

**Completion Report
of the Project**

***“Women in Local Governance:
Networking and Dissemination at
UMA Resource Centre”***

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CONTENTS

1. **Introduction**
2. **UMA Resource Centre: Activities**
 - 2.1 **Research**
 - 2.1.1 Resource Collection
 - 2.1.2 Documentation
 - 2.1.3 Dissemination
 - 2.1.4 Publication
 - 2.2 **Participatory Zonal Trainings**
 - 2.2.1 I Phase Training
 - 2.2.2 II Phase Training
 - 2.2.3 III Phase Training
3. **Panchayath Pravas**
 - 3.1 To All women Gram Panchayat, Athnur, Gulbarga
 - 3.2 To Panchayats in Kottayam District of Kerala
4. **Field Studies**
 - 4.1 Study of All Women Gram Panchayats
 - 4.2 Grama Sabhas At A Glance
 - 4.3 Bellandur.com
5. **Regional Seminar on “Gender, Governance and Grama Sabha”**
6. **Networking**
 - 6.1 As Resource Persons
 - 6.2 As consulting participants
 - 6.3 Visitors to Resource Center
7. **Glimpses from Grassroots**
 - 7.1 Unreachable Secretary
 - 7.2 Contagious Claps
 - 7.3 Bill, for what amount?
 - 7.4 Our Madam
 - 7.5 By the way, what is that?
8. **Media Advocacy**
9. **Conclusion**

1. Introduction

Women in local governance are ushering in the winds of change in a big way. Many a myths have been pounded down by them. Entry of large numbers of rural women to the Panchayat Raj Institutions in India effected by the 73rd Amendment to the constitution is resulting in substantial socio-political changes. Most of the women representatives elected to the Panchayath Raj Institutions come from traditional backgrounds that have a very strong patriarchal system of society. Most of them are illiterates or neo-literates. They are bound to their homes and families, which prescribe definite roles to them. Their husbands or male relatives generally play the role of 'Gods' in their lives and make all decisions for them. However, in spite of these odds, women are marching ahead.

The conservatives cannot tolerate women donning the leadership roles. They feel women have a limited field of action and they must not trespass. Politics was one such taboo area. Though constitution gives equal opportunities to men and women in a democracy, yet when women contest and win elections, they are made to under go humiliation, face innumerable hurdles, even physical and mental torture. They have to confront constant efforts made to pull them down. These women who have dared to enter public service have to work doubly hard to prove themselves. For many, it is indeed impossible to imagine or expect these women to identify, develop and assert their own capabilities, individuality and shape destiny of democracy. Fortunately, that is exactly what is happening! They are changing perceptibly, elected women representatives are blooming beyond barriers, beyond boundaries...

Women elected to the Panchayath Raj Institutions are making a difference and showing achievements despite hardships and have brought in the winds of change. Their achievements are no small measures in terms of the social changes that are emerging.

Supportive, sensitive and sustainable state policies, systems, solidarity networks, and strengthening initiatives become crucial.

Initiatives and Interface with Grassroots Governance

For the past several years ISST, Bangalore has been facilitating the empowerment of women in general and of women in Panchayat Raj in particular. ISST runs the UMA Resource Centre at the Bangalore office, which is accessible to elected representatives, research institutions, government and non governmental organisations (NGOs), policy makers, media representatives and other committed individuals.

Action Aid India's support has proved vital and helped ISST Bangalore to carry forward its work to strengthen grassroot governance and especially the elected women representatives (EWRs) across Karnataka.

2. UMA Resource Centre: Activities

Support provided by Action Aid India to ISST Bangalore has helped in further strengthening political space for women in Panchayat Raj Institutions and thereby facilitating empowering social change.

And this lead us to the current Project where we continue to concentrate on documenting, disseminating information and developing resource materials from the UMA Resource Centre along with continued field programs and networking.

The UMA Resource Centre as a forum has developed in a manner that provides a platform for knowledge transfer and expand networking. Participants at the UMA Resource Centre have easy access to information collated at the Center and the number of users of UMA Resource Centre is expanding.

The activities of the UMA Resource Centre are categorized into four broad categories.

- The first deals with a range of field based activities including training and field facilitation programmes through which we keep in constant touch with grassroots women and their realities.
- The second pertains to documentation and collation of resource materials on development, women's issues and concerns with particular emphasis on women's participation in grassroots governance.
- The third is concerned with production of new research outputs in the form of newsletters, wall magazine, resource books and dissemination of relevant information.
- The fourth relates to strengthening and expanding network activities.

Towards reaching these objectives, ISST Bangalore through this project "Strengthening women in Local Governance" carried forward its work with added consistency and commitment.

- It continued with added intensity and consistency, field based activities with elected women representatives of Gram Panchayats in 5 zones of Karnataka in 3 Phased manner.
- Continued the publication of UMA Prachar in English, Kannada with inclusion of Tamil version; introduced the innovative wall magazine Namma Panchayathi, first of its kind on Panchayath Raj in Karnataka.
- Continued with our documentation, dissemination and networking activities of women in local governance
- Studied the All Women Gram Panchayats in Karnataka; other field studies included Grama Sabhas at a glance; Bellandur.com;

2.1 Research

2.1.1 Resource Collection

The UMA Resource Centre has developed since 1995 and at present it has a collection of over 425 valuable books as well as approximately 750 information-based papers in English and other regional languages.

The Resource Centre has increased its collection by an addition of 75 books/articles on Panchayat Raj. Available resource materials in Kannada and other regional languages are being accessed and collected as a priority in order to address the need for the same in the field.

Categories of Resource Collection at the UMA Resource Centre

Category of Documents

- Books on Gender, Politics, PR, Finance etc
- Workshop/Seminar/Conference reports
- Select papers on PRIs by Experts
- PR Bills/Acts/Amendments legislated by various state governments
- Select papers on PRI Finance & Health
- Training Materials
- Papers related to Women and PRIs
- PRI related papers in other vernacular languages
- Video Cassettes on Local Governance, Gender and Children

2.1.2 Documentation

The resource centre, as a part of its ongoing activity has been identifying and gathering information on resource bases, information sources, institutions, training/ research organisations and individuals. This information has been systematically documented and brought in the form of "Annotated Bibliography". This is being updated regularly.

A small section on audio-visual tapes in different languages is also available. A directory of organisations / institutions working on Panchayat issues titled "Who's Where?" is compiled and updated regularly, since 1994.

Process documentation of field based activities in Kannada like the phase-wise training, workshops, study interactions are being done regularly and vigorously.

2.1.3 Dissemination

The primary objective of disseminating and sharing information has been to strengthen social causes, solidarity and enhance the capabilities of women in local governance by fulfilling their long felt need for information, exchange of experiences and networking among individuals and organizations working in the similar fields.

a) **UMA Prachar**

A resource letter on Panchayat Raj in English, Kannada and Tamil

One of the ways this is accomplished on a regular and continuous basis is through the publication of UMA Prachar, designed to serve as a platform for exchange of ideas and news on Panchayat Raj. UMA Prachar is now being referred to as a "Resource Letter" because it was widely felt that UMA Prachar goes beyond news into views and analysis. Apart from acting as a forum for in-house activities, it is also designed to incorporate case studies, profiles of elected representatives, etc. Uma Prachar reaches nearly 1000 individuals/organisations across the country in English, 1000 in Kannada and in Tamil we plan to reach around 500 to begin with.

