

# Mahila Samakhya Uttar Pradesh

## National Evaluation 2004 Executive summary

### *Evaluation Team*

Prof. Ratnabali Chatterjee

Ms. Gargi Sen

Dr. Geeta Nambissan

Dr. Shiraj Wajih

Mr. Gurumurthy

Ms. Runa Bannerji

Dr. Deepa Das Team Leader

## I. Introduction

The MS programme in Uttar Pradesh was among the first generation programmes to be initiated in the country in 1988-99, with support from Netherlands. From four districts in 1989 the programme had spread to 16 districts in Uttar Pradesh (four of them now in Uttaranchal following the bifurcation of Uttar Pradesh). Currently the programme is implemented in 2455 villages in 34 blocks in 12 districts.

The evaluation team visited four out of the 12 districts viz: Gorakhpur, Saharanpur, Varanasi and Jaunpur.

The outcomes of MS bear out the overall impact of the programme. The programme has impacted on all who have come into contact with it - programme functionaries, sangha women as individuals, the *sangha* as a collective or the community at large.

Besides the impact MS has had on its constituency, as a programme, it has also grown in stature. Unlike many projects, MS is now deemed to be a body of empowered human resources with project - implementation capabilities. Now MS is seen as a resource at different levels including the grassroots level for carrying out several activities.

## II Expansion And Reach

The Mahila Samakhya programme in Uttar Pradesh has expanded from four districts in 1989 to 16 districts in 2000. Following the bifurcation of Uttar Pradesh four of these districts became a part of the newly created State Uttaranchal. Thus, presently there are 12 districts under the coverage of MS in Uttar Pradesh. Expansion to these areas has been based on low female literacy rates, high prevalence of socially marginalized groups and high incidence of violence against women. The rate of expansion is a cause for concern given the fact that there are a large number of areas that qualify for inclusion.

While the programme has reached poor women, mainly dalit and backward class women, there are even more marginalized groups within dalits such as Valmikis and Mushahars whom the programme is yet to cover in the district. On issues such as health, education, and organic farming, the programme has been able to reach out to other social groups as well.

The major problem that is being faced is the lack of personnel to actually provide time and inputs in new areas. Many positions have been lying vacant at the district level and this has impacted the expansion process and has severely limited monitoring, nurturing and mentoring expansion activities.

Sangha/federation women are beginning to play an important role in the formation of new sanghas. The first hand accounts of sangha women come across as a powerful means of influencing women from similar backgrounds to visualize the importance of a women's organization. Though the *potential* to use sanghas and federations in the process of

expansion was quite evident, what is required is involving sanghas women in a planned way.

### **Recommendations**

- Strategies for expansion are found to be effective but the rate of expansion could be expedited. It is suggested that alternative entry points such as Kishori Kendras and the issue of education in the kendras be used.
- AS sanghas/federations have demonstrated their ability to take on a leadership role in expansion of the programme, it would be appropriate to take steps to formalize the involvement of sanghas/federations in the expansion process as mobilizers and also use their subject skills to identify the issues of concern for the women.
- Given the enormous need for empowering women in a relatively backward state like Uttar Pradesh, it is strongly felt that MS expansion must happen on a much larger scale and speed than is being envisaged now, given the success of the programme in the existing areas.

### **III. Inputs/Strategies for Information Dissemination, Knowledge Building, and Skill Development**

Information dissemination and skill development are done through a variety of ways—through regular meetings at the village level, through regular training on leadership, communication, working on collectives, health, panchayati raj, legal issues, savings, economic programmes etc; exposure and hands on experience. A variety of communication material have been developed.

There is need for adequate materials on specific issues that sahayoginis are to address in the field, particularly those that call for more specialized knowledge. It is important that in each of the focus areas, information on Government programmes, roles of concerned Government departments and functionaries as well as official rules and procedures are clearly communicated not only orally but in writing so that strategies can be based on informed understanding and there is easy access to written reference as well.

#### **III.1 Creation of Alternatives for Women's/Girls' Empowerment and Learning**

MS UP has range of alternatives created for the learning of women and girls.

