

Record of Discussions of the National Resource Group Meeting of Mahila Samakhya held on 19-08-2014

A meeting of the National Resource Group (NRG) of Mahila Samakhya (MS) was held under the chairpersonship of Ms. Nishi Mehrotra at New Delhi on August 19, 2014. A complete list of participants is attached at Annexure I. The Chairperson welcomed the participants and shared the agenda of the meeting.

Agenda Item 1: Confirmation of minutes of last NRG meeting held on March 26, 2014.

The minutes of the last meeting of the NRG were confirmed.

The NPD informed that as recommended by the NRG during its last meeting a draft SPDs' Handbook was circulated among SPDs for their comments and suggestions. The revised draft was circulated in the meeting for comments and suggestions of the NRG members.

She informed that new SPDs for the states of Gujarat and UP have joined and they were formally welcomed. The SPD for Bihar has been selected who is expected to join on September 1st, 2014. Karnataka SPD' selection is scheduled on August 23th, 2014. In order to familiarise the new SPDs States have been advised to give them a month in the field for detailed interaction with Sanghas, to be followed by team building exercise at the State level.

Updating on the status of fund release to MS states under the new fund flow mechanisms, the NPD informed that funds have been released to the MS Society of AP, Bihar, Uttrakhand, Kerala and Karnataka. UP had received an advance of Rs. one crore from SSA. Assam, Jharkhand, and Gujarat were yet to receive funds. Chhattisgarh had not sent its Utilisation Certificate hence release of funds from GoI was pending. She informed that the funds for Telangana will be released after the registration of the MS Society for which the State had been reminded repeatedly.

Secretary (SE&L) thanked the NRG members for their contribution as working group members. He said that problems faced by State teams on account of the new system of fund flow were temporary as things would stabilise after the budget heads were created & DDOs designated. He himself has been regularly in touch with Chief / Principal Secretaries of MS States for ensuring faster transfer of funds to Societies. He asked to SPDs to seriously deliberate on the recommendations of the Working Groups and get back with clear action points. The Secretary (SE&L) also informed that the issue of fund release to Telangana has been taken up by MHRD at the highest level. He advised SPD, APMSS to actively follow up with the concerned authorities.

Agenda Item 2: Presentation of Reports/ recommendations by the 6 Working Groups set up for examining 6 specific areas within MS

2.1 Working Group on 'MS in 12th Plan: Issues of merger with SSA'

Presentation was made by Ms. Nishi Mehrotra, Convener of the Working Group which is at Annexure II. The key recommendations by the Working Group were:

- **Fund flow, Budget , Accounts & auditing-**GoI should transfer at least 40% of budget in 1st quarter and 90% of the budget by the end of the 3rd quarter of the financial year.
- **Appointments and DDO powers-**SPDs at State level and DPCs at district level hold DDO powers. No external person should be given charge of these posts in event of vacancy.
- **Programme Review-**Monthly and quarterly programme and budgetary expenditure reviews should be done by SPD and DPCs and external programme review by GoI every 2 years to assess the impact of the programme.
- **Staff Recruitment /Appraisal-**All staff should be recruited on contract for 2 years, with a probation period of 3 months; appraisals through a participatory process for all staff annually. Staff with DD powers (and others) should not be dismissed without proper appraisal.
- **Partnerships and alliances-**In drawing up partnerships MS may engage through MOUs at State level. Delegation of financial powers of SPD/ DPCs should be spelt out specifically in the MoU.

AS (SE) stated that the suggestion with regard to Operational Guidelines was worth taking and putting an Administrative & Operational Manual. Ms. Soma and Ms. Annie appreciated the idea of the manual and suggested that manual should also be able to address the concerns of other departments. Annie requested SPDs to give concrete suggestions out of their recent experience.

AS (SE) advised the SPDs that the fund transfer to MS Societies under the new (fund flow) system is being done for the first time hence procedural issues have to be established and in future this will get routinised.

