



# AJWS Karnataka State Report

Created by Best Practices Foundation

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## INTRODUCTION

Mahila Samakhya (MS) is a government initiative for education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly from socially and economically marginalised groups. The MS movement, over last three decades, has created a paradigm of empowerment for a generation of women, young girls, men and even the state. The movement has massive scale and has touched lives of more than 20 lakh women and girls directly in the country through its various grassroots innovations namely the Nari Adalats (informal women's court), *Kishori Sanghas* (adolescent girls groups), *Mahila Shikshan Kendras*, informing the design of the *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas* since 2004, and bringing the adolescents girls too within its ambit. The large-scale impact of these different innovations has set the ground for MS federations and Sanghas to take the next steps forward.

Women's collectives, *sanghas* at the village level and federations of *sanghas* at block levels emerged as a key institutional structure under the Mahila Samakhya programme. Federations have traditionally been dependent on MS state societies for guidance and functioning. Federations were never seen as autonomous by the MS programme which made them vulnerable to shifting political tides. So the need of the hour is for the 300 federations to identify their own problems, set their own agendas and develop and implement their solutions. This requires a new set of institutional arrangements to be designed by them. This project will begin the dialogue to create this new framework, envision an inclusive process of functioning, and ways in which they could play a more effective agenda setting role at district and state levels. This will bring out the voice, expectations, and demands of women into the public domain.

Best Practices Foundation (BPF) has been requested to take on the role of secretariat for seven states where the MS programme has been in operation - namely Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Telengana and Uttarakhand.

### *Selection of Districts for Dialogues*

In August 2017, BPF held a meeting to brief and train the MS Karnataka team on the upcoming federation dialogues in Karnataka, and to plan and fix dates for the same. To make the dialogues more inclusive, MS Karnataka decided to extend the dialogues to include all federations in the state. To accommodate all the federations in the 9 districts, four district hubs were chosen (Gadag, Gokak, Gulbarga and Bangalore). Each hub saw the participation of women from 3-4 nearby districts. The dialogues took place between August and October 2017.

### *Dialogue with Sanghas*

Discussions with sangha members were conducted prior to the federation dialogues so that issues brought up in sangha discussion could be tabled during the larger dialogues. Our finding showed that the issues faced and raised by the sangha women were very similar to those iterated by the federation members.

## Federations

Dialogues (District Hubs)	Gadag	Gokak	Gulbarga	Bangalore	Total
Federations	10	9	15	9	43
Members	37	44	39	30	150

The participants vary from federations that are as young as 1 year to federation that are as old as 20 years. The Karnataka dialogues represent the views of 43 federations across 13 districts.

Facilitative and supportive roles are played by federations with their respective sanghas. Federations also ensure that issues related to women are heard and addressed by those in power. Each federation is allotted three or four villages, where they monitor the functioning of sanghas like regularity in holding meetings, attending to Nari Adalat cases, updating their SHG documents, repayments of loans. When a sangha approaches the federation for help, the issue is discussed at the Executive Committee (EC) meeting at the district level. The EC is a platform where collective decision making facilitates the sustainability of the federation and sanghas.

## ACHIEVEMENTS, BARRIERS AND FUTURE NEEDS

Women reported out achievements of their federations and the subsequent issues they faced. Achievements of the federations and sanghas can be classified into four broad categories:

1. Institutional Sustainability
2. Campaigns and interventions on the ground
3. Finances and financial sustainability
4. Networking

### *Institutional Sustainability:*

Despite the withdrawal of support from the government to the movement, federation women are trying their best to continue with institutional operations. These operations include regular running of federation meetings, regular Nari Adalat meetings, solving cases, payment of office rent and other related institutional expenses. In the district of Gokak, since MS's withdrawal, the Nari Adalat still meets regularly, once a month, and has solved over 500 cases. The federations regularly disseminate relevant information to women and ensure they get their entitlements.

Federations also continue to monitor public institutions such as the schools, panchayats and anganwadis. For example in Belgaum, when they went to inspect the food prepared by the school for the children they found worms and brought this to the notice of the teachers. In Raibagh block, Belgaum federations monitor the work and the distribution of food of the anganwadi while in Gadag they monitored the KGBVs. Some federations in Bijapur reported monitoring the Gram Panchayat an finding corruption in allocation of sites for housing and a leakage of resources to the block panchayat to release subsidies for construction of houses.

The function of monitoring government agencies still remains an important one of the federation.

### Box 1: Iron lady behind sanitation

Chitramma is the President of Pavitra Mahila Mahasangha Humanabad district, Bidar. According to her “I used to be scared to speak with my husband. He asked me why you do work that is so difficult for you but I continued to try. I can write but could not speak in those days.

One day a case came my way of a man with two wives, one has kids and one has no children. Both women need money to survive. So we thought that one of the wife marry again. So we spoke to the women and one wife said she could leave if he gave her two lakhs, but the man refused. Mrs . Chitramma went to the gram panchayat president and the BDO who gave the man three months’ time to pay .After three months he refuse to give the money. Finally Mrs Chitramma went to the PSI after which he paid forty thousand and the wife left the house and went to her family. This was how she resolved one case.