##### **Mahila Shikshan Kendra**

There are 11 Mahila Shikshan Kendras (MSK) running in six of the 12 districts reaching out to 520 girls. The MSK provides access to institutionalized learning space to girls who are either completely left out of mainstream schooling or who have discontinued it. State Government textbooks form the basis of all teaching-learning in the MSKs as the girls are expected to join Government schools. The strength of the pedagogy in the MSK has been the emphasis on the non-cognitive domain, with a focus on the affective and social skills,

related to emotional states and interpersonal relations, and life skills education. MS UP has begun a process of reviewing the pedagogy of the MSKs and has taken help from 'Sandhan' and 'Nirantar'.

### **Recommendations**

- ❖ The MSK curriculum must be carefully reviewed from the point of view of content, presentation and exercises for children. A manual for teachers to help them understand the objective of the lesson, rationale for the way it is structured along with many more activities is also necessary.
- ❖ There is also need to review the teaching-learning methods and activities and it will be useful to learn from or dovetail with pedagogic initiatives in the State as a part of on-going education projects.
- ❖ Since education is the major programme component of MS it would be important to make pedagogic expertise available on an on-going basis to MSK teachers who presently receive only minimal training inputs. Training workshops for MSK teachers must equip them to handle the diverse needs of children and facilitate effective methods of communication.
- ❖ Provision of middle school education also through the MSK needs serious consideration. There is also need to link up with the National Institute for Open Schooling (NIOS) for those who wish to complete secondary/higher secondary schooling. Training in vocational skills must be well thought out together with knowledge of backward and forward linkages.
- ❖ The success of the MSKs raises the question of the adequacy of one MSK per district. It is felt that the MSKs should be upscaled if a significant impact is to be made and sustained.
- ❖ The teachers at the MSK are committed MS functionaries but receive paltry remuneration and are insecure about their future. The revision of their salaries requires serious consideration by the Government of India. elsewhere.

### **III.2 Kishori Kendras and Literacy kendras**

Kishori Kendras are a non-residential bridging effort for girls who have either never been to school or have left school and may be overage for formal schooling. Anudeshikas or teachers take classes during fixed hours on weekdays for around three hours a day and each batch goes through a course spread over three sessions of six months each. The participation rates have been impressive with 10,492 persons benefiting in six years (1749 per year). It was learnt that many of the girls who graduated from the Kishori Kendras actually rejoined/joined the formal schools after clearing the Class V board examination.

While literacy kendras are providing non-enrolled adolescent girls education (in effect functioning more like a Kishori Kendra), adult women's literacy needs must also be attended to. This is a key area that needs attention.

Literacy camps are organised for 10 days – either residential or non-residential - primarily to teach women and adolescent girls basic literacy skills. A variant has been to conduct residential camps for a period of 1-3 months on legal education, agriculture, economic activities and panchayat/governance

### **Recommendations**

- ❖ Anudeshikas need to be supported with training in subject teaching together with methods/ techniques and activities that are useful in developing core competencies among learners. They must also be made aware of the ways of effectively handling multi-level groups.
- ❖ Links with the formal system and NIOS need strengthening for continuing girls' education. Vocationalisation of education in these kendras is also important to equip the girls with some survival tools.
- ❖ Literacy of women and post literacy needs of neo literate women must also receive attention.

### **III.4 Kishori Sanghas**

The kishori sanghas were in a sense a logical outcome of MS mobilizing adult women. MS facilitated them in conducting meetings, literacy camps, provided them access to libraries and sensitized the girls on gender issues. There are at least 3000 members in the Kishori Sanghas. These Kishoris who came across (to the evaluation team) as enthusiastic and motivated, must be viewed as a critical resource base that needs to be chanelised and given a sense of direction.

### **III.5 Health**

It was relatively easier for MS to intervene in the health sector as sangha meetings provided space for women to share their personal health problems. MS intervened with information sharing on the preventive and promotive aspects of health care issues, that covered public health care facilities through the CHC, PHC, Sub Centre, doctors and ANMs, immunization schedules for children and pregnant women, hygienic practices, nutrition and a plethora of reproductive health issues, contraception as also information about their bodies.