Special features have been included to UMA Prachar during this phase of Women in Local Governance project and it is receiving encouragement and appreciation. They are

- Panchayat Parihar
- "Any comments ? "
- Introductions to other Institutions/Organisations/Initiatives in the field of Panchayat Raj.

"Panchayat Parihar" – is in response to a long felt need among EWRs for a "Listening-Sharing-Learning" post to ask, share, think aloud common problems and questions. "Picking" of questions and possibilities / solutions to overcome them is done in such a way that it has universal panchayat relevance for ERs in general and EWRs in particular. This has been published with additional information as a separate resource book in English and Kannada titled "Panchayath Parihar"

Interesting, thought-provoking, humorous, difficult instances that one experiences, observes, infers from this world of panchayats have lend deeper dimensions to our learnings and capture its complexities. Drawing from these experiences/sharings/ observations, we have included the column "Any Comments". It portrays and presents some of the "simple but significant", "common but complex" pictures at micro-macro level that lead one on to explore and comprehend Panchayat world in its totality.

b) **Wall Magazine – Namma Panchayati**

A large number of EWRs and EMRs in GPs are neo-literates. It is also a known fact that gaining access to 'information' particularly in a rural milieu is determined by various inherent factors like gender, caste and class, along with literacy. Wall magazine reaches out to the neo-literate population within Panchayats and community.

- Publication of wall magazine is aimed at strengthening local self governance and community participation through innovative conduit of information dissemination.

- Namma Panchayathi wall magazine is in simple neo-literate language, illustrated and presented in an interesting format.
- Contains cartoon strip with thought provoking questions at the end of it, gender oriented stories and poems/songs, illustrated panchayathi parihar, language and subject based activities, articles on law and rights. Panchamma is the 'sutradhar' who introduces and leads readers through these content. And she has become very popular. We get letters inviting Panchamma to their GPs!
- There is a large demand for useful, simple and interesting materials in Kannada and this is a step to fill that gap.

2.1.4 Publications

The Publications have been productions based on the field needs and it reflects field experience and insights. Resource books are being published as part of the knowledge building and information dissemination process. To strengthen knowledge base, build solidarity and enhance capabilities and awareness of the elected representatives, field functionaries, researchers, activists, officials and other individuals and institutions committed to the common cause. It covers a wide range of issues related to local self-governance, empowerment of women, training techniques etc. on the basis of field experiences.

Field testing of drafts of the resource books were done. For the resource book on GP Budget of Karnataka, separate meetings of Gram Panchayat Secretaries and Executive Officers were conducted at Chikmagalur and Bangalore Urban. This not only helped in field testing the material but also in sensitising the GP secretaries to the difficulties of EWRs and motivating them to provide a supportive environment for EWRs.



New Publications brought out as part of this project are as follows:

Publications in English

1. Gram Sabha – People's Sabha
2. Grama Panchayat Budget – Karnataka
3. Panchayathi Parihar
4. Beyond Boundaries – Case Studies
5. Gender Governance and Gramasabha
Regional Seminar Report - 2001
6. Newspaper Clippings on Panchayath Raj – 2001

Publications in Kannada

1. Anubava Guchcha – Games and stories
2. Tarabeti Tantrakalu – Training Techniques
3. Grama Sabhe – Janara Sabhe
4. Grama Panchayat Budget
5. Panchayathi Parihar
6. Goodininda Gaganakke

Newsletter - UMA Prachar

In English: 4 Nos. (Vol.8 Nos. 1,2,3,4)
In Kannada: 4 Nos. (Vol.8 Nos.1,2,3,4)
In Tamil: 4 Nos. (Vol.1 Nos. 1,2,3,4)

Wall Magazine – Namma Panchayathi

In Kannada: 4 issues (Nos. 1,2,3,4)
In English (translated sample copies): 2 issues (Nos. 1,2)

2.2 Participatory Zonal Trainings

Training is one of the important strategies to strengthen qualitative participation of women elected to Panchayats. We believe that these activities should not be a 'hit and run' affair, instead our attempt is to make it a consistent process of mutual learning. As a part of the field based activities, the training programmes/workshops were planned in a phased manner in 5 zones of Karnataka. Earlier field activities were carried out mainly in the northern part of Karnataka usually known for its backwardness. However, close interaction and observation of the EWRs of so-termed economically, socially better off districts like Bangalore and Chickmagalur showed poor participation of women in local bodies due to asymmetry of information, lack of access to resource sources, ignorance regarding the Panchayat Raj Act, Panchayat functions and their roles; the challenges and the information gaps that confront EWRs are observed to be more or less similar

irrespective of geographical, cultural, social, economic differences. Thus it was found that distance made no qualitative difference to women's access to information. With this learning, ISST included Anekal taluk of Bangalore Urban district. Along with the northern districts of Gulbarga, Bagalkot and Bellary, Tarikere taluk of Chickmagalur District is another region we have taken up since this is a region where intervention in support of women is low.

Acknowledging the significance and the crucial role that women can play in the efficient functioning of Panchayats, ISST conducted 3 Phase training in all the selected 5 zones of Karnataka. The space, time and input provided has motivated EWRs to make empowering changes to governance using the opportunities that's evolved; to give expression to their potentials and eventually enable them to perform their new political role with greater awareness, confidence and sensitivity.

The Phase-wise trainings are enabling the EWRs to articulate their concerns and demands as peoples' representatives, to better participate in meetings be it their Gram Panchayat (GP) meeting or meeting with officers of other line departments at the village level. During the experience sharing sessions women members have shared that their understanding of themselves as Panchayat functionaries as seen a big change. Positive changes they traced within themselves, in their role as EWRs; as women were commendable. It spanned from the very primary change like attending GP meetings in the first place to lobbying and demanding for constitution of standing committees in their GPs.

In order to promote capacity building of local NGOs and to ensure sustainability all the training programs have been conducted with involvement and assistance from field level NGOs and Panchayats.

Participatory training methods like interactive discussions, games, role-plays, group exercises and so on have been a great success with the participants.

2.2.1 Phase I Trainings

Phase I trainings focussed on basics of governance. Based on the felt needs expressed by EWRs local NGOs and our vision to strengthen them the following modules were incorporated in the training programmes:

- Concept of decentralization, Reservation policy for women
- Panchayat Raj Act, historical background, objectives, principles and societal analysis
- PR system, structures, functions, scope, roles and responsibilities
- Gram Panchayat Budget
- Grama Sabha
- Experience sharing by EWRs on their entry into Politics
- Problems and positive changes as EWRs within GPs, family, community and self
- Follow up action

Follow up action

This was a new component introduced and was carried out by EWRs after the trainings. This exercise involved selection of an issue of current relevance by EWRs, gather information about it, present the information to other colleagues in their GPs, build a case for solving the problem, influence GP agenda and formulate plans and act to tackle that issue.

This proved to be a very invigorating and useful exercise. This not only made EWRs think beyond their 'predictable' GP meetings and tangible issues but focussed their attention on issues of social concern. For e.g., enrollment and retention of children in school. We were able to integrate the gender dimension into it by inputs on the vicious factors affecting girl child education, social conditioning as well as the importance of their education. This was very useful in helping them understand the local problems affecting the issue.

Along with this, our objectives were to also increase their mobility, provide reasons for them to go out as EWRs and interact with people and local institutions like schools, PDS, PHCs, etc. In the process of gathering information they were actually shedding their inhibitions and donning the role of people's representative simultaneously. This also gave them visibility, confidence and views of the people.