2.2 Working Group on ‘Decentralisation of Sanghas and Federations’

Ms.Kameshwari along with Ms. Annie and Ms. Anita Gurumurthy- made a presentation which is attached at Annexure III. Key recommendations were:

- MS should to continue in districts where the programme is 10 or more years old and which have a large number of EBBs. In addition, adverse gender indicators may be factored in for identification of such blocks.
- Explore possibilities of a different programme structure other than a DIU in the older districts where there are mature federations.
- Look beyond the limited definitions of withdrawal as the end of the programme in a given field area, but as a new and higher phase in the process of collectivization, as consolidation of the learning and empowerment.
- A federation becoming autonomous needs to be seen as the continuing architecture for women’s empowerment at the grassroots level. This understanding needs to be basis of the institution building of the sanghas and federations and inform the perspective building and training especially of MS staff.

- Rapid mapping of federation's strengths and MS support lines should be undertaken.
- Time frame for withdrawal and consolidation may be extended till March, 2015.
- Need to imaginatively construct the State Resource Centres and zonal/ multi-district Facilitation/Resource Centres for support to autonomous federations. Also use of digital technologies to create a nation-wide MS platform.

Ms. Anita added that with the overwhelming attention to federations there is a tendency to forget the building blocks i.e. the Sangahs and they should be the focal point. Ms. Annie added that recommendations by the Working Group are strategic, but they need further detailing especially in light of other large scale programmes such as NRLM, Micro –credit/ bank linkage.

Ms. Soma said that the challenge for MS to engage with these mega programmes, is in making the federations negotiate their position. Ms. Lakshmi Krishnamurthy said that MS has been flexible and has responded to challenges. AS (SE) said the recommendations of this Working Group were very concrete and wanted the SPDs to consider them.

Ms. Renuka Mishra suggested that support of local NGOs could be harnessed for supporting federations in phase-out districts. Ms. Prashanthi and Ms. Punam also shared APMS and BMSS experiences of partnering with local NGOs. Dr. Lata Singh suggested federations should be financially sustainable for them to continue as autonomous organisations. Ms. Kalyani supported the idea of a national convention to deliberate upon all the key recommendations of the Working Groups.

AS (SE) said that recommendation to extend the time frame to the end of this financial year is acceptable to the Ministry and emphasised that SPDs must continue with the process that they have already initiated in order to withdraw from older districts.

2.3 Working Group on “Literacy and Learning”

Dr. Archana Sharma shared the key recommendations of the Working Group, which were:

- Re-visioning of MSKs, as umbrella concept for organizing a number of programmes under it, like short-term professional courses, academic and learning support to young women beyond elementary education
- Systematic review of the literacy interventions, materials and training component with a view to revamping the Literacy programmes run adult women.
- MS to continue with its literacy interventions for adult women despite Shakshar Bharat (SB) by convergence as MS provides for contextually specific literacy needs for Sangha women.
- Systematic tracking of learning-literacy, its link with empowerment and leadership processes-, redesigning of the literacy programmes to include basic literacy phase and advance literacy phase, and training of AE teachers/ MS staff on adult learning concepts, pedagogy and approaches.

- Greater allocation of resources for innovations as in MS literacy is being seen as part of a larger strategy for leadership development and Sangha sustainability
- Inter-generational learning ‘Public’ Learning for raising awareness on gender issues in wider public domain. Engaging men and boys in these public discourses has been suggested.

The AS (SE) informed that MS already has a budget line for educational activities, but there have been no proposal from States to utilise the same. She informed that Shakshar Bharat is working in districts with low female literacy, which MS can converge with.. She said that the NPO would prepare a list of Adult Bureau offices working in districts for SPDs reference. Ms. Jandhyala said that a more practical issue being faced by states is about the future of MSKs in phase out districts. AS (SE) clarified that MSKs being managed by federations can continue with funds from State offices. Training and capacity inputs to these federations can also be provided by MS. However in districts where MS is directly managing MSKs, the same will not be continued. Dr. Annie suggested that a small component of library as learning strategy would be useful.