The increasing interest in health issues led to training in curative health using traditional knowledge. The systematic development of core teams in the health sector has enabled MS to set up village-based health posts – Sanjeevni/Tulsi Kendras, that are gaining in popularity. Linkages are maintained with formal medical system to get the benefits of Government facilities, such as iron tablets, immunization and other medicines, or referral of complex cases. 733 women have also been trained in reproductive health (RH) issues with WHO support. Following their training they are operating as community health volunteers who disseminate information about RH to others in the village

## **Recommendations**

- ❖ There is need to document details of specific cases in order that a body of systematized knowledge can be built up.
- ❖ A revenue model for sustaining the health posts needs to be explored through engaging sangha women as trainers, sale of medicine and consultation charges.
- ❖ Steps to be taken for knowledge/skill up gradation to ensure the competence and effectiveness of the health posts.
- ❖ Empower Mahasanghas (through sanghas) to completely take over the management of the health posts.

### **III.6 Naari Adalat**

The Nari Adalat (Women's Court) is the outcome of the issues of violence and social injustice that kept coming up in the sangha meetings. The Nari Adalat as an informal system of dispensing justice in a rights framework has gained social acceptance and approval. More and more people are accessing the services of the Nari Adalat to resolve marital problems, violence (rape, dowry related, in the place of work, etc), succession, trafficking in women, fraud, wage disparities as well as land and property matters. There are 13 Nari Adalats spread over 10 districts.

## **Recommendations**

- ❖ Their very success has raised some pertinent questions regarding the continuity and reach of the Nari Adalats. MS should work out a strategy of expanding this proven useful service far and wide so that many more women can benefit from it. The present formula of one Nari Adalat per block needs to be reviewed for greater penetration. Mobilisation of resources for continuing this endeavour needs to be seriously examined.
- ❖ The Mahasanghas, wherever possible, should gradually take over complete responsibility after a suitable arrangement for resource mobilisation is evolved and the members are adequately prepared by MS and the Resource Centres to take on the responsibility.

### **III.7 Political Participation**

Another area in which MS prepared the sangha women is that of governance. In this background, many of the sangha women were motivated to participate in panchayat elections and a significant number were elected to various positions. In the panchayat elections women from the sanghas have so far made an entry in the political arena mainly in reserved constituencies. It is important that their numbers expand in the next election where they should also attempt to make an entry into the general constituencies as well

## Recommendations

- ❖ A capacity building strategy for the elected members needs to be among the thrust areas to enable them to function effectively in their newly acquired positions.

### III.8 Livelihoods

Livelihood concerns are addressed through the savings groups formed by the sanghas women. Besides their own savings women have decided to create another fund, Anshadan, which is not used on themselves but entirely for community activities.

Different livelihood options have been introduced in different parts of the project area. For instance, agriculture, mining, vending, tent house, production and sale, dairy, etc are some of the areas into which the sangha women have entered. Since 2000 the SAWERA programme has been implemented with support from UNDP.

## Recommendations

- ❖ It is critical that MS be able to provide the required technical support in time to both the programme functionaries and the sangha women. The backward and forward linkages also need to be strengthened for better returns.
- ❖ As MS is engaged in working with adolescent girls in various ways, vocational training must be taken up and linked to income generation. This will necessarily require development of entrepreneurial skills and skills of money management.
- ❖ MS needs to work on opening up remunerative opportunities for the women with skills in different areas of livelihood as trainers and consultants besides through sale of products.

## IV. EXIT POLICY: AUTONOMY, FEDERATIONS, RESOURCE CENTRES, EXPANSION

Withdrawal/exit policy, expansion, autonomy, federation, and resource center are inextricably linked. It is also important that these are taken up simultaneously and not in any sequential order.

The evolution of sanghas, meant comprehensive programmatic efforts towards strengthening the cohesiveness and effectiveness of the *sanghas* in order that they are able to achieve full autonomy. Together with this, MS had to redefine its role. Two clear requirements emerged – one to find ways of supporting the federations and *sanghas* to attain and sustain their autonomy and the other to define a role for MS vis-à-vis these autonomous women's bodies and programmatic expansion.

The fact that MS has been functioning at well below staff capacity is one of the main reasons to have constrained the progress in strengthening sanghas.

Strategies for forming and nurturing sanghas have worked very well. But the required programmatic investment to strategize for realizing the different elements of the exit policy to facilitate the much needed expansion and spread is not seen. It was found that sangha women were not able to really distinguish between the savings group, the financial benefits from the SAWERA programme or the sangha funds from MS. There was a tendency to conflate all these. Dependence of sanghas on the JRP was visible – the women confessed that they still look up to them for her assistance but guidance as well.