Though we had drawn up a simple format to enter data etc. it could not be filled by them owing to their own illiteracy and lack of support by others. However the outcome of this exercise in their outlook, confidence, articulation, participation etc. has been tremendous.



Observations and Insights

- Determination was clearly evident among the EWRs to serve the people they represent, even though a large number of them entered the local bodies only due to pressure by men in the family, community, etc.
- In spite of best efforts put in by EWRs, their lack of political experience; insufficient information and understanding of roles and responsibilities as EWRs and also about the Panchayat Raj Act hinder their effective functioning.
- Arrogant and discriminatory behavior of men representatives, high handedness of secretaries; non-cooperative officials, inhibitions imposed by the society all pose as major obstacles to qualitative functioning of EWRs.
- Lack of information on Government programmes, lack of accessibility to the multifarious 'line' departments put many EWRs at a disadvantageous position.
- Women members who were / are actively involved in women sanghas, Self Help Groups, Dalit and other mass movements are seen to be much more confident, courageous; show higher comprehension, passion for learning and greater grit to face adversities.
- There were many instances when the so-termed 'aged' EWRs were showing immense enthusiasm and zeal to learn, to discharge their duties and were seen motivating and even challenging their younger counterparts to catch on with them!
- Irrespective of geographical, cultural, social, educational, economic, such other differences; challenges, obstacles and information gaps that confront EWRs are more similar than different. For EWRs closer to the state capital with better communication facilities access to Panchayat information especially administrative matters is as good or bad as for EWRs of far away Gulbarga.
- During the 'Experience Sharing' sessions, it was common to learn that majority of the EWRs have spent enormous amounts for elections even at the cost of selling their gold ornaments or cattle, agricultural produce or even their land.
- One of the common grievance shared by the EWRs is that when they have doubts or confusions regarding their roles and administrative matters little support, assistance or clarifications is provided even by the officials.
- Popular agenda for developmental programmes across panchayats commonly include providing drinking water, streetlights, road repairs, constructing community hall, shopping complex and so on. Specific and relevant development programs for women, children and other marginalized sections are conspicuously missing. Hence the immediate need for engendered governance.
- In spite of difficulties, inhibitions, lack of confidence the EWRs face due to illiteracy and ignorance; when they finally overcome these fears and obstacles their thought process, understanding of people's issues and performance are found to be at par or even better than their literate counterparts.
- Lack of honorarium to the ERs at the GP level is viewed to hinder their effective and honest functioning. To strengthen the PRIs, Government needs to address this issue.
- In spite of attempts by the Government to strengthen Gram Sabhas, it has failed to show the desired results, in various parts. Many of the elected men and women representatives themselves are unaware of the requirement to conduct Gram Sabhas

in every village. Many Gram Panchayats are completing the formality of conducting Gram Sabhas as required by Government orders and PR Act by simply convening Gram Sabhas in the name of various villages at the place where the GP headquarters is situated.

- Instances of women presidents' and members' husbands running office on behalf of their wives continues to be seen, more so in the backward districts like Bellary and Gulbarga. This is in spite of the interventions by NGOs committed to social empowerment. The EWRs are not always comfortable or in agreement with this. However for changes to happen, more time, support and skillful negotiations by women within their family power equations becomes crucial. And while interacting with them
- We observe that in the districts of Bellary and Gulbarga there is a dearth of NGOs actively working for women with clear gender perspective and sensitivity. This paucity is felt intensely in the area working with Elected Representatives, in particular.
- Panchayaths are not getting the stipulated grant on time. This has caused untold agony among the elected representatives. Words of helplessness and distress commonly shared by elected representatives were "Due to lack of funds, we are unable to take up promised work and serve the people. We are now being granted angry curse from the people instead of the grant from the government! We are at the receiving end indeed! Caught between people's fury and dried up GP coffer we lose interest and confidence to perform".
- During discussions on gender discrimination, it is notable to observe that the EWRs are gradually able to identify and understand manifestations of discrimination in every day life. However, it is a long way before they can actually make changes in real life and to renegotiate their status and space especially at home. There is need for that much more support to let them claim their fair share of space, time and sunshine!
- Many women cutting across class, caste and geographic borders very commonly feel that men have hardly changed over the ages. According to them men are still stuck in ancient times! There is a pressing need for changes in many of their views, attitudes and practices, so that they too can experience the fruits of empowerment!
- Silver linings are also seen. Changes brought by the reservation for women in Panchayath Raj Act has willy-nilly carved some changes in the lives of some women. Some EWRs have shared that their husbands have become considerate and are sharing household chores thus reducing their burden a little. In some other cases changes have come, by way of fewer restrictions on their mobility.

Participants Pulse

- "You have furnished information regarding panchayath powers and process. In addition, we need to know about various schemes and programmes under different departments. Multiple schemes are too confusing for us"
- "All these days we were hesitant to open our mouth during panchayath meetings, but now even we feel like saying something in the meetings We liked the training very much;"

- “Every one in the Panchayat thinks twice before sending us to training. They are scared that we will learn!”
- “In spite of knowing that training for women members was scheduled for this date, the Panchayat went ahead and fixed the same date for tamarind-auctioning. If not auctioning, there try to fix something else!”
- “Being fully engrossed in household activities and having attended only GP meetings, we hardly had any opportunity to know about GPs. This training has made us more aware of GP and its activities”.
- “Exercises and games are good fun. It actually makes us learn and remember better.
- “None listen to our problems and experiences. We were the listeners, ALWAYS. This program gave us an opportunity to at last share our bitter-sweet experiences”.
- “ Should we lose courage just because no one listens to us? Instead we must speak in such a way that people listen to us”.
- “All through GP meetings I used to have headaches hearing the terms – Quorum, Agenda, Form...At least now I know what it means. It’s their turn to have a headache, now! ”
- “Every time we asked for clarifications the response we got was ‘it is none of your business, why do you bother about all this?’ In this training, when we were asked to come out with our doubts and clarifications, we could not believe our ears! We didn’t know what to ask and what to leave?”
- “Well, this training was useful. But it will be more useful only if we have it again after 3-4 months...”

2.2.2 Phase II Trainings

During Second Phase Trainings the emphasis was on Gender and Governance. Session for Recap of Phase 1 training subjects was a huge success and proved very useful for EWRs to clarify, understand and cross-check between reality they face and the enshrined rights, powers, functions and importantly the spirit of decentralization and equity.

Second Phase Training comprised of gender sensitization modules like status of women in India and Karnataka, Women’s self image, Experiences as a woman and EWR, Women’s work, women’s rights including fundamental rights; gender discrimination and strategies for empowerment, importance of girl child education, solidarity networks etc.

Governance modules comprised of second level input and discussions on Panchayath Raj Institutions, PR Act and the reality, GP functions, powers; GP Budget details like income, expenditure, budget estimating, types of budget; GP Resource Mobilization; accountability; Transparency; Right to Information; Empowering Grama Sabhas; etc.

The EWRs while understanding the gender aspects with keen interest, discussed at length about strategies to bring about positive changes in political field as well as in their own lives.

During Second Phase Training, along with discussion on new topics like *auditing* and *right to information*, the trainings also allowed the recapitulation of other concepts related to PRI that were discussed during first phase trainings. It included space for

clarification of doubts, sharing of experiences of participants after the first phase and future plans. This helped in application of information and perception.

