It has provided them with an identity that goes beyond their family and kinship networks

2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

. Given the short duration of the evaluation period the team focused largely on the qualitative dimensions to obtain an indicative rather than a comprehensive picture.

Information was obtained through Focus group discussions and interactions with members of the sanghas, federations and children and teachers of the Mahila Shikshan Kendras; interactions with the MS team at the State, district and mandal levels and discussions with the Education secretary and other government officials at district and mandal levels as well with representatives of NGO networks at State and district level.

In addition to these qualitative data sets, we attempted to discern micro trends and assess the impact of programmes and interventions by consolidating and analyzing data collected by the APMSS.

3. REACH AND EXPANSION

Presently APMSS is working in 9 districts across 2372 villages in 56 mandals. It is the single largest organization working on gender and development in the state. It has its largest presence in the Telangana region, which is one of the poorest regions in the state covering 7 out of the nine Telangana districts. Last year the programme extended to two coastal districts Srikakulam and Vizianagaram, characterized by poor socio-economic and human development indicators especially a low female literacy rate.

This expansion is creditable but nonetheless needs to be seen contextually.

1. APMSS is suffering from high turnover and numerous vacancies. Expansion to two new districts will result in the diversion of the prevailing skeletal staff of the older districts to the new districts. This is also likely to affect the progress of the programme in the older districts.
2. At present APMSS does not cover all mandals in its project districts. In these seven districts, there are several mandals, which are more backward than the selected mandals from the new districts.
3. APMSS has successfully reached SC women in its project areas, as a majority of SC women in these mandals are sangham members. Women from the STs and minorities have not been included to such an extent. This leaves one with the scope to discuss as to whether one should seek to expand the programme to the unattended settlements as well as the STs and minorities in

the existing villages of the current seven districts or should one expand to new villages and districts.

Key Recommendations

3. Reflection on the current context of APMSS is required prior to expanding the programme.
4. Consolidation of strengths and redefining one's role as a policy influencing body might be of greater relevance rather than expansion to more areas. Expansion to help strengthen the movement and value addition by embracing challenging tasks of advocacy and policy interventions could be more significant than physical expansion .
5. APMSS needs to pay special attention to the tribal dimension and governance in scheduled areas. Governance issue in tribal context has not been adequately acknowledged. Adilabad where APMSS works is exclusively tribal and its proposed expansion to Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts has this special situation and further demands attention to this area of focus.

4. THE SANGHAMS

4.1 Mahila Sanghams

Sanghams are the backbone of the APMSS. The foundation for empowerment in the MS programme was laid through the formation of cohesive Mahila Sanghams as instruments of collective action. The MS intervention has changed the trajectory of the lives of the sangham women.

1. Since the focus of the programme was on mobilizing the poorest of the poor among women, dalits and tribals dominate most of the sanghams, especially the older ones. In the newer districts, efforts at forming multicaste sanghams are underway, as non-dalit and non-tribal women also face oppression.
2. The phenomenon of **multicaste sanghams** requires special attention. The field visits revealed that a properly integrated multicaste sangham is a chimera. In the older districts (Mahabubnagar), some negotiations are underway but integration is yet to be achieved. Concerns are voiced about the power and social dynamics that are likely to be encountered in the process of inclusion of women of other castes.
3. **Mainstreaming seems to be an issue.** It needs to be acknowledged that in villages chosen for being developed as model villages, the Mahila Samatha philosophy extends beyond the SC hamlets. In these villages, committees including the Sarpanch, traditional leaders and youth groups have been instituted who are aware and appreciative of MS. But there are a number of villages where the village seems to be oblivious of what the sangham women are doing.
4. Access to information and interactions with different government offices and exposure through training and visits have contributed to change at all three levels: personal; family and community. It would be premature to state that the village as a whole has experienced changes. What is evident and palpable across the districts is that this process has given the members of the sanghams a great deal of courage and confidence; self-reliance; a platform for collective action and enhanced self-esteem.

5. The **leadership** in the sanghams is extremely well developed. The leaders possess clarity of concepts, a strong information base and good moderating skills. There, however, seems to be a tendency to concentrate leadership in the hands of a few. APMSS needs to address the issue of widening the base of leadership to avoid concentration of power in a few hands
6. **Decision-making seems to lie with the sangham women** as they take up programmes and issues deemed locally relevant. Several examples were cited by women about the hours of deliberations and discussions before making decisions and instituting action at the village, mandal and district levels. Actions covered a range of social, governance, livelihood and land issues and in some areas sanghams have pressurized the government agencies at the mandal and district levels for better implementation and accountability.

