

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
OF
NATIONAL EVALUATION OF KERALA MAHILA SAMAKHYA(KMSS)
PROGRAMME**

- The present evaluation of Kerala Mahila Samakhya Society's (KMSS) programme was conducted between 13th –21st December 04.
- The team members of the evaluation were Ms Rameswari Varma and Ms Ammu Joseph.
- The KMSS programme is confined only to two districts (Trivandrum and Idukki) and two blocks (Vamanapuram and Adimali) each within these districts.
- The evaluation team visited both the blocks and almost all the panchayat areas in both the blocks.
- This report is based on Discussions with Women with whom KMSS is working, Discussions with the functionaries of KMSS, Government Officials of Relevant Departments, and with Activists. NGO's working with women, women's studies scholars and media activists. For the purposes of this report the annual reports of KMSS were also referred.

The objectives of the present evaluation are: -

1. To assess the progress of the programme on the evaluation parameters identified for the National Evaluation of 2004.
2. To critically review programme strategies and interventions.
3. To identify constraints and areas that needs strengthening.
4. To recommend next steps.

The Parameters identified for evaluation of the programme are: -

A Critical Assessment of

1. Expansion and reach in terms of expansion to backward areas, reaching poor and marginalized women, expansion strategies, expansion process etc.
2. Inputs/ strategies at Field level for Information, Dissemination, Knowledge building, Skill Development, and Creation of alternatives for women's/girls empowerment and learning etc on identified issues such as women's education, children's education health, violence, participation in local governance, livelihoods, interaction with Government structures and services.

3. Status of Sanghas/ Federations in terms of impact of the programme on Women's Empowerment, assessing the ability of Sanghas to Access and Demand Accountability of Local Governments Structures/services, Effectiveness of Sanghas in Local Governance, effectiveness of Sangha Intervention in the area of livelihoods etc.
4. Resource centres.
5. Inter-linkages/convergence with national/ state level programmes and organizations.
6. Monitoring, reporting and documentation
7. Organizational Issues.

Introduction to Kerala Mahila Samakhya Society (KMSS) Programme

- ❖ The KMSS was established in 1998. The programme activities started in 1999. After an initial take off, the programme ran into rough weather some where in mid 2002 as a result of which there was a leadership vacuum which has been set right recently. During that period the programme was kept alive mainly by the grass root functionaries.
- ❖ The structure of the KMSS is different from that of MS programmes in other states
- ❖ KMSS sanghas exist at the ward level in Kerala, not at village level as in other MS states.
- ❖ Most of the KMSS sanghas have been converted into SHG's (Self help groups) and registered under the Kudumbashri programme. The Kudumbashri programme is a poverty alleviation programme through formation of self-help groups and assisting them financially.
- ❖ At the ward level there is a proliferation of SHG's/sanghas (these include KMSS sanghas SHG's as also other sanghas/SHG's formed by various other organizations. here are at least 10 –15 sanghas at the ward level and each panchayat has about 10-15 wards.
- ❖ Because there is a demand for MS inputs both from the KMSS sanghas turned SHG's as well as other SHG's, KMSS has facilitated the formation of Vanitha Sabhas (VS) at the ward level. Each VS consists of 3-5 representatives of each KMSS sangha/ SHG as well as other SHG's at the ward level.
- ❖ Thus the Vanitha Sabhas (VS) appears to have become the key unit through which the KMSS programme functions, although KMSS sevinis (functionaries of KMSS at ward level/) also visit the sanghas and give them inputs when needed

- ❖ Because Kerala is a highly politicized and politically polarized state the challenge for KMSS is to safeguard its political neutrality and, at the same time, promote the political participation of the women it works, for addressing issues of specific concern to women so that they can influence the political agenda to address issues of special concern to women.

EXPANSION AND REACH

- There are about 82 VS in Vamanapuram block and about 65 in Adimali block with whom the KMSS sevinis work. Because of the set back to the KMSS programme(mentioned earlier) sevinis have not had any kind of intellectual inputs and captivity building trainings lately.
- Because of the greater attention given to skill and vocational training (during the setback period) there appears to be some fuzziness regarding the Vision, Purpose and Basics of MS(Mahila Samakhya Programme).
- **In our opinion the most important task before KMSS at this stage is not expansion but strengthening, consolidation and most importantly course correction.**

FIELD LEVEL INPUTS / STRATEGIES

a. Education

- In Kerala there is a high standard of women's education. Most KMSS sangha women have studied upto 7th standard at least. Only a few women have studied less than 7th standards
- Most women can read a newspaper except the adivasi women.
- Almost all girls of school going age (except a few dropouts) go to schools. There is a higher dropout rate among Adivasis.
- KMSS offers non formal education classes to adivasi / tribal women about which these women are very happy. They are eager to learn.