Group activities also included discussions based on our publications like the newsletter UMA Prachar and wall magazine Namma Panchayathi

Observations and insights

- It was observed that the EWRs, who believed that, “We are women and it would not be proper to speak to people, it will bring bad name by mingling with the public”, had come out of such a mindset to some extent. Their changed attitude was evident in their words, “as people’s representatives, it is necessary to have contact with people. That’s how we can realise their problems. We must visit government departments, meet the officials on behalf of people, otherwise what is the use of being representatives?” From Phase I to Phase II the “move ahead” was conspicuous.
- There is a general notion that women must keep away from political parties; there are no equal opportunities, and women will be exploited.
- In general among public, mistrust, and doubt regarding political parties prevail. People know their local politicians well and they clearly know whether to trust them or not. People feel that political parties are not meant for EWRs. This is more evident among the women representatives from families without any political background.
- Previously, there was a thinking that taking part in PRI is limited to attending GP meetings. But now it can be observed that EWRs are slowly coming out to involve in the happenings of the village. They take active interest in the functioning of Anganwadis, PHCs, village schools etc.
- EWRs are encouraged by a few people who openly welcome changes in them. Even then occasionally they have to face the sarcasm like, “Why do you bother with these things? Why are you concerned about schools, girl children’s education? Can’t you just have your tea and leave?”
- During the first phase training EWRs were of the idea that male members are there to look after the GP matters. But by the time they arrived for the second phase they have started forming SHGs and *mahila sangha* and with their support they are very much involved in the affairs of the GP.
- Some of the evident changes after the first phase trainings were:
 1. Increased participation by women representatives, at all levels.
 2. Attempts at revival of Grama Sabhas. The sabhas are taking place where it was not taking place earlier. The practice of conducting Grama Sabhas only in the villages where there were GP offices has been changed and they are conducted even in far away villages.
 3. Revival and concerted attempts to constitute Panchayat Standing committees as per Panchayat Raj Act.

4. Networking with community based people's organizations like mahila sanghas, youth associations, etc.
5. Attempt to visit and understand the state of the basic amenities and services in their GPs.
6. Changes in their sense of self; their articulation, participation, confidence, perception, enhanced levels of mobility and awareness.



Participants Pulse...

- While strategies were being discussed regarding increased support and encouragement for the newly elected women representatives; one of the participants told, "The society will improve when even the husbands and men in the family are given training in gender issues."
- According to a secretary, "Previously nobody was uttering a word, now you can see for your self how they speak. Just first phase training has brought out such change, if they under go one more training I cannot imagine what will happen!"
- During the session on *budget* a flipchart with the picture of a tree was being used-comparing the tree to Grama Panchayath and the roots to the revenue etc. Immediately one of the participants exclaimed, "It is true that revenue are like roots of panchayath tree; if there are roots the tree can absorbs water and grow. But in our GP even before the tree can develop roots, it will be decided who has

to absorb money from which works. The moment fund arrives it vanishes in no time!"

- Another EWR lamented that, "I have the enthusiasm to work for the people. But I don't have enough time or energy! By the time I finish household chores I am half-dead. How can I work for the community unless the burden of domestic chores are not reduced?"

Gender perspective formed the generic component and the foundation based on which all learning, sharing and analysis were made. The outcome has been overwhelmingly encouraging. Empowering changes from within have led to substantial changes in EWRs' functioning as peoples representatives. These women are not only redrafting panchayat agendas but also redefining polity.

Of course there have been bottlenecks. In one of the zones on seeing the confident changes in the women, panchayats of that zone had purposely fixed a tamarind auction on the dates coinciding with the training! Earlier the EWRs were not sent even proper intimation regarding their GP meetings but made sure the women get letters reg. that particular auction! These women had stopped being mute puppets and had started seeking clarifications, raising issues concerning women and dalits and even financial matters etc. Some women got together, mustered some courage and attended the 2nd phase training program while few others just could not make it!

Overall, our experience with the Panchayat Raj Institutions has been very positive. They have welcomed these initiatives and extended possible support inspite of the disempowering limitations inherent to PRIs.

2.2.3 Phase III Trainings

Third phase trainings almost became '*Mahiti Melas*' especially in zones like Chickmangalur and Bagalkot. This was due to the fact that the third phase trainings were designed in such a way that it becomes a forum.

- To facilitate solidarity networking for EWRs with Govt. officials, local NGOs, SHGs and other CBOs like mahila sanghas, etc.
- Selected representatives from all above were invited. The invitations and plan for the third phase were finalized in all zones after detailed consultation with the EWRs who participated in the first and second phase trainings. The content, process and invitees was finalised based on Panchayath needs.
- This was planned with an objective of creating a supportive and encouraging environment for EWRs and to establish functional linkages amongst themselves as well as between EWRs and SHGs, govt. officials, NGOs and so on.

- Yet another objective was to disseminate information to change agents, opinion builders within the community and thus strengthen the very fabric of grassroots governance and democracy.

Observations and Insights

- Though there have been attempts by the Govt. agencies and NGOs to facilitate women's participation in politics and considerable work is put in for creating awareness among people, in many panchayaths it is observed that EWRs are not getting much support and encouragement from the society. In many places the very presence of EWRs is neglected and hence their opinions are not considered while taking up development works like Drinking water, roads, schools, revenue generation, etc.,
- It is evident that if there is a clear necessity, women will somehow get people's work done. In development works usually women seek help from the members in the panchayath and from those of taluk/district panchayath. When they refuse to cooperate there are instances of women getting works done by the threat of a *dharna* (protest).
- It is observed that women are interested in eradicating social evils and in many cases they have succeeded in it. An EWR having realised the ill effects of alcoholism, organised other women in the village, protested and succeeded in stopping liquor sale.
- Many of the EWRs had clearly adopted the learnings of earlier training. They not only remembered the new words and concepts viz. Quorum, agenda but made use of it. They were not allowing conduct of meetings without a quorum; they were following the agenda either by reading or getting it read,
- Because of the networking with the SHGs, Mahila Sanghas, women have a feeling of togetherness and their self-confidence has increased. The husbands who were against their attending the meetings have now realised the benefits of SHGs and are supportive.
- Process-oriented SHG activity has increased women's awareness level too. They are now bold and knowledgeable enough to visit the govt. departments and banks on their own to demand and avail the schemes. Likewise they have been able to get the development work done for their village through various govt. programmes.
- Process-oriented, gender sensitive SHGs can play a crucial role in the social reforms. Some SHGs have collectively acted against dowry harassment, atrocities on women, domestic violence and alcoholism.
- Through SHGs women are encouraged to enter political field. SHGs concerned with creating a social environment bring in conducive attitudinal change,
- While speaking about the most tough instances as EWRs, one of the participants said she was constantly cornered and held responsible for the BPL list that was prepared. In reality the list was done by school teachers during the previous term. The real BPL families are left out and their agony was hurled at the current GP members who had nothing to do with BPL listing.