Key Recommendations

- In order to sustain and upscale activities of the sanghams, the inputs in terms of capacity building through trainings, exposure activities and other such means is critical. This capacity building training is underway but the impact needs to be assessed regularly. The output of these processes cannot be always be quantified but could be subjected to qualitative evaluations periodically.
- Wherever efforts are being made for unicast sanghams to evolve into multi-caste sanghams there is need for support and guidance from the federations and the MS staff. It is suggested that some mechanisms should be evolved to differentiate newer members from the older ones. For example, the sanghams can consider having different categories of membership viz. permanent members, associate members and new members. This may help to resolve some of the dilemmas and apprehensions expressed by sangham members regarding the induction of newer members, especially from other castes.
- It is useful to think in terms of more than one sangham per village if required, to ensure real participation. This would help have greater cohesiveness, belongingness, and participation of the members, as the group size is moderate unlike very large size single sanghams in the new districts.
- It would be useful to undertake an exercise across villages to assess whether the MS approach is an isolated phenomenon. **Mainstreaming** is an important goal for us.
- It is crucial to develop a second rung of leadership especially in the light of the upcoming federation model. With the departure of the karyakarthis there will be the need for internal checks and balances. Data should be collected and analyzed on leadership status.
- Given the presence of development programmes such as Velugu and their potential for economically improving sangham women's life situation, collaboration stretching from the state to the village level is strongly recommended.

4.2 Bala Sanghams

Bala sanghams are collectives of boys and girls who come together once every fortnight to discuss social issues and other interests. The practice of girls and boys working together in rural areas is rare and must be acknowledged and appreciated. It is interesting to note that the boys approached the MS staff for obtaining entry into these sanghams rather than vice-versa. Membership to the bala sanghams will enable these young boys to grow up as collaborators rather than adversaries of their counterparts.

Key Recommendations

- The concept of bala sanghams is innovative and they can be given more information regarding the academic and vocational options after the seventh and tenth classes, scholarships available for SC.ST and BC children
- Planned training on gender sensitivity and life skills will have a long-term positive impact.

5. MAJOR INTERVENTIONS INCLUDING ALTERNATE STRUCTURES

Across districts, the issues addressed by the sanghams include dealing with cases of violence against women, child marriages, gender relations in the family and community, education for out of school children, especially older girls, demanding greater accountability from government institutions and welfare programmes. The sangham women related some achievement in checking absenteeism of teachers in schools, demanding entitlements from Panchayats and ensuring that ANMs and other health staff perform their duties.

Five major areas that have been addressed by the programme include: Education of women and children; Health; Social and gender equity; Natural resource management and asset building; Women's participation in panchayat raj institutions

5.1 Education and Empowerment of Women and Children

Education is one of the key areas of intervention of the programme, which is seen as a means for empowerment.. A range of activities have been undertaken to address this objective and these include literacy activities, setting up of alternate structures like the Adult Literacy Centres (ALCs), Mahila Sikshana Kendras (MSKs), Bala Mitra Kendras (BMKs) and more recently the Residential Bridge Course (RBC).

5.1.1 Adult Literacy Centres

In most of the APMSS villages, adult literacy centres were initiated. Women observed seem to derive immense pleasure in writing and handling numbers. But in a number of villages, the ALCs have poor attendance. As a redressal measure, short term Mahila Shikshana Kendras were developed. With the transition to federations requiring self reliance of the Sanghams on the anvil, capacity building of the sanghams with functional literacy requires greater attention in terms of programme priorities and a clear plan of action is required.

5.1.2 Short Term Mahila Sikshana Kendras

Short term MSKs provide for literacy and numeracy skills along with a curriculum that provides information and analysis of social situations in health, district level programmes, and literacy lessons based on discussions. These are ten-day programmes, conducted in three phases during the last three years. The curriculum is based on Paulo Frerian model of learning, which takes real life contexts as its learning domains. Given the ambitious curriculum and the fact that there is a high drop out between phases, this strategy needs reconsideration. Despite these concerns, the areas where there seems to be a positive impact is around issues of empowerment, handling finances and accounts.