2.4 Working Group on Assets and Livelihoods

MS Kalyani Menon made a presentation of behalf of the working group which is attached at *Annexure IV*. Key recommendations for Livelihoods for poor women are –

- Place women's control over land and natural resources at the centre of its approach to sustainable livelihoods.
- Collective activities prioritised over individual activities.
- Develop a holistic and area-based approach to sustainable livelihoods.
- Proactively access resources and benefits under other programmes being implemented at the local level, after a critical scrutiny of these programmes for gender equality, social justice and environmental sustainability.
- Proactively enter policy spaces for increasing women's access to and control over natural resources

Based on these guiding principles, the WG also delineated a few possibilities for direct intervention by MS:

- Build the perspectives of the upcoming generation on the issue of just and sustainable livelihoods:, common pool of learning material to be created in order to engage in discussions on issues such as the politics of natural resources.
- Take up action-research on key livelihood issues such as economic contribution of women to local economies, impact of various agricultural technologies on women's employment, and so on
- Evolve livelihood ideas around providing services to the community through creches, community kitchens, short-stay homes and nursing care for ill or old people, etc

The WG also recommended that the MS should explore ways of actively collaborating with the national flagship programmes around livelihoods such as the national Rural Livelihoods Mission and the MGNREGA of the MoRD.

Ms. Namrata stated that service sector (care giving, catering) were emerging sectors, but required skills were lacking. She said MS has vast experience of different nature, and these should be documented. Similarly, she said those marketing, technical skills and sharing and learning were some of the areas which can be considered for focus. Ms. Annie suggested that MS should create spaces for Sangha women in mega livelihoods programmes. Ms. P. Usha shared KMSS' experience with Kudumsree programme. Opportunities for women should be explored beyond traditional sectors such as care giving, catering etc. Also, it was challenging for women to get into natural resource based livelihoods as these were controlled by big contractors and land mafia. Ms. Namarta stressed importance of basic knowledge and business rules among MS functionaries of livelihoods. She said most of the MS groups involved in collective activities have been registered as Trusts which by their very legal nature cannot make report profit. Ms. Gita Rani said that AMSS promoted Sanghas have faced dilemma when it came to community natural resource based livelihoods. The women have always chose protection of Commons over their individual income gains from the same. Ms. Prashanthi was of the view that MS' Sanghas /federations view livelihoods as much more than mere income generating activity and aspects such as equity, social inclusion, and control over income generating assets are key considerations in initiating livelihood programmes.

2.5 Working Group on Perspective, Training and Skills Building

Ms. Nishi Mehrotra made the presentation which is attached as Annexure V. The WG views capacity building as a continuous process requiring sustained efforts at different levels through facilitation of resources like feminist trainers, academics, researchers and other experts. The structure of capacity building should be a three tier structure organically linked with each other. The role for national level structure may be to identify key resources including NRG members for addressing state trainers, identifying training needs. Regional NRG committees of NRG members have been suggested to guide state resource centres. At the state level strong role for Gender Resource Centres has been envisaged having a four-fold training component- Training for staff and field functionaries, conceptual clarity/perspective building, thematic trainings, skills development/improvement; review and development of training material; development of training pedagogy; engender capacity building of federations to also become trainers at local level.

The key recommendations made by the Working Group were as under:

At the National level

- Workshops to strategise the way ahead for perspective and capacity building in key areas
- Training Needs Assessment with all states to chart the capacity building needs
- In depth training of all SPDs/APDs/SRPs on perspective of MS, its work culture, financial management administration, working with the government at state level etc.
- Roadmap for support to states along with NRG members and other experts
- Workshop on review of training materials and pedagogy, and also to introduction to new training pedagogies.

- Workshop to understand the concept of ‘autonomy’ of Sanghas and federations’ and develop PLA tools to map and track them- those that can be used by Federations and Sanghas themselves. A serious reflection on the autonomy of the MS programme is also desired in the context of the new fund flow pattern and MS’s growing functional impediments in relationships with the state governments.
- A national level interface of MS with NRLM, SSA, RMSA and Sakshar Bharat to evolve an alliance strategy for Federations and Sanghas to tap their resources.