- In spite of the monumental changes, it is a matter of concern that many committed EWRs though are interested to zealously work for the development of the Panchayat and even make it big in politics, because of the indifference and discrimination by the society especially the male populace women are getting disillusioned and disempowered. They who had once dreamt of recontesting are putting it in cold storage and would eventually drop it, maybe. *Consistent support through information dissemination and networking can make them stay proactive in public spaces and usher in the much needed social changes.*

Participant's Pulse

- On learning about the All Women Panchayath of Athnur, an excited participant said, "What I feel is that many more women must come to power and rule. Our work should make men who take us for fools feel ashamed"
- While discussing the changes brought in by contact building between EWRs, one woman told, "Because of our sangha there is unity among women now, men are telling, 'All the women have become knowledgeable, they know all the rules, let's not go against them. Let us listen to what they have to say'."
- Because of the roaster system a disappointed woman president lamented, "With in next six to seven months my tenure will be over, just now I have begun to understand the intricacies of panchayath. I have an urge to work better for my village but what is the use. Everything goes waste. I can't achieve anything with all my learning."
- When one EWR shared of her helplessness due to male dominance, another EWR retorted, "Even if they spit on your face you should not deter. You must fight back. You cannot just sit quietly at home!"
- When asked about the achievements as peoples representative one of the participants responded, "I have interest and the will to achieve something, but every one step I keep these men folk force me to retrace back, two-three steps backwards"
- "They elect you once. If you start questioning, they will push you out the next time. So we must build our own sisterhood and support each other, rain or shine"



Zonal Trainings for Women in Local Governance – Karnataka State

November 2000 – January 2002

Sl No	District/ State	Taluk	Gram Panchayat	Date & Year	Event	No. of participants
1.	Bangalore Urban	Anekal	Hebbagodi Bommasandra Neraluru Chandapura Guddahalli Athibele	28 th – 29 th November 2000	Two day training workshop with ERs of Gram Panchayats	26
2.	Chikmagalur	Tarikere	Siddarahalli Haadikere Neralakere Cheeranahalli Bettadahalli Gadeehalli Gulladamane Mugali	20 th – 21 st December 2000	Two day training workshop on PR for EWRs of Tarikere taluks	21
3.	Bellary	Bellary & Sandur	Chooranur Siriwara Metriki Vitalapura Linganahalli Bommagatti Anthapura Baadanahalli Belagal Sanganakallu	11 th – 12 th January 2001	Two day training programme on PR for EWRs of Bellary.	39
4.	Gulbarga	Allanda & Afzalpur	Athnoor Nimbarga Naroonna Kamalanagar	7 th – 8 th March	Two day training programme on PR for EWRs of Gulbarga	Total 28 (16 EWRs, 8 staff from 4 NGOs).
5.	Bangalore Urban	Anekal	Hebbagodi Bommasandra Neraluru Chandapura Guddahalli Athibele Anekal	11 th – 12 th April 2001	2 nd Phase Training Prog.	24
6.	Chikmagalur	Tarikere	Siddarahalli Haadikere Neralakere Cheeranahalli Bettadahalli Gadeehalli Gulladamane Mugali Tarikere	27 th – 28 th April 2001	2 nd Phase Training Prog.	32
7.	Bellary	Sandur & Bellary	Chooranur Siriwara Metriki	9 th – 10 th May 2001	2 nd phase Training Prog.	19

			Vitalapura Linganahalli Bommagatti Anthapura Baadanahalli Belagal Sanganakallu			
8.	Gulbarga	To All women GP Athnur, local NGOs and historical places	EWRs from Selected GPs from all 5 zones	28 th – 20 th June 2001	Panchayath Pravas - Exchange Programme	29
9.	Gulbarga	Athnur & Afzalpur	Athnoor Nimbarga Naroonna Kamalanagar	12 th – 13 th July 2001	Training Programme	35
10	Bagalkot	Badami	24 GPs of Badami taluk	13 th – 14 th September 2001	Phase Training Prog.	47
11.	Bangalore Urban	Anekal	Attibele Hebbagodi Bommasandra Neraluru Guddahalli Athibele Anekal Chandapura	25 th – 26 th September 2001	3 rd phase Training Prog. For EWRs, representatives from SHGs, Mahila Sanghas, Anganwadi etc.	39
12.	Chikmagalur	Tarikere	Siddarahalli Haadikere Neralakere Cheeranahalli Bettadahalli Gadeehalli Gulladamane Mugali Tarikere	9 th – 10 th October 2001	3 rd phase Training Prog. For EWRs, representatives from SHGs, Mahila Sanghas, Anganwadi etc.	90
13.	Bellary	Bellary and Sandur	Chooranur Siriwara Metriki Vitalapura Linganahalli Bommagatti Anthapura Baadanahalli Belagal Sanganakallu	22 nd – 23 rd October 2001	3 rd Phase Training Prog. for EWRs, representatives from SHGs, Mahila Sanghas, Anganwadi etc.	56

Follow up action plan has been a new inclusion in the trainings. This is a strategic action plan decided at the end of the training. A simple but important subject is taken up for greater understanding through discussions with the concerned, visiting the concerned place etc. The social subject is chosen collectively by the participants or proposed by the ISST team based on issues that emerge during the training. The objectives of this exercise are:

- to lend continuity to the training through follow up activities

- to draw EWRs attention through direct interaction on social issues of concern eg. Education, Health, Anganwadis, Child Labour, Problems of women in their villages, etc.
- to motivate EWRs through this action plan to move around and understand their panchayat schools, hospitals, public distribution shops, etc.
- to understand for themselves the overall situation, areas of improvement, etc.
- to develop sensitivity towards social issues, prioritize them as important areas to be taken up in GPs
- to facilitate greater visibility and public relations in this pretext.

3 Panchayath Pravas

3.1 To All Women Gram Panchayat in Athnur, Gulbarga in Karnataka

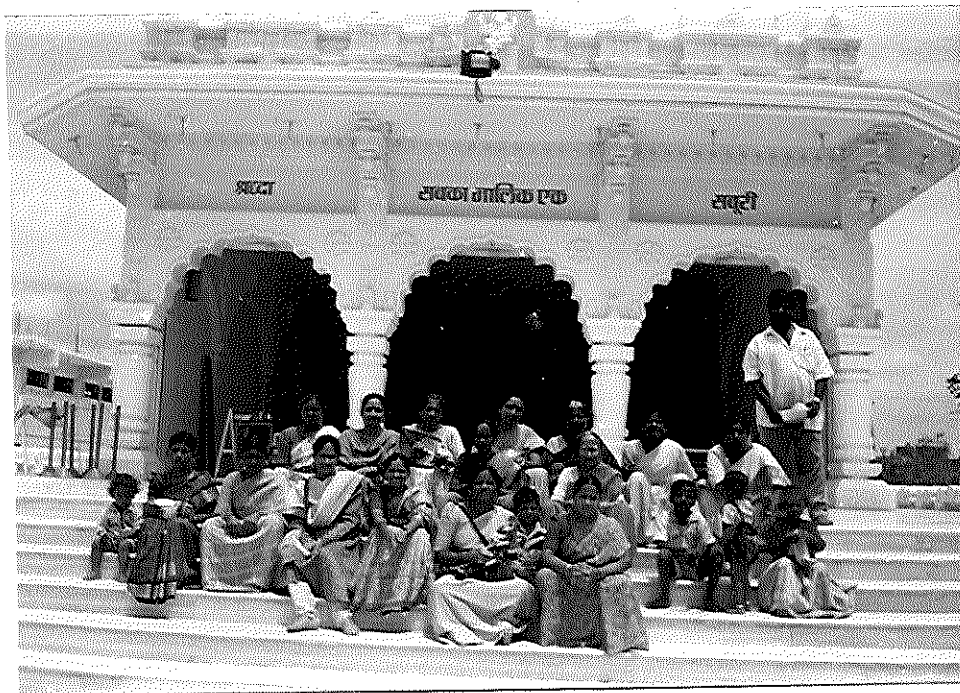
3.2 To Panchayats in Kottayam District of Kerala

- Two separate exposure programs for two different groups of EWRs and NGO activists identified during 3 phase trainings in the 5 zones.
- This facilitated interzonal, interstate solidarity networks for EWRs, GPs and NGOs
- Understanding of various models of PRIs etc.
- This pravas was a path-breaking move for many women who had never stepped out of their GPs and that too without the husband or some male relative to protect or restrict!