Another achievement of our federation was in the field of sanitation. As member of federation and president of gram panchayat we went house to house to campaign for toilets. First I made a toilet in my own home. The Panchayat put in three thousand and I put five thousand. After this 400 – 500 women from seven gram panchayats followed my example. Today we are helping by getting more money to build toilets. Today we provide fifteen thousand for SC/ ST families and twelve thousand for each family from general categories for a toilet. Ours is a fifteen year old federation even after MS withdrawn we have dealt with at least fifty cases. We worked out of gram panchayat building. We have a federation office. We got ten thousand for twenty Self-help groups under the revolving fund scheme.

We have even gone to Andhra Pradesh to solve cases. One girl was taken some man from Andhra Pradesh. We took a constable with executive members to Andhra Pradesh. They already marry the child and we forced them to divorce So the federation and Nari Adalat work closely together We call the Nari Adalat women to solve the cases and we hold the many after that this is how we keep cost down.

My girls benefited from my awareness through the federation I learned how to raise my girls I educated my girls in “Rani Channamma School “One daughter is in sixth and other is in tenth. My daughter learned at home and unlike her cousins so my child has focused on her education.

Mrs Chitramma shared one Nari Adalat case from the Muslim community and is related to both states Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. We have our office at Tadmadgi village where a groom married with Sangareddy girl from Andhra Pradesh. Both are from one community and almost of same age. The mother of the groom came to my house early morning saying that people from Andhra Pradesh came with his son. We approached them in same village and asked them to come to police station. Then we all collectively went to Sangareddy village with the two police. We are not able to understand the language Telugu. Then we requested him to speak in Hindi because we know Hindi better. We realized she had married her relative and wanted a divorce. We went to Kazi (a Muslim priest) and took advice from him. As per the Muslim law with the help of Kazi and village elders we got a divorce sanctioned and took the legal documents back. We with federation arranged the marriage of the son and the family is very happy with federation. The villagers also appreciated federation. Like this the Nari Adalat has solved many cases and now we are charging Rs 500 per case excluding transportation and food.

## Campaigns and Interventions

Since the women are deeply rooted to the cause of the movement they have and continue to hold campaigns and implement interventions on the ground. For example, some federations in Gulbarga district have facilitated the provision of pensions (old age, widow etc.) to 300 women in that area.

There is a high incidence of children dropping out of school at a young age to help their families in agricultural labour. Federations have organised *kala jathas* (march) and identified 220 school drop-outs student mainstreamed them into KGBV schools. The success stories of these mainstreamed children have motivated villagers to carry forward this work and crediting the federation that initiated this.

Women have campaigned against and held awareness camps on prohibition of liquor and Gutka marketing and successfully stopped the sale of it in some areas. Federations conducted training for adolescent girls in crafting, tailoring, information technology and so on. They have organised health and hygiene camps for kishoris (adolescent girls), and vaccinated around 1,000 children against polio in Gulbarga district. All these interventions are common across most districts. While the incidence of child marriage is very high in rural areas, fighting this practice with the community and the children's parents hasn't been an easy journey for these women. However, the women put on a brave front and today proudly claim to have reduced and in some places completed stopped child marriage. In one block in Mysore, they were able to stop about 200 child marriages.

### Box 2: Justice for a Deaf and Dumb Girl

Lakshmi resides in Kalgatti taluk of Dharwad district. She is an executive committee member of her federation, and she narrated an incident that occurred in 2014 with a 14 year old, dumb, mentally challenged Muslim girl. In the village people did not have toilets attached to their homes and open defecation was widely practiced. At around 5PM, the young girl in question went into the fields to defecate. A drunk man of about 45 years of age, followed her into the fields and raped her. The young girl had just matured and was innocent on matters regarding intimacy with men. As it would happen, villagers observed the man following the young girl, and followed him. He entered into an isolated brick kiln covered by heavy foliage. After raping the young girl, the drunk man came out only to find a large group of people waiting for him. They dragged him to the centre of the village, tied him to a tree and thrashed him.

This man was notorious for misbehaving under the influence of alcohol. Cattle herders had seen this man misbehave with women, after drinking, in the past. People had warned him to mend his ways, but he refused to listen.

When news of the incident reached the ears of the members of the Sree Basaveshwara Mahila Svhsai Sangha, they rushed to the location and saw the state of the girl. They quickly covered her up and took her to the nearest hospital. They also called the police station and spoke to the Superintendent of Police and reported the incident to him.

The police came to the village and interrogated various witnesses, in order to establish exactly what had taken place. They refused to be swayed by the different stories people presented and they stayed focused on the law. When they were convinced about what had happened, they took the rapist to jail. The village became divided, with some people siding with the girl and some taking the side of the rapist. Those who were on the man's side



went to the girl's home and tried to convince her parents to take money and withdraw their case from the police. Sangha members spent time with the young girl's parents and counselled them not to succumb, to close the case. They spoke to the parents about how important it was to get justice for the atrocity inflicted on their daughter.

The men folk of the village spoke badly of the sangha members saying that they should have allowed the parents to take money and close the case. They said that since they refused to do this, neither the mentally challenged girl nor her parents got anything. They had only succeeded in giving the men of the village a bad name and showing them in bad light.

The sangha members ensured that the parents received free legal aid from the courts. Three months after the incident, the case for rape was presented in front of a judge. The drunk man was found guilty of rape and sentenced to five years of rigorous imprisonment.

Today, everyone regards the sangha members with a lot of respect for getting justice for a victim of rape – someone who was unable to even shout for help. Even the police have respect for the sangha members and approach them for help when required. The young girl continues to live with her parents as she is dumb and slightly challenged mentally.