5.1.3 Mahila Shikshana Kendras(Long term residential centers)

The MS philosophy is well translated into the content of MSK. The MSKs are run both at district and mandal levels. It provides for accelerated learning opportunities to the never enrolled and dropouts in the age group of 12-18. The curriculum is innovative and covers the syllabus at the primary school level, social issues, personal hygiene and health, vocational education, self-defense, etc. A total of 1809 girls in the age group of 12-18 have been covered between 1997-2004. Of them 64% were from SC communities, 21% from BC, 12% ST and 2.5 % from other castes. The Muslim girls attending the camps are covered under the category of BC girls. Data of two MSKs at Warangal district suggests that about 75% of girls who enroll in the MSK complete the programme successfully and are mainstreamed.

5.1.4 Bala Mitra Kendras (BMKs)

The BMKs (non-formal learning centers) for child labour and school drop outs has been one of the most successful initiatives of APMSS. Success of enrolment campaigns and effective mainstreaming of children from the BMKs into government schools over the past five years with remarkable participation of the community in elementary education has led to reduced need for the BMKs in some areas. A total number of 10,577 children have been accessed through the BMKs.

5.1.5 National Programme For Education of Girls at the Elementary Level (NPEGEL)

The preparatory work on NPEGEL in the different mandals has just begun. The field visits revealed very little coordination between the mandal level officials and APMSS staff in this venture. Authorities are hesitant to involve civil society and not open to the participatory process. They also did not display very much faith in APMSS' ability to effectively implement this programme.

Key Recommendations

- An independent assessment is required to assess the learning levels achieved as defined by the curriculum in all the learning initiatives described above.
- An in-depth impact study of girls who have passed from the centres during the last five years needs to be done. The data regarding children who are mainstreamed and those who continue education should also be maintained so as to assess the impact of this strategy.
- APMSS has acquired enough experience to now influence policy in education. It is desirable to consolidate the MSK experience and present it as a model by clearly articulating curriculum and pedagogy.
- APMSS needs to strengthen the curriculum and teacher's capacities in language and mathematics in the MSKs. They need to be oriented towards the identification of learning difficulties and evolve mechanisms to respond to them.
- Efforts should be made to bring more children from the non-SC/ST category into the MSKs. Living in close proximity for a one year period will help erode caste barriers in the long-term.
- With regard to the NPEGEL there are several recommendations. Firstly there is the need for additional staff as the current staff is already overstretched with existing responsibilities. In addition to the already provided cluster coordinator, there is the need for at least one person for two mandals; one at the district and state levels. The need for vertical linkages is critical for the success of such a programme. The attitude of the mandal officials is a cause for concern and needs to be addressed by directives from the state and national level.
- APMSS may need to collaborate with an external educational resource group, to act as a sounding board for issues arising in the course of programme implementation.

5.2 Social and Gender Equity

A number of initiatives have been taken by the sanghams regarding stopping child marriages, child labour, the initiation of women as joginis, addressing concerns about consumption of liquor, violence against women, struggles against caste discrimination, land rights and access to housing and other basic needs. .

Nari Adalats

The concept of a women's court or nari adalat was adapted from the UP model and the motivation for it was based on the fact that justice was not assured in the regular courts or the caste based institutions. This is definitely seen as a form of empowerment and they also have acquired information on the legal dimensions through training programmes.

MS staff voiced concerns of dealing with sexual harassment in the course of work as well as a threat to their personal security when addressing social issues that are likely to incur the ire of traditional leaders. They are not clear about the kind of support they can obtain and expect from the national level.

Key Recommendations

- The evaluation team strongly feels that 'need based' training should be given to women on legal issues and they should also have access to a network of lawyers and others who can be drawn upon for advice at various levels.
- There is a need to set up a committee against sexual harassment for women working in the programme, as stipulated by the Supreme Court. The constitution of this committee and procedures for redressal and punishment need to be worked out. National office could facilitate a process to set up such committees in other state programmes in consultation with lawyers and NGOs who have been involved in doing similar work with other institutions. This would play an important role in providing security to the staff and also act as a deterrent against harassment both verbal and physical.

5.3 Health

Health has emerged as an important concern for sanghams. Due to a range of training programmes they are able to recognize the relationship between their poor living conditions, workload and ill health. There has been an effort to create awareness regarding diseases, environmental and personal hygiene by the programme. The sangham women expressed their anger and frustration with the lack of responsiveness of the public health services.