The main objectives set for the two panchayat pravas were the following:

1. To create a platform for mutual sharing of ideas, learnings, experiences, achievements, failures, including the geographical and cultural disparities.
 2. To broaden women's horizons through greater mobility and creating awareness through exposures.
 3. To build confidence and solidarity among the EWRs within zones, districts and inter-state.
 4. To generate ideas to solve their problem on their own (problem solving capacity)
 5. For ISST to gather learnings/information from the grassroots.
- Panchayath Pravas to All Women Gram Panchayath (AWGP) Athnur, Gulbarga in North Karnataka included extensive focus group discussions on experiences, strategies and plans between the visiting team and AWGP, its secretary, community heads, local CBOs and NGO functionaries. This interaction not only helped visiting EWRs & NGO activists to appreciate and learn from efforts being made by AWGP inspite of limitations including geographic and developmental backwardness.

Gulbarga being historically rich, important historic monuments and places were shown



- Panchayath Pravas to Kerala included participation in a Grama Sabha, extensive meetings at 2 women headed Gram Panchayats and visits to 10 women entrepreneurial units run by Panchayat supported women SHGs.



Both the exposure trips went on in a festive mood. The preparations for the visit were made with great enthusiasm and this ensured smooth conduct of the entire program. On the final days when all EWRs arrived at Bangalore before embarking on the *jnana pravasa* (as one panchayat president called it) it was sheer excitement in the air. All the participants from different zones were meeting each other for the first time and there was instant bonding and they became one large team. Throughout the journey the EWRs exchanged their learnings, experiences, views and knowledge about each other's panchayat. Very very personal sorrows and difficulties were shared, consolation and suggestions to overcome were being exchanged leaving them friends for all times. They were all thrilled to make the train journeys. For many it was dream come true!

Laxmiddevamma of Chickmangalur said "I feel like a child who finally fulfills her dream to fly!" Chennamma, Vice president of AWGP of Athnur said 'Wonder why we are forced to peep through the smallest hole, when large doors to the world outside await to be opened!'

4. Field Studies

Field studies have enriched our learning and initiatives tremendously. All the studies have been published simultaneously in UMA Prachars and Namma Panchayathi wall magazine for wider dissemination and made available as separate study reports. These studies have been appreciated and used by panchayat representatives, activists, academicians and even the media representatives.

4.1 Baseline Study on All Women Gram Panchayats

- Field study was conducted of the two All Women Gram Panchayats in Karnataka - Athnur GP in Gulbarga and Wanjarkheda in Bidar.
- We have studied and documented the factors that led to their genesis, its influence on the functioning, public opinion and activities being planned/taken up by them.

4.2 Grama Sabhas at a Glance

- Conducted a study of grama sabhas with an objective of understanding people's participation especially women, issues raised by them, actual conduct of Grama sabhas, officials' participation, success and setbacks, factors involved to empower Grama Sabhas.

4.3 Bellandur.com

- Study of Bellandur Gram Panchayath, the first computerized GP of India. This was done in the backdrop of right to information. It was to study the impact of computerization in the functioning of the GP, access and management of information within GP and with public, its problems, advantages etc.

Bellandur is a Gram Panchayat situated 15 kms away from the IT capital, Bangalore. Bellandur GP earned the credit of becoming the first "Computerised GP" in the state, in fact the country. Bellandur Gram Panchayat comes under the jurisdiction of Bangalore District Administration and South Taluk Panchayat which has 5 villages under its jurisdiction.

Newspapers had given wide coverage to Bellandur Gram Panchayats Computerization achievement terming it the "Computer Village" and so on. ISST team decided to visit this Panchayat with the following objectives.

- To study the factors that led to the computerization of the GP office
- To study its effectiveness in GP functioning and in decentralizing information
- To understand the advantages and disadvantages, if any, arising due to the computerisation of the GP office.

Bellandur Gram Panchayat has 12 elected members with 6 women and 6 men members. The President of this GP is Mr. K.Jagannath & the Vice President is Ms.Anitha. The members have successfully held the reins of administration. They have taken up several developmental activities for the effective functioning of the Panchayat with the help of the revenues they have generated.

Considering the work pressure, the Bellandur Village Development Committee had given the Panchayat Rs.70,000/- towards computerisation of the office. Since there is a computer in the office, it is easier to store data, details of the population, birth and death certificates, tax and property details, government projects, budget etc. Three years ago, to get a letter typed or photocopied, one had to go to Bangalore. To avoid this hassle, computer came in handy for them. Moreover, documents, records, typed by a type writer had to be maintained in files which was a laborious task. But with the data stored in the computer nobody has to wait for days or hours to get the required information, which makes the work done quicker and faster.

Of course, it was clear that one need not presume that everything was wonderful with a computer around. Often when the electric power fails, when the software obeys no command, hardware is plagued by a problem, add to it the non availability of the right expertise to repair the computer, then many problems plague the panchayat office. However the fact remains that in spite of it all, when the computer and the basic information management system is put to use efficiently and effectively, dreams of right to information, decentralization of power and knowledge, enhanced work management, accurate planning and evaluation will not stay a dream for long. And this is the story lived by Bellandur GP.

5. Regional Seminar on "Gender, Governance and Grama Sabha"

ISST Bangalore organised a Regional Seminar on "Gender, Governance and Grama Sabha" on 13-14, December 2001 at IST, Bangalore which included experience sharing by EWRs of the participating states and paper presentations were made by leading institutions from respective states.

- These platforms are found useful to exchange ideas, experiences and insights.
- To explore and understand new areas of work, new experiments and strengthen networking.
- To establish multi-sectoral linkages to strengthen women's participation in local self-governance.

Towards this purpose, the convention had invited EWRs of 3 different states to share and exchange their experiences, struggles and achievements in their respective areas alongwith activists, NGO heads to make state presentations.

Participants comprised of Elected women representatives (EWRs) who have shown their capability to deal with difficult situation without any hesitation or apprehensions because they are now aware of their political status and opportunities. Others present at the convention included activists, academicians, govt. officials, bureaucrats, political activists, media representatives both print and electronic media. It included individuals and consultants committed and actively working for Panchayath Raj process, representatives from NGO's and experts.

Ms. Meera M, Associate Director, ISST, Bangalore extended a warm welcome to the gathering. She shared the objective and background of the Regional Seminar. Also presented the salient components, experiences and outcome of the project "Strengthening Women in Local Governance" supported by Action Aid India as part of which this regional seminar was held.

Lighting of the lamp was done by the elected women representatives who had arrived from different parts of the region.



Honourable Chief Guests Smt.Venkatalakshamma, Sanganakallu Gram Panchyath, Bellary District of Karnataka, Dr.K.S.Krishnaswamy, Former Deputy Governor to RBI and Dr.Rameshwari Varma, Honorary Treasurer, LAWS joined the lighting of the lamp ceremony.

Inaugural address was delivered by Dr. K.S. Krishnaswamy, former Deputy Governor, RBI. He elaborated on the following points in his speech.

