

EXPANSION AND COVERAGE

Mahila Samakhya was launched as a pilot project in Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh in 1989 with Dutch assistance. The project was extended to Andhra Pradesh at the end of 1992 and in two districts in Kerala in 1998. The effectiveness of the MS strategy in mobilising women for education has resulted in it being adopted by other basic education projects in Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Assam.

The Madhya Pradesh programme closed down in 2001, but has been registered again in 2007. With the end of DPEP funding in Assam, the Assam programme was brought under the National scheme of Mahila Samakhya in 2002.

After bifurcation of States, the programme presence is also in Uttaranchal (2003) and Jharkhand (2006) now.

MS Societies were registered in Chhattisgarh (2006) and Madhya Pradesh (2007).

At the beginning of the XI Plan, MS coverage existed across 83 districts – and is aiming to expand to atleast 58-60 new districts during the Plan.

Therefore, as of November 2008, e.g. MS coverage is across 89 districts in 9 states - currently being implemented in a total of 28480 villages. Work in 5 districts of Chhattisgarh is in process of being started, as is expansion into new districts in other States under the XI Plan.

Sl.No	State	No. of Districts	No. of villages
1	Andhra Pradesh	12	3090
2	Assam	10	2379
3	Bihar	13	4659
4	Gujarat	7	1982
5	Jharkhand	9	3998
6	Karnataka	12	2701
7	Kerala	3	2587
8	Uttar Pradesh	17	4668
9	Uttaranchal	6	2416

The average number of villages covered in each district ranges from 150 to 250. In the Xth plan, however, guidelines for number of villages to be covered in a district have been laid. In each district 250 villages are required to be covered in order to achieve a critical mass that could demonstrate impact of the MS strategies.

In order to achieve a “critical mass” in the district it is anticipated that in the 11th plan period, the programme would cover at least 250 villages in a district, i.e. there would be around 250 *Sanghas* in each district to be covered through direct intervention of programme personnel. Expansion to more villages in the district would be undertaken either through direct implementation or through the stronger federations. In new districts,

the programme would initially start in 100 villages and expand to cover at least 250 villages in the next five years.

Since MS is not a service delivery programme the process of mobilization and organization takes time. Women are mobilized into sanghas whose regular membership ranges from 25- 40. This figure refers to the women who meet regularly once or twice in a month. It must be noted that many other women also participate in the activities of the sangha depending on the nature of issue or activity being addressed. There is a wider ripple effect on the families of the sangha women as well as the community. Initially women from the poorer sections of the sanghas are organized. As sanghas gain recognition and visibility in the village, they have begun to draw in women from other social groups as well.

Federations of Mahila Sanghas (*Mahasanghas*) have been formed in older MS districts (where the programme has been operational for 3 or more years) during the 10th Plan period. These would also be the forums for providing the strength for collective reflection and action by *Sangha* women. These federations would play a key role in sustaining and nurturing women's empowerment processes at the field level. As the stronger Sanghas become more autonomous in their functioning, it is envisaged that they would federate, and that these federations will take on the role of coordination, as well as monitoring and management of structures like the *Mahila Shikshan Kendras*, *naari adalats*, health centres, etc. These federations are the "exit strategy" for the programme in older areas.