*Financial sustainability:* With little or no financial support from the government in the last two years, the need of the hour for the federations have been increasing their financial stability and working towards sustainability. Federations earn money for their overheads by doing different activities like supplying food items like fruits and vegetables to KGBV School on weekly basis. They also earn money from solves cases in the Nari Adalat. Women constructed 50 latrines and earned INR 10,000/- for the federation. Some federations have invested in banks through fixed deposits, which earns them an interest and helps pay for their travel and daily allowance and office rent. Some federations are involved in the production and marketing of Nari Sanjivani medicines, the profits of which go back to the federation. Members have also received loans from the federation, at a nominal rate of interest.

*Networking:* Women are finding it increasingly important to network amongst other federations across districts and also with external stakeholders, through which they have already witnessed some benefits. In Gulbarga, federation women shared, that by networking and maintaining good relations with the gram panchayat and local leaders, the federation got a site for themselves and a local MLA donated funds to construct an office building. Federation members have worked closely with their panchayats, to get entitlements for widows. They have attended various training programmes and gained knowledge about banking and about self-employment schemes. They were also able to pressurize the panchayat to fix road side lights and clean the gutters and toilets. They mobilized some money from a government scheme and built houses for the very poor.

### **Box 3: Support from the Central Bureau of Investigation**

A year ago a young 17 year old girl called Kavitha studying in her second year of pre-university was given in marriage to her cousin. Her parents hired a marriage hall and began making arrangements for the wedding ceremony. Shankamma, who is an executive committee member of her federation, went to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), located in Huvenhadgaddi taluk of Ballary district, and reported that a child marriage was about to take place. Shankamma, along with other federation members, officials from CWC and the police, went to the marriage hall and stopped the wedding. Kavitha's parents along with the boy's parents, were made to sign a document in the police station, saying that they would not proceed with the marriage. Her parents were very upset and they threatened to go home and commit suicide due to a loss of face. They also said that they did not have a daughter and they refused to take Kavitha home with them. So the federation members saw to it that she was handed over to the CWC officials.

The boy's parents cajoled Kavitha and said that she could go home to their house which was in another village called Ranebennur. In the meanwhile, the sarpanch of the village decided that this whole incident was about the honor and prestige of the family. So he orchestrated a quick wedding for Kavitha and the boy, late at night. To safe

guard themselves, the bridegroom's parents did not give Kavitha any jewellery to show that she was married, and she lived with the family as though she was single. No one knew about the marriage. In time, Kavitha got pregnant but lost her baby. She and her husband began quarreling. Kavitha took legal recourse saying she did not want to remain in the marriage with her husband and wanted a divorce. She also started a relationship with a boy in her class and wanted to run away with him.

Kavitha approached Shankamma and confided in her about her dilemma. Kavitha's husband too, spoke to Shankamma about how distressed he was about his wife's behavior and about how he would take care of her if she returned to him. He also told Shankamma that the boy Kavitha was having an affair with was not of good character and that he would use her and discard her. Shankamma, along with other sangha members decided to bring the parents of both parties together at the police station, to sort out the issues at hand.

The boy was a member of the Dalit Sangarsa Samithi and his fellow members began to abuse Shankamma and speak in a derogatory way about Kavitha. They said that Shankamma was creating trouble by taking their boy to the police station and accusing him of wrong doings. They also said that Kavitha was of bad repute. Shankamma and other sangha members spent time counselling Kavitha. They explained to her the difference between having an affair and being married. Very gradually, Kavitha began to see sense in what was being told to her. She also understood that the boy she was having the affair with, had plans of having fun with her and then abandoning her. He had had a bet with his friends about how easily he could do this! When it was time to leave the police station, both Kavitha and her husband's families left them to their own means, and went home. Shankamma took it upon herself to give them food and shelter for a few days.

In the meanwhile, members of the Dalit Sangarsa Samithi filed a case against Shankamma with the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). They gave a verbal complaint that Shankamma was preventing child marriage and giving shelter to young girls. Shankamma was immediately summoned to the police station, and she went along with her six year old son. Since Shankamma was a widow, based on the complaint, she was suspected of trafficking young girls. There were four CBI officials present at the police station. They proceeded to interrogate her on where she was from, what work she did, why she was so passionate about stopping child marriage, how she went about doing this, etc. Shankamma went through the ordeal of being questioned from 10AM to 5PM. The CBI officers were trying to establish if she was doing something illegal with children.

Shankamma explained to the officials about how she and other members of the federation that she belonged to, worked for the betterment of women. She said that they worked to protect the honor and reputation of women and if this was a crime, they could arrest her. That evening, Kavitha and her husband came to the police station and testified that everything Shankamma had said was true. They also told them, how she had gone out of her way to help them.

The CBI was finally convinced. They suggested to Shankamma that she get a letter from her federation, on the federation letterhead, stating the type of work they did. The officials said that they would support her federation and that the next time she got involved in a case, she should be accompanied by and take the help of a lady constable.

Today, when Shankamma or her federation take on cases, she is able to directly call the police station for legal advice.



## *Barriers*

Although women are fighting for their rights and those of their children, there are many barriers that hinder their growth in these areas. Living in a patriarchal society, and forced to follow those norms, women often feel burdened by their limitations. The women feel constantly undermined by the men in their community.