- Women have a very significant role to play in decentralized administration. It has become easier for women to enter the politics because of the 73rd and 74th amendments to the constitution. This phenomenon has brought in qualitative change in the administration.
- Gramasabha is based on the principles of decentralization and people's participation. The Panchayath Raj Institutions bring people and government closer.
- PRIs have not yet been vested with sufficient powers to function autonomously. It has still remained as an organ of state government; the Deputy Commissioner still being supreme power in districts.
- Projects are planned and decided at higher levels and only specific schemes are thrust on the Panchayath. Panchayath has no role in the planning process.
- The act needs to be reformed further. Functions of State Government and Panchayaths shall be specified clearly and separately. The role of bureaucracy should also be delineated clearly. Health functionaries and teachers should be brought under Panchayath administration.
- Administrative power of the Panchayath is still a conundrum and essential financial resource is another area of concern. Panchayaths don't have their own budget, all that they have are a few schemes instead.
- We can hope improvement in administration only after addressing these issues.
- Powers bestowed on Gramasabha too are insufficient it does not have control over anything. Given the meager frequency of Gramasabha meetings it is impractical to expect the budgets to be approved there. Guideline should be laid down regarding the regularity, place, and procedure of Gramasabhas.
- Families of the elected women representatives must understand and accept that these women have a public identity too. Similarly society must acknowledge her public identity as a natural fact. Support system to elected women representatives should be enhanced.

Dr.Rameswari Varma, Honorary treasurer, LAWS and former Director, Centre for Women Studies and Smt.Shakuntala Narasimhan, well known columnist honoured the EWRs by presenting the panchayat women leaders with Souvenirs and Momentos.

Experience sharing and presentations were made by Smt.Kalpana Sathish, Human Rights Foundation, Chennai; Smt.Rani Muniakkanu, President, Vanduvancheri Panchayath and member of State Federation Tamil Nadu; Sri Bandari Ankaiah, Member Secretary, Lok Satta, Hyderabad; Smt.Sudha, President, Mahubabad Gram Panchayat, Andhra Pradesh; Smt.Suman Kolhar, Ex Vice-President, Zilla Panchayath, Bijapur and Coordinator, SSF, Bangalore, Smt. Chennamma, Patel, Vice President, All Women Gram Panchayath, Athnur, Karnataka; Smt.Rasheeda, Mahila Samakhya Gulbarga; Smt.Gangamma, Gram Panchayath Member, Tarikere Taluk, Karnataka; Smt.Munirathnamma, Member, Anekal Gram Panchayath, Bangalore

Urban; Smt. Venkatalaxmi, Member, Sangankallu Gram Panchayat, Bellary, Karnataka; Smt.Sonu Bai, Member, Muddebihala Gram Panchayath, Bijapur, Karnataka; Smt.Hanumavva Dhaddhi, Gram Panchayath, Chickmagalur, Karnataka; Smt.Jaspreet, Prajayatna, MAYA, Bangalore; Smt.Nirmala Siriguppi, District Program Coodinator, Mahila Samakhya Karnataka; Dr.Shanta Mohan, Fellow, Gender Studies Unit, NIAS, Bangalore, Smt.Prafulla Kurien, Manager, NABARD, Bangalore.



Sessions were chaired by Dr.Renuka Vishwanathan, IAS, member Secretary, taxation reforms, Government of Karnataka; Dr.Rameswari Varma, Honorary treasurer, LAWS and former member, Karnataka State Commission for Women, Dr.Abdul Aziz, Member, Karnataka State Planning Commission and Economic Professor (Retd), ISEC, Bangalore; Sri.C.Narayanswamy, Ex-MP and former President, Zilla Panchayath, Bangalore Urban, Dr.Shanta Mohan, Fellow, Gender Studies Unit, NIAS, Bangalore.

Two plays were staged as part of the seminar. "Rekke Kattuvira" play depicting the futility of war and violence through the lives of a mother and daughter was staged by Smt.Chitra and Smt.Saraswathi, both activists and founder members of Manasa Patrike. "Baaki Ithihasa" play depicting the gender dimensions through the lives, struggles, strengths and dreams of women from different class and walks of life was staged by Smt.Vani Periodi, gender and development consultant of Karnataka.

Over 80 members participated representing the Government, NGOs, Panchayats, Academic institutions and media. Three New Resource Books of ISST, Bangalore were released during the Regional Seminar. This occasion was also used for display of publications and IEC materials of ISST and other NGOs of Bangalore.

6. Networking

▪ As part of its networking activities, ISST organizes and participates in seminars, workshops, consultative meetings and other action programs.

6.1 As Resource Persons for TOT on Panchayat Raj System

Apart from imparting training to the EWRs of the local bodies directly, ISST has readily shared expertise and even encouraged participation of selected field functionaries, heads of local NGOs during zonal trainings with the objective of expanding local resource base and building local network for EWRs and also to develop gender sensitivity in the development functionaries themselves.

Invitations to ISST have been coming in large numbers to conduct Training Of Trainers (TOT) on Women in Panchayat Raj from various NGO. Lack of time to indulge in them has been the case. However we were able to take up the invitation by ISI, Bangalore. ISST team conducted the TOT on “Panchayat Raj System” role of NGOs” for a group of NGOs working at the grassroots across the states.

The two day programme was engaged through interactive sessions, participatory games, group discussions and charts and posters. Folk stories were used effectively. At the end of the program organizers as well as the participants had many words of appreciation which encourages the team further.

6.2 As consulting participants

Apart from networking efforts through information dissemination to committed institutions and individuals through UMA Prachar, Wall Magazine and Resource books, some of the outside programs attended are as follows:

- Paper presented at the State level seminar on “Role of Voluntary Organisations in the development of Karnataka” organised by NIPCCD, Bangalore on 23-24th January 2002
- One day consultation meet on “Empowerment of Grama Sabhas and Panchayat Raj Institutions” organised jointly by NCPNR, GGV-Karnataka, UPVAN-UP, FEVORD-K-Bangalore on 23/1/02 at Ashirwad, Bangalore.
- Consultation meet on “Evolving Strategies for good governance in Karnataka State” organised by NIAS, Bangalore on 20/1/02.
- Meeting on “Panchayat Raj” organised by World Bank on 8-9 January 2002 at Richmond Hotel, Bangalore.
- Workshop on “Access to Land for the Rural Poor” organised by RDI and UAS on 23rd and 24th October 2001 at Hebbal Campus of UAS, Bangalore.

- Regional Workshop on Prevention of Trafficking of Women & Children organised by WCD and UNICEF at Hotel Ashoka on 16th & 17th October 2001.
- Brain storming session to constitute State Resource Group on 13th July 2001 organised by JSYS, Bangalore.
- Meeting on Sexual Harassment Bill organised by HHS on 17th July at Ashirwad, Bangalore
- National Conference on Backward Areas Development on 13th July 2001 organised by Swami Ramananda Teertha Institute at Vidhana Soudha, Bangalore
- Workshop on Rural Decentralisation in Karnataka: Status, Best Practices and Strategy” on May 30th – June 1st 2001 organised by ISEC in collaboration with World Bank and Dept. of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj.
- “PRI Material Development Workshop” organised by NEG on 19th & 20th May 2001.
- Seminar on “Financing for District Development” organised by SSF, Bangalore at NIAS on 19th May 2001
- “Women’s Political Empowerment Day” programme by ISS at Town Hall, Bangalore on 24th April 2001.
- Documentary Film “GUHYA” on Devadasi system
- “Women’s Images in the Media” conducted by CDL, Bangalore on 24th February 2001
- “Role of NGOs in Strengthening PRIs”, at ISI on 19th – 20th February 2001
- “Participatory Research in Development Work” organised by Christ College, Bangalore on 8-9th February 2001
- “Democratic Decentralisation and Participation of Women in Panchayats: A Case of Karnataka” and “Power, Patronage and Accountability in the Panchayats of Karnataka”, on 19th January 2001 organised by ISEC, Bangalore.
- “Women’s Political Participation at Governance” a one day workshop on 17th January 2001 organised by the Gender Studies Unit of NIAS.



