

MAHILA SHAKTI KENDRA (MASK)

WHAT IS MASK

Mask is a Federation of over 200 Self-Help Groups promoted by Gana Chetana Samaj (a registered NGO) from the year September 1999. MASK was established on 01 April 2002 and has been registered as a Society on 08 February, 2006, under the Societies Registration Act XII of 1860, bearing Registration No. RS / SPR / 242 C / 06 of 2006. MASK began generating its own resources from the year of its establishment in 2002. The resources come from service charges and contributions from its groups (members) and from resource persons fees from training programmes conducted for NGOs. Every year MASK celebrates International women's day for which it spends approximately Rs. 25,000/- to 30,000/- from its own resources. MASK also conducts ongoing skill up gradation programmes and addresses issues of social justice, expenses for which are met from its own resources. MASK has employed four full time staff from its women SHG members and has rented a place at Balipara and has purchased two Hectares of land for a training centre.

ORIGIN OF MASK

On 01 April 2002, the Presidents and Secretaries of the first 60 SHGs promoted by Gana Chetana Samaj, (GCS) had a meeting with the Director, Oscar Pereira, S.J., to discuss the sustainability of their groups after they would be weaned away from GCS on completion of the project supported by IGSSS (Indo Global Social Service Society). The Director of GCS proposed that the groups form a Federation (with objectives, activities and methodology spelt out below) to sustain their groups. Mrs. Sushila Sangma, the SHG Training Coordinator and Mrs. Elisa (Purnima) Boro, the Micro-Credit Coordinator of GCS, who belong to two of the oldest groups promoted by GCS, were unanimously elected as the first President and Secretary respectively, of MASK. All the Governing Body and General Body Members of MASK and the staff of MASK, are from among the women's Self-Help Groups.

VISION

To empower the poor and marginalized, especially women, to bring about social change in their status and transformation in society.

MISSION

To promote and form Self-Help communities of love, concern, thrift and solidarity among the poor, especially among marginalized women irrespective of cast creed or colour, whereby they become conscious of their collective strength / power to help themselves individually and as a

group and to empower themselves economically and socially in order to live with dignity in the mainstream of society.

OBJECTIVES

The overall wider objective of MASK is “to organize, establish, consolidate, carry out, maintain, support and develop social activities, economic development programmes, agricultural, environmental, educational and medical works aimed at the service of the people, in particular women, irrespective of race, community, caste or creed.

Among the specific objectives of MASK the following are the more important objectives for achieving the vision, the overall objective and for fulfilling the mission:

1. To establish a forum where in women can critically analyse their socio-economic situation and act as catalyst to bring about social change.
2. To build up self-confidence and spirit of cooperation among women.
3. To address social problems / evils affecting members, the group and society.
4. To strive towards economic empowerment of the marginalised, in particular of women, aimed at self-reliance and self-sufficiency, by providing opportunities for self-employment through micro-credit financing and formation of cluster of SHGs.
5. To provide micro-credit facilities to SHGs to enable their members to redeem their mortgaged lands and loans from moneylenders and thus break the vicious circle of indebtedness the poor are trapped in.
6. To link SHGs to the Banks, Government infrastructures and other institutions for socio-economic development through micro-credit facilities.
7. To build the capacity of SHGs in view of making them self-sufficient and self-reliant in managing the affairs of their groups.
8. To give special emphasis to the development and empowerment of tribal and adivasi women since they bear the dual burden of oppression, not only as marginalised Tribals, but also that of gender discrimination.
9. To address issues of injustice, violence and discrimination against women and weaker sections of society to bring about social change.

ACTIVITIES

1. Promotion and Nurturing of Self-Help Groups.
2. Residential Capacity Building Programmes of three different Modules for Presidents and Secretaries of SHGs. spread out in a period of two years.
3. One Day Capacity Building Programmes, of three different modules for members of each SHG
4. Periodical assessment / evaluation of groups based on NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) format, for linking groups to Banks for Revolving Funds and for long term loans.
5. Skill up-gradation training and exposure programmes for groups.
6. Income Generating Programmes for SHG Members and for Groups.
7. Micro-Credit to groups for further on lending to group members:
 - i. for redeeming mortgaged lands.
 - ii. for releasing loans from money lenders.
 - iii. for income generating activities.
8. Residential SHG TOT (Training of Trainers) Programmes (on promotion and nurturing of SHGs) for personnel of NGOs and Dioceses of Northeast India ranging from six to 12 days.
9. Organise rallies and agitations to address issues of injustices, oppression and exploitation, and settles cases of injustices through the 'Mahila Court' (women's court)
10. Awareness programmes regarding human rights, legal awareness, preventive and curative care, sustainable agriculture etc.

MASK HAS DEVELOPED, over the years, in collaboration with GCS,

- a vision, concept and objectives for SHGs;
- a model bye-laws/ rules and regulations for SHGs to adopt and make their own;
- stages of functioning or growth of SHGs;
- three days residential capacity building programmes of three different modules for Presidents of SHGs;

- one day capacity building programmes of three different modules for Members of each SHG; methodology for supervision and monitoring performance and growth of SHGs;
- format for periodical assessment of the performance and growth of SHGs;
- TOT (Training of Trainers Programmes) on SHGs for NGOs of Northeast (ranging from six to 12 days)

This methodology has been documented and used for training personnel of three Dioceses, and NGOs of the Northeast. The documented methodology has also received wide approval from Bankers and Government officials and NGOs, who come for exposure programmes to groups of MASK.

MASK has also printed various records, registers, books of accounts and forms to be used by SHGs. Most of the NGOs who have gone through the TOT programmes conducted by Gana Chetana Samaj and MASK have adopted the SHG methodology of MASK.

The SHG methodology is only the starting point and is viewed as a sine qua non for initiating any development activity or programme, because it builds or provides a strong base, a community / cluster of communities that grows into a Federation of Self-Help Communities, to reflect on their problems, to prioritise the issues affecting their lives and to plan action programmes to address those issues. This process of reflection and action which is essential to any development, is in-built in the SHG methodology and if properly implemented, can become an effective tool for social change.

10 February 2006
Balipara

FOR MAHILA SHAKTI KENDRA

Sushila Sangma
President

Eliza Boro
Secretary/Director