Many federation women across districts in Karnataka have shared that they are not given enough of freedom in their families as well as their community. This lack of freedom restricts them in terms of mobility, financial sustainability etc. Family members of federation women object to them traveling outside the village on federation work, because of the opportunity cost. The time spent on federation work could be spent in the field due to which these families feel they are denied the extra income. Restricted mobility in terms of patriarchal norms is one thing, women also find that their mobility is limited because of poor public transportation and lack of access to private transportation modes.

Another barrier faced by the women is government officials disrespect them, make them wait and do not take them seriously. The officials expect a bribe, which women refuse to provide. Women have shared that even the *panchayat* members expect a bribe for big jobs. Earlier, the police too were uncooperative when approached. So, the women changed their strategy and met the superintendent of police at the district in a group. They threatened him by saying that if they did not cooperate they would sit in front of his office and hold a *dharna*. Recently, they shared that the police have been more cooperative, but they continue to face difficulties with government staff and Panchayat members.

The lack of financial stability is a hindrance to the future growth of the federation. Federations shared that they do not have any funds to start income generating activities. With the withdrawal of government support, it is important for these federations to have funds to support their day-to-day operations and for future sustainability. This additional income will ensure that they receive a travel and daily allowance, when out on federation work.

Some federations do not have a proper office to work out of, which hinders their ability to conduct regular EC meetings which further results in daily operations being disrupted. Office space is very important for women, as those are the few times where they are allowed to step out of their house for a limited period of time. This office not only provides them a space for their work they are doing but also a safe space and a platform for women to share their experiences/concerns during the meetings.

## *Issues*

Safe drinking water is a huge issue for the women of the area. All groups including the Nari Adalat, Executive Committee members and sanghas, came together and approached the panchayat and submitted letters to them about this. In Gudebanda (Taluk), the Deviyajyothi Mahila Mahasanga spoke about having their own ration store, for which they have submitted a letter to the panchayat.

Another issue women are facing is the lack of toilets. In some areas, the government has given them money to build toilets, but in many areas, women defecate in the open or walk a distance to the nearest toilet. Women are approaching government departments for this provision.

A serious issue remains that of child marriage where parents still do not understand that the reason the federation is raising an objection is because the girl is underage.



Girls dropping out of school continue to be an issue because girls work on the farm to earn more. Poor educational facilities lead to girls dropping out.

Another major issue is that of elopement where adolescents run away from home. See Box x to understand how the federation and Nari Adalat deal with these types of cases. Closely related to this was the issue of girl children being sold.

#### **Box 4: Elopement and Rehabilitation of a Young Girl**

Laxmibai Rajole, President, Kamadhenu MSK Mahila Federation Aland Dist Gulbarga discussed a case of how the federation dealt with elopement. A girl from Dangapur – Jawali of Aland taluka of Gulbarga district married a boy of Kallalgi village in same taluka of district from same caste. They ran away from their native village to settle in Mumbai. He got a job in private company. After some years, he stopped taking proper care of his wife, denying her of food, drinking, beating her, and keeping her almost like a prisoner. He began having an affair with another woman whom he brought home. The second wife delivered a female child and took charge of the house. The first wife is deeply affected due to the physical violence unleashed by her husband.

There is always quarrel between both wives. The second wife always says *“Your husband brought me here and this is not my fault”*.



There are always fights between the first wife and her husband. One fine day, she questioned her husband about his behaviour. She said, “I came here to Mumbai with you leaving behind, my village and parents. The situation I am in today is much worse than before”. One day she narrated whole story to the neighbor, who advised to stay with her husband. This resulted in her continuing to live with her husband for another three years. There is no communication between her and her parents.

She fell ill due to this harassment, depression and fear and sought help from her husband who refused asking her to return to her village. She returned to Dangapur. Hearing about the Nari Adalat, she approached and confided in an executive committee member of the federation. The EC members and Nari Adalat members collectively decided to help her. The Nari Adalat members visited Kavalgi village which is the native village of her husband and met his family members. In discussions with her, they realized that she wanted some compensation from her husband to start a new life, and did not want to live with him. After 4 to 5 meetings with his parents, they sent a legal notice to them summoning them for a Nari Adalat hearing, threatening them with police action if they refused. “Refusal will result in more difficulties. This may lead to arrest of all your family members including boy. He may lose his job in Mumbai and difficult situation may arise”.

His parents attended the meeting along with the EC and Nari adalat members. They informed him that this is a very serious matter and if he did not compromise, they will go to court and request his employer to terminate his services. “Legally she is your daughter-in-law with rights on your property, and land. We will give you one week time to decide amongst yourselves and convey your final decision to federation. We want Rs. 15 lakhs to be paid by you with a written statement on bond paper. Your wife has recovered from depression and fear after counseling and emotional support from SHG and federation members”.

Finally, the family decided to compromise and paid eight lakhs to her family. We federation member decided to make a fixed deposit in the bank in her name. Her family decided to pay Rs 1000 to SHG and Rs 8000 to federation to show their gratitude for handling her case.

The accused family who was highly influential and belonged to economically powerful background used to threaten her family. "We withstood these threats only because of the federation support", said her parents. Today, the girl is a member of an SHG in her village.

Misappropriation of public funds was reported in several districts. For instance, in Belgaum, federations talked about how pregnant women, lactating women and students were provided less than the quantity of food sanctioned. The federation had to follow up and inform the anganwadi of the exact amount of food to be provided by the government

#### **Box 5: Adolescent Girls' Safety**

Lambani girls are considered to be very beautiful and therefore sold their girls as soon as there were born because of sheer poverty. These girls were pushed into sex work at a very young age. Many people from the North used to come and buy these girls. They used to grade children according to their beauty (e.g. A grade, B grade and C grade). Soon the media got to know about this and because of news channels reporting this, the practice stopped for a while. When the news died down, it started again.