MS has partnered with government for disease control and immunization programmes. HIV and AIDS control training has been undertaken by the MS team as well as by some federations. Initiatives like the revival of traditional practices and herbal medicine are important and need to be encouraged. The training of private practitioners has focused largely on the use of safe needles and also some aspects of safe motherhood. This is an important area of intervention that needs greater planned elaboration.

Key Recommendations

- There is a need to evolve a strategy for the interventions in the public sector. At this point the emphasis has been on awareness building but it is time the programme undertakes an exercise at the sangham level for prioritizing the ‘felt needs’ and then evolving suitable strategies.
- The training material and pedagogy requires needs to be critically evaluated. The impact of these training programmes also needs to be assessed.
- MS needs to partner with other organizations and concerned doctors of the public sector to address the inadequacies of the public health system. The MS could also play an important role in highlighting malpractices in the private sector and act as a pressure group along with other concerned organizations for regulating this sector.
- The district level officials see a key role for sangham women in controlling epidemics and becoming resource persons for implementing services of the public health care system.

5.4 National Resource Management

Natural resource management (NRM) is a critical component in addressing livelihood issues. In some of the sanghams, the women took the initiative of engaging in collective farming. This initiative became the inspiration for the Samatha Dharani programme, a UNDP assisted Women and agriculture programme.

The Samatha Dharani programme has met with mixed responses across districts. In some of the districts women expressed satisfaction at gaining some assets and converting the fallow land into a productive asset. The sanghams showed maturity in handling accounts, had evolved systems for borrowing and paying back from the revolving fund and the grain bank. In other districts, there was a deep sense of frustration due to lack of control over external factors like drought for instance in Mahbubnagar.

Key Recommendations

- The conceptualization of the Samatha Dharani programme for only three years is in our view shortsighted. The process of acquiring the land, preparing it and then seeing some benefits from it, takes a great deal of time and effort. There is a need to have some scheme that provides continuity to this programme that is just about consolidating itself in some areas.
- There is a need to tie up with ongoing programmes for watershed management, community forestry management and comprehensive land development programmes.
- APMSS as the single largest women focused group has potential to critique the NRM policies and participatory process to make them gender sensitive. APMSS needs to engage actively in Van Samrakshana Samithis, Water User Associations, and Watershed Programmes etc and is poised to play a significant role in improving the livelihoods, employment and better utilization of state funds in these NRM activities.

5.5 Women’s Participation in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs)

The APMSS data shows that over time there has been an increase in the participation of women in PRIs. Sangham women have initiated and demanded their entitlements from the panchayats and even higher authorities. There is a need for deepening APMSS work in this area.

Key Recommendations

- Capacity building in this area is crucial. Focused training in PRI is strongly recommended. There is the need to strengthen the hands of the sangham women who are panchayat

members, in other ways through vertical linkages, as mere membership does not assure empowerment.

- APMSS has to also understand the women and Panchayat issue with reference to the Scheduled Areas and tribal self-rule. This aspect has not received the attention in APMSS so far. Work in agency areas has not been focused in the local specific context, which gives attention to the special amendment to Panchayati Raj legislation.

6. CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING OF STAFF

Capacity building and training is a key component of APMSS programme intervention. The staff has been exposed to a range of training programmes and exposure visits in all the key intervention areas described earlier. It is undisputed that these have been of value given the vibrancy in the field. There is a need to reexamine training needs in the light of the challenges of meeting the requirements of federations and as well to evolve into a resource group

Key Recommendations

- There is the need for an area wise evaluation of training programmes, which will examine both content and methodology of training programmes to assess where further inputs are required. It will also be useful to engage in an assessment of needs at this juncture that should be prioritized in the future.
- The interface with the government is likely to increase. APMSS will begin functioning as both as a policy making and implementing body. Special training inputs are required for dealing with this enhanced role.

7. FEDERATIONS: PROCESSES AND STATUS

The process of several sanghams coming together and federating into autonomous bodies at the mandal level has already begun. In some districts, the federations have registered themselves while in others they are still in the process. Federations have been registered in 14 out of the 37 mandals that APMSS works in.