At the State level

- Undertake a serious training needs assessment exercise through the GRC to prepare for the National workshop.
- Plan and follow up refresher trainings of staff and field functionaries on various issues
- Take up a state level visioning for the GRC and DRC
- Undertake a review of all the training, literacy and education materials and components with experts/ consultants to prepare for the literacy workshop at national level.
- Develop a plan and roadmap to work with sanghas and federations which are at different stages of empowerment and autonomy.
- Follow up on commitments and action plans developed during the national workshops.

Ms. Kalyani pointed that training was not the only method of capacity building and other effective ways should also be explored. Ms. Renuka suggested district level trainings jointly for SPDs and DPCs to dismantle hierarchies that may have been created over the years. Ms. Soma suggested that spaces and opportunities for cross learning should be encouraged. She emphasised that spaces for reflection are very critical in a programme such as MS. Sr. Sujitha commented that collective conviction, collective reflection and feeling of working together is the strength of MS and should be encouraged. Ms. Namarta reminded that MS has a huge number of trained Sangah/ federation members who could be used as training resource.

2.6 Working Group on ‘Working Adolescent Girls’

Ms. Vandana Mahajan made the presentation on the Working Group observations which is attached at Annexure VI. The key are:

- **MSK Alumni Forum-** These forums would help build camaraderie, mutual support for the girls, raising confidence levels of girls, and serve as cross learning platform.
- **Gender desks in High schools/ colleges and Help lines for Girls-**the increase in incidents of cyber crimes (mobiles, internet) and other forums of violence & abuse against girls demand such initiatives to create such support structures for adolescents.
- **Scaling Up of Sumitra’s in KGBVs-AP’** ‘Sumitras- councilor cum special educator’ model should be shared as a best practice.
- **New perspective, tools, approaches and sets of skill building-**the adolescents need to be supported with new skills making them economically self-reliant and

empowered to deal with the gender discriminatory barriers in their educational path. Different curriculum, tools and trainings are recommended for boys and girls.

- **Reorienting & Sensitizing community, MS staff and teachers-** Orientation and sensitization to equip all stakeholders for better handling of adolescent issues, and use of multi-pronged strategies to reach out to diverse stakeholders to address issues of safety of adolescent in public spaces is required.
- **Adolescent and Youth resource centers-**setting up of libraries, promoting study groups and innovative ICT based approaches to learning has been recommended.
- **Linkages and convergence** initiatives by MS need to be strengthened. Department of Youth and Adolescents, SSA, Yuva Maitree Kendra, SABLA, Vocational Training Institutes, NYK, SALSA/DALSA, UNICEF, NREGA, NRLM, ICDS, PRIs etc. have been recommended as some of the programmes to explore possibilities of convergence.
- **Need for dedicated resource support-** There is a definite need to have a specific budget line with dedicated resources for supporting systematic and scaled up activities as proposed above by the working group.

Ms. Lakshami suggested that MS has to adopt different strategies to build a critical mass of gender sensitive youth. Ms. Soma suggested that youths should be exposed to various interesting experiments in governance structures which were taking place in our country.

The Chairperson thanked all the Working Groups for their hard work in putting the reports together.

Agenda Item 3: Suggestions for MS evaluation

The AS (SE) informed that the MS scheme's continuation was pending approval and the Ministry has been advised to commission a third party evaluation for which Ravi J Matthai Centre for Education Innovation, IIM-A has been selected. The AS (SE) requested members for their suggestions on the ToR.

Prof. Ankur from Ravi Matthai Centre for Educational Innovation, IIM-A provided an overview of the ToR -evaluation design, methodology, sample size/ scope, time line etc. He requested NRG for their suggestions and comments on the key aspects of ToR. Recommendation of the NRG were that the evaluation should reflect the journey of the MS programme, the Sanghas to be visited should be selected randomly, not just the current ones but people with old association with MS should also be contacted, as well as other stakeholders. It was also suggested that the evaluation should cover the work done with adolescents and indicators of empowerment should be clearly arrived at.