Tipamma who is a judge in the Nari Adalat and also the chairman of the EC of Kittur chennama mahila Okuta and other federation women from Chincholi taluk, found out about this issue. Tipamma heard of these practices from the ASHA workers in those tandas and then word of mouth. The girls who were sold never returned home. The men who would take these women gave them good comforts.

Tipamma visited the tandas along with some MS staff. She went to the women and asked them why they were selling their girls. The women said "We are very poor, so we will sell our children. What will we do with four girl children? My husband drinks a lot and when I give birth to girl children, he troubles me so better to give them away. If we sell them to someone rich, we will get some financial support". After hearing, what they had to say, Tipamma told them that what they were doing was wrong and against the law.

Tipamma along with some other federation women had set up some awareness camps in Chincholi taluk. They had brought some Panchayat leaders there to speak to the villagers. She sensitized the community and told them that they should not sell their girls just for money. Tipamma brought in the police department, lawyers, some government officials to speak to the women. They trained the community and raised their awareness on why they should not do this. Tipamma informed these women about KGBV and that if they had too many kids, they could enroll them into KGBV and not sell them off. Tipamma told them "These are your very own children, you should not sell them."

There was one incident where two women from two different tandas were getting ready to sell their daughters to some rich men. When MS found out about this, they visited these two women along with some Panchayat members and government officials and convinced them not to sell their daughters. When the officials realized that women were doing this for money they gave them a plot of land, put a bore-well and constructed a house for them, on the condition that they never sell their girl children. They started a campaign in areas where this practice was common.

Now after Tipamma with the help of MS has sensitized them to the issue and also raised their awareness on this issue, this practice has decreased. It happens once in a while, in a hush hush manner but it has reduced significantly.

#### *Future Needs*

In the future federations have indicated that they want their own office space for their operations. Members strongly feel that they need to secure more funds to sustain the federations. These funds could be from profits from IGAs, or tenders from the government and other stakeholders etc. Women want official identity cards, which

they feel will help them gain more recognition and legitimacy from the community and government officials who would not be in a position to avoid them.

Women also expressed the need and interest to be updated on all the existing six pillars of the MS movement, especially on laws which would prove useful to the members of the Nari Adalat.

## MEMBERSHIP, PARTNERSHIPS AND IMPORTANCE OF COLLECTIVES

### *Membership*

Membership in a collective is important because it helps build the movement. Membership at the sangha level helps the women get recognition and have an identity in the community both as individuals and as sanghas. Women feel sanghas are safe spaces to share their personal problems and share experiences to help solve issues of domestic violence, family feuds, sexual harassment etc. They are also exposed and have access to more information on various entitlements, resources, and networks. At the federation level, sangha membership is equally important and finally the more sanghas, the more federations which eventually builds the movement. Federations provide a platform for women to raise problems at a higher level. Federations act as an intermediate between the sanghas and the government departments and being a member of the federations ensures that women are updated on relevant and necessary information and also access their entitlements. Through membership in sanghas and federations women can exercise their voice and also demand their rights. Federations are able to identify and intervene in problems related to the village or the community, because it has a wide reach. Due to this its scale of operations, information from government departments is channelled to the federation, which can then be disseminated to reach populations of women, who reside in remote areas too. Moreover, since federations comprise of representatives from various sanghas members, across a wide geography, they know all the issues that need to be tabled at various levels.

**INCREASED MEMBERSHIP NOT ONLY ENSURES DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES, BUT ALSO BUILDS LEGITIMACY DUE TO ITS WIDE REACH. WOMEN BELIEVE THAT THEY WILL GAIN MORE RECOGNITION AND CONFIDENCE AS AN INDIVIDUAL, SANGHA AND FEDERATION IN THE COMMUNITY BY BECOMING MEMBERS OF FEDERATIONS.**

Many existing IGAs are operating at the sangha level in group, therefore, increased membership would mean that more women can be part of the IGAs and more money will feed into sanghas and federations. This will in turn help sanghas and federations grow their finances.

### *Importance of Collectives*

Increasing membership strengthens the collective. Women as a collective are in a better position to liaise with local government, local institutions, cooperative societies, NGOs and local banks, members and gain knowledge on different issues, get entitlements for their community and get support when dealing with major issues. As a collective, there is larger representation and hence there is greater legitimacy.

#### **Box 6: Importance of Membership**

There was a sex work racket in Bagalkote close to the highway. This racket came to light when Shantamma (president of federation in Bagalkote district) was on her way back home from the fields. She approached the lady in charge who had been tricking college girls into this work. The lady got extremely angry and questioned Shantamma's authority to interfere in such matters. Then Shantamma held her arm and took her to the police station. Shantamma shared that "*Because I was a member, and now the president of the federation, I have gained strength and courage to get that woman arrested and free those girls.*"

Many women like Shantamma have benefitted through their membership in the federation.

Women can also stand for local elections because the community respects them and they know the issues on the ground.

## STRUCTURE AND LEADERSHIP

### Structure

Women were asked to think of possible structures for their federations for the future and try to think of themselves as independent bodies without the support of MS. Women sketched and described many probably structures that are illustrated below.