### **Recommendations**

- ❖ As a programme MS has to evolve a systematic approach to facilitate the autonomy of the sanghas. The programme should also decide on its strategy to deal with the issue of strengthening the weak sanghas as there has been a discussion on how long the programme should work on weak sanghas and whether these should be abandoned if they continue to be weak beyond a certain period of time.
- ❖ In the event of shortage of personnel and in keeping with the vision of the Tenth Plan Document, MS must work out strategies that would by default involve ‘strong’ sanghas and federations to work on ‘weak’ and ‘medium’ sanghas for their upgradation and autonomy. In fact, the engagement of such women is to be made an integral part of the withdrawal-expansion strategy based on a clearly defined role for them.

#### **IV.1. Federations**

There are 15 block level Mahasanghas with representatives from 774 sanghas in 14 blocks of the seven project districts. Some of the Maha sanghas have been registered under the Societies Act. Women are very excited about becoming a part of a large and formal collective of sanghas. They draw strength from this collective particularly in matters of conflict and problem resolution as collective strength, they think, has greater impact. They are able to effectively interface and dialogue with panchayats, the law enforcing and the legal machinery to create space for women’s issues and gender justice.

Some concerns relate to the functioning and future of the Mahasanghas in terms of not having a fund to meet the travel costs of the Mahasangha members. Women meet their own travel costs, which does not seem to be a sustainable model. Mahasangha has no space of its own for holding meetings, workshops, trainings and developing into a resource hub.

### **Recommendations**

- ❖ MS needs to concretize the concept of autonomy and the role of the Mahasangha and the sanghas that have federated. Efforts will have to be heightened towards concept building across levels.

- ❖ The present understanding seems to emphasise on the different/possible areas of activities through convergence and linkages but do not appear to be geared towards preparing the Mahasanghas to take over from the DIU. MS will have to build this perspective as well so that all will start thinking and working towards that end. While sangha women and federations have developed a wide range of capacities, there is need to have certain other skill sets to enable them to run and manage programmatic activities envisaged of them. Concrete strategies are urgently needed for handing over MSKs, Nari Adalats, etc. with the Mahasangha having financial and managerial control over them (not as in the case of the Nari Adalat in Nangal in Saharanpur).

#### **4.2. Resource Centres**

In most areas where the programme is over three years old, the requirement for higher levels of expertise has been felt together with a need to strengthen the decentralization process. To cater to this new programmatic need, resource centres have been conceived of at the State, district and block levels to operate as technical units that would support the autonomy and sustenance of the structures created by MS.

With time Mahila Samakhya has emerged as a resource for gender sensitization, participatory learning processes, women centered processes, community mobilization processes and life skill education. It needs to be pointed out that the primary role of the resource centers, as a support mechanism for the sanghas/federations has been somewhat underplayed in the evolving vision of the Resource Center

UP has conceptualized Regional Resource Centres (RRC) as the programme is undergoing fast geographic expansion. In order to strengthen district capacities and for decentralization three regional resource centers are envisaged. The 12 districts of UP are divided into three regions according to their geographical location.

Progress on establishment and operationalisation of resource centers has been staggered and slow. The efforts made in setting up the block resource centers have not been in accordance with a well-charted plan. The approach is therefore ad hoc.

#### **Recommendations**

- ❖ It is felt that a clear understanding of the perceived role of the resource centers within the budgetary provisions in the scheme has to be urgently developed. The overwhelming thrust will have to be in developing the resource centers for fulfilling their role of assisting the Mahasanghas.
- ❖ In planning the establishment of the resource centers concrete HR requirements, specific resource inputs required, thrust of activities, development of expertise, etc will have to be thought through.

## **V. INTERLINKAGES AND CONVERGENCE**

### **V.1 Networking**

The network of allies and friends from the Government and non-Government sectors has grown over the years to ably support MS interventions in diverse fields. MS has created a large local support base in every district as well as at the State level. Examples of interlinkages and convergence run across all levels of the programme with sangha women taking the lead in interfacing with local officials, service providers, and the different wings of the Government machinery. MS has also made conscious efforts to bring the benefits of Government schemes and programmes to the sangha women. District Coordinators of MS were made district Nodal Officers in the year for women's empowerment.