Sustained human resource inputs are required to build and sustain the process. Federation members see multiple roles for themselves in consolidating and taking forward the MS philosophy, forming new sanghams and strengthening the old sanghams. Financial independence is of concern for all federations. The collections made by the federations are too meager for holding meetings and any other activity. Federation members were confident that they could hold meetings and form new sanghams, even if the karyakartha is withdrawn, but felt there was no way they could raise resources or meet the expenses involved.

Key Recommendations

- The pace and direction of the process of federation formation should not be forced nor under the pressure of MS phasing out as prescribed in the tenth plan. The process of federation formation is a labour intensive process that requires human and technical inputs of the MS team at all levels. There is also variation in the capacities of sanghams who are currently under the process of federating.
- In several federations, there is an issue with financial support. Therefore they do require some core support funding in order to consolidate their efforts while encouraging them to explore alternate sources of funding for the future. The APMSS must play a mentor's role in these processes and help federations to apprentice in order to acquire skills.

Representatives of federations and state team estimated annual requirements of federations to understand the magnitude of financial assistance required to sustain activities. Around Rs 1.75 lakh per annum is the approximate requirement of each federation while they have less than a ten thousands raised their contributions at present.

- The federations require capacity building on various aspects and the MS team is to play a critical role in this. The relationship between the MS staff and the federations can be an evolving one but a cessation may result in the premature collapse of the programme.

7. STATE RESOURCE CENTRE

The state resource center is the next key venture for APMSS. The center is likely to represent a consolidation of past efforts and training material. This will be available to NGOs and government. This will help extend the MS philosophy to areas beyond the mandals it is currently working in. There is a need to build data systems, document and provide some research input in programme planning. The resource center can provide an opportunity for APMSS to draw on individuals and organizations working on related themes to contribute in terms of capacity building, training and research. The importance of documenting and analysis of the programme is absolutely essential at this stage, if it is to meaningfully inform other initiatives

Key Recommendations

- The evaluation team supports the idea of a state resource center but feels that the scope and content needs to be deliberated more concretely.
- Through the state resource center there is a strong need to build a systematic MIS that will help APMSS experiences and struggles influence policies and other sections of the society including NGOs. A database on the trends and status of varied groups of population in the 7 plus districts covering 2500 villages would mean a great strength to speak and press for changes in programmes and policies. MIS that enables APMSS to not only implement development interventions -like BMK, Bala Sanghams, MSKs, reproductive health, Samatha Dharani common land programme, Panchayat Raj, drought and PDS, Nari Adalat, etc- but critique the existing policies based on experiences and suggest changes to address the constraints and obstacles to the effective participation of the marginalized sections in the schemes. It could be thus be a resource centre, which has the strength of database. It could be the focal point undertaking pilot studies, surveys and conducting dialogue and designing alternative for policy and civil society.
- The evaluation team was of the opinion that there must be separate staff for the resource center who work with the core team and districts. It would be useful to have an advisory committee who would help the center chalk out its activities based on the needs of the programme.
- There is the need for vertical linkages, i.e., there should be district resource center, which will feed into a state center to enable advocacy at all levels.
- Synergies between the federations and the resource centers should emerge.

9. CONVERGENCE AND COLLABORATIONS WITH GOVERNMENT AND NGOs

Given the wide-ranging agenda of MS, both collaboration and convergence of APMSS with the government and NGOs is likely and required. This is an area that needs serious review and given

a fresh direction for the future. Currently NGOs collaborate with APMSS largely in the form of receiving and providing training. APMSS is highly respected for its mobilizing capacity and its ability to provide an interface for the other NGOs with grassroots.

However, an active engagement of the APMSS as a member of the networking is in the area of child rights. It has been active member of the Andhra Pradesh Alliance for Child Rights (APACR), a statewide network of child focused NGOs. It is the first and most significant collaborative effort of the APMSS with other groups at district and state level for the past few years.

9.1 Education

Government officials in the education department were familiar with the MS philosophy and interventions and saw MS's strength in mobilizing and motivating communities and through the alternate structures were helping in enrollment of children. However, their technical capacities were not cited as an area of strength. Although APMSS has evolved strategies for learning, adapted teaching materials etc. they have not impacted on state curriculum. APMSS needs to negotiate with SSA to play a more proactive role in planning under NPEGEL. Similarly in the case of KGBV, APMSS needs to seize the opportunity and dialogue with government to build on the MSK experience.

9.2 Health Programmes

The health department sees APMSS as an important player in community mobilization activities. Given the vertical programming of health interventions there is little scope for a real partnership between government and the APMSS.