Illustration of the different federation structures are presented below. Federation members of the district of Bidar drew the structure in Figure 1

Explaining their vision of the federation structure, women shared that each block level federation should have its own office building. The office should be equipped with the basic material required for smooth functioning of meetings. Arrangements should be made for women to be able to stay overnight at the office in case of any emergencies. Women indicated a strong demand for latrines within the office. Since many women are involved in the preparation of herbal medicines (Nari Sanjeevani), they wanted some space next to the office for production of that.

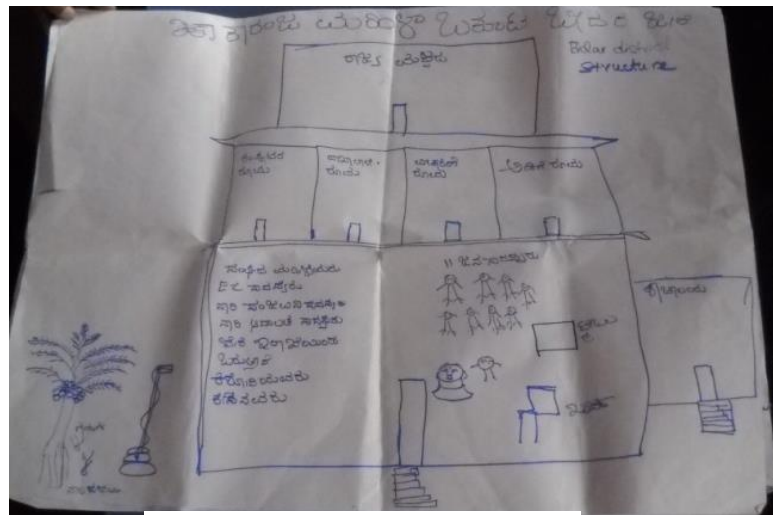


Figure 2: Structure of Federations in Bidar

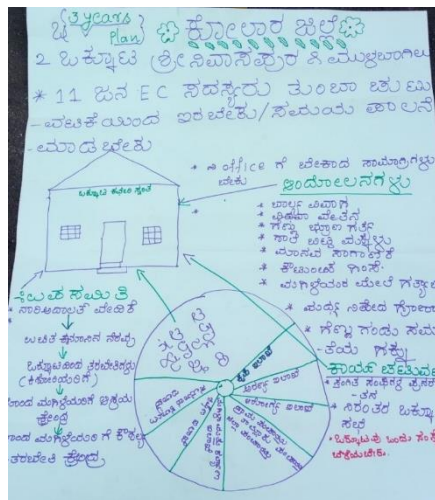


Figure 1: Three-year plan of federations in Kolar

Women of Bidar wanted to have monthly meetings at the district level where they could table issues from the block level federations. They would also like to have quarterly meetings with state level federations to solve issues of district level federations and also form linkages with government departments for maximum benefits. Future structures should include including more sanghas by reviving defunct sanghas and linking them to federations thus building the movement.

Figure 2 represents the three year plan of the structure of the federation envisioned by women in Shrinivaspura and Mulbagilu taluka of Kolar district. The house depicts the federation office. They want to have 11 EC members who will be more proactive and creative in innovating solutions. They want two committees – Nari Adalat and a free legal advice committee.

Recently women have identified many drop-outs (girls), incidence of female foeticide in their villages and high use of alcohol by men. Therefore, for the future, they want to hold protests and campaigns to fight for the rights of themselves and their children. The protests are around child marriage, availing pensions for widows etc, mainstreaming girl drop outs into KGBVs, banning alcohol, women's rights, domestic violence, female foeticide.



**Figure 3: Future growth of Federations in Kolar**

The circle represents the various partnerships the federation would like to foster in the future. These include – agriculture, forest, education, health, social welfare, child and women development departments, police, courts, Panchayats etc. Along with these partnership, the federations wanted to revive defunct sanghas and link them back to these existing federations. They want to provide training for adolescent girls, set-up santvana centres for women and train women in skill development so that they can start earning through micro-enterprises.

Figure 3 is an illustration by women of federations in Kolar on how they feel their federations should grow. The roots are the sanghas and the sanghas are the first and most important part of the structure.

Without sanghas, there wouldn't be federations. The trunk of the tree is the Executive Committee of the federations and the leaves are the EC members. At the top of the tree (canopy) lies the district level federation. Above the EC members are the multiple departments that the federation would like to build partnerships with. In the future, they want to make their federation strong like a tree. They want to learn from other

federations and reach a larger scale. For the tree to become strong, the roots needs to be strong, and for that, the women realize that they need to include more sanghas, increase membership and also revive defunct sanghas and link them to federations.

### *Leadership*

In discussions with federation with regards to a future structure, one thing that came up as part of structure was good leadership. Many federations felt the need to have a new line of leadership. A leadership that is young, sincere, responsible, proactive and can be held accountable. Women have had enough interactions with EC members of other federations and external stakeholders (government officials, political parties etc) to be able to differentiate a good leader from a bad one. In their eyes and experience, government officials and politicians are corrupt, dishonest and lazy. It is these officials who have denied them their rights and entitlements, denied them a voice etc. While forming a new structure in the future without MS, women said that they wanted leaders who are committed to the cause and are willing to volunteer their time. Members said they would like to have collective leadership with each leader having different responsibilities and transparency across the leadership. Federation members from Bidar iterated that they wanted the following changes in the structure of the federation. They want more training programmes and to actively form and rejuvenate defunct sanghas. The women also expressed the need for new leadership in the federation, of women who took their responsibilities seriously. Based on past experiences, women feel that there should be an age cap on EC members (25 to 40 years), so that they are responsible enough to take up this position.