### **V. 2 Interface & Linkages with Mainstream Initiatives for Women's/Girls' Education**

It is not new for MS to be associated with mainstream initiatives for the education of women and girls. The involvement of MS has been at the policy level, strategy development and also in the implementation of certain components of Government programmes and schemes viz., community mobilisation, organisation of campaigns, training, and monitoring. It is only recently that MS has taken to implementing schemes such as the NPEGEL and KGBV. With regard to these schemes MS has been made an implementer by default in areas where it is already present. In the case of KGBV there was agreement in principle that MS would implement the residential schools but the modalities of the programme's involvement were still to be worked out.

Under NPEGEL, the federations are involved in community mobilization, ensuring that all girls go to school and are monitoring the NPEGEL schools (110) in 12 blocks to make them into model schools.

Based on the experiences of implementing NPEGEL there is a feeling in MS that within the operational guidelines provided by SSA it is not able to bring in the qualitative difference that the programme is equipped to. There is a growing resentment to the way in which things are being thrust upon MS, they are not allowed flexibility in implementation, and are effectively being reduced to a mere implementing agency that is mandated to follow a blueprint of action.

### **V.3 Interlinkages with Other Initiatives for Women & Girls**

MS in UP is in regular contact with the State departments of Education, Women and Child Development, Health, Panchayati Raj, Culture, Planning, Social Welfare and enjoys a

good working relationship. In fact, MS is partnering the Health Department through a project to mobilize the community for a maternal and child health initiative.

Besides functioning as a pressure group MS has negotiated with the State for integrating a strong gender perspective with various state policies and programmes. This has led to MS UP being invited by the Department of Women and Child Development to prepare a draft policy for women of UP. MS was also invited for formulation of the National Policy for Health, Tenth Plan document, Education Policy of UP and share its experiences and make recommendations based on field experiences.

### **Recommendations**

- ❖ There is need to understand the opportunities that schemes such as the NPEGEL and KGBV offer to MS. For this, MS must be able to negotiate its space within the system so that it can bring in the processes that can change mindsets and social relations within the classroom.
- ❖ At the State level meeting with partners, from the Government and NGOs, the Director ICDS showed keen interest in involving MS for developing a workshop module on life skills and reproductive health for the Kishori Shakti Yojana. This, the evaluation team thought, was well within the reach of MS and should be taken up as an activity of the Mahasanghas and resource centers.

## **VI. MONITORING, REPORTING AND DOCUMENTATION**

### **VI.1 Review, Reflection and Monitoring**

The reporting systems in MS are still very qualitative in nature and somehow have not got into the mould of numerically expressing progress and details of activities. MS in UP can be credited for its intent and effort to operationalise a management information system (MIS) to substantiate the qualitative details with numbers.

### **VI.2 Management Information Systems**

MS UP has developed a formal MIS that is being used. In developing the MIS an attempt was made to develop a system that is user friendly (particularly for Sahyoginis), and at the same time could capture both the district and sangha level initiatives and the changes affected at the community level.

There is a need to reduce the data generation load to the bare essentials that could influence decisions about programming. There are several problems that need to be addressed such as discrepancies or data not being easily retrievable. What needs further development is the

utilization of this information to affect course corrections and use it as a more effective management tool.

In addition to programme monitoring systems MS UP has also developed a financial monitoring systems. The new financial monitoring system was developed with a component of physical verification on quarterly basis. It helps to understand the expenditures in tandem with the activities and helps to understand whether the activities are carried out or not and how much saving there has been vis-à-vis the budgeted amounts.

### **VI.3 Documentation**

There has been a lot of documentation in the form of reports and MS has undertaken small studies as well. Both the print and audiovisual medium have been used for the purpose of documentation. Quality of the content, language and presentation need to be improved – particularly in English – for wider circulation. Some of the subtle aspects of the experiences of programme functionaries, including anudeshikas, need to be captured as strategic measures for handling local specific situations and issues. These could at some point be incorporated in training/orientation modules, etc.

The quality of the audiovisual material requires to be refined with a clear objective of production. There needs to be greater clarity as to why it is being produced – whether for information dissemination, training, advocacy, etc - who is the target audience and what is the message that is sought to be communicated.