Suggestions

- ❖ KMSS can make wide use of the printed word for communication through newsletters, booklets etc.
- ❖ Explore the possibility of starting residential schools for dropouts in Adimali area, Idukki district.

b. Livelihoods, Income Generation, Training

This is one area in which KMSS has made successful inroads by helping women acquire various vocational skills with potential for income generation. KMSS has given the women a wide variety of vocational and skill training, which is widely appreciated by women. and there is a demand for more such trainings.

Suggestions

- Since employment and income generation trainings is a felt need of the women, these must continue. But there is a need for making these trainings more systematic after proper feasibility studies.
- There is a need at the same time to plan all these activities with women's empowerment as conceptualized by MS, taking into account the established reality that empowerment does not automatically follow from work participation and monetary earnings.
- There is also a need for building capacity of women in vital areas such as accounts, management and marketing.

c. Health

- KMSS has been giving health inputs on awareness regarding various diseases. Women are happy about receiving these inputs and are seeking more information on health related issues.
- Women are not happy with the performance of the government health service delivery systems.
- Women are concerned about the emerging problem of young children's abuse of tobacco and pan masalas.
- The sevinis find it difficult to get relevant resource persons

Suggestions

- ❖ There is no evidence of systematic organization of health inputs. Much of it is adhoc. There is a need to develop a clear strategy in this area
- ❖ Kerala has a rich knowledge and practice of Ayurveda system of medicine Women can be trained to grow medicinal plants both for home remedies as well as an economic enterprise. Adivasi women may be encouraged to use their rich knowledge of identifying medicinal plants and preparing herbal medicines as an economic activity.

- ❖ A directory of resource persons having a gender perspective with relevant knowledge and experience may be compiled.
- ❖ Women should be trained to demand a more responsive public health delivery system.

d. Legal Literacy

KMSS has given inputs on women's rights, laws relating to women etc. Women are very happy about receiving these inputs and there is a demand for more such inputs. But the provision of legal inputs also seems adhoc.

There seems to be a gap between theory (learnt in "classes") and reality (understanding and dealing with issues at the ground level).

Suggestions

- ❖ There is a need for capacity building among sevinis themselves in legal literacy.
- ❖ There is a need to carefully plan the legal inputs, ensuring that laws are analyzed from a gender perspective.
- ❖ There is a need to have access to specially designed modules on legal literacy with relevance to Kerala context

e. Participation In Local Self-Governance And Accessing Of Various Government Schemes And Benefits

A major area where the programme seems to have made some difference is in promoting women's participation in local governance. MS has played a key role in encouraging women to become active participants in these activities.

- ❖ KMSS's contribution to women's positive participation and contribution to gram sabha meetings, as well as the people's planning process as a whole, seemed to be appreciated
- ❖ There also appears to be a good rapport between KMSS sevinis and women panchayat members.
- ❖ There are several instances of Vanitha Sabha accessing economic benefits from panchayats
- ❖ The programme's linkages with the mainstream processes, especially with institutions of local self government, seem to be strong. But that has to be sustained

- ❖ Women acknowledge that they have been able to access the several benefits available to them through panchayats as well as government programmes/departments, thanks to their association with KMSS

Suggestions

- ❖ Most of the inputs on politics, too appear to have been as adhoc as those on health and law. There is certainly scope for strengthening the participation of KMSS women in the local planning and governance structure in Kerala.
- ❖ There is a need to develop a network of elected women representatives at different levels of the panchayat system in both the districts even if the elections are round the corner. Their experience will be useful to promote political participation of women in their constituency.
- ❖ It may be worth bringing out a booklet on various schemes and programmes offered by various departments and agencies of the government so that grassroots women can benefit from them.

f. Gender Relations And Violence

Gender relations and violence against women is one of the most difficult and complex aspects of Kerala society. Women are clearly aware of the various kinds of violence that women are subjected to, such as domestic violence (both physical and mental) sexual harassment in public places (a.k.a.eve-teasing) and sexual harassment at work places. However they do not seem to feel confident about doing anything to stop such abuse. Some VS seem to have tackled some cases of gender based violence in their communities. Women are also keen to learn and understand how to handle adolescent girls, who are being increasingly exposed to strange notions of sexuality and glamour through the media.