Prof. Ankur Sareen assured the NRG members that their perspective on the evaluation will be taken on board. He stated that RJMCEI has the expertise and sensitivity required to evaluate a programme such as MS. The tools and questionnaires were already under preparation and would be field tested in Gujarat, MS.

The NRG approved the National Evaluation study by RJMCEI, IIM-A.

Agenda Item 4: Any other item with the permission of chair

The NPD said that SPDs Handbook will be finalized soon, after incorporating suggestions from the NRG which they were requested to send in the next 10 days. The Working Groups reports will be treated as final by the NPO and the recommendations which have come from different groups will inform the writing of the MS' XII Plan Document. The NPD said that prior to holding a National Convention lot of preparatory work and consultations with district has to be carried out by SPDs in their respective states. However, these should be used for discussion and suggestion even later. She suggested extensive deliberations on the working group reports in each state.

AS (SE) agreed with the idea to hold a national convention, however, she reiterated that an event of such nature would need lot of time and hard work. She thanked the NRG members for their hard work as members of Working Groups, and asked SPDs to translate the reports, and carry out extensive deliberations on each of the key recommendation to arrive at concrete action points. She further emphasised that each State should come out with contextualised solutions which would make the proposed convention richer. Thereafter, a national convention could be convened with an appropriate agenda.

She said that this was the last meeting of the current NRG and NPO was in process of reconstituting a new NRG. She requested members for their suggestions on new members. Also, she informed the SPDs that till the reconstitution of the new NRG the current NRG members would continue to act as non-official members of NRG.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks by the Chairperson.

List of participants in the meeting of National Resource Group of Mahila Samakhya Programme held on 19th August, 2014 at Conference hall, Room No. 112, ‘C’ wing, Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi.

1. Ms. Nishi Mehrotra- Chairperson, NRG
2. Shri Rajarshi Bhattacharya, Secretary (SE&L), MHRD
3. Ms. Vrinda Srup, Additional Secretary, (SE), MHRD)
4. Dr. Nagesh Singh, Economic Advisor, (SE&L), MHRD
5. Dr. Manider Kaur Dewivedi, Director (SE&L), MHRD & NPD of MS
6. Dr. Annie Namala, NRG Member
7. Ms. Namrata Bali, NRG Member
8. Ms.Kalyani Menon Sen, NRG Member
9. Ms. Soma Kishore Parthasarathy, NRG Member
10. Dr. Archana Sharma, NRG Member
11. Ms. Lakshmi Krishnamurthy, NRG Member
12. Dr. Lata Singh, NRG Member
13. Ms. Anita Gurumurthy, NRG Member
14. Ms. Vandana Mahajan, NRG Member
15. Ms. Renuka Mishra, NRG Member
16. Sister Sujita, Notredame, NRG Member
17. Ms. Kameshwari Jandhyala, Member, Working Group of MS- Special invitee
18. Prof. Ankur Sareen, Prof. IIM-A, Special Invite
19. Ms. P. Prasanthi, SPD, Andhra Pradesh
20. Ms. Gita Rani Bhattacharya, SPD, Assam
21. Ms. Parveen Sultana, SPD, Chhattisgarh
22. Ms. Pushpa Priyadarshi, State Project Co-ordinator, Bihar
23. Ms. Apexa Bhatt, SPD, Gujarat
24. Ms. Kavita, SPD,-I-c, Karnataka
25. Ms. P. E. Usha, SPD, Kerala
26. Dr.Smriti Singh, SPD, Uttar Pradesh
27. Smt. Geeta Gairola, SPD, Uttarakhand
28. Ms. Poonam, DPC, MS, Bihar
29. Ms. Babita Verma, DPC, Uttar Pradesh
30. Ms. Jyoti Pahwa, Under Secretary, MHRD
31. Ms. Santosh Sharma, Constultant, National Office of MS, MHRD
32. Ms. Safia Zameer, Constultant, National Office of MS, MHRD