### **Recommendations**

- ❖ There is need for systematizing the review and monitoring of the programme. There is a lot of data/information collected/available but how much of that is actually feeding into planning and implementation is the question. It is thus suggested that the basic information requirements be identified to avoid data overload and also to ensure proper usage of what is available.
- ❖ The documentation and research of MS programmes is weak and needs serious attention. This is necessary in all spheres of programmatic intervention.
- ❖ The MIS needs to be reviewed for simplification, reduction in the volume of data being captured to absolute essentials, and systematize report generation in terms of the reports to be generated and the periodicity of generating the reports.
- ❖ Capacities of functionaries need to be built in the areas of data analysis, and using it for planning and implementation.

## **VII. ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES**

### **VII.1 Recruitment of Personnel**

While all the sanctioned positions at the State office are filled, the districts are facing the real human resource crunch. Not a single district is functioning with full staff. Turnover and retention of personnel has been a problem that has afflicted MS. Better remuneration offered by other programmes and organisations has also led to staff leaving.

As there is no specific provision of personnel for the State Resource Centre, operationalising the Center is becoming difficult. The tenth plan document does not spell out the staffing position for the SRC, but does provide for lump sum budget heads for training, workshops, resource persons etc. MS in UP probably requires some urgent support to plan HR, training, workshops etc. within the budgetary provisions in the scheme.

#### **VII.1.1 Training for MS personnel**

Training of staff includes a strong component on perspective building, an understanding of gender issues and feminist ideology, conceptualized programmatic issues, development of programming, management and other relevant personal skills, familiarization with the concept of collective working and participatory processes etc. What the team needs are skills and knowledge to help the strengthening of sanghas and federations that are in the process of becoming independent of the programme.

### **Recommendations**

1. The specific areas that MS in UP is presently focusing on, such as health, education, land rights, irrigation, governance, financial institutions and loans, are inextricably linked to Government programmes, norms, rules and procedures. Greater clarity is required in this regard on the ground. Where education is concerned, clear understanding needs to be created on incentives that the Government is providing, vacant positions of teachers in schools, the norms underlying mid day meals, other inputs by the Government to improve the schools and so on in order that monitoring is possible on the ground.
2. For greater depth in addressing issues, MS needs to seek technical expertise wherever necessary. This is especially relevant for education (specific pedagogical issues, refinement of curriculum), agriculture (organic farming, land holdings), income-generation (product development, quality, design, sourcing raw materials, pricing, marketing, financial management).
3. At the present juncture MS in UP should examine the implementation status and try to link it to specific information requirements. Such an exercise will help the State office to gear itself to sourcing and providing the requisite information/skill support to the districts using the most appropriate means.

4. There is need to add to capacity of sahayoginis to effectively conduct sangha and cluster meetings, train women to assess their own work periodically, plan and strategize, engage in self monitoring, and to strengthen their sanghas and gear themselves for the cycle of forming sanghas and helping them attain their autonomy and operationalise the mahasanghas. Sahayoginis need greater exposure to experiences from other districts within MS as well as to other organizations as well.

### **Recommendations**

- ❖ Vacant positions since 2000 together with the turnover of personnel have virtually crippled the functioning of the programme in the districts. This area needs urgent attention.
- ❖ Staff competence needs concerted technical inputs to match the levels of know-how required by them to function successfully. MS must take steps to access relevant expertise.
- ❖ The honorarium paid to different functionaries needs to be reviewed from the point of view of the job profile and the workload.
- ❖ The programme needs to stabilise in terms of setting up systems, creating conceptual clarity about issues such as role of MS vis-à-vis the altered scenario, autonomy of Mahasanghas, etc. MS should develop a time plan for following this through. In making these observations it is not recommended that MS in UP takes to expansion in a haste except to the extent of expanding the successful components of the programme such as Nari Adalat, MSKs, Kishori Kendra and so on, to the presently unserved areas in the programme blocks.
- ❖ MS needs to take a careful look at the budgets and plans vis-à-vis expenditure levels to make planning and budgeting exercises in the future more rational and realistic. Any element of ad hocism must be eliminated. In this context it is suggested that a separate study on the annual activities planned, budgets and expenditure patterns be undertaken. This will help understand the situation in the State and also plan support of the required nature by the National Office.

\*\*\*\*\*