## FINANCES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Federations understand the importance of finances to be able to sustain in the long-term. With the withdrawal of MS, some federations do not have the money to pay for TA/DA of women. This has led to disruptions and in some cases a complete standstill of federation operations (meetings, Nari Adalat cases, campaigns, training etc.) in some districts.

Current federation survival depends on three aspects: a) Annual membership fees b) contracts and tenders from government and other agencies, and c) income generating activities (micro-enterprises).

## *Federation Operations*

Until now, the federations have been receiving financial support through MS to pay for their daily operations. Their current expenditure are as follows:

- Office rent
- Audit and accounts
- TA/DA for women for meetings
- Renewal of registration fees
- Visits to government departments etc.

## *Contracts and Income Generating Activities*

Federations have been receiving some funds through supplying food to KGBVs, selling herbal medicines, donations, and interest from banks. Some federations have also expressed interest in actively pursuing and setting up micro-enterprises and give a proportion of their profits to the federation. One of the hurdles they currently faced in this aspect was that they do not have the necessary skills to market their products, due to which sales in the past have been quite low. Members have requested to be trained on marketing so that they can successfully maintain and run businesses. Members also need to be trained to write proposals, prepare budgets to ensure they get some contracts from the government to pursue their work.

Many federation members currently earn money by supplying fruits, vegetables, milk and eggs to Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV). They also produce Ayurvedic medicines like hair oil, pain relief oil, soap powder, chilli powder and part of the profit goes to federations. Interest received from fixed deposits in banks and loan given in *Mahasanchi* scheme, also contribute to the federation's corpus. Some federations print documents, registers and individual pass books and sell it to SHGs for a profit. Federations also charge SHGs for updating their records.

In Bidar district the federation members earn money by providing training in SHG activities and the functioning of the six different committees. They are invited by NGOs, bankers and members of other institutions and contribute 20% of their remuneration to their respective federations. Some federation take catering contracts of meals at the time of the General Body meetings, EC meetings and other occasions and they contribute a part of the profits to the federation.

The federation plan on building a corpus, starting businesses and get tenders that will help sustain their federation.

## WOMEN'S AND ADOLESCENT GIRL'S RIGHTS

In order to get the federation women to articulate what their views were on women and girl's rights, the participants were divided into groups and each group was given a hypothetical, but realistic situation based around the issue of women and girls' rights. The groups were asked to think and discuss the issue, and present, how they, as a federation, would tackle each of these situations. When the groups presented their solutions, in the form of role plays. There was plenty of discussions and counter arguments between the women. In their enthusiasm, some women tended to deviate into other topics. But the overall suggestions on how to ensure that women and girls are not denied their rights, was very rich and diverse.

*On the subject of honour killing, women feel that nobody (whether its parents, partner, community etc) has right to take away another human's right to live. Rights cannot be snatched from either women or men. In a situation where the couple has eloped due to unacceptance by their families of an inter-caste marriage, the women strongly felt that both sides of the families should have spoken about the problem together instead of taking such a drastic step. The federation women feel that it is their responsibility to intervene inform the parents about the couple's right to live and also sensitise them on this issue and explain to them that these biases are not justified. If need be, the women are ready to protest and fight for the rights of other women. The women believe that in these situations it is very important to stick together and stay united.*

*"When we need blood we take anyone's blood, why are we holding onto these old caste traditions".*

*Federation woman, Gokak*

On the subject of sexual exploitation and trafficking, the women discussed that the bride's parents should have found out about the groom before sending her off. They also strongly felt that men and boys need be sensitised on the issue of sexual exploitation. Girls should not be abandoned just because they have gotten married, they should be allowed to be in touch and visit their maternal home once in a while, it is their right and they should fight for it. The women also said that when a girl marries and goes to another state, the whole community should get together and support the girl's family. They said that different federations should also connect to ensure a better outreach.

Domestic violence was another situation presented by the women. Federation women feel that most women are a victim of domestic violence at some point in their life and the women receive little or no support from their in-laws in this regard. In this situation, the women said that the federation should investigate into the matter and intervene. As a first step, federation members feel that they should approach the wife and first counsel her. The women said that if the wife was not a sangha member, she should be made to join one immediately because she will get support from a large group. They said that the woman and her mother-in-law should be made to sit together and talk the issue through, with the sangha as a mediator. Another view that emerged from the women was that because it was a male dominated society, sangha and federation members must unite and support each other. When asked what type of support they can give, the women said that if the violence continued, they could move her out of her house and into the federation office, where she would be safe.

#### **Box 7: Saved from being burnt**

Mudakappa Quatti of Devarahubballi village in Dharwad district, used to drink and beat his wife. This took place regularly. One day, he came home drunk and went too far. He proceeded to thrash his poor wife, picked up a five litre can of kerosene lying around, and poured it on her. He was about to strike a match and burn her when a passerby saw and he rushed into the house and dragged the drunk husband to the sangha. Paramma Hongal is the very powerful President of the Ranichennama Mahila Okkut. She narrated that all the members present, asked the husband why he was misbehaving and being so cruel to his wife. He retorted by saying that since she was *his* wife, he could do anything he wanted to her. The sangha women told him that this was wrong and that he should not ill-treat his wife. They threatened him by saying that if he continued, they would file a complaint against him at the police station. Mudakappa was an arrogant and stubborn man who refused to listen. The women went to the police, who came to the village and attempted to reason with this man. But he was adamant that he could do whatever he wished with his wife and no one could stop him. He even went on to tell the police that if he wanted to, he could even burn her.