Suggestions

- ❖ It is strongly recommended that MS rededicate itself to the task of helping women to empower themselves not only economically and politically, but also socially and culturally
- ❖ There is a urgent need for training KMSS functionaries to improve their understanding of the roots and forms of violence against women, as well as to help them formulate strategies to help women tackle such problems effectively within the prevailing social and cultural climate.
- ❖ Explore the possibility of creating “violence free zones” in the area where KMSS is active.

- ❖ Explore the possibility of taking up violence against women as a Thrust Area and organize **Vigilance Committees** as per government order.
- ❖ Disseminate success stories about women preventing violence and bringing perpetrators to book.
- ❖ Bring out small booklets in Malayalam on gender based violence and strategies for tackling the multi faceted problem for the use among and distribution to women at the grassroots.

g. Programme For Adolescent Girls

- ❖ The KMSS has recently launched a special educational intervention programme for adolescent girls.
- ❖ The aim of the KMS programme for adolescents is to prepare the girls to face the challenges of life, with inputs on menstruation and other bodily changes associated with adolescence, personal safety, dealing with sexual harassment, including “eve-teasing,” etc
- ❖ We were not able to get much insights into this programme since our visits coincided with examination time for the girls.

Suggestions

- ❖ We would like to suggest that the intervention with adolescent girls be properly planned, with care taken to ensure that the resource persons handling the adolescent groups are not only professionally competent but also gender-sensitive and not moralistic or judgmental.
- ❖ We also think it is important to ensure that working with girls calls for innovative methodologies, including creative inputs such as songs, games, role plays, other elements of theatre, etc.
- ❖ The sevinis/resource persons may require special training to incorporate such activities into their work with girls.

STATUS OF SANGHAS AND FEDERATIONS

- ❖ The programme has provided a space for women to come together out of relative isolation in their homes to forge new bonds of friendship and work together on common concerns.
- ❖ Women have reached a stage where they raise questions, try to seek answers and attempt to solve problems collectively.
- ❖ The KMSS programme has increased their sense of belonging to a community of women which has increased their articulation, their mobility, self-confidence, ability to deal with the outside world, and so on.
- ❖ The newfound confidence and assertiveness of women has led to some change in the attitudes and behavior of family members, including husbands.
- ❖ Women can now negotiate for more space within their families.
- ❖ Belonging to a women's collective has also raised their status in the community and in panchayats.
- ❖ Women are also using the agency of sanghas to question their own location and demand greater access to resources and structures of governance. They say are now able to participate as a group and as individuals in meetings, and to discuss and negotiate with government and other functionaries.
- ❖ Sanghas have emerged as credible local organizations providing valuable information.
- ❖ From the discussion on issues such as violence against women and sexual harassment we understand that women are still caught up in the victim blaming syndrome.
- ❖ Although caste-based prejudice and discrimination may persist within homes and families, caste divides are not there in the sanghas.
- ❖ The KMSS works mainly through VS. Since VS are made up of representatives of ward level sanghas/SHG's they are in a way equivalent to MS sanghas federations in other states. The next stage would be to federate VS's at the panchayat level. The KMSS programme needs to be strengthened before there are any attempts to create federations of VS's at any level.
- ❖ The KMSS is at present too young and under developed to function autonomously (except, possibly, at the level of savings and credit) and for the programme to start withdrawing from the field.

Suggestions

- ❖ A fresh understanding of the MS concept of the sangha may help both programme staff/volunteers and the women they work with, and may enable them to understand and distinguish between sanghas facilitated by MS and the SHG's /neighborhood groups.
- ❖ It may also be useful for them to get acquainted with the wide range of activities undertaken by MS initiated sanghas and federations in different parts of the country, as

well as the different forms empowerment that are possible through collective thinking, discussions, decision making and action.