The APMSS has to strategize their role in the various government programmes and could play a role as representatives of the 'felt needs' of the most vulnerable and also articulate the inadequacies of the public services as perceived by the people.

9.3 Samatha Dharani- National Resource Management/Livelihoods

Samatha Dharani programme aimed at facilitating the livelihoods and food security through sustainable farming practices with women as the focus reveal the constraints and challenges inherent in collaboration with government structures. It was envisaged that extension officers would be placed by the Agricultural Department to work in collaboration with the APMSS on this innovative women farming project. However, it was a major disappointment as there were no extension officers placed by the department to work for the project as collaborators and also no inputs of any nature to the programme by the department. The hope of building synergies with the expertise of the agriculture department so that the lessons can be applied to wider society has not been realised.

Key Recommendations

- This section reveals that the relationship between APMSS and the government at different levels is shaky. Convergence against this backdrop will prove to be problematic. Hence there is the need for directives from the national office detailing the locus standi of

APMSS. These directives need to be communicated vertically from the state to the mandal level government officials. The earlier section on intervention reveals the negative attitude of the mandal level officials, which is a cause for concern and must be addressed.

- Across all interventions, there is the need for workshops for gender sensitization and orientation to the APMSS programme for government officials at different levels.
- The APMSS needs to review and define the nature and scope of its collaborations with both government and non-government organizations. It needs to play a more pro-active role in raising issues of policy concern from its very rich and wide field experience. There is a need for evolving strategies for collaborations.

10. HUMAN RESOURCE ISSUES

Given the labour intensive nature of the programme, the availability of staff at all levels of the programme is of immense concern. The evaluation team recognized the immense amount of time and energy that goes into building processes in order to realize the goal of the Mahila Samakhya programme.

1. Staff availability and retention is a serious concern in the programme. Further the reasons for high staff turn over are several, the high workload, low salary and competition from other NGOs who often pay better. There is a need to rationalize the salary structure.
2. Job and personal security are also important issues that influence availability and retention of staff. There have been some ugly incidents when MS workers have incurred the wrath of a section of the villagers for stopping a child marriage in Mahbubnagar District. Another dimension is sexual harassment by people who may not be connected to the programme. Ensuring the personal security of ifeld workers needs to be expeditiously addressed

Key Recommendations

- Given the philosophy of this programme, human resources are critical for building and sustaining it in future. Apart from understaffing at all levels there is a concern regarding staff turnover. There is need to review salary structures, incentives and workload of these workers to ensure retention.
- At this stage, there is need for perspective building within the programme, which will provide directions for the future. Perspective building is itself a process that will require an assessment of the key areas of intervention and also build on issues to be addressed in the future. APMSS needs to play a more pro-active role at the state level by drawing upon persons who will be a resource for various needs of the programme. From the national level, the state programme must draw on the NRG members and the staff from the national office to help in the process of perspective building.
- The need to strengthen human resources is critical for supporting the sanghams, federations and also the advocacy at the mandal, district and state levels.
- The range of issues have increased and therefore it maybe useful for resource persons to be in charge of specific themes, especially at the state level.
- There is need to create structures to address the security concerns of the staff. A committee to deal with sexual harassment, especially from third parties, needs to be set up. The evaluation team was of the opinion that this is an issue that is of concern and needs to be addressed by the National Office. It was suggested that a committee against

- sexual harassment be addressed with support from lawyers and other NGOs who have expertise in this area.
- The state team needs to be expanded and it is suggested that a combination of a resource person and consultant for each issue may help in strengthening the programme.
 - The medical insurance cover must be provided to workers at all levels and PF also be restored as a part of security of workers.

11. IN CONCLUSION

This report seeks to reiterate that the work of the APMSS has had far reaching consequences. The dedication and the commitment of the staff members are evident from the response of the sangham women. This team has internalized empowerment notions and is efficiently communicating these in the field. Changes in many dimensions are apparent.

The time has come for APMSS to consciously evolve and reinvent itself as a policy creating entity. It requires a higher degree of creativity and flexibility to responds to the demands of the civil society and devise suitable strategies and mechanisms that facilitate the women and sanghams to play an active role independent of and autonomous from the MS. It calls for identification of varied sections in the civil society with whom APMSS could ally and take forward their empirical experiences to have the benefit of forcing changes in the policy level.