- As panel member for South Zone Partner's Meet organised by PLAN International on December 12, 2000 at Hotel Capitol, Bangalore.
- One day workshop regarding "RCH" organised by FRHS, Bangalore on 18th November 2000 in Mysore.
- Planning meeting against the Supreme Court verdict on the Narmada case" organised by Alternative Law Forum, Bangalore on 31/10/2000.
- National colloquium on National Population Policy organised by Jawaharlal Nehru University and SSF at Bangalore on 19th & 20th October 2000.
- Two day regional seminar on Women and Political Participation at Canopy hotel organised by Dept. of Women & Child Development and Centre for Women's Studies.
- Consultation on CEDAW Convention organised by AIWRAW and NIAS.

6.3 Visitors

Our networking efforts also grew to include several individuals who visited the Resource Centre at ISST Bangalore from within India and outside. Some amongst them are

- Elected representatives have been one of our regular visitors now especially those from Chickmangalur and Bangalore urban zone. They have seen the Resource Center as a support center to discuss, clarify, update information and share their struggles and setbacks.
- Charlotte Lapsansky, Brown University, USA
- Amshula Jayaram, Bangalore
- Alycia Kellman, USA
- C.S.Prakash, Executive Director, Chintamani
- M.Chandrakantha, JSYS, Bangalore
- V.Sreenarayanan, Deputy General Manager, NABARD, Bangalore
- K.Subramaniam, Manager, NABARD, Bangalore
- Dr.Tim Hanstad, Executive Director, Rural Development Institute, Bangalore
- Ms.Jennifer Brown, Staff Attorney, RDI, Bangalore
- Ms.Kripa, MIDS, Madras
- Mr.Anantha, Lecturer, GFGC for Women, Shimoga
- Sr.Linnet D'silva, Director, Jeevandhara Seva Kendra, Hassan
- Ms.Jayanthi, Sumangali Seva Ashram, Bangalore
- Mr.Ravi & Ms.Geetharani, BAIF Institute for Rural Development, Tiptur, Tumkur

7. Glimpses from Grassroots

Glimpses from grassroots have been published under "Any Comments" in UMA Prachars. These thought provoking, interesting and insightful anecdotes were very eagerly awaited by readers and this has appealed to almost all across over academics activists and political domains. Some of them are included here.

7.1 The Unreachable Secretary...

In one of our training programmes, the participants constantly kept complaining about the lack of flow of information especially regarding accounts and procedures of GP. It was their wish to get the necessary information from the concerned secretary. To fulfil their wish we requested the secretary of the hosting GP to join us in the sessions and address their queries. The secretary very sweetly said "By all means, Madam, I will be there in a moment". Since he did not turn even after the stipulated time, we requested him and several times to clarify their doubts. Every time the reply was "I'll be there in a moment". In the meantime, we continued with the training programme, clarified the doubts and even concluded the training. But the ever smiling secretary never turned up. The EWRs were heard saying that the secretaries are always available to create but not to clarify doubts! If this was the way he slipped from us, is it hard to imagine how many more such 'slips' the EWRs would have to manage?

7.2 Contagious Claps...

Workshop at Bellary started with claps and continued amidst quite a lot of claps till lunch on Day 1. Though initially it was a welcoming choice for us to think that the claps were in appreciation it didn't quite seem OK.

During a session the facilitator clapped her hands to draw group attention towards a chart. And the next moment vigorous clapping of the group drowned her voice. Suppressing her surprise the facilitator went on only to get a repeat of the clapping scenario...And the contagious claps seemed to go on and on...Even a slightest clapping gesture would get endless reciprocation of the same from the group.

This act of theirs made us curious and we broached the subject only to be told "Madam, in all the programmes we attended after becoming EWRs, we were asked to clap our hands off before, after and in the middle of speeches. It has become a habit for all of us now!"

7.3 Bill, For What Amount?

It was a training program conducted in collaboration with a Panchayat. As per routine procedure the accounts were being settled with Panchayat functionary for the food and other expenses incurred. After all the totals were made and amount arrived at, out of the blue he posed this question "For what amount should the bill be?" accompanied with a funny smile. It took a while before we understood the underlying meaning of the question. Though it was made clear to them that the bill must be for the actual amount spent, this instance makes one wonder about the state of other financial dealings there and elsewhere!

7.4 Our Madam

With the increase in number of women in local bodies, status of women within the family, community and Panchayats is going through many changes. In a group discussion during training for EWRs on this issue, a woman representative shared that 'family members and sometimes even husbands come forward to share household chores. Even community sees us in a better light'. Another participant added 'till now we were called by our names now they attach the prefix ...member so & so!' Just then another participant stood up and shared in all enthusiasm " my husband who used to always refer to me as my wife has now all of a sudden started referring to me as 'Our MADAM'.



7.5 By the way, what is that?

Soon after the elections, ISST team went to the concerned department to gather information on All Women Gram Panchayats. We asked the concerned official for information on the number of AWGP, if any, during this term; where they were and how many of them and so on...In lieu of information all we got in response were more questions. With a puzzled look he asked, " All Women Gram Panchayats? By the way, what is that?"

8. Media Advocacy

- 8.1 Wide coverage for ISST's initiatives for strengthening Women in Local Governance came by way of newspaper, television and radio coverage. Print and electronic media covered the regional seminar on Gender, Governance and Grama sabha'. We do feel lot more could be done and achieved for the cause by prioritizing this component.
- 8.2 One of the elected women representatives who is also a folk singer at AIR was so impressed by the Panchayath Pravas that she talked to AIR officials and got programmes aired exclusively on the Panchayath Pravas to Kerala..
- 8.3 A Paper presentation "Need for References and Documentation: Justice to the subject" during the three day workshop on "Development and Communication" for leading media representatives and NGOs from 26-28 February 2001 organised by "SAARTHI" in Bangalore

9. Conclusion

The Institute's interactions with EWRs and other agencies working in this area during the project period has been enriching. ISST, Bangalore has also grown as a credible focal point on issues of Gender, Governance and Development of the marginalised especially women, through Field Facilitation Programs including Trainings, Action Research, Publications and Networking. Women in Local Governance are establishing themselves as focal facilitators in social change. However, it can at best claim to have travelled a small distance towards the vision of empowering women to build in them the confidence and the capability to share every empowering space in society along with the 'public platforms' equitably. And continue to gain community support and acceptance on equal terms in their public role.

For all of us committed to this cause, there are many more miles to cover. And the path, wisdom and vision to do so gets strengthened when the frontline champions of decentralized democracy, the elected panchayat representatives including women and others marginalized take central roles in the process. The insights gained from grassroot experiences, research, dissemination and networking activities need further strengthening and convergence at all levels and will prove crucial in this journey.