- ❖ The programme in Kerala clearly needs sustained inputs on gender issues.
- ❖ Both sevinis and the women they work with- especially resource persons and women panchayat members would benefit from exchange /exposure visits with VS programmes in other states for the purpose of learning fro each other.
- ❖ It is worthwhile to collect, modify(if necessary), translate and use training modules on gender, including issues such as gender based violence, which analyze Indian society from a feminist perspective.
- ❖ It may be worth while to adopt the Karnataka model of forming issue wise committees and providing training in each of those issues.
- ❖ Organize a mahiti mela type of gathering to enable women from both districts to get together.

RESOURCE CENTRE

- ❖ At present the KMSS does not have any resource centres.
- ❖ At the stage at which the KMSS is today Resource Centres as visualized in other state MS programmes may not be possible.
- ❖ It is necessary to set up a Library of Resource Material at the state level, with copies of at least Key Documents made available at the Panchayat level, if possible.
- ❖ Prepare a resource directory at Block, District and State levels of persons with relevant knowledge, expertise and perspectives, persons who could be brought into enrich the programme.

INTERLINKAGES/CONVERGENCE WITH NATIONAL/STATE LEVEL PROGRAMMES

- ❖ There seems to be some convergence at the local level with institutions of Local Self Government.
- ❖ But the programme seems to be lagging behind in creating and consolidation such links at the state and national levels.
- ❖ Contacts and collaboration between the programe and non-governmental and other like minded organizations and programmes, especially at the state level, seem to have dwindled in the recent past.

Suggestions

- ❖ The programme needs to come out of the relative isolation in which it appears to have been functioning, especially over the past couple of years.

- ❖ There is a need to set up District and State Resource Groups and organize regular meetings with members of such groups in this respect.
- ❖ It may be worth while to explore possibilities of tapping Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan funds for KMSS programmes for girls and adolescent education.
- ❖ Build contacts and collaborations with active members of the women's movement in Kerala and NGO's working on women's empowerment.

MONITORING, REPORTING AND DOCUMENTATION

- ❖ Monthly review meetings are held by the DPCs. On the basis of these meetings, the DPCs send their monthly reports to the state office. The performance of sevinis is assessed on the basis of the way they coordinate work at the field and their efficiency in conducting programme.
- ❖ There is room for much improvement in the area of reporting and documentation. At present the mechanisms and processes for capturing/documenting organizational memory and appear to be weak at best.

Suggestions

- ❖ Baseline surveys should probably be conducted at least in the new area into which the programme is to be extended.
- ❖ It is important that sevinis get training in Documentation And Reporting.

ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

- ❖ There has been little or no recruitment, induction and training in KMSS in recent years, with the exception of the post of the SPD. The programme is currently set to begin the process of hiring new people to fill several long pending vacancies for a number of critical posts. The programme in Kerala has been treading water for the past couple of years, with minimal supports or inputs from any source internal or external.
- ❖ The fact that the sevinis have somehow managed to keep up their contacts and relationships with the women, and to keep the programme going to the extent possible under such difficult circumstances is indeed laudable.
- ❖ We did not come across any Grievance Redressal Mechanisms
- ❖ Planning and Budgeting also seems to be affected because of the rough patch the programme went through.
- ❖ In our opinion the question of going to scale does not arise at the moment.
- ❖ It is far more important at this stage to make up for lost time by providing the programme with proper direction and strengthening it with necessary inputs.

- ❖ Only after it has recovered from the effects of the last two years will it be in a position to forge ahead into new area and eventually go to scale.

Suggestions

Suggested trainings/capacity building for KMSS functionaries which we feel are very necessary

Training In :

- Gender issues and gender relations, with special focus on the situation in India generally and Kerala specifically, and integrally related to field experiences and questions/doubts/needs expressed by women.
- Concepts of empowerment, with special reference to observations/experiences in the field.
- MS vision, mission, goals and strategies
- Social and gender violence, with special focus on understanding the roots of gender-based violence and thinking through workable strategies to deal with the problem at different levels.
- Gender-Sensitive Planning and Budgeting (necessary for the entire KMSS team).
- Current affairs, including globalisation and its impact on the economy, society and culture.
- Personality Development and Training and leadership building.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- ❖ Facilitate exposure visits of KMSS staff and women to other MS state programmes.
- ❖ There is felt need to address the concerns and needs of older women, disabled / differently abled women.
- ❖ Explore possibilities of working with Men's Groups on Gender Issues.

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