The police took Mudakappa to the police station and put him behind bars. In the meanwhile, Paramma, along with the sangha women took the man's wife to Annawar police station and registered a case against her husband. The whole time, the police tried to convince the women not to register a case because it concerned a private matter between a husband and a wife. Paramma said that they were determine that the law should take its course and justice must be served. They told the police that they *MUST* register their case and that if they refused, they would go to the women's police station and register the case. The federation members spent the whole day at the police station along with the victim. Finally, at around 10PM, the police registered their case against the victim's husband.

The women told the police that they have to get justice for this poor woman because this was not the first time that her husband had beaten and ill-treated her.

The case took nearly one and a half years to come up for a hearing in court. During this time, the husband remained in Dharwad jail while the wife along with their son stayed at home. The federation members kept a close watch on her and supported her for all her needs. She continued to work as a coolie to make ends meet.

The judge sentenced the husband to seven years imprisonment. At the time, there was an MLA who had just won the elections. To show his gratitude to the people, he ordered that ten prisoners from Dharwad jail be set free! From those set free, this cruel husband was one, and hence he did not serve his full sentence.

The wife was working in the fields, when suddenly she saw her husband walking back to the village. She was so petrified, that she got her son and ran to her parent's home in another village called Mummigatti. Paramma Hongal, said that the woman continued to work as a coolie and contributed to her and her son's keep in her parent's home. But she is so fearful, that till date she has not returned home! She believes that her husband would beat her and kill her. Then what would become of her young son?

According to Paramma, the husband continues to reside in his home. He bad mouths and abuses the sangha women for protecting his wife from him. He also speaks badly about each of them. The women have patiently endured this for a long time. One day their patience snapped and they thrashed him with their slippers. But the man is unrepentant.

When Paramma was asked what the federation's strategy was, to deal with this man, she said that they were helpless because the government had set him free from jail. So what could they do when the system was against them? The federation members lend their support by calling the woman when her husband is out, to come and pick up her rations. They are happy that they managed to save the woman's life and ensure that she is away from her dangerous husband.



The last situation given to the women was that if they were given some funds to be spent on adolescent girls, what they would spend it on. All the women were in agreement that firstly money should be invested in educating girl children. Many children in their villages are married off at a young age of 12 and forced to drop out of school for this reason. Both men and women need to be sensitised on the importance of educating a girl child and that she too can take up a job and help her husband's family in the future. Federation women would also provide vocational training to the girls. At present, they are not able to give any training because they do not have the money to.

Overall, on the topic of **Women and Girl's Rights**, women felt that they had made some progress on the topics and situations discussed above. They understand that a lot more time and effort needs to invest in this as ultimately only a woman will fight for another women's right. They also see the need to sensitise men to these issues and make them understand that they are snatching away women's rights and by law that it right.



## ISSUES, PAST, PRESENT, BARRIERS

Many women did admit that in the past, they were ignorant of the importance of **education** and of being literate. But today, even though most of them can only sign their names, they advocate the importance of education and some of them even attend night school. One of the women shared that now their men ask them to read documents before they sign.

Due to a mix of ignorance and a lack of self-confidence, the women always saw the **panchayat** as a male domain, and never knew its purpose. But today they attend panchayat meetings and are aware of the benefits available to them from the government. The federation women feel that more women should stand for panchayat elections, so that they can address the needs of women.

*“My children especially my girls have benefited from my awareness through the federation. I learned how to raise my girls and the importance of education. My girls are now studying in Rani Channamma School”*

Chitramma, Humnabad district,

Now there is more awareness on **health** and the women said that they have stopped having blind faith in superstitious beliefs.

With regards to their **finances**, earlier they did not have a right over their money because the patriarchal belief was that women did not need to spend. But today, the women earn their own money and spend it the way they see fit. Women also take loans from various quarters, and are confident of returning the money, as they know about money management.

The women said that now, they have a better understanding of the **law**. Earlier, it was unheard of to interfere in a domestic quarrel. Now they all know that if they have to move forward, it is only possible by fighting together. It was important that everyone knows about the law. Even the sanghas have issues. Many cases can be solved with help from the courts, the police and the community.

## WAY FORWARD

Despite hesitation from a few federations of continuing with MS, most federations have been and are of the strong opinion that they will continue their work and fight for women's right with or without the support of MS. Ultimately they are fighting for their own rights and that shouldn't stop with the withdrawal of MS.

The key points that were discussed as the way forward are as follows:

1. Federations need to foster partnerships with external stakeholders (like government departments for various entitlements, other NGOs etc.)
2. Federations need to include more women, create more sanghas and link them to federations to build the movement and increase their reach.
3. Federations should be able to sustain themselves financially without relying on MS. For this they need to secure tenders from the government and also start income generating activities that will feed money back into the federation for their operations.
4. There is a strong need now to involve men and boys in their work in the capacity of training and sensitising them to the issues faced by women and seek their support in overcoming these barriers.
5. Different federation members have to take on different roles in administration.
6. More awareness and campaigns on various issues especially education, women and girls' rights, participation in Panchayats, entitlements.